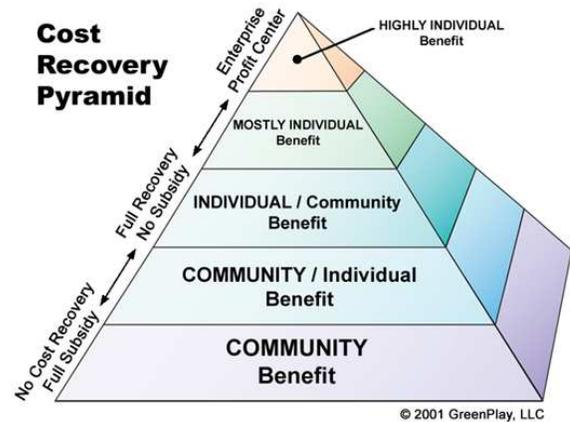


## APPENDIX III - COST RECOVERY PYRAMID METHODOLOGY

The creation of a cost recovery philosophy and policy is a key component to maintaining an agency's financial control, equitably priced offerings, and identifying core programs, facilities and services.

Critical to this philosophical undertaking is the support and buy-in of elected officials and advisory boards, staff and ultimately of citizens. Whether or not significant changes are called for, the organization wants to be certain that it is philosophically aligned with its constituents. The development of the cost recovery philosophy and policy is built upon a very logical foundation, using the understanding of who is benefiting from the parks and recreation service to determine how that service should be paid for.



The development of the cost recovery philosophy can be separated into the following steps:

### Step 1 - Building on Your Mission - What is Your Mission?

The entire premise for this process is to fulfill the Community mission. It is important that organizational values are reflected in the mission. Often mission statements are a starting point and further work needs to occur to create a more detailed common understanding of the interpretation of the mission. This is accomplished by involving staff in a discussion of a variety of Filters.

### Step 2 - Understanding Filters and the Pyramid

Filters are a series of continuums covering different ways of viewing service provision. The **Primary Filters** influence the final positioning of services as they relate to each other and are summarized below. The **Benefits Filter**, however, forms the **foundation** of the **Pyramid Model** and is used in this discussion to illustrate a cost recovery philosophy and policies for parks and recreation organizations. The other filters are explained later.

Filter	Definition
<b>Benefit</b>	Who receives the benefit of the service? (Skill development, education, physical health, mental health, safety)
<b>Commitment</b>	What is the intensity of the program?
<b>Trends</b>	Is it tried and true or a fad?
<b>Obligation</b>	Is it our role to provide? (Is it legally mandated, e.g. ADA)
<b>Market</b>	What is the effect of the program in attracting customers?
<b>Relative Cost to Provide</b>	What is the cost per participant?
<b>Environmental Impact</b>	What is the impact to the resource or other visitors?
<b>Political</b>	What out of our control?
<b>Who We Serve</b>	Are we targeting certain populations?

## THE BENEFITS FILTER

The principal foundation of all the filters is the **Benefits Filter**. It is shown first as a continuum and then applied to the Cost Recovery Pyramid model.

Conceptually, the base level of the pyramid represents the mainstay of a public parks and recreation program. Programs appropriate to higher levels of the pyramid should only be offered when the preceding levels below are full enough to provide a foundation for the next level. This foundation and upward progression is intended to represent the public parks and recreation core mission, while also reflecting the growth and maturity of an organization as it enhances its program and facility offerings.

It is often easier to integrate the values of the organization with its mission if they can be visualized. An ideal philosophical model for this purpose is the pyramid. In addition to a physical structure, *pyramid* is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "an immaterial structure built on a broad supporting base and narrowing gradually to an apex." Parks and recreation programs are built with a broad supporting base of core services, enhanced with more specialized services as resources allow. Envision a pyramid sectioned horizontally into five levels.

### COMMUNITY Benefit

The foundational level of the pyramid is the largest, and includes those programs, facilities, and services that benefit the **COMMUNITY** as a whole. These programs, facilities, and services can increase property values, provide safety, address social needs, and enhance quality of life for residents. The community generally pays for these basic services and facilities through taxes. These services are offered to residents at minimal or no fee. A large percentage of the tax support of the agency would fund this level of the pyramid.



