



## NWSRA Needs Assessment

As part of 2017-2021 NWSRA Comprehensive Strategic Planning Process

# SWOT ANALYSIS

Helpful

Harmful

Internal

## STRENGTHS

Attributes of the organization that help achieve the mission

## WEAKNESSES

Attributes of the organization that stop achievement of the mission

External

## OPPORTUNITIES

External conditions that help achieve the mission

## THREATS

External conditions that could damage the mission

# What will we do with the information we gather?



# SWOT ANALYSIS

## STRENGTHS

What do we do better than others?

What unique capabilities and resources do we possess?

What do others perceive our strengths to be?

What are we best at?

# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

Rich History  
Strong Reputation – Accredited  
Skilled Staff – Professional – versatile  
Knowledgeable regarding disabilities –  
Certifications - Specialty areas  
Outside Presentations  
Leaders in the field  
Relationship with Foundation  
Better growth opportunities for the staff  
Collaboration (staff, park districts, other agencies serving individuals with a disability)  
Programming with transportation/accessibility  
Choice/Variety of recreation opportunities  
Board involvement  
Leader in inclusion services  
Behavior management team  
Customer Service  
Planning  
Fiscally sound  
Relationship with our park districts  
Staff longevity  
Parent support / booster club  
Brand / label is recognizable  
Paralympics / Paralympic Clubs  
LED program  
Inclusion  
Pursuit Accommodating to individuals

Foundation – SLSF!  
Communication  
Thinking outside the box  
Availability  
Teamwork / caring for each other  
Provide opportunities for continuing ed.  
Professional networking  
Exceeding expectations  
Empathy of staff  
Above and beyond with communications  
Opportunity for advancement  
Attention to safety  
Internal relationships  
Provide most value even with budget restrictions  
Create & develop, keeps staff up to date  
Always thinking ahead  
Adaptable  
Flexible  
Taking advantage of opportunities  
(investigate, research, sustainable)  
Commitment of Staff and Board  
Innovation  
Resources of 17 agencies  
Provided case for serving people with a disability



# SWOT ANALYSIS

## WEAKNESSES

What do similar agencies do better than us?

What can we improve given the current situation?

What do others perceive as our weaknesses?

# SWOT Analysis

## Weaknesses

Staff turnover  
Internal communication  
Not modern database  
Gaps in knowledge  
Resistance to change  
Staff longevity  
Work Load vs. staff needs  
Redundant job duties  
Retention of PT staff  
Large Service Area  
Families wanting more services  
Outreach to different demographics  
Communication & follow through  
Spread ourselves too thin  
Change is good but might be hard to communicate with staff & for people to keep up

Equal opportunities to outliers  
Outreach - trying to get our message out to everyone  
Sensory room  
Resources need to uphold vast amount of programs and services provided  
More budget for individual programs  
Full time staff spread thin  
Sometimes we grow too fast (can't keep up)  
More program space – own facility....  
Program development staff involvement  
Reaching teens and HS groups  
Terminology – Letter  
Staff diversity (diversity as a whole)  
Training for diversity  
Trying to be all things to all people  
Growing too fast – quality suffers  
Needs vs. Resources how do we strike a balance



# SWOT ANALYSIS

## OPPORTUNITIES

What trends or conditions may positively impact the Association?

What opportunities are available to the Association?

# SWOT Analysis

## Opportunities

PURSUIT Success  
Staff Turnover (new fresh ideas)  
Collaborations  
Untapped disability demographics  
Relationships with outside vendors, districts, agencies  
Snoezelen Room  
Early Childhood Programming  
Member district relationships  
Outreach committee  
Mentoring opportunities  
Behavior Team  
Reverse inclusion in PD programs  
Partnerships  
To get different certifications  
Set standards for programs – staff & lesson plans  
Reach people not seeing  
Advances in technology  
New Lightning athletics/sports  
Tennis and equestrian  
Connecting with schools  
Changing mentality of rec. and leisure  
Neighboring SRA's  
Attract massive amounts of staff  
High School work programs  
Benefits of outreach opportunities  
Private partnership opportunities

Universities, Colleges, high school recruitment of volunteers and PT staff  
SLSF – Always!  
Memberships  
Retirements  
Succession planning  
Job Description revamp  
Redefine with legislators  
Scholarships  
Higher incidents of Autism in community  
Focus on diversity  
Focus on underserved areas  
Expos / Marketing opportunities  
Media focus on people with disabilities  
Recruitment / Development  
New facilities in PD – get more new programs  
Transportation / Vehicles  
Adult Day program  
Fitness program collaborations  
Outreach to younger population to introduce to the field  
Success of Pursuit – opportunity to grow and expand  
Use what we know to help legislators understand what we do  
Partnership opportunities



# SWOT ANALYSIS

## THREATS

What trends or conditions may negatively impact you?

