

## Proposed COVID-19 Phase III Event Guidance for Public Parks & Recreation Service Providers in Washington State\*

*\*Developed in consultation with Oregon Recreation and Park Association, California Park and Recreation Society, California Association of Recreation and Park Districts and Idaho Recreation and Park Association*

On behalf of local parks and recreation service providers across Washington State, we ask Governor Inslee to consider variations to size limitations for large gatherings offered by public agencies in Phase 3. The request is to allow for variations when social distancing and event protocols can be managed in a safe and responsible way to limit contact and the spread of disease.

### We acknowledge:

That we have a critical responsibility as coordinators of public events, to monitor and control the capacity of gatherings and mitigate behaviors that put participants at risk.

### We share:

A common desire to safely restore social interactions, help the economy recover, and educate the community on safe and responsible behavior while in public settings.

**We believe:** That a one-size-fits-all, number-driven rule for gatherings can be replaced by a safety-driven goal that takes into account the varied size of events, capacity and layout of facilities and spaces, type of contact, and degree of mitigation that can be provided.

“John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During Covid-19: Guidance for Governors” includes a number of controls that can be utilized, such as physical distancing, engineered barriers, administrative protocols, and use of personal protective equipment that can make an event of 50-2,500 practical.

We have attached a matrix of standardized considerations to set and manage event capacity so universal safety protocols can be maintained to protect against the spread of COVID-19 or other viruses.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) supports decision-making criteria and modifications to mitigate risk. These modifications can be instituted in many outdoor park settings that provide parks agencies with spacious areas to use for safety controls. The greatest factor outlined in CDC guidelines is an evaluation of the appropriate measures to control density of attendees within a confined area to ensure close contact (within 6 feet) is always avoided. The criteria above should be applied to each site and event to set a capacity limit.

## **Why local events?**

Local parks support social equity and no- or low-cost access to nature and healthy spaces in proximity to one's home. In fact, local parks are an equal-access destination and experience for all segments of society regardless of their income, their racial makeup, their religion, or their sexual orientation. **Parks and outdoor recreation environments provide some of the lowest-cost, most effective public health interventions available in our communities.** Local access this summer, to events of 2,500 or less, or the capacity of the venue, can help limit longer-distance travel and promote staycations in home communities.

Mental and physical health are even more critical for everyone during the recovery process. Parks are a low-cost, accessible, local option for addressing the high-stress impacts of social isolation and enduring the anxiety-producing global public health emergency. Access to natural areas and opportunities for physical activity reduces stress and improves mental health.

Parks and recreation plays an equally important role in community economic revitalization, especially for gig workers who earn all of their income over the summer months. Many events include some degree of cost recovery, which is good for the overall economy.

## **We request that:**

1. Large gathering restrictions be shifted from blanket and numbers-driven restrictions to more criteria-based protocols for Phase III.
2. Representatives from public parks and recreation are consulted as Governor Inslee assembles community, business, public health, education and industry leaders to advise him on recovery considerations, capacity limits, and priorities.
3. Restoration of Phase III recreation programming be instituted, to re-engage the community and enable access to the physical and social benefits while complying with public health distancing requirements as soon as possible. Programming is often planned at least three months before the experience, allowing adequate time to address health and safety, staffing, marketing and other resource needs. Developing a scalable framework will preserve staff capacity and provide the best results for our communities;
4. Relief funding be allocated for local agencies to offset revenue loss to provide quick restoration of public services and ensure parks and recreation agencies can move forward with initiatives that align with recovery phases. Helping jurisdictions with significant budget reductions and revenue shortfalls specifically for parks and recreation needs is critical as we are experiencing an even higher demand for services during the pandemic.

**We commit:**

- To align our services with local, state and federal guidance for large gatherings. We commit to following the CDC guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html> and national best practices, as outlined by the National Recreation and Parks Association <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/health-wellness/coronavirus-disease-2019/path-to-recovery/assessing-the-risk-of-spaces-facilities-and-programs/>
- To apply those standards in a way that is consistent with the progressive phases outlined in [Governor Inslee's Recovery Plan Policy Brief](#).
- To empower and facilitate responsible use and enjoyment of our park and recreation system within our local communities.
- To utilize technology, registration processes and physical barriers to prevent unauthorized or over-sized gatherings from occurring.
- To train our staff and equip them to safely operate programs, services and public facilities.

As a statewide association, **we commit to:**

- 1) Collaborate with the Governor's Office, State Department of Health and local public health jurisdictions and other governmental and private sector interests to further develop a recovery framework with the above principles in mind;
- 2) Provide parks and recreation professionals with venues for best practice discussions and distribution of consistent and replicable program models and materials. For example, we have sample plans for social distancing that have already been created for many of our standard activities;
- 3) Help foster consistency across the state while respecting differences in jurisdictional authorities; and
- 4) Work in tandem with local health jurisdictions with special emphasis on preventing re-emergence of the virus in areas with high populations and higher risk based on health disparities and past rates of contagion. This would include operating in a manner consistent with the locally determined phase of recovery.

- 5) Adapt programs and operations to meet changing public health restrictions and social distancing requirements, including adjusting service delivery should a region experience a second wave of outbreak.