

# 2026 NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW





**Cover image:** A group gathers at the Carson Valley Swim Center in Minden, Nevada, to celebrate being voted “Best of Carson Valley” for 10 years in a row.

Photo courtesy of The Record-Courier.

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# How to Use This Report

NRPA's Park Metrics database is the **only** source of nationwide park and recreation benchmarking data that accurately describe agency characteristics. Use this report to understand the data agencies often need to answer important questions during a typical journey as a park and recreation professional.

## BUDGETING

Operating expenditures per capita/acre/FTE, earmarks



Are my agency's operating expenditures per FTE on par with other agencies of a similar size?

## PROGRAMMING

Quantity offered, participants, types



Do most agencies offer daycare services?

## FUNDING

Sources, revenue per capita, cost recovery, capital expenditures, deferred maintenance



Does my agency spend a typical proportion of improvement dollars toward new development versus renovations?

## STAFFING

FTEs, operational areas



What percentage of FTEs do typical park and recreation agencies allocate to operations and maintenance?

## MASTER PLANNING

Parkland, facilities, trails



How does my total acres of parkland per 1,000 residents compare to the typical agency serving a similarly sized population?

# Introduction

Local park and recreation agencies and the professionals who work in this field create environments that support thriving communities. These unique entities shape neighborhoods, provide opportunities for health and well-being, serve as environmental havens and offer facilities where communities of all sizes can gather.

Recognizing the wants and needs of the residents they serve, park and recreation professionals are keenly aware of the necessary balance between providing vital services and working within the confines of budgetary restrictions. Maintaining accurate knowledge of current assets and planning for future needs are critical for every park and recreation agency. To assist individual agencies in evaluating their programs and making critical decisions that will benefit their communities, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) collects annual nationwide data on characteristics of agencies, including types of programs offered, size of population served, budget and staffing. This report provides summaries of these data.

## About the Review

Park and recreation agencies nationwide used the [NRPA Park Metrics](#) survey tool to self-report all data included in this review. The *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review* presents data from the more than 850 unique park and recreation agencies across the country that completed the Agency Performance Survey within Park Metrics from 2023 to 2025. Note that not all agencies answered every survey question.

This report highlights the characteristics of park and recreation agencies across the country in terms of facilities, programming, budget and other facets of agencies. These results are not standards that agencies

should strive to meet. Instead, they represent a snapshot of current circumstances that agencies can use for benchmarking. Throughout this report, the term “typical agency” refers to the median — the middle value in a set of numbers where 50 percent of data points are above and 50 percent are below. When possible, the report includes the lower quartile (25th percentile) and upper quartile (75th percentile) for a fuller view of the data.

Why not showcase averages instead? Agencies participating in this survey serve populations ranging from a few hundred to several million residents and have operating budgets varying from less than \$20,000 to more than \$100 million. These extreme values may skew averages. Therefore, medians are a more stable measurement. If appropriate, the report also will include and clearly identify averages.

## Additional Information

The data in this report are presented at a high level with minimal details. While all benchmark figures contain overall results representative of the entire United States, additional breakdowns of these figures by community and agency characteristics are available on NRPA’s website, allowing readers to recognize even more powerful evidence regarding the vital work of park and recreation professionals and their agencies. Visit the [NRPA Agency Performance Review webpage](#) to use an interactive tool to filter results by population, population density, budget, jurisdiction type, region, number of full-time equivalents (FTEs), number of parks and acres of parks maintained.

Additionally, visit the [NRPA Park Metrics webpage](#) to learn more about this survey and the suite of benchmarking reporting tools. We encourage park and recreation agencies to create a Park Metrics account or

log in to an existing agency account to build a more customized benchmark report based on specific agency size, type and geographic region. You also may use this tool to generate reports to further assist with analysis of an agency's needs and to identify peer agencies with similar characteristics.



You will see this icon throughout the report to indicate an example of how park and recreation agencies have used Park Metrics data to answer important questions.

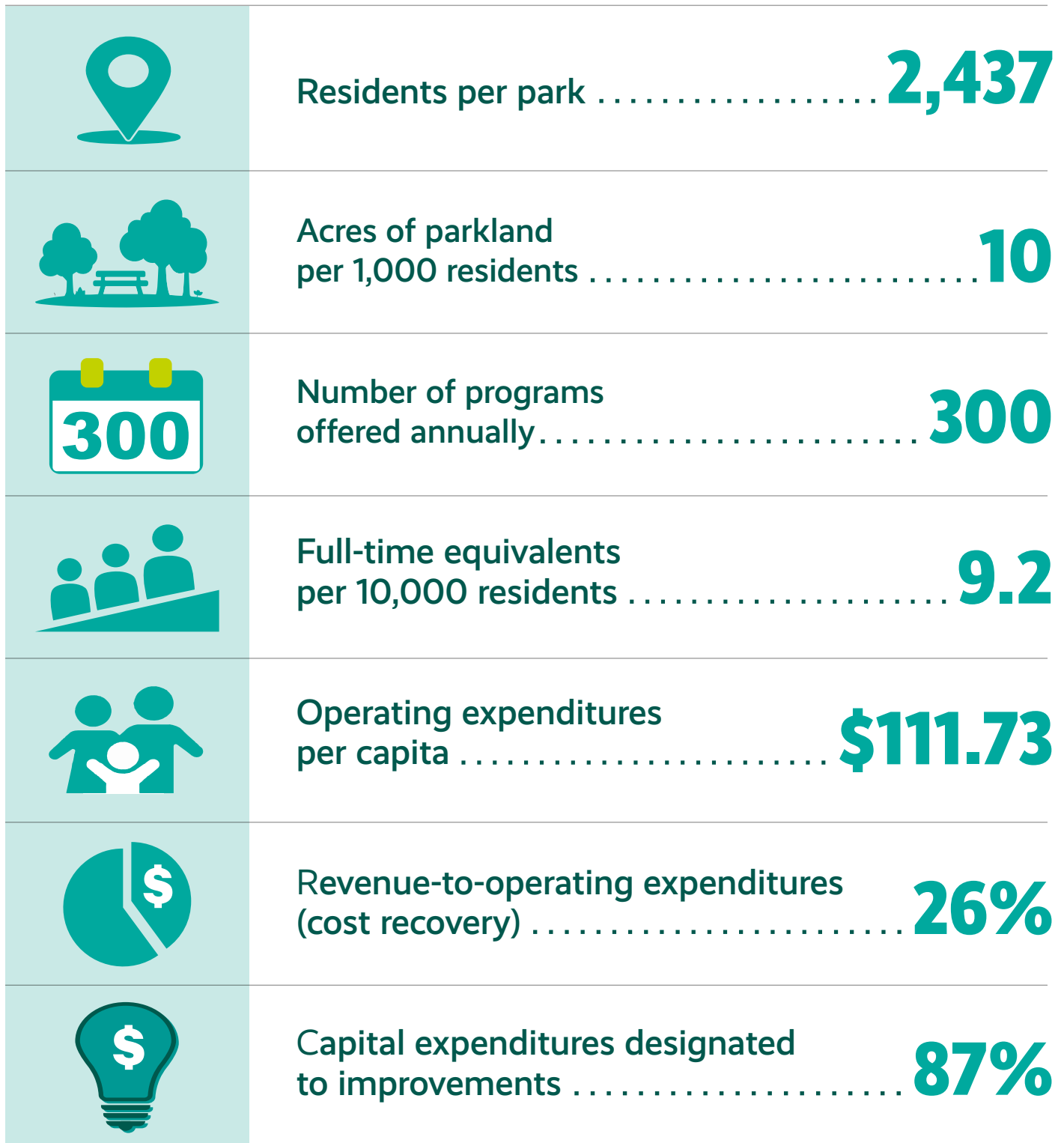
People participate in Cycling Without Age, which offers adaptive bike rides, in Akron, Ohio.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUMMIT METRO (OHIO) PARKS

# Infographic

## 2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review Key Findings



\*These numbers represent the typical U.S. park and recreation agency

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PHOTO COURTESY OF AMMON PIERCE

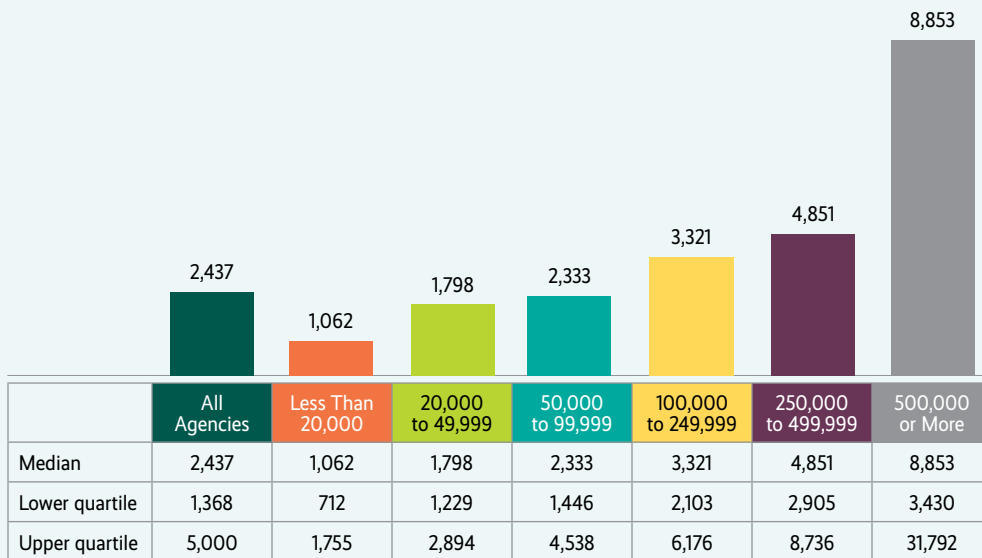
Dogs participate in a dog swim event called "Dog Days" in Fruita, Colorado.

