



SUMMER SEASONAL HIRING REPORT



NATIONAL RECREATION
AND PARK ASSOCIATION



Staff pose with performers at a community event in Goose Creek, South Carolina. Photo courtesy of City of Goose Creek (South Carolina) Recreation Department

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PHOTO COURTESY OF VILLAGE OF COTTAGE GROVE (WISCONSIN)
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Children play at a splash pad in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin.

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Children participate in a coloring activity in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FREDERICKSBURG (VIRGINIA) PARKS AND RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

The park and recreation summer seasonal workforce is essential in ensuring the seamless operation and sustained dependability of programming and outdoor spaces during the summer months. These dedicated individuals form the backbone of a dynamic workforce that makes certain the demands of a community’s recreation activities and other needs are met.

Ranging from maintenance and landscaping to organizing events and facilitating engagement and programming for all ages, temporary employees are a necessity for park and recreation agencies and users alike. The significance of a well-equipped and well-trained seasonal workforce becomes particularly clear in the summer when an influx of visitors converges upon parks, and parents look to their local park and recreation agency for youth activities while school is not in session. The summer seasonal workforce is instrumental in creating memorable and enjoyable experiences for all members of a community. Indeed, many park and recreation agencies would not be able to meet

their communities’ needs during this busy time without temporary employees.

However, recruiting and retaining a summer seasonal workforce often has challenges. To find out what those challenges are — and how park and recreation professionals address those challenges — in September 2023, the Research team of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) sent a 22-question survey to park and recreation agency directors. The survey asked participants about their experiences with summer seasonal hiring specific to 2023. The survey generated 322 responses, the data from which are the basis of this report.

SUMMER SEASONAL HIRING REPORT: KEY FINDINGS

97% of park and recreation agencies hired summer seasonal staff in 2023



The **top three** summer seasonal positions in parks and recreation were:

- Summer camp staff (79%)
- Lifeguards (66%)
- Maintenance (63%)

73% of agencies partnered with local schools to recruit summer seasonal staff



9 in 10 park and recreation agencies experienced challenges in hiring and/or retaining summer seasonal staff

Top challenges to hiring summer seasonal staff included:

- Individuals unable to work for the entire season
- Agencies unable to match/exceed wages paid by other employers



56% of agencies diverted permanent full-time staff from their day-to-day responsibilities to cover unfilled seasonal responsibilities

Most park and recreation agencies aim to begin recruiting/hiring summer **seasonal staff** by February



Children splash in water fountains outdoors in Henderson, Kentucky.

