

2021

NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW



BECAUSE EVERYONE DESERVES A GREAT PARK

Aaron Watson, executive director of Mercer County (New Jersey) Park Commission, holds an owl.
Photo courtesy of Eleanor Horne.





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Christie Bruner, community engagement supervisor at City of St. Petersburg (Florida) Parks and Recreation - Healthy St. Pete, helps an AARP board member change the resistance on a hand bike machine. *Photo courtesy of Bruner.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2020 demonstrated that parks and recreation is essential. Throughout every phase of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, park and recreation professionals have worked tirelessly to keep individuals safe — delivering vital emergency services, offering safe recreation opportunities to the public, and continuing to provide residents with services and facilities that promote both physical and mental health. Physical distancing practices and local/state public health edicts not only led to facility closures and programming cancellations, but also presented an opportunity to create innovative programming. Park and recreation leaders met the unexpected task of navigating budget cuts and sharp declines in generated revenue, staff reductions, hiring freezes and work-from-home limitations — as well as myriad unplanned safety challenges. The lasting effects of this global pandemic may not be known for years, but parks and recreation has faced each challenge head-on — and will continue to do so.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides local park and recreation professionals with the most up-to-date data that inform current and future decisions and equip leaders with insights that help them make a case for greater funding, increased staffing, additional planning and more resources granted by key stakeholders and elected officials. The *2021 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 *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics feature the most comprehensive collection of park and recreation-related benchmarks and insights that inform professionals, key stakeholders and the public about the state of the park and recreation field.

Data is a powerful tool, but not the final answer for what is best for your agency. The *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics help inform conversations with 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 identify the optimal mix of facilities and programming your agency should deliver.

The *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review* does not present park and recreation “standards”; the benchmarks outlined do not promote any sort of standards against which every park and recreation agency should measure itself. The reason for this is simple: there is not a single set of standards for parks and recreation because different agencies serve different communities that have unique needs, desires and challenges.

Agencies also have diverse funding mechanisms.

For instance, if your agency has more workers per 10,000 residents relative to the “typical” agency, you should not necessarily 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 vary in their population demographics; so too should their park and recreation agencies.

Successful agencies tailor their offerings to meet the needs and demands of all members of their communities. Knowing the characteristics of the residents who use your agency's resources — as well as the characteristics of those who may use those resources in the future (including age, race and income trends) — is also a factor when shaping the optimal mix of facilities and services your agency offers.

Park and recreation professionals should use the *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review* in conjunction with other resources, including those that may be proprietary to a specific agency, those from NRPA and those from other sources. This report also provides a list of additional NRPA resources to review.

HOW TO USE THE 2021 NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND NRPA PARK METRICS

The first step is to look at the available data. Most of the data presented in the *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review* feature medians along with data responses at the lower quartile (lowest 25 percent) and upper quartile (highest 25 percent). The data allow for insights not only into where your agency stands compared to “typical” agencies (i.e., those at the median values), but also compared to the full spectrum of agencies at both the high and low quartiles. Many metrics include the top-line figures as well as certain cross-tabulations by jurisdiction population or population density. More comprehensive cross-tabulations are available as interactive tables at nraparkmetrics.org/Metrics.

The next step is to build a customized benchmark report based on a peer group you define. Go into NRPA Park Metrics 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 with the key metrics of agencies throughout the United States.

The *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review* contains data from 1,000 unique park and recreation agencies across the United States, as reported between 2018 and 2020.

Note: Not all agencies answered every survey question.

2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review Key Findings



Residents per
Playground:

3,607

Full-Time Equivalent Employees
(FTEs) per 10,000 Residents:

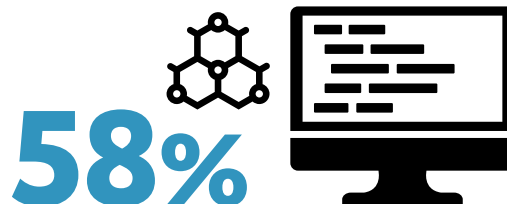
8.2



Operating Expenditures
per Capita:

\$88.30/year

Acres of Parkland
per 1,000 Residents: **9.9**

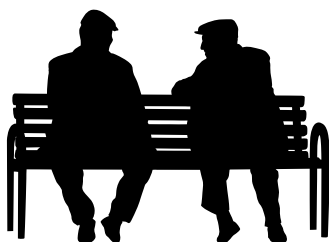


58%

of park and recreation agencies
deliver STEM programming to
youth and young adults

Residents per Park:

2,277



Revenue to Operating
Expenditures:

22.9%



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The 2021 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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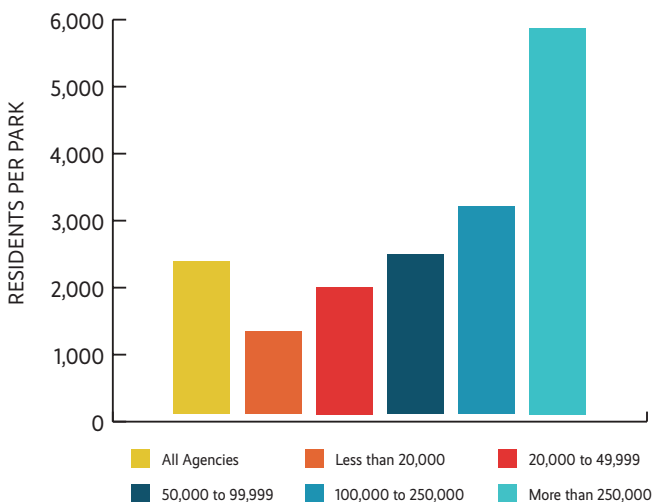
FIGURE	TOP-LINE FINDING	PAGE NO.
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PARK FACILITIES

Local and regional park and recreation agencies differ greatly in size and the types of facilities they offer. The typical agency participating in NRPA Park Metrics serves a jurisdiction — a town, city, county and/or region — of 49,500 people. Other agencies serve an area of just a few thousand people; still others are the park and recreation resource for millions of people.

