



**PRESENTS**

# **RAISING COMMUNITY AWARENESS**

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*Every skatepark begins with a realization: "You know what? There needs to be a place to skate." At first it may seem like few people share this viewpoint. Over time, however, the word will get out and people will begin talking about "the new skatepark."*

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## RAISING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Every skatepark begins with a realization: “You know what? There needs to be a place to skate.” Every village, town, and city with a skatepark owes a debt of gratitude to an advocate, almost certainly a person not unlike yourself. Skaters, shop owners, even non-skaters like police, business owners, and ordinary citizens have advocated for skateparks across the US, in every case initially sparked by the same basic realization.

But this realization is not nearly enough: innovation is simple; execution is where the rubber hits the road. Everyone has ideas, but what makes an advocate different is the ability to take an idea and see it through, in this case, to get a skatepark built. That’s what SPS in general, and this section in particular, is about: helping you, the advocate, get your skatepark.

As illustrated in our “About Us” section, Skaters for Public Skateparks is an association of skateboarders who have dedicated the better part of our lives to skateboarding and the many phases of skatepark development. Following our recommendations will save you a lot of time, and let’s start here: turning your idea into reality.

The first step, of course, is getting people to see and understand your point of view. What may be numbingly obvious to you and your friends may be, at first, a wild idea to others. You’ll need to bridge this gap of understanding because you’ll need other people’s help, and most of these people have never skated. To build your “skatepark army” your first step is to raise awareness of the problem to others.

***Raising awareness about the need for a new skatepark is much more than simply demonstrating that there aren’t enough parks...***

Raising awareness about the need for a new skatepark is much more than simply demonstrating that there aren’t enough parks, or any at all, whatever the case may be. By stepping forward to talk about this need, you’re making a promise that it’s the right thing to do. You’ll need to possess a strong conviction that this is true, or else your message will almost certainly be ignored.

As an example, think about the last time you were coaxed into telling a joke that you no longer thought was funny. Your lack of enthusiasm – your lack of conviction that the joke will cause laughter actually causes the joke to fail. The same thing applies here: confidence and conviction in what you communicate triggers a response as infectious as laughter triggered by a well-presented gag.

Later on you'll present your ideas to people who, again, probably know nothing about skateboarding, or worse, believe they know enough because they've watched the X-Games. What's important is that you know and remember that you'll probably be the expert, and that you patiently stick to your guns until they understand your point of view. But as with any conversation, you have to begin by getting their attention.

Attention is a valuable commodity. You'll work hard to get it, and if it's wasted it will be even more difficult to reacquire. As an advocate, you should take every opportunity to command respect and build trust in your message. This may require superficial compromises in attire (i.e., clothing, hair), or deliberating for hours on the tone of a verbal presentation. Even if you're not a professional-level writer or don't have a wardrobe filled with business suits, your sincerity and earnestness will resonate with your audience. We find it helpful to remember our goal: a skatepark, NOT an acceptance of a clothing or lifestyle choices.

It's important to be patient and set your expectations to realistic levels. Delivering a three-minute speech in front of a public city council meeting could be met with a standing ovation and the crowd cheering you on, but it probably won't. In fact, odds are that the non-skating public will be very skeptical about your plan and won't be shy about letting you know it. As you approach every encounter, be it a phone call, a face-to-face meeting with a city employee, or a meeting with the Mayor, you'll want a clear, realistic goal in mind. If you expect that each encounter will result in unbridled support for the skatepark you'll quickly become so overwhelmed with disappointment you won't want to continue. Protect yourself by setting realistic expectations and taking things one step at a time.

***Every audience will have a reason to love your skatepark proposal; they just may not know it yet.***

Every audience will have a reason to love your skatepark proposal; they just don't know it yet. Get your group together beforehand and attempt to predict what each audience will like, then tailor your message to their needs. For example, if you plan to meet with members of the tourism board, don't inundate them with the fact that skaters don't have a safe place to go. As strong a message as that may be, it just isn't appropriate for your audience. Instead, in this example, come prepared with statistics on how premium parks attract touring skateboarders, and how few other "destination" parks are nearby. You need to show them how a skatepark is a solution to their problems, not just yours.