*Examples of these services could include the existence of the community parks and recreation system, the ability for youngsters to visit facilities on an informal basis, development and distribution of marketing brochures, low-income or scholarship programs, park and facility planning and design, park maintenance, or others.*

**NOTE:** All examples are generic - your programs and services may be very different based on your agencies mission, demographics, goals, etc.

### COMMUNITY / Individual Benefit

The second and smaller level of the pyramid represents programs, facilities, and services that promote individual physical and mental well-being, and provide recreation skill development. They are generally the more traditionally expected services and beginner instructional levels. These programs, services, and facilities are typically assigned fees based on a specified percentage of direct and indirect costs. These costs are partially offset by both a tax subsidy to account for the **COMMUNITY** Benefit and participant fees to account for the **INDIVIDUAL** Benefit.



*Examples of these services could include the ability of teens and adults to visit facilities on an informal basis, ranger led interpretive programs, and beginning level instructional programs and classes, etc.*

### INDIVIDUAL / Community Benefit

The third and even smaller level of the pyramid represents services that promote individual physical and mental well-being, and provide an intermediate level of recreational skill development. This level provides more **INDIVIDUAL** Benefit and less **COMMUNITY** Benefit and should be priced accordingly. The



individual fee is higher than for programs and services that fall in the lower pyramid levels.

*Examples of these services could include summer recreational day camp, summer sports leagues, year-round swim team, etc.*

### **MOSTLY INDIVIDUAL Benefit**

The fourth and still smaller pyramid level represents specialized services generally for specific groups, and may have a competitive focus. In this level programs and services may be priced to recover full cost, including all direct and indirect expenses.



*Examples of these services might include specialty classes, golf, and outdoor adventure programs. Examples of these facilities might include camp sites with power hook-ups.*

### **HIGHLY INDIVIDUAL Benefit**

At the top of the pyramid, the fifth and smallest level represents activities that have a profit center potential, and may even fall outside of the core mission. In this level, programs and services should be priced to recover full cost plus a designated profit percentage.



*Examples of these activities could include elite diving teams, golf lessons, food concessions, company picnic rentals and other facility rentals, such as for weddings, or other services.*

## **Step 3 - Sorting Services**

It is critical that this sorting step be done with staff, and with governing bodies and citizens in mind. This is where ownership is created for the philosophy, while participants discover the current and possibly varied operating histories, cultures, missions, and values of the organization. It is the time to develop consensus and get everyone on the same page, the page you write together. Remember, as well, this effort must reflect the community and must align with the thinking of policy makers.

### **Sample Policy Language:**

XXX community brought together staff from across the department to sort existing programs into each level of the pyramid. This was a challenging step. It was facilitated by an objective and impartial facilitator in order to hear all viewpoints. It generated discussion and debate as participants discovered what different staff members had to say about serving culturally and economically different parts of the community; about historic versus recreational parks; about adults versus youth versus seniors; about weddings and interpretive programs; and the list goes on. It was important to push through the “what” to the “why” to find common ground. This is all what discovering the philosophy is about.

## **Step 4 - Understanding the Other Filters**

Inherent in sorting programs into the pyramid model using the benefits filter is the realization that other filters come into play. This can result in decisions to place programs in other levels than might first be thought. These filters also follow a continuum form however do not necessarily follow the five levels like the benefits filter. In other words, the continuum may fall totally within the first two levels of the pyramid. These filters can aid in determining core programs versus ancillary programs. These filters represent a layering effect and should be used to make adjustments to an initial placement in the pyramid.

**THE MARKETING FILTER:** What is the effect of the program in attracting customers?



**Loss Leader**

**Popular - High Willingness to Pay**

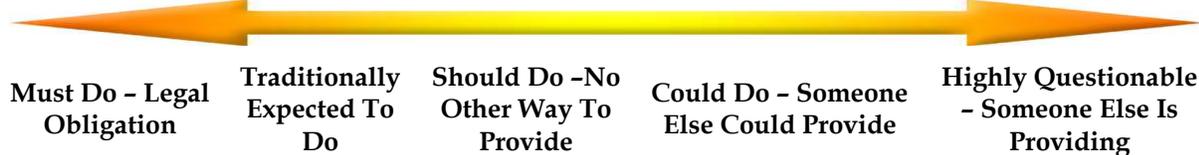
**THE COMMITMENT FILTER:** What is the intensity of the program, what is the commitment of the participant?



