

2013

Parks and Recreation

NATIONAL DATABASE REPORT

Essential information on

- Staffing
- Budgets
- Programming
- GIS and Mapping
- And More



National Recreation
and Park Association

Introduction

The Community Value of Parks

FOR PARKS TO HAVE A COMMUNITY VALUE they must benefit users and non-users alike. A quote from John Crompton, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Texas A&M University, succinctly summarizes this concept: “If the paramount needs of a majority of residents are not met, the field does not deserve their support. Such widespread community support will be based primarily on the off-site benefits that accrue to nonusers rather than on the on-site benefits that accrue to users.”

Among the many responsibilities of professional park and recreation leaders is the need to continually examine and communicate the value of the parks system to their community. NRPA's PRORAGIS database is a tool that is designed and administered to assist in that effort. Since its inception, NRPA has invested significantly in improving PRORAGIS and expanding its capabilities to serve the parks and recreation community. Most recently, we added the Eco-Benefit Calculator in 2012, a tool that adds yet another dimension in presenting the community value of local park systems. Its release comes after a three-year data collection effort, which we are now using to develop an initial trend analysis.

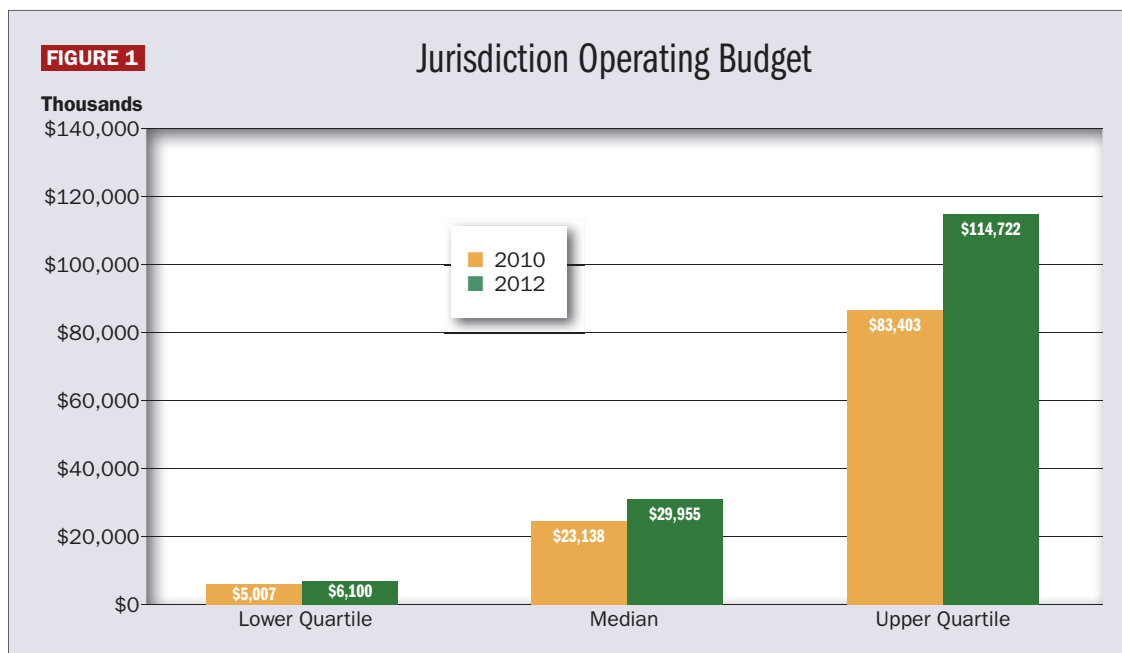
This 2013 Report marks the first year that PRORAGIS can be used to establish industry trends. Three years of data are required and we now have well over 1,000 profiles distributed across the 2010 to 2012 reporting years. Thus this report focuses on

the significant trends affecting your operations and management. These trends are national in nature and may not be reflected in your location, but they can still give you insight to the state of the industry.

The system, which relies on agencies to supply their own data through a survey, is still in its early stages, but it offers an informative look at the functions, structures, and budgets of more than 300 agencies of various sizes, types, and regions.

How to Use and Read This Report

The information in this report should be used as a tool for informed decision-making rather than as an almanac of absolute standards. It is designed to help you better evaluate your agency and its offerings. This report is derived from the database as of November 30, 2012, and data can and does change throughout the year. The NRPA online database platform, available 24/7, allows member users to



run reports on-demand based on real-time data, thus, the most current data are always available to registered users who have completed profiles.

The report is organized into sections relating to essential park agency functions: responsibilities, staffing/volunteers, budgeting, programming, operations and maintenance, and geographic information systems (GIS) and mapping. The presentations of data within each section indicate the number of responses, with results depicted by median (the 50th percentile value), lower quartile (the observation point below which 25 percent of responses lie), and upper quartile (the observation point above which the top 25 percent of responses lie).

Throughout the report are references to ratios or “operating ratios.” This terminology indicates the use of some basis for comparison (e.g., a number per 1,000 people in a jurisdiction’s population). The basis used depends upon the data being compared—and is always identified in the actual table, example, or figure.

Who Participated?

In all, 383 agencies represent the 2012 data in this report. Just more than half of those participating (54 percent) were city agencies, and the median population per agency jurisdiction was 48,000. While this population is high when considering all park and recreation agencies, it is closer to the median of NRPA members who make up the majority of profiles.

The Importance of Data Analysis for Park Agencies

Programming, maintenance, budgeting, and many

other essential park functions demand careful research and monitoring. Not only is this collection of data a resource for conducting such critical research—but the NRPA online database tool can be used for agency-specific performance and benchmarking reports. Beyond providing a set of initial numbers and offering a state-of-the-industry overview, the system lends itself to monitoring performance and impact over time.

In short, the detailed surveying provided by this database guarantees a full picture of both your agency and other agencies across the nation. Whether the top priority is staffing or land acquisition, NRPA collects the data you need to make—and justify—sound decisions.

Figures 1 and 2 represent jurisdiction budgets reported for 2010 and 2012. In **Figure 1**, the quartiles and the median all reflect an increased operating budget when comparing 2010 to 2012. This is a cautiously optimistic result for the whole field as funding levels appear to be recovering from their lowest points in 2009 (the source of 2010 report data). While we cannot positively state that we have recovered, we can say that we appear to be recovering from our worst years.

The picture is somewhat similar for the jurisdiction capital budgets. Both the upper and lower quartiles are showing increases between 2010 and 2012 of over 20 percent. The median actually shows a decline. This may change next year as there were several successful ballot initiatives to increase local park and recreation funding in November 2012.