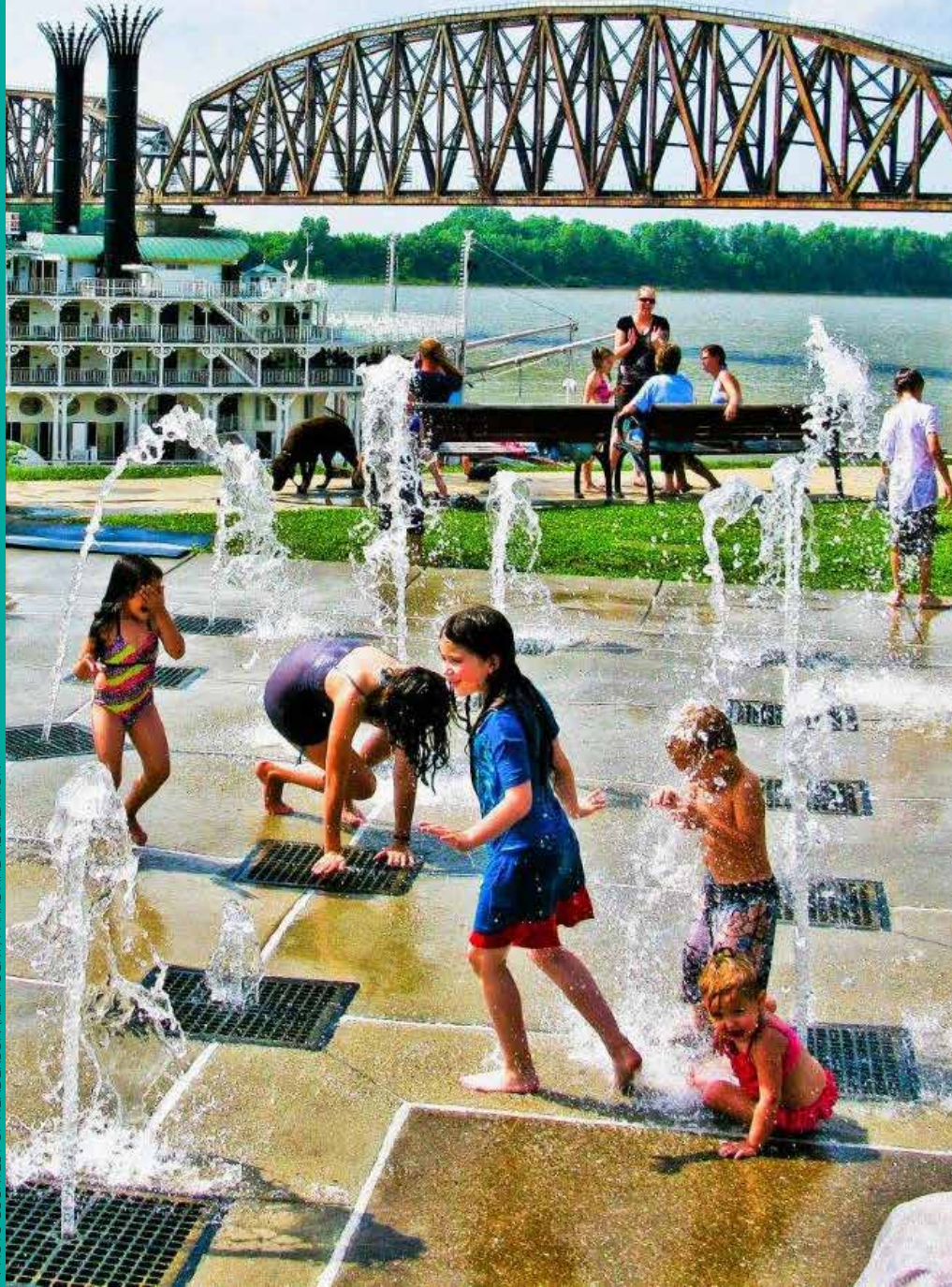


PHOTO COURTESY OF HENDERSON (KENTUCKY) PARKS AND RECREATION

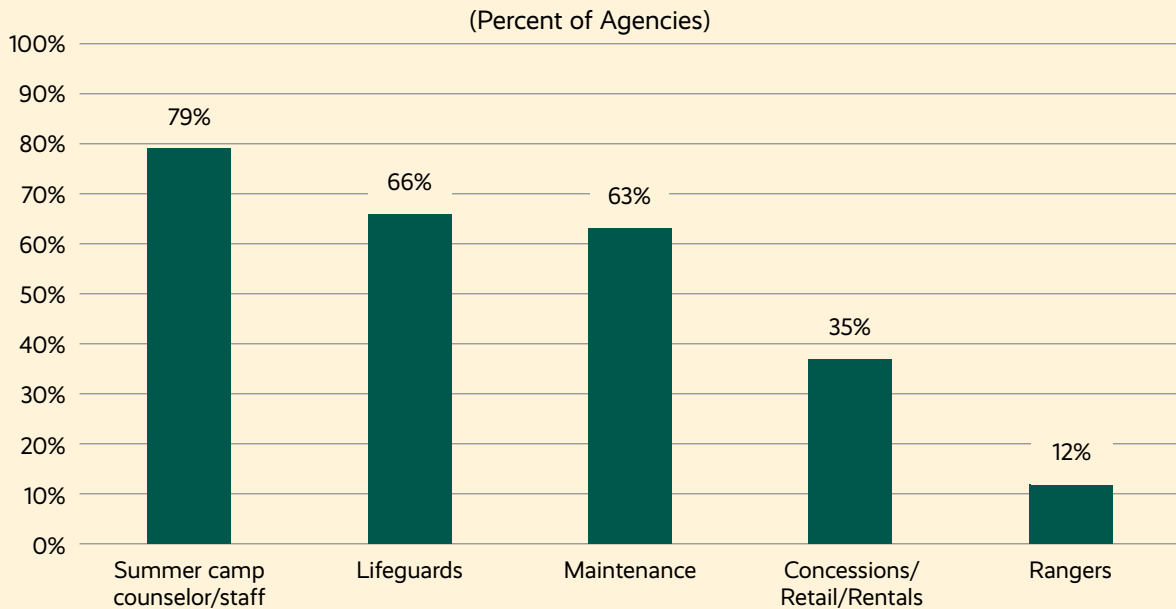
KEY FINDINGS

Nearly all (97 percent) park and recreation agencies hired summer seasonal employees in 2023 to assist with increased summer attendance, programming and other activities. Summer camp counselors and staff were the most sought-after summer seasonal employees at all agencies, regardless of the population those agencies serve.

Two in three park and recreation agencies sought lifeguards as summer seasonal workers, with nearly as many agencies (63 percent) employing additional maintenance workers for the duration of the summer. Summer seasonal concession,

retail and rental hiring occurred at 35 percent of park and recreation facilities, while 12 percent of agencies employed additional rangers during this time. Other summer seasonal positions included athletics, event, recreation, gate and desk staff.

Most Frequent Summer Park and Recreation Jobs Are Summer Camp Counselors, Lifeguards and Maintenance Crew Members



The typical park and recreation agency budgeted 10,150 hours for its summer seasonal staff in 2023, but this number was significantly higher at agencies that serve larger jurisdictions. Agencies serving a population of less than 20,000 residents budgeted 6,500 summer seasonal

hours; those in jurisdictions of between 50,000 and 99,999 residents budgeted 19,560 summer seasonal hours; and the agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 residents had a typical summer seasonal workforce budget of 100,000 hours.

Park and Recreation Agencies' Summer Seasonal Staff Budgeted Hours – 2023

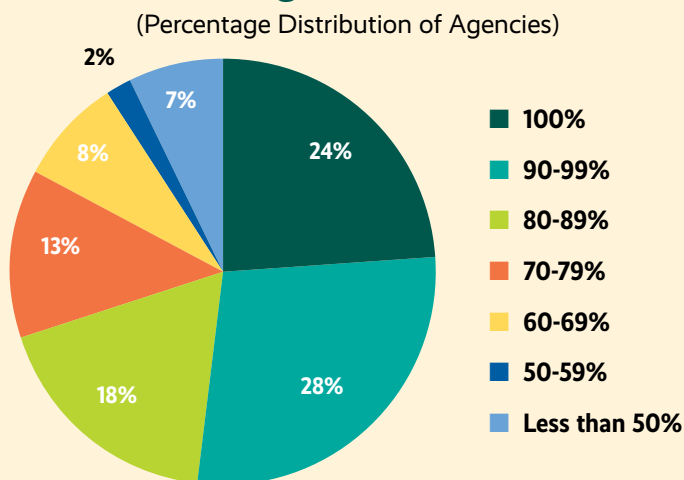
(by Jurisdiction Population)

	All	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median Number of Hours	10,150	6,500	9,600	19,560	22,800	100,000

More than half of park and recreation agencies employed a sufficient number of workers to cover at least 90 percent of their 2023 budgeted summer seasonal hours. Specifically, 24 percent of park and recreation agencies successfully hired all summer seasonal staff for which they budgeted, while 28 percent filled between 90 and 99 percent of their budgeted targets. Three in 10 agencies hired between 70 and 89 percent of those budgeted seasonal employees, while another one in 10 park and recreation agencies hired between 50 and 69 percent of the seasonal staff. Seven percent of park and recreation agencies failed to meet half of their summer seasonal employee targets in 2023.

Park and recreation agencies serving communities of less than 50,000 residents were more likely than their peers serving larger jurisdictions to be successful in fully meeting their summer seasonal workforce hiring targets. Thirty-three percent of agencies serving less than 20,000 residents and 29 percent of those serving populations between 20,000 and 49,999 successfully hired all budgeted summer seasonal staff; 13 percent of agencies serving 50,000 to 99,999 residents and 23 percent of agencies serving 100,000 to 250,000 residents hired a full summer seasonal staff. No park and recreation agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 reported a 100 percent success rate in their summer seasonal hiring.

More Than Half of Park and Recreation Agencies Successfully Hired Most or All of Their Budgeted Seasonal Workforce



The inability to hire sufficient numbers of workers for the summer caused a ripple effect felt by both agency staff and the public. Six in seven park and recreation agencies needed to take actions to cover a shortfall in seasonal staff in the summer of 2023. Fifty-six percent of agencies diverted permanent full-time staff from their day-to-day responsibilities to cover unfilled seasonal hours. A third of park and recreation agencies increased the hours of their permanent part-time staff to cover seasonal staff shortages.