What are similar agency's doing that may impact you?

Do we have solid financial support?

What impact do our weaknesses have on the threats to us?

# SWOT Analysis

## Threats

Tax freezes on partner districts  
40 hour work weeks  
ACA  
EVA Changes  
Minimum wage increase  
State of Illinois economic situation  
Teachers as staff  
Other smaller facilities opening doing the same thing as NWSRA (private)  
Unbudgeted expenses  
Lack of Part-time staff  
New legislation  
Bring in demographics even when doing promotions  
Increase in disabled individuals  
People living longer

No state budget impact on families  
Increased scholarship requests  
Participants going elsewhere  
Potential for medical staff  
Money (EAV's falling)  
IMRF  
New labor laws  
Lack of facility space  
Staff competition (why work for us?)  
Mental health growing not having background to support their needs  
Materials to schools not passed out  
Weather effects on programs  
Space limitations at current facilities



# Survey

Review Internal and External Stakeholders



## Survey Results:

- 230 Respondents
- 61% Board, Staff, Volunteers & Partners
- 39% Participant/Parent

# Survey

**With the Mission in mind, please rate your agreement with the following statements:**

- ▶ The mission clearly defines the purpose of NWSRA **99%**
- ▶ The mission of the Association is realistic **99%**
- ▶ The programs of the Association are consistent with the Mission Statement **96%**
- ▶ The Association's planning and budgetary priorities are supportive of the mission  
*(don't know: 24%)* **68%**
- ▶ The Association's actions and decisions demonstrate an understanding that the association service the 17 area park districts **87%** *(don't know 18%)*
- ▶ The Association engages the participants and responds to their needs accordingly **94%**
- ▶ In relationship to the planning process for the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan, I believe the missions is still relevant to the Association **91%**

# Survey

Based on the Vision Statement as created in 2010, rate your level of agreement

- ▶ Communicates the direction of the organization 89%
- ▶ Helps make day-to-day operating decisions 75%
- ▶ Keeps the Association focused 83%
- ▶ Motivates employees 74%
- ▶ In relationship to the planning process for the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan, I believe that this vision statement is still relevant to the Association. 87%



# Survey

Based on the Values, as identified in the Strategic Plan, rate your level of agreement that this is the culture of NWSRA

- ▶ Respect for each individual 96%
- ▶ Dedication to safe and fun programs 95%
- ▶ Collaboration for community access 87%
- ▶ Commitment to enthusiastic service 94%
- ▶ These values represent the current culture of the association 94%



