

Managing Recreation Resources for Beneficial Social Outcomes

by Rob Greenaway and Kay Booth

This article is the result of a collaboration between Rob Greenaway and Kay Booth; it begins with Rob's own reminiscences on his introduction to the Beneficial Outcomes Approach to recreation management. - Eds.

It is only occasionally that new information makes you reappraise completely your fundamental approach to planning for and managing recreation resources. Several years ago a colleague introduced me to the Canadian-based *Benefits Catalogue* published by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association¹. This is a list of the beneficial social outcomes resulting from the provision of recreation resources. This is nothing startling - the document outlines how recreation and active living help people live longer, provide the opportunities for learning various skills, strengthen family ties and several dozen other such patently obvious things. As leisure professionals we have heard

it all before. It is just another list of perfectly good reasons for doing the work we do. As I already implicitly focused my approach to recreation planning with an eye to providing those benefits, I thought I could just file the data. However, I had completely missed the point.

Some time ago, when I was a student at Lincoln University, I was having trouble with an assignment and sought guidance from a lecturer who gave me some excellent advice: when you aim to win people over with an argument or to explain your case, focus on describing the *benefits* of your proposal. The question becomes: what is a benefit? He explained this using the acronym FAB - features, advantages and benefits - and the example of a vacuum cleaner. A *feature* is something you can see and touch, so a feature of a new vacuum cleaner might be a foot operated on/off switch. The *advantage*? You don't need to bend over to turn the machine on and off. The *benefits*? Turning

the machine on and off is quick and reduces back strain. The vacuum cleaner marketer needs to sell the benefits - although most stop at the advantage; or they sell the advantage as a benefit. In fact, most marketers have no idea.

For another example, I recently bought an outdoors/travel shirt. The swing tag contained the following data, under the heading, *Features & Benefits*: 'Button front, off-shoulder seams, underarm vents, pre-bent elbows, pleated back, flight pass zip pocket, small chest pocket & buttoned wrist cuff'. These are all features, not a benefit among them. However, the introductory blurb did list one: 'The ultimate travel shirt. Pockets perfectly positioned to help you through the check-in, check-out counters of airports across the world'. You would hope that the designers cut out the shirt knowing the benefits they were trying to deliver. Imagine sitting down

Continued page 30

Continued from page 26

and creating a shirt with 'off-shoulder seams' and subsequently trying to dream up an 'off-shoulder seams' rationale to convince me to buy it.

Yet this is what we often do with recreation services. A recreation facility is just another off-shoulder seam (which would be a great analogy if I knew what benefits derived from an off-shoulder seam - which demonstrates my point - that the shirt sellers missed the point with this consumer). The lesson? Every feature must confer a benefit, otherwise it is superfluous.

The logical link between a feature and a benefit is an advantage. Typing 'FAB features advantages benefits' into 'Google' will produce a list of thousands of uses and misuses of the analysis. A really good application is at: www.fabtechinc.com/psp02.html. The firm sells ETFE Coating - I have no idea what this is, but here is their analysis of ETFE coating (I'd buy it if I knew what it was):

Features: Fluoropolymer ETFE Coating (ethylenetetrafluoroethylene)

Advantages: Resists corrosives, caustics, abrasives; anti-stick, non-wetting, inert; superior adhesion and field repairable; may be applied to all sizes in round, oval and rectangular configurations.

Benefits: Unparalleled performance in corrosive environments - fumes or liquids; less downtime; reduced maintenance; years of worry-free productivity; available for air control components as well as duct, piping and tanks.

That was the first step in my epiphany: we often already have some relevant information but do not effectively relate it to the problem at hand. What is frequently missing is a proven method for applying the information or the concept.

The second step came during the consultation stage in the development of a recreation and sport strategy for a local authority. As part of the consultation process we held a number of meetings with Domain Boards - voluntary groups endowed by council with a small annual grant to manage reserve which, in this case, were predominantly used for sports. When we queried their role as reserve managers, the board members almost always responded with something like: 'We maintain the lease to the Bowling Club and look after the fields and clubroom'.