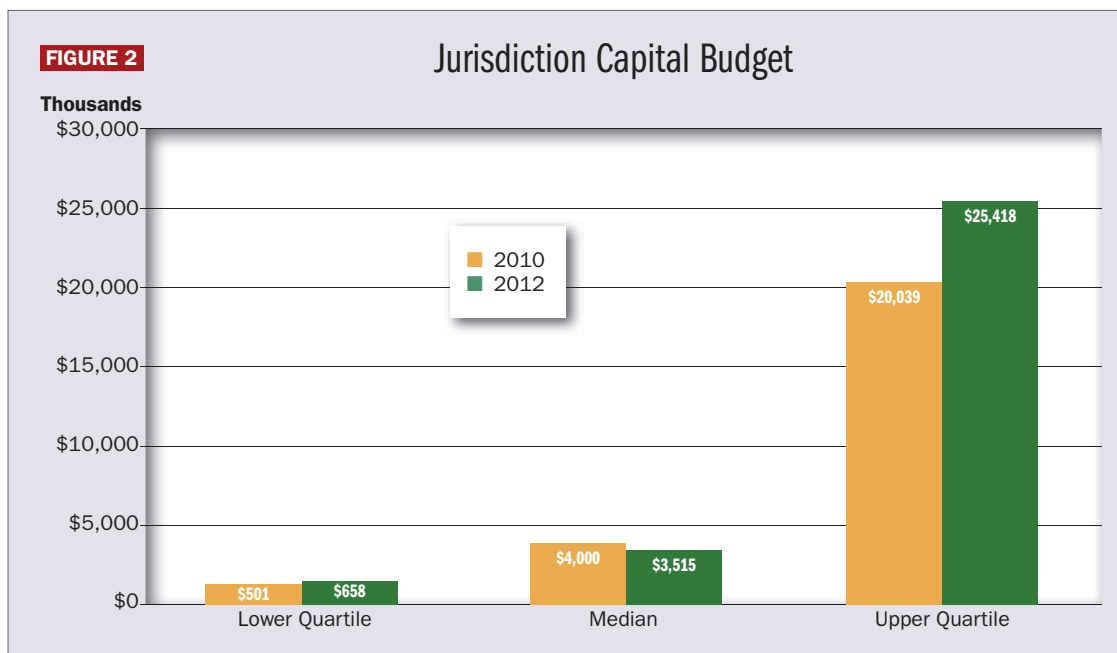


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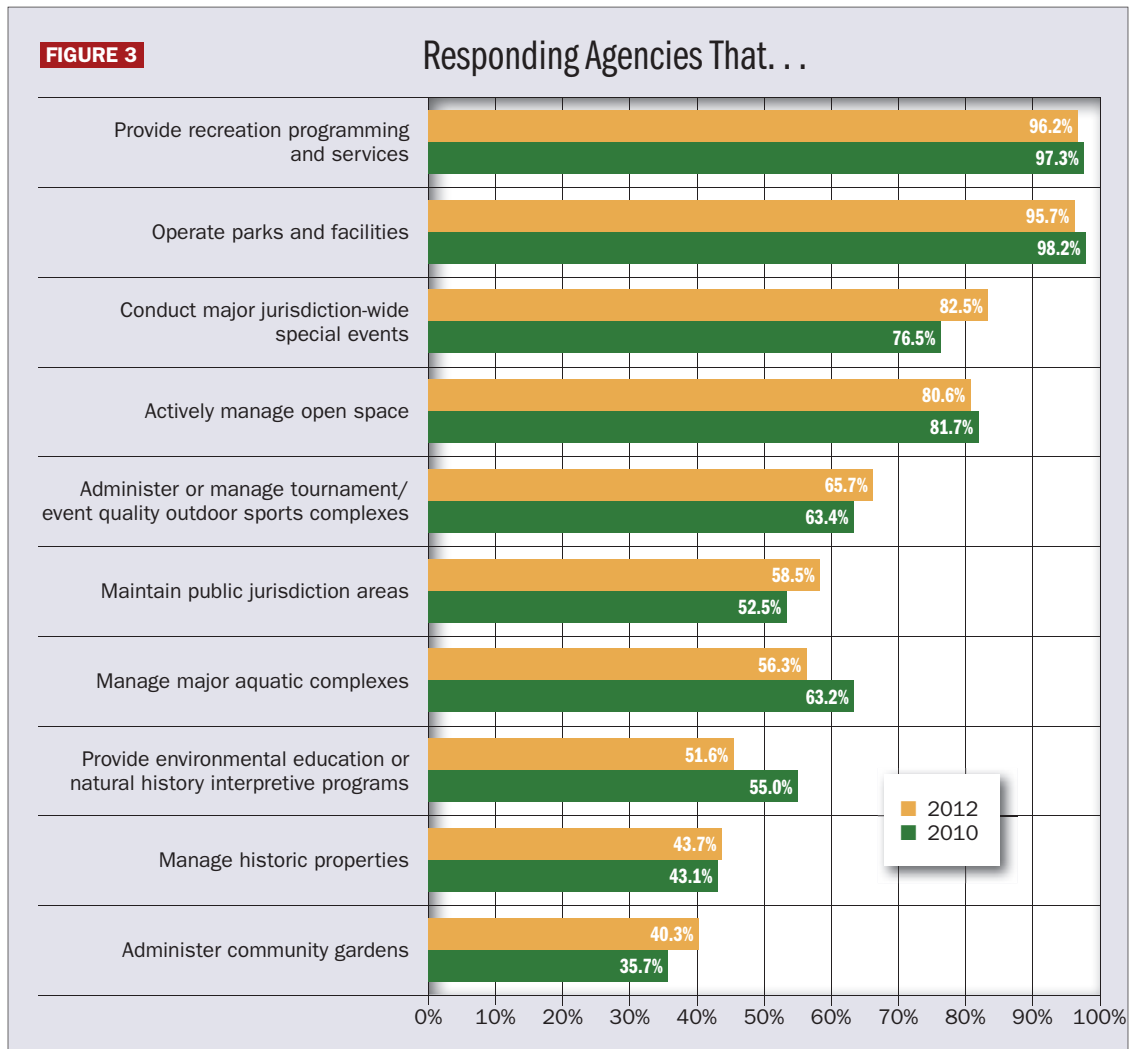
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New Eco-benefits Calculator shows environmental and economic value of parks and recreation to communities.

This special report on the parks and recreation field—
as well as the PRORAGIS database from which it is drawn—
is produced by the

