Park and Recreation Directors' Retrospective on the COVID-19 Pandemic: Results from a Post-Pandemic Survey

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Study Findings/Key Takeaways

Several key findings emerged from this post-COVID-19 survey of park and recreation directors (N=303). Comparisons of key variables across community and agency type as well as funding models and innovation/resilience yielded few significant variations. What follows is a brief summary of those findings – study takeaways.

- Directors generally felt that the park and recreation profession as a whole was innovative (76%) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but slightly less likely to view their own agencies as innovative (62%).
- Likewise, directors felt that the park and recreation profession (81%) and their own agencies (77%) were resilient throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- When comparing their current organizational status to pre-pandemic status, directors were less likely to say that their agencies were "worse than before" with regard to their financial health/standing (20%), capacity to address critical community needs (18%), capacity to fulfill their mission (23%) and staffing numbers (25%). Nevertheless, the share of directors who felt that their organizations were "better than before" was still a minority (ranging from 32% to 39%).
- Directors reported that program participation decreased significantly for their organizations when comparing peak pandemic to pre-pandemic levels (65% saying it decreased), but rebounded when comparing current vs. pre-pandemic levels (54% saying it increased).
- With regard to park visitation, directors reported increases when comparing peak pandemic to pre-pandemic (20% saying it increased and 60% reporting it increased significantly). This increased visitation seems to have held up, with 80% reporting a visitation increase currently compared to pre-pandemic.
- A slight majority (51%) reported their agencies' overall organizational funding increased compared to pre-pandemic levels (a span of two-years at the time of the survey). Thirty-percent indicated their agencies' funding remained flat over this time period and 19% said their overall funding had decreased.
- Regarding federal relief funds, a majority (68%) reported that their agencies received or planned to receive CARES and/or ARPA funds, while 21% indicated their organizations did not/will not receive allocations of these funds; 11% were unsure.
- Directors reported that one-on-one conversations with officials (78%), visitation/use data (75%), and celebrity/community leader endorsements (68%) were the most effective strategies used to advocate and communicate for funding during COVID-19. Of these strategies, one-on-one conversations with officials were used the most (89%) and celebrity endorsements were used the least (66%).
- Directors felt that community members were vocal, but only somewhat (25%) or moderately (29%).
- Almost half (45%) reported that their agencies assumed new roles over the course of the pandemic. These new roles were primarily focused on COVID-19 healthcare (e.g., PPE distribution centers, testing/vaccination clinics), community support and well-being (e.g.,

homeless shelters, coordinating food distribution) and child services (childcare for essential workers, hybrid childcare learning programs).

- Forty-two percent reported that their agencies initiated new partnerships over the course of the pandemic such as food-share programs, expanding childcare services, immunization and health education centers and virtual/distance learning. These new partnerships were primarily with nonprofit organizations (25%), school systems (22%) and healthcare providers (18%).

Section 1.0
Introduction

Local parks and recreation provides important contributions to health, well-being and quality of life. Park and recreation services are regarded highly by the public (Mowen et al., 2018), and recent evidence suggests these services have been especially appreciated and heavily utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mowen & Powers, 2021; Grima et al., 2020; Lopez et al., 2020). In a recent Pennsylvania study, a majority of participants perceived park and recreation services as essential in their communities during the pandemic, with many citing benefits to physical and mental health as well as providing safe and COVID-19 friendly recreation opportunities (Mowen & Powers, 2021). Although it is clear that the public values parks and recreation – and the public is an important stakeholder for these services – the perspectives of other stakeholders, those involved in direct delivery of these services, warrant attention. Providers of park and recreation services including local government officials and park and recreation directors are responsible for investment and policy decisions, thus their perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on park and recreation agencies are worthy of documentation. As the COVID-19 pandemic becomes endemic, it is critical to understand park agency directors' perceptions and experiences related to park funding, investment and innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to understand strengths/weaknesses and prepare for future crises.

For example, in the immediate wake of COVID-19, many park and recreation agencies faced significant funding cuts (Roth 2020a, Roth 2020b). While about half of park and recreation agencies in the U.S faced median operational budget cuts of 20% starting in January 2021, use of their services has increased notably since early 2020 (Geng et al., 2020). As the nation progresses through the pandemic and confronts new social and financial challenges, it's important to understand how park and recreation agencies were affected by the pandemic over a longer time frame – both operationally as well as financially.

