



VIRGINIA RECREATION & PARK SOCIETY

Strategic Plan 2024



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Acknowledgements

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Special Thanks

The Virginia Recreation Parks Society (VRPS) strategic planning steering committee would like to express our sincere gratitude to all stakeholders and members for your invaluable support and cooperation throughout the development of this strategic plan. The successful completion of this project would not have been possible without your support and commitment to fostering sustainable growth and enhancing the quality of services of VRPS.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the current board of directors for their unwavering dedication and expertise in guiding this strategic plan. Their insightful input and constructive feedback have been instrumental in shaping its vision and ensuring its alignment with the VRPS's long term goals.

We would also like to acknowledge the 132 members and stakeholders who actively participated in focus groups and the online survey. Their valuable insights, suggestions, and engagement have played a crucial role in shaping the strategies and initiatives outlined in this strategic plan.

Letter from the Executive Director

Our Pathway to the Future

When strategic planning for an organization starts, participants are asked to share their vision of the future this organization wants to create. This strategic plan is that vision for VRPS – articulated by the Strategic Planning Team but created by you, our members. Thank you for your ideas, brainstorming, feedback, and editing. This is our collective vision for the future of VRPS and parks and recreation in Virginia, and it's also our call to action!

As a membership, we can ask ourselves and our leaders: how will we fulfill our mission to unite all of parks and recreation and leisure services in Virginia? The Strategic Plan lays out our goals through our themes and objectives effectively creating the overarching plan. However, beyond the 'how', I believe it will be our core values that will guide us successfully in this mission. When our core values are built into the DNA of an organization, not only as part of this document, but echoed in discussion, decision-making, and education throughout VRPS, we will be able to navigate whatever the future throws at us while staying strong and committed to our 'why', as well.

In so many of my conversations with members about their hopes for VRPS and for parks and recreation in Virginia, a consistent theme comes up – the desire to be proactive in our destiny and to be thought leaders in our communities, the Commonwealth, and nationally in parks and recreation. VRPS members get things done, solve problems adaptively, and understand their communities' needs intimately. The better we can share your stories through proactive **advocacy**, the better we can raise the standards of excellence in Virginia and gain additional support for your important work.

With talk of excellence, comes the responsibility for **equity** – in the programs VRPS highlights, in the education provided at our events and workshops, and in the organization itself. We will continue to better ourselves and center equity with the help of our other core values of **leadership**, **lifelong learning**, and **networking**. These are our tools for creating change, holding ourselves accountable, and promoting the diverse perspectives, techniques, strengths, and experiences of all professionals in our community in programs big and small, and from all parts of Virginia.

Finally, we can't do all this alone. I hope you see yourself reflected in this plan and in this organization. Much of this plan is focused on the **stewardship** of VRPS, ensuring that our members will always have the resources and community of a strong association working on their behalf. Your participation in VRPS' future is key to its success. Join us – as a member, as a partner, a supporter, a volunteer, or as a leader. The future awaits...

Warmly,



Bailey Kasten, CAE, ICE-CPP
Executive Director

Introduction

Virginia Recreation and Park Society Board and Strategic Plan Team partnered to create an engagement strategy that would provide for robust stakeholder input. The intended focus of the engagement plan was to bring together members, sponsors, partners, board of directors and VRPS staff to maximize information gathering and inspire comprehensive vision for the society's next five years.

The Strategic Plan Team kicked off the member engagement by conducting a SWOT Analysis with key VRPS stakeholders. The stakeholders were made up of the Board of Directors, Foundation Board, Members, Sponsors, Partners, Directors, and University representatives. The SWOT revealed the following internal strengths, weakness and external opportunities and threats of the Society:

Internal Strengths

- Educational and training opportunities
- Networking Opportunities
- Leadership
- Knowledgeable members and staff
- Membership
- Communication
- Use of Resources

Internal Weaknesses

- Lack of Innovation
- Annual Conference (Lack of change and accessibility)
- Communication
- Leadership (Direction, change, diversity)
- Source of funding
- Staffing and staff development
- Marketing
- University partnerships
- Young professional outreach

External Opportunities

- Community partnerships
- Engage younger professionals (current and potential)

- Explore new revenue sources
- All levels of staff development initiatives (trainings, networking, etc.)
- Leadership communications (goals, direction, changes)
- Offering trainings that reach all members

External Threats or Barriers

- Financial stability
- Limited staffing
- Becoming obsolete (lack of college programs, change in priorities)
- Decrease in memberships
- Leadership (support, diversity, communication)
- Competition with other trainings, professional organizations

The VRPS Strategic Plan team facilitated six discovery sessions, three in-person and three virtual between March 22nd-31st, 2023. Discovery session participants totaled 59 stakeholders. The stakeholder make-up consisted of those with VRPS involvement for less than five years encompassing 27% of discovery sessions while members of six to ten years was 19%, eleven to nineteen years at 21%, and twenty plus years at 33% of the sessions' participants.

