

# Park and rec programs and the importance of waivers

By Farah Derosier

It is that time of year when the weather is starting to get nicer and parks and recreation departments are rolling out their summer programs. From events, youth sports leagues and outdoor fitness classes to day camps and other activities, these programs offer opportunities for individuals to stay active, learn new skills, and connect with their neighbors. However, alongside the benefits and fun, there is an essential component that helps these programs run smoothly and responsibly. What is that you ask? Waivers.

Public parks and recreation departments serve as the backbone of accessible programs to their community. Did you know 90% of U.S. adults say that parks and recreation is an important local government service? While parks programs aim to be safe and inclusive, any activity involving physical activity carries some level of risk that could result in injury or harm to an individual. This is where waivers come into play. The waiver is a legal document that participants sign to acknowledge and accept the risks associated with each program or activity. Waivers are a good first line of defense in protecting your agency from legal liability in the event of an accident or injury that occurs during the program. By signing the waiver, participants confirm that they understand the nature of the activity and any potential risks.

For waivers to be effective, waivers should be clearly written, easy to understand, and specific to the activities involved. They should include:

- A detailed description of the program or activity and potential risks,
- Acknowledgement of those risks by the participant, and
- A release of liability.

Additionally, parks departments should regularly review and update waiver language in consultation with your entity's attorney to ensure compliance with state and local laws.

I think we all can agree parks and recreation programs enhance communities by promoting wellness, education, and social connection. To sustain these valuable services in a safe and responsible manner, waivers play a critical role. Waivers reduce your risk of liability while allowing everyone to enjoy the benefits of parks programs. Sample waivers can be found in the [Liability Resource Manual](#) located on the WCIA website. Also, if you have a waiver you would like us to take a look at or discuss with you, please reach out to your assigned Risk Rep.