



# NRPA Out-of-School Time Survey Results

Enriching the Lives of Children Through Parks and Recreation





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# INTRODUCTION

Park and recreation agencies are leaders in promoting a better quality of life across the United States. They make this happen through the promotion of the **conservation** of natural lands and preserving animal habitats, improving the **health & wellness** of families and children through pushing for increased activity and expanded access to healthy meals, and pushing for greater **social equity** by closing the hunger and education gaps.



America's local park and recreation agencies promote healthy, prosperous and connected communities every day. Millions of people personally benefit from their local and regional park agencies in many ways – gathering places to meet with friends and family, open spaces to exercise and reap the benefits of clean air and water, and community resources where one can connect to others and nature.

Although people of all ages take advantage of park and recreation agency services, one particular area brightens the futures of one group: children. Park and recreation agencies are a safe place to go when they are not in school. The hours before and after school and when school is out during the summer are challenging and potentially dangerous times for children not under the direct watch of parents, teachers or family. These hours, instead, represent opportunities for learning and personal enrichment that open up greater possibilities for children.

Out-of-school time (OST) programs are critical providers of child care – summer camps, before school and afterschool care – affording parents and caregivers the opportunity to earn a living. These programs also provide education about nature and nutrition, tutoring mentoring and enrichment opportunities that improve the mental, physical and emotional health of youth. More so, OST programs fill a critical need by providing healthy meals to children during out-of-school times. Without these meals, many children would simply go hungry away from school.

For all of the great results OST programs bring to their communities, there remain many opportunities for greater success by serving more children and expanding program offerings. To gain a better understanding of the scope and missions of out-of-school time programs, along with their greatest challenges, the NRPA research team surveyed park and recreation agencies throughout the United States. The study, comprised of a 14-question survey, was sent to park and recreation agency directors during June 2016. The survey generated 396 responses, the data from which are the basis of this report.

## KEY FINDINGS

- *Out-of-school time programs serve children of all ages – although a majority are either elementary or middle school age– and of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.*
- *Child care programs are a major area of emphasis for most out-of-school time programs, followed by athletic leagues, education and tutoring, and enrichment activities.*
- *Out-of-school time programs are a critical source of nutritious meals for children, especially at metropolitan/urban park and recreation agencies.*
- *The biggest challenges keeping out-of-school time programs from greater success and being able to serve more children are funding shortfalls, facility space shortages and inadequate staffing.*

**9 in 10 agencies**  
offer at least one  
out-of-school time program

**57% of agencies**  
provide meals through  
the USDA meal program

## Top OST Programs:



**95%**  
Summer  
Camp



**69%**  
Sports  
Leagues



**39%**  
Tutoring



**22%**  
Mentoring

## Biggest Challenges for OST Programs



**65%**  
Funding  
Shortfalls



**58%**  
Facility Space  
Shortages



**42%**  
Inadequate  
Staffing

# OST PARTICIPANTS AND OFFERINGS

## Out-of-School Time Programs

Nine in 10 park and recreation agencies offer out-of-school time (OST) programs, serving millions of children throughout the United States. The typical park and recreation agency's OST program serves roughly 1,000 children per year, but these programs can vary significantly in the number of children they serve. The typical agency in an urban setting serves 1,400 children per year while the median count of children served in rural and suburban areas is 800. Overall, some agencies provide OST offerings to just a few hundred children while other agencies' programs serve tens of thousands of children.

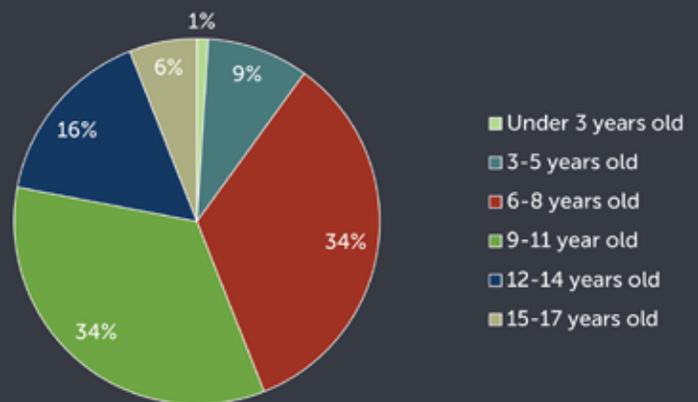
OST programs serve children of all ages, spanning from infants to teenagers about to graduate from high school. But, the overwhelming majority of children participating in OST programs are of elementary or middle school age. Thirty-four percent are between six and eight years old while half are between the ages of nine and 14.