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Responsibilities

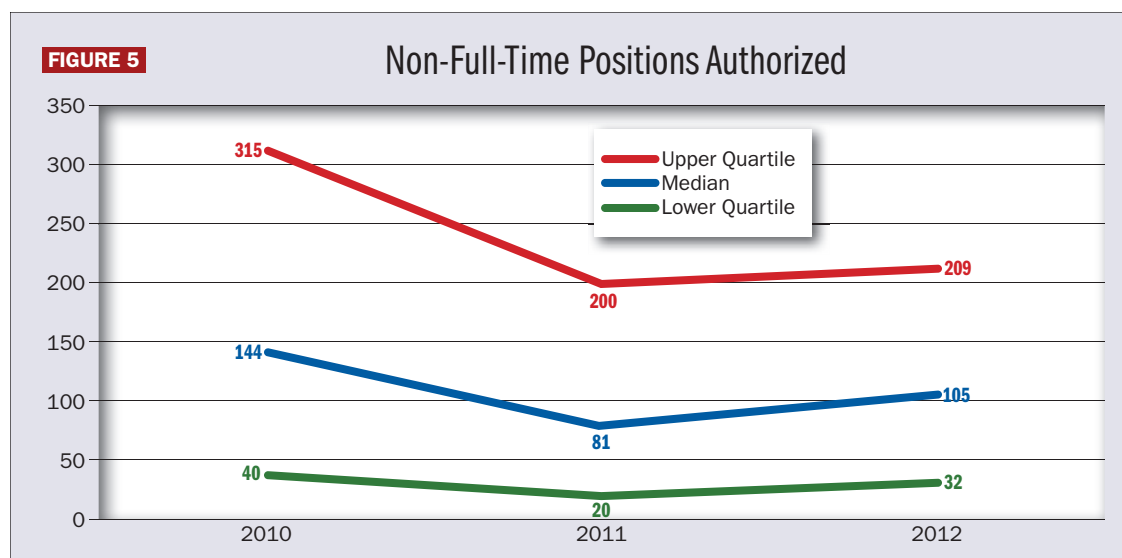
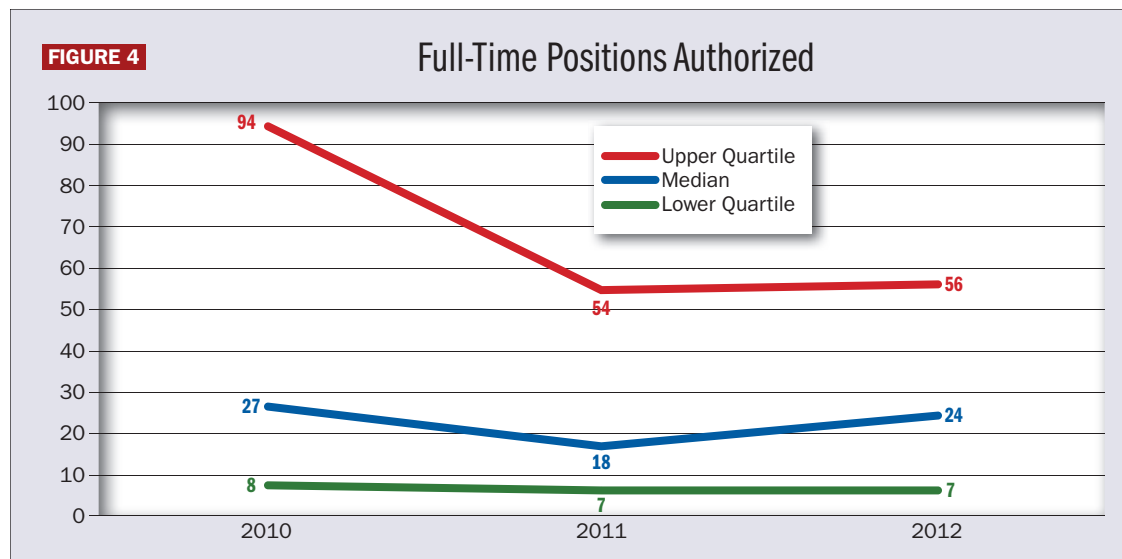
Traditionally, parks and recreation agencies have been defined by their dual roles of managing parks and running recreational facilities and programs. While department profiles indicate that those continue to be the two most common roles for park agencies, responses also reflected a wide range of typical duties, including caring for and conserving open spaces, managing major sports or aquatic complexes, assisting in historic preservation, and overseeing community gardens (Figure 3). Areas of responsibility that showed growth from 2010 to 2012 include conducting major special events, maintaining public jurisdiction areas, and administering community gardens. Meanwhile, fewer agencies reported managing major aquatic complexes and providing environmental education and natural history programs in 2012.



Staffing And Volunteers

WHETHER an agency is conducting benchmark studies or calculating the cost of its programming and operations, staffing and administrative information is critical. The NRPA database offers insight into work activities; distribution of paid and volunteer staff by function, skills, and abilities needed; ratios of staff to attendance for programming; and park acres maintained.

In **Figures 4** and **5**, for example, the numbers of full-time-equivalent and part-time employees shown by quartile demonstrate a slight rebound. However, **Figure 6** shows that despite increasing agency operating budgets (see **Figure 8**), the number of full-time equivalent employees is still much lower than in 2010, especially for larger agencies where FTE equivalents remain down by more than half.



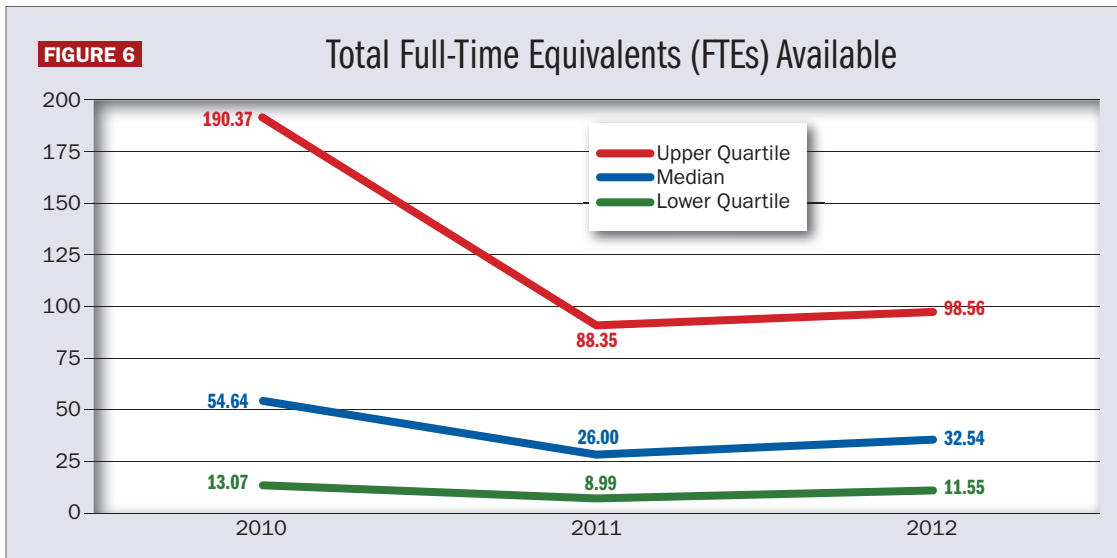


Figure 7 indicates a similar decline in overall numbers of volunteers and the number of volunteer hours. Is this happening in your volunteer program? Why? These and other similar questions can be answered by doing further research within the system and contacting participating agencies in that category for ideas, policies, and best practices.

FIGURE 7 Number of Recreation Department Volunteers

How many volunteers are in your parks and recreation department?

