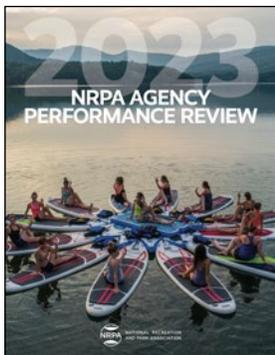


# 2023

## NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW



NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION



**Cover image:** Participants enjoy the sunset during a stand-up paddle board yoga class at Carvins Cove Natural Reserve in Roanoke, Virginia.

Photo courtesy of Roanoke Parks and Recreation

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARKSVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION

A child plays during Riverfest, an arts and recreation festival, at McGregor Park in Clarksville, Tennessee.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL LEE

Gallery Park residents enjoy the annual Fourth of July fireworks show in Glenview, Illinois.

Local parks and recreation shape our landscapes; more importantly, they shape our lives. Throughout the past year, more than 275 million people in the United States visited a local park or recreation facility. Proximity to high-quality parks and recreation opportunities consistently is an important factor in people's decision regarding where to live. Nine in 10 U.S. adults agree that parks and recreation is an important service provided by their local government. The value of parks and recreation happens thanks to the tireless and dedicated efforts of the more than 160,000 full-time and hundreds of thousands of part-time, seasonal and volunteer workers at agencies across the nation.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides park and recreation professionals across the

United States with the most up-to-date data that inform current and future decisions and equip leaders with insights that help those professionals make the case to key stakeholders and elected officials for greater, more sustainable funding. The *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* summarizes the key findings from NRPA Park Metrics — the benchmarking resource that assists park and recreation professionals in the effective management and planning of their operating resources and capital facilities. Taken together, the *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics deliver the most comprehensive collection of park and recreation-related benchmarks and insights that apprise professionals, key stakeholders and the public about the state of the park and recreation industry.

Data is a powerful tool, but does not, by itself, provide final answers to the question of what is best for your individual park and recreation agency. The *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics help inform conversations among internal colleagues, external consultants, partners and policymakers about the role of parks and recreation in your community. The combination of insights from this report, along with information about your community's specific needs and experiences, will help you craft the optimal mix of facilities and programming your agency should deliver.

The *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* does not present park and recreation “standards,” nor do the benchmarks represent any standards against which every individual park and recreation agency should measure itself. In fact, NRPA does not have a set of specific standards. The reason for this is simple: there is not one single set of standards for parks and recreation because different agencies serve different communities that have unique needs, desires and challenges. For instance, if your agency has more workers per 10,000 residents relative to the “typical” agency, it does not necessarily mean you should shed staff to meet that benchmark. An agency with a larger staff may offer more hands-on programming because of the unique needs of the population it serves. Communities differ; so too should the amenities and programs offered by their park and recreation agencies. A park and recreation agency may serve a small town, a large city or an entire county. It may be a department of its local jurisdiction's government or its own governmental entity. While most agencies deliver both park and recreation amenities and programming, some focus solely on maintaining parks and green spaces while others only offer recreational programming. Agencies also have diverse funding mechanisms, drawing from such sources as general tax funding, dedicated taxes, generated income and grants.

Truly successful agencies tailor their offerings to meet the needs and demands of all members of their communities. To be successful, it is essential that park and recreation professionals know the characteristics of the residents who use their agencies' resources — including residents' age, race and income trends — as well as the types of programming, facilities and amenities

those residents look for from their local parks. It also is vital to recognize the characteristics of those who may use those resources in the future when shaping the optimal mix of facilities and services your agency will offer going forward.

Park and recreation professionals should use the *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* with other resources, including those that may be proprietary to their specific agency, those from NRPA and others from external sources. This report also provides a list of additional NRPA resources.

## How to Use the 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review and NRPA Park Metrics

The first step in using the *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* is to look at the available data. Most of the data presented in the report feature medians and data responses at the lower quartile (lowest 25 percent) and upper quartile (highest 25 percent). The data allow for insights into where your agency stands compared to “typical” agencies (i.e., those at the median values), as well as the full spectrum of agencies at both the high and low quartiles. Many metrics include the top-line figures and certain cross-tabulations by jurisdiction population or population density. More comprehensive cross-tabulations are available as interactive tables at [nrpa.org/Metrics](https://nrpa.org/Metrics).

The next step is to build a customized benchmark report based on your preferred peer group. Go into NRPA Park Metrics ([nrpa.org/ParkMetrics](https://nrpa.org/ParkMetrics)) to filter the data by agency type, size and geographic region. You can enhance this experience even further by entering your agency's data into NRPA Park Metrics, after which you can generate reports that compare your agency's data against the key metrics of agencies throughout the United States.

The *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* presents data from more than 1,000 unique park and recreation agencies across the United States as reported between 2020 and 2022.

*Note: Not all agencies answered every survey question.*

# INFOGRAPHIC

## 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review Key Findings

Residents per park:

**2,287**



Acres of parkland  
per 1,000 residents:

**10.8**



Residents per  
playground:

**3,759**



Full-time equivalent employees  
(FTEs) per 10,000 residents:

**8.9**



Percentage of full-time staff dedicated  
to operations/maintenance:

**46%**



Operating expenditures  
per capita:

**\$94.77**



Revenue to operating  
expenditures:

**24.6%**



# INDEX OF FIGURES

The 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review highlights characteristics of America’s local public park agencies with graphics categorized into seven sections: park facilities, programming, responsibilities of park and recreation agencies, staffing, budget, agency funding and policies.

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# PARK FACILITIES



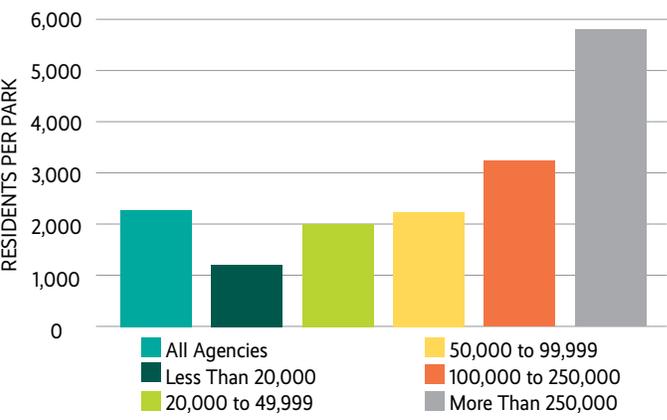
PHOTO COURTESY OF KATE PHOTOGRAPHY

Local and regional park and recreation agencies differ significantly in size and the types of facilities they offer. Of the more than 10,000 local park and recreation agencies across the United States, many serve areas comprised of a few hundred people; others are the park and recreation resource for millions. The typical agency participating in NRPA Park Metrics serves a jurisdiction — a town, city, county and/or region — of 45,000 people.

The typical park and recreation agency manages 22 parks encompassing 571 acres. After adding in non-park sites (including open spaces that an agency may manage — such as city hall lawns or roadway medians), the median number increases to 30 sites encompassing 676 acres.

The typical agency has one park for every 2,287 residents. The number of residents per park rises as the population of the town, city, county or region served by an agency increases. For those agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 residents, there is one park for every 1,225 residents. The ratio increases to one park for every 2,240 residents in jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, and then rises further to one park for every 5,791 people at agencies serving areas with a population of more than 250,000.

**FIGURE 1: RESIDENTS PER PARK (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	2,287	1,225	2,014	2,240	3,240	5,791
Lower Quartile	1,296	666	1,203	1,461	2,067	3,050
Upper Quartile	4,609	2,042	3,162	3,655	6,197	15,900

The typical park and recreation agency manages 10.8 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents in its jurisdiction. The smallest agencies — those serving less than 20,000 residents — typically manage 13 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. That ratio narrows to 10.1 acres per 1,000 residents for agencies that serve

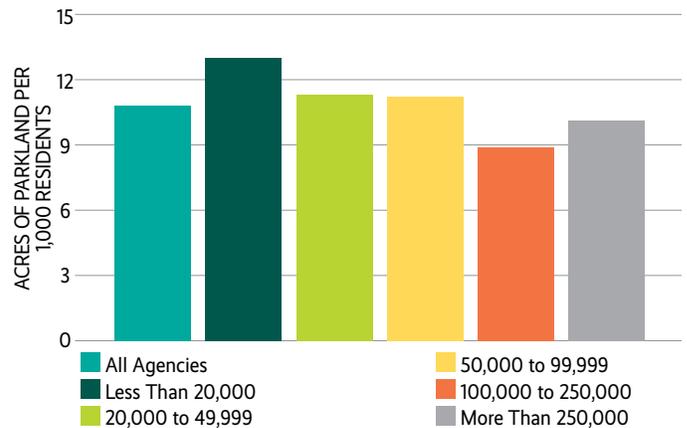
A young child slides down a slide in Miami, Florida.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIAMI-DADE PARKS AND RECREATION

a population of more than 250,000 people. Agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 100,000 and 250,000 manage 8.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Parkland refers to both maintained parks and open space areas, such as green spaces and courtyards.

**FIGURE 2: ACRES OF PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	10.8	13.0	11.3	11.2	8.9	10.1
Lower Quartile	5.3	6.0	5.9	5.0	4.5	5.2
Upper Quartile	18.4	21.1	17.9	17.3	17.1	17.4

Park and recreation professionals oversee a wide range of facilities and features for which their agencies have responsibility. In addition, the number of amenities and facilities managed by park and recreation agencies varies. Ninety-five percent of park and recreation agencies provide playground facilities for their communities, typically managing 14 playgrounds. At least half of agencies have basketball courts, diamond fields for baseball and/or softball, tennis courts, multi-purpose and/or youth soccer rectangular fields, dog parks, community gardens and outdoor swimming pools.