The children served by OST programs are racially and ethnically diverse, reflecting the ability of park and recreation agencies to bring together Americans from a variety of backgrounds, incomes, races, and places. Forty-four percent are non-Hispanic whites while 23 percent are black or African-American. One in five children participating in OST programs are Hispanic or Latino while five percent are Asian/Pacific Islanders and two percent are of Native American or American Indian descent.

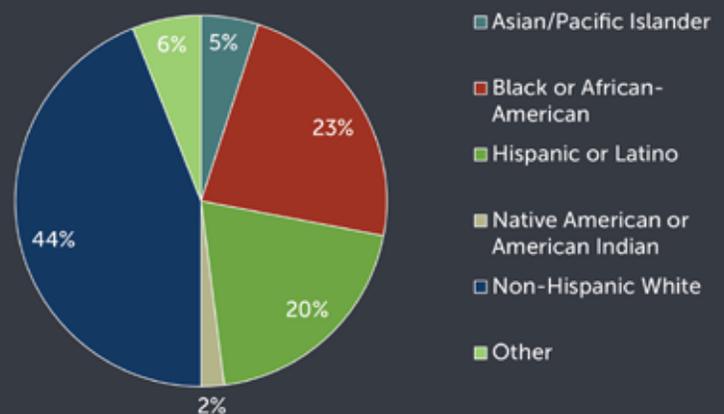
Park and recreation agencies serving metropolitan or urban jurisdictions deliver OST services to an even more diverse population. Thirty percent of the children participating in OST programs at these agencies are black or African-American while 27 percent are Hispanic or Latino. At these same agencies, 28 percent of the children partaking in OST programs are non-Hispanic white, six percent are Asian/Pacific Islander and two percent identify as Native American or American Indian descent.

Park and recreation agencies offer a wide array of OST services to meet the needs of their communities' youth. For many communities, park and recreation agencies are a major provider of child care. In fact, the most common OST offering is summer camp, offered by 95 percent of park and recreation agencies. Further, six in ten agencies offer afterschool care while a quarter of agencies provide before school care.

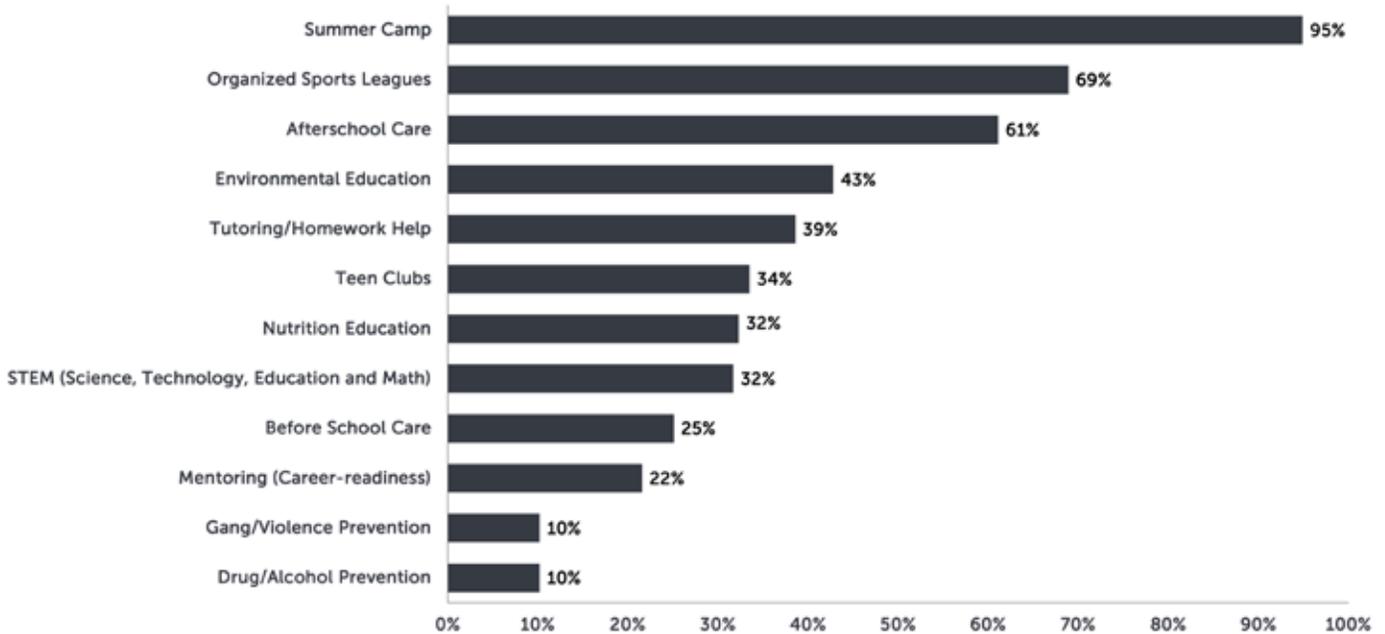
Age Distribution of Out-of-School Time Program Participants  
(Percent Distribution)



