

Leisure Service Delivery Systems: Are They Adequate?¹

Rene Fukuhara Dahl²

Abstract: This presentation explores a model of service delivery ranging from direct service provision to advocacy and reports findings on the delivery mode most prevalent in park and recreation departments that serve Asian groups in their community. The implications of the role of the professional, the range of service delivery, and the manner in which ethnic groups are excluded are discussed.

The ability of leisure service agencies to respond to all constituents in their communities becomes increasingly important as these communities become more ethnically diverse. Leisure service agencies will be challenged to develop more flexible and responsive client-oriented delivery systems if they are to respond to this challenge. To accomplish these changes, leisure service professionals must reconceptualize their image of the individual and broaden their notions of leisure service delivery. First, I will discuss briefly the conditions which necessitate the reconceptualization of the individual and then will follow with an explanation of an expanded service delivery model. Finally, I will discuss findings gathered from interviews with leisure service providers to determine the leisure service delivery roles which they use.

By now, most people are familiar with the significant changes in the ethnic composition of this country. According to the 1990 census data, the rate of increase of "minority" populations was almost twice as fast as in the 1970s. Much of this increase took place among people of Hispanic ancestry—an increase of 7.7 million people, or a 53 percent increase from 1980. In 1990, the resident population of this country looked as follows: 30 million African Americans, an increase of 13.2 percent since 1980; 7.3 million Asians, or an increase of 107.8 percent in the last 10 years; 2-million American Indians, up 37.9 percent; and 22.4 Hispanics, or an increase of 53 percent since 1980 (Barringer 1991). By the turn of the century, collectively, people of color will be the majority in California. Irrespective of one's reaction to this fact, these significant changes signify that a new reality has emerged, with implications for all park, recreation, and leisure service professionals.

To provide relevant and meaningful services to all members of the community, park, recreation, and leisure service professionals must reconceptualize their image of the individual. "Historically, recreation and leisure service agencies have tended to function from a Newtonian, reductionist perspective in which individuals were thought to be composed of discrete, separate, and identifiable parts rather than as holistic entities" (Murphy and Dahl 1991, p. 107). In accordance with this mechanistic

image of the person, park, recreation, and leisure service agencies have operated primarily from the traditional role of direct service, where the professional has been the primary service provider. In this role, the professional is viewed as an "external" agent who determines for individuals what is best for them. The individual client has been expected either to fit into this dominant model of service delivery, irrespective of the relevance and meaning of those services, or not receive services at all.

Murphy and others (1991) offer an alternative perspective. They argue that the individual must be seen as a total organism with more than leisure needs. "The person who participates in a leisure service program may also have concerns about housing, child or elder care, security, employment, health, and transportation. Thus, individuals will respond to leisure programs and opportunities in many ways, partly because of their varying life circumstances" (Murphy and Dahl 1991, p. 109). When the individual is reconceptualized from a holistic perspective and life circumstances are acknowledged as contributing to one's interest and awareness in leisure expression and experience, professionals are more likely to reach a broader range of constituents.

Additionally, once the individual has been reconceptualized, the repertoire of roles the professional can utilize broadens to include more than direct service provision (table 1). Added to the professional's repertoire of roles are information-referral, enabler, and advocate. The information-referral role is widely used and incorporates coordination, referral, and technical assistance. "This approach extends the leisure service agency's structure and necessarily results in working with other organizations within the wider community system" (Murphy and Dahl 1991, p. 109). This role is essential to working with ethnic individuals and groups because it makes available many services that perhaps would be unavailable to groups that are often excluded from mainstream opportunities.

In the enabler role, the professional is engaged in a facilitative process in which individuals are assisted in making self-directed choices. The goal of this role is to transfer gradually the responsibility for leisure planning to the individual and away from the external agent, the professional. By emphasizing self-directed choice, the professional helps to foster personal freedom and internal locus of control, two critical components of the leisure experience. As an advocate, the professional assumes that individuals have a right to personal fulfillment. "Thus, the professional's role includes support, facilitating participants' identification of and ability to access their own internal resources, and encouraging each individual to make choices (Murphy and Dahl 1991, p. 109).

To determine what professional roles were being utilized by public park and recreation agencies to serve Asian constituents,

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²Associate Professor of Recreation and Leisure Studies, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.

