

Definition of a Special Recreation Association (SRA)

What is a special recreation association (SRA)?

A special recreation association (SRA) is formed by two or more park districts/villages who want to join together to provide recreation programs for their residents with disabilities.

What are the benefits of being a part of a special recreation association?

A special recreation association can provide more programs and a greater range of services than a single community. By pooling residents and funding, more programs that meet the needs of unique individuals can be offered. This includes the ability to provide programs for target age groups and ability levels.

An SRA has a professional staff that has the education and training to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. They have the ability to design programs and adapt activities to provide the programs needed by your residents. The staff also has the ability to perform outreach to those with special needs.

The shared funding of expenses is a benefit to SRA involvement. The SRA hires the specialized staff and purchases wheelchair accessible vehicles and other adaptive equipment that serves the residents of all the member districts. Joint funding is more economical than working as a single community.

The SRA may also assist its members with accessibility audits and other special projects relating to people with disabilities.

Why do villages or park districts decide to join a special recreation association?

Park districts and recreation departments are required to provide services for all residents, including those with disabilities. This can mean stand alone programs designed for individuals with disabilities and inclusion services which provide accommodations for those with disabilities who choose to participate in any of the recreation department or park district's programs and services.

A special recreation association is an excellent way of meeting the recreation needs of residents with all types of programs and services. A special recreation association is designed to specifically provide these services.

Individuals with disabilities need many types of adaptations in order to achieve success and satisfaction in their leisure activities. SRA programs and services are specially designed to meet these needs.

Special recreation associations have proven to be a very cost-effective way of serving people with disabilities. By sharing the expense of providing services with other park and recreation agencies, districts or departments use funds more economically.

With over thirty years of experience, SRAs in Illinois have proven to be national models for programming excellence for people with disabilities. The pooling of population and financial resources creates and supports much needed specialized programming in a very effective and efficient manner.

How is a special recreation association formed?

An SRA can be formed by two or more units of local government in Illinois. These entities develop a joint agreement outlining their intent to provide recreation services for people with disabilities. Other elements in a joint agreement include the manner in which the services will be funded and delivered, the establishment of a governing board for the association, and other rules and protocol deemed appropriate by the member boards.

How are costs of involvement determined?

The actual cost varies by park district or village. Most SRAs use a percentage based on the Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) of the member entity to establish that member's cost of involvement in the SRA. Some SRAs use a combination of the EAV and a population formula to determine the member contribution.

How is a special recreation association funded?

Funding is available through the special recreation tax in Illinois for communities that are a part of a joint agreement and is exempt from the Illinois Property Tax Limitation Law. This prevents the cost of providing services for people with disabilities from impacting the funding for other programs and services offered by a district or municipality. Some communities choose to provide funds from their general fund, rather than levying the tax. In addition to member agency contributions, program fees, grants, and donations are used to support the SRA.

Illinois Park District Code Section 5-8:

Sec. 5-8. Any park district that is a party to a joint agreement to provide recreational programs for the handicapped under Section 8-10b of this Code may levy and collect annually a tax of not to exceed .04% of the value, as equalized or assessed by the Department of Revenue of all taxable property in the district for the purpose of funding the district's share of the expenses of providing these programs under that joint agreement, which tax shall be levied and collected in like manner as the general taxes for the district. Such tax shall be in addition to all other taxes authorized by law to be levied and collected in the district and shall not be included within any limitation of rate contained in this Code or any other law, but shall be excluded therefrom, in addition thereto and in excess thereof. However, no tax may be levied pursuant to this Section in any area in which a tax is levied under Section 11-95-14 of the Illinois Municipal Code. (Source: P.A. 85-124.)

Illinois Municipal Code 65 ILCS 5/11-95-13 and 14 :

Sec. 11-95-13. The corporate authorities of a municipality specified in Section 11-95-2 and a recreation board specified in Section 11-95-3 are authorized to establish, maintain

and manage recreational programs for the handicapped, including both mentally and physically handicapped, to provide transportation for the handicapped to and from such programs, to provide for such examination of participants in such programs as may be deemed necessary, to charge fees for participating in such programs, the fee charged for non-residents of such municipality need not be the same as the fees charged the residents of the municipality, and to charge fees for transportation furnished to participants. (Source: P.A. 76-806.)

Sec. 11-95-14. The corporate authorities of any 2 or more municipalities specified in Section 11-95-2 and any 2 or more recreation boards specified in Section 11-95-3, or any combination thereof, are authorized to take any action jointly relating to recreational programs for the handicapped that could be taken individually and to enter into agreements with other such recreation boards, corporate authorities and park districts or any combination thereof, for the purpose of providing for the establishment, maintenance and management of joint recreational programs for the handicapped of all the participating districts and municipal areas, including provisions for transportation of participants, procedures for approval of budgets, authorization of expenditures and sharing of expenses, location of recreational areas in the area of any of the participating districts and municipalities, acquisition of real estate by gift, legacy, grant, or purchase, employment of a director and other professional workers for such program who may be employed by one participating district, municipality or board which shall be reimbursed on a mutually agreed basis by the other municipalities, districts and boards that are parties to the joint agreement, authorization for one municipality, board or district to supply professional workers for a joint program conducted in another municipality or district and to provide other requirements for operation of such joint program as may be desirable. The corporate authorities of any municipality that is a party to a joint agreement entered into under this Section may levy and collect a tax, in the manner provided by law for the levy and collection of other municipal taxes in the municipality but in addition to taxes for general purposes authorized by Section 8-3-1 or levied as limited by any provision of a special charter under which the municipality is incorporated, at not to exceed .04% of the value, as equalized or assessed by the Department of Revenue, of all taxable property within the municipality for the purpose of funding that municipality's share of the expenses for providing the programs under that joint agreement. However, no tax may be levied pursuant to this Section in any area in which a tax is levied under Section 5-8 of the Park District Code. (Source: P.A. 92-230, eff. 1-1-02.)