Given this background, the purpose of this study was to assess local park and recreation directors'/leaders' perceptions and experiences related to investment, contributions of parks and recreation, and advocacy/communications throughout the pandemic era. Such data may be useful to the National Recreation and Park Association in sharing relevant and timely information with local park and recreation professionals and in effectively advocating for local park and recreation services.

From June to August, 2022, a brief 10-minute self-administered online survey was distributed via email to NRPA members identified as directors and senior managers. This survey inquired about a range of topics related to park leaders' opinions regarding organizational innovation and resilience during the pandemic as well as the pandemic's impact on their agencies' operations, particularly in the area of financing. The survey also documented the degree to which agencies added new responsibilities and initiated new partnerships due to the pandemic. Finally, leaders were asked about their use of funding advocacy/communication activities as well as their opinions regarding the effectiveness of these activities. This report is organized by topic and provides descriptive data on key findings.

Section 2. Results

Section 2.1
Organization and Director Demographic Profile

To develop an organizational and demographic profile, respondents were asked to identify the zip code of their organizations' headquarters, their type of agency or organization, community type, population size their organizations serve, their role within their agencies or organizations, as well as how long they have worked in the field.

- The total sample size at the beginning of the survey was n = 303; at the end of the survey it was n = 168. Sample size by state (among the 155 who responded to this question) was as follows: 12% in California (n = 20); 10% in North Carolina (n = 16); 9% in Florida (n = 15); 7% in Illinois (n = 12); 5% each in Ohio (n = 8) and Virginia (n = 8); 4% each in Michigan (n = 7), Kansas (n = 6), and Arizona (n = 6); 3% each in Colorado (n = 5) and Missouri (n = 5); 2% each in Maine (n = 3), Connecticut (n = 3), New Jersey (n = 3), Kentucky (n = 3), Iowa (n = 4), Wisconsin (n = 4), Texas (n = 4), and Oregon (n = 4); 1% each in Massachusetts (n = 2), New York (n = 2), Tennessee (n = 2), Indiana (n = 2), New Mexico (n = 2), Nevada (n = 2), Pennsylvania (n = 2) and Washington (n = 2); and <1% each in South Carolina (n = 1), Georgia (n = 1), Alabama (n = 1), Minnesota (n = 1), South Dakota (n = 1), North Dakota (n = 1), Louisiana (n = 1), Idaho (n = 1), and Utah (n = 1).

- The types of agency/organization represented in this survey were: 67% city, town, or borough park and recreation department (n = 111); 16% county park and recreation agency (n = 26); 8% independent park district (n = 13); 4% park and recreation authority or commission (n = 6); 3% other (n = 5); 2% school system (n = 3); 1% nonprofit organization (n = 2).

- With regard to community type, a slight majority (54%) served suburban communities, while 24% served urban and 22% served rural communities.

- When asked to indicate the size of the population their organizations served, the largest percentage of respondents (31%, n = 52) reported serving populations greater than 100,000; 21% (n = 34) while 10% (n = 16) reported serving a population between 2,500 and 9,999.

- On average, respondents reported working in the park and recreation profession for 25 years with a median of 26 years (n = 165). The least amount of time a respondent reported working in the profession was 3 years, while the longest was 52 years.

Section 2.2
Organizational Innovation and Resiliency throughout COVID-19

Directors were asked to evaluate how innovative they thought their organizations, as well as parks and recreation as a profession, were in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Items were measured on a five-point semantic differential scale where "1" represented '*not at all innovative*' and "5" represented '*extremely innovative'* (Table 1).

- Approximately three-quarters of respondents (76%, n = 231) reported that parks and recreation as a profession was *innovative* with a mean score of 4 on a 5-point scale; only 4% of the sample (n = 11) indicated parks and recreation as a profession was *not innovative*.

- The majority of respondents (62%, n = 191) reported that their organizations were *innovative* with a mean score of 3.77 on a 5-point scale; Again, only 9% of the sample (n = 26) indicated that their organizations were *not innovative*.