# Regional Focus Groups

## Section 1 - Introduction and Overview of Focus Group Process

- Included an overview of the focus group process and the format used

## Section 2 - Recommendation

- 3-5 focuses under each pillar were recommended

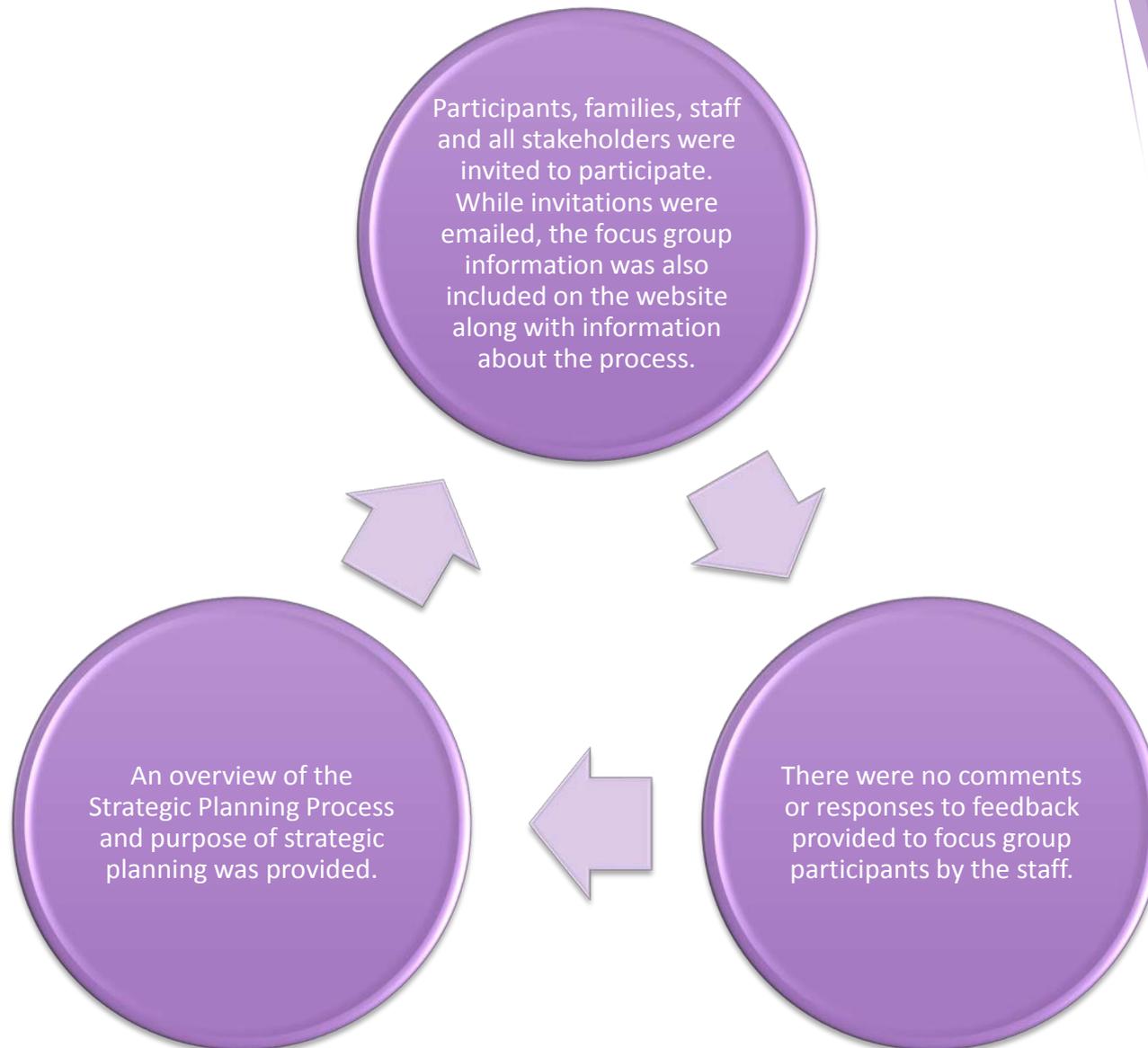
## Section 3 - Summary and Evaluation of Process

- Included a summary of the process logistics and any recommendations for future focus group processes, as well as an evaluation of the meeting



Participants, family members, community partners, Park District staff and other stakeholders were approached to create regional focus groups. Four regional focus group meetings were held to look at the past and evaluate where NWSRA has been, to assess where NWSRA currently is and to plan for the future to improve services to the residents of NWSRA member park districts. Following are the items discussed at the Regional Focus Group meetings.

# Regional Focus Group Meetings



# Regional Focus Group Meetings

The steps of the NWSRA process were illustrated, as well as what strategic planning cannot change. This included:

- Strategic Planning cannot change federal and state mandates and laws (many unfunded)
  - Minimum wage
  - Insurance and Retirement benefit requirements
- Strategic Planning cannot increase budgets, tax levies or change the cost of providing the services
  - Special Recreation levy
  - Cost of doing business is increasing (insurance, wages, cost of facilities and equipment)

# Publicity and Format of Focus Groups

Invitations were sent to participants, staff, volunteers and stakeholders

Information was included on the website

Participants were asked to RSVP

Participants signed in and were given name tags and an agenda

A brief PowerPoint was presented

Described the process

Talked about what Strategic Planning couldn't change

Presented the Mission, Vision and Core Values

Introduced the Pillars



# Input Phase

A blank sheet was placed on the wall for each pillar:

**Financial Management**

**Operational Excellence**

**Promoting Leadership**

**Outstanding Service**

Participants provided input and their input was documented in one of the four categories

Everyone received a sheet with the facilitator's name and email  
so they could provide further input

# Final Report

A final report was provided to the NWSRA Board of Trustees, and included the following information:

Focus Group  
Schedule, format and  
presentation

General Observations  
about the focus  
groups

Recommendations  
for the Focuses under  
each Pillar



# Regional Focus Groups

Thank you to the following Park Districts for providing facility space to host the Regional Focus Groups:

West Region: Schaumburg Park District

Central Region: Rolling Meadows Park District

East Region: Mount Prospect Park District

North Region: Buffalo Grove Park District



# Regional Focus Group Meetings: General Observations

The majority of the focus group participants were parents of adult participants.