The typical park and recreation agency has:

- One playground for every 3,759 residents
- One basketball court for every 7,404 residents
- One outdoor tennis court for every 5,860 residents
- One dog park for every 43,532 residents

**FIGURE 3: OUTDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES – POPULATION PER FACILITY**  
(BY PREVALENCE AND POPULATION PER FACILITY)

Types of Facilities	Median Number of Residents per Facility						
	Percent of Agencies	All Agencies	Population of Jurisdiction				
			Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Playgrounds	95%	3,759	2,014	3,028	3,779	5,024	10,811
Basketball courts	86	7,404	3,729	7,117	8,790	8,792	15,214
Diamond fields: baseball field – youth	79	6,863	3,114	5,033	7,237	14,564	26,826
Tennis courts (outdoor)	76	5,860	2,805	5,815	5,577	7,797	12,033
Rectangular fields: multi-purpose	69	9,177	3,859	7,674	13,244	14,471	23,771
Dog parks	68	43,532	11,100	28,000	54,119	78,526	131,943
Diamond fields: softball field – adult	63	15,345	5,800	11,802	17,078	26,508	39,652
Diamond fields: softball field – youth	62	11,384	5,079	9,060	12,716	26,313	44,265
Diamond fields: baseball field – youth	55	20,228	7,627	19,556	27,566	45,257	54,004
Community gardens	52	31,395	8,178	26,741	52,906	56,297	114,666
Swimming pools (outdoor)	51	38,635	9,745	25,191	43,100	67,267	108,245
Rectangular fields: soccer field – youth	50	7,228	3,600	4,947	7,207	12,875	47,204
Multiuse courts – basketball, volleyball	49	17,475	5,093	14,800	22,960	40,667	62,018
Totlots	48	11,649	5,816	11,195	11,641	17,703	37,441
Rectangular fields: soccer field – adult	42	13,692	6,955	10,775	17,741	18,215	42,136
Skate parks	41	53,144	10,726	32,000	62,927	110,000	235,209
Rectangular fields: football field	35	26,780	8,637	18,785	29,374	50,837	73,556
Pickleball (outdoor)	31	13,922	3,252	9,257	11,150	29,836	46,801
Regulation 18-hole courses	29	94,109	9,587	32,990	69,374	114,842	239,241
Multiuse courts – tennis, pickleball (outdoor)	27	15,948	4,868	9,667	16,556	36,876	45,455
Multipurpose synthetic field	25	36,884	9,518	25,330	34,814	57,011	144,306
Ice rinks (outdoor)	18	17,741	8,045	13,247	33,214	108,000	543,242
Rectangular fields: cricket field	14	139,248	ISD	34,706	62,943	118,709	362,153
Rectangular fields: lacrosse field	11	26,411	9,786	16,584	49,348	56,000	126,912
Overlay fields	9	14,763	8,707	9,468	16,398	25,452	27,737
Rectangular fields: field hockey field	4	20,909	18,000	17,292	44,292	53,895	ISD

\*ISD = Insufficient Data

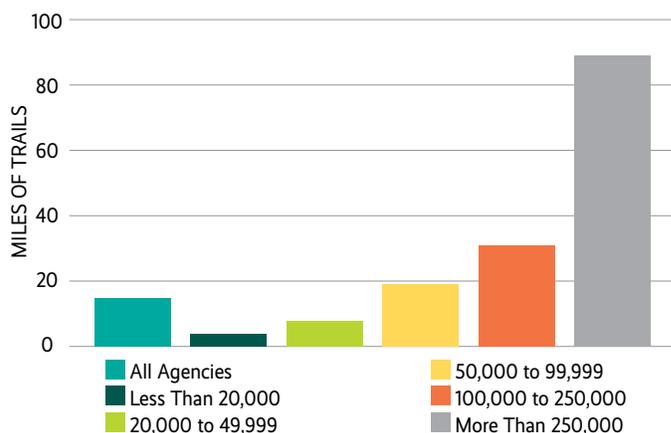
In addition, 84 percent of park and recreation agencies have trails, greenways and/or blueways as part of their outdoor infrastructure. The typical park and recreation agency that manages or maintains trails for walking, hiking, running and/or biking has 15 miles of trails in its network. Agencies serving jurisdictions of more than 250,000 residents have a median of 89 miles of trails under their purview.

Geography also plays a role in the number of trail miles managed by park and recreation agencies. Agencies in a city locale have a median of 16 miles of trails, while county-based agencies typically have approximately 36 miles of trails.

The typical park and recreation agency operates seven buildings. Agencies serving populations of less than 20,000 often operate three buildings, while those serving populations between 100,000 and 250,000 oversee 13 buildings. Agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 typically have 43 buildings under their purview.

Park and recreation agencies also offer many indoor facilities to their residents. Three in five have recreation centers and community centers. Also commonly offered are senior centers, performance amphitheatres and nature centers. The typical agency that offers rec-

**FIGURE 4: MILES OF TRAIL  
(BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	15	4	8	19	31	89
Lower Quartile	5	2	5	8	16	36
Upper Quartile	44	10	20	33	58	176

reation centers has one facility for every 31,215 residents, while those agencies with community centers have one such facility for every 29,494 residents. A little more than two in five agencies offer senior centers, with one such facility for every 59,727 residents in their jurisdictions.



A participant receives an award upon completion of a race in North Port, Florida.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF NORTH PORT PARKS AND RECREATION

Teammates pose after a basketball game in Henderson, Nevada.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF HENDERSON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

**FIGURE 5: INDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES – POPULATION PER FACILITY (BY PREVALENCE AND POPULATION PER FACILITY)**

Types of Facilities	Median Number of Residents per Facility						
	Percent of Agencies	All Agencies	Population of Jurisdiction				
			Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Recreation centers (including gyms)	63%	31,215	9,745	24,380	38,018	54,125	65,909
Community centers	59	29,494	8,829	26,696	53,331	54,354	109,710
Senior centers	41	59,727	14,000	31,199	67,139	123,882	294,394
Performance amphitheaters	37	67,862	11,100	30,283	60,495	121,000	298,416
Nature centers	33	120,000	10,633	32,000	71,360	129,859	358,431
Aquatics centers	28	53,950	11,650	31,645	60,116	108,843	273,914
Stadiums	20	79,866	9,250	31,000	64,150	156,798	432,000
Teen centers	13	55,494	14,593	31,645	58,174	127,301	426,501
Indoor ice rinks	12	53,224	8,000	24,838	53,224	102,132	395,699
Arenas	8	79,828	5,531	24,626	68,208	104,774	578,231

# PROGRAMMING



A group of children play at a community center in Lexington, Massachusetts.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LEXINGTON RECREATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The 275 million people who visited a local park or recreation facility last year were able to select from a wide variety of offerings that met their needs and desires. Each of those people represents a touchpoint or “contact” for parks and recreation. “Contacts” include many different types of interactions with a park and recreation agency, such as visits to a local park, running or biking on a local trail, visits to a local recreation center or other interactions with any park and recreation facility operated by an agency. Moreover, a person can have more than one contact with parks and recreation. Someone who swims at their local agency’s aquatics center 10 times a year and bikes along a local trail five times a year would have 15 contacts.

The typical park and recreation agency registers approximately 341,000 contacts every year. The number of contacts varies dramatically from agency to agency. For example, the typical agency at the 75th percentile has more than 1.3 million annual contacts. Engage-

ment between *large* park and recreation agencies and visitors is even more frequent — the typical agency serving a population of more than 250,000 has nearly 1.9 million contacts per year, with those at the 75th percentile serving more than 4.1 million people annually.

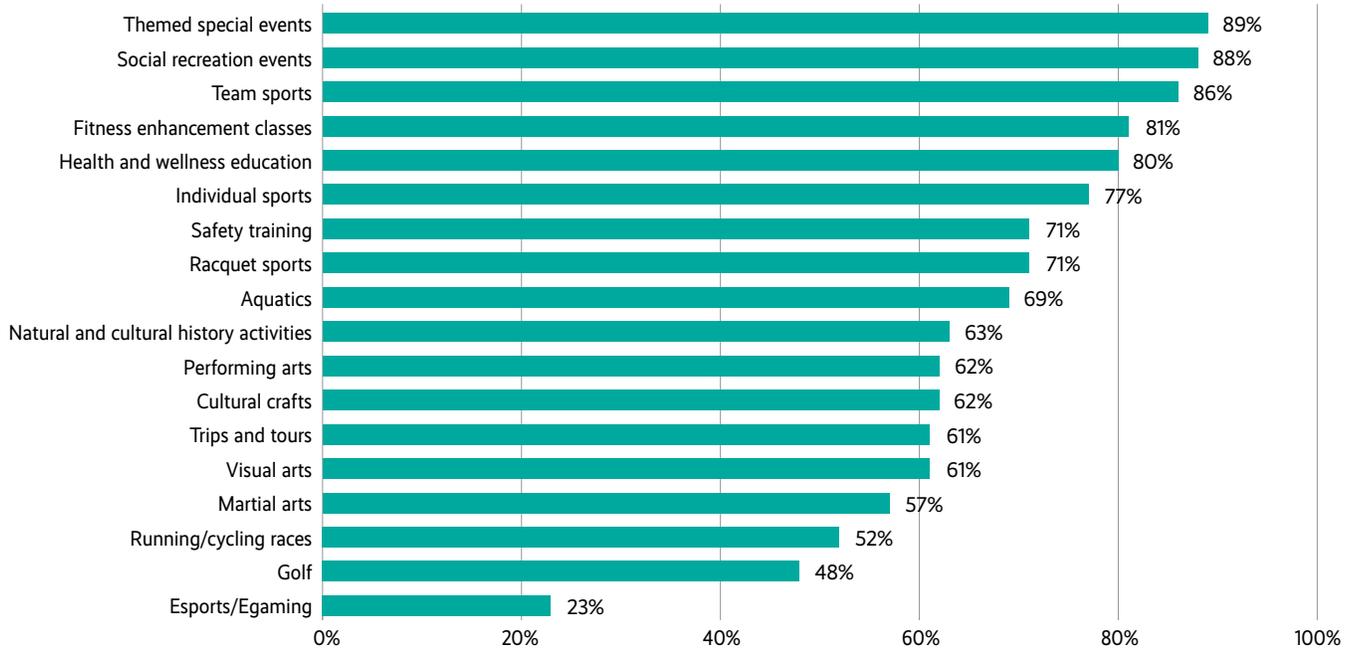
Programming is a crucial driver of engagement with parks and recreation. The typical park and recreation agency generates more than 20,000 contacts through its programs alone. Those agencies serving more than 250,000 residents may have more than two-and-a-half times the number of contacts compared with agencies overall.