Table 1. Innovation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Variable	Mean Score	Percent (%) (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Reviewing the past two years, how innovative do you think parks and recreation, as a profession, was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	4.00	1	3	20	48	28
Reviewing the past two years, how innovative do you think your organization was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	3.77	2	7	28	38	24

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.
*Note. Response Code: 1 = not at all innovative and 5 = extremely innovative.

After being given an operational definition of resilience (see Survey Instrument in Appendix A, Question #2), directors were then asked to evaluate how resilient they thought their organizations, as well as the parks and recreation profession, were in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Items were measured on a five-point scale where one represented '*not at all resilient*' and five represented '*exceptionally resilient'* (Table 2).

- Just over three-quarters of respondents (77%, n = 185) reported that their organizations were *resilient* with a mean score of 4.14 on a 5-point scale; only 5% of the sample (n = 12) indicated that their organizations were *slightly resilient* or *not at all resilient*.

- Approximately 81% of respondents (n = 193) reported that parks and recreation, as a profession, was *resilient* with a mean score of 4.14 on a 5-point scale. Again, only 3% of the sample (n = 7) reported the profession was *slightly resilient* or *not at all resilient*.

Table 2. Resiliency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Variable	Mean Score	Percent (%) (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Reviewing the past two years, how resilient do you think your organization was on delivering on its core mission during the COVID-19 pandemic?	4.14	1	4	17	35	42
Reviewing the past two years, how resilient do you think parks and recreation, as a profession, was on delivering on its core mission during the COVID-19 pandemic?	4.14	1	2	16	44	37

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.
*Note. Response Code: 1 = Not at all resilient and 5 = exceptionally resilient.

Comparisons of their organizations today vs. prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, items were measured on a five-point scale where "1" represented '*much worse than before,*' "2" represented '*somewhat worse than before,*' "3" represented *'about the same as before,'* "4" represented '*somewhat better than before*' and "5" represented '*much better than before*' (Table 3).

- 44% of respondents (n = 102) indicated that their organizations' current *capacity to address critical community needs* was *about the same* as before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 3.30 on a 5-point scale; 39% of respondents (n = 90) indicated that their organizations' current *capacity to address critical community needs* was *somewhat better* or *much better* than before the pandemic; and 18% of respondents (n = 41) indicated that their organizations' current *capacity to address critical community needs* was *somewhat worse* or *much worse* than before the pandemic.

- 41% of respondents (n = 95) indicated that their organizations' current *financial health/standing* was *about the same* as before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 3.27 on a 5-point scale; 39% of respondents (n = 90) indicated that their organizations' current *financial health/standing* was *somewhat better* or *much better* than before the pandemic; and 20% of respondents (n = 48) indicated that their organizations' current *financial health/standing* was *somewhat worse* or *much worse* than before the pandemic.

- 43% (n = 99) indicated their organizations; current *capacity to fulfill its mission* was *about the same* as before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 3.20 on a 5-point scale; 35% of respondents (n = 81) indicated that their organizations' current *capacity to fulfill its mission* was *somewhat better* or *much better* than before the pandemic; and 23% of respondents (n = 53) indicated that their organizations' current *capacity to fulfill its mission* was *somewhat worse* or *much worse* than before the pandemic.

- 42% of respondents (n = 98) indicated that their organizations' current *staffing numbers* were *about the same* as before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 3.09 on a 5-point scale; 32% of respondents (n = 75) indicated that their organizations' current *staffing numbers* were *somewhat better* or *much better* than before the pandemic; and 26% of respondents (n = 58) indicated that their organizations' current *staffing numbers* were *somewhat worse* or *much worse* than before the pandemic.

Table 3. Organizational status today vs. prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Variable *"Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your organization's current…"*	**Mean Score**	**Percent (%)**				
		(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**
Capacity to address critical community needs	3.30	3	15	44	27	12
Financial health/standing	3.27	3	17	41	27	12
Capacity to fulfill its mission	3.20	3	20	43	24	11
Staffing numbers	3.09	7	19	42	24	8

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

*Note. Response Code: 1 = much worse than before, 2 = somewhat worse than before, 3 = about the same as before, 4 = somewhat better than before, and 5 = much better than before.

