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How to Establish a Play Pack Equipment Rental/Lending Program

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Wendy has been a leader in the field, representing Connecticut and New England on several National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Boards and Committees. She previously served as the Executive Director of CRPA and Assistant Regional Director for NRPA's Northeast region.

She has received Connecticut's annual professional award, and is the founder of S&S® Worldwide's Chalk It Up!™ program, which features Benefits Programming & Awareness opportunities. She is also a certified NRPA mentor for Benefits Based Awareness, Programming & Management programs.

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How to Establish a Play Pack Equipment Rental/Lending Program

The Benefits of a Rental or Lending Program

Everyone wants to get together to hang out, renew old friendships, meet the neighbors, or just plain have a good time with friends and family. Sounds great – but the good times and interactions among people who don't usually socialize together doesn't necessarily happen on its own.

The next time you get a call from a neighborhood group wanting help with a block party or a nervous family member renting your park pavilion for an upcoming reunion, or if your department wants to foster a sense of community by hosting neighborhood outreach activities, a Play Pak rental or lending program is for you!

So, you've decided to make available equipment for picnic and group gatherings – good for you. Here's some help to get you started...

Consider the ups and downs of this service:
Many departments have offered "Picnic Kits" in the past. Many still do with great success. Those that have stopped this service did so because of difficulties in the logistics. Most departments had trouble with storage, drop offs/pick ups and damaged equipment. The service is used most during the busiest times of the year. Some have even said "it is a major pain in the you-know-what," "it's too labor intensive" and "hard to manage." So why do it?

Almost everyone that reported this also said the program was well received and worth the effort, and that they would do it again if they could improve on these concerns. Many others said that in spite of the extra effort, the benefits to the citizens far outweigh the problems. Overall, people think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. For example, it:

- is a valuable community service
- is an inexpensive option for equipment that's too expensive for limited use
- promotes a Positive Play Image
- helps to meet society's needs
- can assist non-profit groups and help you make new partners
- complements your picnic pavilion rentals
- will be used by lots of people on a fairly regular basis

Who wants this stuff? Neighborhood Block Parties, Scouts, Church Groups, Sports Teams for end-of-the-season parties, Kids' Birthday Parties, Family Reunions.

Now, let's get you started...

We have surveyed departments across the USA and have found several successful models to help you out. The following ideas are a guide for you. You may have to adapt the ideas, prices, etc. to best fit your individual agency's needs.

It's easy to promote this program! Here's a sample Program Description and/or Press Release:

Come Out & Play, Funville! (or your Community/Agency Name)
Let the Funville Parks & Recreation Department help you put together your next fun family gathering, neighborhood block party, etc. Our new "Come Out & Play!®" Paks are now available to lend/rent. Kits include all the goods you'll need to save you from having to run out and buy the stuff, and then clutter up your garage later!

Pick up your Play Pak on Friday and return it the following Monday. A $_____ deposit is required, and a small fee of $_____ gets you all this and more! Our staff can help you plan your event with resources such as game books and icebreaker activities to make your event memorable! Just ask us for help when you stop in. Reserve your kit at least ___ days in advance.

How to Oversee Your Program/LOGISTICS

Fees & Deposits
You will need to decide on a fee and/or deposit you may want to charge. Prices vary based on your needs. Different places have charged anything from no fee up to a $12 fee, and a $10 deposit to as much as a $25 deposit. Deposits are usually refundable based on the condition of the equipment upon return. If you accept credit cards, you can hold a deposit on the renter's card.

Drop Off & Pick Up
Since the majority of rentals will be for weekend use, a Friday pickup and Monday return is recommended. You can offer pickups and rentals at anytime. However, it's helpful to have consistent hours for this so it doesn't impose on your other daily duties. It doesn't actually matter if renters pick them up on Thursday and bring them back on Tuesday; it's really your call based on your staff availability. If you are open on weekends, you could charge a daily fee if a renter returns the Pak in time for another user to pick up for Sunday.

What's in the Play Pak? Partial vs. Full
Each Play Pak can be issued as a whole or partial order, depending upon your customer's needs. You can use a checklist to keep track of items this way, and it will allow parts of the kit to be used by more customers each time. Upon request, you could offer larger items such as a tug-of-war rope or the megaphone, but these items would not normally be included in every rental Pak.

Storage & Care of Equipment

- Laminate game instructions so they'll last longer.
- Keep a backup master copy of game instructions.
- Keep dirt off equipment.
- Keep balls properly inflated to prevent damage from over/under inflation by a customer.
- Request that customers return equipment packed in the same way they received it.
- Inspect equipment upon return before the customer leaves.