Race/Ethnicity of Out-of-School Time Program Participants  
(Percent Distribution)



## Out-of-School Time Program Offerings (Percent of Agencies)

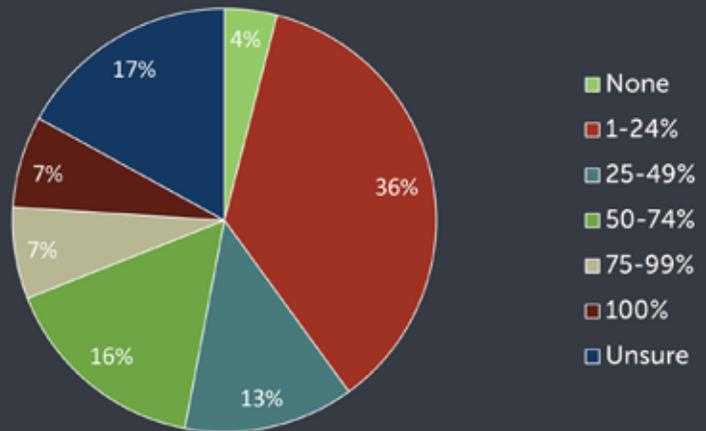


Beyond child care, OST program offerings are split between athletic activities, education and enrichment activities and opportunities. Seven in ten park and recreation agencies include organized sport leagues as a part of their OST program. Learning-focused OST programs include those concentrated on environmental education (43 percent), tutoring/help with homework (39 percent), nutrition education (32 percent) and STEM (science, technology, education and math)(32 percent). These offerings connect children with the great outdoors, help stop summer brain drain and close the education gap, provide a nutritious foundation, and prepare children for the jobs of tomorrow. As part of their OST offerings, some agencies include enrichment opportunities and activities, including teen clubs (34 percent), mentoring (22 percent), drug/alcohol prevention (ten percent) and gang/violence prevention (ten percent).

OST program offerings differ by park and recreation agency to meet the various needs and challenges of the communities they serve. For example, park and recreation agencies located in urban or metropolitan areas are significantly more likely than other agencies to include as part of their OST offerings nutrition education, tutoring/homework, mentoring (e.g., career readiness) and teen clubs.

