



HEALTHY AGING IN PARKS SURVEY



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HEALTHY AGING

IN PARKS & RECREATION



9 IN 10 PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

DEDICATE FACILITIES, ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMING TO OLDER ADULTS

MOST COMMON PARK AND RECREATION OFFERINGS TO OLDER ADULTS:



91%
EXERCISE
CLASSES



58%
OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER
IN RECREATION CENTERS



70%
FIELD TRIPS,
TOURS, VACATIONS



58%
EVENTS & FESTIVALS
FOR OLDER ADULTS



67%
ARTS & CRAFTS
CLASSES

76%
OF AGENCIES

offer one or more evidence-based programs to older adults

63%
OF AGENCIES

identified **Area Agencies on Aging** as their most common partner in efforts to deliver services to older adults

44%
OF AGENCIES

target adults as young as **50 years old** for their older adults offerings

71%
OF AGENCIES

characterize themselves as **the leader or one of the leaders providing services and programming** for older adults

INTRODUCTION

Our nation is one of constant evolution. Today, the United States is a more diverse nation, featuring more people with different backgrounds, unique needs and distinctive desires than ever before. For park and recreation agencies, these changes represent both a challenge and an opportunity as they have had to evolve to ensure that all members of their communities benefit from their vast holdings of open spaces, recreation facilities and service offerings.

One area of rapidly growing interest is serving the expanding population of older adults. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 13.0 percent of the U.S. population was at least 65 years old in 2010. Just five years later, this percentage had risen to 14.9 percent, representing 47.8 million older adults. Looking toward the future, forecasts indicate that the size of this cohort will expand greatly in the coming years. The Census Bureau anticipates that the 65-plus population will swell by nearly 38 percent between 2015 and 2025 to 65.9 million. This group will grow to 82.3 million by 2040, at which time older adults will represent 21.7 percent of the total U.S. population, and will be larger than the percentage of the population under the age of 18.

Parks were designed to bring together people of all ages, abilities, genders, races and ethnicities in the community. As park and recreation agencies have reinvented themselves to meet the needs and desires of aging Baby Boomers, they have continued to provide wellness, exercise and leisure activities that support healthy aging in our communities, including traditional activities such as educational and arts and crafts programs, adult day programs, meal programs, fitness classes like group exercise and swimming, transportation assistance, and social and volunteer opportunities. They have also established partnerships with other organizations that serve older adults in order to fill the gaps in needed community services.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) conducted a survey to gain greater insight on how park and recreation agencies and their staff serve older adults. In May 2017, the NRPA research team sent park and recreation professionals an 18-question survey that asked participants to describe the facilities, services and programming their agencies offer to older adults, and the challenges they face in serving this ever-growing population. The survey generated responses from 524 park and recreation professionals, with 23 percent of completed surveys coming from metropolitan/urban agencies, 66 percent coming from suburban/county agencies and 11 percent coming from rural agencies. The data collected from the survey inform the findings presented in this report.

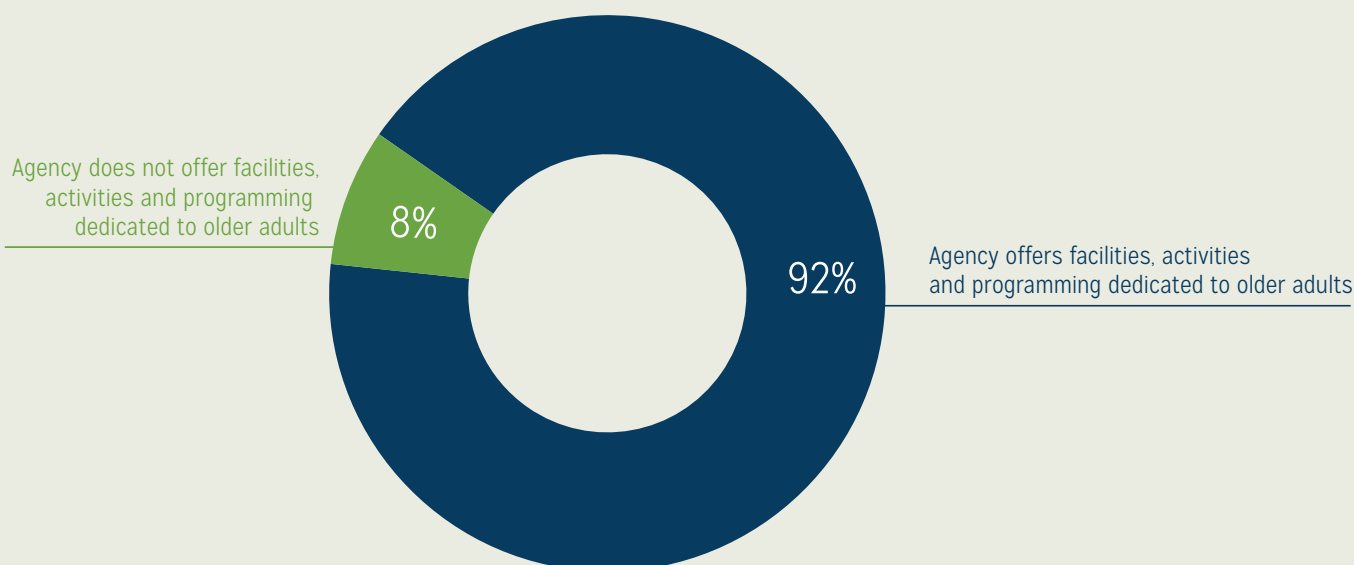


KEY FINDINGS

Facilities and programming dedicated to older adults are very common across park and recreation agencies throughout the United States. More than nine in 10 park and recreation professionals indicate that their agency offers older adults living in their community a wide variety of facilities, activities and programming. Rural park and recreation agencies are less likely to offer specific offerings for older adults. Only 76 percent of rural agencies offer facilities, activities and programming dedicated to older adults in the community. This percentage rises to 96 percent and 93 percent for agencies located in urban and suburban locales, respectively.