Section 2.3
Park Visitation and Program Participation over the COVID-19 Era

Directors were asked to evaluate how their organizations' park visitation and program participation changed over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Items were measured on a five-point scale where one represented *'decreased significantly*,' two represented '*decreased somewhat,'* three represented *'remained the same,'* four represented '*increased somewhat,'* and five represented '*increased significantly'* (Table 4).

- 80% of respondents (n = 175) indicated that their organizations' *park visitation peak pandemic* had *increased* compared to that before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 4.18 on a 5-point scale. About 16% of respondents (n = 33) indicated that their organizations' *park visitation peak pandemic* had *decreased* compared to that before the pandemic; and 6% of respondents (n = 13) indicated that their organizations' *park visitation peak pandemic* had *remained the same* compared to that before the pandemic.

- 80% of respondents (n = 179) indicated that their organizations' *park visitation now* had *increased* compared to that before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 4.08 on a 5-point scale. Fourteen percent of respondents (n = 31) indicated that their organizations' *park visitation now* had *remained the same* compared to that before the pandemic; and 6% of respondents (n = 12) indicated that their organizations' *park visitation now* had *decreased* compared to that before the pandemic.

- Approximately half of respondents (54%, n = 121) indicated that their organizations' *program participation now* had *increased* compared to that before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 3.45 on a 5-point scale. Thirty percent of respondents (n = 67) indicated that their organizations' *program participation now* had *decreased* compared to that before the pandemic; and 18% of respondents (n = 41) indicated that their organizations' *program participation now* had *remained the same* compared to that before the pandemic.

- The majority of respondents (65%, n = 147) indicated that their organizations' *program participation peak pandemic* had *decreased* compared to that before the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average score of 2.40 on a 5-point scale. Twenty-eight percent of respondents (n = 63) indicated that their organizations' *program participation peak pandemic* had *increased* compared to that before the pandemic; and 8% of respondents (n = 17) indicated that their organizations' *program participation peak pandemic* had *remained the same* compared to that before the pandemic.

Table 4. Park visitation and program participation over the COVID-19 pandemic

Variable *"Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your organization's current…"*	**Mean Score**	**Percent (%)**				
		(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**
Park visitation now compared to pre-pandemic	4.08	0	6	14	47	33
Park visitation peak pandemic compared to pre-pandemic	4.18	6	9	6	20	60
Program participation now compared to pre-pandemic	3.45	3	27	18	28	26
Program participation peak pandemic compared to pre-pandemic	2.40	37	28	8	15	13

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

*Note. Response Code: 1 = decreased significantly, 2 = decreased somewhat, 3 = remained the same, 4 = increased somewhat, and 5 = increased significantly.

Section 2.4
Budget and Funding Impacts

Regarding how *overall funding for operating expenses* had changed for their organizations' operating expenses compared to that before the pandemic, roughly half of the respondents (51%, n = 116) indicated that their funding had *increased*; 30% of respondents (n = 67) indicated that funding for their organizations' operating expenses *stayed the same*; and 19% of respondents (n = 43) indicated that funding for their organizations' operating expenses had *decreased* (Table 5).

Table 5. Overall organizational funding compared to pre-pandemic

Variable *"To what extent has overall funding declined, not changed, or increased for your organization's operating expenses?"*	**Mean /Percent (%)**
Mean	4.35
At least 20% increase	6
10-19% increase	12
5-9% increase	20
1-4% increase	14
Stayed the same	30
1-4% decrease	4
5-9% decrease	6
10-19% decrease	5
At least 20% decrease	4

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.
*Note. Response Code: 1 = At least 20% increase, 2 = 10-19% increase, 3 = 5-9% increase, 4 = 1-4% increase, 5 = stayed the same, 6 = 1-4% decrease, 7 = 5-9% decrease, 8 = 10-19% decrease, and 9 = At least a 20% decrease.

Directors were also asked questions regarding their agencies' *total operational budgets* for the 2021 fiscal year. The median reported operational budget (n = 169) was $3.2 million; the lowest reported operational budget was $0 and the highest reported operational budget was $229.5 million.