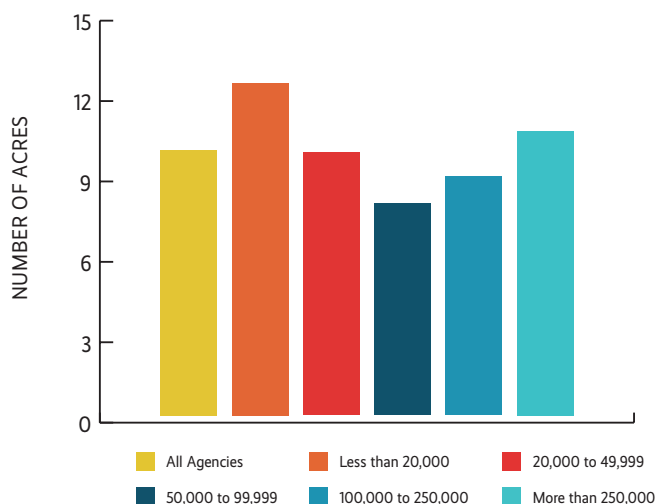
Naturally, the offerings of these agencies are as varied as the markets they serve. The typical park and recreation agency manages 21 parks comprising a total of 458 acres. After adding in non-park sites (including open spaces that an agency may manage, such as city hall lawns or roadway medians), the median increases to 28 parks encompassing 565 acres.

**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	2,277	1,235	1,900	2,387	3,104	5,765
Lower Quartile	1,302	776	1,207	1,483	2,042	2,760
Upper Quartile	4,359	1,948	3,083	4,367	5,869	13,146

**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	9.9	12.4	9.8	7.9	8.9	10.6
Lower Quartile	5.2	5.2	5.6	4.4	4.6	5.6
Upper Quartile	17.6	21.8	15.7	15.9	15.9	17.5

The typical agency has one park for every 2,277 residents. The number of people 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 1,235 residents. The ratio increases to one park for every 2,387 residents in jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, then rises further to one park for every 5,765 people at agencies serving areas with a population of more than 250,000.

The typical park and recreation agency manages 9.9 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents in its jurisdiction. The smallest agencies — those serving less than 20,000 residents — typically have 12.4 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. That ratio narrows to 10.6 acres per 1,000 residents in jurisdictions where agencies serve a population of more than 250,000 people. Agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 100,000 and 250,000 have 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.

Park and recreation professionals oversee a wide variety of facilities and features for which their agencies have responsibility. Ninety-four percent of park and recreation agencies provide playground facilities in their communities and the typical agency has 13 playgrounds in its catalog of offerings. At least 50 percent of agencies have basketball courts, tennis courts, diamond fields for baseball and/or softball, multipurpose rectangular fields, dog parks and outdoor swimming pools.

The typical park and recreation agency has:

- One playground for every 3,607 residents
- One basketball court for every 7,187 residents
- One outdoor tennis court for every 5,089 residents
- One dog park for every 46,000 residents

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

Type of Facilities		Median Number of Residents per Facility					
		Population of Jurisdiction					
	Percent of Agencies	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
Playgrounds	94.4%	3,607	2,132	2,961	3,672	4,804	8,271
Basketball courts	87.4	7,187	4,051	7,000	8,790	8,477	11,632
Tennis courts (outdoor only)	81.4	5,089	2,748	4,819	5,726	5,818	9,997
Diamond fields: baseball — youth	78.0	6,763	3,000	5,099	7,560	12,914	23,619
Rectangular fields: multipurpose	66.4	8,750	3,895	7,400	11,212	10,792	22,538
Diamond fields: softball — adult	65.5	13,510	5,663	11,184	16,250	28,081	35,875
Dog parks	64.9	46,000	11,148	27,528	58,926	76,610	129,506
Diamond fields: softball — youth	59.3	11,287	5,447	9,891	11,884	26,073	43,670
Swimming pools (outdoor only)	51.5	37,569	8,591	25,402	43,100	67,004	93,534
Diamond fields: baseball — adult	51.3	20,159	7,989	20,522	22,366	38,899	48,657
Rectangular fields: soccer — youth	48.9	7,192	3,433	5,833	8,291	12,646	32,649
Community gardens	48.3	31,175	9,001	25,480	51,197	72,238	96,322
Tot lots	45.1	11,000	6,194	8,974	13,701	19,122	22,163
Multiuse courts: basketball, volleyball	44.6	20,000	6,200	18,850	24,644	36,979	70,287
Rectangular fields: soccer — adult	43.6	12,943	7,541	11,161	12,800	20,000	30,092
Skate parks	39.3	49,750	11,000	31,248	66,672	109,798	247,664
Rectangular fields: football	36.5	25,977	7,917	16,584	31,972	51,719	78,656
Multipurpose synthetic fields	21.0	38,328	13,200	22,041	40,305	53,550	112,707
Ice rinks (outdoor only)	17.9	16,664	10,000	13,049	29,386	112,000	472,688
Rectangular fields: cricket	12.1	128,393	ISD*	29,404	62,958	110,936	370,119
Rectangular fields: lacrosse	11.2	29,000	7,051	13,333	33,437	63,250	174,861
Overlay fields	8.7	15,385	4,385	8,935	10,724	42,139	87,438
Rectangular fields: field hockey	3.5	23,270	ISD*	15,007	ISD*	110,558	ISD*

