

YARDSTICK PARKS

Why should you consider joining?

What is Yardstick?

Yardstick is a benchmarking project owned by NZRA and focused on parks and recreation activities. It collects and compares a range of information relating to the provision of services, cost of service provision, asset management processes and planning and policy information.

Yardstick is managed by a technical group of parks and recreation managers from a range of member organisations in New Zealand and Australia. Membership in Yardstick New Zealand is available through NZRA and in Australia through IPWEA. Prophet IAM provides project management and other services to ensure that the annual project is completed on time.

The project is intended to operate long term, enabling a range of topics to be covered in detail each year, together with the repetition of some topics in future years to provide trend information. The ongoing changes are intended to reflect the latest industry trends and information needs. The project is self-funding, relying on a subscription from members to cover its costs.

What do you get?

- An annual questionnaire designed by current member park managers which ensures relevant topics and understandable questions
- A hard copy annual report which is an easy to read open document suitable for parks professionals, senior managers and elected officials
- A CD that includes a PDF copy of the current year's report, the raw data from all members in an excel spreadsheet and all previous years' reports and data
- Measurement against key performance indicators which enable organisations to select certain KPIs for use in their own organisations' reporting processes
- The opportunity to suggest categories of the parks industry you would like to see benchmarked and the opportunity to assist in question development.

What can Yardstick information be used for?

Reviewing levels of service

- Understanding and stating your level of service is a fundamental requirement for good asset management planning. Yardstick provides you with factual information to assist with this task.
- This can be at a macro level in terms of total expenditure per resident or hectare of reserve land. Yardstick data can be used to support an argument to increase resource allocation.
- At a micro level, expenditure and operational standards for grass mowing, garden maintenance, and other reserve assets can be reviewed.
- Provision of reserve land both in total and by category (e.g. sports fields, neighbourhood parks and natural/ecological areas) can be compared and reviewed. This is valuable for reserve strategy or network planning.
- Provision of reserve assets such as furniture, toilets, area of garden planting and number of trees can be assessed to determine if your provision is appropriate.



Reviewing financial performance

- Efficiency of delivery can be compared both at a macro level and for a range of individual activities.
- Information for estimating the cost of new services.
- Cost estimating for maintenance contracting.
- Information to negotiate rates with service providers.

Policy development

- Yardstick researches and records those that have adopted policy, and what it covers, across the spectrum of parks activity to help guide appropriate policy development.
- Policy development is easier and more consistent as the Yardstick enables you to share information with organisations that have already developed policy.

Information development

- Good information and asset knowledge are cornerstones of good asset management.
- Yardstick questions are designed to guide and encourage best practice in regard to information about the assets and services you provide.
- Yardstick can help you design and develop your asset and financial information systems.
- The better your information inputs to Yardstick, the more valuable the results will be to you.

Standards

- Identifies where there are industry standards, which members are often not aware of.
- Levels of use and compliance are identified.
- Use of standards is encouraged, which is considered to be of benefit to the industry.
- Yardstick provides industry information to help improve existing, and drive the development of, new parks standards.

Best practice

- A core value of Yardstick is to drive best practice in the industry. There is huge variability in the way parks are managed across our industry. Involvement with Yardstick is a means to learn collectively about better ways of doing things, and to provide a template to set up systems and procedures to align with industry best practice.

Performance measurement

- Provides a cost effective method of independent review.
- Yardstick can be used to determine performance at various levels. This includes:
 - Organisational key performance indicators
 - Management staff performance assessment
 - Contractor (or service deliverer) performance.

In-depth analysis

- The Yardstick report provides an overview of information and comparison with the whole industry.
- To gain even greater value all the raw data is supplied in electronic format to enable you to undertake more in-depth analysis by cross-referencing data sets and/or comparing yourself with similar or neighbouring organisations (an example of this is available on request).

Networking

- Last but by no means least, Yardstick acts like a club and provides a great means by which to identify similar organisations and to contact them directly to discuss common issues and to share information and experiences.

The uses for Yardstick information is wide and varied and will change for individual organisations over time as different issues arise. Yardstick's rolling category approach means that an extensive resource of information is built up which can be used, as required, both now and in the future. In other words,



not all the information in each year will be immediately relevant, but it may become so at some time in the future as an issue arises or policies and strategies are developed.

What do members say?

"Yardstick has provided useful information to enable a gap analysis to be carried out of our asset management procedures and activity management plan. This analysis was then used to produce an improvement plan and justify necessary resourcing requirements."

Bill Steans, Parks and Recreation Manager, Timaru District Council, New Zealand.

"Yardstick information enabled Parks Conservation and Lands to show that it was striving for 'best practice' when the Government's agency for Procurement Solutions within the Department of Treasury commissioned the ACT Planning and Land Authority's City Maintenance Audit Project. This audit was to identify where and how Parks Conservation and Lands was both meeting and striving for 'best practice'. As part of this audit we were required to identify if and how we had compared our organisation against similar organisations. Yardstick not only provides a tool for this purpose but the element of independence it offers, and now significant membership, provides real benchmark information in an open report. Canberra was one of the first members in Australia and are pleased to see the project growing quickly now in our country."

Ian Baird, Senior Policy Officer, Sustainable Policy and Programs, Environment and Recreation, Department of Territory and Municipal Services, Canberra, Australia.

"Gore District Council have conducted two strategic reviews by elected member working parties, one for Aquatic Services and the other for Parks and Reserves. As in any such exercise with elected members and laymen it is often extremely difficult to convey certain information so it can be placed in the appropriate context that it was intended. Yardstick has been the underpinning factor in providing information for me for both of these working parties. Yardstick provides a large volume of relevant and current information in an easily read format. You can also use the data to formulate justifiable and valid discussion points on almost any topic relating to either the operational or provision aspects of the business. I am convinced that Yardstick is a great tool, and a necessity for anyone managing recreational assets."

Ian Soper, Parks and Recreation Manager Gore District Council, New Zealand.

Further information

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