In addition to this, questions were also asked about agencies' *total capital budget* for the 2021 fiscal year. The median reported capital budget (n = 163) was $573,000; the lowest reported capital budget was $0 and the highest reported capital budget was $79.4 million.

When asked to indicate the percentage of the total operating budget their organizations received from various funding sources for the FY2021, respondents (n = 174) indicated they received, on average 59% from *general fund tax support* (min = 0%, max = 100%), 20% from *earned/generated revenue* (min = 0%, max = 100%), 7% from *dedicated levies or* bonds (min = 0%, max = 100%), 5% from *other dedicated taxes* (min = 0%, max = 95%), 4% from *grants* (min = 0%, max = 75%), 3% from *other* sources (min = 0%, max = 100%) and 2% from *sponsorships* (min = 0%, max = 20%) (Table 6).

- 90% of directors reported receiving no funding from *other* sources, 76% of directors reported receiving no funding from *other dedicated taxes*, *71%* of directors reported receiving no funding from *dedicated levies or bonds*, 61% of directors reported receiving no funding from *sponsorships*, 48% of directors reported receiving no funding from *grants,* 28% of directors reported receiving no funding from *earned/generated revenue* and 12% of directors reported receiving no funding from *general fund tax support.*

Table 6. Percentage of agencies' total operating budget from various sources for FY2021

Variable	Avg. Percent (%) of total operational budget	Percent (%) of budgets receiving no funds from this source
General fund tax support	59	12
Earned/generated revenue	20	28
Dedicated levies or bonds	7	71
Other dedicated taxes	5	76
Grants	4	48
Other	3	90
Sponsorships	2	61

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

Regarding the CARES Act and ARPA Relief Funding, 68% of directors (n = 143) indicated that their organizations received or planned to receive *CARES and/or ARPA relief funds,* while 21% (n = 45) indicated that they had not received nor anticipated receiving an allocation of these funds. Approximately 11% of directors (n = 22) indicated that they were unsure if their organizations received or planned to receive any *CARES and/or ARPA relief funds.*

Section 2.5
Funding Advocacy and Community Vocalness over the COVID-19 Pandemic

Directors were asked to rate the effectiveness of various *advocacy/communication strategies* when advocating to local officials for park and recreation funding and investment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Items were measured on a five-point scale where one represented '*very ineffective*,' 2 represented '*somewhat ineffective*,' three represented '*neither effective nor ineffective,*' 4 represented '*somewhat effective'* and 5 represented '*very effective'* (Table 7).

- The most effective strategies when advocating to local officials for funding were *one-on-one conversations with officials*, followed by *park trails, facility data (condition, use)* and *endorsements by community leaders or celebrities,* with 78% (n = 129), 75% (n = 113), and 68% (n = 84) of directors indicating these strategies were *somewhat effective* or *very effective,* respectively.

- The least effective strategy was *community petitions or calls into action*, with only a slight majority 51% (n = 59) indicating this strategy as *somewhat or very effective*

Table 7. Effectiveness of advocacy/communication strategies for funding during COVID-19

Variable	Mean Score	Percent (%) (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
One-on-one conversations with officials	4.07	<1	6	16	41	37
Park, trails, facility data (condition, use)	4.07	2	4	19	35	40
Endorsements by community leaders or celebrities	3.93	3	3	25	34	34
Public opinion data on support for parks and recreation	3.90	3	5	24	36	32
Citizen testimonies at public meetings	3.89	3	4	27	35	32
Storytelling (i.e., community member testimonials)	3.87	4	6	19	42	30
Economic impact data	3.80	2	8	26	39	26
Charts, infographics, and/or illustrations of data	3.77	4	6	26	38	26
Tours of facilities or programs with officials	3.68	4	6	33	34	24
Data on facility inequities or gaps in service	3.57	4	13	28	34	21
Community petitions or calls to action	3.41	10	10	30	31	20

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

*Note. Valid percentages are filtered **to only include cases that reported using each strategy**.

*Note. Response Code: 1 = very ineffective, 2 = somewhat ineffective, 3 = neither effective nor ineffective, 4 = somewhat effective, 5 = very effective.

The advocacy/communication strategies used most often by directors were *one-on-one conversations with officials*, followed by *public opinion data on support for parks and recreation,* and *park, trails, facility data (condition, use)*, with 89% (n = 166), 84% (n = 156), and 82% (n = 151) of directors indicating they used those strategies, respectively (Table 8).

