

# Trailblazing women in parks and recreation:

Lessons in leadership and impact



Women have played a vital role in shaping the parks and recreation industry, bringing leadership, innovation, and fresh perspectives to community spaces. From policy development to public engagement, they help ensure that parks remain accessible and impactful. Despite challenges in a traditionally male-dominated field, women continue to pave the way by advocating for change and fostering equity. Becky Dunlap and Lakita Fraser exemplify the resilience and vision that make women in parks and recreation essential to the industry.

**Here's their top advice for women considering a career in the field.**



## Building your career

- Be open to unexpected opportunities—sometimes the most fulfilling careers begin in unexpected places.
- Find work that aligns with your passions. If you enjoy working with people and the outdoors, parks and recreation can be a rewarding path.



## Overcoming challenges

- Imposter syndrome is normal—push through it and remember that you belong in leadership roles.
- Balance ambition with bandwidth. You cannot do everything all the time, and knowing when to pause is key to long-term success.
- Lean on mentors and peers for guidance. Surround yourself with people who uplift you and provide perspective during challenges.



## Leadership and innovation

- Strong leadership drives resilience. The industry faces funding shortages and policy changes, but adapting and evolving ensures success.
- Embrace innovation. Technology can streamline operations, improve efficiency, and create better experiences for communities.
- Be adaptable. The parks and recreation field is constantly shifting, and staying flexible will help you navigate change.



## Advice for women in the industry

- Believe in yourself and take up space. Leadership roles are meant for those willing to step up with confidence.
- Mistakes do not define you—your response does. Every setback is an opportunity for growth and learning.
- Advocate for more opportunities for women. Representation matters, and more women in leadership strengthens the industry.



## Looking to the future

- The industry is resilient—stay committed. Parks and recreation professionals have faced challenges before and will continue to innovate.
- Network and collaborate. Building connections strengthens professional growth and opens doors to new opportunities.
- Keep learning. Staying informed on technology, policies, and industry trends ensures long-term success.



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Becky Dunlap is a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional with BerryDunn's Local Government Practice Group, specializing in efficiency, innovation, and strategic planning. She has completed hundreds of demographics and trends reports, guiding agencies in planning for evolving communities. Becky is also the creator of the Let's Talk Parks podcast, has been featured in Parks and Recreation Business Magazine, and was named to NRPA's 30 under 30 in 2021. She is committed to driving meaningful change in parks and recreation.



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Lakita Fraser is a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional and a distinguished AAPRA inductee (2020). With expertise in strategic planning, organizational development, and facility construction, she excels in fiscal management, public/private alliances, and personnel leadership. Passionate about mentorship and lifelong learning, she teaches and speaks at local, state, and national conferences, inspiring professionals with her high energy and positivity.



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