# Park Facilities

Park and recreation professionals provide their communities with vital infrastructure that fosters a sense of togetherness while recognizing the uniqueness of the individuals they serve. The indoor and outdoor facilities operated by local park and recreation professionals serve a multitude of purposes, like promoting health and well-being, providing spaces where all are welcome, providing shelters in emergencies and mitigating the impacts of natural disasters.

Park sizes range from small neighborhood “pocket parks” to large regional parks. In heavily populated jurisdictions, a single park may serve many thousands of residents. It is vital to ensure that all people have access to quality parks, whether through preserving existing parks and green spaces or requiring these spaces as part of newly developed neighborhoods. **The typical park and recreation agency has one park per every 2,437 residents.**

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



Not all lands managed by local park and recreation agencies are formal parks. Many agencies are responsible for non-park sites such as the courtyards around government buildings, green spaces used for flood

management and numerous other open spaces. For this report, “parkland” refers to both formal parks and non-park sites. **The typical park and recreation agency manages 10 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.**

A mother reads a storybook to her daughter during Monday Funday, a toddler-focused program that encourages early childhood development through recreation in Palm Coast, Florida.

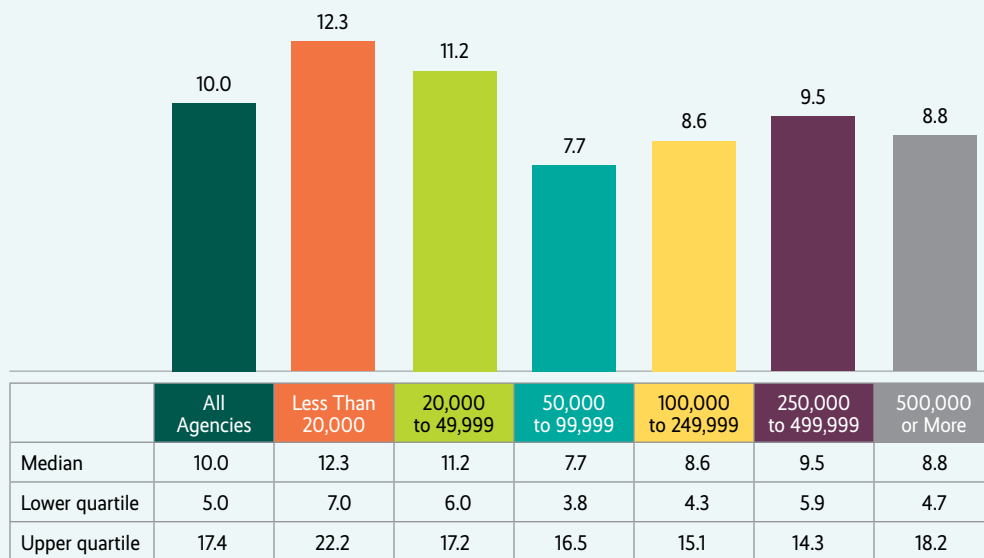


PHOTO COURTESY OF ISABELLE BRENNES

## Attracting New Residents

A park and recreation agency in the western United States serving a population of about 490,000 people calculated that it has 1,950 residents per park. Its location is known for access to outdoor spaces, and they want to develop a marketing campaign to encourage new residents who value outdoor recreation to move to the area. To see if it is performing on par with other agencies serving similar population sizes, the director examines Figure 1 in the *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and finds that the typical U.S. agency of its size has 4,851 residents per park. The city marketing and communications team then uses this information to support the message that their city offers more abundant parkland for residents compared to a typical U.S. city.

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



Park and recreation professionals recognize the importance of outdoor facilities that enable families and the community to gather, socialize, enjoy nature and exercise however they prefer. A single tot lot for toddlers or a pickleball court for older adults may serve thousands of residents. Ninety-six percent of park and recreation agencies provide playgrounds in their local communities for all ages. Overall, agencies have one playground

per 3,710 residents. Playground data can be broken down further based on age and accessibility. Sixty-seven percent of park and recreation agencies offer tot lots dedicated to children ages 2 to 5, 69 percent offer playgrounds primarily dedicated to kids ages 5 to 12, and 61 percent of all playgrounds include play elements for children with differing abilities.

**FIGURE 3: OUTDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

BY PREVALENCE AND POPULATION PER FACILITY

Median Number of Residents per Facility

Population of Jurisdiction

Types of Facilities	Percent of Agencies	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 249,999	250,000 to 499,999	500,000 or More
Playgrounds#	96%	3,710	1,866	3,010	3,656	4,922	6,502	13,907
Basketball courts*	87%	8,634	4,928	7,934	8,881	9,595	16,558	22,497
Diamond fields	77%	5,257	2,165	3,650	5,287	7,246	8,821	13,628
Tennis courts*	76%	7,278	3,238	6,646	7,242	8,239	11,959	13,714
Dog parks	71%	48,539	10,311	26,147	54,684	71,032	97,645	154,123
Rectangular fields	71%	6,839	3,400	4,294	6,291	7,187	11,885	18,007
Volleyball courts*	58%	24,991	6,880	16,569	26,454	34,728	42,314	90,521
Fitness zones+	56%	33,188	7,421	23,138	32,294	37,819	75,801	99,842
Splash pads+	56%	44,052	12,304	28,000	39,138	65,806	103,016	172,057
Community garden plots	55%	42,472	9,857	26,437	56,816	63,576	129,360	106,537
Swimming pools	53%	48,461	9,138	27,262	46,888	59,742	102,121	143,541
Disc golf courses	51%	66,898	9,514	32,812	61,480	106,552	164,442	390,249
Walking/Running tracks+	51%	16,570	6,500	15,233	17,881	36,209	26,241	74,296
Pickleball courts*	50%	10,657	2,667	6,537	8,333	17,280	22,719	69,929
Skateboard parks	48%	58,404	11,028	34,275	60,576	104,592	170,914	258,016
Multiuse racquet courts^	41%	16,651	4,375	10,723	13,234	29,750	54,814	46,911
Multiuse courts^	35%	26,534	5,323	21,477	28,262	41,034	64,380	92,287
Driving range stations	34%	27,830	6,978	23,382	33,449	11,606	85,889	260,035
Eighteen-hole golf courses	34%	102,422	11,904	34,275	64,096	118,723	153,690	305,726
Synthetic fields+	23%	43,643	12,778	24,096	35,523	51,041	85,416	131,955
Nine-hole golf courses	19%	130,822	11,790	36,000	65,000	140,880	284,771	611,731
Overlay fields	18%	19,189	8,570	12,504	25,500	16,897	36,269	83,126
Waterparks	18%	67,892	15,000	33,544	62,469	164,118	253,886	679,157
Ice rinks	17%	25,000	8,894	21,075	26,179	110,000	170,000	729,000
Racquetball/Handball/Squash courts	9%	45,060	14,000	ID	29,500	34,000	121,910	100,000

#Includes all playgrounds regardless of age or ability of intended user. \*Dedicated to a single sport (not multiuse). +Fitness zones/exercise stations; splash pads/spray grounds/spray showers; walking/running tracks/loops; synthetic rectangular fields. ^Multiuse courts: basketball, volleyball, etc.; multiuse racquet courts: tennis, pickleball, etc. (excluding racquetball/handball/squash courts). ID= insufficient data

Indoor recreation facilities offer year-round opportunities. These facilities within recreation centers, aquatics centers, community centers and more offer solo and group activities from pick-up basketball games to aqua aerobics. **Forty-five percent of park and recreation agencies provide indoor multiuse courts. Overall, agencies have one indoor multiuse court per 23,568 residents.**

Pools are a large investment for agencies of any budget. Slightly more than a third of park and recre-

ation agencies (34%) operate, maintain or manage indoor swimming facilities or indoor water parks. Twenty-five percent of agencies have competitive swimming pools (measuring 25 yards/25 meters or larger), while 23 percent have leisure pools (measuring less than 25 yards/25 meters). Sixteen percent of park and recreation agencies offer therapeutic pools (characterized as pools with zero-grade entry and/or heated for therapeutic benefit).

### FIGURE 4: INDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

BY PREVALENCE AND POPULATION PER FACILITY

Median Number of Residents per Facility

Population of Jurisdiction

Types of Facilities	Percent of Agencies	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 249,999	250,000 to 499,999	500,000 or More
Multiuse courts <sup>^</sup>	45%	23,568	5,546	14,615	26,250	41,034	56,061	81,433
Basketball courts <sup>*</sup>	32%	23,839	5,799	16,842	24,583	61,880	81,400	65,000
Walking/Running tracks <sup>+</sup>	27%	55,250	10,156	34,573	62,014	116,616	193,321	500,350
Competitive swimming pools	25%	68,722	10,197	37,306	64,150	116,998	284,771	308,216
Leisure pools	23%	70,440	13,000	34,495	64,028	112,022	255,012	604,735
Multiuse racquet courts <sup>^</sup>	19%	17,138	3,711	9,000	15,312	38,823	78,746	161,043
Therapeutic pools	16%	81,127	11,000	33,556	64,908	151,000	278,410	592,619
Pickleball courts <sup>*</sup>	14%	15,893	4,250	14,131	17,240	29,849	77,060	100,717
Racquetball/Handball/Squash courts	12%	35,220	6,884	15,262	38,030	57,834	86,048	364,500
Tennis courts <sup>*</sup>	5%	25,414	N/A	8,973	10,438	41,245	52,892	114,743

<sup>\*</sup>Dedicated to a single sport (not multiuse). <sup>+</sup>Walking/running tracks/loops; synthetic rectangular fields. <sup>^</sup>Multiuse courts: basketball, volleyball, etc.; multiuse racquet courts: tennis, pickleball, etc. (not including racquetball/handball/squash).

Park and recreation professionals operate, maintain and manage buildings of varying sizes and uses. Programming within building facilities, such as recreation centers, teen centers and senior centers, provides integral opportunities for community members to gather, learn and be active. **Sixty-seven percent of**

**park and recreation agencies operate recreation centers. Overall, agencies have one recreation center per 33,231 residents.** The buildings under the care of parks and recreation are not only for sports. They also may include amphitheaters, nature centers, and restroom facilities in parks and sports fields.

