

# HRG

Herbert, Rowland & Grubic, Inc.  
Engineering & Related Services

AN EMPLOYEE-OWNED COMPANY

## PARTNERSHIPS



Enhance Your Parks &  
Recreation Programs While  
Minimizing The Costs

## ABOUT HERBERT, ROWLAND & GRUBIC, INC

Herbert, Rowland & Grubic, Inc. (HRG) is an employee-owned, nationally ranked design firm providing civil engineering, surveying, and environmental services. The firm was founded in Harrisburg in 1962 and has offices in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia.

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

You work hard to provide the best possible recreation experience for your community. Today's parks and recreation programs are increasingly sophisticated. Communities offer so much more than a few ball fields and a playground.

Residents want facilities and programs that appeal to all ages and abilities:

- > active and passive parks
- > trails
- > pools and sprinkler pads
- > tennis and pickleball courts
- > yoga and fitness classes
- > nature education
- > athletic leagues for youth and adults

Providing this level of service is not easy. It requires a significant level of money and staffing. Many communities don't have the resources to provide this level of programming on their own, but partnerships bring the impossible into reach.

Partnering with neighboring municipalities, local schools, non-profit organizations, and private businesses can give residents access to a much more diverse array of recreational opportunities. It can also increase the user base for existing programs and facilities.

This guide will:

- > explain the benefits of partnerships in recreation programs
- > help you identify potential partners in your community
- > offer advice for how to maximize the benefits of partnership and minimize its risks



# 2

## BENEFITS OF PARTERSHIP

Why should communities consider partnerships in their recreation programs? Partnerships can help a community make its programs more effective and more affordable. They can also increase the opportunity for grant money and enhance the development and professional growth of staff. Here are just a few of the benefits of recreational partnerships.

### Communities can provide a broader array of programs and facilities.

As stated in the Introduction, partnerships allow a community to offer a broader range of programs and facilities to its residents. Smaller communities will not have the resources to support the full range of parks, athletic programs, and classes its residents desire, and they may not have a large enough user base to make these programs successful. They may only have a few people interested.

If communities cooperate, they can each provide a certain percentage of the programs their residents desire within their own borders and provide financial support to their neighbors in exchange for access to their facilities.

### Partnerships heighten a program's credibility and visibility.

When partnering with other municipalities, your programs and facilities become more visible and robust. You are able to market your programs to a wider audience in a wider range of media.

### Partnerships increase the user base for programs and facilities (avoiding cancellations and lowering fees).

With enhanced visibility, you will no doubt see an increase in program registrations.

This is particularly important to protect programs that might otherwise have risked cancellation if the interest was too low. Sometimes your community may have a small segment of its population interested in a program, but it's not enough to generate the fees needed to run the program. If you





open the program to neighboring communities, you can get enough registrations to succeed and avoid disappointing residents with a cancellation.

It's also important for keeping costs down. Most programs and facilities involve certain fixed costs that must be covered by user fees. When those fixed costs are spread over a wider user base, each user pays a smaller portion.

### Partnerships increase the volunteer base for programs and facilities.

Volunteers are vital to the health of a community's parks and recreation programs, and some communities struggle to find enough volunteers to keep a program going. Partnering with neighboring communities can change that.

### Communities save money by sharing resources.

Communities can achieve economies of scale by sharing:

- > staff
- > program instructors
- > equipment
- > facilities

### Communities can improve their chance of receiving grants.

Grant agencies often give preference to projects that are regional in nature because they want their money to have a broad impact and benefit the largest number of people possible. Communities can even receive funding to help them develop cooperative agreements from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Peer-to-Peer Program. This program provides technical assistance and up to \$10,000 in grants to communities developing a cooperative recreation program.

### Staff enjoys enhanced growth and development opportunities.

Your staff can benefit greatly from partnerships with neighboring communities. These partnerships can help them:

- > increase their networking opportunities
- > develop new friendships
- > open up opportunities for professional growth
- > obtain a better understanding of how other programs operate

# 3

## HOW TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS

If you think partnerships could enhance your community's recreation program, you're probably starting to wonder how you identify potential partners. Neighboring municipalities are an obvious choice, but they're not the only one. You can also partner with other community organizations and the private sector. Here are a few options to consider:

### Local Schools

Schools often have their own playgrounds, athletic facilities, and recreation programs, and these facilities are already supported by community tax dollars. A partnership can open up access to these facilities to all community members, not just students, during evenings and weekends. Imagine the possibilities you can explore using the school's gymnasium, cafeteria, auditorium, library, home economics rooms, art rooms, music rooms, shop areas, and classrooms.