7A Number of Volunteers	2010	2011	2012
Lower Quartile	50	25	24
Median	228	126	150
Upper Quartile	1,035	500	608
7B Number of Hours Worked by Volunteers	2010	2011	2012
Lower Quartile	1,100	250	150
Median	6,000	3,740	3,900
Upper Quartile	40,016	16,485	14,100
7C Number of Hours Worked per Volunteer	2010	2011	2012
Lower Quartile	12	9	7
Median	21	20	15
Upper Quartile	37	55	37

Staffing Data: Comparing Apples to Apples

Comparing your staffing details with departments that have completely different operations and structures will yield misleading results. One difficulty of reviewing data from various departments is that a multitude of factors contributes to staffing levels. They include:

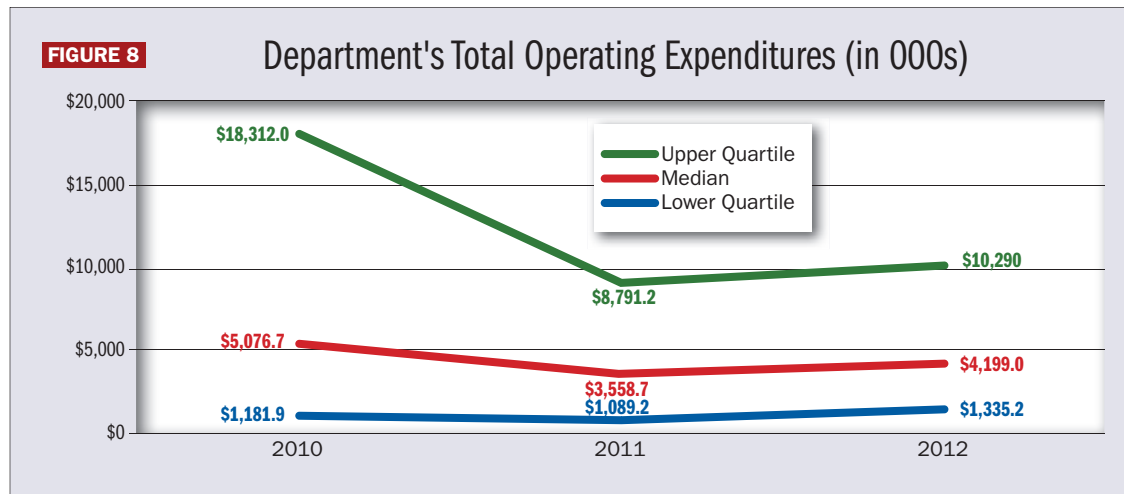
- Seasonal vs. year-round operation;
- Cold weather vs. warm weather;
- Overall duty emphasis on programming vs. land management and operations;
- External duties related to jurisdiction (e.g., street trees, special events, grounds care of public facilities, etc.)

All of this data can be found in the profile data for your department and others with which you wish to compare.

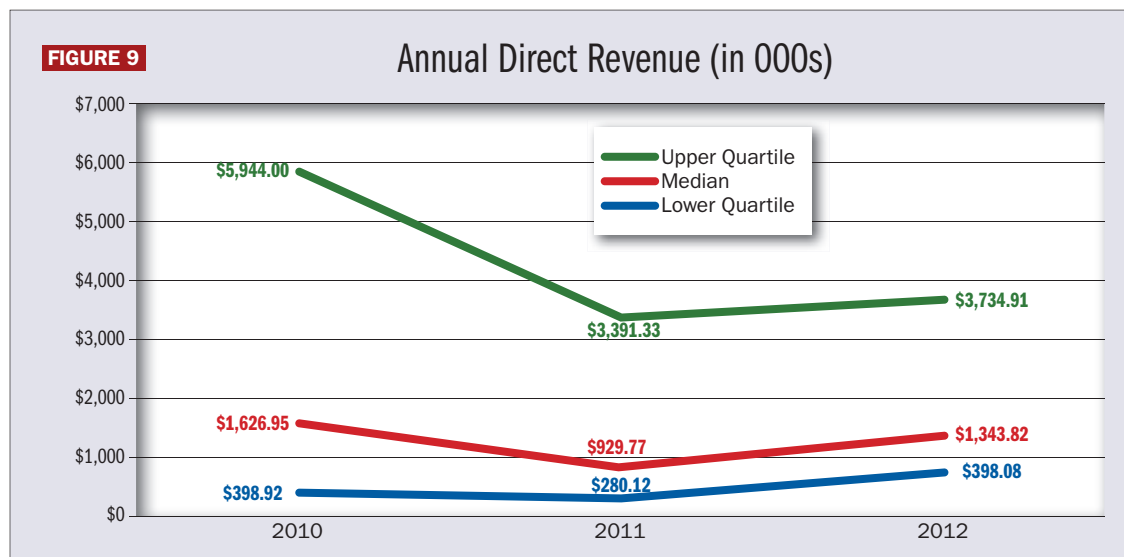
Budget

ALL AGENCIES MUST JUSTIFY THEIR BUDGET REQUESTS—and all successful budget proposals base their numbers on data. The NRPA database offers a variety of operating ratios that can supply budget justification criteria, as well as calculate agency-specific costs.

Figures 8 through 11 provide a variety of useful budget-related data: trends in operating expenditures (Figure 8), direct revenue (Figure 9), most common revenue source percentages (Figure 10), capital budget (Figure 11A), renovation need (Figure 11B), and new capital need amounts (Figure 11C).

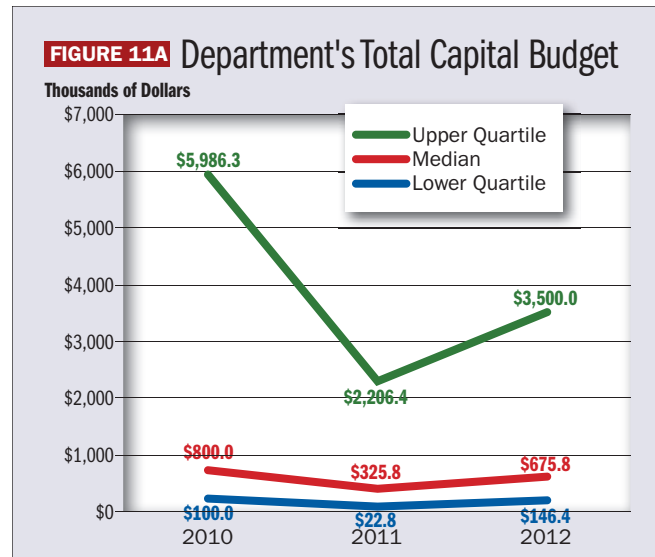
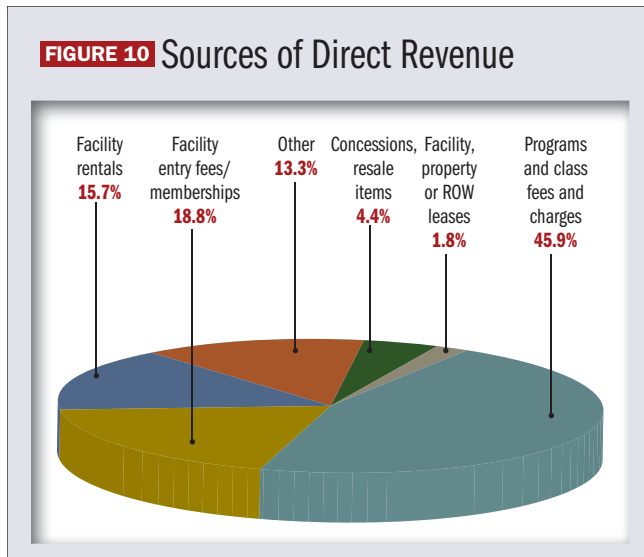


Across the board since 2010, agency funding levels have been negatively impacted by the recent recession. However, as shown in Figure 8, smaller agencies (and those with smaller resource commitments) have been the most stable over the past three years. Agencies receiving higher levels of funding in FY 2010 are generally those that experienced the greatest percentage of cuts in funding. Early indications are that this trend is reversing, however funding generally continues to remain below 2010 levels.