*ISD = Insufficient Data

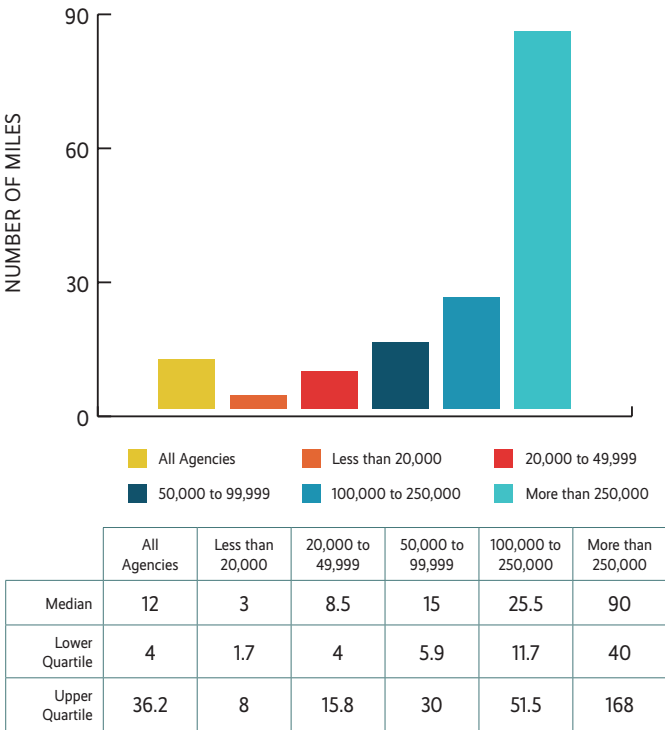
In addition, 79 percent of park and recreation agencies have trails, greenways and/or blueways as part of their outdoor infrastructure. The typical park and recreation agency that manages or maintains trails for walking, hiking, running and/or biking has 12 miles of trails in its network. Agencies serving more than 250,000 residents have a median of 90 miles of trails under their purview.

Geography also plays a role in the amount of trail miles managed by park and recreation agencies. Agencies in a city jurisdiction locale have a median of 13.2 miles of trails, while county-based agencies typically have approximately 33 miles of trails.

Park and recreation agencies offer a number of indoor facilities to their residents. More than three in five agencies offer community centers and recreation centers. Also common are senior centers, performance amphitheaters and nature centers. The typical agency with recreation centers has one facility for every 30,709 residents, while those agencies with community centers have one such facility for every 29,000 residents. Two in five agencies offer senior centers, with one such facility for every 61,975 residents in their jurisdiction.

The typical park and recreation agency operates seven buildings. Those agencies serving populations of less than 20,000 community members often operate three buildings, while those serving populations between

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



100,000 and 250,000 oversee 14 buildings. Those agencies serving a population of more than 250,000 typically have 43 buildings under their purview.

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

Type of Facilities		Median Number of Residents per Facility					
		Population of Jurisdiction					
	Percent of Agencies	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
Recreation centers	63.9%	30,709	9,800	24,545	41,452	53,550	71,514
Community centers	58.6	29,000	9,045	26,099	41,245	56,025	109,089
Senior centers	39.0	61,975	12,304	34,674	68,540	122,000	275,401
Performance amphitheaters	35.1	62,927	11,000	31,115	59,294	113,221	341,294
Nature centers	31.6	109,212	11,704	33,164	69,250	125,000	361,613
Aquatics centers	25.0	49,024	11,000	29,790	62,313	85,500	235,760
Stadiums	18.0	64,800	9,126	27,192	62,682	135,323	330,868
Ice rinks	13.2	55,174	7,911	27,000	55,174	102,543	385,525
Teen centers	12.8	57,729	12,044	32,000	57,027	152,714	343,661
Arenas	6.5	53,236	7,102	24,413	66,215	118,271	499,500

PROGRAMMING

Residents interact with park and recreation amenities and programming throughout the year, resulting in thousands, if not millions, of contacts annually. “Contacts” may 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 interaction with any park and recreation facility operated by an agency. Moreover, a person can have more than one contact. For example, someone who swims at their local agency’s aquatic 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 250,000 contacts every year. The number of contacts varies dramatically from agency to agency. For example, the typical agency at the 75th percentile has nearly 1 million annual contacts. Interaction 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 2 million contacts per year, with those at the 75th percentile serving greater than 3.8 million people annually.

Programming is a key method of engagement that drives the use of park and recreation facilities. When associated with registration fees, it is also the largest source of non-tax revenue for most agencies. The typical agency offers 175

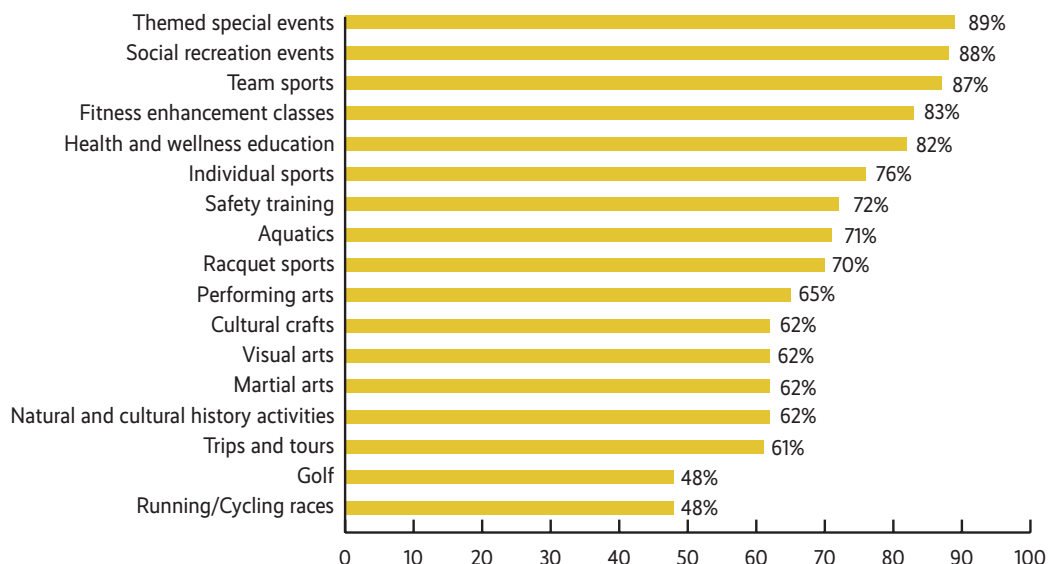
programs each year; 102 of those programs are fee-based events. Agencies serving a population of less than 20,000 typically hold 32 fee-based programs per year, while those serving more than 250,000 residents provide greater than 502 fee-based programs annually.