VRPS' Strategic Plan provides direction for the next five years. The Strategic Plan's purpose is to:

- Create a road map for the future direction of the Virginia Recreation and Park Society
- Determine key areas for future decision-making
- Unify the society around a compelling vision
- Create action toward accomplishment

Staff, the Board of Directors, members, and stakeholders were engaged throughout the process. The Strategic Plan includes specific completed tasks, such as:

- Mission, vision, and values
- Information about the Balanced Scorecard strategic framework
- Strategic themes
- Strategic objectives
- Strategic initiatives and time frames
- Guidelines for implementation
- Engagement summary

Mission, Vision, and Values

A good starting point for an organization's strategy is a review and development of a mission and vision. Mission statements define the business or purpose of the organization. Vision statements are more aspirational: what do we hope to become? The essence of strategic planning asks these three basic questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How will we get there?

In meetings with Board of Directors and staff, the following statements were developed.

Mission: *To unite all engaged in the field of parks, recreation, and leisure services in the Commonwealth of Virginia.*

Vision: *To be an industry leader and trusted resource, connecting and advancing all involved in parks and recreation.*

Values: The values define the important tenets of the way employees work together. As part of the Strategic Plan's engagement process, staff were asked what words best represent the values most important to them. A staff sub-committee finalized and defined the organization's core values.

Advocacy - VRPS is committed to "advancing our parks and recreation story" through raising awareness and advocating with and on the behalf of members on state-wide matters associated with legislation, funding, conservation, equity, health and wellness.

Equity - VRPS strives to address systemic disparities to provide equal opportunities, resources, and outcomes for all individuals, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances.

Leadership - VRPS seeks to attract, develop, and empower leadership at all levels through education, volunteerism, and service to the Society and the profession.

Lifelong Learning - VRPS provides opportunities, resources, and support to empower our staff and members to embrace curiosity, expand their knowledge, and develop new skills.

Networking - VRPS acknowledges the importance of providing both formal and informal opportunities for its members to exchange ideas and practices, and to form professional connections.

Stewardship - VRPS accepts the responsibility to support the Society's mission through excellent management of its resources, assets, and opportunities.



Balanced Scorecard

VRPS Strategic Plan is based on the Balanced Scorecard, a strategy framework that emphasizes the cause-and-effect relationships among distinct yet interrelated perspectives: community, financial performance, internal support processes, and organizational learning and growth. The scorecard focuses on the key drivers of success that lead to the achievement of mission and vision. It was developed in the early 1990s as a platform to measure organizational performance and has since grown into a strategy platform.

The Balanced Scorecard framework includes four themes:

- **Community:** To achieve our mission and vision, how should we seek to meet our community needs?
- **Financial:** To succeed financially, how do we show evidence of our financial stewardship to our taxpayers?
- **Internal Business:** To satisfy our customers, which business practices must we do extremely well?
- **Continuous Member Development:** To achieve our mission and vision, how will we sustain our ability to change, improve, and develop leaders amongst the membership?

Strategic Themes, Objectives, & Initiatives

The plan includes a hierarchy of elements that starts with the most macro level of strategy and moves to a more micro level (moving from strategic

to tactical). The starting point for any strategic planning process is the review of the mission, vision, and values.

Subsequently, strategic themes and objectives were developed. The initiatives support the objectives, or how do we work toward achieving the objectives and themes. After the development of themes and objectives, strategic initiatives were created. Steering committee members developed the themes, leading to development of objectives and initiatives. Each successive element of strategy more specifically detailed the premise of the four themes, as noted in the following:

Strategic Themes: The themes are the most macro level of strategic direction, following the four perspectives of community, financial, internal business support, and learning and growth. They are very broad-based approaches to strategic direction.

