

Fairfax County Park Authority

LOB #334:

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Purpose

The purpose of this LOB is to provide information on Park Authority programs and services to residents and visitors and to ensure community engagement. It implements communication strategies to enable the public to understand and participate in the Park Authority's vision, mission, and values.

Description

This LOB serves as the face of the Park Authority providing critical information to the public and Park Authority staff via public/community meetings, social media, the web, traditional media relations, Virginia Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act compliance ensuring community participation in short and long term park planning, and constituent resource management and emergency communications regarding park and facility programming. This LOB facilitates approximately 150 special community events and outreach meetings per year. This LOB is comprised of 4 full time General Fund staff and 1 full time Revenue and Operating Fund staff. The function of this LOB has existed since the inception of the Park Authority in 1950.

Illustrative facts and figures:

- Facebook "followers" have grown consistently over the past two fiscal years at 1200 per year.
- As of June 30, 2015, this LOB had 6,036 fans. In FY 2015, this represented 21.3 percent growth.
- Facebook Reach grew 13.7 percent in FY 2015 to 600,354 (people who see the Park Authority posts).
- Facebook impressions grew from 1,227,471 in FY 2014 to 1,543,927 in FY 2015, a 20.5 percent growth.
- Twitter followers surged in FY 2015 gaining 2,126 followers recording 44 percent growth to a total of 4,823.
- Total annual Twitter impressions for FY 2015 were 613,420.
- Web page views in FY 2015 totaled 37.6 million, a 4 percent growth since FY 2013.
- Parktakes Mobile page views increased 63 percent in FY 2014 and an additional 21 percent in FY 2015 for two year growth of 70 percent.
- Web – 4,295 webpages maintained, 1,000 content file updates quarterly that include web pages, PDFs and images.
- In 2014, 90 press releases were published, 137 public service announcements and 23 cut lines (photos with illustrative information) were made.
- Parkmail constituent emails tallied approximately 60 per day reaching approximately 21,900 over the calendar year. Approximately 7,500 of these required responses on particular issues or concerns.

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Benefits

This LOB provides the following benefits:

- Provides timely information on Park Authority programs and services enabling residents to avail themselves of everything the Authority has to offer.
- Enables public participation in the park planning process through various outreach methods including meeting notices, meetings facilitation, collecting comments, and posting the comments on the web.
- Enables public participation in Park Board governance by publishing Park Board agendas, reports and materials; calendars and biographical information, archives of minutes, park master plans, and press releases, public service announcements and coordinates regular public forums.
- Generates content and provides oversight of the website and social media for an expanding number of public platforms including Facebook, the park blog, YouTube and Twitter, to meet the ever-growing demand by the public for open access to information about the park system.

This LOB closely aligns with many of the County's vision elements, especially Connecting People and Places by connecting the community with their parks via emails on programs, facilitating the passing of information on camps, events, etc., and by providing a locator and directions to help them arrive safely and directly and Creating a Culture of Engagement by participating in online engagement of the community via blogs and engagement software; by dialog at public meetings and events; and by facilitating the sign up of volunteers, highlighting their accomplishments; and coordinating and executing the volunteer awards programs.

Mandates

This LOB is partially mandated by the following statutes:

- VFOIA – State and Federal mandate - Freedom of Information Act Code of Virginia §2.2-3704-3706
- ADA – access for meetings and events - ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-325)
- Open Public Meetings Act –State - Open Meetings Law Code of Virginia §2.2-3707-3712

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Trends and Challenges

The main trends related to this LOB include the following:

- Social media is now a primary communication vehicle.
- Reduction of the media core has necessitated pushing information out to the public and actively publishing content on a variety of platforms.
- Developing a wide variety of different platforms and communications tools including email, blogs, social media, etc.

The major challenges that this LOB faces include the following:

- Increased public demand for information using new technology.
- Mastering a wide variety of different platforms and communications tools including email, blogs, social media, etc.
- Transition to mobile applications.
- ADA compliance reformatting requirements for web documents.
- FOIA requests continue to increase, approximately 300 percent over three years.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #334: Public Information and Engagement			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$399,765	\$397,137	\$456,209
Benefits	36,250	35,975	50,001
Operating Expenses	59,425	59,606	26,898
Total Expenditures	\$495,440	\$492,718	\$533,108
General Fund Expenditures	\$345,752	\$333,768	\$378,442
Total Revenue	\$5,985	\$4,160	\$13,713
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	5 / 5	5 / 5	5 / 5
Total Positions	5 / 5	5 / 5	5 / 5

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Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
FOIA Requests	60	100	200	240	260
FOIA Response time	5 days	5 days	5 days	5 days	5 days
Respond to Parkmail within 24 hours.	7,000	7,200	7,500	10,000	12,500
Using emails for Marketing instead of US Mail	No data available	1.515 million	1.554 million	1.600 million	1.625 million

The Public Information Office meets the VFOIA mandates. Many documents are provided via email, and online forms help to quickly clarify the requests, ultimately streamlining the process. This adherence to time constraints provides both compliance with the law and excellent customer service.

As with previous metrics, customer service is a primary tenet in the treatment of a host of requests, queries, and concerns that are shared online via Parkmail. This e-mailbox is one of several that the Park Authority utilizes to address constituent needs in a timely fashion, but the only one that maintains a 24-hour timeframe for initial response on weekdays, and often on weekends.

The use of mass e-mails has enhanced the ability to communicate directly with customers. This marketing allows the Park Authority to grow the customer base, increase revenues and reduce the cost of mailings. Mass email use is expected to grow by approximately 100,000 from FY 2014 to FY 2016.

For the Park Revenue and Operating fund, E-subscription to Parktakes Magazine, providing information on revenue programs and classes, further drives parks use of technology and the ability to gain more e-subscriptions. The majority of new members elect e-subscriptions which reduces the number of copies printed and mailed. From FY 2013 to FY 2015, e-subscriptions increased by approximately 10,000, from 40,000 to 50,000.

Public engagement defines the Park Authority realizing that people must love their parks in order to engage with the park system offerings. This engagement is shouldered in large measure by the Public Information Office in support of other divisions and the Park Board. Examples include bi-weekly public forums for the Park Board, community and media relations work, approximately 150 events annually, several dozen park planning meetings, hundreds of opportunities to share information at fairs, Homeowner Associations meetings, town halls and other civic engagements, as well as Idealscale, social media platforms, publications, blogs and our website. This office facilitates meetings and often provides logistical and staff support. The efforts of the Public Information Office ensure that residents of this community are aware of the benefits and opportunities provided by the Park Authority and know how to avail themselves of those opportunities