Successful partnerships are built on mutual benefit, and the school can also benefit from a partnership with the municipality. Its clubs and classes will be able to use the community's parks, nature areas, and programs to enhance education.



### Local Businesses

Local businesses have much to offer a municipal recreation program. Many for-profit entities offer recreational programs like golf, sports leagues, and fitness classes. Others provide athletic equipment. They would be natural partners for your recreation program.

Perhaps your community could offer golf instruction at the for-profit course. This benefits the community because it doesn't have to construct its own course to offer the program, and it benefits the business because it provides added visibility, potentially creates new customers, and maximizes the use of facilities during off-peak hours.

All businesses can benefit from partnerships with the community's parks and recreation program – even if they are not strictly recreational in nature. Stores, restaurants, and service providers can show their investment in the community by sponsoring programs and local athletic teams. This is a great advertising opportunity for them, and it builds good will in the community.

Businesses that occupy key locations near existing or planned park property can be given special consideration for partnership opportunities.

### Community and Non-Profit Organizations

Communities can identify potential non-profit partners by looking for organizations that are focused on some of the same benefits parks and recreation provide:

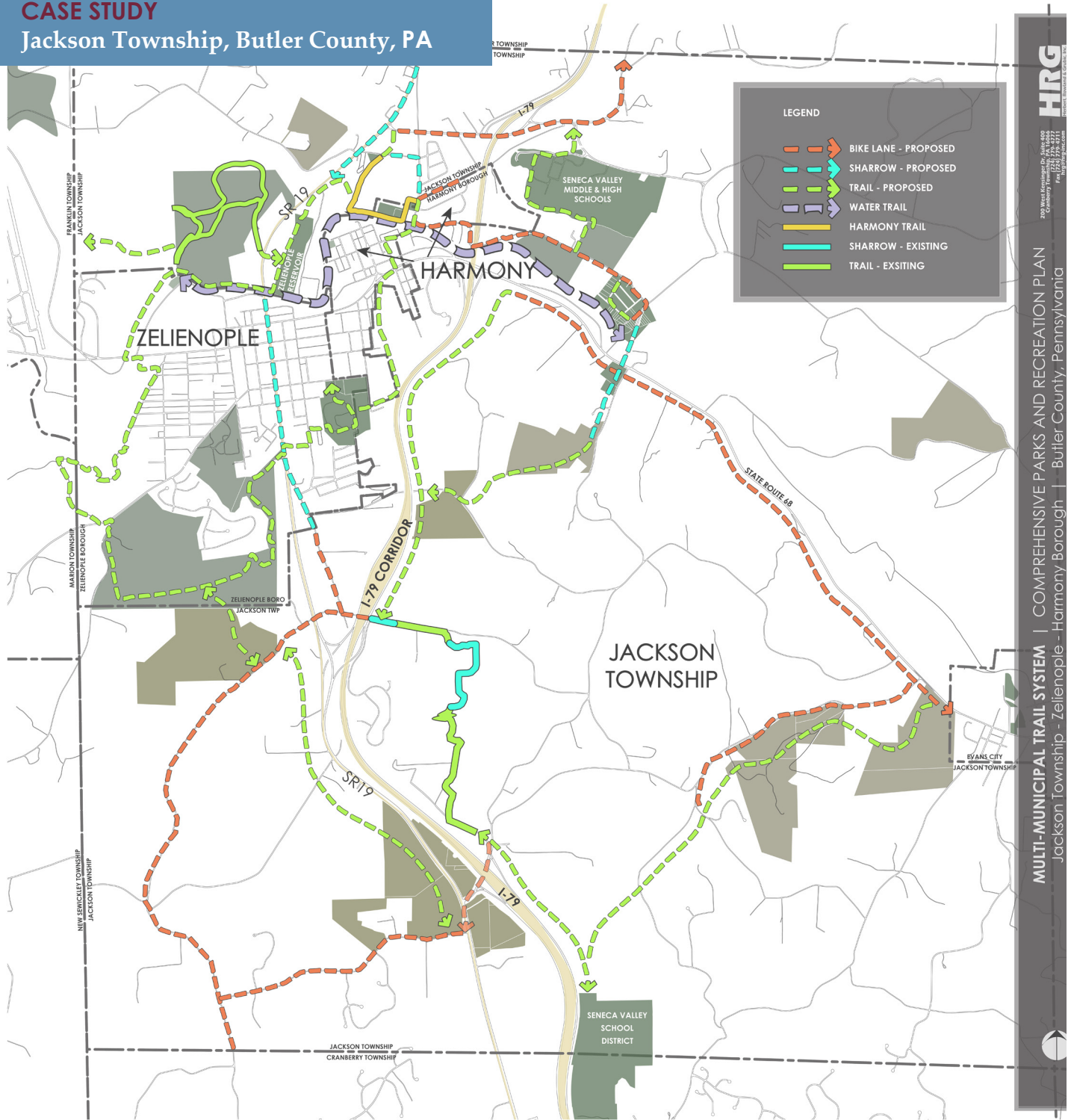
- > keeping people connected/preventing loneliness
- > keeping youth engaged in positive activities
- > promoting better health
- > protecting and preserving the environment/natural resources

Potential partners include local scouting organizations, youth athletic associations, churches, and more.