# Master Planning for Older Adult Facilities and Programming



A city in Virginia with an aging population of a little less than 250,000 people is working on master planning. Needs surveys in several communities have indicated more services and support for older adults are necessary. The park and recreation director calculated that the city has one senior center per about 231,000 residents and wants to know if she can justify planning for at least one additional senior facility. Using Figure 5 in the *2026 NRPA Annual Performance Review*, she learns that the median number of residents per senior facility for similarly sized jurisdictions in the United States is 128,957. She presents this information to support a planned addition of one dedicated center for older adults in an area of the city that has the strongest need for, and interest in, older adult support and programming.

**FIGURE 5: TYPES OF INDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES AND AMENITIES**

BY PREVALENCE AND POPULATION PER FACILITY

Median Number of Residents per Facility

Population of Jurisdiction

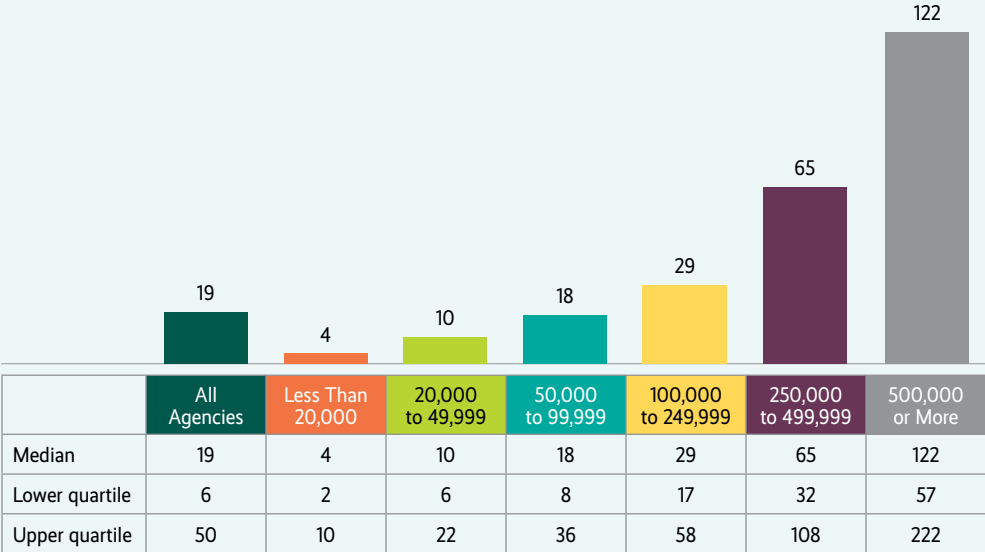
Types of Facilities	Percent of Agencies	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 249,999	250,000 to 499,999	500,000 or More
Permanent and semipermanent restrooms	76%	5,270	2,627	4,756	5,498	7,130	9,364	12,900
Recreation centers (including gyms)	67%	33,231	9,634	25,198	33,231	62,282	50,891	77,004
Community centers	60%	37,858	11,523	29,722	55,698	59,398	90,000	115,470
Performance amphitheaters	44%	68,658	12,000	34,858	60,675	109,350	266,056	491,026
Senior centers	43%	66,375	14,120	35,000	63,548	128,957	167,043	501,787
Facilities with restrooms available free of use to public not included above	39%	16,116	5,252	10,454	16,257	27,353	35,675	77,569
Nature centers	36%	151,731	9,715	37,066	64,096	148,322	278,226	499,374
Aquatics centers	32%	56,850	13,000	32,226	60,472	102,113	161,986	296,131
Stadiums	19%	102,647	5,435	33,597	62,314	138,333	246,246	780,995
Teen centers	13%	79,377	10,139	32,798	63,000	127,151	313,286	445,527
Indoor ice rinks	12%	58,308	9,700	22,696	51,000	106,395	305,344	604,735
Arenas	10%	100,382	7,000	25,000	66,898	123,102	ID	696,549

ID= insufficient data

Local park and recreation agencies connect communities through vast networks of trails. Whether for a leisurely bike ride or a walking commute to work, trails combine recreation and function by providing access to routes free from traffic. **The typical park and rec-**

**reation agency is responsible for managing and/or maintaining 19 miles of trails.** This figure increases as the jurisdiction population served by an agency increases. Agencies serving populations of 500,000 or more typically manage nearly 125 miles of trails.

**FIGURE 6: MILES OF TRAILS**  
(MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION



People use a walking and bike trail in Orlando, Florida.

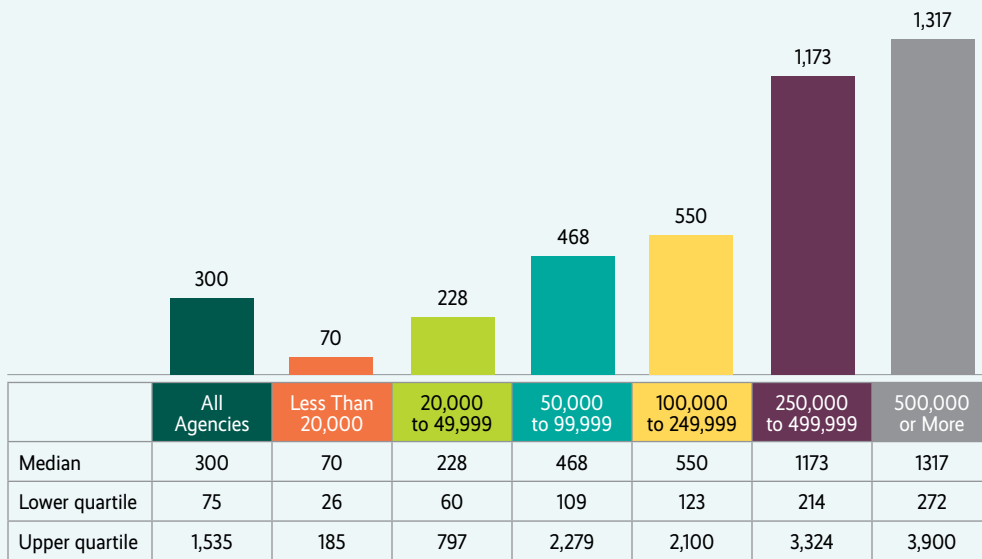
PHOTO COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK

# Programming and Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Agencies

Park and recreation professionals strive to understand the needs and wants of their communities and provide ample program opportunities that best suit those varied desires. **The typical park and recreation agency offers 300 programs annually, of which 80 percent**

**are fee-based.** Offering programs at low cost or no cost ensures more people will be able to take advantage of all that parks and recreation has to offer. In some jurisdictions, agencies have established a model of no-cost programming, while other agencies are expected to recoup all of their programming expenses or more.

**FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF PROGRAMS OFFERED ANNUALLY (MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION**



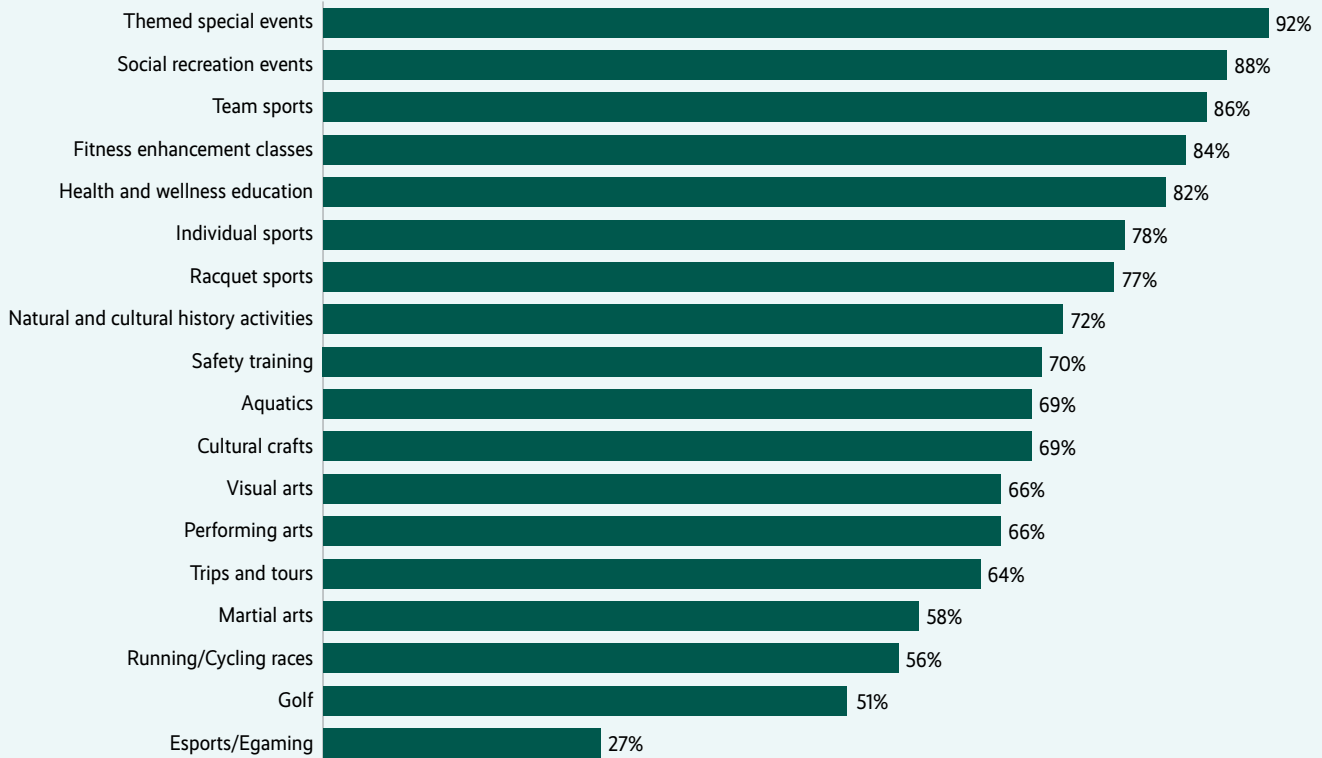
**FIGURE 7.1: PERCENT OF ALL PROGRAMS THAT ARE FEE-BASED**

	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 249,999	250,000 to 499,999	500,000 or More
Median	80%	83%	81%	84%	84%	70%	58%
Lower quartile	52%	67%	54%	67%	49%	40%	17%
Upper quartile	94%	92%	96%	93%	95%	92%	86%

A vast array of programming is offered through local parks and recreation. Programming can be activities, events, clubs, teams, classes or other types of group activities. **More than 9 in 10 park and recreation agencies (92%) offer themed special events such as**

**movies or concerts in the park, cultural events and holiday festivities.** Meeting people within the community, learning new skills and being active are some of the program outcomes in parks and recreation.