Strategic Objectives: These typically number between two and four for each theme. They create a framework for the parameters of strategic direction. Objectives support the themes. They answer the question, “what do we need to do to reach the strategic themes?” Objectives form the basis of key performance indicators.

Strategic Initiatives: The initiatives support the objectives. They provide more detail about how the objectives will be achieved. They have an associated timeline and are categorized according to a short, medium, or long-term time frame.

Diagram 1 provides a visual representation of the steps involved in building strategy:

Diagram 1: Steps to Building Strategy



Diagram 2: VRPS Strategic Map

Empowering Connections and Meaningful Engagement				
Member Perspective	Attracting and retaining members	Identify ways to uniquely promote VRPS and continue to create memorable programs and services	Serving as an industry leader and a trusted source	Developing a well-defined culture and brand
Financial Sustainability				
Financial Perspective	Building financial stability	Diversifying the VRPS Revenue Portfolio	Creating an inclusive and equitable membership model	Developing financial accountability
Organizational Excellence				
Internal Business Perspective	Establish a culture of transparency and trust within membership	Maintaining a Continuity of Operations	Tracking and analyzing industry trends	Providing efficient and effective business operations
Holistic Member Development				
Continuous Member Development	Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Connecting with retirees and past leadership to preserve institutional knowledge	Supporting professional development for members and staff	

Strategic Themes

In using the scorecard, VRPS has developed strategic themes that are broad-brushed organizational descriptions that provide direction, following the four Balanced Scorecard themes of Member Perspective, Financial Perspective, Internal Business Perspective, and Continuous Member Development. The themes include:

Member Perspective: Empowering Connections and Meaningful Engagement

Financial Perspective: Financial Sustainability

Internal Business Perspective: Organizational Excellence

Continuous Member Development: Holistic Member Development

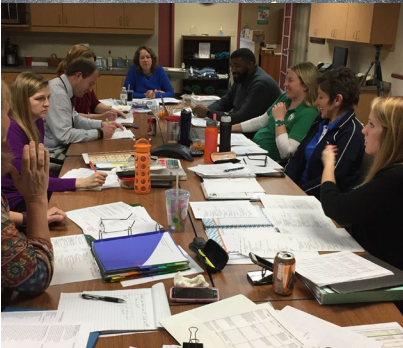
Strategic Map

Diagram 2 shows the information listed above with strategic themes in a Strategy Map. The map includes themes as well as objectives supporting the themes.

The following are the themes, objectives, and initiatives for the next five years from 2024–2028. Initiatives are aligned with the strategic themes and objectives and provide greater specificity on how they will be implemented. Annual initiatives will be reviewed and strategic tactics supporting the initiative will be detailed by the staff involved in completing the initiative. The tactics are not included within the Strategic Plan, as the approach to completing each initiative should be developed at the time the work on the initiative is begun. The time frame for completion of the initiatives is organized according to four categories, as follows:

- **Short-Term Initiatives:** Initiated during 2024 and completed by December 2024
- **Medium-Term Initiatives:** Initiated during 2024 and completed by December 2026
- **Long-Term Initiatives:** Initiated in 2024 and completed in 2028

VRPS Strategic Plan



Theme 1: EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT	
Objective 1: Attracting and Retaining members	Time frame
a. Communicate the benefits, impact, and value of VRPS.	Short-term
b. Implement new student outreach opportunities.	Short-term
c. Engage all Virginia parks and recreation agencies and leaders.	Short-term
d. Develop external engagement strategies.	Medium-term
Theme 1: EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT	
Objective 2: Identify ways to uniquely promote VRPS and continue to create memorable programs and services	Time frame
a. Strategically identify key partners to increase, diversify innovative programs and services.	Medium-term
b. Highlight participating agencies and recognize their involvement.	Short-term
c. Utilize innovative marketing, social media and technology.	Medium-term
Theme 1: EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT	
Objective 3: Serving as an industry leader and a trusted source	Time frame
a. Unite with relevant state departments to inform and collaborate with state officials.	Medium-term
b. Identify legislative priorities and inform membership of impacts to parks and recreation.	Short-term
Theme 1: EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT	
Objective 4: Developing a well-defined culture and brand	Time frame
a. Increase brand recognition.	Long-term
b. Incorporate VRPS Values throughout the Society.	Medium-term
c. Identify and be responsive to member needs.	Short-term
Theme 2: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	
Objective 1: Building financial stability	Time frame
a. Develop a long-term reserve plan.	Short-term
b. Review and update financial policies.	Short-term
Theme 2: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	
Objective 2: Diversifying the VRPS Revenue Portfolio	Time frame
a. Develop and grow partnerships, sponsorships and alternative revenue sources.	Medium-term
Theme 2: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	
Objective 3: Creating an inclusive and equitable membership model	Time frame
a. Conduct comparative analysis.	Short-term
b. Restructure membership fees.	Medium-term
Theme 2: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	
Objective 4: Developing financial accountability	Time frame
a. Establish guidelines for Resource Group/Service Area revenue.	Short-term
b. Provide financial reporting and independent audits.	Short-term
c. Incorporate a collaborative approach to budget creation and sound decision-making.	Short-term