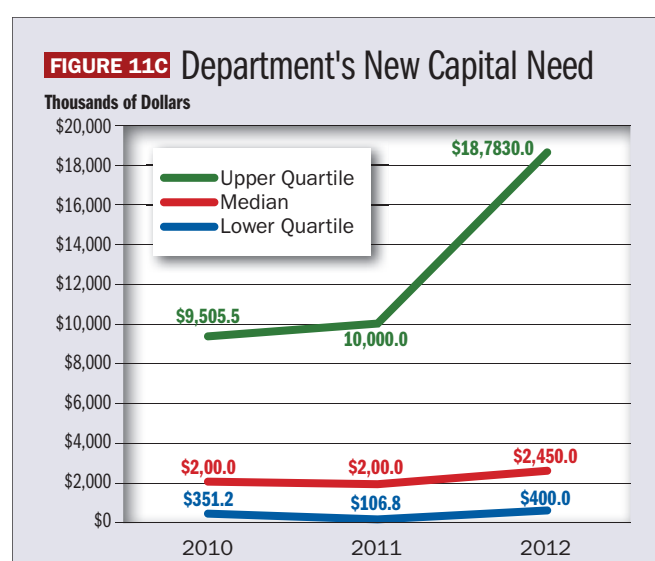
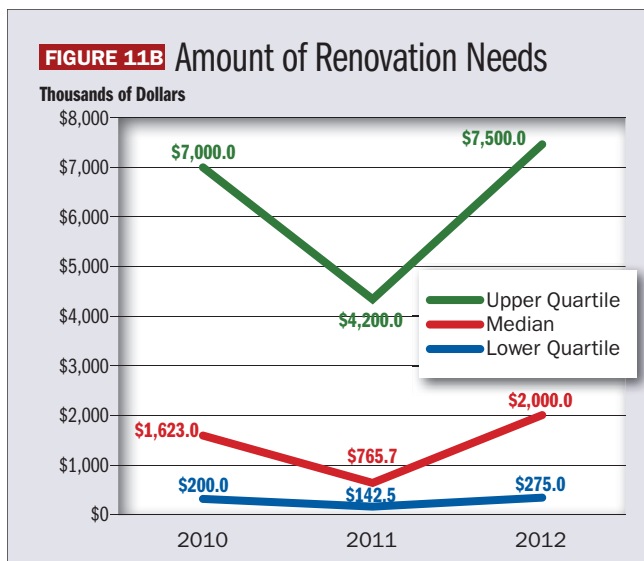


Revenue trends (revenue generated through direct revenue such as classes, programs, memberships, permits, rentals, and concessions), shown in **Figure 9**, are generally following funding trends, with significant decreases realized from 2010 levels. Smaller agencies, however, appear more resilient—by 2012 agencies in the lower quartile had realized an increase over 2010 levels and those in the median quartile had virtually recovered. Upper quartile agencies continue to realize revenues significantly below 2010 but by 2012 were experiencing a slightly increasing revenue trend.

Figure 10 shows the percent contribution of each source of direct revenue varied only slightly from 2010 to 2012. The most common sources in the “Other” category include contributions and/or donations, interest revenue, grants, parking, and fines/penalties.



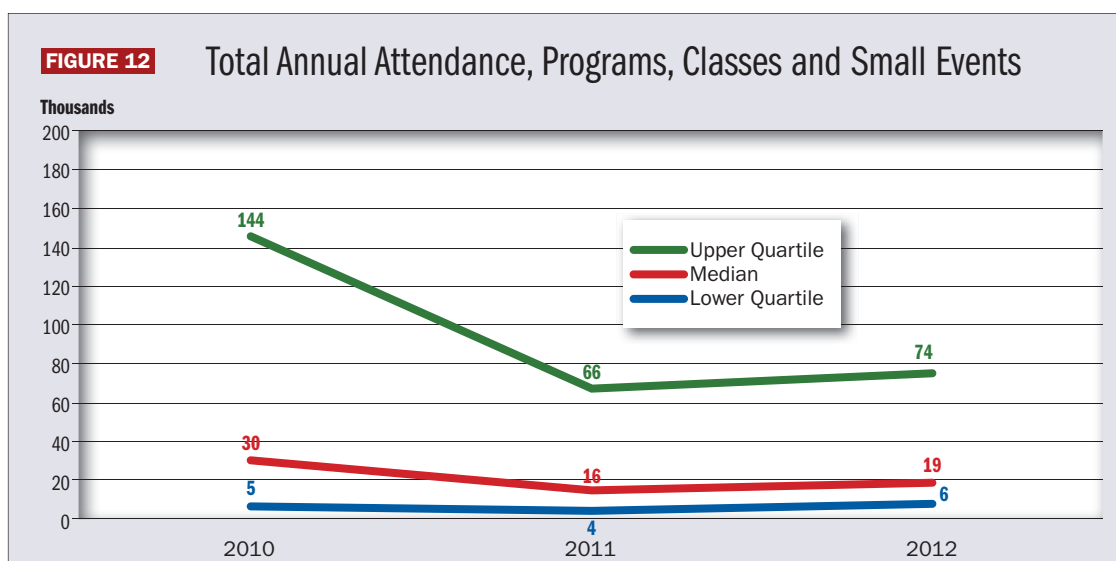
Capital budgets in **Figure 11A** are following a similar pattern to operating budgets. Small departments are almost back to the 2010 budget levels while all others are climbing during the FY 2012 cycle. On a side note, it should be recognized that November 2012 saw the largest number of park and recreation capital ballot referendums since 2008. In general, these referendums passed with about 67 percent of the electorate’s support. This is a significant indicator of improved public confidence in the future economy and their support of parks and recreation services.



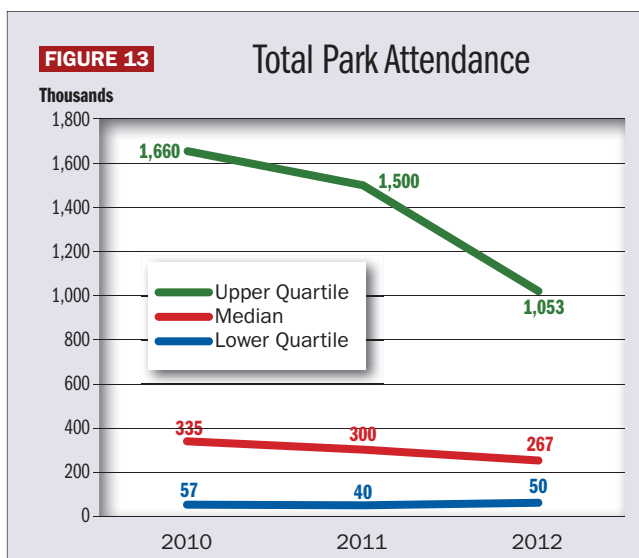
Recognize that **Figures 11B** and **11C** are not allocated dollars but departmental estimates of renovation and new capital needs. The sharp spike in 2012 seems to represent the inability to fund new or renovation projects and may represent project postponements and deferred maintenance in response to budget reductions.