**FIGURE 8: PROGRAMMING OFFERED BY PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES**  
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)



**FIGURE 9: PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON CHILDREN, OLDER ADULTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**  
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)

	All Agencies	Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 249,999	250,000 to 499,999	500,000 or More
Summer camps	84%	68%	84%	92%	86%	92%	93%
Specific older adult programs	80%	64%	82%	89%	84%	84%	82%
Specific teen programs	71%	55%	66%	81%	76%	77%	77%
Programs for people with disabilities	70%	35%	68%	82%	78%	87%	82%
STEM* programs	62%	44%	50%	72%	69%	75%	75%
After-school programs	56%	50%	43%	57%	56%	74%	71%
Preschool	32%	22%	37%	42%	29%	35%	26%
Before-school programs	17%	13%	18%	22%	14%	17%	22%
Full-day care	9%	6%	4%	15%	7%	11%	11%

\*STEM: science, technology, engineering and math

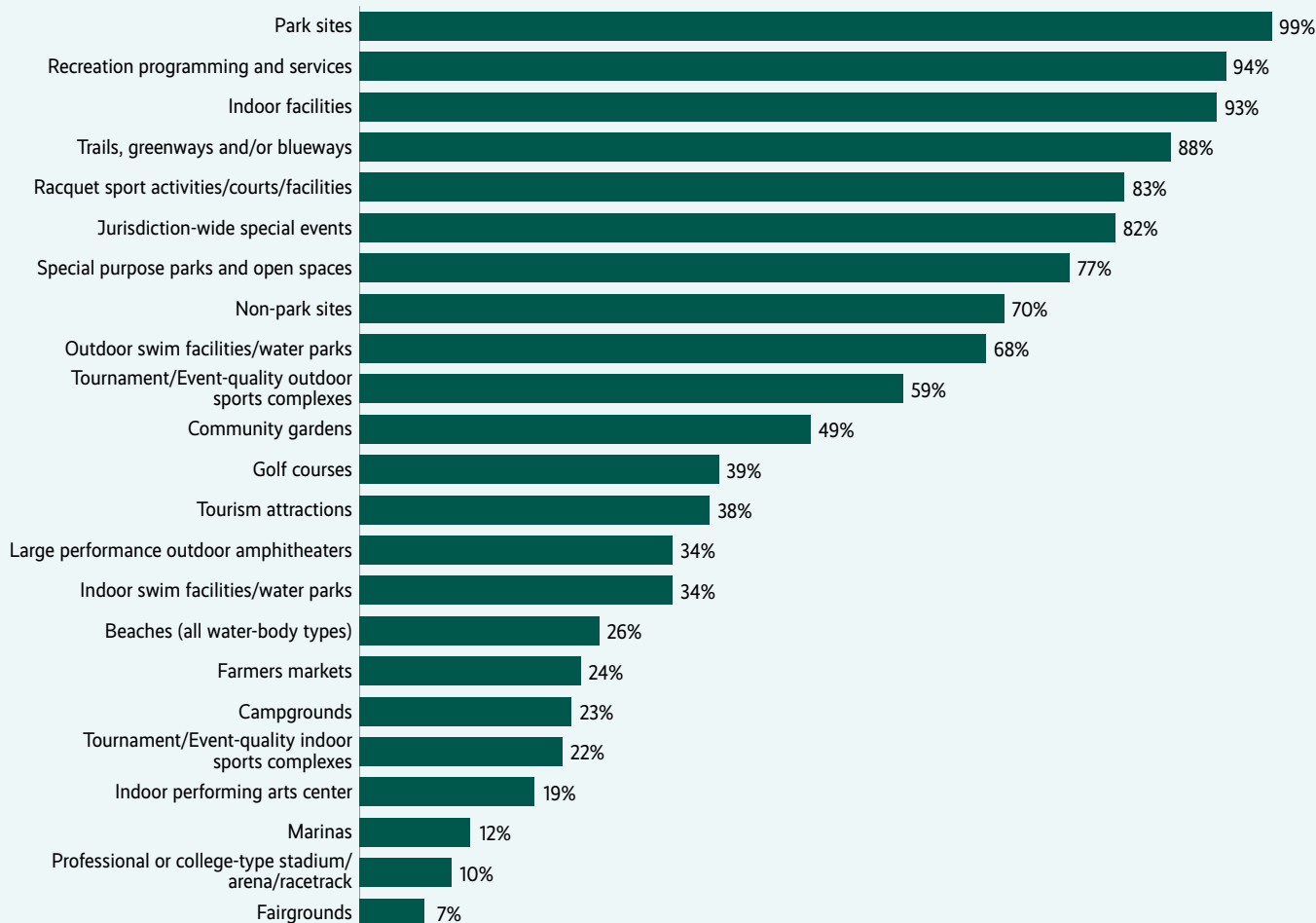
Most park and recreation agencies operate programs year-round for all ages and abilities. Summer camps, full-day care for youth and programs for older adults can provide reliable, low-cost and safe options for parents and caregivers. **Eighty-four percent of all park and recreation agencies offer summer camps, 80 percent offer older adult programming, and 70 percent offer programs for people with disabilities.**

Whether operating park sites, maintaining indoor facilities, contracting campgrounds, administering sports complexes or managing trails, local parks and recreation is responsible for a variety of community assets. Not every community has an agency that is responsi-

ble for both parks and recreation. **Nearly all agencies (99%) operate and maintain park sites, and 94 percent provide recreation services.**

The responsibilities that an agency assumes often can depend on jurisdiction type. While 23 percent of agencies overall operate, maintain or contract campgrounds, 53 percent of county park and recreation agencies are responsible for these spaces. County park and recreation agencies are also more likely than municipal agencies overall to manage, maintain or contract tourism attractions (53% versus 38%, respectively) and manage or maintain beaches (45% versus 26%, respectively).

**FIGURE 10: RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES**  
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)



# Staffing



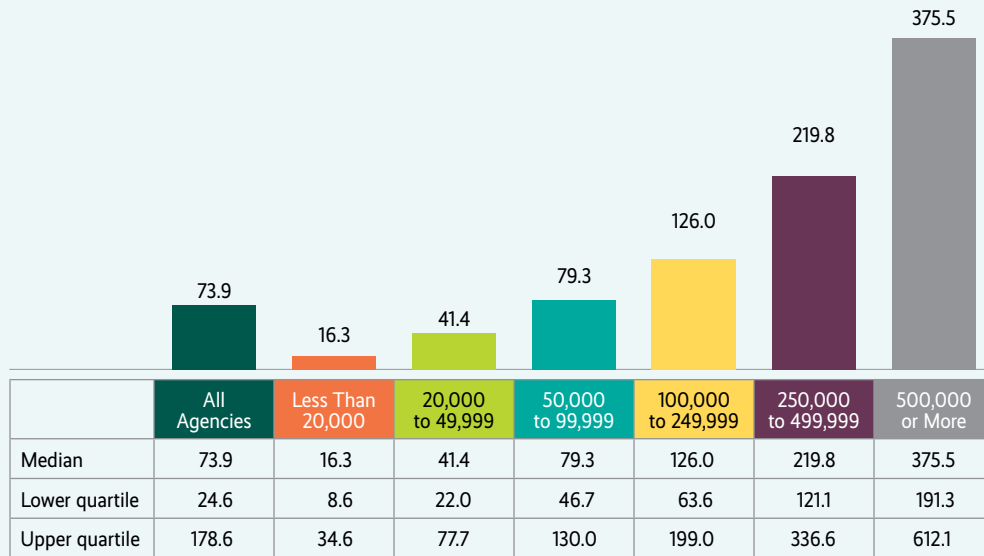
PHOTO COURTESY OF PANAMA CITY (FLORIDA) PARKS, CULTURE AND RECREATION

Members of FloridaCorps plant trees and give trees away during quarterly tree giveaways in Panama City, Florida.

**P**ark and recreation professionals care for myriad facilities and programs, resulting in communities that are vibrant and enjoyable places to live. These professionals strive for safe and welcoming spaces for all, and it is imperative that agencies receive sufficient funding to adequately staff facilities, events and programs. **The**

**typical park and recreation agency has 73.9 full-time equivalents (FTEs) on staff.** This number increases as the population an agency serves increases. Agencies in jurisdictions with more than half a million residents have a median staff of 375.5 FTEs and more than 600 FTEs in the upper quartile of that same population group.

**FIGURE 11: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY STAFFING: FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION**



A different way to look at staffing levels is by number of FTEs per 10,000 residents. **The typical park and recreation agency has 9.2 FTEs for every 10,000 residents.** As seen in Figure 12, as population size increases, the ratio

of FTEs per 10,000 residents decreases. For example, jurisdictions of fewer than 20,000 people have 16 FTEs per 10,000 residents, while jurisdictions of 500,000 or more have 4.1 FTEs for every 10,000 residents.