VIRTUALLY ALL PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES DEDICATE FACILITIES, ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMING TO OLDER ADULTS

(Percentage Distribution)



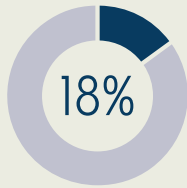
Park and recreation agencies are a major provider of services for older adults in their communities – frequently one of just a few organizations in their areas that directly serve this population. Other providers of services for older adults include senior living housing providers, area-wide agencies on aging, faith-based organizations, local hospitals/health providers and nonprofit organizations that serve older adults.

Seventy-one percent of survey respondents characterize their agency as the leader or one of the leaders in providing services and programming geared to older adults. This includes 18 percent of agencies that are the leading provider of services and programming for older adults. Fifty-three percent say their local park and recreation agencies are one of several major service providers of services and programming for older adults.

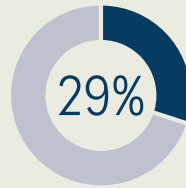
The role of the park and recreation agency as a service provider varies significantly by agency type. Agencies based in suburban locations are most likely to be a leading provider of offerings to older adults when compared to urban and rural locations. Three-quarters of suburban park and recreation agencies are a leading provider of older adult offerings, including 21 percent of these agencies that are the leading provider of such offerings. This percentage drops to 68 percent for urban park and recreation agencies and falls even further to 56 percent for agencies located in rural locations.

PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES ARE A LEADING PROVIDER OF SERVICES & PROGRAMMING FOR OLDER ADULTS

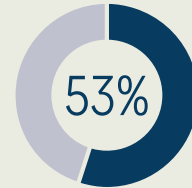
(Percentage Distribution of Agencies w/ Older Adults Offerings)



The park and recreation agency is the leading provider of services & programming for older adults



Other organizations are the leading providers of services & programming for older adults



The park and recreation agency is one of several major providers of services & programming for older adults

*Park and recreation agencies are **a major provider of services for older adults** in their communities*