Registration fees for special programming are the largest source of non-tax revenue for most agencies. The typical agency offers 200 programs each year; 141 of those programs are fee-based events. Agencies serving a population of less than 20,000 typically hold 30 fee-based programs per year, while those serving more than 250,000 residents offer 400 fee-based programs annually.

Programming provided by agencies spans a variety of park and recreation activities — many of which touch on one or more of NRPA’s Three Pillars: Health and Wellness, Equity, and Conservation. Key programming activities offered by at least seven in 10 park and recreation agencies include:

- Themed special events (offered by 89 percent of agencies)
- Social recreation events (88 percent)
- Team sports (86 percent)
- Fitness enhancement classes (81 percent)
- Health and wellness education (80 percent)
- Individual sports (77 percent)
- Safety training (71 percent)
- Racquet sports (71 percent)
- Aquatics (69 percent)

**FIGURE 6: PROGRAMMING OFFERED BY PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES  
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**



The “prime directive” for all park and recreation agencies is to serve the public. Delivering high-quality services to all community members is a key commitment of park and recreation professionals. That promise includes those professionals being leaders in providing services and programming for children, older adults and people with disabilities. Eighty-two percent of park and recreation agencies offer summer camp programs for their communities’ children. A majority also delivers programs for teens and after-school care as parts of their out-of-school time (OST) offerings. Fewer agencies include preschool, before-school care or all-day childcare as a part of their program offerings.

In addition, most park and recreation agencies offer specific programming for other segments of their communities including older adults (77 percent), teens (65 percent) and people with disabilities (63 percent). Agencies in larger communities are most likely to offer these types of programming. For example, 78 percent of park and recreation agencies in jurisdictions serving 100,000 to 250,000 residents offer programming designed for people with disabilities. In comparison, 34 percent of agencies that serve populations of less than 20,000 residents offer such programs. More than half of park and recreation agencies provide science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-specific programs to community members.

**FIGURE 7: TARGETED PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN, OLDER ADULTS  
AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES  
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**

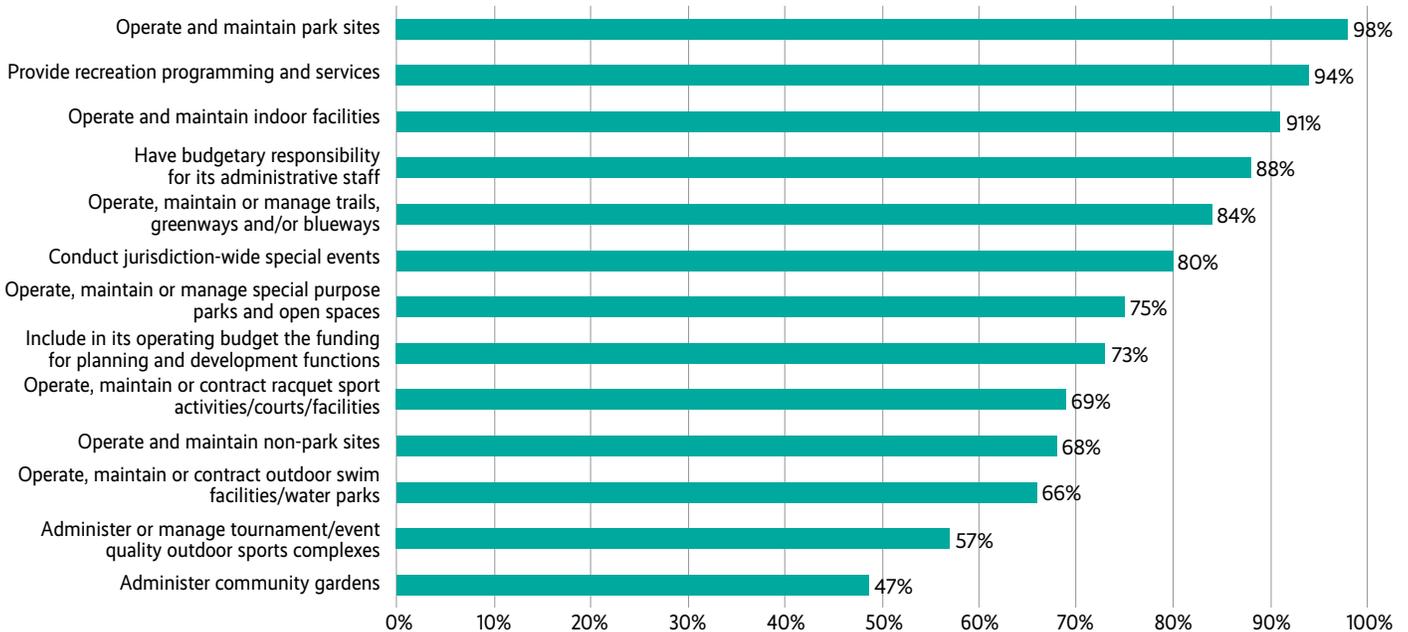
	Percent of Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Summer camp	82%	60%	86%	93%	86%	90%
Specific senior programs	77	61	77	87	84	77
Specific teen programs	65	43	61	77	77	78
Programs for people with disabilities	63	34	55	80	78	81
Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs	58	42	49	68	64	71
After-school programs	53	45	47	53	57	69
Preschool	33	24	32	44	34	33
Before-school programs	19	16	19	21	17	18
Full daycare	7	5	6	11	4	12

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

At its core, parks and recreation is responsible for just that: parks and recreation. But park and recreation professionals oversee myriad services and facilities in their communities beyond their “traditional” roles of operating parks and related facilities (98 percent) and providing recreation programming and services (94 percent). In addition to those two core functions, the top responsibilities for park and recreation professionals are to:

- Operate and maintain indoor facilities (91 percent of agencies)
- Have budgetary responsibility for their administrative staff (88 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage trails, greenways and/or blueways (84 percent)
- Conduct major jurisdiction-wide special events (80 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage special-purpose parks and open spaces (75 percent)
- Operate, maintain or contract racquet sport activities/courts/facilities (69 percent)
- Operate and maintain non-park sites (68 percent)
- Operate, maintain or contract outdoor swim facilities/water parks (66 percent)
- Administer or manage tournament/event-quality outdoor sports complexes (57 percent)
- Administer community gardens (47 percent)

**FIGURE 8: KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES (PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**



**FIGURE 9: OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES  
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**

Operate, maintain or contract tourism attractions	38%
Manage large performance outdoor amphitheaters	37
Operate, maintain or contract golf courses	35
Operate, maintain or contract indoor swim facilities/water parks	31
Maintain or manage beaches (inclusive of all waterbody types)	25
Administer or manage farmers markets	22
Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts center	20
Administer or manage tournament/event quality indoor sports complexes	20
Operate, maintain or contract campgrounds	19
Operate, maintain or contract marinas	12
Administer or manage professional or college-type stadium/arena/racetrack	10
Manage or maintain fairgrounds	6



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATCHEZ PARKS AND RECREATION

# STAFFING



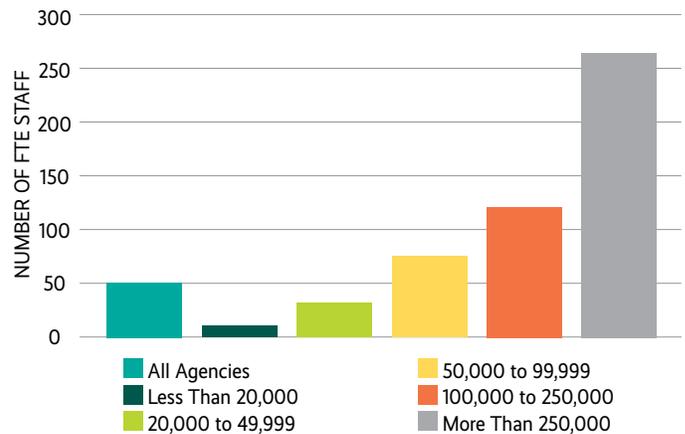
A summer camper shows off her mermaid art in Kettering, Ohio.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF KETTERING PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL ARTS DEPARTMENT

Because park and recreation agencies differ by size and jurisdiction served, so too do staffing levels. Staffing at the typical park and recreation agency includes 51.5 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) with a mix of both full-time and part-time staff. Staff size, however, expands rapidly as the size of the population served by an agency increases. Park and recreation agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 residents have a median of 11.3 FTEs on staff. Agencies serving areas with 50,000 to 99,999 people have a median of 75.8 FTEs, while those in jurisdictions of more than 250,000 residents have a median of 264.1 FTEs on staff. The median number of FTEs on staff also positively correlates with:

- **Number of acres maintained:** 250 or fewer acres — 20.4 FTEs; more than 3,500 acres — 263.0 FTEs
- **Number of parks maintained:** Less than 10 parks — 13.8 FTEs; 50 or more parks — 218.2 FTEs
- **Operating expenditures:** Less than \$500,000 — 4.1 FTEs; more than \$10 million — 184.5 FTEs
- **Population served by the agency:** Less than 500 people per square mile — 22.3 FTEs; more than 2,500 people per square mile — 95.8 FTEs

**FIGURE 10: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY STAFFING: FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (FTEs) (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**

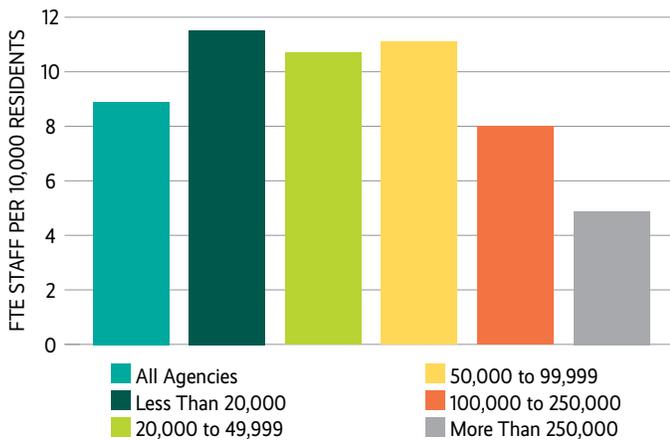


	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	51.5	11.3	32.3	75.8	121.5	264.1
Lower Quartile	17.3	6.0	17.0	46.0	72.8	103.9
Upper Quartile	134.7	22.0	67.8	127.5	198.3	533.0

One way to view agency staffing is to measure it relative to the population that an agency serves. The typical park and recreation agency has 8.9 FTEs on staff for every 10,000 residents in the jurisdiction served by that agency. Agencies in more populated areas tend to have fewer FTEs on staff per population. Agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 people have 11.5 FTEs for every 10,000 residents; this measure decreases to 4.9 FTEs for 10,000 residents in areas with more than 250,000 people.

Agencies that serve areas with greater population density tend to have more FTEs per number of residents. Those operating in jurisdictions of less than 500 people per square mile have 5.8 FTEs per 10,000 people served compared to 10.2 FTEs per 10,000 residents in areas with more than 2,500 people per square mile.

**FIGURE 11: PARK AND RECREATION FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (FTEs) PER 10,000 RESIDENTS (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	8.9	11.5	10.7	11.1	8.0	4.9
Lower Quartile	4.8	6.5	5.6	6.6	4.8	1.9
Upper Quartile	15.5	20.1	19.7	18.1	12.3	8.0

Operations and maintenance are the primary work responsibility of park and recreation professionals. But staff also devote their energies to other areas. On average, an agency's full-time staff dedicate their time to the following general activities:

- Operations/Maintenance (46 percent of staff time)
- Programming (30 percent)
- Administration (17 percent)
- Capital development (3 percent)
- Other (4 percent)

Thirty-nine percent of park and recreation agency professionals are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Those professionals covered by such agreements are more likely to work at agencies that:

- **Have a larger staff:** 24 percent of agencies with a staff of fewer than 10 FTEs compared to 55 percent of agencies with 100 or more FTEs
- **Serve larger populations:** 23 percent of agencies in jurisdictions of less than 20,000 people com-

A runner crosses the finish line at a race in City of North Port, Florida.

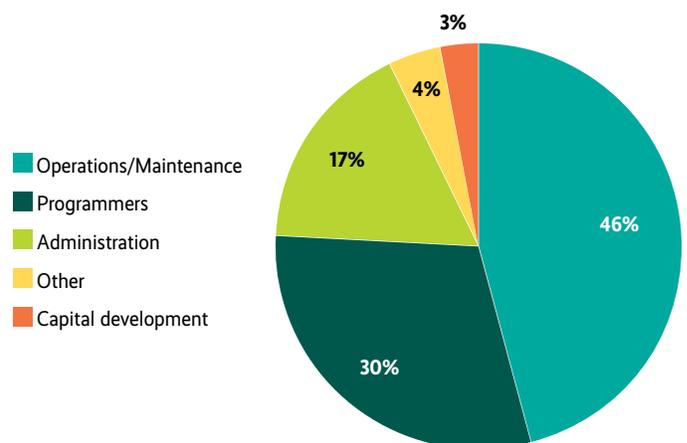
PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF NORTH PORT PARKS AND RECREATION



pared to 61 percent of agencies in jurisdictions of more than 250,000 people

- **Have more parks:** 19 percent of agencies with less than 10 parks compared to 61 percent of agencies with at least 50 parks
- **Maintain more parkland:** 28 percent of agencies that maintain 250 acres or less of parkland compared to 62 percent of agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland

**FIGURE 12: RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION STAFF (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGENCY FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (FTEs))**



Operations/Maintenance	46%
Programmers	30
Administration	17
Other	4
Capital development	3

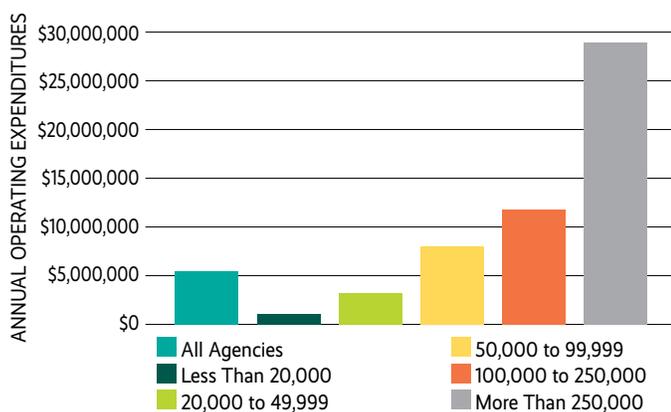
# BUDGET



Attendees of the reopening of Belmont Park in Clearwater, Florida, boast shovels and assist with planting shrubs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLEARWATER PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

**FIGURE 13: ANNUAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



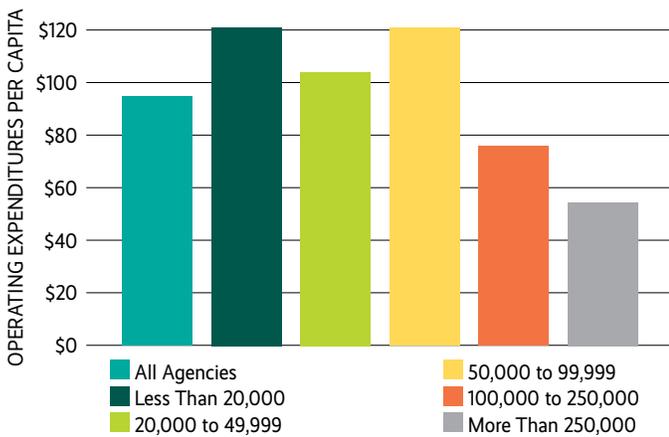
	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$5,500,000	\$1,200,000	\$3,255,771	\$8,005,757	\$11,834,432	\$28,878,054
Lower Quartile	\$2,045,100	\$573,150	\$1,996,538	\$5,338,200	\$6,147,332	\$14,735,128
Upper Quartile	\$14,841,451	\$2,482,403	\$6,279,749	\$13,413,924	\$21,753,741	\$53,898,865

U.S. Census Bureau data indicate that local park and recreation agencies' operating expenditures totaled \$45 billion in 2020 (most recent data available). Per NRPA Park Metrics data, the typical park and recreation agency has current annual operating expenditures of \$5.5 million, although budget size varies widely depending on a number of factors (including population served, services offered).

Normalizing operating expenditure data by population served by an agency is a more meaningful way of articulating and comparing spending. By this measure, the typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$94.77 on a per capita basis. The denser the population served by an agency, the higher the per capita operating expenses: the typical agency serving a jurisdiction of less than 500 people per square mile has per capita operating expenses of \$60.73, while one serving a jurisdiction of more than 2,500 people per square mile has a median of \$116.01 per resident.

At the same time, per capita operations spending is inversely related to the population of the area served. Agencies serving less than 20,000 people have a median operating expenditure of \$120.79 per resident. That figure declines to \$54.62 per resident for agencies serving jurisdictions of more than 250,000 people, declining further to \$41.67 in jurisdictions of more than 500,000 residents.

**FIGURE 14: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**

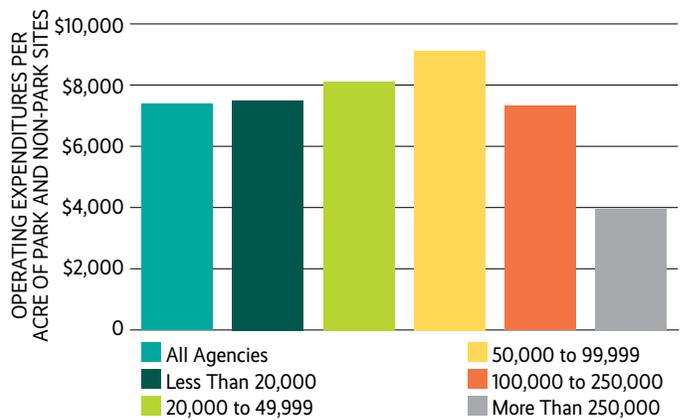


	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$94.77	\$120.79	\$103.95	\$120.70	\$75.88	\$54.62
Lower Quartile	\$53.23	\$69.65	\$64.04	\$73.64	\$47.07	\$22.04
Upper Quartile	\$173.05	\$229.61	\$197.61	\$197.47	\$155.62	\$93.16

One can normalize operating expenditures by the amount of parkland managed by an agency. The median operating expenditure is \$7,388 per acre of park and non-park sites managed by the typical agency. (Note: Non-park sites are public spaces — such as lawns at a city hall — not designated as parks, but whose maintenance and/or operation costs are part of the park and recreation agency’s budget.) The typical operating expenditure per acre of parkland increases with population density. The typical agency serving a jurisdiction of fewer than 500 people per square mile spends \$4,359 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median rises to \$13,048 per acre at agencies serving a jurisdiction with a population density greater than 2,500 residents per square mile.