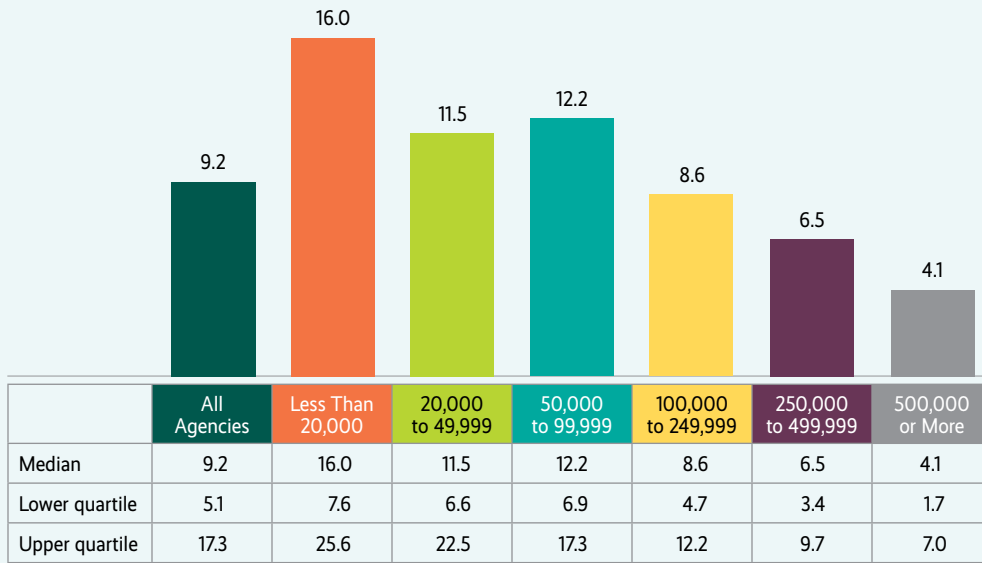
## Data-Driven Staffing Decisions



A large city in the southern United States needs to cut 15 percent across the board from staff FTEs in the new municipal budget. The director of parks and recreation needs benchmarking data to determine where staffing cuts may be the least disruptive based on national benchmarks. In the *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, the director examines Figure 11 to find that the agency's 575 total FTEs does, indeed, exceed the typical total number of FTEs for park and recreation agencies that serve similar populations across the nation. Still, the director wants more information about how the FTEs for agency roles compare to other agencies. Using the national rates of FTEs by role in Figure 13, the director learns that the agency's operations/maintenance FTE rates (21%) are much lower than those of the typical U.S. agency (45%) and the agency's programming FTE rate (41%) are higher than the typical U.S. agency (32%). To explore more deeply, the agency director uses the side-by-side custom report in the [Park Metrics](#) tool and learns that other agencies serving similar populations in the state are much closer to national benchmarks. Using this information, the director now has initial evidence to look more closely at cutting programming staffing instead of operations/maintenance staffing as an option for reductions.

**FIGURE 12: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY STAFFING: FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS PER 10,000 RESIDENTS**

(MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION

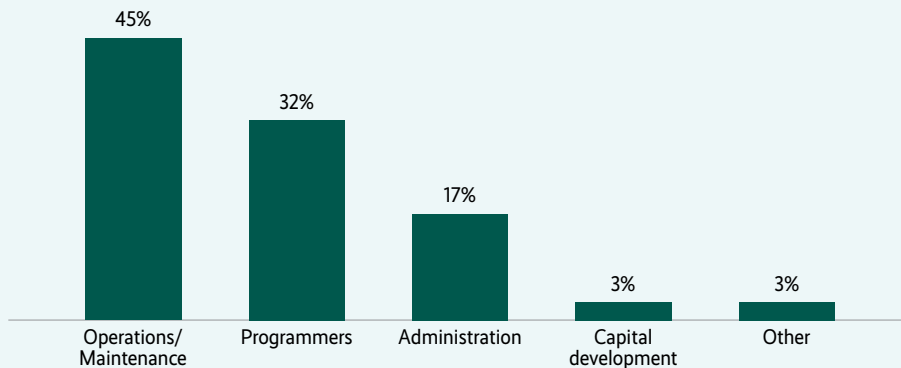


Park and recreation professionals have many titles and play many roles. Directors, maintenance foremen, aquatics specialists and many others make up the passionate and dedicated teams found within local parks and recreation. **Forty-five percent of park and recreation agency personnel are involved in operations/**

**maintenance, and 32 percent are devoted to programming.** Slightly less than a quarter of staff (23%) account for administrative, capital development or other roles. This division of roles changes little regardless of population, budget, jurisdiction type or region.

**FIGURE 13: OPERATIONAL AREAS OF PARK AND RECREATION STAFF**

(AVERAGE) PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGENCY FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS



# Budget



A person plants a fruit tree to combat food insecurity at Yerba Buena Gardens Conservancy in San Francisco, California.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUBHAJEET GHOSE

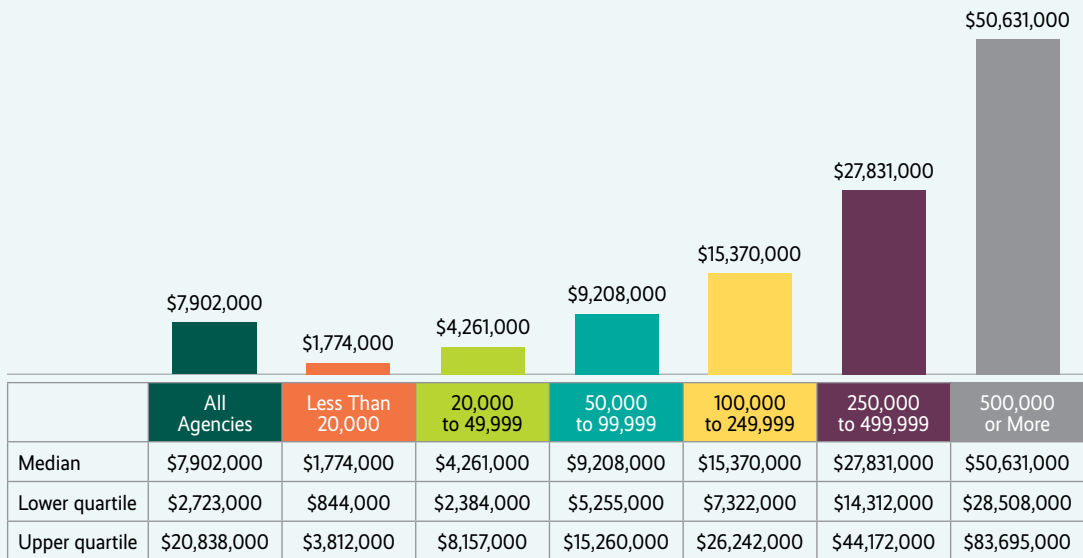
## Annual Operating Budget

Determining the fiscal capabilities of a park and recreation agency requires in-depth knowledge of personnel services, contracts, commodities and supplies, and capital. Establishing an annual operating budget that, at a minimum, satisfies the needs of the community and meets the goals of key leaders of the

governing body (i.e., mayor, board of directors) is a vital balancing act.

**The typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenditures of \$7,901,989.** Special park districts have the highest amount of median operating expenditures: more than \$12 million.

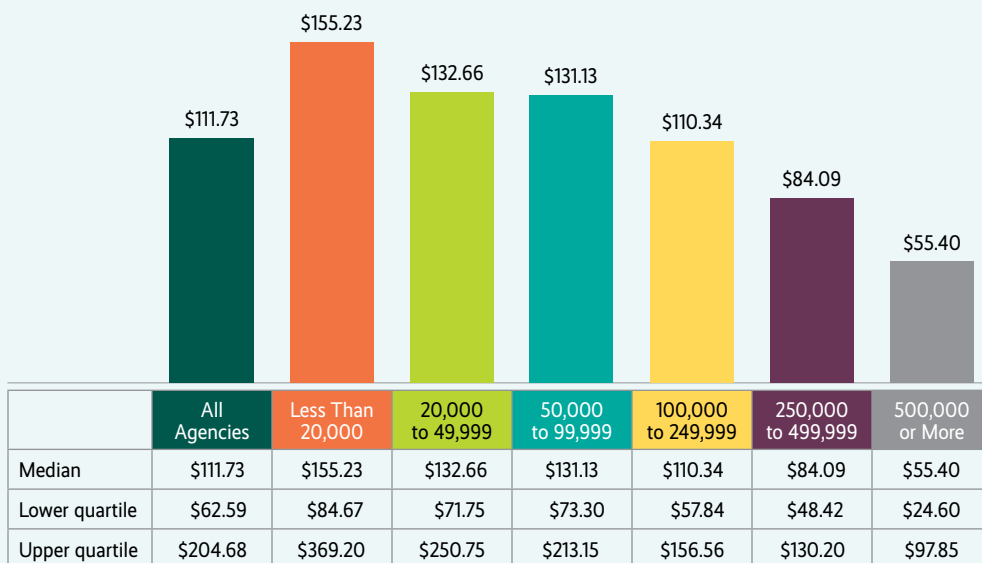
**FIGURE 14: ANNUAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES**  
(ROUNDED MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION



Viewing annual operating budgets in a variety of ways gives a more complete picture of how and where budgeting and spending occur across parks and recreation. While total operating expenditures increase with population, that pattern nearly reverses when examining operating expenditures per capita (per person). **The typical park and recreation agency has operating**

**expenditures of \$111.73 per capita.** Agencies serving a population of 100,000 or more have lower operating expenditures per capita than those serving less populated jurisdictions. Special park districts report the highest operating expenditures per capita — a median of \$217.89 per capita.