The second largest group represented was parents of teen participants.

There were very few parents of young children.

The general consensus was that they greatly appreciated the services provided by NWSRA.

The focus group participants appreciated being asked for their input.

In one of the three focus groups it was difficult to get them to provide much input.

It was obvious that NWSRA serves as a lifeline to the families and that it has had a profound impact on their lives and the lives of their children.

There were 26 individuals attending the focus group sessions, of which four were park district staff.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: West Region

- Impressed with staff
- Want more programming on No School Days Off
- Not enough skill development being taught for sports prior to the start of competitions
- Make sure that the participants with behaviors are being addressed
- Communication regarding behavior process
- Concerned about ratio of participants to staff
- More communication about a child's progress and what is happening in the program
- Less games and more inner agency scrimmages
- Work to build the community acceptance through service related projects done with the participants and families
- More programming out west
- More cultural arts opportunities; plays, musicals, museums...
- Ability to contact staff when they are at a program with their child or at least the ability to call and update about a situation during the program
- Immediate response when registering regarding if they are in or on a waitlist
- Referrals between social service agencies
- Need more community visibility
- Stay connected to social service agencies in the community
- Become a clearing house for other resources
- Get on ABLEGRAM
- Concerned about staff training. What level of training do they receive? Lack of knowledge about sports
- Social Club and Special Events are not very unique
- Go more places that local
- Better utilization of Park District unique facilities and others

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: West Region

### Pillar: Financial Management

- Can we afford to have a 1:1 ratio for participants?
- Costs are reasonable.
- Pursuit is more costly than other programs. Please help participants get financial assistance. Can more programs get state funding through Medicaid, like CAU and Clearbrook?

### Pillar: Operational Excellence

- Would appreciate better notification of confirmation of registration and cancellation of programs.
- Varying needs of participants impacting experience of other participants and sometimes impacting safety.
- Ratio modification for some staff to deal with individual needs. Staff should be gender specific.
- There needs to be a more defined discipline process. Staff and parents should be aware of the process, so there is no question when it has to be utilized. Elimination should be the last step and should only be done in extreme cases. Can family help in those cases (by helping at program)?
- Communication is important...need to know discipline expectations/responsibilities, what to work on at home, more feedback is needed regarding participant's experience. We want this to work, so if you tell us to reinforce what you are doing, we will!
- Put the program evaluation online and have written evaluations also. Evaluate more frequently.
- Get participants involved in the community by doing service projects.
- Make sure that NWSRA connects with independent living homes such as Clearbrook, Little City, Ray Graham, St. Coletta's and The Meadows. Concern was raised about participants losing touch with NWSRA when they start living independently. They felt that would be a great loss since many of the participants have been utilizing the services of NWSRA since they were children.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: West Region

### Pillar: Promoting Leadership

- There appears to be a staff shortage. They need better training regarding discipline and policies, and specific information about participants...what works, what doesn't.
- More training on behavior management for staff.
- Allow higher functioning participants to help and serve as leaders when appropriate.
- Many of the coaches/instructors do not have enough knowledge of the sport to be coaching or teaching the sport. They could use more sports-specific training.

### Pillar: Outstanding Service

- Use parents and stakeholders as advocates for NWSRA at the local, state and national level.
- The people and staff are phenomenal.
- More programming on schools out days, especially high school test days (like Palatine High School).
- Be more responsive to complaints.
- Not enough skill development and training prior to competition. Perhaps more instruction prior to starting to compete.
- Location of games are far away, more coaching locally and less travel.
- How about transportation to practices?
- Try intrasquad/scrimmages vs. competing with communities.
- Is it social or is it sport? This should be determined when deciding on the format of the program.
- Utilize more local entertainment such as high school plays, cultural events, community theatre, concert series, trips rather than traveling far away.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: West Region

### Pillar: Outstanding Service (continued)

- More “special” trips such as dinners, theatre, etc.
- Let people know about resources like the Able-Gram send out by Schaumburg for people with disabilities.
- Make sure that the futures homes of participants are connected to NWSRA.
- Serve as a site for information and referrals for services for the disabled.
- Provide networking for parents. This could serve as a support group. If your child is in sports you get to know each other, but if you are in regular program you may never meet. I would like to connect with other parents.
- Pursuit is very good.
- Better utilization of park district facilities and classes, junior college classes (collaborate!).
- Provide access to a staff cell phone number when they are on a trip so parents can call. Example was given of providing a series (A, B, C, D,) of phones for use with programs, publicize numbers so personal cell phones don't have to be used and parents have a comfort level of knowing they can call if the trip is late or child is having a bad day.
- Unified Sports aren't functioning as designed.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: Central Region

Closer/more locations of pick-ups and drop offs

Programming for lower functioning adults

Programming for older adults

More instruction for skills

Why are there two different fees for Saturday programs?

