

12 Programming Ideas to Engage Gen Z and 8 Creative Ways to Reach Them

A Guide for Parks and Recreation Leaders





INTRODUCTION

Digital Natives. Highly collaborative. Pragmatic.

These are just some characteristics that uniquely define Generation Z (Gen Z), those born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s. They have never known a time without the Internet, value diversity and unique contributions, and perhaps most impactfully for you as a parks and recreation leader, they are the next generation of community leaders.



If your parks and recreation resident engagement strategy doesn't include a defined component for targeting teens, you are missing an opportunity to build a sustainable and financially impactful relationship with a cohort of residents poised to tackle such inherited issues as climate change and systemic bias. In this eBook, you'll learn about the characteristics of Gen Z, programming ideas to attract their unique sensibilities, and marketing ideas to get them into your parks, classes, and pools regularly.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

04

Understanding Gen Z

[Go to Section](#)

06

Programming Ideas for Targeting Teens

[Go to Section](#)

08

Marketing Ideas to Reach Gen Z

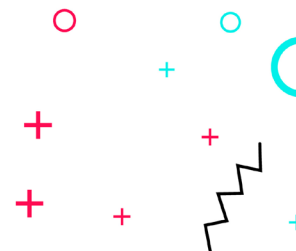
[Go to Section](#)



Understanding Gen Z

Gen Zers are self-drivers who care deeply about others, strive for diverse communities, and are highly collaborative. They are social, value flexibility, authenticity, relevance, and non-hierarchical leadership structures. Many of them are old enough to vote and want their voices heard regarding decisions impacting their community.

Unlike Millennials, who were digital pioneers who witnessed the paradigm shift to digital interconnectedness, Gen Zers don't remember a time when they couldn't immediately see the image captured by a camera or carry a phone in their pocket. They don't do paper, in-office visits, phone calls, or anything less than instant gratification.



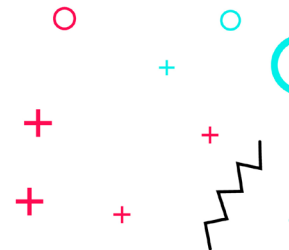


With easy access to information has come an abundance of screen time that has created feelings of isolation and underdeveloped social skills, making easily accessible and psychologically safe social outlets critical for these young adults. Often called the “loneliest generation,” Gen Zers have spent significant time independently consuming

content on their smartphones or watching Netflix, leaving them less confident in social settings. While they may not realize it, they need a safe outlet for engaging people with similar interests in a way that will help them forge IRL (that’s “in real life” in cyberspeak) relationships.

Finally, when seeking to understand Gen Z, one must understand the importance they place on responsible financial decisions. Many in this cohort grew up watching their parents take financial hits during the Great Recession of 2008, leaving them with a more conservative mindset regarding extravagant spending and risk-taking and leaving them appreciative of no-cost and low-cost opportunities.

As a parks and recreation leader, if you can find ways to give Gen Z affordable and accessible outlets to engage that don’t require them to sign up in person or use a paper form, you’ll foster relationships with the future leaders of your community.





Programming Ideas for Targeting Teens

What types of parks and recreation classes, activities, leagues, and memberships will appeal to a diverse cohort of socially insecure and financially pragmatic young adults fueled by social activism and environmental responsibility? Here's our inspirational list:

- 1. Outdoor Movie Nights.** Engage the Netflix generation with an outdoor movie night in one of your beautiful parks. Many Gen Zers are delaying getting their driver's license, plus with fewer drive-ins available, you can still create that whimsical experience of watching a favorite movie with a warm breeze in your hair.
- 2. Outdoor Study Sessions.** You'll need strong Wi-Fi for this one. Create a place where teens can gather outdoors in the sunshine to study and support one another as they prep for year-end finals. Collaborate with teachers in your school district to support on-site tutoring.
- 3. Bring on the Food Trucks.** There were 35,512 food truck businesses in the U.S. in 2020. We repeat. This is not a trend. Support local small businesses and bring young people together for an evening of al fresco dining. It's very Insta-worthy. #YOLO.
- 4. Lights or Art in the Park.** Young people love (cost-effective) experiential art. The holidays make ideal opportunities for such outdoor events as haunted hayrides, holiday lights in the park, and even summertime Chinese lantern festivals.
- 5. Active Play Spaces.** There will always be a need for soccer leagues and swim classes, but the YouTube generation is all about creating content showcasing their unique physicality. As part of your long-term facility strategy, consider investing in the addition of a skateboard park, zip line course, or parkour infrastructure.
- 6. Kite Competitions.** Consider holding a local kite decorating and flying competition to honor Pakistani heritage and its people's annual Basant festival. Teens will appreciate the creative outlet, social media sharing possibilities, and cultural inclusion.
- 7. Digital Scavenger Hunts.** Geocaching and other digital scavenger hunts are popular with teens who embrace activities built on a foundation of digital access and information sharing.