**FIGURE 15: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA**  
(MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION

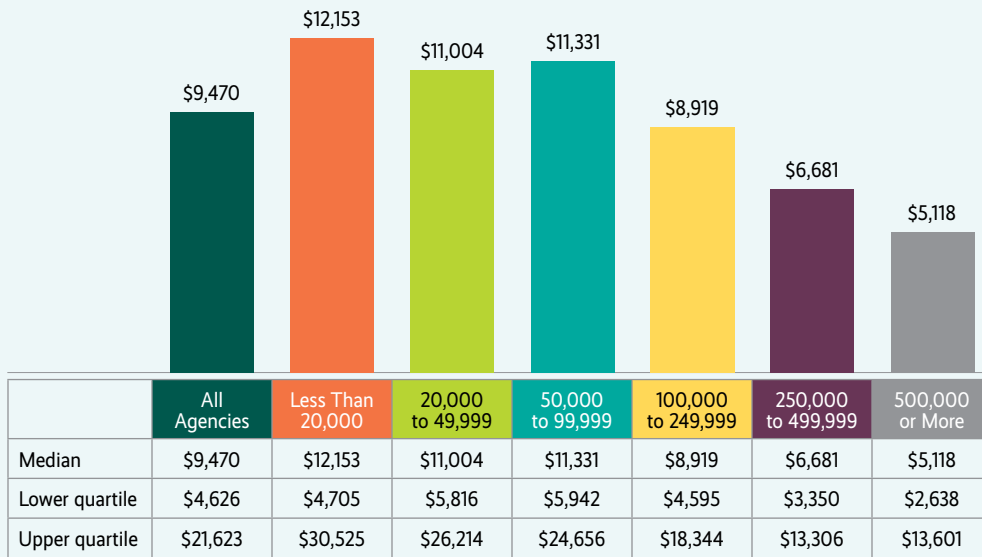


Evaluating operating expenditures by acre of park and non-park sites provides another look into where expenses occur. **The typical park and recreation agency has operating expenditures of \$9,470 per acre of park and non-park sites.**

agency manages or maintains than by only the number of parks managed or maintained. Park and recreation agencies that maintain 250 acres or less have a median operating expenditure per acre of park and non-park sites of \$21,094. Conversely, park and recreation agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres have a median operating expenditure per acre of park and non-park sites of \$3,692.

Data show that operating expenditures are affected more by the number of park and non-park acres an

**FIGURE 16: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER ACRE OF PARK AND NON-PARK SITES (MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION**



Personnel services account for the largest portion of operating expenditures at park and recreation agencies

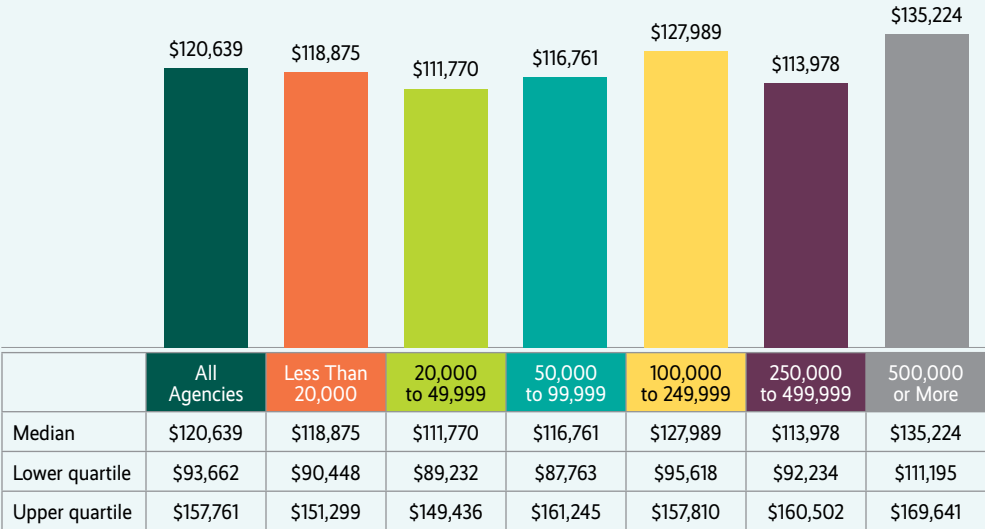
annually. **The typical park and recreation agency has operating expenditures of \$120,639 per FTE.**

A young person participates in a para-equestrian activity as part of the PlayLA Adaptive Youth Sports Program in City of Los Angeles.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL HOWARD

**FIGURE 17: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION**



Members of a youth basketball team huddle with their volunteer coach in McCall, Idaho.

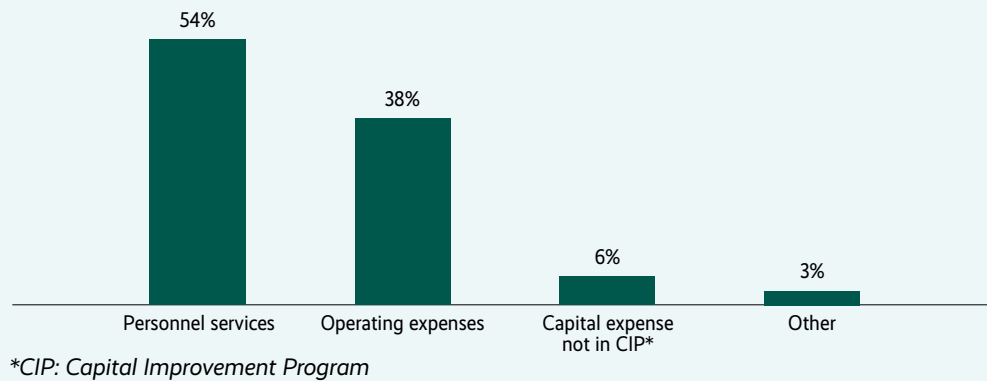


PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF MCCALL (IDAHO) PARKS AND RECREATION

Personnel services and operating expenses (e.g., program expenses, utilities, maintenance, transportation) account for 92 percent of park and recreation agencies' total budgeted operating expenditures. **Fifty-four percent of park and recreation operating expenditures**

**are earmarked for personnel services, while 38 percent are for operating expenses.** A similar split is seen throughout agencies of all population sizes, regions, jurisdiction types and budgets, with the exception of agencies with a budget under \$1 million.

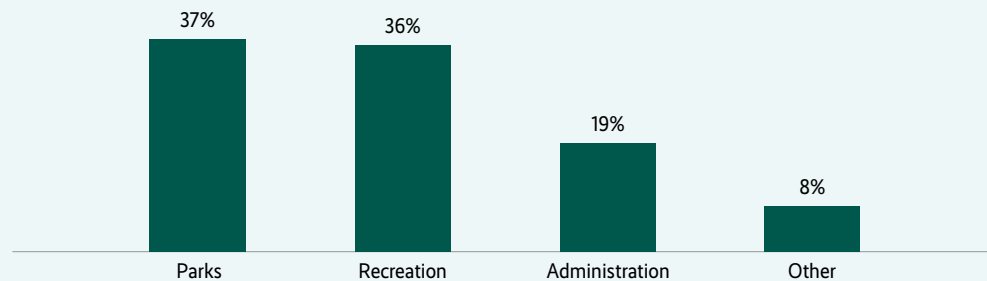
**FIGURE 18: DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES**  
(AVERAGE) PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES



Dividing operating expenditures by dedicated areas is also an option. Park expenditures and recreation expenditures account for nearly three-quarters of operating expenditures (73%), with the distribution nearly evenly split. **The average percentage distribution of total operating expenditures devoted to parks is 37**

**percent, while 36 percent is devoted to recreation. Administration accounts for 19 percent of total operating expenditures.** Park and recreation agencies serving a population of 1 million or more devote 55 percent of their total operating expenses to parks and 23 percent to recreation.

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



# Agency Funding

PHOTO COURTESY OF BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METRO PARK AND RECREATION DISTRICT

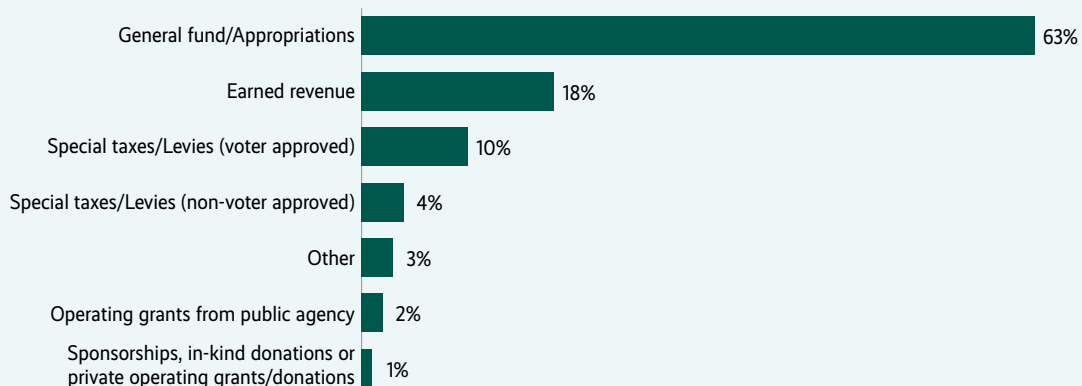


In Washington, the Bainbridge Island Metro Park and Recreation District's Neurodiverse Student Conservation Corps participants dedicate their summer to working with the park district's natural resource team.

**P**ark and recreation agencies gain funding through a variety of sources. **At the average agency, 63 percent of available funds come from general fund tax support/appropriations, and 18 percent come from earned**

**revenue.** Outliers are found among agencies in various regions and certain jurisdiction types. An estimated 42 percent of agencies in the Great Lakes region source available funds from their general fund, compared to 80 percent of agencies in the South.

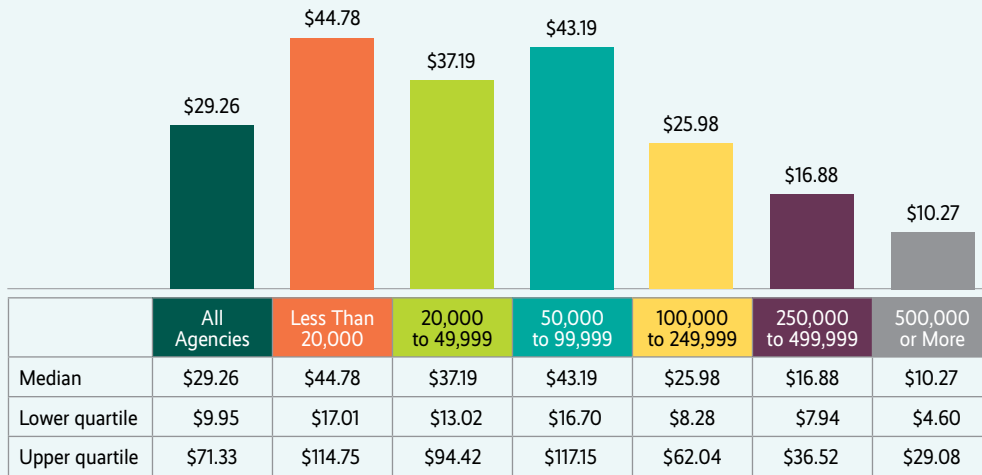
**FIGURE 20: SOURCES OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES**  
(AVERAGE) PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES



Revenue generation goals differ by agency. **The typical park and recreation agency annually generates \$29.26 of revenue per capita.** Agency locale and jurisdiction population play important roles in per capita revenue generation.