Dec 2023



Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objective 1: Establish a culture of transparency and trust within membership	Time frame
a. Distribute VRPS Annual Report.	Short-term
b. Communicate via Monthly Directors Letter.	Short-term
c. Share regular programmatic and financial updates with members.	Short-term

Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objective 2: Maintaining a Continuity of Operations	Time frame
a. Assess the existing organizational structure.	Short-term
b. Initiate a formal succession management plan.	Medium-term
c. Develop new strategies to recruit, retain, and recognize volunteers.	Short-term
d. Streamline and update Standard Operating Procedures, manuals, policies and processes.	Long-term

Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objective 3: Tracking and analyzing industry trends	Time frame
a. Research and share best practices and industry standards related to parks and recreation and non-profit organizations.	Medium-term
b. Become students of industry data serving as a resource to leaders.	Long-term

Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objective 4: Providing efficient and effective business operations	Time frame
a. Establish key performance indicators.	Short-term
b. Continue internal and external evaluations.	Short-term
c. Evaluate core priorities and offerings.	Medium-term

Theme 4: HOLISTIC MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Objective 1: Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Time frame
a. Develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement.	Short-term
b. Create best practices on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, policies and programs.	Medium-term

Theme 4: HOLISTIC MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Objective 2: Connecting with retirees and past leadership to preserve institutional knowledge	Time frame
a. Increase engagement and communication with retirees.	Short-term
b. Incorporate retirees into mentorship opportunities.	Medium-term
c. Create board transition plan.	Medium-term

Theme 4: HOLISTIC MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Objective 3: Supporting professional development for members and staff	Time frame
a. Offer relevant workshops, informal roundtables and networking opportunities online and in-person.	Short-term
b. Create opportunities to engage and serve the diverse specialty groups and membership segments of VRPS.	Medium-term

Timeframes

- **Short-Term Initiatives:** Initiated during 2024 and completed by December 2024
- **Medium-Term Initiatives:** Initiated during 2024 and completed by December 2026
- **Long-Term Initiatives:** Initiated in 2024 and completed by 2028

Key Performance Indicators

Another important element of the Balanced Scorecard is the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These measures are aligned with the strategic objectives. Below is a chart listing the strategic themes and objectives and the corresponding KPIs for each objective.

	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Empowering Connections and Meaningful Engagement	Attracting and retaining members	Increase in attracting new members Number of members retained
	Identify ways to uniquely promote VRPS and continue to create memorable programs and services	Number of new ideas and substantial programs Efficient and effective programs, workshops, and trainings
	Serving as an industry leader and a trusted source	Having a seat at the table with Virginia Departments Number of partnerships solidified
	Developing a well-defined culture and brand	VRPS recognition across the state Consistency in all marketing efforts and collateral
Financial Sustainability	Building financial stability	Year over year growth Long-term reserve plan created
	Diversifying the VRPS Revenue Portfolio	Alternative Revenue Growth Growth in sponsor donations
	Creating an inclusive and equitable membership model	Creation of a model that includes all agency sizes
	Developing financial accountability	Adherence to new financial policies and procedures
Organizational Excellence	Establish a culture of transparency and trust within membership	Members are knowledgeable of updates and key information in the society Number of VRPS Town Hall Meetings
	Maintaining a Continuity of Operations	Service delivery meets the needs of the members
	Tracking and analyzing industry trends	Annual report of statewide trends
	Providing efficient and effective business operations	Quantified process and service improvements
Holistic Member Development	Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Written statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
	Connecting with retirees and past leadership to preserve institutional knowledge	Increase in retiree involvement in mentorship program, volunteer opportunities, and Foundation
	Supporting professional development for members and staff	Percent of program utilization by members

Implementation Guidelines

The following is a list of suggestions for successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. These elements represent the commitment and discipline required to integrate the process into daily operations.