- 8. Challenge Teens to a Photo Contest.** Some of your community's best photographers are likely the teens who have curated their photography skills to empower them to build social media engagement on highly visual platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. Hold a contest that asks students to submit their best picture of their favorite place in your community by tagging your parks and recreation department on social media.
- 9. Offer Opportunities for Childhood Whimsy.** Gen Z feels the pressure and burden of social unrest, environmental stewardship, and other complex causes. Give them a free, open-air opportunity to feel like a (younger) kid again with sidewalk chalk stations on paved park trails, soap bubble buckets and wands, jump ropes, and oversized Jenga™ or Connect Four™ games.
- 10. Celebrate Diverse Cultures.** You likely have Easter Egg Hunts and Independence Day Fireworks on your activity calendar, but what about Diwali and Eid ul-Fitr? Gen Z is the most diverse generation. Nearly 51 percent of this cohort is white, 13.8 percent is Black or African American, 25 percent is Hispanic, and 5.3 percent is Asian. Twenty-nine percent of Generation Z are also children of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Such diversity makes them interested in learning about other cultures and wanting their heritage and ethnicity to be seen and celebrated. Add community events to your calendar to elevate awareness of all the cultures that comprise the unique tapestry of your community.
- 11. Host a Fitness Challenge.** Gen Z is growing up in the Reality TV era. From The Amazing Race to Survivor to The Biggest Loser to RuPaul's Drag Race, this generation knows what it means to compete and win on the public stage. As a health and wellness-focused group, they are likely to engage in competitions that award strides in various fitness categories. From Cross-Fit to American Ninja Warrior courses to traditional weight loss events, these young people want their chance to win and be recognized.
- 12. Tweetups.** Gen Z and Millennials make up over half of all Twitter users. Help bring this isolated generation out of the house and from behind their screens by hosting a Tweetup. These events are organized, in-person gatherings of people who have connected virtually via Twitter. Typically, people with shared interests and experiences meet up in person to discuss topics of interest and network. Gen Z is entrepreneurial, and it's never too early to start building connections.



Marketing Ideas to Reach Gen Z

Gen Zers do not like email, and they particularly do not want marketing emails. So, how can you reach them to communicate about your unique community offerings?

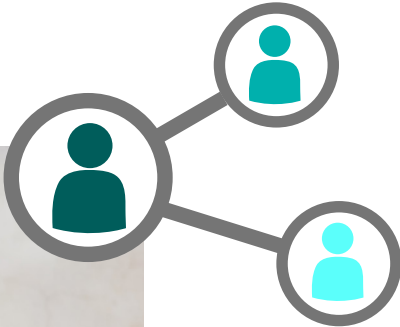




Target Gen Z with Social Media Advertising

Social media advertising allows you to target specific community members with impactful and relevant messaging. Gen Zers reported using social media for four or more hours a day (54%) at a rate almost double that of all U.S. adults (28%). Social

networks allow for some of the most targeted advertising options. Use platforms popular with Gen Z, like Instagram, to send them targeted ads about community engagement opportunities.



Utilize SMS Text Messages to Share Information

Gen Zers are never without their smartphone (though their batteries are always running low from constant usage). If you can obtain phone numbers from teens who attend an event and can get them to opt-in to text message updates (and respect the frequency with which you contact them), you can continue to market to them using this impactful and highly targeted channel.

Guerilla Marketing

Sometimes the best way to get peoples' attention is to cause a scene. For example, perhaps you could place a large metal garbage can in the middle of a paved park pathway (as long as it does not impede the ability of individuals or persons living with a disability from passing by it). At the scene, post a sign encouraging people to attend your upcoming park clean-up event—an age-friendly event that will appeal to environmentally conscious Gen Zers).





Use Facebook Events

For individual community classes and one-time events, create a Facebook event page to promote the event and to allow people to RSVP that they are attending. By RSVPing to your event, it will create a status update in their news feed, sharing with their friends and followers that they are attending—a source of social sharing and free advertising.

Live Stream Events on Social

If you're noticing a theme when it comes to reaching Gen Zers, it's all about social media. Use Instagram Live to stream footage of key community events, like the final five minutes of the high school basketball league play-offs or part of a demonstration of skateboarding safety best practices from one of your staffers. Instagram Live offers an easy-to-use platform to engage with teens using live broadcasts and will get this engaged group thinking about signing up for future opportunities. After all, they have FOMO and don't want to miss out.



Promote In-the-Now Reminders on Twitter

Twitter is a medium best used for hyper-time-relevant news and information. Use it for last-call reminders, opening-day announcements, and sign-up deadline notifications. When sharing news and promotions about your community events on Twitter, add relevant hashtags to help members in the community not already following you find your stories. For example, if you're promoting registrations for your new pickleball class, add a hashtag for your community name, and consider such additional hashtags as #pickleball, #pickleballislife, and #CommunityNameEvents

Snap

Snapchat is an ideal social platform for creative social influencers in our younger generations. It lets you capture your audience's attention with photos, videos, drawings, and clever captions. Be as creative as possible and use Snapchat's integrated tools and filters to spread the word about seasonal classes, local community events, and open sports league registrations.



Lean Into the Latest Dance Craze with TikTok

TikTok is a video-based platform. Many users leverage it to create entertaining videos in which they execute short clips of themselves doing the latest dance craze, telling jokes, or sharing meaningful moments. It will take some video capturing and editing capabilities by a team member

or a passionate intern. Still, you can use TikTok to share fun and funny videos captured at events to reach Gen-Zers (and their parents—yes, they are on TikTok too). Bonus if you can get your elected officials involved.



CONCLUSION

Gen Zers seek and respect genuine relationships. Prove that you know and understand them by offering outdoor experiences, collaborative engagement, and physical and culturally relevant experiences that speak to their sensibilities. The result will be new raving fans to add to your community — the kind that shares and shares often.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Whitney Greene

Product Marketing Manager

Whitney Greene is the Product Marketing Manager for multiple CivicPlus products. She works with our product, sales, creative, and communications teams to arm internal stakeholders with enablement, in addition to animating the voice of CivicPlus products so it appeals to our audience.

ABOUT CIVICPLUS

CivicPlus® is a technology company focused on building trust in government by fostering consistently positive digital experiences for residents and staff. With over 12,000 global customers, CivicPlus solutions are used daily by over 100,000 administrative staff members and over 340 million people in the U.S. and Canada alone. For more information, visit civicplus.com.



civicplus.com



06-5009-022823