So, we would ask, why did they do those things? 'To maintain the lease, the fields and the clubrooms', they would reply. They all did a fantastic job, but we thought the approach was somewhat limiting and the argument rather circular. We were interested in maximising the benefits to be derived from providing sporting and recreation facilities for the community. We led the conversation around to a discussion of the benefits which flowed from the provision of the various services by each Domain Board. It was not so much an exercise in trying to change the focus of the board but rather to give them a greater sense of purpose. They were not just facility providers, they were battlers against such problems as obesity, diabetes, family breakdown and mental disease. They were more important than they realised.

This project was interesting in that it reminded me of the FAB analysis. But I had not yet experienced the full extent of my epiphany. I have Rex Hendry of the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DoC) to thank for that. His team invited me to speak at a Department of Conservation recreation planning workshop in Wanganui. During a pre-workshop discussion Rex mentioned the publication on the Beneficial Outcomes Approach to recreation planning by Kay Booth, Bev Driver and others as being relevant to their situation². I had their report in the office but had only scanned it, linked it with the Canadian benefits catalogue and assigned it to the 'blindingly obvious and therefore meaningless' file. However, in preparation for the Wanganui workshop I dragged it out from amongst a pile of other recreation planning material and ran a personal refresher course. The approach is summarised in Box 1.

And then it struck me. Things that are blindingly obvious are often blinding. If you design a shirt that's going to get you through the airport check-in more quickly, you need to start with a completely blank sheet and ask what benefits do we want to provide and what features will deliver those benefits. As Booth *et al.* would say, we must know which *outcomes* we are seeking before we can decide what *outputs* will be needed. The outcomes are benefits, which is why they call it in the Beneficial Outcomes Approach or BOA. The outputs are, in the FAB terminology, advantageous

features - actual things you provide, like picnic tables, hooks in changing rooms, or deliberately do not provide, like music or mechanical noise in outdoor settings (and perhaps in a few restaurants). Back to the example of my outdoors/travel shirt: this was designed to get me through airport check-ins more quickly (the *outcome* or *benefit*) via the installation of a flight pass zip pocket (the *output* or advantageous feature).

Do we take this approach with open space and recreation resources? When we cement in a park bench at the local park, do we think about the advantages and the benefits first? An obvious advantage is you do not need to sit on damp grass to have a rest. The benefits? These could include strengthening family ties as it makes it possible to take grandma for a walk since she can now rest part way; or enhancing social bonds created by the conversations that take place as complete strangers share the seat. Some of these benefits will have major impacts on where, why and how the seat is installed.

I took the Booth *et al.* report with me to Wanganui and discussed it with the DoC team. My challenge to them was that they had not explicitly analysed and understood the benefits provided by the substantial recreation resources that they managed. According to its 1996 Visitor Strategy³ the department generally bases its resource allocation model on a match between the identified visitor classes and the assessed resource capabilities, relying on a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum analysis. It sounds good - matching users and their expectations to a suitable resource. If done well, it is a recipe to reduce complaints.

However, the New Zealand Conservation Act 1987 charges DoC with fostering recreation where it doesn't compromise conservation values. Unfortunately the Act does not interpret the word 'foster'. In my mind, 'foster' is an active word - it is, after all, a verb. But you can only foster something if you have a clear idea of the benefits you are seeking to provide. I do not hear DoC expressing enthusiasm for improving the population's cardio-vascular health via the provision of recreational opportunities on conservation of lands. It is, after all, rather risky, since increasing the use of natural areas may indeed compromise conservation values. However, if you have a statute that charges you with fostering



Box 1. The Beneficial Outcomes Approach (BOA)

Key Principles

- an emphasis on the achievement of positive social outcomes and the avoidance of negative social outcomes
- recognition that the management of inputs and outputs is the means to achieve this end (and not an end in itself);
- recognition that outcomes look beyond site-specific management to the broad societal role of public agencies, acknowledging off-site consumers as well as on-site users;
- maintenance of clear outcomes-focused objectives and that
- involvement of stakeholders with managers in defining these objectives