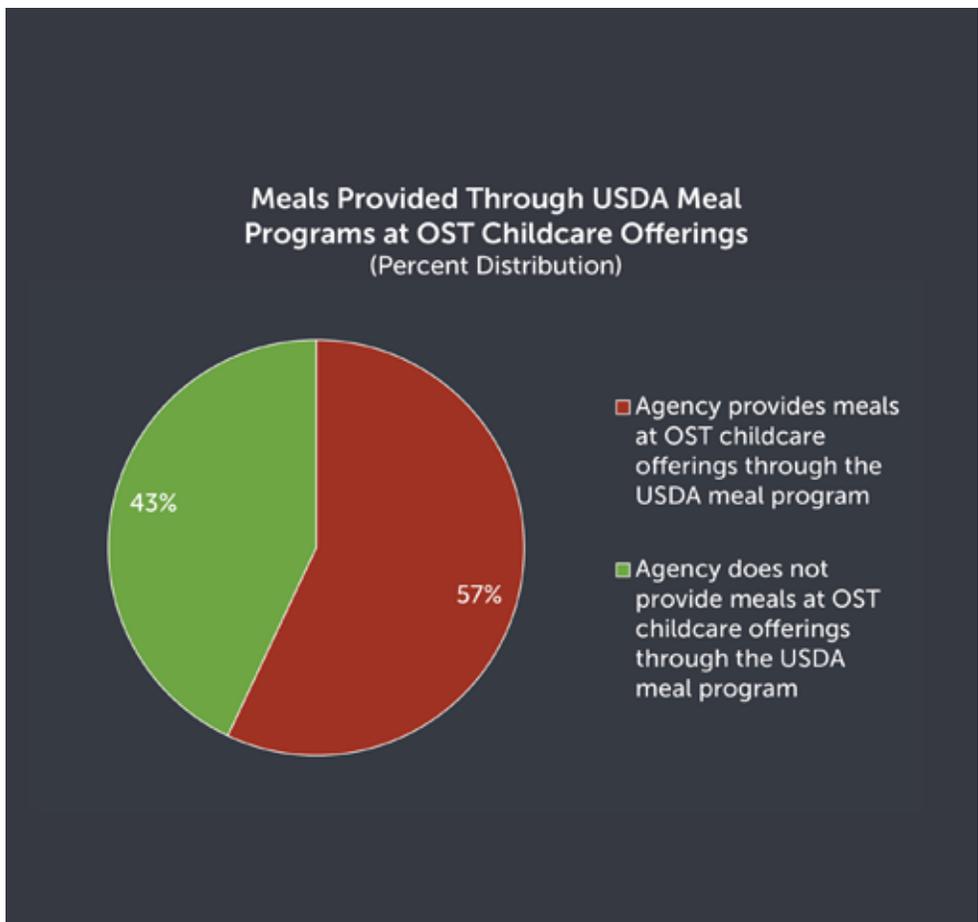
OST programs that offer homework help and tutoring are frequently delivering these services with staff that holds degrees and/or certifications in the subject areas they are teaching. Between a quarter and half of the staff at typical agency that offers homework help and tutoring hold degrees and/or certifications in the areas in which they are offering assistance. This percentage is higher

**Percentage of OST Homework Helpers and Tutors  
with Degrees/Certifications in the Subject Areas**  
(Percent Distribution of Agencies That Offer Homework Help and Tutoring)



at some agencies. Three in ten survey respondents report that at least half of the staff providing homework help and/or tutoring hold relevant degrees and/or certifications, with 15 percent indicating that virtually all staff is credentialed.

These tutors are often using materials that match the current education standards followed by the local public school system when they are assisting the children. A third of survey respondents report that all of the materials used by tutors are up-to-date with the current education standards of the local public school system, with another 47 percent of respondents indicating that the materials partially meet current standards.



Out-of-school time programs are about more than child care, fun activities and education. These programs also are an important source for nutritious meals for many children. Without these meals, many of the children may otherwise go hungry. Fifty-seven percent of park and recreation agencies offering summer camp and before school and/or afterschool care serve meals through USDA meal programs. This can include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and/or the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