Park and recreation agencies serving larger populations tend to have lower operating expenditures than do agencies serving small- and medium-sized jurisdictions. The typical park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction of less than 20,000 people spends a median of \$7,495 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median increases to \$8,106 per acre for agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 20,000 and 49,999, but then declines to \$3,970 per acre managed by agencies serving more than 250,000 people.

**FIGURE 15: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER ACRE OF PARK AND NON-PARK SITES (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**

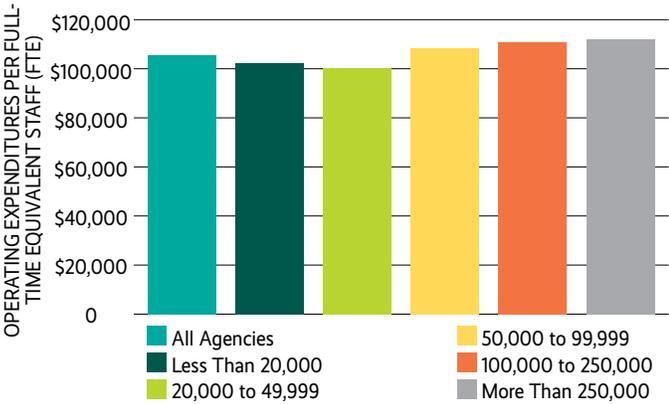


	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$7,388	\$7,495	\$8,106	\$9,108	\$7,323	\$3,970
Lower Quartile	\$3,521	\$3,692	\$4,250	\$5,434	\$3,082	\$1,601
Upper Quartile	\$17,668	\$23,506	\$20,047	\$20,564	\$14,045	\$10,629

The typical park and recreation agency has \$105,484 in annual operating expenditures for each employee (as measured by full-time equivalent (FTE) employees). The denser the population an agency serves, the higher the operating expenditures for each FTE. Agencies serving less than 500 residents per square mile have median operating expenditures of \$97,861 for each FTE. The median rises to \$113,888 per FTE for agencies serving areas with more than 2,500 residents per square mile.

As is the case for most nonprofit/government entities, personnel services account for the largest share of the operations budget at the typical park and recreation agency.

**FIGURE 16: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STAFF (FTE) (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**

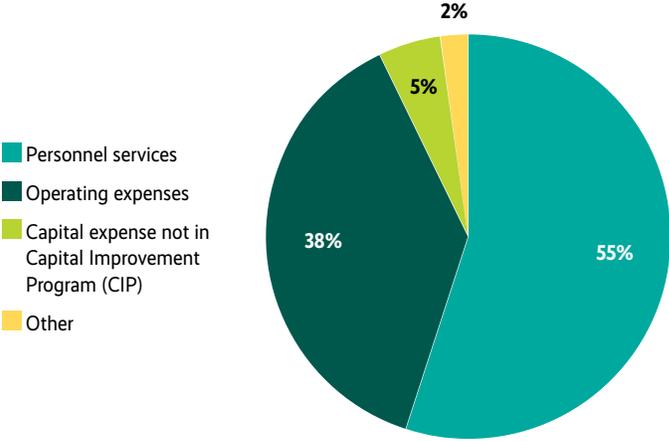


	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$105,484	\$102,135	\$99,944	\$108,035	\$110,707	\$111,770
Lower Quartile	\$78,258	\$73,560	\$76,360	\$81,301	\$76,332	\$83,477
Upper Quartile	\$144,945	\$152,404	\$140,221	\$140,257	\$145,048	\$150,000

- Personnel services (55 percent of the operating budget) include salaries, wages and benefits for full-time and non-full-time personnel and contracted individuals.
- Operating expenditures (38 percent of the operating budget) fund agency operations.
- Capital funds repay the operating budget, all enterprise funds, interdepartmental transfers and, in some cases, the capital debt service. This is five percent of the operating budget. A portion of the operations spending includes capital expenses that are not part of an agency’s capital improvement plan, such as expenditures for capital equipment (e.g., computers, vehicles, large-area mowers, tractors, boats), some periodic cyclical maintenance (e.g., carpets, conference chairs, push mowers) and perhaps debt services paid from the agency’s operating funds.

The typical park and recreation agency dedicates 46 percent of its annual operating budget to managing and maintaining parks and open spaces. Agencies spend a median 41 percent of their annual operating

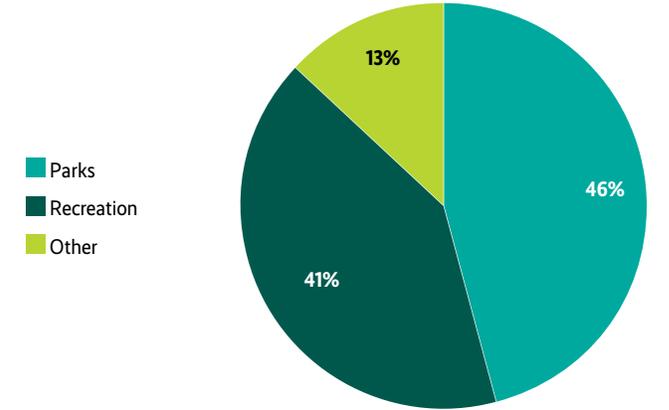
**FIGURE 17: DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES)**



Personnel services	55%
Operating expenses	38%
Capital expense not in CIP	5%
Other	2%

expenditures to support recreation offerings, including programming (e.g., out-of-school time activities, sports leagues, health and wellness programs) and the facilities for such activities.

**FIGURE 18: OPERATING EXPENDITURES DEDICATED TO PARKS OR RECREATION (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES)**



Parks	46%
Recreation	41%
Other	13%

# AGENCY FUNDING



Youth who use wheelchairs participate in inclusive programming in Hopewell, Virginia.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOPEWELL RECREATION AND PARKS

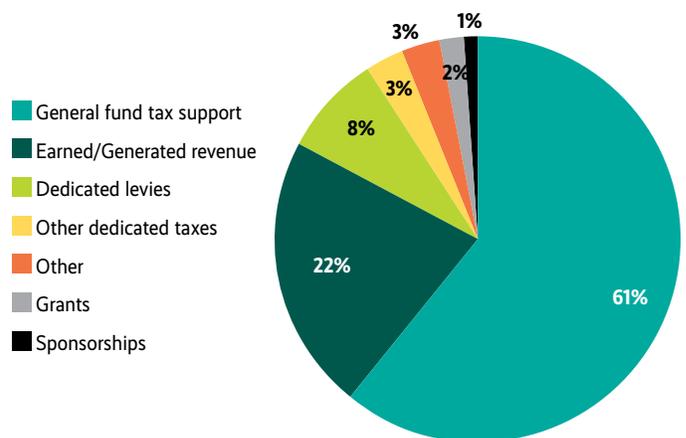
Funding sources for park and recreation operations vary greatly by agency; however, support from the local jurisdiction’s general fund tax base is common. On average, park and recreation agencies derive slightly more than three-fifths of their operating expenditures from general fund tax support. However, the percentage of funding from general fund tax support tends to be lower for those agencies with larger operating budgets.

The second-largest source of funding for most agencies is earned/generated revenue, accounting for an average of 22 percent of operating expenditures. In addition, many agencies have access to special, dedicated taxes that cover a part of their budgets, while others obtain much of their funding from tax levies dedicated to park and recreation purposes approved by citizen referenda.

But as mentioned previously, many agencies generate funding from non-tax revenue (such as fees for special programming). The typical park and recreation agency generates nearly \$1.3 million in non-tax revenues annually, although this amount can vary significantly based on agency size, the services and facilities offered by an agency and the mandate from agency leadership and policymakers. Agencies with annual operating budgets of less than \$500,000 typically generate nearly \$44,000 in non-tax revenues. In comparison, those

with annual budgets greater than \$10 million generate a median of slightly more than \$5.9 million from non-tax revenue sources.

**FIGURE 19: SOURCES OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES**  
(AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES)

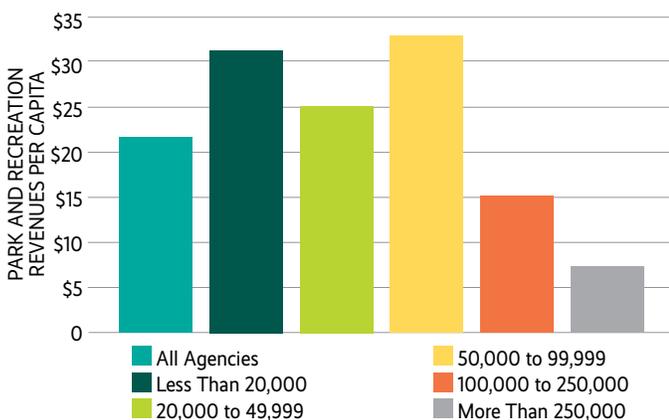


General fund tax support	61%
Earned/Generated revenue	22
Dedicated levies	8
Other dedicated taxes	3
Other	3
Grants	2
Sponsorships	1

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$21.71 in revenue annually per each resident in the jurisdiction it serves. Agencies operating in less densely populated areas generate less revenue than do those with a greater population density. The typical agency — serving a jurisdiction of fewer than 500 people per square mile — realizes \$12.93 in revenue on a per capita basis per year compared to a median of \$27.71 for agencies serving a jurisdiction of greater than 2,500 people per square mile.