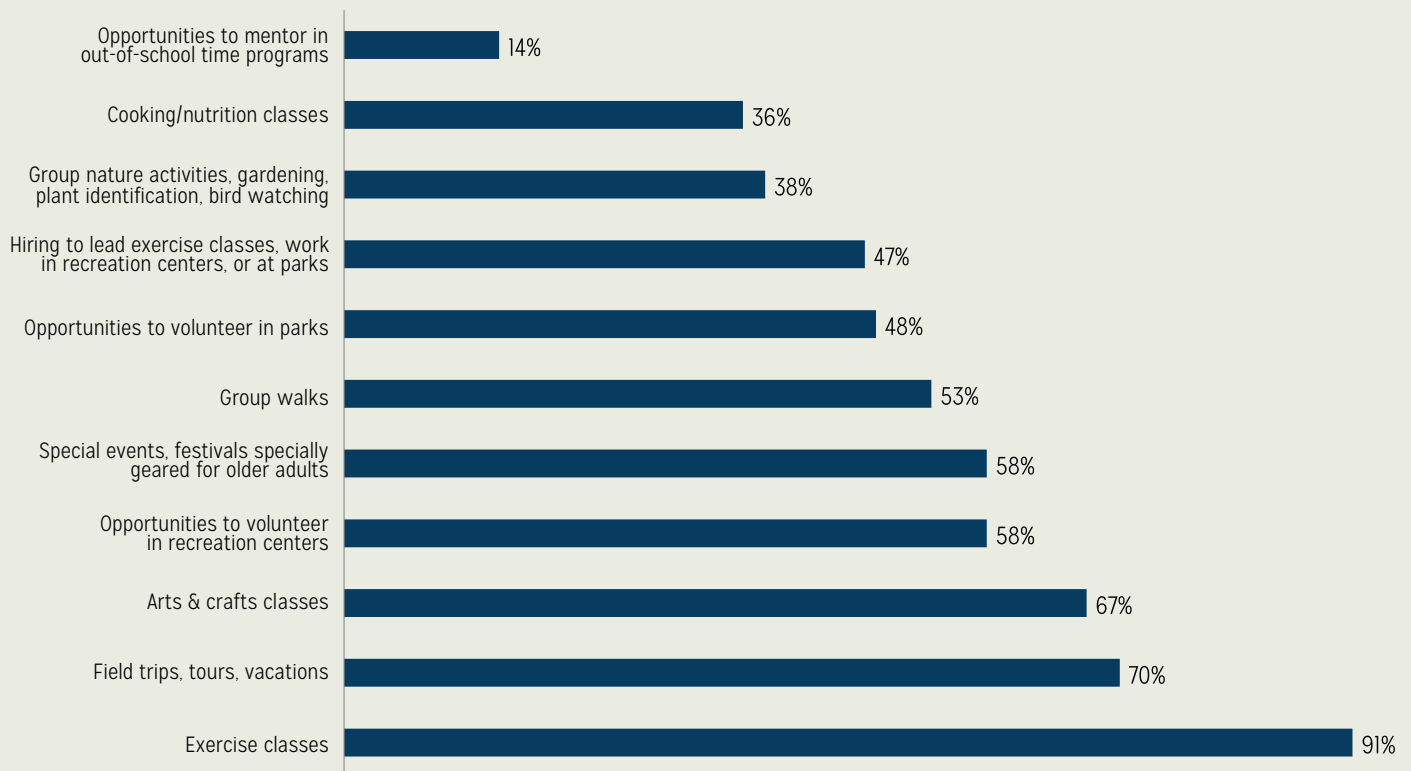
PROGRAMMING & OFFERINGS

As diverse as older adults are, so too are their needs and desires. As a result, park and recreation agencies offer these members of their community a wide variety of activities. These activities vary greatly, including providing older adults with occasions to socialize with others, ways to stay healthy and active, chances to learn something new and opportunities to serve others in their communities. The most offered activities geared to older adults include:

- Exercise classes (91 percent)
- Field trips, tours, vacations (70 percent)
- Arts & crafts classes (67 percent)
- Opportunities to volunteer at recreation centers (58 percent)
- Special events and festivals targeted to older adults (58 percent)
- Group walks (53 percent)
- Opportunities to volunteer in parks (48 percent)
- Paid job opportunities to lead exercise classes and work in recreation centers or at parks (47 percent)

ACTIVITIES PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES OFFER TO OLDER ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY

(Percent of Agencies w/ Older Adult Offerings)



One area where park and recreation agencies can make a real, lasting difference is in providing evidence-based programs that keep older adults healthy and active for years to come. These programs encourage healthy lifestyles through exercise, improved balance and nutritious eating.

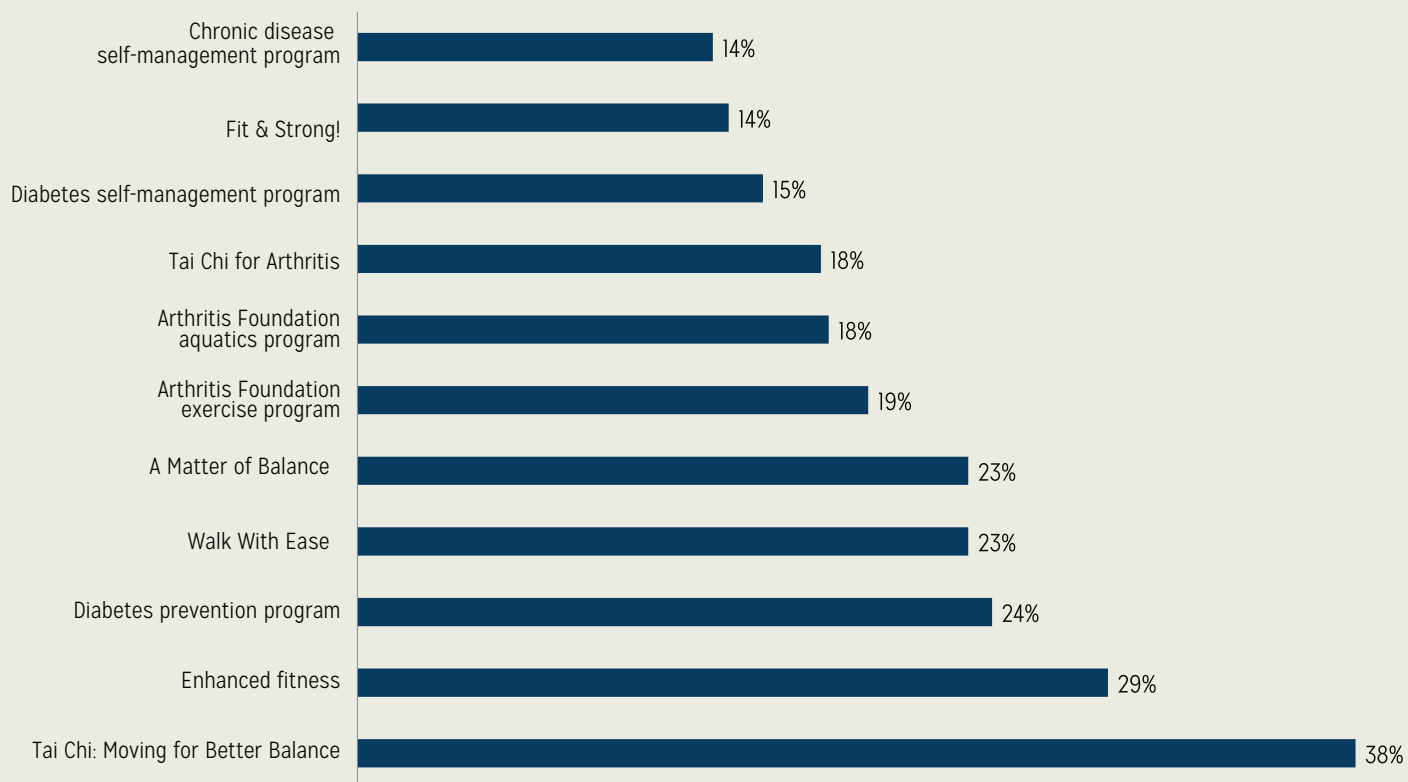
Three-quarters of park and recreation agencies offer one or more evidence-based programs for older adults in their communities, including those focused on chronic disease self-management, increasing physical activity and decreasing falls. These programs, however, are far less likely to be available from park and recreation agencies located in rural settings. Only 59 percent of rural park and recreation agencies offer one or more evidenced-based programs to older adults in their community. The equivalent percentages for suburban and urban agencies are 75 percent and 85 percent, respectively.