While per capita revenue of agencies in cities (\$29.26) closely aligns to the median, per capita revenue for agencies in counties is \$8.47. Special park districts generate \$80.87 of revenue per capita.

**FIGURE 21: PARK AND RECREATION REVENUE PER CAPITA (MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION**



Revenue as a percentage of operating expenditures (or cost recovery) can be an effective metric to evaluate pricing structure and guide future budgetary decisions. **The typical park and recreation agency recovers 26**

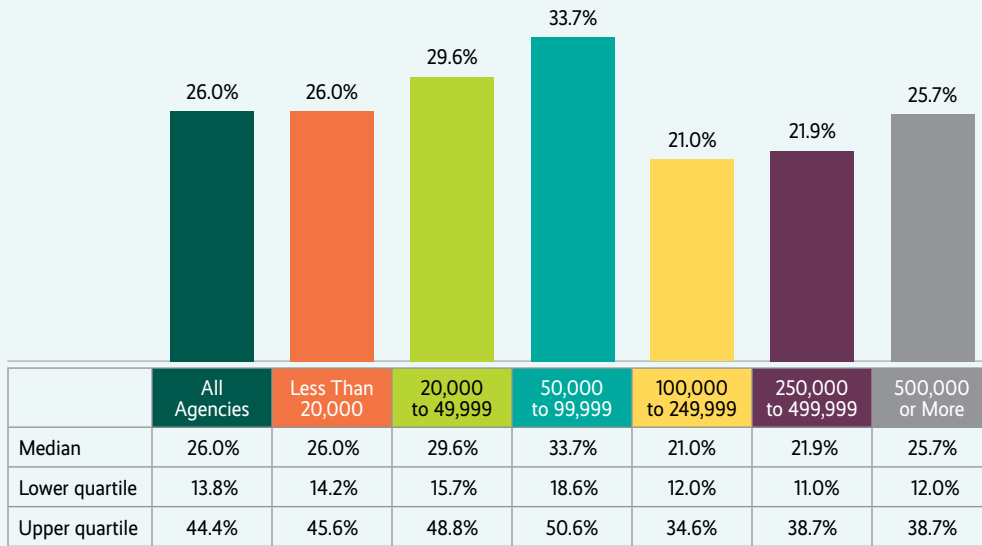
**percent of its annual operating expenditures from non-tax revenue.** Agencies in the Northeast see the highest cost recovery of all regions at 44 percent.

## Benchmarking Performance



A new assistant director at a small park and recreation agency in the southeastern United States serving a population of almost 17,000 residents received a compliment from a peer agency on the agency’s excellent cost-recovery percentage of 47.6 percent. As a new leader in this agency, the assistant director became curious about typical cost-recovery rates for similar agencies. Using Figure 22 in the *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, which shows that typical agencies with fewer than 20,000 residents have a 26 percent cost recovery, the assistant director learned that the agency was performing very well in this area compared to similarly sized agencies nationwide.

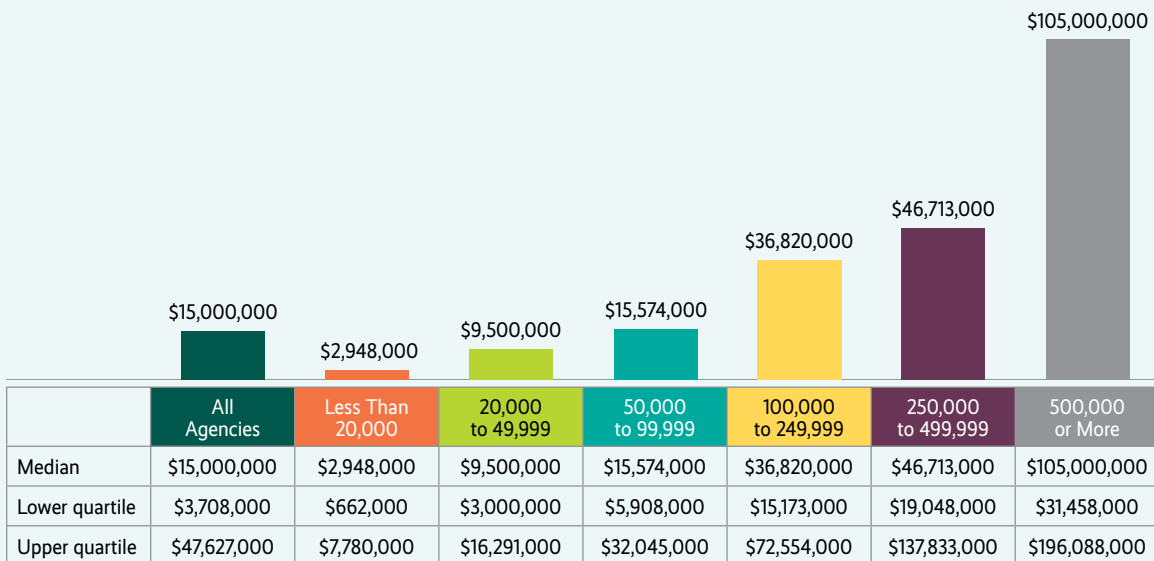
**FIGURE 22: REVENUE AS A PERCENTAGE OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES (COST RECOVERY)**  
 (PERCENTAGE OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



As park and recreation agencies consider investing in new facilities or improving existing infrastructure, multiyear budgeting helps facilitate long-range planning. **The typical park and recreation agency has a five-year capital spending budget of \$15 million.** This figure is heavily influenced by population size.

Agencies serving a population of fewer than 20,000 people have a five-year capital budget of slightly less than \$3 million, while agencies serving a population of 500,000 or more typically have a five-year capital budget set at \$105 million.

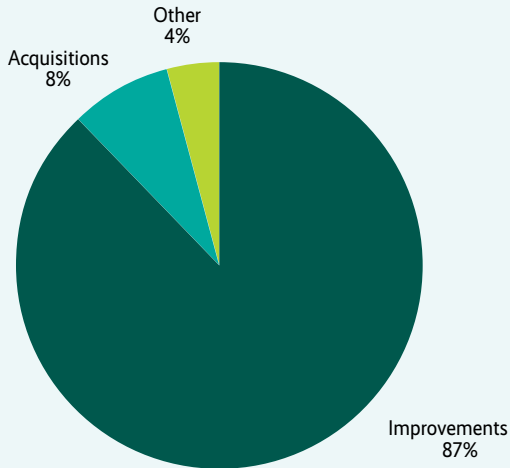
**FIGURE 23: FIVE-YEAR CAPITAL BUDGET SPENDING**  
 (ROUNDED MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION



Park and recreation agencies manage, maintain and operate facilities of all sizes and functions. An agency may run the newest, most state-of-the-art recreation

center while also managing aging centers in need of costly attention. Funding for maintaining a level of service in existing facilities and identifying needs for new facilities, offerings and programming based on the requirements and wants of residents are targets for capital budgets. **The average park and recreation agency designates 87 percent of its capital expenditures to improvements and 8 percent to acquisitions.** Similar splits are found across agencies of all budget sizes, regions, jurisdiction types and populations.

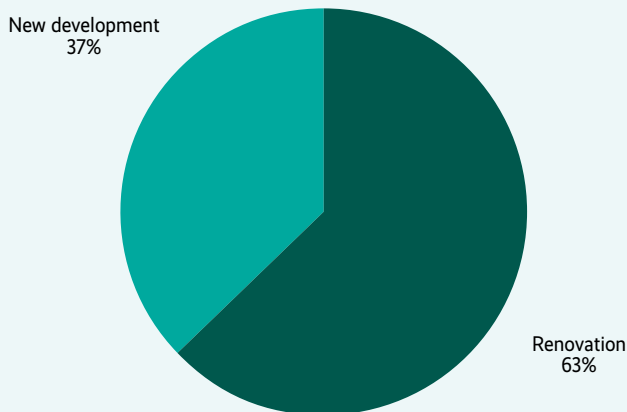
**FIGURE 24: TARGETS FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURES**  
(AVERAGE) PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CAPITAL EXPENDITURES



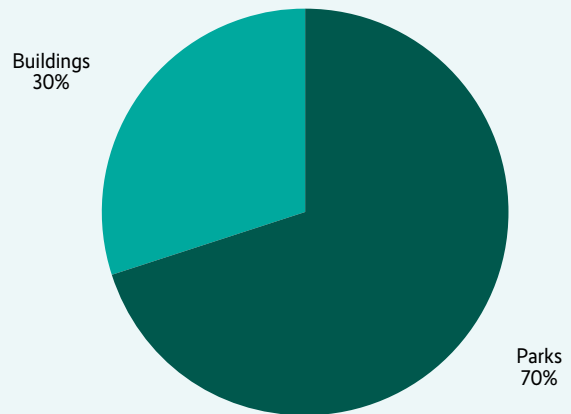
Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The nearly 90 percent of budgeted capital expenditures assigned to improvements can be broken down further — average percentage designated to renovation versus new development and average percentage designated to parks versus buildings. **Nearly two-thirds of designated improvement dollars (63%) are applied to renovation, while just more than a third (37%) are used for new development.** Further, 70 percent of improvement dollars go to parks, while 30 percent are allocated to buildings.