The typical park and recreation agency generates more than 16,000 contacts through its programs alone. Those agencies serving more than 250,000 residents may have nearly quadruple the number of contacts.

Programming can span a variety of park and recreation activities, with many touching one or more of NRPA’s Three Pillars: Health and Wellness, Equity and Conservation. Key programming activities offered by at least 70 percent of park and recreation agencies include:

- Themed special events (offered by 89 percent of agencies)
- Social recreation events (88 percent)
- Team sports (87 percent)
- Fitness enhancement classes (83 percent)
- Health and wellness education (82 percent)
- Individual sports (76 percent)
- Safety training (72 percent)
- Aquatics (71 percent)
- Racquet sports (70 percent)

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



Agency jurisdiction locale plays a role in the types of programming offered. Top programming activities offered in towns, cities and counties include:

Town	Percent of Agencies	City	Percent of Agencies	County	Percent of Agencies
Social recreation events	94%	Themed special events	92%	Social recreation events	79%
Themed special events	92	Team sports	91	Themed special events	78
Fitness enhancement classes	88	Social recreation events	89	Natural and cultural history activities	78
Team sports	87	Fitness enhancement classes	85	Health and wellness education	75
Health and wellness education	86	Health and wellness education	83	Team sports	73
Safety training	79	Aquatics	78	Fitness enhancement classes	68

Delivering high-quality services to all members of the community 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-three percent of park and recreation agencies offer summer camp programs for their communities' children, and a majority deliver programs for teens and afterschool care as part 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. OST programs are commonplace offerings by agencies of nearly all sizes, but most especially by those that serve populations of at least 20,000 residents.

In addition, most park and recreation agencies offer specific programming for other segments of their communities, including older adults (79 percent) and people with disabilities (62 percent). Agencies in larger communities are most likely to offer these types of programming. For example, 81 percent of park and recreation agencies in jurisdictions serving 100,000 to 250,000 residents offer programming designed for people with disabilities compared to 38 percent of agencies serving less than 20,000 residents that offer such programs. Nearly three in five park and recreation agencies provide STEM-specific programs to community members.

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

	Percent of Agencies	Population of Jurisdiction (Percent)				
		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	83%	61%	89%	92%	88%	90%
Senior programs	79	68	79	86	87	78
Teen programs	67	49	64	74	76	79
Programs for people with disabilities	62	38	56	70	81	78
After-school programs	58	40	48	67	69	73
STEM programs	57	51	48	59	63	71
Preschool	36	26	38	44	38	36
Before-school programs	20	14	21	24	19	23
Full daycare	8	6	7	11	6	13



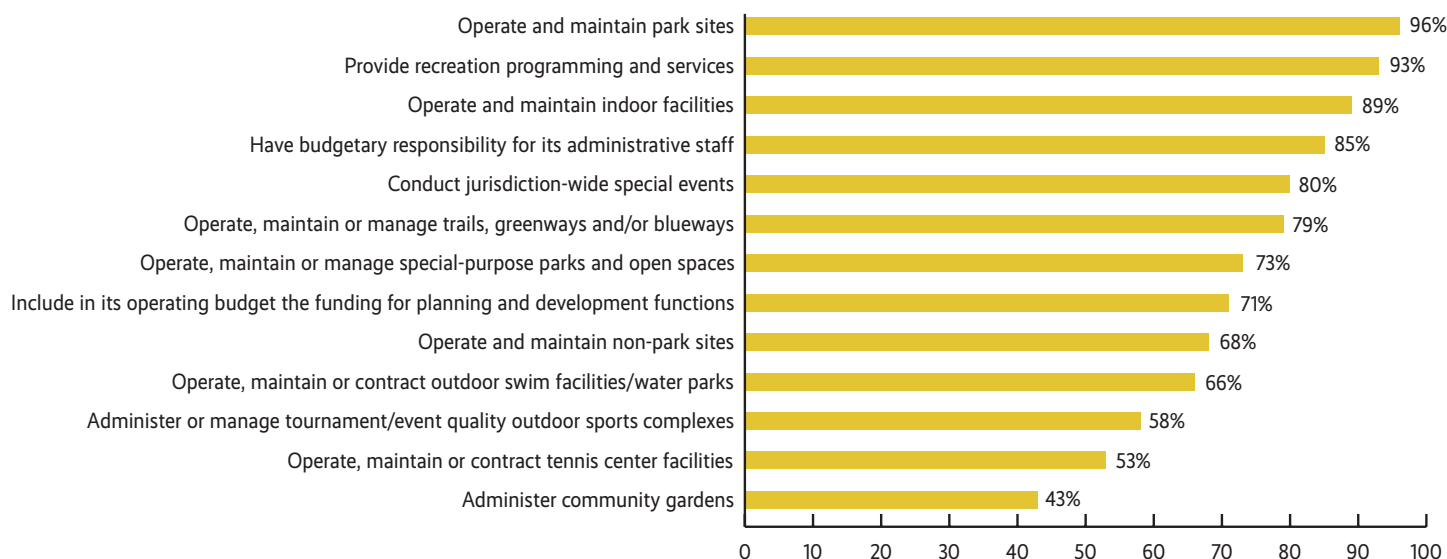
A group of pickleball players celebrate the game at the Incline Village Tennis Center in Incline Village, Nevada. Photo courtesy of Incline Village Parks and Recreation Department.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