The advocacy/communication strategies used least often by directors were *tours of facilities or programs with officials*, followed by *endorsements by community leaders or celebrities,* and *community petitions or calls to action*, with 73% (n = 135), 66% (n = 122), and 63% (n = 117) of directors indicating they used those strategies, respectively (Table 8).

Perceived vocalness of constituents in support of parks and recreation was measured on a five-point scale where one represented ‘not at all vocal,’ two represented ‘slightly vocal,’ three represented ‘somewhat vocal,’ four represented ‘moderately vocal’ and five represented ‘extremely vocal’ (Table 9). About 39% of respondents (n = 55) indicated that their community members were moderately or extremely vocal, yet a similar share (36%) reported that their community was not at all or only slightly vocal, with a mean score of 3.06 on a 5-point scale

Table 8. Percentage of directors who used each strategy for funding during COVID-19

Variable	Percent (%)
One-on-one conversations with officials	89
Public opinion data on support for parks and recreation	84
Park, trails, facility data (condition, use)	82
Storytelling (i.e., community member testimonials)	81
Charts, infographics, and/or illustrations of data	76
Data on facility inequities or gaps in service	76
Citizen testimonies at public meetings	75
Economic impact data	74
Tours of facilities or programs with officials	73
Endorsements by community leaders or celebrities	66
Community petitions or calls to action	63

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

*Note. Items refer to the advocacy/communication strategies in Table 6.

Table 9. Community member vocalness in support of funding for parks and recreation

Mean Score	Percent (%)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
3.06	8	28	25	29	10

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

*Note. Response Code: 1 = not at all vocal, 2 = slightly vocal, 3 = somewhat vocal, 4 = moderately vocal, and 5 = extremely vocal.

Section 2-6.
Partnerships and New Roles/Responsibilities over the COVID-19 Pandemic

When directors were asked if their organizations assumed any new roles or responsibilities over the COVID-19 pandemic, 45% of respondents (n = 75) reported *yes* and 55% of respondents (n = 92) reported *no*.

The open-ended responses from the directors who answered '*yes*' to their agencies having assumed any new roles or responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic (n = 66) were thematically coded to identify any recurring themes within the reported new roles and responsibilities. About 32% of respondents (n = 21) reported assuming new roles around *COVID-19 healthcare*; 30% of respondents (n = 20) reported assuming new roles around *community support and well-being*; 14% of respondents (n = 9) reported assuming new roles around *childcare services*; 9% of respondents (n = 6) reported assuming new roles around *COVID-19 logistics*; 8% of respondents (n = 5) reported assuming new roles around *school district support*; and 8% of respondents (n = 5) reported assuming new roles around *intra-organizational responsibilities* (Table 10).

- Samples of *COVID-19-related healthcare* – "*provided space for PPE distribution and testing and vaccination clinics*" and "*offered drive-through testing and vaccine support at facilities.*"

- Samples of *community support and wellbeing* – "*community centers as homeless shelters* and "*coordinating food distributions*."

- Samples of *childcare services* – "*we worked to provide childcare for essential workers*" and "*hybrid learning childcare program.*"

- Samples of *COVID-19 logistics* – "*used our registration software for COVID-19 shot scheduling*" and "*help monitor compliance for entering public buildings.*"

- Samples of *school district support* – "*school lunch delivery*" and "*remote school learning center.*"

- Samples of *intra-organizational responsibilities* – "*additional facility maintenance and clean-up*" and "*adjusted titles and positions.*"

Table 10. Director's thematically coded qualitative responses to new roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

"If new roles assumed, what were those new roles?"	**Percent (%)**
Themes	
COVID-19-related healthcare	32
Community support and well-being services	30
Childcare services	14
COVID-19 logistics	9
School district support	8
Intra-organizational responsibilities	8

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

When directors were asked if their organizations initiated any new partnerships throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, 42% of respondents (n = 70) reported *yes* and 58% of respondents (n = 98) reported *no*. The open-ended responses from the directors who answered '*yes*' to having initiated any new partnerships over the COVID-19 pandemic (n = 55) were thematically coded to identify any recurring themes within the reported new partnerships. About 25% of respondents (n = 14) reported initiating new partnerships with *nonprofit organizations;* 22% of respondents (n = 12) reported initiating new partnerships with *school and education systems and* 18% of respondents (n = 10) reported initiating new partnerships with *health organizations and providers* (Table 11).