- The plan becomes the guidepost for VRPS. When decisions or responses to the community are needed, the plan will serve as the reference point for decision-making and whether new issues or responses to the community are of higher importance than what has been established in the plan.
- Strategic Plan information should be included as part of employee onboarding.
- Post a summary version of the plan on the VRPS website and track results. This will assist in providing the community with information about the VRPS's strategic direction and commitment to results. Summarize the plan's progress to distribute with the Society's annual report.
- A staff person or team should have the responsibility of being the "champion" of the plan's implementation to help ensure success. This staff person is responsible for monitoring the plan's progress and works with staff to effectively integrate the plan with operations.
- Assign a leader to each strategic initiative. Each initiative generally requires a team of employees to work on completing the initiative through a cross-functional team.
- Regularly report on the plan's progress. Break the plan into separate fiscal years, and report one year at a time as an ongoing annual work plan. Each initiative for the year should include a list of tactics that support its completion. The tactics are developed prior to each year for the upcoming list of initiatives and are developed by the staff members involved in completing the initiative. It is the project leader's responsibility to report on their initiative quarterly. Input each year's data in a spreadsheet or strategic planning software that lists the themes, objectives, and initiatives start date and completion date and the name of the staff person responsible for the initiative's completion.
- At the end of the year, perform an annual review of the Strategic Plan and document any changes to initiatives to reflect changes in priorities. This process can be included at an annual review meeting in which successive years' initiatives are

discussed as part of the annual budget process. Initiatives should tie into the budget process.

- After each year of the plan, the staff should review the plan's process and re-tool any parts of the process that need improvement.
- The Society's scorecard represents measures at the *objective* level, not the *initiative* level. To supplement the Society's scorecard, the leader of each initiative should develop measures of success for the initiative he or she is responsible for.
- Track the measures on a quarterly basis. Provide an annual narrative about the results. Review the inventory of measures on an annual basis and adjust as necessary to help ensure the measures continuously add value to decision-making.
- Update major stakeholders and members on the plan's implementation and results on an annual basis.
- Conduct staff meetings on a quarterly or semiannual basis to review the plan's progress and results.
- Performance appraisals should reflect the completion of the Strategic Plan initiatives as an evaluation criterion. Align performance criteria with VRPS values.
- Track ideas for new strategies that arise and review them periodically to determine if they supplant any existing initiatives.

Definitions

The following list of key words describes the definitions of the terminology used for the Strategic Plan. They are listed according to how they fall within the hierarchy of strategy, from the most macro to the most micro elements.

Mission—describes the business of the organization. The mission also defines the core purpose of the organization and why it exists.

Vision—desired future of the organization. The vision should be a "stretch" for the organization, but possible to achieve in approximately five years. It should state a measurable achievement.

Values—describe the way the Society operates. These are meaningful expressions of describing what is important in the way we provide our services to the community.

Balanced Scorecard Perspectives—the four perspectives include Community, Financial, Internal

Business Process, and Continuous Member Development. The perspectives demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships in the completion of strategy. All the strategic initiatives are aligned with these perspectives.

Strategic Themes—broad-brushed, macro-oriented organizational sense of direction that relates to the four Balanced Scorecard perspectives.

Strategic Objectives—concise statements describing the specific elements an organization must do well to execute its strategy.

Key Performance Indicators—the indicators are a measurement system that support the strategic objectives. The measures are normally quantitative

indicators and capture numbers, dollars, percentages, etc. Measures assist the staff with the ability to determine organizational performance.

Strategic Initiatives—the specific programs, activities, projects, or actions an organization will undertake to meet performance targets. The strategic initiatives are specifically detailed with specific tactics.

Tactics—tactics are not included as part of the plan. The development occurs after the plan's implementation. Tactics are subordinate to the initiatives and detail the steps necessary to complete an initiative. Board members, staff and stakeholders will identify the tactics for the initiatives before the start of each fiscal year.



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To learn more about Virginia Recreation and Park Society visit:
www.vrps.com