

Chicago Park District Masters Project Coordination

Jessica Renee Napier | May 10, 2013



The Chicago Park District manages 350 to 400 separate projects per year, directing the various staff members tied to each plan, allocating funding for each assignment and ensuring sound communication to avoid any workload overlap.

As one of the largest municipal park systems in the nation, the district is responsible for more than 8,100 acres of green space, including 580 parks, 77 pools, and 26 miles of lakefront and beaches. Whenever there is a repair needed or a new project in one of its parks or facilities, the Chicago Park District is in charge of developing the plan, allocating the budget and following the project through to completion.

A few years ago, the district implemented an integrated custom and off-the-shelf solution with the goal of streamlining these processes. Developed by technology consultant Sofbang, the system helps the district manage its funds, grants, projects and work orders.

“Prior to the Project Management solution, I could get 10 calls a day from project managers asking very simple questions about the status of or funding for their projects,” said Elizabeth Tomlins, the district’s capital projects manager. “Temporarily, we created an Excel sheet with project statuses and funding sources that all could see. But now

that we've put everything into the Project Management System, it's put the responsibility in the hands of the project manager to be accountable for their work.”

As a part of the \$3.3 million project, the district has also restructured the way they manage grants and funding allocations. Before deploying the new solution, everything related to grant dates, requirements and deadlines was listed on a spreadsheet.

As a part of the \$3.3 million project, the district has also restructured the way they manage grants and funding allocations. Before deploying the new solution, everything related to grant dates, requirements and deadlines was listed on a spreadsheet.

This solution also improved communication between park staff and trade staff, such as carpenters, plumbers and electricians. Previously, park supervisors — or service requesters — would submit a request for a repair, and then receive a request number. Follow through lacked, however, as the requester often didn't receive any status updates on their request.

“Now, park staff can see everything they've submitted and they can see the status of their work requests in one central location,” said Victoria Cordova, the district’s project manager. “They can also view reasons for why something might have been cancelled. Before, they were in the dark. The trades also like it because they can prioritize their schedules and work orders. Everyone can have an even workload. It's helped productivity and it's made our staff more efficient.”

In the future, the district plans to expand the service request solution as a mobile technology. The staff, in conjunction with Sofbang, is exploring tools, like rugged tablets, that can be utilized in the field by trade staff. The mobile upgrade would replace paper forms and allow for real-time project updates.

Tanya Anthony, the district’s chief administrative officer, said that the new system also has the potential to support the city’s transparency initiatives. The district is discussing an online function in which the public could view the number of work orders completed and each job’s timeliness.

Anthony said that, thus far, the new system’s biggest value has been the opportunity to collaborate.

“The communication and knowing what each division is doing has been the greatest outcome from a user perspective,” she said. “From the park staff knowing the status of their work order to the project manager knowing the status of their funding, has been extremely valuable.”

Photo credit: rosebennet/Flickr CC

<http://www.govtech.com/Chicago-Parks-District-Masters-Project-Coordination.html>