Agencies serving a population of 50,000 to 250,000 residents were most likely to have used permanent full-time staff to cover unfilled seasonal hours. Sixty-four percent of

respondents from agencies in jurisdictions of 50,000 to 99,999 residents and 70 percent of those from agencies serving 100,000 to 250,000 residents reported using permanent full-time staff to cover unfilled seasonal hours as the most common action taken at their agencies.

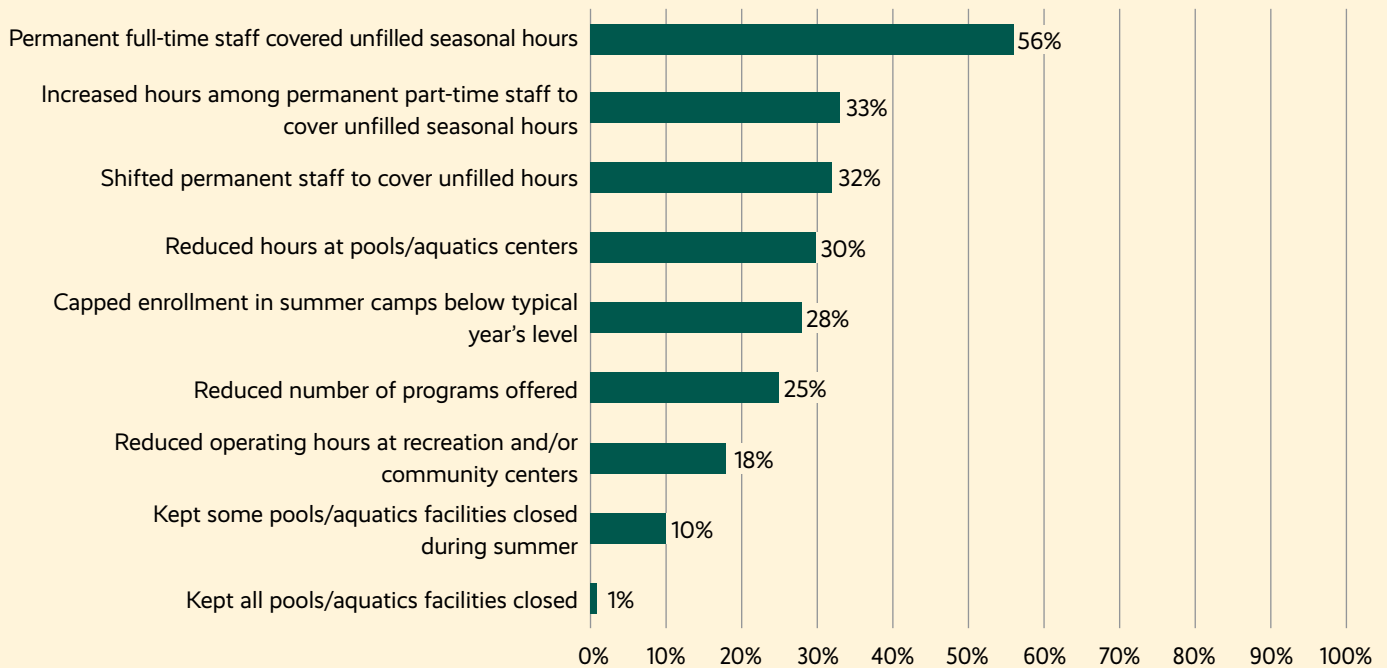
Agencies also reduced services in response to unfilled hours. Thirty percent of park and recreation agencies reduced hours at their pools/aquatics centers. Twenty-eight percent capped enrollment in summer camps below their typical levels, while one in four reduced the number of programs offered during the summer of 2023.



People paint a mural on an outdoor building in Tyler, Texas.

Six in Seven Park and Recreation Agencies Took Actions as a Result of a Shortfall in Seasonal Staff in Summer 2023

(Percent of Agencies)



Recruitment of seasonal workers spans many months. Most agencies start recruitment at the beginning of the calendar year and strive to have staff in place by late spring. Eight percent of agencies target as early as March to have summer seasonal workers in place. More than a third set their target for April and nearly half attempt to wrap up the hiring of their seasonal workforce in May. Less than one in 10 agencies set June as their deadline for completing their summer seasonal workforce hiring.

Planning for the next summer's seasonal hiring typically begins during the previous winter. While most agencies wait until at least January to begin their summer seasonal hiring in earnest, six percent plan to begin before the start of the new year. One in five agencies starts the summer seasonal hiring process in January, 29 percent do so in February and 32 percent do so in March. Over a third of agencies begin the earnest search for summer seasonal employees in April, May or later.

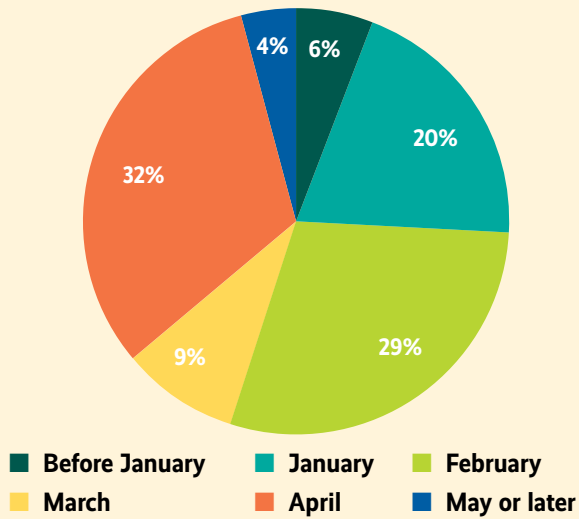
PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION



Staff pose outside of a building in San Diego.