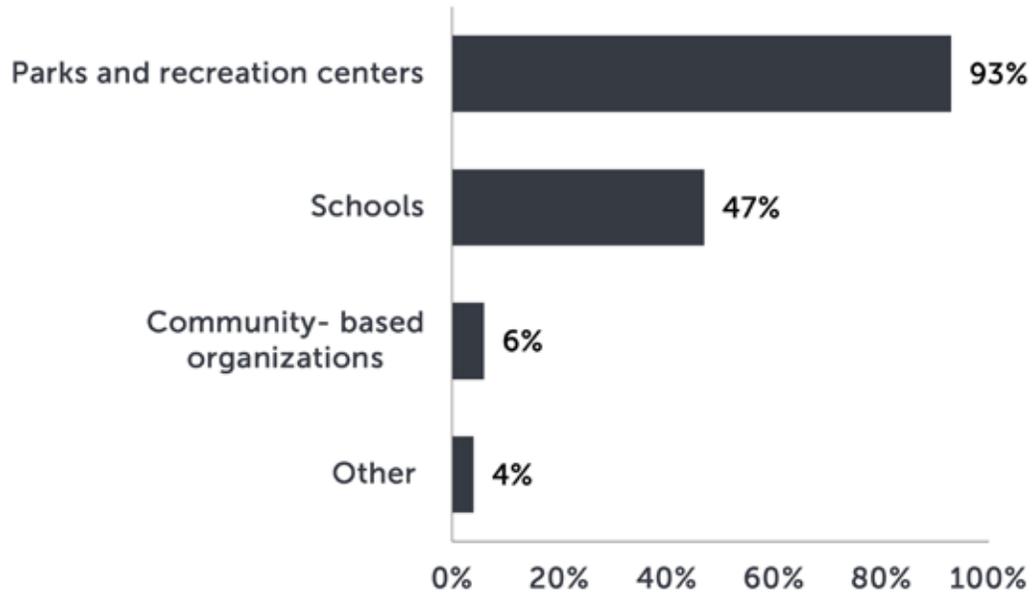
This percentage rises at urban and metropolitan agencies. Seventy-six percent of agencies serving urban or metropolitan areas provide meals as part of their child care offerings. Similarly, 72 percent of agencies with more than half of their OST participants being African-Americans and/or Hispanics offer meals at their child care offerings, regardless of jurisdiction size.

## LOCATIONS AND PARTNERS

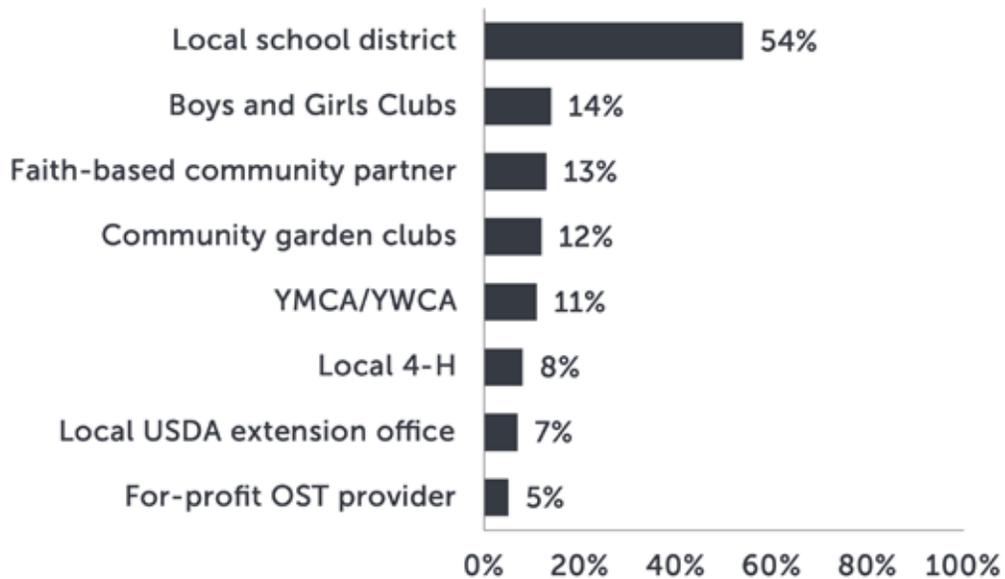
Park and recreation centers are the most likely location for agencies' OST program offerings. More than nine in ten survey respondents indicate that some or all of their agencies' OST programs take place at their own parks and/or recreation centers. Other places that agencies hold at least some of their OST programming includes schools (47 percent) and community-based organizations (e.g., faith-based, YMCA/YWCA, BGCA, etc.).