The most widely offered evidence-based programs for older adults include:

- Diabetes: [Diabetes Prevention Program](#) (24 percent)
- Falls Prevention: [Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance](#) (38 percent); [A Matter of Balance](#) (23 percent)
- Arthritis: [EnhanceFitness](#) (29 percent); [Walk With Ease](#) (23 percent); [Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program](#) (19 percent); [Arthritis Foundation Aquatics Program](#) (18 percent); [Tai Chi for Arthritis](#) (18 percent)

PARK & RECREATION AGENCIES OFFER MANY EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS FOR OLDER ADULTS

(Percent of Agencies that Offer Evidence-Based Programs)

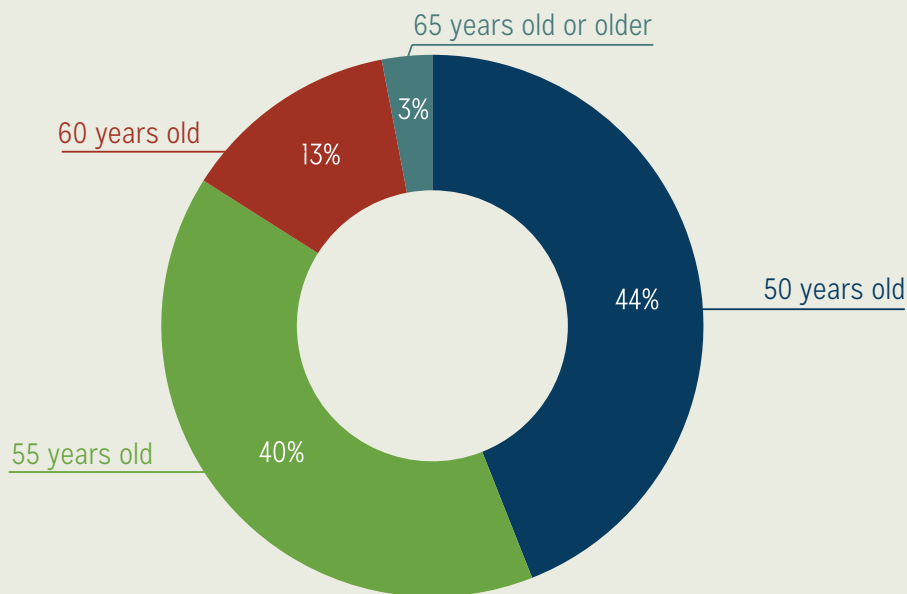


The wide breadth of service offerings from park and recreation agencies for older adults reflects the broad population served. As an example, agencies that follow a wide definition of “older adults” include adults who are years away from retirement when designing and marketing offerings. This reflects not only the fact that older working Americans themselves have unique needs that park and recreation agencies can meet, but also represents an opportunity to keep these people connected with park and recreation after their children have left home and they may have become less active. Naturally, the needs and desires of 50 years olds can differ significantly from those of 75 years old, and yet it is critical that agencies serve both populations well.

Forty-four percent of park and recreation agencies target adults as young as 50 years old for their older adult programming, with another 40 percent of agencies indicating their older adult age target begins at 55 years old. Only one in six park and recreation agencies begin to target 60 year olds or over for their older adult offerings.

MINIMUM AGE OF RESIDENTS PARK & RECREATION AGENCY TARGETS ITS OLDER ADULTS ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMING

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies w/ Older Adult Offerings)