**FIGURE 25: IMPROVEMENT DOLLARS SPLIT BETWEEN RENOVATION AND NEW DEVELOPMENT**  
(AVERAGE) PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF IMPROVEMENT DOLLARS



**FIGURE 26: IMPROVEMENT DOLLARS SPLIT BETWEEN BUILDINGS AND PARKS**  
(AVERAGE) PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF IMPROVEMENT DOLLARS



Whether because of lack of funding, time, resources and/or available staff, park and recreation agencies expect to have some deferred maintenance projects. Deferred maintenance projects vary greatly, and tracking these projects is not a universal practice. **The typical park and recreation agency has an estimated \$1 million of deferred maintenance projects.** While median deferred maintenance values are lower at agencies with smaller populations and higher at

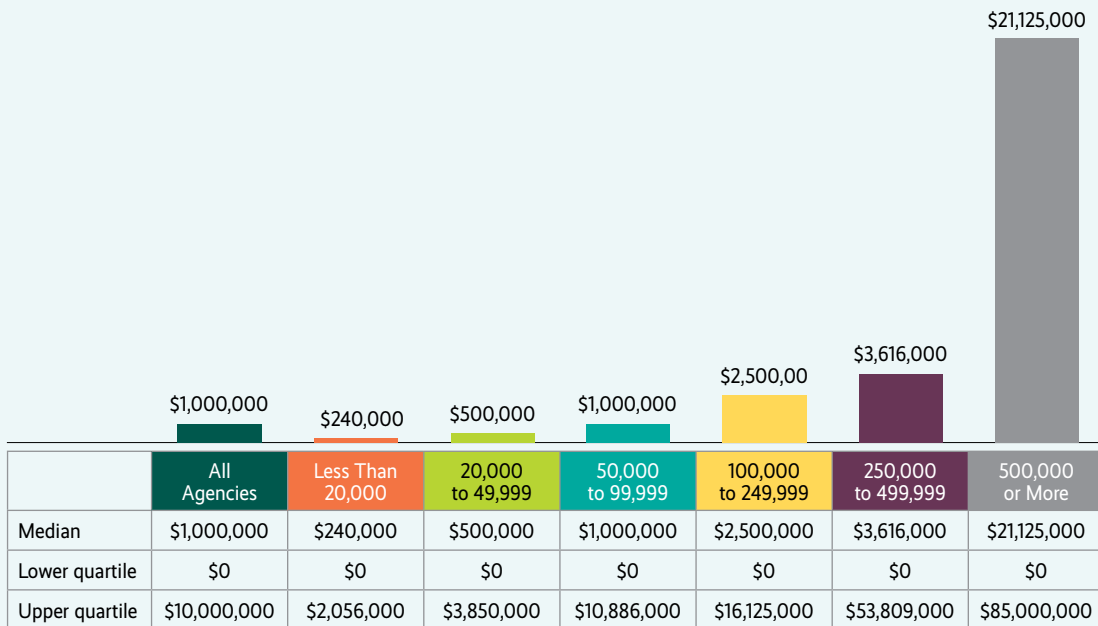
agencies serving larger jurisdictions, the pattern is consistent based on the number of park acres maintained. Park and recreation agencies maintaining 250 acres of parks have an estimated \$120,500 in deferred maintenance, while agencies maintaining 1,000 to 3,500 acres estimate this figure at \$4 million. Agencies maintaining more than 3,500 acres of parks have an estimated deferred maintenance value of more than \$10.5 million.

## Considering Deferred Maintenance



The city council for a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States asked its park and recreation superintendent if the reported \$6.5 million deferred maintenance in 2025 was typical of park and recreation agencies serving a similarly sized population. Using Figure 27 in the *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, the superintendent reviewed the median deferred maintenance reported for agencies serving 50,000 to 99,999 residents to find that the park and recreation agency's deferred maintenance was more than six times the median, sparking conversations about future actions.

**FIGURE 27: ESTIMATED VALUE OF DEFERRED MAINTENANCE PROJECTS PER AGENCY**  
(ROUNDED MEDIAN) BY JURISDICTION POPULATION



# Conclusions

Data play a large role in championing parks and recreation. This *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review* provides a high-level summary of nationwide data from park and recreation agencies that contributed budget, staffing, responsibilities, facilities, activities and policies data to [NRPA Park Metrics](#) during the past three years. It is an essential resource for comparing agency characteristics to nationwide statistics. For example, if a city's councilmembers value comparisons to nationwide data, this report is a ready source of high-level data for discussions and presentations. As the reader, you also can use data in this report to quickly obtain high-level information about "typical" park and recreation agencies to gain a first-line, general perspective.

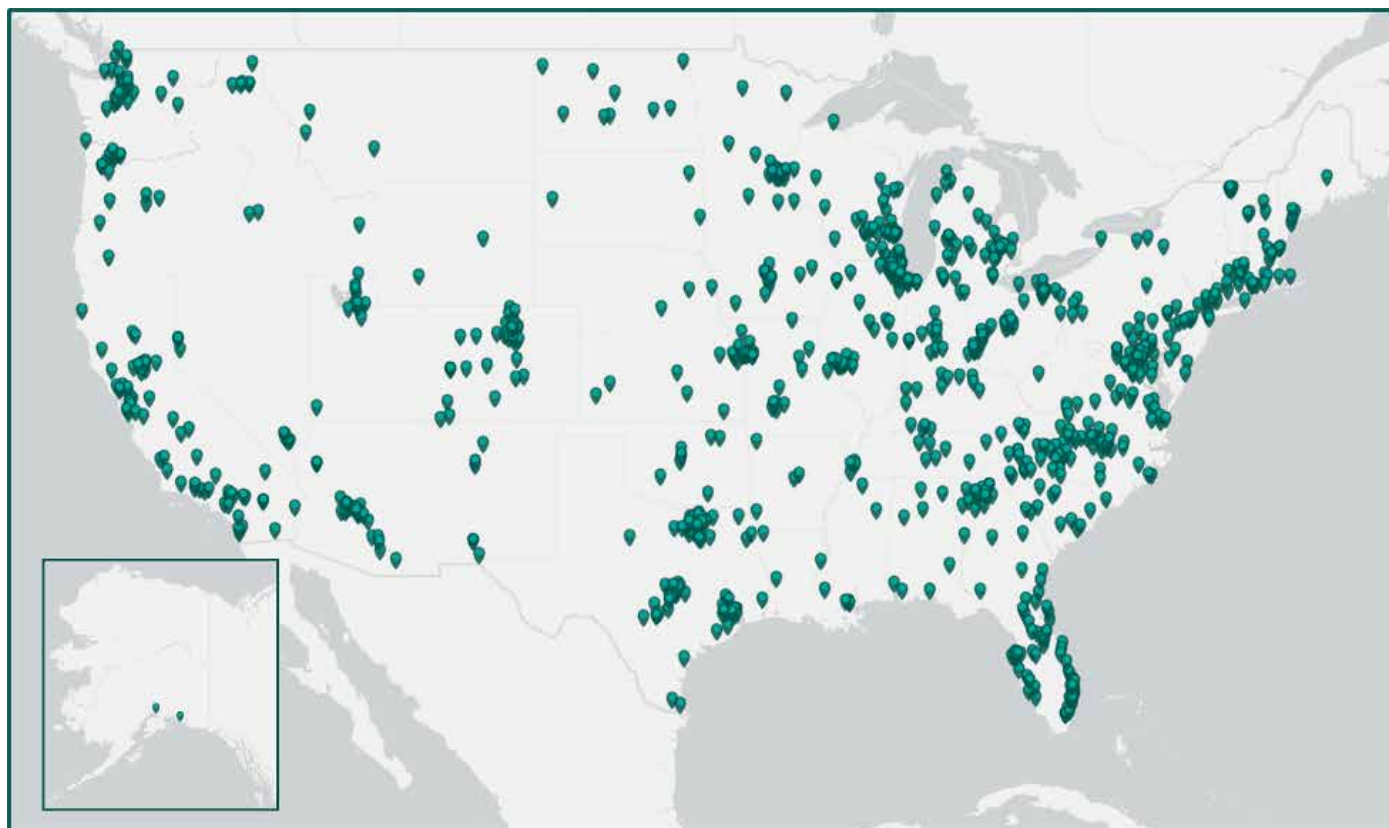
The benchmarks presented in this report serve as a snapshot of what is — not necessarily what should be — at local park and recreation agencies. If you want to explore the data more deeply, for example, comparing your agency's budget or facilities to agencies that are like yours, the [NRPA Park Metrics](#) system provides a variety of filters and custom reports to help you make specific comparisons to help with decision making. For example, pulling data from specific peer agencies for comparison may help you support your case for funding requests, explore operational improvements and better support your community's residents.

Additionally, regularly contributing to the NRPA Park Metrics Agency Performance Survey provides your agency with a one-stop platform to view year-over-year trends, easily identifying areas of success and tracking opportunities for improvement. This survey is also a requirement for all agencies applying for NRPA's Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). Generally, the usefulness of Park Metrics data relies upon nationwide agencies' willingness to share their data. More agencies sharing data means more complete benchmarking data for the entire field. We encourage all agencies to include contributing data to Park Metrics as part of their annual journey.

Are you new to NRPA Park Metrics or do you want to learn ways to more effectively use data at your agency? Take the [Park Metrics Skill Summit](#), a free, self-paced virtual learning course that walks learners through how to contribute to and take advantage of this valuable dataset.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to give a huge thank you to the thousands of park and recreation professionals who participated in the annual NRPA Park Metrics campaign and completed their Agency Performance Survey. Thank you to Melissa May, Dianne Palladino, Samantha Serrano, Garrett Warfield, Danielle Doll, Lindsay Reeves, Alexandra Klein, Vitisia Paynich, Kim Mabon and Kate Anderson for making this report possible.



A map displays the agencies that contributed data for the *2026 NRPA Agency Performance Review*.

# 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 and Evaluation 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](https://nrpa.org/Research).



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