Programming and Attendance

FROM SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAMS TO PURELY RECREATIONAL OFFERINGS, parks and recreation agencies offer a vast array of programs. Programming data can help agencies both compare their program attendance and offerings and demonstrate the range of services they are providing their constituents. While attendance at programs, classes, and small events is starting to rebound (**Figure 12**), program offerings have declined in every major category since 2010 (**Figure 14**).



The decline shown in **Figure 13** seems to reflect the societal pattern of reducing expenses during the uncertain economic times. The tendency to stay closer to home may also explain the increase in major special events, before and after-school programs, and community gardens shown in **Figure 15**.



Facts at a Glance: Parks and Social Services Programs

- Nearly 77.2 percent of agencies offer a summer camp, down from 80 percent in 2010.
- Of those agencies offering summer camps, the median number of weeks remained at 8, the median number of campers per week dropped from 115 to 98, and 43.5 percent of agencies offered meals to campers, up from 39 percent in 2010.
- The percent of responding departments offering before- and after-school programs rose to 49.2 percent.
- Of those departments, 8.9 percent offer before-school feeding programs and 35 percent offer after-school feeding programs, down from 39 percent in 2010.

Facts such as these—the decline of such critical services as caring for and feeding children—can help agencies demonstrate their local impact and procure grant monies.

Programming is also subject to cost versus revenue (and other measures of cost). For example, in offering a fitness class, an agency might try to recover at least the direct costs of the program including instructor, materials and promotions—with a pro rata share for operations, and equipment. For a learn-to-swim class—even if there is no fee charged—it is important also to determine the cost of the program. These kinds of program cost determinations allow agencies to better establish and defend a hierarchy of fees. They also serve to ensure social equity in programming. **Figure 19**, for example, shows median program fees per participant.

FIGURE 14 Programs Offered by Agencies

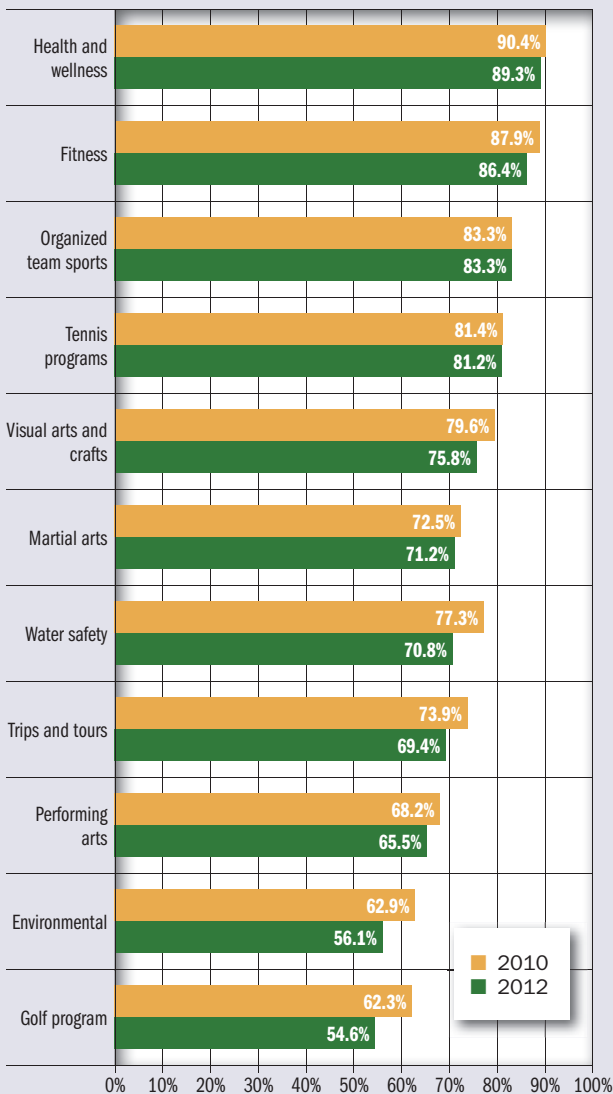
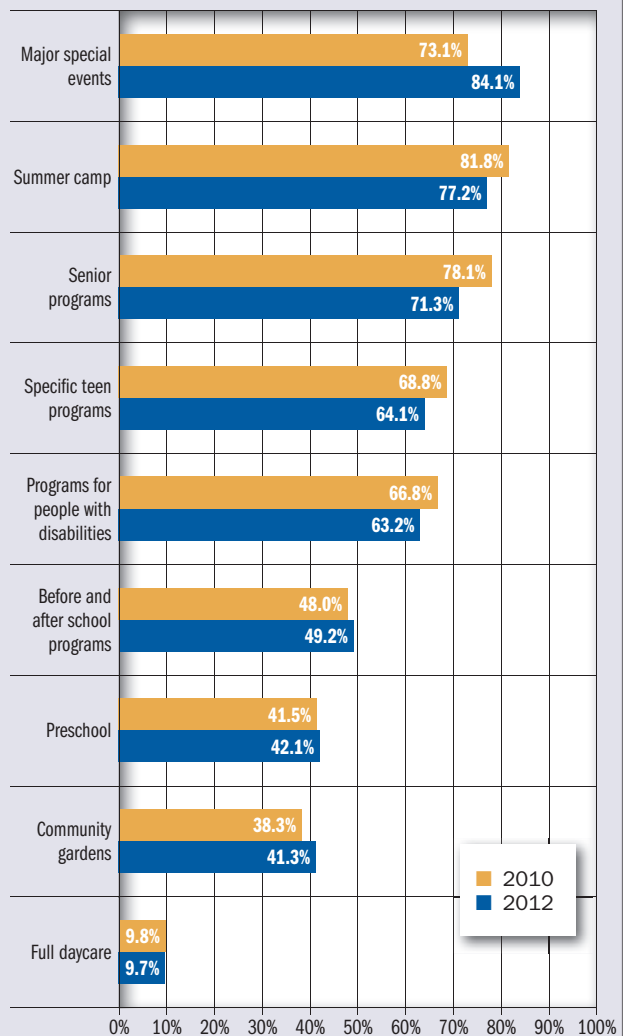


FIGURE 15 Recreation Opportunities Offered by Agencies



Operations, Maintenance, and Benchmarking

THE NRPA DATA INVENTORY encompasses a wide variety of facilities-related topics that help equip agencies of all sizes and jurisdiction types for comprehensive, cost-effective operations. **Figures 16–19** depict some of the facilities data and breadth-of-scope insights the database offers.

