



2026

National Gold Medal Award

The Premiere Award in Parks and Recreation

Public Agency Questions and Judging Criteria

This document provides the 2026 National Gold Medal Award application questions with assigned point values, maximum word count per question, and the criteria used by the National Gold Medal Award Judges to assess the applicant's responses. It is intended as a guide; judges apply their own experiences and knowledge in their assessment of each response.

Applicants should use this document as a guide to frame their responses however, they are encouraged to remember their agency is unique in its enabling legislation, resources, constituents, and challenges. The National Gold Medal Award seeks to identify those entities (public agencies and armed forces installation programs) that demonstrate excellence in managing and delivering high quality parks and recreation services, *regardless of the size of the budget, the acres managed, the types and number of facilities, or size of staff.*

NOTE: Maximum total word count and point value vary for each question.

- 1. Every park and recreation agency has a unique mission, culture, funding, and legislative framework. Describe specific management practices or strategies that your agency does well to meet its stated goals.**

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 15 points

*This question is for the agency to explain in broad terms their management practices or strategies that they judge they do well. Why do they believe they are a national leader in managing their agency? This question is **not** about the magnitude of their resources (budget, revenues, grants, staff, facilities, etc) but how well they fulfill their mission and serve their community using the resources they have. The response should be linked to their enabling legislation, vision, mission, goals and objectives, action plans, or strategic plan. The response is intended to tie what the agency was created to do with how effective it is at managing their resources to achieve its mission.*

- 2. Building on your response from #1, how does your agency measure success in the areas stated in Question 1? Provide three examples of what is measured, how it is measured, and how the data is used in decision-making.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

*In Question #1 the agency is asked to state in broad terms why they believe they are a leader in managing its resources to meet its stated goals using the resources it has. The magnitude of the resources is **not** important; what is important is how effectively they manage their resources to achieve their mission, goals, and objectives. Agencies are to provide three examples of the types of data collected and how used in decision-making.*

- 3. Effective agencies understand their funding *regardless of the amount* and plan carefully how those funds will be used. Describe your agency's fiscal management strategies and provide two examples of how funds are allocated to support your mission and goals.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

This question seeks to understand the agency's approach to fiscal planning and management, specifically how it allocates and utilizes funds to advance its mission and achieve its goals. The emphasis is on how the agency manages and applies its financial resources, not on the total amount of funding received. The response should highlight two fiscal management strategies the agency uses to allocate funds effectively.

- 4. Provide three examples from the past three years of creative strategies that keep staff informed, engaged and involved in decision making. Explain desired outcomes, data collected, and how it informed actions.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

This question requests the agency share new or creative actions it is taking to communicate and/or connect internally with its team members beyond staff meetings or newsletters. Have these efforts resulted in improved staff morale, more efficient decision-making, and/or sharing of resources, etc.? Describe three initiatives or actions taken, the desired outcome(s) and how measured.

- 5. Provide three examples from the past three years of agency partnerships with external entities that expanded resources or increased impact. Describe the partnership, the data collected, and the resulting impact.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

The intent of this question is to identify how the agency partners to increase resources or expand its influence. Describe three initiatives or actions undertaken, how measured, and the desired outcome.

- 6. Provide three examples from the past three years of measurable and impactful results your agency has achieved. Provide context, the outcome(s) achieved and how these results were communicated to policymakers and the public.**

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 10 points

Park and recreation agencies are often asked about their value and the impact they are having in their community. This question seeks to determine if the agency has identified and demonstrated the outcomes of their services and programs to its community and decision makers. Describe three examples, why these outcome(s) were chosen, and how progress is measured and communicated.

- 7. Provide three examples from the past three years of innovative practices or approaches that strengthened the agency's performance. Describe what was done and its impact on one or more areas (i.e., service**

delivery, programs, customer satisfaction, communications, partnerships, financial condition, maintenance practices or staff performance).

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 10 points

One of the strengths of the parks and recreation profession is it is constantly reinventing itself and adapting to internal and external forces. Has the agency reinvented/adapted by creating new innovations, delivery methods, partnerships, etc.? The intent of this question is to identify three new innovations the agency has implemented during the last three years that has had a significant positive impact to the community it serves.

- 8. Provide two initiatives or actions your agency has taken in the past three years to promote equity in programs, policies, and practices. Explain how these efforts ensure that all community members have fair and inclusive access to quality programs and services. Provide context, the outcomes achieved, and how they were measured.**

Maximum 150 words / Maximum 5 points

The intent of this question is to learn if everyone in the community has fair and just access to quality parks, facilities, recreation programs and services regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, age, language, or physical or mental abilities.

Is there an equitable delivery of facilities and recreation programs throughout the community and has the agency identified any barriers that need addressing? Does the agency recognize and celebrate differences and ensure community members / customers feel welcome? The agency may submit it has identified inequities, provided it reports on how the inequities are being addressed.

- 9. Provide two examples from the past three years of how your agency has connected community members to programs, spaces or services that promote health and well-being. Provide context, the outcomes achieved and how they were measured.**

Maximum 150 words / Maximum 5 points

Park and recreation agencies play a vital role in meeting the evolving health needs of their community. Health and well-being can include programs that provide access to healthy foods; physical activity; social connections; nature; substance abuse prevention; mental health; or improve air and water quality. The core of this work is equity, ensuring all people can achieve positive health and well-being outcomes.

- 10. Provide two examples from the past three years of how your agency has advanced environmental sustainability and resiliency. Provide context, the outcomes achieved, and how they were measured.**

Maximum 150 words / Maximum 5 points

Implementation of community-wide sustainability measures that improve the environment as well as promote human and ecosystem health can include protecting the natural habitat, stormwater management and lowering of water usage, focused maintenance practices, reducing or eliminating use of carbon-based energy, reducing landfill waste, providing programs that educate and engage community members, and intentional communications through websites, social media, brochures, and signage.

11. Describe a challenge(s) your agency or community experienced in the past three years and how it responded. Explain how the agency identified the challenge(s), the actions taken, and the results / changes achieved.

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 10 points

There is no one answer to Question #11 as each agency is different which means the challenge(s) an agency faces will be unique. This question has three components: identification of the challenge; how the agency responded; and the measurement(s) used to evaluate effectiveness. The challenges may be manmade, weather, unprecedented growth, government changes, pandemics, civil or political unrest. These ideas are not inclusive but are provided as possibilities.

TOTAL WORDS: 2610

TOTAL POINTS: 100

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