Takes too long to get a response back after using the email on website

Love the uniforms the staff wear that makes it easy to identify them

Program leaders change a lot

More communication between Cillas, group homes and NWSRA

There is no way to sign up for programs without paying for transportation

Would love to be able to drop off participant at program site if they knew the place and time of arrival

Want to see Jr. High and High School after school programming

More opportunities for parents to network and communicate with each other

Carpooling lists?

Minimize the gaps between programs

Questions about our age breakdowns

Consistency with locations for Saturday programs

Would love a way to know who is leading the program

Need to promote Facebook as a means of up to date information

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: Central Region

### Pillar: Financial Management

- Fees are reasonable
- Saturday Superstars is a half hour less and costs more money. When this happens please explain why.
- Gaps between sessions should be closed and parents would be willing to pay the extra cost.
- More money should be allocated to market NWSRA. The community needs to know about what they do.

### Pillar: Operational Excellence

- Offer transportation for all events, if possible.
- Put emails of staff in brochure so they can be easily contacted if there is a question or concern.
- Publicize who is leading the program, whenever possible. Some leaders are better than others with our individual children. Familiarity gives us comfort.
- Online registration is funky.
- Registration for programs with and without transportation is confusing, at best. Sometimes the transportation is more expensive than the program!
- Good communication with NWSRA.
- Consider a quarterly gathering of parents

### Pillar: Promoting Leadership

- Staff are easily identified.
- They know participants by name.
- There is program leader turnover which requires more training or orientation of how to work with specific participants.
- Caring, supportive, helpful.
- Parents would be willing to advocate but they would need “talking points” provided about the specific topics.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: Central Region

### Pillar: Outstanding Service

- Appreciate flexibility, even if it isn't an exact fit. If the choice is putting someone in a program that might be off one year, that is better than the child not having any program at all. As long as he/she isn't disruptive, why not?
- More age or ability appropriate programming. Mixing numerous ages and abilities can be tough for staff and distracting for participants
- Encourage moving toward age-appropriate programming with some tweaking, as they are moving out of high school programming. Maybe a transition program group? That's a tough step to take!
- Love that NWSRA is out in the community.
- More programs for older adults (an over 20 group and an over 30 group were mentioned). The young ones aren't necessarily comfortable hanging with the 50's and 60's.
- "Flipping" Saturday program type and location. Opening more options for more people, closer to home.
- Little more instruction with the sports programs. Competition can be too much if they don't know the sport.
- Pursuit is great.
- SILA – Stay connected with NWSRA.
- Add programs for day off of schools. These days are tough for working parents.
- CAP District 25 for junior high and high school, a camp type setting. Can we extend the camp type programming to the school year?
- Afterschool program that you can sign up for five days at once, rather than individual programs by the day. Working parents typically need the full week. Maybe take single day registration and give a break for all five days and allow to register with one transaction for the full week.
- Teach social skills with competition.
- Grateful!

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: East Region

Continue succession planning

Continue to make sure that staff are well trained

Fees are low to reasonable

Concern about families who cannot afford to pay

Concerns about State funding and budget issues

Appreciate scholarship funding

More social clubs with individual options

Parent's Night Out programs are too short – extend

Saturday Club House is too short – extend to 4-5 hour programs

No transportation for Little Sprouts

Location and start times for some programs is not feasible...5 pm start times are really tough in traffic

Interested in another PURSUIT with transportation

Would love an aftercare option for PURSUIT or extended hours

More Parents Night Out programs

Provide opportunity for staff to network

Like the consistent staff

Love the front office staff

Do not like separate flyers...want everything in the brochure

Would possibly be willing to serve as an advocate in Springfield and with legislators

More informational meetings to hear what is going on at NWSRA

Want a way to communicate with staff when they are in the program

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: East Region

### Pillar: Financial Management

- Fees are reasonable.
- Appreciate scholarship funding.