Small- and medium-sized park and recreation agencies generate more revenue per capita compared to large-sized ones. Agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 people generate \$31.31 in per capita revenue per resident — nearly matching that generated by agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, with a median of \$32.91 in revenue per resident each year. In comparison, agencies serving populations of more than 250,000 generate \$7.39 per capita in revenue, with the amount declining to \$6.66 in jurisdictions with populations of more than 500,000 residents, matching the lower quartile amount for agencies overall.

**FIGURE 20: PARK AND RECREATION REVENUES PER CAPITA (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**

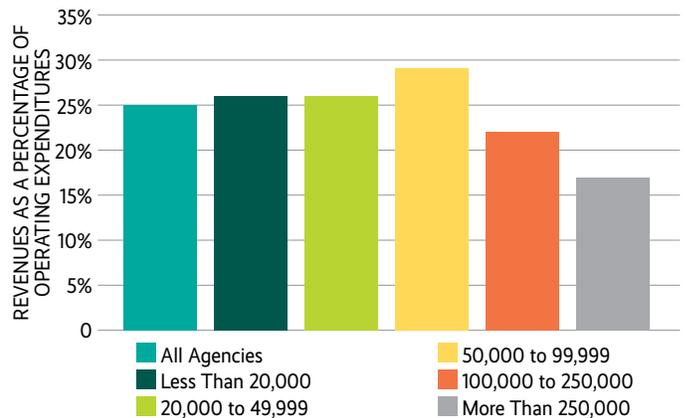


	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$21.71	\$31.31	\$25.14	\$32.91	\$15.20	\$7.39
Lower Quartile	\$6.66	\$8.18	\$9.13	\$12.85	\$5.14	\$2.59
Upper Quartile	\$57.51	\$83.28	\$69.84	\$77.41	\$46.71	\$21.78

Another way to look at revenue generation is by examining cost recovery as a percentage of operating expenditures. The typical agency recovers 24.6 percent of its operating expenditures from non-tax revenues. The amount of cost recovery differs significantly among agencies based on an agency’s portfolio of facilities and programming, the demographics of the populace it serves, the agency’s mission and possible revenue mandates from the agency’s governing authorities.

Agencies serving less than 500 people per square mile have a median percentage cost recovery of 25 percent. Cost recovery dips slightly to 22.1 percent of operating expenditures for agencies serving jurisdictions of between 1,000 and 2,500 people per square mile.

**FIGURE 21: REVENUES AS A PERCENTAGE OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES (COST RECOVERY) (PERCENTAGE OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	24.6%	25.9%	25.7%	28.5%	22.0%	16.7%
Lower Quartile	11.6	10.9	12.0	14.7	11.5	7.4
Upper Quartile	44.5	50.9	48.1	51.9	38.4	31.4

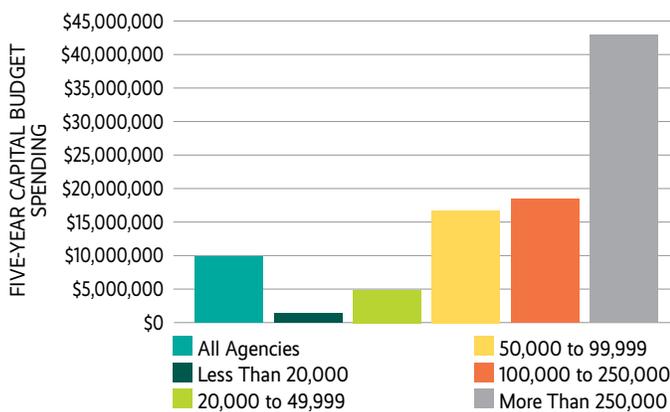
Beyond day-to-day operations, park and recreation agencies have a median of \$10 million in capital expenditures budgeted for the next five years. Not surprisingly, the larger the agency, the larger its five-year capital budget. The typical park and recreation agency serving a population of less than 20,000 has a median five-year capital budget of \$1.5 million. Five-year capital budgets

increase greatly as the population served increases — to more than \$16.8 million at agencies serving jurisdictions of 50,000 to 99,999 residents and nearly \$43 million at agencies in areas with more than 250,000 residents. In addition, factors that are positively related to the size of the five-year capital budget include:

- **The number of parks maintained:** Less than 10 parks — \$1.7 million; 50 or more parks — \$35.1 million
- **Acres of parks maintained:** 250 or fewer acres — \$2.6 million; more than 3,500 acres — \$42 million
- **Operating budgets:** Annual operating budgets less than \$500,000 to \$350,000; annual operating budgets greater than \$10 million to \$32.9 million
- **Population density:** Less than 500 people per square mile — \$3.3 million; more than 2,500 people per square mile — \$16.3 million



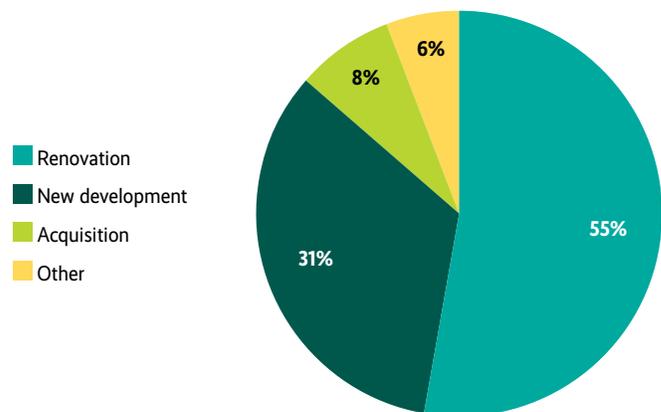
**FIGURE 22: FIVE-YEAR CAPITAL BUDGET SPENDING (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$10,000,000	\$1,500,000	\$5,000,000	\$16,815,000	\$18,560,000	\$42,888,140
Lower Quartile	\$1,844,875	\$500,000	\$1,500,000	\$6,000,000	\$8,000,000	\$15,000,000
Upper Quartile	\$30,509,975	\$4,118,785	\$15,000,000	\$28,012,500	\$43,448,361	\$125,000,000

Park and recreation agencies designate their capital expenditures to a variety of areas. On average, agencies designate 55 percent of their capital budget for renovation and 31 percent toward new development.

**FIGURE 23: TARGETS FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURES (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CAPITAL EXPENDITURES)**



Renovation	55%
New development	31
Acquisition	8
Other	6



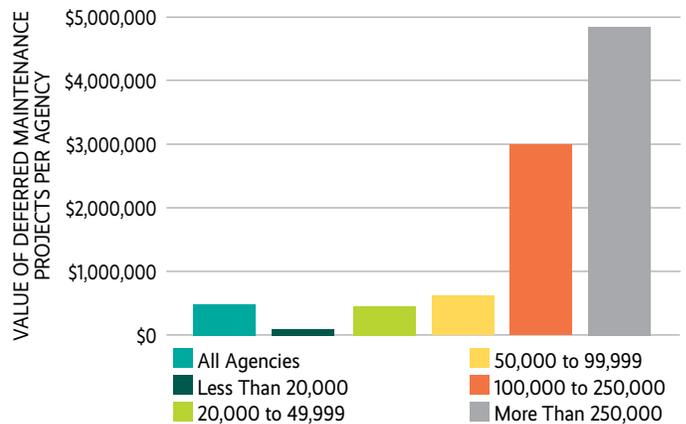
A group of teens hike through the woods in Castle Rock, Colorado.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOWN OF CASTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION

- **Serve larger populations:** \$1.2 million at agencies in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people compared to \$57.8 million at agencies serving jurisdictions of more than 250,000 people
- **Have more parks:** \$1.4 million at agencies with less than 10 parks compared to nearly \$47.6 million at agencies with 50 or more parks
- **Maintain more parkland:** \$3.5 million at agencies that maintain 250 acres or less of parkland compared to \$62 million at agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland

Further, jurisdiction type plays a prominent role in the value of deferred maintenance projects found in park and recreation agencies. Agencies located in towns have deferred maintenance totaling an average of \$1.4 million, while the average deferred maintenance at city-based agencies is \$19.8 million. County park and recreation agencies have an average of \$26.9 million in deferred maintenance projects. In comparison, independent park districts/authorities and special park districts have an average of \$9 million and \$6.6 million, respectively, in deferred maintenance projects.

**FIGURE 24: VALUE OF DEFERRED MAINTENANCE PROJECTS PER AGENCY (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)**



	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More Than 250,000
Median	\$500,000	\$117,500	\$475,000	\$636,000	\$3,000,000	\$4,835,000
Lower Quartile	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Upper Quartile	\$6,050,000	\$750,000	\$5,000,000	\$6,460,559	\$12,500,000	\$50,350,000
Average	\$16,520,514	\$1,240,479	\$8,055,043	\$7,448,720	\$13,591,214	\$57,844,879

On average, park and recreation agencies report having \$16.5 million of deferred maintenance projects on their books. Agencies operating in less densely populated areas have fewer deferred projects than do those operating in areas with a greater population density. Agencies serving a jurisdiction of fewer than 500 people per square mile have an average of \$9.8 million in deferred maintenance projects compared to \$27 million for agencies serving a jurisdiction of more than 2,500 people per square mile. Average deferred maintenance balances rise at agencies that:

- **Have higher operating budgets:** \$368,833 at agencies with operating budgets less than \$500,000 compared to \$38.4 million at agencies with operating budgets that exceed \$10 million
- **Have a larger staff:** \$1.8 million at agencies with a staff of fewer than 10 FTEs compared to \$38.5 million at agencies with 100 or more FTEs

# POLICIES

Park and recreation agencies have various policies that address how residents enjoy amenities and programming in their communities. Many policies align with an agency’s mission to increase a community’s overall health and wellness, such as banning tobacco products, limiting the consumption of alcohol and ensuring the availability of healthy food options. Other policies address the collection of fees that help agencies with park upkeep and staffing challenges.