Park and recreation professionals oversee myriad services and facilities in their communities beyond their “traditional” roles of operating parks and related facilities (at 96 percent of agencies) and providing recreation programming and services (93 percent). In addition to those two core functions, the top responsibilities for park and recreation professionals are:

- Operate and maintain indoor facilities (89 percent of agencies)
- Have budgetary responsibility for their administrative staff (85 percent)
- Conduct major jurisdiction-wide special events (80 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage trails, greenways and/or blueways (79 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage special-purpose parks and open spaces (73 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 (58 percent)
- Operate, maintain or contract tennis center facilities (53 percent)
- Administer community gardens (43 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	35%
Operate, maintain or contract golf courses	35
Manage large outdoor performance amphitheaters	34
Operate, maintain or contract indoor swim facilities/water parks	32
Administer or manage farmers markets	21
Administer or manage tournament-/event-quality indoor sports complexes	19
Operate, maintain or contract campgrounds	18
Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts centers	18
Administer or manage professional or college-type stadiums/arenas/racetracks	17
Maintain or manage beaches (inclusive of all water-body types)	9
Manage or maintain fairgrounds	8
Operate, maintain or contract marinas	6



A park and recreation professional mows a multiuse field at Anthem (Arizona) Community Park. *Photo courtesy of Marcus Petty.*

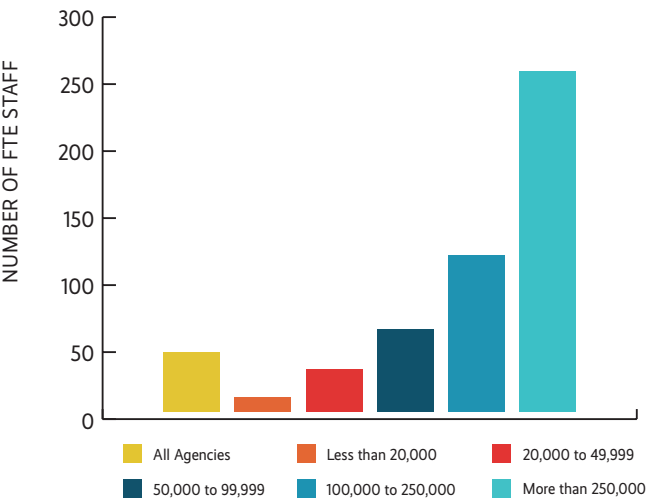
STAFFING

Staffing at the typical park and recreation agency includes 44.3 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) with a mix of both full-time and part-time staff. Staff size, however, expands rapidly as the population of the jurisdiction served by an agency increases. Park and recreation agencies serving jurisdictions with a population of less than 20,000 have a median of 10.9 FTEs on staff. Agencies serving areas with 50,000 to 99,999 people have a median of 61.2 FTEs, while those serving areas with more than 250,000 residents have a median of 254.1 FTEs on staff.

Median counts of FTEs on staff also positively correlate with:

- Number of acres maintained: 250 or fewer acres — 17 FTEs; more than 3,500 acres — 266.7 FTEs
- Number of parks maintained: less than 10 parks — 15.1 FTEs; 50 or more parks — 222.1 FTEs
- Operating expenditures: less than \$500,000 — 3.6 FTEs; more than \$10 million — 198.5 FTEs
- Population served by the agency: less than 500 people per square mile — 18.6 FTEs; more than 2,500 people per square mile — 79.4 FTEs

FIGURE 10: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY STAFFING: 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	44.3	10.9	31.4	61.2	117	254.1
Lower Quartile	15.9	5.4	16.3	34.4	46	106
Upper Quartile	126.9	21.5	59.8	114.6	202.2	550

One way to view agency staffing is to measure it relative to the population that the agency serves. The typical park and recreation agency has 8.1 FTEs on staff for every 10,000 residents in the jurisdiction served by that agency. Agencies located in more-populated areas tend to have fewer FTEs on staff per population. Agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people have 9.3 FTEs for every 10,000 residents, with this measure decreasing to 5.2 FTEs for every 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 with less than 500 people per square mile have 4.9 FTEs per 10,000 people served compared to 9.7 FTEs per 10,000 residents in areas with more than 2,500 people per square mile.



Children take part in a nature-based learning activity hosted by Prince William County (Virginia) Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. *Photo courtesy of Dianne Wahl.*

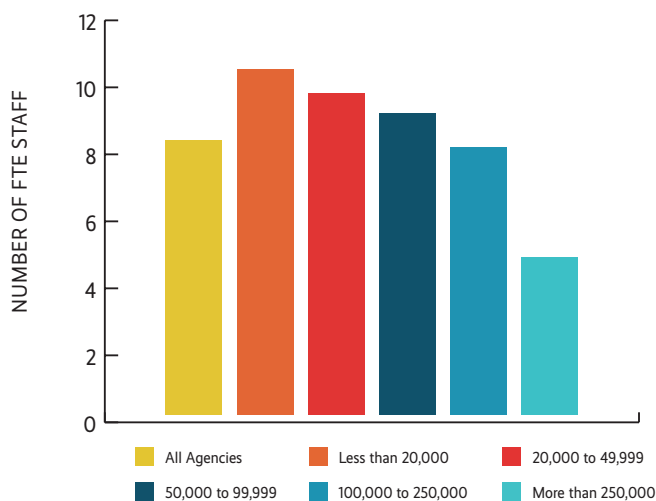
Operations and maintenance are the primary work responsibility for park and recreation professionals. But staff also devote their energies to other areas. On average, an agency's full-time staff dedicate their time to the following general activities:

- Operations/Maintenance (45 percent)
- Programming (31 percent)
- Administration (17 percent)
- Capital development (3 percent)
- Other (4 percent)

Thirty-seven percent of park and recreation professionals are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Those professionals covered by such agreements are more likely to be members of staff at agencies that:

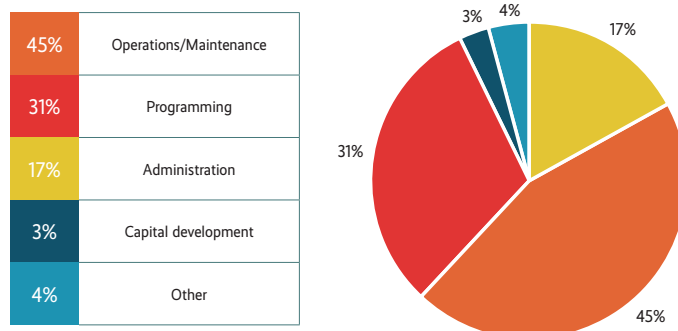
- Have a larger staff: 20 percent of agencies with a staff of fewer than 10 FTEs compared to 54 percent of agencies with 100 or more FTEs.
- Serve larger populations: 19 percent of agencies in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people compared to 61 percent of agencies in jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.
- Have more parks: 15 percent of agencies with less than 10 parks compared to 60 percent of agencies with at least 50 parks.
- Maintain more parkland: 24 percent of agencies that maintain 250 acres or less of parkland compared to 61 percent of agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland.

FIGURE 11: PARK AND RECREATION 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	8.2	10.3	9.6	9	8	4.7
Lower Quartile	4.5	6.4	5.3	5.1	3.3	2.3
Upper Quartile	14.9	22.6	17.8	15.8	13.4	8.2

FIGURE 12: RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION STAFF (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGENCY FTEs)



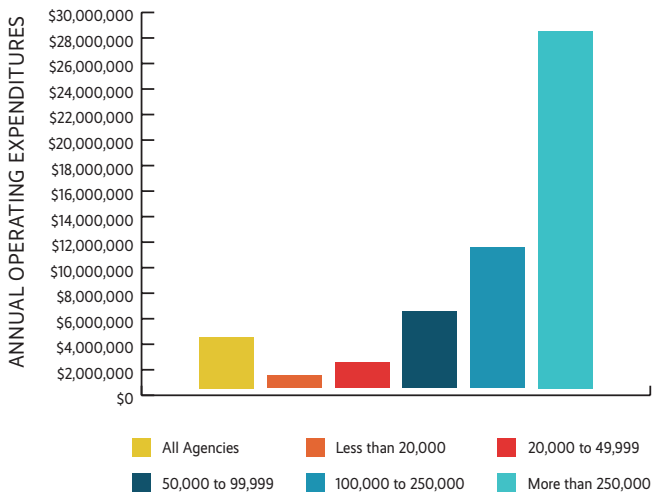
BUDGET

U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that local park and recreation agencies' operating expenditures totaled \$40 billion in 2018. Per NRPA Park Metrics data, the typical park and recreation agency has current annual operating expenditures of \$4,898,633.

Normalizing operating expenditure data by population served by an agency is a much more accurate and meaningful way of articulating and comparing spending. By this measure, the typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$88.30 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 with less than 500 people per square mile has per capita operating expenses of \$45.44, while one serving an area with more than 2,500 people per square mile has a median of \$107.33 per resident.

At the same time, per capita operations spending is inversely related to the population of the area served. Agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 people have a median operating expenditure of \$114.62 per person. That figure declines to \$54.68 per resident for agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people, declining further to \$43.05 in jurisdictions with more than half-a-million residents.

FIGURE 13: ANNUAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)

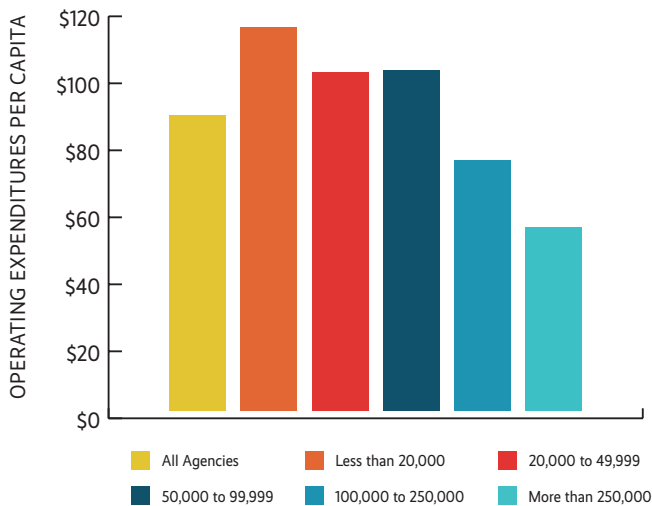


	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Median	\$4,898,633	\$1,209,393	\$3,234,982	\$7,150,817	\$11,862,458	\$28,564,326
Lower Quartile	\$1,863,016	\$545,821	\$1,879,595	\$3,900,154	\$5,762,630	\$13,419,026
Upper Quartile	\$13,839,293	\$2,193,932	\$6,553,308	\$11,149,210	\$22,066,712	\$52,700,000



Youth participate in a Learn To Skate program at the Apex Center Ice Arena in Arvada, Colorado. Photo courtesy of Benjamin Sweet, Apex Park and Recreation District.