FIGURE 16

Square Feet per Facility, Fiscal Year 2012

Facility type	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
Recreation /Community Center	10,011	24,821	44,700
Fitness Center	1,000	2,500	17,400
Senior Center	3,909	8,000	13,750

Figure 17—It may be tempting to compare the median population per facility against the old NRPA national guidelines, last updated in 1995. For example, the 1995 standards recommended one basketball court for every 5,000 residents and one swimming pool for every 20,000 residents. However, today it is much more informative to create a PRORAGIS profile for your agency and then compare your results against other agencies with a similar population size and demographics. Your PRORAGIS results are also available with upper and lower quartiles, not just the median.

FIGURE 17

Facility Types—2012

Facility type	Departments Offering	Median jurisdiction population per facility
Diamond fields (e.g., baseball/softball)	94.6%	2,900
Playground	94.3%	3,364
Basketball court (outdoor)	91.5%	7,340
Tennis court (outdoor)	90.8%	4,375
Rectangular fields (e.g., football/soccer)	89.4%	3,783
Recreation/community center	77.5%	24,683
Swimming pool (outdoor)	63.0%	33,128
Dog park	47.7%	43,333
Community gardens	42.4%	13,956
Golf course (9 holes)	40.4%	24,952
Swimming pool (indoor)	29.8%	47,800
Tennis court (indoor)	7.7%	19,667

FIGURE 18**Acres of Parks Maintained**

Number of Acres	2012 Operating Expenditures per Acre of Land Managed or Maintained			2012 Acres of Parkland Maintained per FTE		
	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
250 or less	\$4,825	\$12,467	\$43,051	2.2	7.6	13.1
251 to 1,000	\$3,803	\$7,855	\$17,312	6.3	17.1	33.0
1,001 to 3,500	\$2,568	\$4,513	\$7,965	10.8	21.3	42.0
More than 3,500	\$427	\$3,579	\$4,752	20.1	95.3	322.1

Character, magnitude, frequency, service level, materials, and environment are the key factors in determining maintenance costs and budget. Number of acres of parkland maintained per full-time-equivalent employee (FTE) is the primary comparative number in use (**Figure 18**). Use of this index is due to the variability of the other factors (e.g., climate, soils, size of parks, natural vs. formal care, specialty grasses vs. native grasses).

Benchmarking Ratios

The key to benchmarking ratios is that they allow comparison between agencies of different sizes and resources. For example, in the third ratio (Operating Expenditures per Acre of Land Maintained) the cost per acre can be the same for a jurisdiction with 100 acres as it is for a jurisdiction of 1,000 acres. The variances will more likely be found in the physical character of the acre (topography, soils, vegetation, etc.). The greater the number of profiles we get with this data, the more accurate it will become.

FIGURE 19**Miscellaneous Benchmarking Ratios**

	2010 Median	2011 Median	2012 Median
Operating expenditures per capita	\$74	\$72	\$85
Operating expenditures per FTE	\$95,566	\$95,080	\$100,000
Operating expenditures per acre of land managed or maintained	\$7,223	\$6,499	\$6,381
Acreage of parkland per 1,000 population	14.7	10.1	11.1
Acres of parking maintained per FTE	15.7	15.2	15.2
Direct revenue per capita	\$26.19	\$19.49	\$29.62
Revenue as a percent of total operating expense	34.0%	27.7%	34.9%
Revenue per visitor	\$4.10	\$3.47	\$5.00
Total operating expenditures per visitor	\$14.52	\$11.55	\$16.00
Total capital plus total operating expenditures per capita	\$17.15	\$13.75	\$18.10
Tax cost per capita	\$45.87	\$27.44	\$69.31
Program attendance per program staffing (FTE)	2,577	2,442	1,699
Program fees and charges per program participant	\$30.02	\$32.20	\$29.93

Geographic Information System

AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF PRORAGIS, the Geographic Information System became available in August 2011 and makes its first appearance in this 2013 report. Since its initial development, the GIS system has recorded more than 800 jurisdiction uploads, representing almost all types of jurisdictions from state to village. A number of features have been added for user benefit:

- Measurement tools that are interactive and allow area and distance measures
- Differing map views showing street, satellite, and topographic views
- Boundaries for counties and congressional districts
- Integration between operating data variables and GIS that allows searches to include location, budget, population, and others.

Other features that will be finished soon include overlays for crime, economic data, and obesity levels, and even icons to represent facility points.

The examples in this report are from the Chattanooga Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department. Their GIS data was completed using the Excel spreadsheet. Warner Park has been enhanced using the interactive edit tool in the application, which allows the drawing of park and/or facility polygons.

To find this feature, go to www.nrpa.org/proragis, log in, and click on “GIS” under “Full PRORAGIS.”

FIGURE 20 Chattanooga Street Map

The Chattanooga street map shows park locations as green points. This visual can be found by typing "Chattanooga" in the location block of the search menu on the left side of the screen.

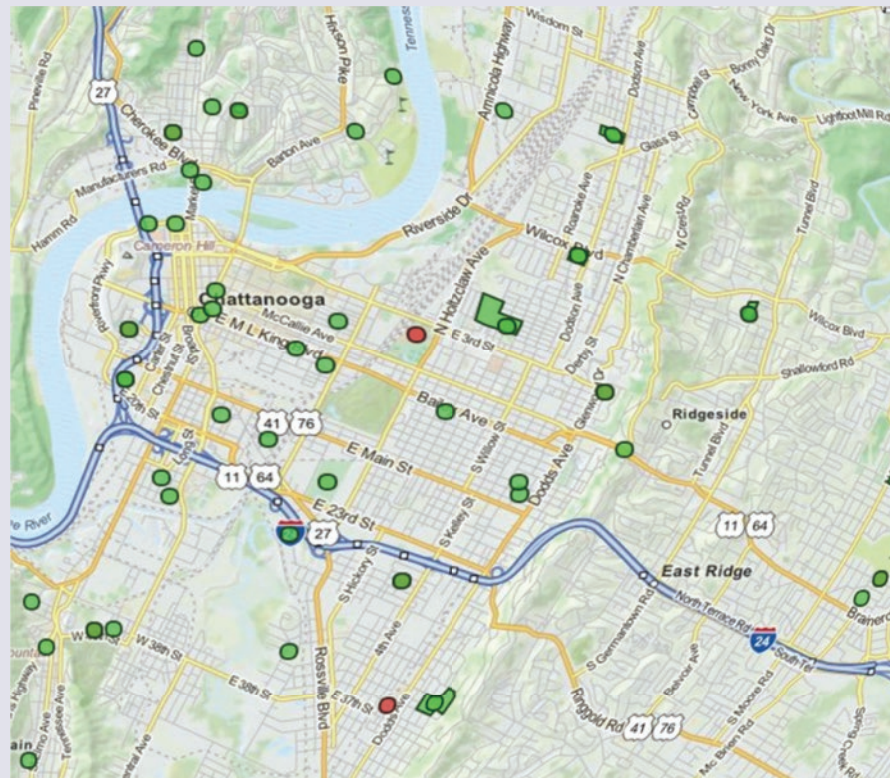
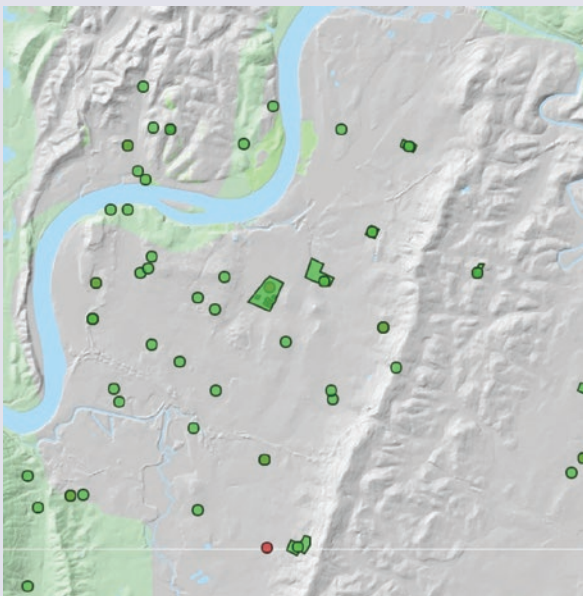