More than four in five park and recreation agencies have policies that prohibit the use of tobacco products in their parks, at their facilities and on their grounds. Fifty-five percent of agencies ban the use of tobacco at all agency parks and facilities, while another 26 percent make exceptions for certain facilities (e.g., golf courses).

Three in four park and recreation agencies allow the consumption of alcohol by legal-age adults on at least some of their premises. Seventeen percent of agencies have a policy that allows the consumption of alcohol at all park and recreation agency locations in their jurisdiction. Agencies are more likely to permit the consumption of alcohol at only a few select locations rather than at all facilities. Further, 49 percent of agencies allow the sale of alcohol on their premises — mainly at select locations and by either the agencies themselves or authorized concessionaires.

Park and recreation agencies promote health and wellness by offering healthy food options at their vending machines and concessions. At least two-thirds of agencies offer healthy food options in vending machines and/or concession stands at their facilities.

Relatively few park and recreation agencies charge an admission fee to enter or park a vehicle at their facilities. Eighteen percent of agencies charge fees to enter some of their parks and 16 percent of agencies have parking fees at some of their facilities. In both cases, the agencies that charge either admission or parking fees do so only at a limited number of facilities.

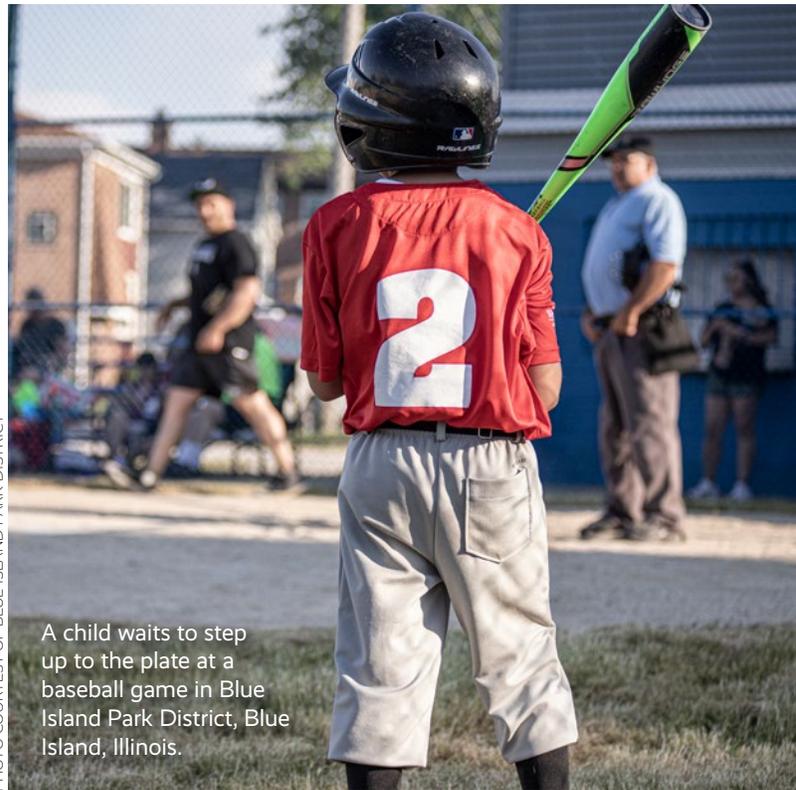


PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE ISLAND PARK DISTRICT

A child waits to step up to the plate at a baseball game in Blue Island Park District, Blue Island, Illinois.

**FIGURE 25: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY POLICIES (PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**

	Yes, at all locations	Yes, at select locations	No
Has a policy barring the use of all tobacco products in its parks and at its facilities and grounds	55%	26%	19%
Has a policy that allows the consumption of alcohol by legal-aged adults on its premises	17	58	24
Agency sells alcoholic beverages to legal-aged adults on its premises (sold either by the agency or by a concessionaire authorized by the agency)	3	49	48
Agency provides healthy food options in its vending machines	25	40	35
Agency provides healthy food options at its concession stands	25	47	29
Agency charges a parking fee at its parks or facilities	1	16	83
Agency charges an admission fee to enter its parks	1	18	81

Summer camp at City of Los Angeles' EXPO Center includes sports, technology, activities and weekly field trips.



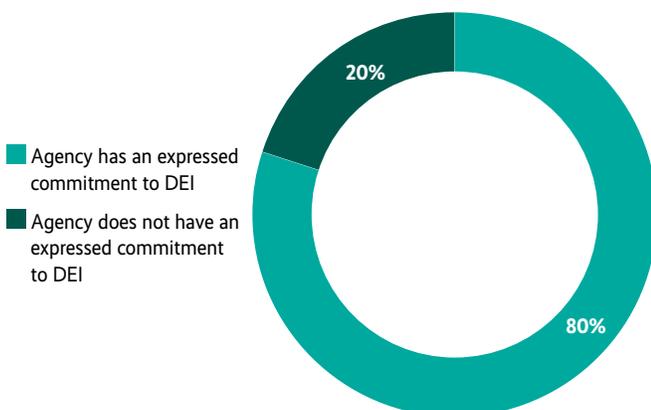
PHOTO COURTESY OF GAIL PARKER

Park and recreation professionals and their agencies are essential in the promotion and advancement of community health, resiliency and overall well-being. Given their mission to make communities better places to live, learn, work and play, park and recreation agencies also are in a unique position to champion efforts that advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

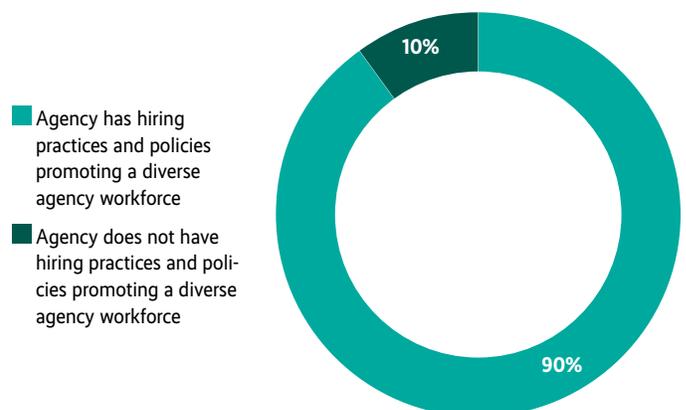
Among the implemented DEI practices are:

- Eighty percent of park and recreation agencies have an expressed commitment to DEI in their foundational documents (e.g., vision, mission and strategic plan documents).
- Ninety percent of park and recreation agencies have hiring practices and policies that promote a diverse workforce.

**FIGURE 26: PERCENT OF AGENCIES WITH AN EXPRESSED COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) IN THEIR FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS (PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION)**



**FIGURE 27: PERCENT OF AGENCIES WITH HIRING PRACTICES AND POLICIES THAT PROMOTE A DIVERSE WORKFORCE (PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION)**



# ADDITIONAL NRPA RESOURCES

Athletes compete in the Bluegrass 10,000 race on the Fourth of July, which has taken place for more than 30 years in downtown Lexington, Kentucky.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMY WALLLOT

The *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and *NRPA Park Metrics* are just two tools offered by NRPA that champion the work of park and recreation professionals across the United States. The NRPA Research team focuses its efforts on two major areas:

- Collecting and analyzing data to help park and recreation professionals make optimal decisions on operations, programming and spending
- Developing data to help park and recreation professionals make the case for greater and more sustainable funding

Included in the vast suite of NRPA Research resources are:

- **Engagement With Parks Report:** This annual NRPA research survey probes the public's use of parks, the key reasons that drive their use and the greatest challenges preventing greater

usage. Each year, the study examines the importance of public parks in our lives, including how parks compare to other services and offerings of local governments. Recent findings show that 275 million people accessed their local parks or recreation facilities during the past year; nine in 10 U.S. adults agree that parks and recreation is an important local government service; and 84 percent of people consider high-quality park and recreation amenities as a principal factor when choosing a place to live.

- **NRPA Park Pulse Polls:** Each month, the NRPA Research team polls 1,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and older representing a cross-section of the population to explore their views on topics related to the park and recreation field. Questions span from the serious to the more lighthearted — but all demonstrate the power of parks and recreation.