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

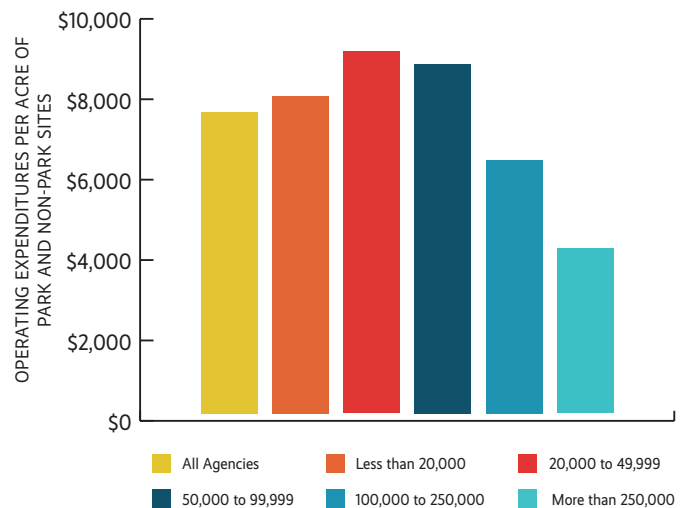


	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Median	\$88.30	\$114.62	\$100.93	\$101.65	\$74.87	\$54.68
Lower Quartile	\$48.84	\$64.02	\$60.04	\$58.77	\$45.39	\$21.77
Upper Quartile	\$159.07	\$222.94	\$195.81	\$166.17	\$154.56	\$85.33

One can normalize operating expenditures by the amount of parkland managed by an agency. The median operating expenditure is \$7,556 per acre of park and non-park sites managed by the typical agency. The typical operating expenditure per acre of parkland increases with population density. The typical agency serving a jurisdiction with fewer than 500 people per square mile spends \$3,939 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median rises to \$12,172 per acre at agencies serving a jurisdiction with a population density greater than 2,500 per square mile.

Park and recreation agencies serving larger populations tend to have lower operating expenditures than do agencies serving small- or medium-sized jurisdictions. The typical park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 20,000 people spends a median of \$7,959 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median increases to \$9,002 per acre for agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 20,000 and 49,999, but then declines to \$4,169 per acre managed by agencies serving jurisdictions of more than 250,000 people.

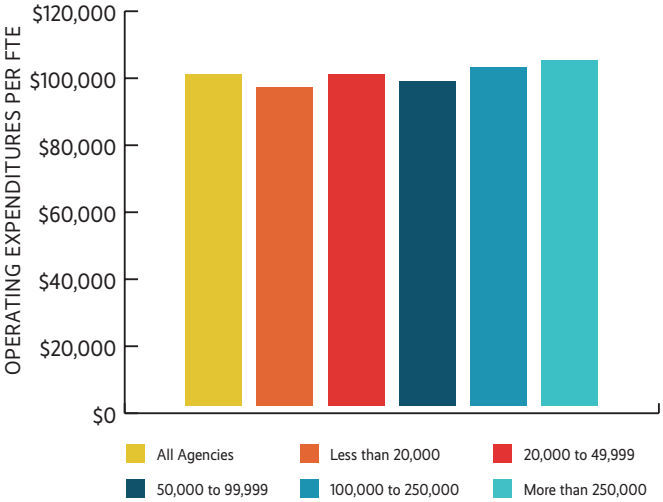
FIGURE 15: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER ACRE OF PARK AND NON-PARK SITES (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



	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	\$7,556	\$7,959	\$9,002	\$8,755	\$6,300	\$4,169
Lower Quartile	\$3,586	\$3,749	\$4,458	\$4,898	\$2,916	\$1,698
Upper Quartile	\$18,346	\$21,708	\$21,147	\$20,809	\$16,422	\$9,428

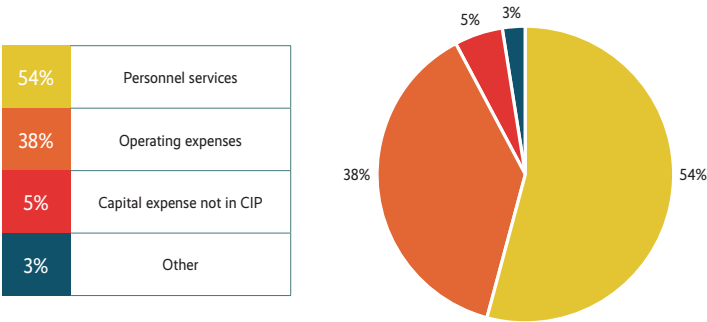
The typical park and recreation agency has \$99,016 in annual operating expenditures for each employee (as measured by FTEs). The denser the jurisdiction served by the agency, the higher the operations expenditures for each FTE. Agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 500 residents per square mile have median operating expenditures of \$92,846 for each FTE. The median rises to \$103,496 per FTE for agencies serving areas with more than 2,500 residents per square mile. Similarly, the measure rises from \$86,046 for agencies with less than 10 parks to \$104,005 for agencies with 50 or more parks.

FIGURE 16: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER 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	\$99,016	\$95,913	\$99,644	\$97,737	\$101,069	\$103,667
Lower Quartile	\$73,391	\$67,954	\$74,626	\$70,591	\$76,040	\$77,174
Upper Quartile	\$141,938	\$137,067	\$145,953	\$139,766	\$143,621	\$145,470

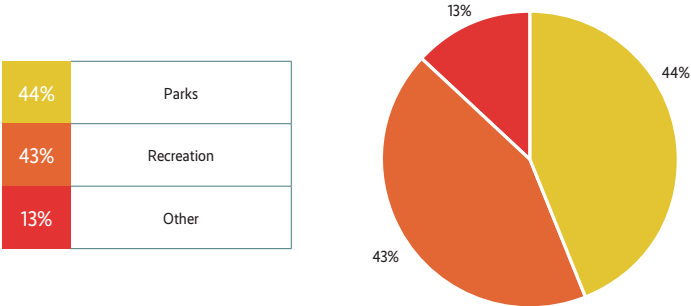
FIGURE 17: DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES)



- Personnel services account for the largest share of the operations budget at the typical park and recreation agency.
- Personnel services (54 percent of the operating budget) include expenditures for all salaries, wages and benefits for both full-time and part-time personnel, along with contracted individuals.
 - Operating expenditures (38 percent of the operating budget) fund the agency operations, including operational support for force-accounted employees.
 - Capital funds repay the operating budget, all enterprise funds, interdepartmental transfers and, in some cases, the capital debt service. This represents around 5 percent of the operating budget. A portion of the operations spending includes capital expenses that are not part of the agency’s capital improvement plan (CIP), such as expenditures for capital equipment (e.g., computers, vehicles, mowers, tractors, boats), some periodic cyclical maintenance (e.g., carpets, conference chairs) and, perhaps, debt services paid from the agency’s operating funds.