Park and recreation agencies are not developing and offering their out-of-school time programs on their own. Rather, three-quarters of park and recreation agencies work with outside partners to support their OST offerings, with the most likely outside partner being the local school district (54 percent). Agencies may also partner with local clubs, including Boys and Girls Clubs (14 percent), faith-based community groups (13 percent), community garden clubs (12 percent) and the local YMCA or YWCA (11 percent).

## Locations of Out-of-School Time Programming (Percent of Agencies)



## Outside Partners to Out-of-School Time Programs (Percent of Agencies)

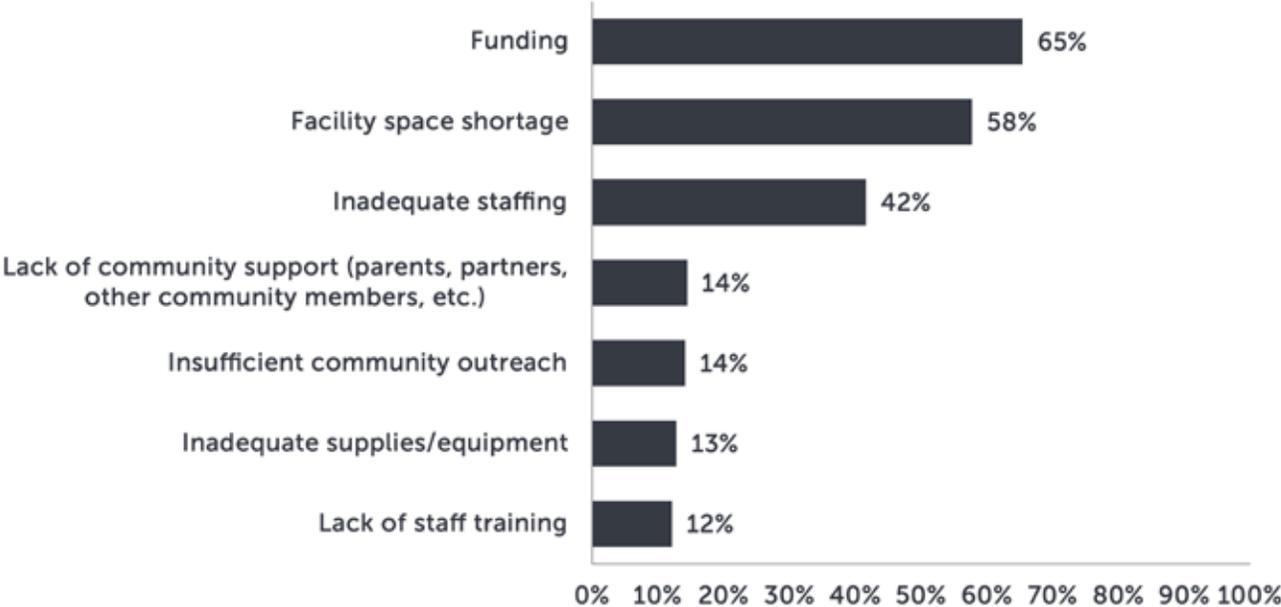


# CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES OF OST PROGRAMS

Park and recreation agencies have become the cornerstone for communities across the country, providing youth with an opportunity to thrive during out-of-school times. Families rely on OST programs to ensure their children receive quality physical activity, nutrition and nature education, healthy meals and snacks, and social opportunities. For many, this is an invaluable service that helps them make ends meet, save on food costs, supplement in-class education and stay healthy.

Even with the many benefits that OST programs bring to their communities today, park and recreation agencies face a number of challenges that are preventing them from expanding these services to even more children in their communities. The two biggest challenges facing agencies have to do with insufficient funding (65 percent) and a shortage of facility space to hold OST programming (58 percent). Just over two in five agencies also face difficulties in the form of inadequate staffing. Fewer agencies' OST programs struggle because of a lack of community support, insufficient community outreach, inadequate supplies/equipment and a lack of staff training. The challenges identified by park and recreation professionals to achieving greater success with their OST programs do not differ significantly by the type of agency (i.e., urban vs. suburban vs. rural) or by the demographic profile of the children they serve.

