

FAQs from Directors and Leaders of Park Districts and Municipalities

What is a special recreation association (SRA)?

A special recreation association (SRA) is formed by two or more park districts/villages who want to join together to provide recreation programs for their residents with disabilities.

What are the benefits of being a part of a special recreation association?

A special recreation association can provide more programs and a greater range of services than a single community. By pooling residents and funding, more programs that meet the needs of unique individuals can be offered. This includes the ability to provide programs for target age groups and ability levels.

An SRA has a professional staff that has the education and training to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. They have the ability to design programs and adapt activities to provide the programs needed by your residents. The staff also has the ability to perform outreach to those with special needs.

The shared funding of expenses is a benefit to SRA involvement. The SRA hires the specialized staff and purchases wheelchair accessible vehicles and other adaptive equipment that serves the residents of all the member districts. Joint funding is more economical than working as a single community.

The SRA may also assist its members with accessibility audits and other special projects relating to people with disabilities.

Why should my village or park district be a part of a special recreation association?

Park districts and recreation departments are required to provide services for all residents, including those with disabilities. This can mean stand alone programs designed for individuals with disabilities and inclusion services which provide accommodations for those with disabilities who choose to participate in any of the recreation department or park district's programs and services.

A special recreation association is an excellent way of meeting the recreation needs of your residents with all types of programs and services. A special recreation association is designed to specifically provide these services.

Individuals with disabilities need many types of adaptations in order to achieve success and satisfaction in their leisure activities. SRA programs and services are specially designed to meet these needs.

The number of individuals with disabilities is increasing. The needs and demands for appropriate service will also increase. Being proactive establishes your agency as one that intends to serve ***all*** of its residents.

Special recreation associations have proven to be a very cost-effective way of serving people with disabilities. By sharing the expense of providing services with other park and recreation agencies, your district or department uses funds more economically.

With over thirty years of experience, SRAs in Illinois have proven to be national models for programming excellence for people with disabilities. The pooling of population and financial resources creates and supports much needed specialized programming in a very effective and efficient manner.

How do you form a special recreation association?

An SRA can be formed by two or more units of local government in Illinois. These entities develop a joint agreement outlining their intent to provide recreation services for people with disabilities. Other elements in a joint agreement include the manner in which the services will be funded and delivered, the establishment of a governing board for the association, and other rules and protocol deemed appropriate by the member boards.

How do you join a special recreation association?

If your community is interested in learning more about an existing SRA, contact the SRA to learn about the expectations of its member communities. The SRA will let you know if they are seeking or would consider an additional member into its association. SRAs have many contacts with other service providers which would be of help in evaluating your community's needs. Generally, a resolution seeking to join an SRA is extended by the prospective member to the SRA Board. If the SRA Board is in agreement, the resolution is acted upon by the SRA Board and the new member is admitted into the SRA.

How much does it cost to be in a special recreation association?

The actual cost varies by park district or village. Most SRAs use a percentage based on the Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) of the member entity to establish that member's cost of involvement in the SRA. Some SRAs use a combination of the EAV and a population formula to determine the member contribution.

How do you fund a special recreation association?

Funding is available through the special recreation tax in Illinois for communities that are a part of a joint agreement and is exempt from the Illinois Property Tax Limitation Law. This prevents the cost of providing services for people with disabilities from impacting the funding for other programs and services offered by your district or municipality. Some communities choose to provide funds from their general fund, rather than levying the tax. In addition to member agency contributions, program fees, grants, and donations are used to support the SRA. **(See Illinois Park District Code Section 5-8 or Illinois Municipal Code 65 ILCS 5/11-95-13 and 14.)**

What if I don't have many people with disabilities in my area?

Many directors of park districts and elected officials don't hear from their residents with disabilities and therefore may think that there is no need for special recreation in their area. There are over 200 park districts and villages currently members of SRAs who may have thought the same thing at one time.

Individuals with disabilities or parents of special needs children often are busy taking care of their needs. Their days can be filled with school/work, doctor's appointments, therapies, and transporting themselves or children to these places. By the end of the day there isn't always enough time or energy to advocate for recreation too. It is also important to know that Special Recreation Associations are unique to Illinois, so people who can benefit from these services might not even know to ask. Thirty years of special recreation programming in Illinois tells us that every community has residents with special needs. You will find it interesting to view your areas demographics on the US Census website and look at reported disability information.

You could also contact your school district and special education cooperative and ask for general statistics for how many children receive special education who reside in your service area.

In Illinois, this includes those between the ages of 3 and 22. Sheltered workshops, group homes, and rehabilitation facilities in the area could assist you in determining the number of adults who they serve and who might benefit from special recreation services. Special Olympics is another good source of general information. Disability support groups can also assist in providing information about where to find individuals in your community.

How do I determine the needs of people with disabilities in my village or park district?

Work with the providers noted above to contact potential participants. Set up meetings to discuss services and needs with these providers and groups of parents, residents, and interested individuals. Listen to what they share. Determine how to gather information from those who cannot attend meetings.

How can I learn more about the benefits of special recreation associations?

Additional information is on this website. Click on Find My Services, then SRA Directory. Feel free to contact a special recreation association listed in the directory. The executive directors of the associations would be happy to share their experiences with you and resources that would be helpful in your decision-making.