Paperwork
It is best if you have a sign-out sheet clearly stating that the renter shall be held responsible for damage or loss of equipment. It should clearly state what your replacement policy is. Do you want the renter to replace the item, or will you charge a specific replacement fee? Have the sign-out form designed so that the equipment can be checked back in and inspected upon return.

Advertising
Create an informational handout explaining all logistics of the rental program and make it available in the department.

Replacements & Budgeting
Most departments polled will replace equipment as needed when worn out, lost or broken. Your budget can be based on deposits, or a line-item request (ranging from $100-$300 per year).

Depending on your audience, many of our Activity Packs may be suitable for a rental program. Two popular choices are the **W4536 Field Day Pack** and our **W6046 Active Play Pack**.

Add-Ons for Extra Value

Here is a list of extra items you can find in the S&S® Recreation, Primelife® and Discount Sports catalogs. or online at ssww.com, that can augment the Play Pak for greater versatility.

Item	Item #	Item	Item #
4 Team Goal	W8796	Participant Ribbons	W7141
Croquet Set	W10675	Pennant Streamers	W7371
Playground Balls	W6055	Horse Shoe Set	W10604
Hoops	W10320	Potato Sacks	W4537
Tailgate Toss Game	W10666	“Everybody Dance” CD	MM103
Bocce	W10725	Electric Inflator	W3509
Washer Toss Game	W10377	Shuffleboard Set	W10131

Additional Resources

Surveys
You can measure your success with a survey that your participants return to you after they use the Play Pak. Let everyone recognize just how well they have connected and communicated with one another and measure the increased socialization gained by the provision of the Play Pak service. Feedback from participants is a great way to demonstrate your effectiveness to those who need to see.

Offer Over-the-Counter/Point-of-Sale Option
Have a brand new kit on display and for sale to families – the price of the kit will beat the price they'll pay retail at the local store!

Recycled Sports Equipment Option
Have a local used sporting goods franchise offer the kits as a partnership with your organization. They can store and maintain the equipment, you can promote the kits and the store in exchange.

Sponsors
Have a local sporting goods company – or any other business interested in allying itself with your agency – purchase the kits and have them place their logo on the bag. "This Play Pak compliments of *Robert's Food Mart. Stop in today for some healthy snacks or to pick up supplies for your next event!"*

Credits
Many thanks to the Park and Recreation Departments listed below:

Stamford, CT	Haddam-Killingworth, CT	Beloit, WI	Appleton, WI
Madison, WI	Columbia, MO	Channahon, IL	Perinton, NY
Rockville, MD	Wicomico County, Salisbury, MD	Troy, MI	Sunnyvale, CA

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Tear off this sheet and duplicate it for your participants.

Getting ready to have fun with your Play Pak? Here are some things to consider...

You need a warm up – a mixer activity to get people involved. For example, have everyone in your play area try to line up according to age without using any verbal cues whatsoever. Or have everyone with a birthday in July step to a particular area. Do this until everyone has a chance to meet someone new with whom they share something in common.

Ask different people to be in charge of specific activities to start at different times.

Activities can include all ages and ability levels – be sure to ask your Parks & Recreation Department staff for advice if you're not sure if an activity is age-appropriate.

It's always a big hit when you bring "penny candy" as prizes!

How about some theme ideas for invitations, decorations and costumes?

Neighborhood "Survivor"	First Week	Holidays	Fun & Games 101
Mixing & Meeting (M&M)	Circus	Hayride/Farm	Olympics
Celebration for Connecting	Outer Space	Jungle/Tarzan	Hollywood Stunts
Archeological Expedition	Mystery & Mayhem		
Family Fun P.A.C.T. (Playing And Coming Together)			

Game Ideas

There are many great books available that have great game ideas. For example, *Kids' Outdoor Parties* by Penny Warner has 35 different exciting party themes for kids. For adults, we recommend *Games People Play*, also by Penny Warner. If you're looking to have fun at work, try *201 Ways to Have Fun at Work* by Hemsath & Yerkes.

Safety

Warning! This kit weighs over 20 pounds. Please lift with care. All physical activity carries some potential for physical harm. Please follow recommended game rules at all times. Remember, let kids be kids. Adults should use extra care when playing with children that are smaller in size and weaker in strength.

Please tear off and return the bottom of this sheet to your Parks & Recreation Department when you're finished.

Name (optional) _____

For what purpose did you borrow this Play Pak? _____

Did you find it useful? ____ If not, why? _____

Did you use all of the equipment provided? _____ If not, what didn't you need? _____

_____

What else would you want in the Play Pak instead? _____

Did everyone play? _____

Did they appear to have fun? _____

Did people that would not otherwise interact do so? _____

Would you borrow the Play Pak again for future events?_____