**Biggest Challenges to Out-of-School Time Programs Faced by Park and Recreation Agencies**  
(Percent of Agencies)



OST Success Stories Shared By Park and Recreation Agencies.

"Thanks to the scholarship program, my daughter has been able to do the dance classes that she looks forward to each week, and we've kept her in swim so that she still gets to connect with those friends and keep her skills up. It's such an amazing program, and it's made ALL the difference for our family."

"CHOICE: When we allowed the children to pick what they wanted to do during the afternoon time and not be forced to follow a counselor's set agenda. We offered 2 to 3 choices of staff-led activities. We witnessed behavioral issues drop by 75 percent and children not wanting to leave during this time in our schedule."

"During the recession, the centers would have been closed if not for some of the agencies stepping forward to manage some of the centers. They started community gardens and literacy programs and promoted health, recreation opportunities and job training."

"Our youth theatre program is an outstanding example of a youth program that teaches positive values of collaboration, cooperation and shared success. The program involves youth at all levels of the theatrical experience, from being on stage to helping on the crew. Young people come to appreciate the opportunities for sharing talent in a number of ways."

"We are a rural city of approximately 17,500 residents. Each summer, we serve over 2,000 participants through our summer camp programs."

"In 2015, we served over 105,000 meals with our Playgrounds Program."

"In general, we have been able to work with our school district partners to provide camp, or before & afterschool care for children who have significant developmental or physical disabilities. Their parents would not otherwise be able to afford care."

"Smiles on the kids' faces during activities. Kids telling their parents to come back later to pick them up. Parents telling staff about how their kids come home excited to tell the stories from the program. Parents telling staff how they went to the program when they were kids and would not allow their kids to miss the same opportunities."

## Examples of Challenges Faced by Parks and Recreation Agencies' OST Programs

"Child care licensing requirements by the county make it difficult for us to provide year-round afterschool programming for K-5 students."

"Staffing for our School's Out and Winter Break Camps is by far the biggest challenge. We have more available staffing during the summer season, but fall and winter is a much different challenge."

"Educating parents & guardians about the importance of nutrition education & physical activities together as a family."

"Funding is always a deciding factor in program offerings and the level and training of staff. Transportation is one area that limits our ability to provide quality programs to as many children as possible. Funding for supplies and equipment is always short. Thank goodness we get support from various local businesses, etc."

"We struggle with balancing our scholarship program with our member-based programs in terms of fairness and social equity."

"Transportation to our sites is probably the single biggest challenge we face since we are on the periphery of a major metropolitan area."

"We have an approximately 3-year waiting list for our afterschool program. We need additional space to accommodate the need."

"Some of our biggest challenges include insufficient community outreach. Marketing to and reaching citizens is important, and as the way we reach our clients changes, we have to adapt to that change and find innovative ways to market our programs."

# CONCLUSION

Park and recreation agencies are perhaps best known for their leadership in conservation, health & wellness, and social equity in their communities. At the same time, these agencies are an important resource to millions of children and families in the United States. Through their out-of-school time (OST) programs, these agencies are a primary provider of before and afterschool care along with summer camps that are invaluable to working families. Children and their parents rely on agencies to provide education about nutrition and the environment, tutoring and mentoring support, nutritious meals or snacks and enrichment activities that promote individual growth.

For all of the success that OST programs have, park and recreation agencies are stymied by a lack of funding, facility shortages and inadequate staffing. Operating within tight fiscal constraints resulting from diminished local government budgets and limited ability to expand their physical presence, park and recreation agencies make a difference in the lives of their community's youth. Access to greater resources and funding are critical to spread these opportunities to more of communities.



## About the Survey

In June 2016, the NRPA Research team sent a 14-question survey to 6,000 park and recreation professionals inquiring about their agencies' out-of-school time (OST) programs. Three hundred and ninety-six agencies responded to the survey, resulting (after removing bounced-back emails and duplicates) approximately an eight percent response rate.



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