### Pillar: Operational Excellence

- More programs like Night Hawks. Like that you can pay for the sessions that you want
- More options for Social Club
- Increase time for Parents' Night Out and Saturday Clubhouse. Make them more frequent and increase the duration. It's hardly time to travel to pick-up location and get grocery shopping done.
- Little Sprouts is in Bartlett. That is too long of a drive. It's hard when programs are in the outlying communities in the NWSRA service area.
- Appreciates bus pick-ups for camps.
- Be more strategic in planning program times and locations. Having a program at rush hour in a suburb on the edge of the service area is difficult.
- Swim more than one a week for swim team (came from a parent of a person in their 20's)
- Interested in Pursuit. Needs transportation, Include an after-care option.
- It would be nice if the Site Directors were accessible during the day.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: East Region

### Pillar: Promoting Leadership

- When jobs become available look at people inside. Develop a succession plan.
- Park Districts appreciate being able to utilize NWSRA for training of their staff. This helps the park district and special recreation association work together as a team.
- Keep staff consistent for programs whenever possible. It helps the staff and participants develop relationships and for staff to know the participant's name and any special needs they may have.

### Pillar: Outstanding Service

- Provide more opportunities for parent networking. Sports parents get to know each other, but other parents don't get much of an opportunity to connect. It would be comforting to talk to another parent and I am sure we could share information and resources.
- In brochure, put all the Social Club information on one page. Make it easier to read. (TGIF, Night Hawks)
- Possibly make a separate flyer for this information, since it's the nuts and bolts of the adult programming.
- Review it and Register for all of it in one place.
- Always include location so we can determine if transportation is needed
- Utilize parents as advocates for NWSRA and individuals with disabilities
- Schedule periodic (not just during Strategic Plan) meetings to solicit input and to provide information to parents and participants.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: North Region

Some facilities are much better than others...some space we have for programs is way in the back.

Try to keep staff, especially entry level

Preparedness for tough behaviors is much better

Safety concerns: behaviors, non-verbal participants need more engagement with staff

More collaboration between staff and parents

Setting up one to one meetings prior to programs

Late afternoon or early evening Night Hawk programs

Need more non-verbal participant programs like camp connections

Clarification on ages -> why the breakdown that we use?

Camp Connection on Saturdays?

More "blended programs" like Zumba with the park districts

Making inclusion more visible to all parents and participants and explained

Afterschool care for junior high and up during the week

Rich variety of staff!

What is the training & staffing that goes on?

More volunteer/service opportunities

Gluten/Dairy Free/Vegan Cooking class

Use your respite worker to program



# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: North Region

Adult ages (young adults 19-25)

Saturday programs are essential!!!

Better age breakdowns

Replicating Saturday program line-up for adults & young adults

Rotating programs throughout all 17 communities

Rotate programs on different days seasonally?

Well-structured activities are preferred especially during waiting/downtimes

Questions about behavior management abilities

Yes, they would advocate in Springfield

Work with Uber and ride sharing agencies

## Focus Group Feedback: North Region

### Pillar: Financial Management

- “Extra” costs are impacting the quality of the programming because the dollars are having to stretch further.
- Fees are fair to high, especially transportation. Sometimes transportation is more than the program.
- Fees too high for Medicaid participants.
- Transportation is too expensive.
  - -Look for partnership opportunities
  - -Uber is used in San Francisco as a cost saving measure for group travel.
- There is staff turnover due to hour restraints and financial issues.
- When extra assistance is needed for a participant, or a program is full, and the program can’t be expanded due to staff availability, NWSRA might consider allowing family members or the families’ personal workers (that they hire to help their family) to go on the trip to fill the supervision/ratio gap.

### Pillar: Operational Excellence

- The “aging out” rule needs clarification. Why? This presents a problem for families. There is a gap for those kids in their 20’s once they no longer receive services from high school. This is tough transition.
- Wait Lists – Expand when possible. Seriously consider adding programs when there are constant wait lists rather than taking wait lists every time.
- Assist with transition to next age group of programming. This is a hard time to navigate for parents and participants.
- Saturday programs are essential, 10 am-1:45 pm is a good time slot and good program duration.
- Too wide of an age group for adult programming. Considering breaking down to young adults and older adults for social activities and sports. The large age span often has a negative impact on the experience for the participants, especially the younger ones.
- Rotate days/times/seasons of programs at schools so each school gets the opportunity to host a program
- Utilize parents advocate at local, state and federal level
- Let people know that they can consult with their PD and NWSRA for placement of adults and children in park district programs. While NWSRA programs are always available, inclusion can be considered when appropriate and safe for the participant.
- No afterschool care for young adults with working parents. Incorporate into existing programs as a five- day option, rather than having to separately register for individual daily programs. Also, please add programs for days off of school. It is very difficult for working parents to cover days off.