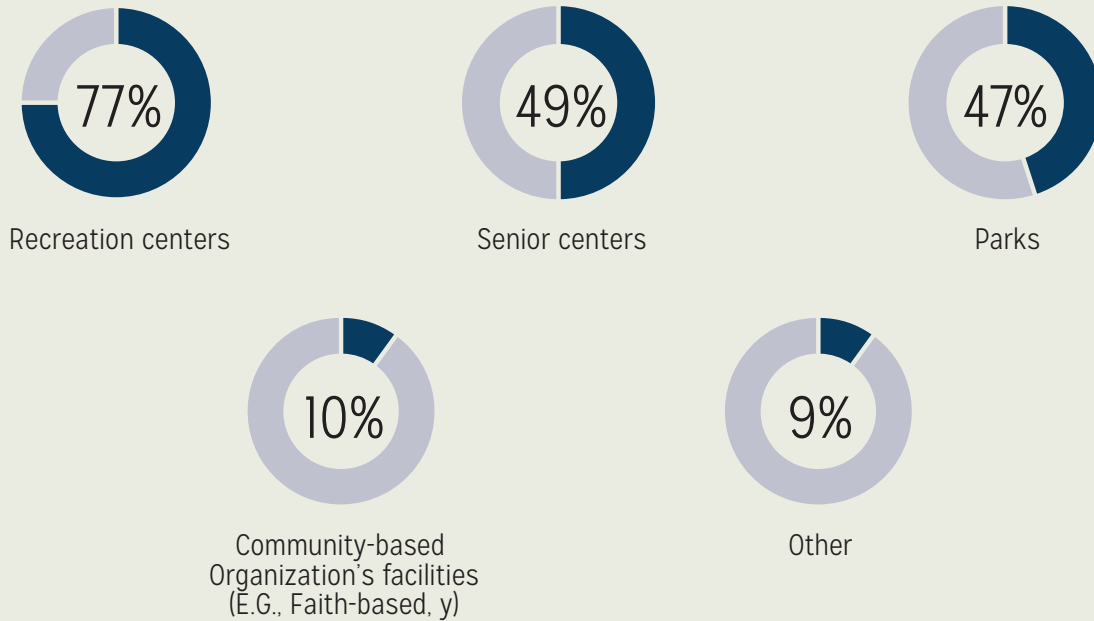


Recreation centers are the most frequent places where park and recreation agencies deliver programming and services for older adults, with three-quarters of agencies delivering older-adult programming at these facilities. Nearly half of agencies deliver at least some of their older-adult programming at senior centers. According to the [2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#), park and recreation agencies that have at least one senior center typically have one of these facilities for every 48,822 residents served by the agency. (As an example, this means a town with 100,000 residents could have two senior centers operated by the park and recreation department.)

Another place where agencies deliver programming for older adults in their community is their agency’s local parks (47 percent). Far less frequently, park and recreation agencies hold some of their older adults programming at the facilities of local community-based organizations, including the YMCA and churches (10 percent).

PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES MOST LIKELY DELIVER PROGRAMMING FOR OLDER ADULTS AT RECREATION CENTERS, SENIOR CENTERS, AND PARKS

(Percentage of Agencies w/ Older Adult Offerings)



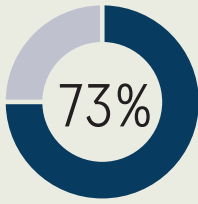
The needs and desires of older adults can vary significantly and are growing as the population increases. At the same time, park and recreation agencies must deliver high-quality services while facing tight budgets. As a result, park and recreation professionals engage with older adults to best understand what facilities, programming and services optimally serve the older adults in their community. This includes getting direct feedback from users (and potential users) of these services through:

- Surveys of community members (73 percent)
- Target marketing and outreach (60 percent)
- Community engagement at senior housing communities (33 percent)
- Community engagement at faith-based organizations (13 percent)

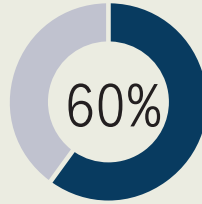
In addition, park and recreation agencies identify opportunities to best serve older adults by analyzing market research and census data. A quarter of park and recreation agencies tap market research data resources to better understand the needs and desires of their older adult population. One of these resources is the [NRPA Facility Market Report](#), which offers key data and insights about the population residing near a park, recreation center or any other agency facility. These reports feature demographic data and forecasts, highlight rates of recreation participation, and take a particular focus on health and wellness of nearby residents.

PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES FOLLOW MANY METHODS TO ENGAGE WITH OLDER ADULTS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

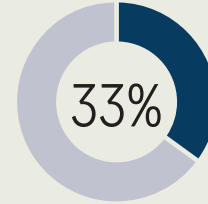
(Percentage of Agencies w/ Older Adult Offerings)



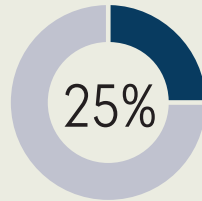
Survey of community members



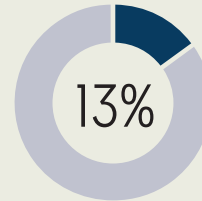
Target marketing and outreach



Community engagement at adult housing communities



Analysis of market research data of community members



Community engagement at faith-based organizations

Park and recreation agencies are in a unique position to ensure that the needs of underserved older adults are being met. Agencies are a critical, lifesaving resource to those with lower-income members of the population by providing low-cost nutritional meals, transportation to and from senior centers, recreation centers and other needed service providers, and low-cost/free fitness programs. Forty-four percent of park and recreation agencies have specific programming and outreach activities designed to serve the specific needs of underserved older adults in the community. Following are a few examples of what park and recreation agencies are providing to their older adult population:

- Offering transportation for anyone 55 years or older anywhere within the community for less than \$1 roundtrip
- Providing free or low-cost meals followed by targeted social and/or physical activities encouraging increased participation by older adults
- Hosting health fairs, craft fairs and educational seminars focusing on older adults
- Encouraging travel through sponsored field trips and tours, allowing older adults to have greater access to the world around them

RESOURCES AND PARTNERS

Even as the population and the needs of older adults grow, park and recreation agencies, in many cases, dedicate a relatively small percentage of their annual budgets to serve this population. Although a quarter of agencies indicate that they dedicate more than 10 percent of their operating budget to older adult programming, the typical park and recreation agency devotes five percent of its annual operating budget to older adult programming and outreach. Whereas the median percentage of operating expenditures is also five percent at agencies located in both rural and urban settings, the typical percentage of annual operating budgets dedicated to older adult offerings rises to eight percent at park and recreation agencies in suburban locations.