Most Park and Recreation Agencies Start Their Summer Season Recruitment by February

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)



Most Park and Recreation Agencies Aim to Have Their Summer Seasonal Workers in Place by May

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

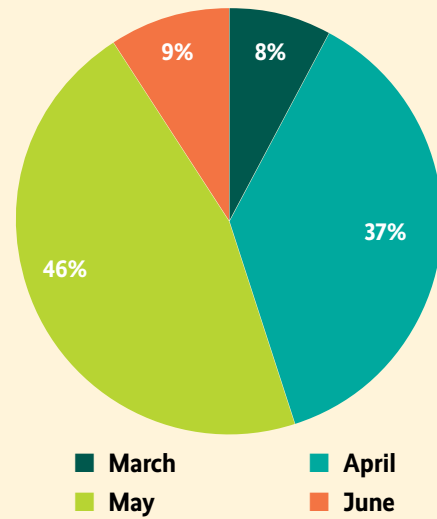


PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHEVILLE (NORTH CAROLINA) PARKS AND RECREATION

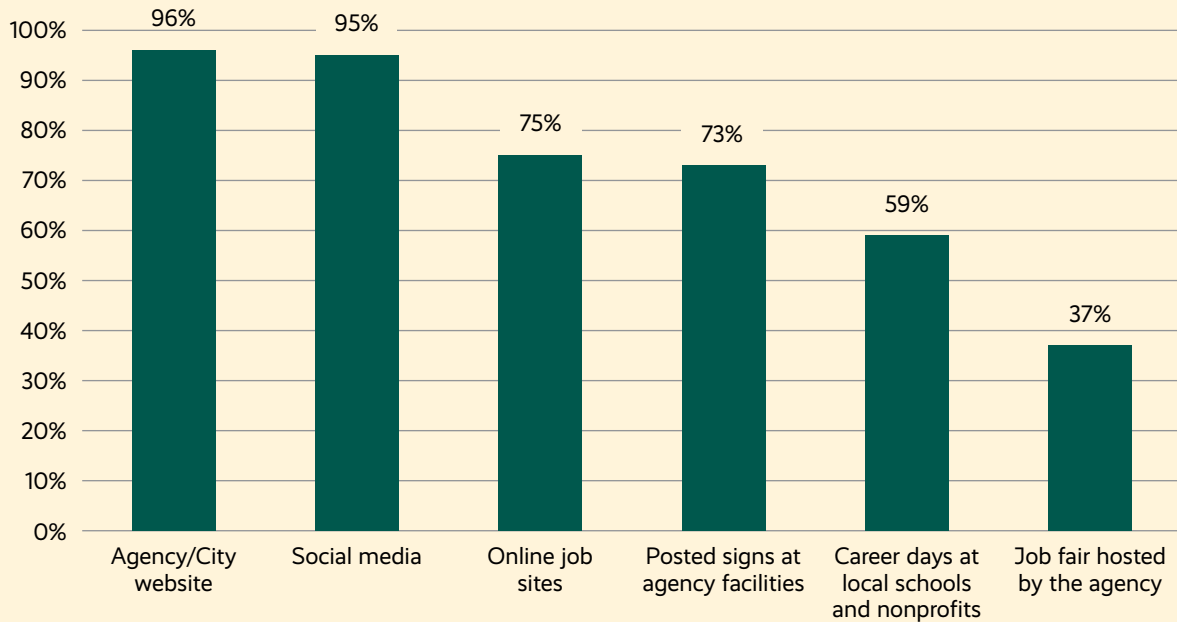
A group of children jump into a pool in Asheville, North Carolina.

Job seekers and their employers have a multitude of options when it comes to posting job openings or advertising for qualified candidates. Park and recreation agencies use their own or their jurisdictions' government websites and social media channels to advertise summer seasonal job opportunities. Nearly all agencies post job opportunities on their websites and social media channels. Three in four agencies post summer seasonal job opportunities to online job sites with nearly as many (73 percent) posting signs in their facilities.

Almost sixty percent of agencies participate in career days at local schools and nonprofits to attract summer seasonal staff. This is especially common among agencies in more populated areas, where as many as 85 percent of agencies attend such events looking for summer hires. A little more than a third of park and recreation agencies host a designated job fair in search of summer seasonal workers. However, this share doubles (to 73 percent) for agencies that serve a population of more than 250,000 residents. Other marketing methods for attracting summer seasonal

Parks and Recreation/City Websites and Social Media Are Most Frequently Used Methods for Marketing Summer Seasonal Employment Opportunities

(Percent of Agencies)



staff include word of mouth, job fairs in other locations and outreach to past seasonal employees.

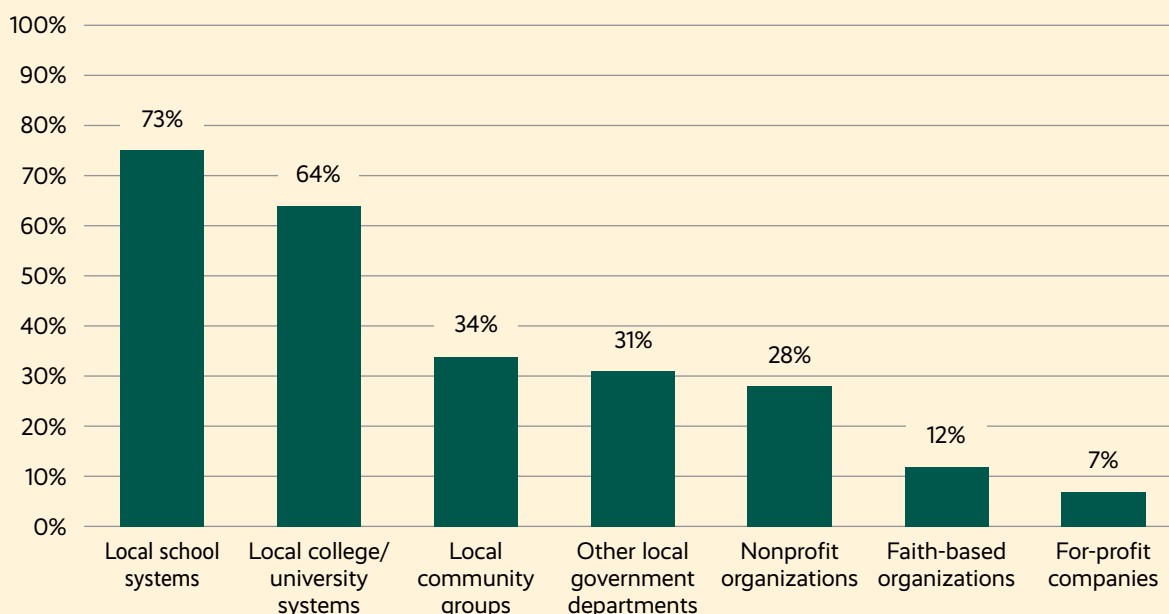
Park and recreation professionals partner both with their own local government and outside entities during their summer seasonal recruitment process. Six in seven park and recreation agencies work with partners to find their summer seasonal workforce. Local schools and universities are partners in recruiting summer staff at more than three in five agencies overall. Seventy-three percent of park and recreation agencies partner with local school systems (through 12th grade). Sixty-four percent of park and recreation agencies partner with local colleges and universities for summer seasonal recruiting opportunities;

agencies serving a population of at least 100,000 utilize these college/university partnerships frequently. Ninety-two percent of agencies serving a population of 100,000 to 250,000 and 80 percent of agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 residents lean on partnerships with local colleges and universities to recruit summer seasonal staff. Additional partners for agencies serving all population sizes include:

- Community groups – cited by 34 percent of respondents
- Other local government departments – 31 percent
- Nonprofit organizations – 28 percent
- Faith-based organizations – 12 percent
- For-profit companies – seven percent

Six in Seven Park and Recreation Agencies Partner With Other Entities to Recruit Summer Seasonal Workers

(Percent of Agencies)



Nine in 10 park and recreation agencies experience challenges in hiring/retaining summer seasonal staff. More than half (52 percent) of agencies note the biggest challenge they face with their summer seasonal workforce is the inability of those staff members to serve the full summer. This challenge is felt especially at agencies serving a population between 20,000 to 49,999; 63 percent of these agencies cite an employee's inability to work the full summer season as their biggest challenge.

A park and recreation agency's inability to match the competitive wages of other seasonal employers is a challenge for half of all agencies. Wage challenges are most prevalent at both population extremes: 57 percent of park and recreation agencies serving a population of less than 20,000 and 60 percent of agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 residents were unable to match the wages of other seasonal employers in the summer of 2023.

A top challenge at a third of park and recreation agencies is the length of the hiring process. The hiring process length resulting in potential employees finding alternate jobs while awaiting hire is particularly challenging for agencies serving the following population sizes:

- 100,000 to 250,000 residents – 54 percent
- More than 250,000 residents – 73 percent

More than a quarter (27 percent) of park and recreation agencies note challenges in seasonal employees' inability to work the hours during which their services are needed. Additional summer seasonal hiring challenges include:

- Potential seasonal workers lack prior experience/training – cited by 22 percent of respondents
- Human resources (HR) process incompatible with teen schedules – 17 percent
- Agency/Government policies prohibit offering incentives to entice workers – 16 percent
- Previous seasonal employers waiting until the last minute for possible past-offered incentives – six percent

Parks and recreation is one of many options from which people typically have to choose when it comes to summer seasonal jobs. The biggest challenge in attracting summer seasonal workers is the perception that teenagers and young adults are not interested in working. For 70 percent of agencies, a lack of interest in work among high school/college students is cited as their biggest hiring challenge.

Fast food/restaurants represent the strongest competitors for summer seasonal workers (as reported by 56 percent of park and recreation agencies). Nearly a third of agencies

Unable to Work a Full Summer and Unable to Match Other Employers' Wages Seen as Top Summer Seasonal Hiring Challenges for Parks and Recreation

(Percent of Agencies)

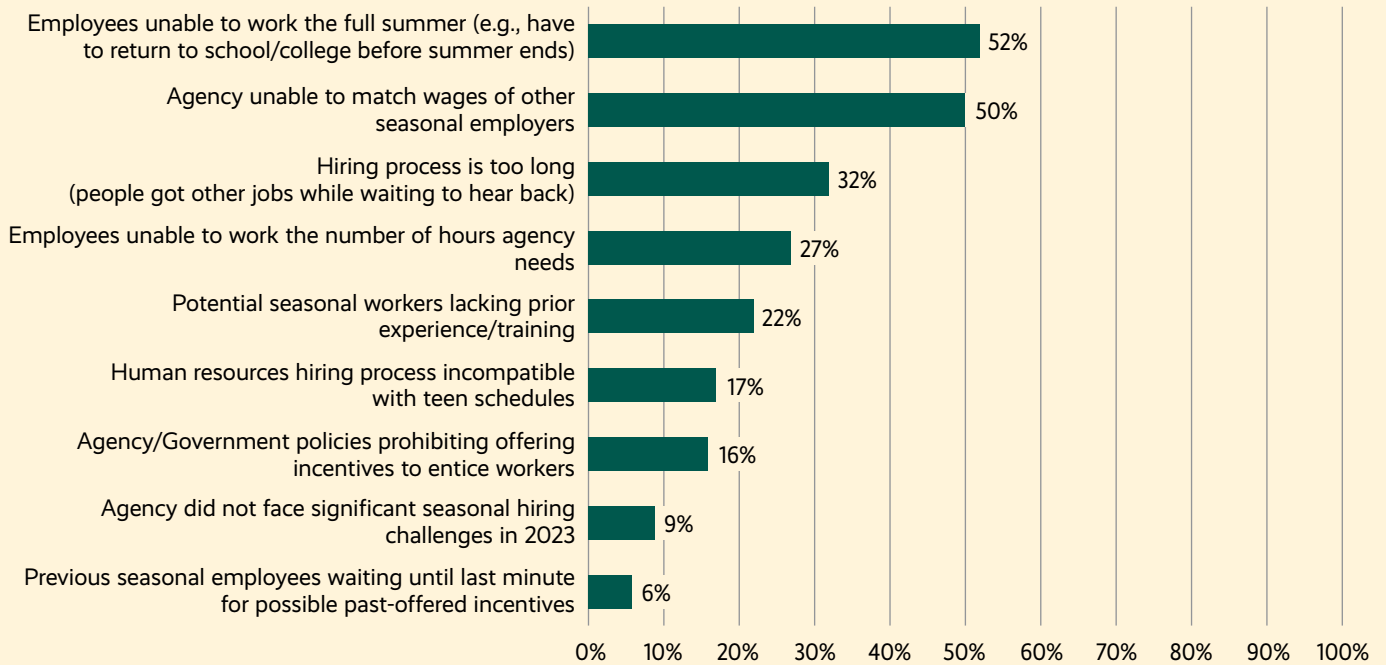
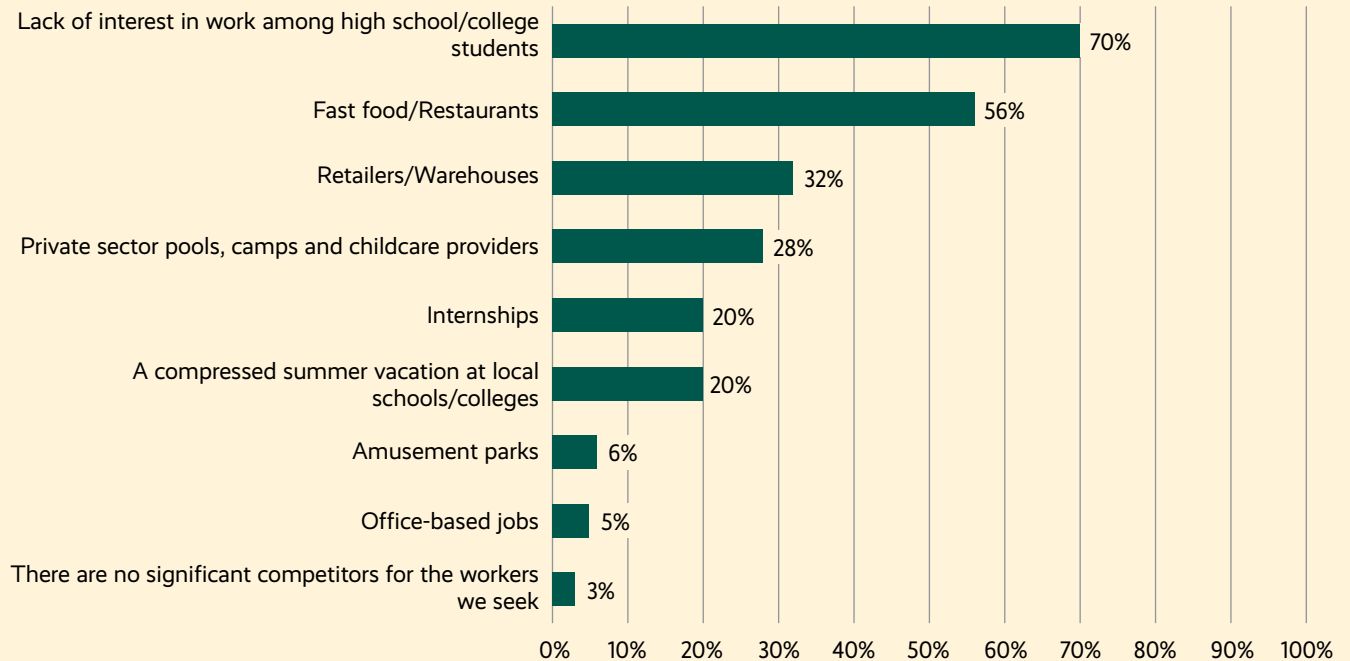