# Regional Focus Groups

## Focus Group Feedback: North Region

### Pillar: Promoting Leadership

- Staff at NWSRA are fantastic.
- Structured programs make handling behavior issues easier and allow for easier transition when there is staff turnover.
- Staff are prepared. They have come a long way since my child was younger.
- More training is needed for staff as to how to communicate with non-verbal participants and how to effectively deal with discipline.
- Encourage collaboration between parent and staff, problem-solving and being proactive
- Provide staff with detailed information and plan for each participant. Share with new staff and volunteers so they don't have to "reinvent the wheel" every time there is a staff change. Volunteers could benefit from the information also. More feedback when things don't go well would be appreciated. Then, the parent and staff can work together to problem solve or reinforce good behavior.
- Set up automatic meeting with parent and staff when a new staff person comes on board, especially when there have been issues or challenges with the participant.
- Offer consultation with a staff person when a parent is concerned about transitioning into a new program, a new age group or when there is a new participant.
- Encourage park districts and other community businesses to hire individuals with disabilities. Kudos for Buffalo Grove Park District for hiring an individual who was a frequent visitor to one of their facilities.

## Focus Group Feedback: North Region

### Pillar: Outstanding Service

- Find places in the community for individuals to continue their interests once they age out of park district or NWSRA programming.
- It would be nice to be able to get ahold of someone after hours or at camp during the day when our child is on a trip or in a program.
- More programs at Rolling Meadow Community Center. The staff are great.
- Increase Pursuit opportunities. It's a great program and, if possible, include adults that require more support. Open it to more people.
- Programming is needed for participants with Asperger's Syndrome and other higher functioning individuals.
- Offer the opportunity for higher functioning participants to register for park district programs with assistance. Educate families about this option.
- Well-structured programs are most enjoyed and effective. Routine is good!
- Some park district facilities don't treat us as if they want us there. They stick us in a back room. We love Rolling Meadows and Wheeling!
- Don't like Prospect Heights. We don't feel welcome there.
- Start a mentoring program for 20-something participants. Have a blended program with their peers.
- Non-verbal participants don't always fit in.
- Nighthawks and like programs, please start and end earlier and offer Saturday programs. The nights get late for working parents.
- There is concern about safety in programs due to the actions of more difficult kids.
- Include NWSRA cooperative programs in the park district brochures.
- Park Districts should host special recreation open houses so people can learn about NWSRA.
- Offer less food-related programs. If there is food, offer a gluten-free and dairy-free options.
- Increase and improve school district special education departments' communication with NWSRA to ensure a smooth transition from school year to summer, or to new age group once they age out of high school programming.
- Offer more service-related programs. Not everything has to be social. Get the kids involved in the community. They need to learn to work and to contribute to the community.

# Purpose of the Focuses

The process of developing the Focuses resulted in:

- Zeroing in on where NWSRA should put its effort and energy
- Allow NWSRA specific areas in which the goals and objectives will be developed
- Focus directly relates to what the customer wants

Upon completion of the Regional Focus Groups, focuses were recommended under each Pillar.

## Pillar: Financial Management

### Recommended Focuses:

- Fee Analysis for Programs and Transportation
- Alternate Funding Sources for Pursuit
- Marketing

# Pillar: Financial Management

## Fee Analysis for Programs and Transportation

- While you can't change reality, and the true cost of programs, find a way to educate the participants of what the real costs are for programs.
- Look for a transportation partner to decrease costs.
- Is NWSRA ready for a major partner or sponsor? Discover ways to involve financial partners in the agency as sponsors, not donors through the Foundation.

## Alternate Funding Sources for Pursuit

- Explore funding mechanisms for additional Pursuit opportunities

## Marketing

- Explore the allocation of additional funding for the marketing of NWSRA, increasing the awareness of NWSRA in the group home, independent living, and social service arenas.

## Pillar: Operational Excellence

### Recommended Focuses:

- Adult Programming
- Youth and High School Programming
- Communications and Publicity

# Pillar: Operational Excellence

## Adult Programming

- Transition assistance for participants just coming into adult programming from high school.
- Explore the viability of offering programs for young adults (20's and 30's) separately from older adults (40 and up)
- Work with parents to make transition to the independent living environment, ensuring connection to NWSRA.
- Assess adult sports programming, measuring the amount and quality of instruction prior to participants transitioning into a competitive environment and determining if level of competition is necessary and appropriate. Also determine, philosophically, if the program is social or competitive. This will bring the right people to the program and will reduce potential conflict.
- Determine if the format of some youth and high school programming could be modified for young adults that have aged out of high school programming or if the format used for some of the high school programming could be extended to young adults.
- Work to add Pursuit programming opportunities to accommodate need. Determine if the program could be offered for lower functioning adults.
- Develop a service-based program for adults teaching the importance of volunteerism and the concept of “service over self”.
- Consider more opportunities for higher functioning (e.g. Asperger’s Syndrome) adults independent of other adults with more severe disabilities.
- Increase opportunities for Pursuit, allowing for more individuals to participate.