The good news is that park and recreation agencies are not alone when developing and delivering these important services. Instead, agencies work closely with a number of key partners in their cities, towns and counties to develop and deliver these offerings. More than nine in 10 park and recreation agencies partner with outside organizations so they can better serve this population. These entities include:

- Area agencies on aging (63 percent)
- Retirement communities (47 percent)
- Senior meals providers (46 percent)
- Hospitals and doctors' offices (43 percent)
- Local health departments (42 percent)
- Health insurance companies (41 percent)
- Community-based organizations (e.g., YMCAs, faith-based) (41 percent)

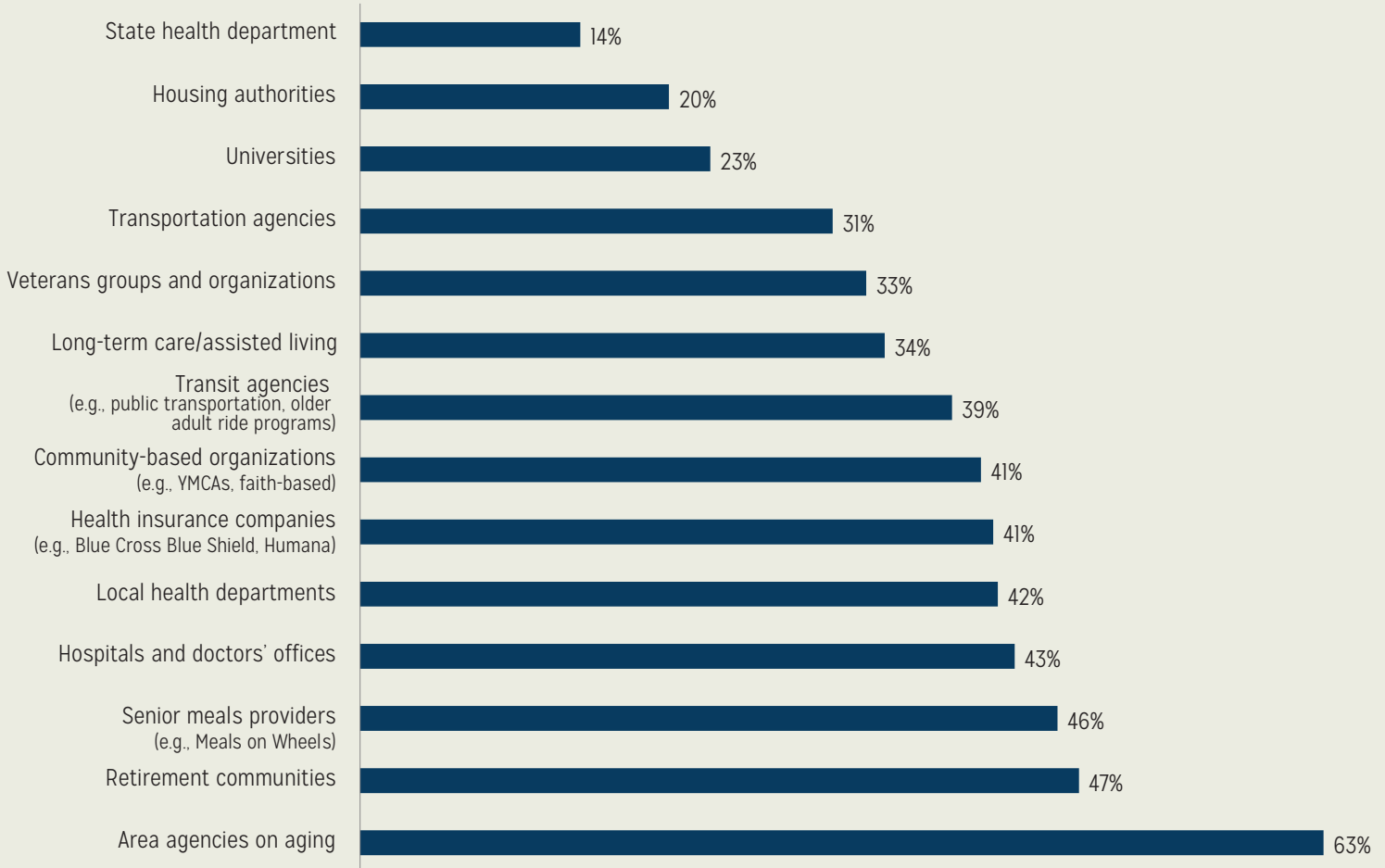
Furthermore, with relatively small operating budgets for older-adult programming, many agencies impose membership fees to offset costs associated with these targeted programs and services. However, the coverage of programs and services by health insurance plans is an increasing trend that allows for reimbursement to agencies so that services can be offered at little to no cost. Thirty-nine percent of agencies indicated that they offer fitness membership programs, such as SilverSneakers, that are covered by many health insurance companies.