## CASE STUDY

### Jackson Township, Butler County, PA



**HRG**

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**MULTI-MUNICIPAL TRAIL SYSTEM | COMPREHENSIVE PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN**  
Jackson Township - Zelienville - Harmony Borough - Butler County, Pennsylvania

The Commodore Perry Regional Trail shown here is a network of trails, sidewalks, and in-road facilities that will span more than 50 miles in length, paralleling the Route 19 corridor as it makes its way from the North Hills of Pittsburgh to Erie. It was born out of a partnership between Jackson Township, the Rachel Carson Trails Conservancy; Pine, Cranberry, Marshall, and Adams Townships; and the Borough of Bradford Woods. Jackson Township also

formed partnerships with the North Country Trail and a non-profit organization that operates water trails in Northwestern Pennsylvania to enhance its residents' access to recreational resources.

# 4

## HOW TO MINIMIZE THE RISK OF PARTNERSHIP

As shown in the preceding pages, partnerships offer a community many benefits, but they also carry some risk. Community leaders are rightly concerned about protecting their autonomy and ensuring their constituents receive a fair return on the contributions they make.

### Communication is key.

From the earliest stages of planning, communities should establish open lines of communication with their partners. They would be well-advised to form a regional recreation board with representation from each partner and key community stakeholders.

Board meetings will provide a forum for the discussion of ideas and grievances. They'll also facilitate coordination of recreational programs and facility usage. Each partner will have a voice to protect its autonomy and advocate for equality.

The regional recreation board should be established by a written agreement that outlines its responsibilities and scope of authority. The agreement can address each partner's financial responsibilities, its operations and maintenance obligations, and its approach to joint marketing and public relations.

Carefully negotiated legal agreements are important to protect each partner and provide peace of mind.

Communication is important, but some matters should be put in writing. Municipalities should work with an experienced consultant and legal counsel to negotiate inter-municipal agreements for any cooperative efforts. These agreements outline:

- > the mission of the regional partnership
- > its goals and objectives
- > the needs of the region
- > benefits to each partner
- > the contributions each partner will make
- > projected outcomes
- > methods for resolving conflict

Communities should also outline an exit strategy, in case any entity decides to leave the partnership in the future.

On the flip side, they should outline a strategy for others to join the partnership in the future. Nearby communities



inspired by their success may be interested in participating once the partnership has proven its worth. Such participation could enhance the benefits to constituents even further, so municipalities will want to be prepared to take advantage of them.

Municipalities can dream big and deliver significant recreational resources for their communities if they plan proactively and leverage partnerships.

A comprehensive recreational plan helps municipalities determine their community's wishes and map a course to deliver on those desires. The plan shows municipalities where they want to go, so they can make sure every step they make is pointing them in the right direction. Funding for recreation is limited, and a plan helps to ensure that every dollar is invested wisely.

Partnerships help communities stretch those dollars further. By cooperating with neighboring municipalities, local organizations, and the private sector, municipalities can provide their residents with access to resources and programs they could never afford to do on their own.

But cooperation can be hard. It requires compromise and trust. Communities must establish lines of communication and use them openly and honestly. They must also establish a legal framework in writing to protect the interests of all parties and establish consensus on program expectations.

HRG can help!

## Contact our experts to discuss how potential partnerships can enhance your community's recreation program:



**JAMES FEATH, RLA**  
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Mr. Feath is an assistant vice president at Herbert, Rowland & Grubic, Inc. He has 20 years of experience in land development and landscape architecture, which includes extensive experience in the planning and design of parks, trails, and recreational facilities.

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**VIRGINIA LOANEY, RLA**  
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Ms. Loaney is a group manager at Herbert, Rowland & Grubic, Inc. She is a talented designer and planner who can bring a diverse range of stakeholders together for the success of recreational programs and facilities. Ms. Loaney is a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

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**NICHOLE MENDINSKY, RLA, CPRP**  
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Ms. Mendinsky is a certified park and recreation professional who has worked with a broad range of municipalities, private businesses, and non-profit organizations to create recreational facilities. She skillfully balances needs with constraints to create visionary, but achievable projects.

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