**THE TRENDS FILTER:** Is the program or service tried and true, or is it a fad?



**THE OBLIGATION FILTER:** Is it our role to provide? Is it legally mandated?



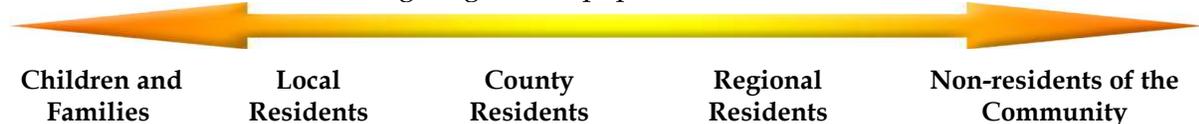
**THE RELATIVE COST TO PROVIDE FILTER:** What is the cost per participant?



**THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT FILTER:** What is the impact to the resource or other visitors?



**WHO WE SERVE:** Are we targeting certain populations?



**THE POLITICAL FILTER:** What is out of our control?

This filter does not operate on a continuum, but is a reality, and will dictate from time to time where certain programs fit in the pyramid.

**Step 5 - Determining Current Subsidy/Cost Recovery Levels**

Subsidy and cost recovery are complementary. If a program is subsidized at 75%, it has a 25% cost recovery, and vice-versa. It is more powerful to work through this exercise thinking about where the tax subsidy is used rather than what is the cost recovery. When it is complete, you can reverse thinking to articulate the cost recovery philosophy, as necessary.

The overall subsidy/cost recovery level is comprised of the average of everything in all of the levels together as a whole. Determine what the current subsidy level is for the programs sorted into each level. There may be quite a range in each level, and some programs could overlap with other levels of the pyramid. This will be rectified in the final steps.

### Step 6 – Assigning Desired Subsidy/Cost Recovery Levels

Ask these questions: Who benefits? Who pays? Now you have the answer; who benefits – pays! The tax subsidy is used in greater amounts at the bottom levels of the pyramid, reflecting the benefit to the **Community** as a whole. As the pyramid is climbed, the percentage of tax subsidy decreases, and at the top levels it may not be used at all, reflecting the **Individual** benefit. So, what is the right percentage of tax subsidy for each level? It would be appropriate to keep some range within each level; however, the ranges should not overlap from level to level.

Again, this effort must reflect your community and must align with the thinking of your policy makers. In addition, pricing must also reflect what your community thinks is reasonable, as well as the value of the offering.

#### *Examples*

*Many times categories at the bottom level will be completely or mostly subsidized, but you may have a small cost recovery to convey value for the experience. The range for subsidy may be 90-100% - but it may be higher, depending on your overall goals.*

*The top level may range from 0% subsidy to 50% excess revenues above all costs, or more. Or, your organization may not have any activities or services in the top level.*

### Step 7 – Adjust Fees to Reflect Your Comprehensive Cost Recovery Philosophy

Across the country, ranges in overall cost recovery levels can vary from less than 10% to over 100%. Your organization sets your target based on your mission, stakeholder input, funding, and/or other circumstances. This exercise may have been completed to determine present cost recovery level. Or, you may have needed to increase your cost recovery from where you are currently to meet budget targets. Sometimes just implementing the policy equitably to existing programs is enough, without a concerted effort to increase fees. Now that this information is apparent, the organization can articulate where it has been and where it is going – by pyramid level and overall, and fees can be adjusted accordingly.

### Step 8 – Use Your Efforts to Your Advantage in the Future

The results of this exercise may be used:

- To articulate your comprehensive cost recovery philosophy;
- To train staff at all levels as to why and how things are priced the way they are;
- To shift subsidy to where it is most appropriately needed;
- To recommend program or service cuts to meet budget subsidy targets, or show how revenues can be increased as an alternative; and,
- To justify the pricing of new programs.

*This Sample Cost Recovery Philosophy and Policy Outline is provided by:*



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