PHOTO COURTESY OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACES

People plant native grasses on a beach in Miami.

Students' Lack of Interest in Summer Employment Seen as Biggest Challenge, While Food Service Viewed as Biggest Competitor When Hiring Summer Seasonal Workers

(Percent of Agencies)



indicate that retailers/warehouses recruit many of the same workers. Additional competitors with which one in five agencies vies for workers include private-sector pools, camps and childcare (28 percent), internships, and compressed summer vacation length among high school/college students (both 20 percent).

Many departments and parties are involved in the recruiting and hiring of summer seasonal employees. Park and recreation agency HR departments manage many of the aspects of the summer seasonal hiring process. Fifty-three percent of park and recreation HR departments are responsible for recruiting these temporary staff members, while nearly half are responsible for posting these job positions. Background checks (44 percent) and reviewing applicants, as well as initial interviews (43 percent), are conducted by park and recreation HR departments. Thirty-eight percent of these departments

handle final interviews and make job offers. In agencies serving a population of less than 20,000 residents, more than 60 percent of park and recreation agency HR departments handle job posting, recruiting, reviewing of applications and final interviews. Park and recreation agencies in jurisdictions of more than 250,000 residents are more likely than other agencies to use government-wide HR departments in their recruiting and hiring of summer seasonal workers. In these larger jurisdictions, government-wide HR departments are responsible for more than half of job postings and 60 percent of drug testing. Hiring managers are more likely the responsible parties in agencies serving larger populations. Agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 residents use hiring managers much more often in the final steps of interviewing than do agencies serving fewer than 20,000 residents (80 percent compared to 32 percent, respectively).

Process for Recruiting and Hiring Summer Seasonal Workers Varies Depending on the Agency

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

	Park and Recreation Agency Human Resources Department	Government-wide Human Resources Department	Hiring Manager	External Party	Other	Not Applicable
Job posting	49%	36%	11%	0%	3%	0%
Recruiting	53%	19%	25%	0%	3%	1%
Review of applicants and initial interview	43%	4%	51%	0%	3%	0%
Final interview(s)	38%	1%	57%	0%	3%	2%
Background checks	44%	43%	5%	4%	2%	3%
Drug testing	27%	38%	1%	7%	1%	26%
Making the offer	38%	18%	40%	0%	3%	1%

Park and recreation agencies often recruit and hire their summer seasonal workers through the same process and use the same resources as they do when hiring permanent full-time and part-time staff. At nearly four in five (79 percent) park and recreation agencies, the recruiting and hiring process for seasonal workers is the same as the process for recruiting and hiring permanent and full-time staff. Regardless of the size of the population an agency serves, the process remains largely the same.

Even so, employing the same strategy for hiring seasonal staff or regular full-/part-time staff comes with its pluses and minuses. On the plus side, following the same procedure for all staff hiring makes the process more familiar and allows an agency to tap into existing recruitment resources and partners. However, using the same process for all hires often lengthens the hiring time. Park and recreation agencies compete with private employers that often can make an offer of summer employment much quicker, resulting in potential seasonal staff going elsewhere.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO PARKS AND RECREATION

Two people take a self-portrait photo with a hawk in San Diego.