The Approach in a Nutshell

1. The BOA is a management planning process which was developed for natural resource management government agencies in the United States. It has now been applied in several countries, within recreation management agencies as well as natural resource administration, in both urban and wilderness contexts.
2. The purpose of the BOA is to optimise the net benefits of actions undertaken by public agencies. It aims to help agencies to be more accountable and responsive to the consumers they serve.
3. The fundamental question raised by the BOA is: why should a particular action be taken by a public agency? The BOA responds to this question by defining the positive outcomes to be provided and negative outcomes to be avoided within the context of the agency's legislative mandate and budgetary and resource constraints.
4. A critical feature of the approach is that it does not view the management of inputs or the production of outputs to be the end result of management. Instead they are viewed as a means to an end - which is the optimisation of desired net benefits or positive outcomes. Therefore, throughout the BOA management planning process, primary attention is focused on outcomes. Under the BOA, no outputs are produced unless it is clearly understood and articulated what beneficial outcomes are intended to result from those outputs.
5. The approach uses workshops - attended by managers and stakeholders - to identify current and desired outcomes and to define them explicitly. This includes specifying the effect of the outcomes - where, when and on whom or what will the effect of the outcomes be felt? Demand studies then help to ascertain which outcomes are most desired and which are to be avoided. These outcomes are prioritised and then translated into outputs (described in terms of management objectives and actions). Through the production and use of these outputs it is intended that the desired outcomes will be attained or the undesirable outcomes prevented. Managers then evaluate the success of an initiative by analysing whether it achieved the targeted outputs and consequent outcomes.
6. The BOA may be implemented with respect to an area of policy (such as a facility management program), a geographical area (eg. an individual park or reserve) or across a whole agency's operations. Thus it may be used for project management or as an institutional management framework.
7. The approach can be relatively easily implemented. It is based on sound principles of modern management science and is grounded in considerable reputable research on customer preferences and behaviour.

recreation and the benefits being sought are not made clear, then you could easily end up with a flight pass zip pocket where there is no form of public transport!

We debated the application of the Beneficial Outcomes Approach to DoC in Wanganui. I was not raising anything that Booth *et al.* had not already stated. Eventually one of the team said, 'It looks like we'll need a complete change of paradigm'. I felt I had achieved something, but the team member might have been being ironic, considering that the Booth *et al.* report states: 'Several proponents of the BOA have described this shift of primary attention away from inputs and outputs to outcomes as a major paradigm shift in park and recreation resource management' (p. 10).

Regardless, my epiphany was complete. We need to begin at the end

of the management process - with the benefits we aim to deliver - and work backwards from there. The benefits the recreation sector provides must be writ large in our planning work. The Beneficial Outcomes Approach offers an excellent method for achieving this. It is considered a core planning tool in North America and we need to pick it up in Australasia. Blindingly obvious really.

Rob Greenaway is a recreation consultant based in Christchurch and is a Director of Rob Greenaway & Associates and the Global Leisure Group - rob@greenaway.co.nz www.greenaway.co.nz www.globalleisuregroup.com

Kay Booth is a Senior Lecturer in Parks, Recreation and Tourism at Lincoln University. boothk@lincoln.ac.nz www.lincoln.ac.nz

References

1. See www.lin.ca/htdocs/benefits.htm
2. Booth, K.L., Driver, B.L., Espiner, S.R., and Kappelle, R.J., 2002. Managing Public Conservation Lands by the Beneficial Outcomes Approach with Emphasis on Social Outcomes. Department of Conservation Science Internal Series 52. Department of Conservation, Wellington. (Available from DoC Science and Research Publications Unit: Tel. 64 4 4710726).2.
3. Department of Conservation, 1996. Visitor Strategy. Department of Conservation, Wellington.