You will likely encounter vocal individuals who don't want your skatepark going anywhere, regardless of your reasonable and organized responses to their complaints. These people may dog you from beginning to end. The best thing you can do is continue to lobby those who support your skatepark, as they will become advocates themselves. Your adversaries will maintain much passion fighting against something they know nothing about, while you get to crusade for something you believe in. Public servants tend to be more swayed by facts and figures than the general populace, and, curiously, we find that those who fight parks tend to hold their anti-skating position despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Since public servants chose their careers because they enjoy serving the community, you may find that they, over time, become your closest allies as you continue to patiently and professionally present facts supporting your position.

Your community will be especially receptive to a demonstration of your commitment to the cause. Skateboarders have long embraced their reputation as outcasts, so the community may be naturally reluctant to support a facility for a group that has flaunted its "bad boy" image. It may be up to your group, as skateboarders, to prove that you're serious, professional, and committed. For example, helping to keep your existing skateparks clean (or even helping maintain a park that is popular with skateboarders) will show the public that your group is not solely interested in having a new place to skate, but interested in the welfare of everyone. Having skateboarding workshops, park clean-ups (especially ones focused on graffiti), and \$1 helmet sales are all great examples of programs that will get the public's attention in a positive way.

***Your parks department will benefit from your community service. At the same time, your group will gain notoriety. It's a win-win situation.***

Consider the fact that SPS is made up of professional adults who happen to have chosen skateboarding as our preferred activity. We are aware of a negative public perception because we are skaters, but we have also seen how quickly this bias is replaced by enthusiastic support when we demonstrate intelligent and mature behavior. Consider this quote from a city person:

"I do soccer fields, baseball diamonds, dog parks, and tennis courts. But I prefer skatepark projects because in every case it allows us to work with a group of kids that's supposedly "unreachable" and in a few cases criminal, and yet every single time they surprise us with their hard work, maturity, and industriousness" (Carolyn Snyder, Eugene, Oregon)

Because the skatepark will almost certainly be placed within a city park, working directly with your parks department can be a great way to become familiar with park policies and processes. Most parks departments appreci-

ate any kind of volunteer commitment, so if you have a specific idea about what you think your group can handle, definitely run it by the park's volunteer coordinator or maintenance supervisor. Your parks department is likely advocating for money, just like you are, so they'll benefit from your involvement by showing how well they're working with the area youth, while your group's mission will gain notoriety at the same time.

It's a win-win situation, and we've found that you'll find your strongest allies from within the ranks of a parks and recreation department.

***Newspapers love skateboarding stories so be sure to invite them to any event you organize.***

There are several publications that will prove themselves useful in meeting your goals. Local newspapers are always looking for stories. Skateboarding is a great topic for the local section of paper because there are fantastic photo opportunities, as well as aficionados of all ages. Newspapers eat this stuff up, especially if there's a "good news" angle, so be sure to invite them to any event you organize. Manage your expectations and be prepared to deliver your message concisely to reporters. They want a great story as much as you do and they'll help you find it.

Public meetings are another opportunity for you to get your message across. These can be precarious presentations, as you may find yourself struggling to defend a very unpopular idea. Focus on the issues facing that community and carefully consider how a skatepark interacts with them. Again, it's important that you manage your expectations and deliver your idea for a skatepark as a win-win situation. Much can be said on this topic alone and if you feel you are unsure, please seek experienced assistance.

Your last line of community involvement will be local law enforcement. Approach them with an open mind and return with solutions. We can appreciate the reluctance to do so; many of us have been skaters who were forever "hassled" by the police and know it's difficult to appreciate how approaching law enforcement will serve any good end.

***Approach local law enforcement with solutions and you'll find that they are can become influential allies in your case for a new skatepark.***

Recall the earlier statement that public servants chose their line of work because they derive satisfaction from serving the community. This may be hard to appreciate after being ticketed the 10th time for skateboarding, but the fact is that law enforcement officials are simply enforcing a law they probably had no personal hand in creating. In our experience, we've found success boldly walking into their midst, presenting our case, and requesting their assistance. Consider what this looks like from

their perspective. Finally, consider what having law enforcement on your side will do to your cause.

Although police aren't typically opposed to skateparks, they are an influential facet of authority that many people are inclined to listen to. As a result, they can be influential advocates for the new skatepark, but before they can do that they need to know about it. That's your job.

In the beginning it may seem like few people are paying attention to your cause. Over time, however, the word will get out and you'll find people approaching you for the answers about "the new skatepark."