Four in Five Park and Recreation Agencies Use the Same Process/Resources to Hire Seasonal and Permanent Staff

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

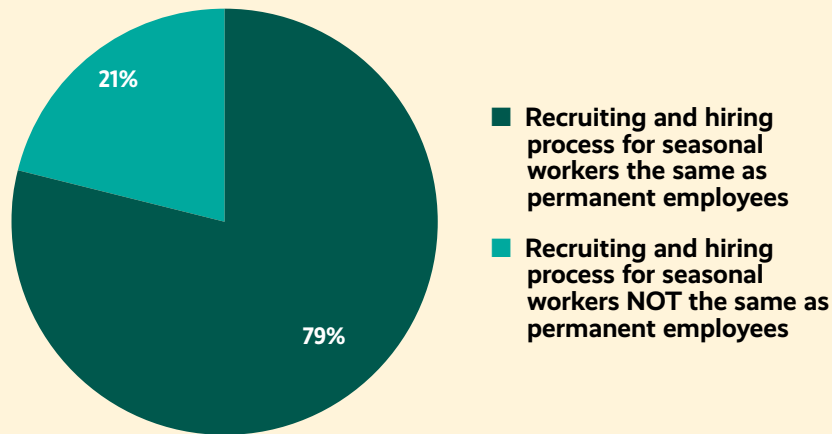


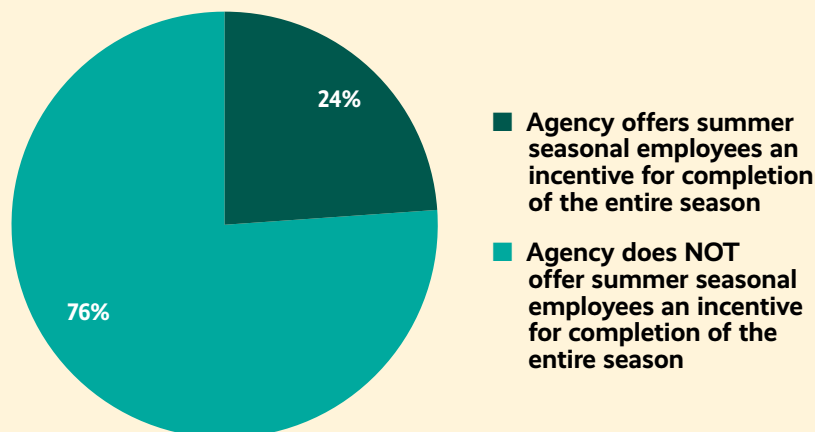
PHOTO COURTESY OF LAURA JARRIEL, THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT (MINNESOTA)

One of the biggest challenges park and recreation agencies face in their summer seasonal workforce is an employee's inability to complete the full length of service needed. To entice employees to complete this time, nearly one in four agencies offers an incentive. One in three agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 residents provides an incentive based on the completion of an entire season.

A group of people bird watch on a trail in Plymouth, Minnesota.

One in Four Park and Recreation Agencies Offer Summer Seasonal Staff an Incentive for Completing the Entire Season

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

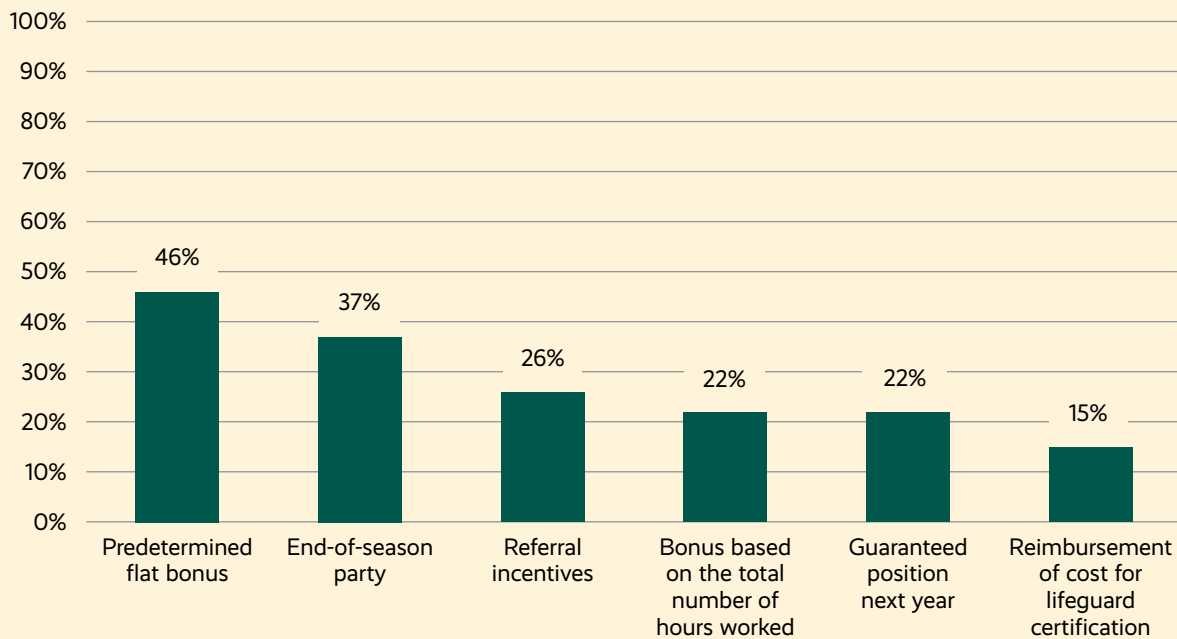


While not every park and recreation agency offers incentives to keep seasonal workers through the summer, those that do have a variety of enticements to offer. A predetermined flat bonus is used as an incentive to keep seasonal workers through the entirety of this season at 46 percent of park and recreation agencies. End-of-the-season parties for seasonal workers and staff are

offered at more than one-third of agencies, while one in four offer referral incentives. Twenty-two percent offer a bonus based on the total number of hours worked and the same share offers a guaranteed position for next year. Reimbursing the cost of lifeguard certification, training and/or courses is used as an incentive to stay an entire season at 15 percent of agencies.

Predetermined Flat Bonus Noted as Most Popular Incentive Given to Reward Summer Seasonal Workers Completing the Season

(Percent of Agencies Offering Incentive)



Lifeguards are a vital part of a park and recreation agency’s summer programming. Sixty-four percent of park and recreation agencies offer training and certification testing for their lifeguard hires. More than 80 percent of agencies serving a population between 100,000 and 250,000 residents provide lifeguard certification testing and training. One in 10 agencies offer reimbursement for successful lifeguard training and certification.

Parks and recreation is a leading employer of youth and young adults. For many summer seasonal hires, employment in parks and recreation represents a first job, and park and recreation agencies are often trusted employers to which workers return summer after summer. Five in six park and recreation summer seasonal employees are of college age (19-23 years old) or younger.