- Samples of partnerships with *nonprofit organizations* – "*food share programs,*" "*libraries and churches*" and "*partnered with local YMCA.*"

- Samples of partnerships with *school and education systems* – "*expanded role with school district for supporting childcare*" and "*stronger school district partnership.*"

- Samples of partnerships with *local governments* – "*health department for COVID immunization and education centers*" and "*other county departments to reach underserved.*"

- Samples of partnerships with *health organizations and providers* – "*partnered with our local community health coalition*" and "*local hospital used our site for vaccinations.*"

- Samples of partnerships with *local businesses* – "*we worked with new and existing contractors to provide distance learning support to our patrons.*"

- Samples of partnerships with *sponsoring organizations* – "*$50,000 was awarded twice to any small business in town that applied for it*" and "*corporate sponsorships.*"

Table 11. Director's thematically coded qualitative responses to new partnerships during the COVID-19 Pandemic

"Of organizations who initiated new partnerships during COVID-19 pandemic, what type of partner did they initiate those relationships with?"	**Percent (%)**
Themes	
Nonprofit organizations	25
School and education systems	22
Health organizations and providers	18
Local governments	16
Local businesses	13
Sponsoring organizations	5

*Note. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding.

Appendix A. Survey Instrument

2022 NRPA Park and Recreation Director Survey – COVID-19 Era Experiences

The purpose of this study is to evaluate local park and recreation directors'/leaders' perceptions of their organization, particularly funding, through the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is being conducted by Dr. Andrew Mowen from the Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Management (RPTM) at Penn State, Dr. Samantha Powers from George Mason University, and Dr. Nick Pitas from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and your responses will be confidential and only reported in aggregate form. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time by closing out of the survey.

Your responses will be helpful to NRPA and will be shared with park and recreation professionals. Study findings may also be used inform parks and recreation policies, advocacy, and management. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact principal study investigator, Dr. Andrew J. Mowen at amowen@psu.edu. This research has been reviewed according to Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board procedures for research involving human subjects.

By choosing to initiate the survey, you are providing implied consent and willingness to participate in the study.

Section 1: Organizational Innovation and Resiliency over COVID-19

1. Please respond to the following statements about your organization during the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Not at all Innovative				Extremely Innovative
Reviewing the past two years, how innovative do you think your organization was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	1	2	3	4	5
Reviewing the past two years, how innovative do you think parks and recreation as a profession was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?	1	2	3	4	5

1a. If they respond with a 1 or 2 – prompt with open-ended question…
In your opinion, why wasn't your organization as innovative during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1b. If they respond with a 3, 4 or 5 – prompt with open-ended question…
What has your organization done that was innovative during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. The following questions are about organizational resilience. One definition of organizational resilience is "the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper." Please answer the following questions about your organization's resilience.

	Not at all resilient				Exceptionally resilient
Reviewing the past two years, how resilient do you think your organization was on delivering on its core mission during the COVID-19 pandemic?	1	2	3	4	5
Reviewing the past two years, how resilient do you think parks and recreation as a profession was on delivering on its core mission during the COVID-19 pandemic?	1	2	3	4	5

2a. If they respond with a 1 or 2 – prompt with open-ended question…
In your opinion, why wasn't your organization as resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2b. If they respond 4 or 5 – prompt with open-ended question…
In your opinion, what made your organization resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. Please respond to the following statements regarding your organization today vs. prior to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you rate your organization's current…	Much worse than before	Somewhat worse than before	About the same as before	Somewhat better than before	Much better than before
financial health/standing	1	2	3	4	5
staffing numbers	1	2	3	4	5
capacity to fulfill its mission	1	2	3	4	5
capacity to address critical community needs	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please respond to the following statements regarding *park visitation and program participation* over the COVID-19 era.