Table 1—Service roles

Service Roles	Direct Service	Information Referral	Enabling Facilitation	Advocacy
Existing Service Roles	• Conduct of fee classes for ethnic/cultural groups • Provision for facility rental by ethnic/cultural groups • Provision of ethnic/cultural older adult social service programs	• Contracting private vendors • Contracting/hiring staff from ethnic/cultural groups • Cooperative/consultative interagency arrangements		
Emerging Service Roles		• Appointing ethnic/cultural persons to boards/commissions • Providing community-wide "Leisure Resource" information at every operation site	• Conduct of ethnic/cultural awareness programs on regular basis for "whole" community • Conduct community Leisure Resource/Opportunity Awareness Programs for Immigrant Groups • Encourage Self-Help programs by neighborhood/community ethnic/cultural groups • Ensure leisure participation as option for everyone by meeting with indigenous community ethnic/cultural groups to learn about needs/wants on provider bases	• Ensure participation by all ethnic/cultural groups by involving members in agency decision making • Ensure accessibility for ethnic/cultural groups by intervening in housing, transportation, and recreation concerns through proactive participation at City Hall, Housing/Transportation authorities, etc. • Publication of brochures, catalogs, newsletters, flyers, etc., in multiple languages which reflect constituency
Client/Participant Dependence on Leisure Service Agency for Leisure Expression/Participation  Client Independence from Leisure Service Agency for Leisure Expression/Participation				

staff from 11 agencies in California were interviewed in person or by telephone. Directors or superintendents were the primary sources of information, although in some instances, department managers referred the researcher to their staff person (s) who was working directly with Asian constituents.

All of the departments provided direct service to their communities in general, particularly fees and charges classes at community centers and programs for older adults at senior centers. None of the departments provided direct services to Asian constituents in particular; and, in one instance, this was because the city had a Title VI regulation, Compliance Against Discrimination, by which to abide. Two large departments with decentralized structures provided services at community centers where programs were specifically designed to meet local constituent needs. In these instances, Asian populations were primarily served because they represented the neighborhood populations.

All of the departments provided information and referral services to Asian constituents. Most of these services consisted of contracting staff from various ethnic groups to work on special programs and projects for the department, such as organizing an art gallery exhibition. Other information and referral roles used included contracting private vendors to provide services such as a reading enrichment program in the schools; and engaging in cooperative interagency arrangements with other agencies, particularly for gang prevention programs.

One of the departments in this study utilized the enabler role extensively. This department co-sponsored a program with the police department which was designed to increase community action and pride. Its original intent was to keep neighborhoods free from drugs and related crimes. Another project, a city-community partnership, included neighborhood clean-up, after school recreation and tutoring programs, and mini-fairs in which citizens were informed about city services and full-time city staff worked with community groups to develop neighborhood action plans. Two departments used the advocacy role, albeit, in a limited fashion. In the first instance, one department printed its city-wide brochure in two languages as a way to reach its large ethnic community, while the second department printed individual program flyers in several languages.

This study is ongoing and more departments will be included in the sample over time. Several conclusions are drawn, however, from the existing sample. The two roles most frequently utilized by public parks and recreation departments are direct service and information and referral. To a large degree, use of those roles presumes existing contact with one's clientele, particularly with the direct service role. The information and referral role is more inclusive in that its services and outreach attempts expand organizational boundaries. The enabler role has been a highly effective role for one large department in working with other city agencies to combat serious community

problems. It seems there will be increasing need for this role, with limited resources and the plethora of problems with which communities are faced. The advocate role remains the most underutilized professional role, yet it has the potential to be the most influential role the professional can enact. Because the advocate focuses on removing barriers and working with and on behalf of constituents, the professional has the potential to ensure accessibility to services for diverse groups and increase participation by involving members in agency decision making. Through this role, the professional has the ability to maximize client independence in both leisure experience and expression.

Utilizing all of the roles in the leisure service delivery continuum to respond more effectively to increasingly diverse populations is crucial to delivery of services that are relevant to

these populations. "By developing an awareness and understanding about cultural value systems, from which leisure values, beliefs, and behaviors arise, the leisure service professional can develop a range of programs which include all constituencies rather than excluding those who do not fit traditional service approaches" (Murphy and Dahl 1991, p. 109).

References

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