A quarter of agencies indicate that they dedicate more than 10 percent of their operating budget to older adult programming

PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES PARTNER WITH MANY OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS TO BETTER SERVE OLDER ADULTS

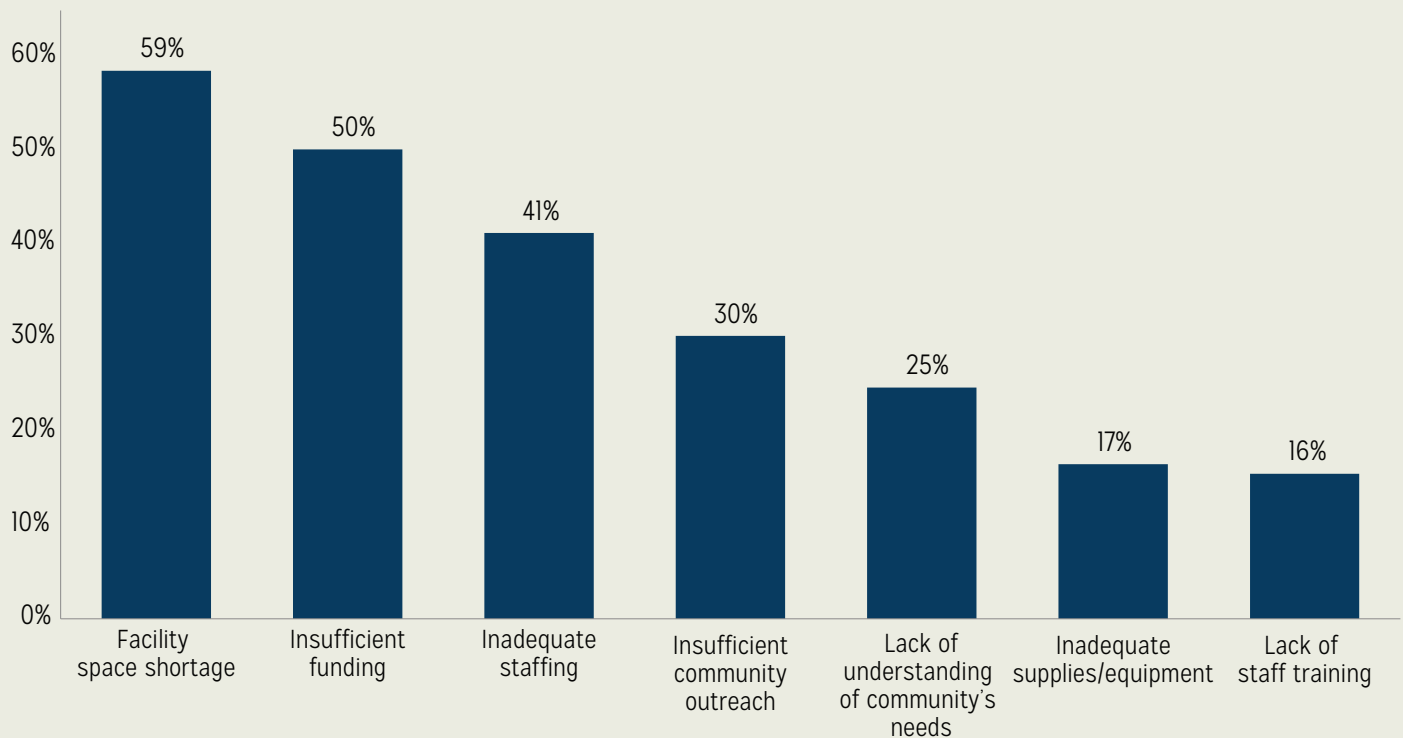
(Percent of Agencies that Partner w/ Outside Agencies)



As much as park and recreation agencies have a sustained, positive impact on the lives of older adults, there remain significant opportunities to do more, including serving more people and expanding service offerings. But, to do so, most survey respondents indicated that their agencies have significant hurdles they must overcome. Most of the challenges are the result of inadequate resources, including facility space shortages (58 percent), insufficient funding (50 percent) and inadequate staffing (40 percent). Presumably, these resource constraints will become even more acute as the older adult population grows and the demand for these services increases.

PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES FACE CHALLENGES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO BETTER SERVE OLDER ADULTS

(Percent of Agencies w/Older Adult Offerings)



Beyond greater access to funding resources and staffing, park and recreation professionals indicate interest for education, training and other support that would build their agencies' capabilities in serving the needs and desires of older adults. Areas that park and recreation professionals agree their agencies need greater assistance include:

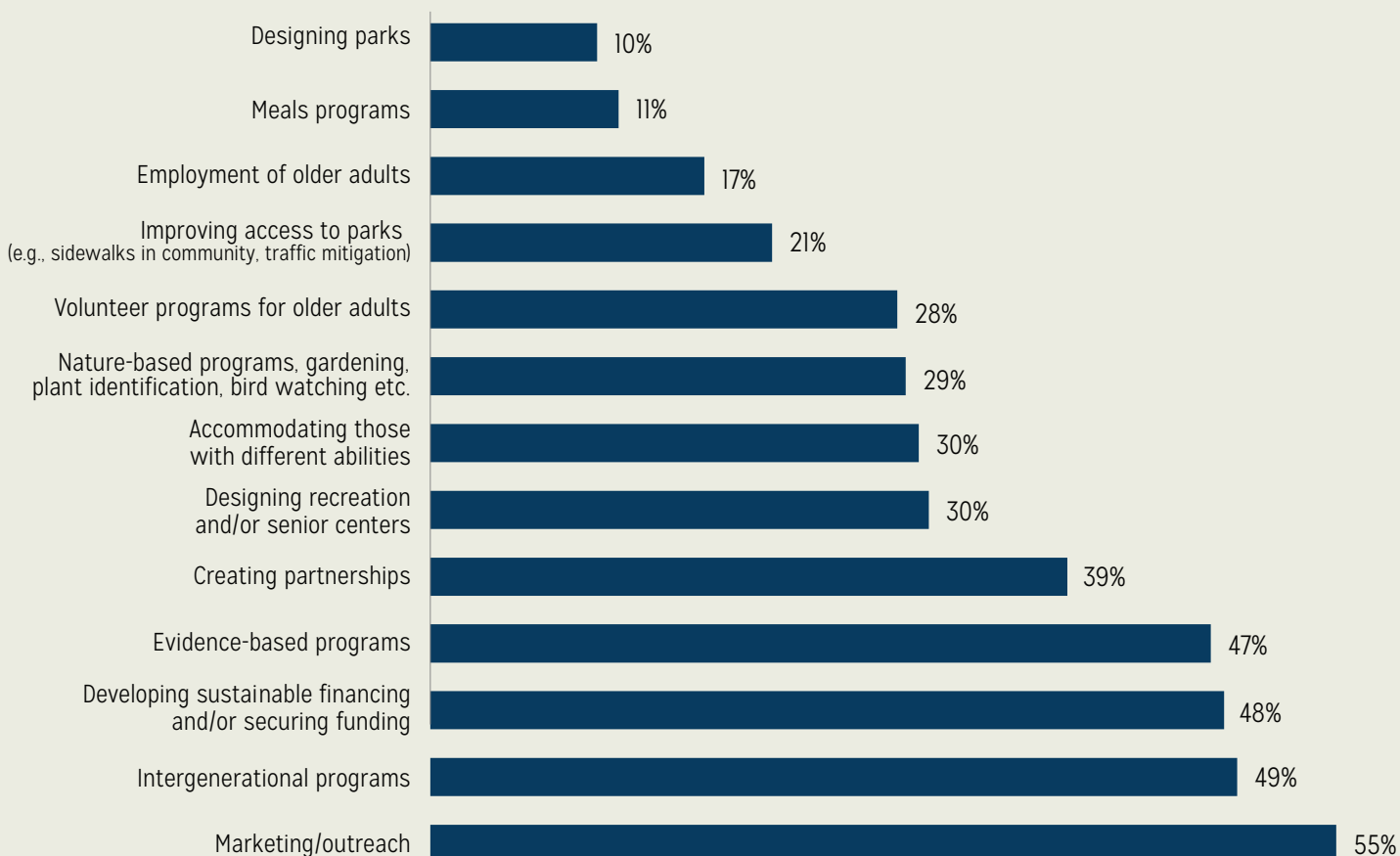
- Marketing/outreach (55 percent)
- Intergenerational programs (49 percent)
- Developing sustainable financing/securing funding (48 percent)
- Evidence-based programs (47 percent)
- Creating partnerships (39 percent)
- Developing recreation and/or senior centers (30 percent)
- Accommodating those with different abilities (30 percent)
- Nature-based programs, gardening, plant identification, bird watching (29 percent)
- Volunteer programs for older adults (28 percent)

Examples of challenges agencies cite include:

- Increased attendance that puts a strain on facility capacity and location availability
- Low attendance of fee-based programs, but over-capacity attendance of free programs
- The need for training for staff, key stakeholders and the public on the diversity of programming needed to be offered with an age group ranging from 50 to 100 years old
- The need for dedicated staff focusing on both older adult programming and securing funding for this targeted group

AREAS WHERE PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES SEEK ADDITIONAL RESOURCES SO THEY MAY BETTER SERVE OLDER ADULTS

(Percent of Agencies w/ Older Adult Offerings)



CONCLUSIONS

Park and recreation agencies are a leading provider of services and recreation opportunities for older adults in nearly every town, city and county across the United States. Whether working closely with partners or acting on their own, park and recreation professionals provide older adults with a wealth of resources that improve mental and physical health, provide social activities with others, arrange for opportunities to serve others in their community and, most importantly, allow them to age in place.

As the nation ages and more of the Baby Boomer generation moves into retirement age and some members of Generation X pass the age of 50, the demand for park and recreation agencies to serve older Americans will continue to grow. To meet this challenge, agencies will need to identify reliable funding sources, additional space for these activities to occur, and build out their staffs' capabilities to serve the needs and desires of older adults. Further, engaging with the older adult community, whether through surveys, one-on-one conversations, and/or market research data analysis, will help ensure that park and recreation agencies continue to evolve to meet the needs and desires of these generations, as well as those to follow.



*Park and recreation professionals provide older adults with a **wealth of resources that improve mental and physical health***



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