- **2022 NRPA Park and Recreation Salary Survey:** Having access to comprehensive compensation data informs park and recreation agency leaders about how to attract the best staff. This report features detailed base salary and bonus data for 10 park and recreation leadership positions. When released in the summer, the *2023 Salary Survey* report will feature compensation data for 13 park and recreation leadership positions.
- **Sustainability in Parks and Recreation Report:** This report highlights how park and recreation professionals are working to make their agencies and their communities more sustainable through such actions as protecting natural habitat, embracing park infrastructure, managing stormwater effectively and lowering agency water usage. Park and recreation professionals continually review and update their plans to address communities' specific needs and goals while leveraging the latest knowledge, best practices and technology to advance sustainable efforts. This report showcases park and recreation agencies' innate role as sustainability leaders in their communities.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Parks and Recreation Report:** Given their mission to make communities better places to live, learn, work and play, park and recreation agencies are in a unique position to champion efforts that advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). This report takes inventory of the DEI activities, if any, agencies have established, the professional development opportunities provided to staff and the challenges organizations face in promoting DEI practices.
- **Parks and Recreation: Advancing Community Health and Well-Being Report:** To meet the public's emerging health and wellness needs, parks and recreation is evolving into Community Wellness Hubs. These hubs are trusted gathering places that allow every community member to connect with essential programs, services and spaces that advance health equity, improve health outcomes and enhance the quality of life. This report focuses on how park and recreation professionals tackle their communities' ever-expanding health and wellness needs, including programming, education, innovations and health equity.
- **NRPA Out-of-School Time Report:** More than four in five park and recreation agencies offer out-of-school time (OST) programs that serve millions of children throughout the United States. These before-school, after-school and/or summer programs provide physical activity opportunities, safe spaces for children, childcare for parents and caregivers, and social connections with peers. This report looks at those offerings and benefits of OST programs provided by local parks and recreation, and the innovations to OST programs brought about by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- **The Economic Impact of Parks Report:** Thanks to the efforts of park and recreation professionals throughout the United States, local park and recreation agencies generated \$218 billion in economic activity and supported 1.3 million jobs in 2019. Beyond the nationwide impact, this report also shows the economic contribution of parks and recreation on the state level. The estimates of total economic impacts include the direct, indirect and induced effects of operations and capital spending by local park and recreation agencies in each state and the District of Columbia.
- **Youth Sports at Park and Recreation Agencies Report:** This study explores youth sports offerings, partnerships, fees and registration, and equitable access. Key findings include: five in six park and recreation agencies collaborate with partners to deliver youth sports activities; 86 percent of park and recreation professionals agree that they and their peers contribute to a fair and just future for youth sports by identifying inequities in access to organized sports offerings; and two in three agencies offer reduced or discounted fees for lower-income residents.
- **Workforce Development and Career Exploration in Parks and Recreation Report:** Workforce development and career exploration programs are critical contributors to the future success of parks and recreation. Key findings include: a third of agencies currently have a workforce development/career exploration program; nearly nine in 10 agencies collaborate with partners on these programs; and the top program goal is to develop future park and recreation leaders.

- **Park and Recreation Agency-Foundation Relationships: Partnering for the Future Report:** This study shares evidence-based best practices that optimize agency-foundation relationships and detailed snapshots of the benefits and challenges between these relationships.
- **Data and Mapping Resource Library:** A wealth of more than 30 free data and mapping resources are available to assist your agency in broadening its impact on the community and operate more efficiently. The Data and Mapping Resource Library offers a collection of relevant, publicly available databases and visualizations curated for park and recreation professionals and advocates.
- **Evaluation Resource Hub:** The NRPA Research team has created several tools that help park and recreation professionals collect and use data to identify new opportunities for amenities and services and pinpoint areas for improvement. The hub includes:
  - o **Health Impact Evaluation Framework:** This framework helps local park and recreation agencies better measure the impact of their health and wellness programs and initiatives, by connecting agencies to a multitude of existing evaluation tools, data sources, data analysis, data collection tools and other resources.
  - o **Green Infrastructure Evaluation Framework:** This resource helps local governments and park advocates measure the many benefits of green infrastructure in parks. Follow the framework's three simple steps — define benefits and measures, collect data and use data — to improve green infrastructure projects and share the message about project benefits.
  - o **Customer Feedback Surveys:** Obtaining customer feedback is challenging for many park and recreation agencies, especially those with resource constraints. This guide outlines fundamental principles of conducting effective customer satisfaction surveys, focusing on acting on the results while keeping your agency's time, money, staffing and current survey skills in mind.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARILYN SKLAR, MONTGOMERY PARKS, MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

A child sleds during a snow day at Tilden Woods Local Park in Montgomery County, Maryland.

- o **Community Needs Assessments:** This resource guides park and recreation professionals through the entire community needs assessment lifecycle — from deciding clear goals to eliciting a high response rate from your community. Most importantly, it demonstrates how to use the survey data to strengthen your agency in both the short and long term.
- **Parks and Recreation Is Essential:** A collection of five statements with supporting research that showcases the fundamental role of parks and recreation:
  - o Parks and recreation promotes health and wellness.
  - o Parks and recreation drives economic opportunity.
  - o Parks and recreation's programming and education activities are critical to childhood development.
  - o Parks and recreation is everywhere, uniting people and strengthening communities.
  - o Parks and recreation is essential and adaptable infrastructure that makes our communities resilient in the face of natural disasters and climate change.

# CONCLUSIONS

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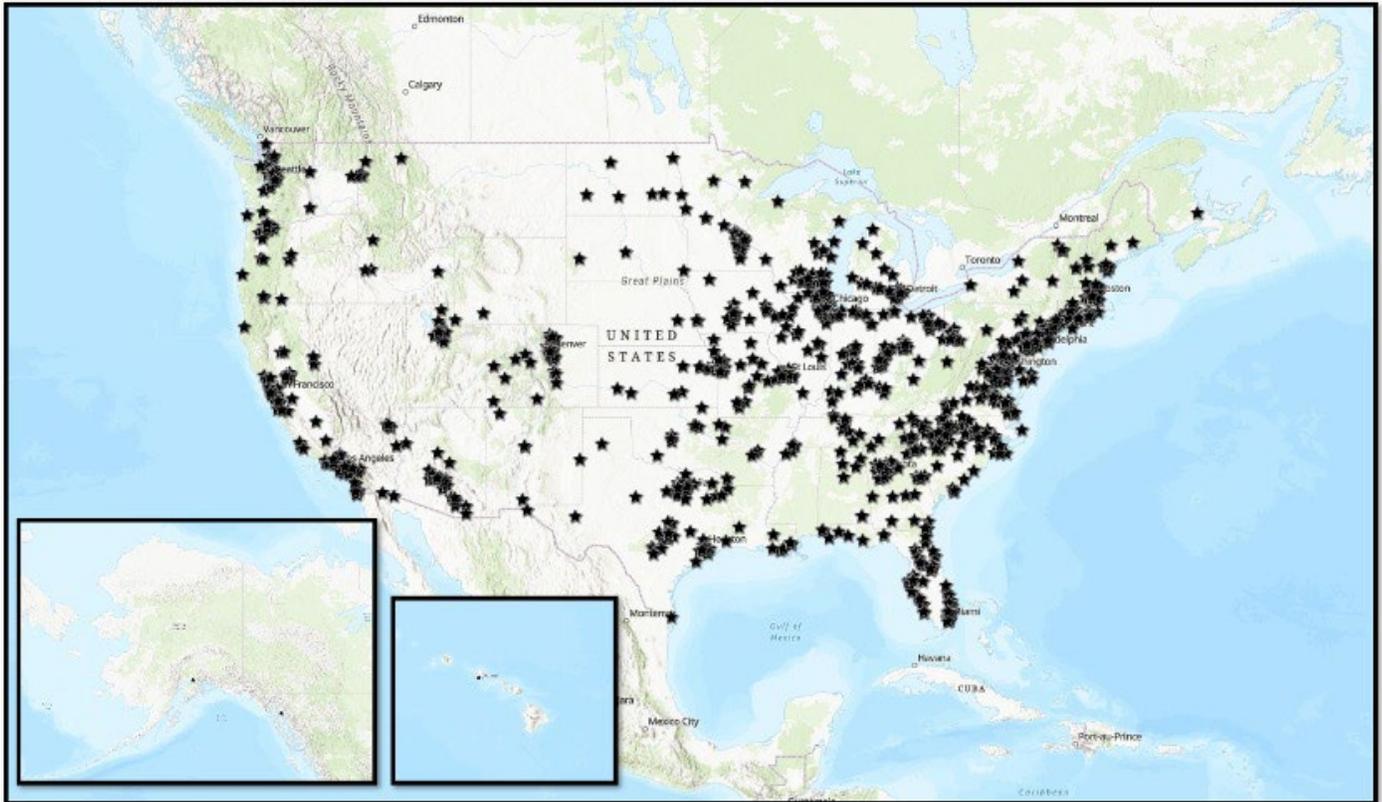
The *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics comprise the most comprehensive park and recreation-related data, benchmarks and insights that inform park and recreation agency professionals, key stakeholders and the public about the state of the park and recreation industry. These resources provide all those who care about quality parks and recreation with various tools.

1. **Guidance on the resources dedicated to and performance of parks and recreation.** How does your local park and recreation agency measure up in terms of providing open spaces, recreation opportunities and programming relative to your peer agencies? Is your agency properly staffed or sufficiently funded compared to others?
2. **Data that enable informed decisions on the optimal set of service and facility offerings.** Park and recreation agency leaders do not make decisions based on a one-size-fits-all standard that does not reflect individual communities' unique circumstances and needs. Instead, these metrics enable park and recreation professionals to compare their agencies with others they view as peers.
3. **Comprehensive data demonstrating the broad offerings and programming that represent the full definition of parks and recreation.** The information in this report helps demonstrate to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public the full breadth of service offerings and responsibilities of park and recreation professionals and their agencies throughout the United States.

Park and recreation professionals can use the *2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics in conjunction with NRPA's other research resources and tools to ensure all members of their community have access to high-quality park and recreation amenities and services.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NRPA is grateful to all the park and recreation professionals and their agencies that completed the Agency Performance Survey in NRPA Park Metrics. Thank you to Kevin Roth, Melissa May, Danielle Doll, Lindsay Collins, Vitisia Paynich, Kim Mabon, Greg Manns and Kate Anderson for making this report possible.



*\*The map indicates the locations of agencies that participated in Park Metrics, whose data are the basis of this report.*

# ABOUT NRPA

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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. We conduct 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 about NRPA research reports and resources at [nrpa.org/Research](https://nrpa.org/Research).



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE VILLAGES RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENT

A hot air balloon lands with passengers in The Villages, Florida.



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