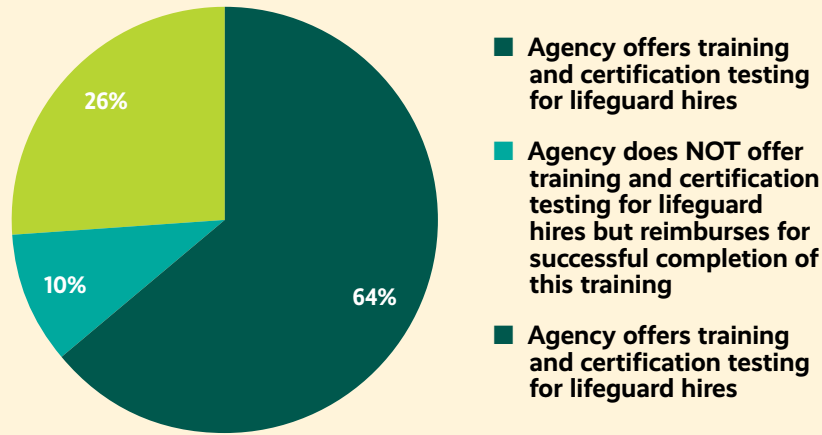
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVING (TEXAS) PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT



Volunteers participate in a park clean up in Irving, Texas.

Nearly Three-Quarters of Park and Recreation Agencies Offer Training and Certification for Lifeguard Hires

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

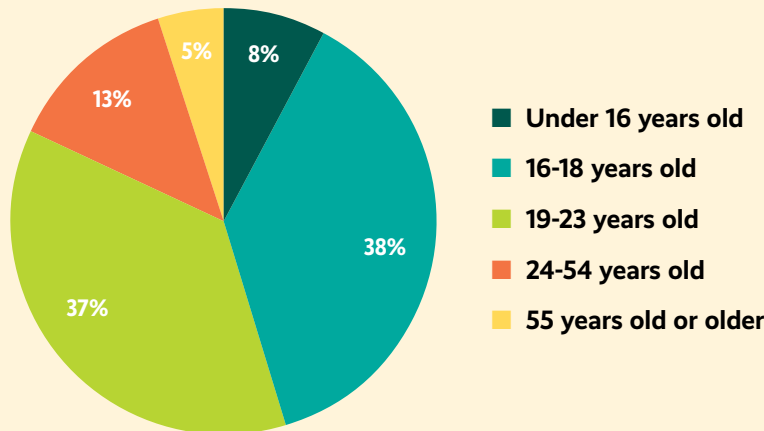


Forty-six percent of summer seasonal staff are high school-aged or younger (under 18 years old). College-aged young adults account for 37 percent of parks and recreation summer seasonal staff, while 13 percent of

those roles are filled by adults between the ages of 24 and 54. Older adults (ages 55 or older) account for five percent of the summer seasonal workforce.

Five in Six Park and Recreation Summer Seasonal Employees Are Under 24 Years Old

(Percentage Distribution)





Staff and volunteers participate in a cleanup in Annapolis, Maryland.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNAPOLIS (MARYLAND) RECREATION AND PARKS

SUCCESSSES IN SUMMER SEASONAL HIRING AND RETENTION

Successful strategies employed by park and recreation agencies to hire their summer 2023 seasonal employees included:

- Increasing hourly wage
- Recruiting through high schools and colleges
- Offering flexible scheduling
- Offering incentives, like sign-on bonuses or paid training and referrals
- Hiring a mix of ages, from adults to teenagers, to allow for coverage on shoulder seasons
- Increasing job fair presence

- Holding same-day hiring event to conduct interviews and offer conditional letters of employment
- Giving recreation center memberships or discounted memberships to seasonal employees and their families

Park and recreation agencies are not only interested in recruiting potential summer seasonal employees; they are also interested in retaining these employees for the coming years. Agencies shared retention techniques and strategies they found to be most effective for year-to-year summer

seasonal employees returning to their agency. These techniques and strategies included:

- Offering bonuses or increased pay based on previous summer season employment
- Treating people right and with respect; Ensuring workers know they are making a difference and part of a team
- Making a fun environment that seasonal workers want to return to
- Flexible scheduling
- Allowing staff to earn apparel, such as rain jackets and hats for covering shifts
- Increasing pay for working holidays
- Instituting a reward system
- Keeping some employees on payroll through the year so they may work during school breaks
- Providing food to staff
- Continuing contact with seasonal employees throughout the year
- End-of-year parties and swag giveaways
- Ensuring there is leadership engagement with staff every day so it is understood that while these employees may be employed for a short amount of time, they are still part of the team

HIRING:

“We visited local high schools during their lunch periods and handed out job descriptions and applications. We also made the application a QR code so applicants could fill it out right on their phones. We also emailed local colleges and technical centers to promote the openings for us as well.”

“Pulled some of the follow-up that was traditionally done by the citywide HR department and PR department handled the contacts with applicants to help them through the process.”

RETENTION:

“We do offer a 25-cent-per-hour wage increase each year returning. We have a reputation for developing our seasonal staff for promotion to full time year-round positions. The majority of our promotions come from our seasonal pool of employees.”

“Building an inclusive culture, open communication, mentoring program, growth pay.”

CONCLUSION

Local park and recreation agencies rely on the hard work and dedication of their summer seasonal workforce to ensure that programming and facilities operate at the high level their communities expect and deserve.

Whether fulfilling roles at summer camps, lifeguarding at a local community pool or providing maintenance of parks and facilities, this fleet of essential workers supports regular full-time and part-time park and recreation professionals who otherwise would not have the capacity to staff all that an agency offers during the busy summer months.

Hiring summer seasonal staff is not an easy task for most park and recreation agencies. However, successful employment and retention strategies and critical partnering programs — especially those with local high schools and universities — can be found throughout the country. As local park and recreation professionals plan for another year of summer programming, it should be understood that summer success is directly related to the role played by seasonal employees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Reynolds, Catherine Tepper, Kim Mabon, Kent Hunt, Micheal Biedenstein and Kate Anderson for making this report possible.

ABOUT NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, vibrant and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. With more than 60,000 members, NRPA advances this vision by investing in and championing the work of park and recreation professionals and advocates — the catalysts for positive change in service of equity, climate-readiness, and overall health and well-being.

NRPA brings strength to our message by partnering with like-minded organizations, including those in the federal government, nonprofits and commercial enterprises. Funded through dues, grants, registrations and charitable contributions, NRPA produces research, education and

policy initiatives for our members that ultimately enrich the communities they serve.

NRPA places immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation and conducts research with two goals. First, NRPA creates and analyzes data to help park and recreation agencies make optimal decisions on operations, programming and spending. Second, NRPA develops data and insights that support park and recreation professionals making the case for greater and more stable funding to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public. The NRPA Research team works closely with internal subject matter experts, respected industry consultants and the academic community to develop its reports and data resources. Learn more at nrpa.org/Research.



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