Time period…	Decreased significantly	Decreased somewhat	Remained the same	Increased somewhat	Increased significantly	Not applicable
Park visitation peak pandemic compared to pre-pandemic	1	2	3	4	5	9
Park visitation now compared to pre-pandemic	1	2	3	4	5	9
Program participation peak pandemic compared to pre-pandemic	1	2	3	4	5	9
Program participation now compared to pre-pandemic	1	2	3	4	5	9

Section 2: Funding

5. Compared to pre-pandemic (select one response below):
   - At least 20% increase
   - 10-19% increase
   - 5-9% increase
   - 1-4% increase
   - Stay the same
   - 1-4% decrease
   - 5-9% decrease
   - 10-19% decrease
   - At least 20% decrease

5a. If response is any increase prompt with the follow-up…

What helped your organization *increase* its funding levels (i.e., money allocated to your park and recreation organization from all sources)? (open-ended)

6. What was the total operating budget for your organization during FY2021?

7. What was the total capital budget for your organization during FY2021?

8. Did your organization receive (or does it plan to receive) any federal COVID-19 relief funding (e.g., CARES, ARPA) _ Yes _ No

The next few questions are about your organizations' advocacy, partnership, and other community support efforts over the COVID-19 pandemic…

9. Please rate the effectiveness of the following *advocacy/communication tactics* when advocating to local officials for park and recreation funding and investment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Very ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	Have not used this format
Community petitions or calls to action	1	2	3	4	5	0
Storytelling (i.e., community member testimonials)	1	2	3	4	5	0
Citizen testimonies at public meetings	1	2	3	4	5	0
Public opinion data on support for parks and recreation	1	2	3	4	5	0
Park, trails, facility data (condition, use)	1	2	3	4	5	0
Charts, infographics, and/or illustrations of data	1	2	3	4	5	0
Economic impact data	1	2	3	4	5	0
Data on facility inequities or gaps in service	1	2	3	4	5	0
Tours of facilities or programs with officials	1	2	3	4	5	0

One-on-one conversations with officials	1	2	3	4	5	0
Endorsements by community leaders or celebrities	1	2	3	4	5	0

10. With regard to the advocacy strategies listed above, would you like to share a success story from your organization about advocating for parks and recreation?

___Yes (if yes, respondent can write it in the box provided)

___No, not at this time, skip to next question

11. In your opinion, to what extent are your community members vocal in their support for promoting funding and investment in park and recreation services? (Not at all vocal, Slightly vocal, Somewhat vocal, Moderately vocal, Extremely vocal)

12. Please indicate the percentage of your total operating budget from each of the following sources for FY2021. If you do not know the exact percentage or whether your agency actually receives funding from this source, please use your best estimate. If your organization does NOT get funding from one of the sources, please enter 0. (Sum of sources should add up to 100% in the Total box).

a. General fund tax support
b. Dedicated levies or bonds
c. Earned/generated revenue
d. Other dedicated taxes
e. Sponsorships
f. Grants
g. Other (please describe below)

TOTAL (percentages must add to 100%)

13. Did your organization assume any new roles or responsibilities over the COVID-19 pandemic?

___ Yes (please describe)

___ No

14. Did your organization initiate any new partnerships over the COVID-19 pandemic?

___ Yes (please describe)

___ No

Section 3: Basic Agency Information

15. Which of the following best describes your park and recreation organization? (please check one)

___ City, town, or borough park and recreation department
___ Park and recreation authority or commission
___ Independent park district
___ County park and recreation agency
___ Nonprofit organization
___ School system
___ Other (please describe) ____________________________

16. What is the zip code of your organization's headquarters?

17. Select the response that best describes your local community:

___Urban
___Rural
___Suburban

18. Please indicate the size of the population your organization serves (check one).

___Less than 2,500
___2,500 to 9,999
___10,000 to 24,999
___25,000 to 49,999
___50,000 to 99,999
___100,000 to or more

19. Please respond to the following two questions concerning your experience as park and recreation professional and leader:

_______ Numbers of years working in the park and recreation profession

_______ Number of years working as director, superintendent, or leader at current park and recreation organization

To enter a drawing for one of ten $25 Amazon gift cards, please click the following link:

Please click the right arrow below to submit your survey.
Thank you for your participation!