## Pillar: Operational Excellence

### Youth and High School Programming

- Analyze gaps in programming such as: between program seasons, days off of school, test days, etc. and fill in gaps when possible.
- Explore a community service program for youth promoting the concept of “service over self”.
- Look at day, time, location and duration of programs to allow for easier access to programs, more time to travel and for additional respite for caregivers.

### Communication and Publicity

- Simplify the brochure and registration process, specifically with programs that have multiple program options, plus transportation. Consider adding program leader names when available.
- Provide a better communication vehicle for program registration confirmation, cancellations, evaluations and feedback/collaboration/contact between parent and staff.
- Publicize all the great things that NWSRA does: the success stories, the training, the number of people you employ, all of your partnerships, etc. Don't stop telling your story.

## Pillar: Promoting Leadership

### Recommended Focuses:

- Training
- Succession Planning
- Public Relations
- Service Leadership

# Pillar: Promoting Leadership

## Training

- More specialized (and publicized) training in the areas of behavior management, communicating with non-verbal participants, and sports-specific skills.
- Refine and train staff a specific method of communication between staff as one takes over a program from another, regarding participants as they transition from one program to another and between parent and staff when issues arise.

## Succession Planning

- Develop a succession plan to retain good staff and help the agency through transitions.
- Make sure processes and customer service techniques are agency-specific, not staff-specific.
- Cross train and develop opportunities for staff to be involved in the level above their classification for training purposes

# Pillar: Promoting Leadership

## Public Relations

- Educate staff and participants about the restraints put on the agency so they are aware of why hours are limited at NWSRA and not at other, smaller SRAs, and other impactful laws, restrictions and mandates.
- Within confidentiality restraints, tell the stories of the bonds between staff and participants, and the rewards of working with individuals with disabilities. This is a positive public relations tool, as well as a job recruiting tool.

## Service Leadership

- Develop opportunities for staff, volunteers and, when appropriate, participants to get involved in service projects within the service area.
- Educate all about the value of service and volunteerism.
- Develop service partners within the NWSRA communities, allowing for the name, mission and values of NWSRA to be visible in each region.

## Pillar: Outstanding Service

### Recommended Focuses:

- Parent and Stakeholder Feedback, Education and Networking
- Community Outreach
- Facility Usage and Location Analysis

## Pillar: Outstanding Service

### Parent and Stakeholder Feedback, Education and Networking

- Utilize parents and stakeholders as advocates for NWSRA and for people with disabilities by educating them and other stakeholders about legislative issues and other relative topics, and by providing specific “talking points” and contact information when advocacy is needed.
- Provide opportunities for parents and stakeholders to meet, connect and communicate through a network, periodic meetings and/or electronic communication.
- Offer more frequent evaluation opportunities for parents, both in written and electronic form.

# Pillar: Outstanding Service

## Community Outreach

- Become more involved in member communities by offering social outings to concerts in the park, plays, and other community events, thus increasing the awareness of NWSRA in its member communities and providing a low cost program option for participants.
- Increase networking with special education personnel in member community school districts.
- Continue to educate member agencies about the role and value of NWSRA and the importance of the services they provide and how they are an extension of their agency.
- Encourage Park Districts to host an Open House for parents of children and adults with disabilities, working closely with the school districts to identify families, providing an overview of the relationship between the two agencies and the types of programming available.
- Take advantage of program and partner opportunities at junior colleges and other education institutions.
- Continue to look for partnership and collaboration opportunities within the NWSRA service area and through the state and region.

## Pillar: Outstanding Service

### Facility Usage and Location Analysis

- Inventory and evaluate usage of member agency facilities.
- Establish equitable way to assign locations to programs taking into account the location of participants and availability of facilities
- Determine procedure for accounting for hours of usage in each member community, making sure that there is a fair and equitable process for compensating those that are used more than others.
- Continue to educate member agency staff that NWSRA is an extension of the park district. Encourage them to provide a welcoming environment and an atmosphere of teamwork when working with NWSRA staff, participants and volunteers.