FIGURE 21 Chattanooga Topographic Map



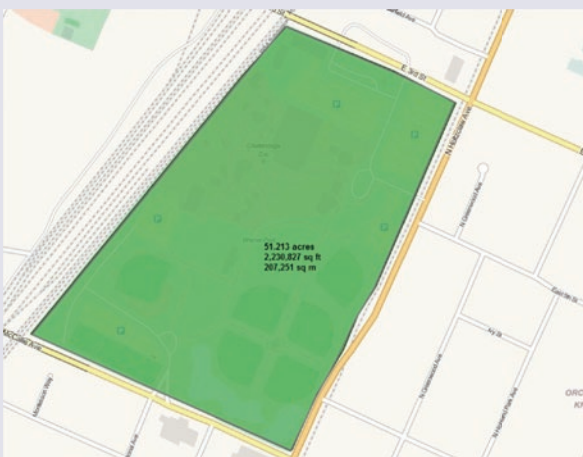
This Chattanooga topographic map shows park locations as green points. This is the same view as the street map. Note the presence of Lookout Mountain dividing the city. This view can help one understand the challenges that a department may face in providing services. You can create this view by going to the mapping menu and clicking on “Terrain” under Basemap.

FIGURE 22 Chattanooga Satellite Map



This Chattanooga satellite map focuses on the Warner Park location. This enables you to see a variety of different features in relation to the parks. The view reflects what Warner Park looks like before any polygons are added. You can get this view by going to the mapping menu and clicking on “Satellite.” Zoom in to see the birds-eye view of parks and features.

FIGURE 23 Warner Park



Here is Warner Park with a park polygon and area measurement added. To find this image, search for “Warner Park” in the search panel. You can obtain the area by clicking on the left icons and using your cursor to define the area, which is then calculated automatically. This tool can be used to obtain a rough estimate of the “acres of trees” measurement needed for the Eco-Benefit Calculator (page 16).

FIGURE 24 Warner Park



In this view of Warner Park in Chattanooga, the light green fill indicates the park polygon and the red athletic fields as facility polygons. These can be created by going to the Edit menu and selecting polygons, points, or lines (for roads and trails) and using the cursor to outline the feature. Then fill out the facility or park attributes and press “Save” at the bottom. To find these features in PRORAGIS, search for “Warner Park” with a location of “Chattanooga.”

Parks as Community Value

Understanding and Explaining the PRORAGIS Eco-Benefit Calculator

IN SEPTEMBER 2012, NRPA added the Eco-Benefit Calculator as a new feature to PRORAGIS to quantify the community values inherent in the acquisition and stewardship of parklands. The current calculator is a work in progress that quantifies some values, but others will be added as units of measure are researched and verified. Some agencies that have used the calculator found that their community's annual investment in parks and recreation is repaid up to three times over in benefits.

Importance of Context

For parks to have community value, they must benefit users and non-users alike, such as through ecological values, economic benefits, indirect revenue, and the potential for smart growth strategies. However, every community has unique differences that will affect the magnitude of the benefits and values. A community in a forested area will differ from one in prairie or densely developed area so a variety of topographical, geological, vegetation, and built environment attributes must be factored. And the benefits derived from any given park can be assessed differently than for a system of parks. A single park can be ecologically poor, developed entirely into facilities for users and so forth. Thus, it is important to consider the

parks as a system of several parks featuring open space and undeveloped lands as well as parks with major community and tourist user facilities and attractions. It is this system that distributes the benefits throughout the community.

The Community Value Table

The Community Value Table shown below identifies and defines each of the values. Where adequate research exists to enable the value to be quantified in dollars the value is added to the Eco-Benefit Calculator located in the PRORAGIS database. Some of the values below are provided despite not yet having quantifiable multipliers. NRPA will continue to research those values to develop reliable quantifiers for use in the calculator.

COMMUNITY VALUE FOR ALL RESIDENTS	TRENDS FOR THE NEAR-TERM FUTURE
Ecological Values	
Air Quality —Ecological services provided by vegetation cover have a significant impact on the community.	Urban and suburban parks will become increasingly important, due to climatic concerns, particularly in areas subject to intensive development. Pollution abatement, oxygen production, cooling effects, and noise reduction are benefits accruing from a sustainable vegetative cover.
Water Quality —Vegetation, particularly trees, provides many services including reduced runoff, nutrient recovery, reduced erosion, and improved recovery of groundwater.	Water control provided by vegetative cover will be recognized as a low-cost value for its benefits of reduced water runoff, mitigation of the costs of erosion impacts, and nutrient and groundwater retention. In many cases, particularly where parks are located on riparian corridors, flood mitigation and water quality improvements are significant services provided by parks.
Economic Values	
Proximate Value —The percentage increase of property tax value as a result of proximity to parkland properties.	As the proximate value is more widely recognized, both residential and commercial projects will feature parks as an amenity. Recent examples include the Hi-Line Park in New York City and numerous residential developments around the country.
Smart Growth Sustainable Strategies —Denser housing, walkable communities, and other strategies avoid budget-draining impacts of providing public services.	Results in nearly 100 studies show that it costs communities \$1.16 to provide services for every dollar received in tax revenues over the life of the development. More communities will seek to add passive park spaces or developments centered around parks to offset these costs.
Tourism —Most special events are associated with attractions managed by the parks and recreation department.	Park and recreation departments, in partnership with convention bureaus and others, will place greater emphasis on events that add tourist dollars to the community's resources.
Direct Revenue —Almost all park and recreation departments recover some of their costs through program and class fees, entry fees, rentals, permits, and similar.	Nationally, most park and recreation departments generate revenues averaging about 23 percent cost recovery. More effective management and marketing strategies will enable departments to increase their cost recovery while maintaining social equity.
Indirect Revenue —Agency budgets include both salaries and the purchase of goods and services that generate additional jobs and sources of income.	Park and recreation lands, facilities, and services generate jobs and expenditures that support the local economy. As communities recognize this multiplier effect, communities will further benefit economically.
Future	
Social Values —Parks and recreation will further affect health and wellness, community cohesiveness, and educational performance.	Research studies indicate that data may be available to quantify the social values of parks. NRPA will seek to add those to the PRORAGIS as soon as a research is adequate to provide for measurement.