The typical park and recreation agency dedicates 44 percent of its annual operating budget to the management and maintenance of parks and open spaces. Agencies spend a median of 43 percent of their annual operating expenditures to support recreation offerings, including programming (e.g., OST 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)



Charleston County (South Carolina) Park and Recreation Commission hosts Shaggin' on the Cooper at the Mount Pleasant Pier.
Photo courtesy of Lisa Knisley-White.

AGENCY FUNDING

Funding sources for park and recreation operations vary greatly by agency, but support from the local jurisdiction general fund tax base is common. On average, park and recreation agencies derive three-fifths of their operating expenditures from general fund tax support, although the percentage of funding from general fund tax support tends to be lower at agencies with larger operating budgets. The second-largest source of revenue for most agencies is earned/generated revenues, accounting for an average of 23 percent of operating expenditures. 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.

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$1 million in non-tax revenues on an annual basis, although this amount can vary greatly based on agency size, the services and facilities offered by the agency, and the mandate from agency leadership and policymakers. Agencies with annual operating budgets less than \$500,000 typically generate \$50,000 in non-tax revenues, while those with annual budgets greater than \$10 million generate a median of slightly more than \$5.2 million from non-tax revenue sources.

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$19.38 in revenue annually for each resident in the jurisdiction it serves. Agencies operating in less densely populated areas generate less revenue than those in areas with a greater population density. The typical agency — operating in a jurisdiction with fewer than 500 people per square mile — realizes \$8.72 in revenue on a per capita basis per year compared to a median of \$25.68 for agencies serving a jurisdiction with greater than 2,500 people per square mile.

Small- and medium-sized park and recreation agencies generate more revenue on a per capita basis than do large ones. Agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people generate \$28.41 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 \$26.68 in revenue per resident each year. In comparison, agencies serving populations greater than 250,000 generate \$6.21 per capita in revenue, with the amount declining to \$5.67 in jurisdictions with more than half-a-million residents.

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

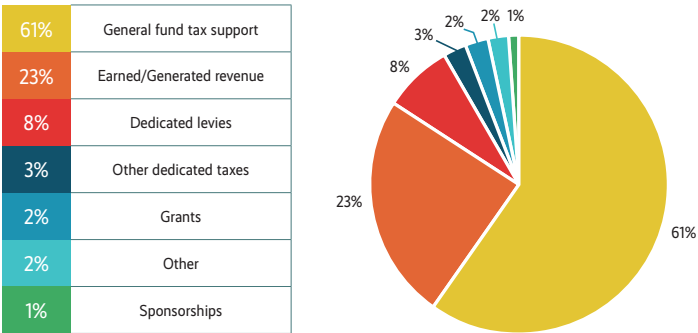
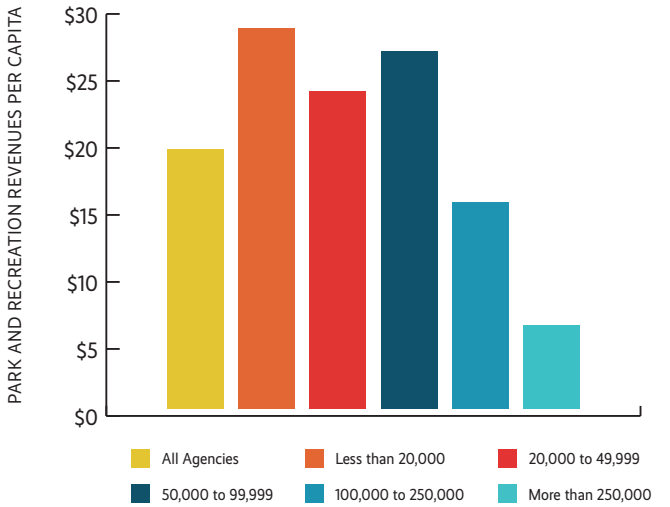
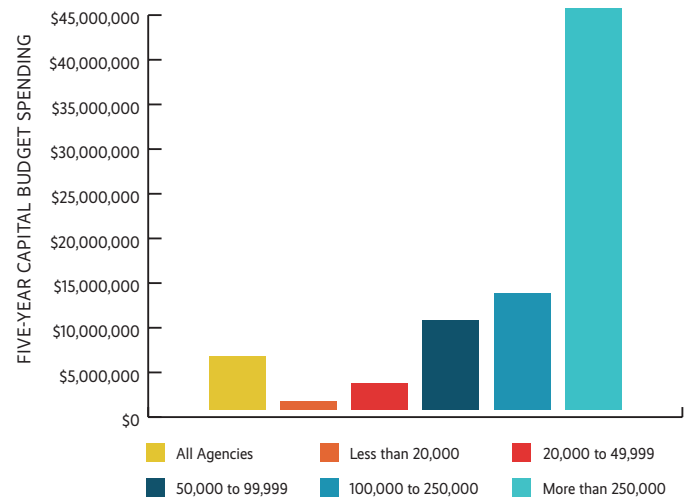


FIGURE 20: PARK AND RECREATION REVENUES PER CAPITA (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



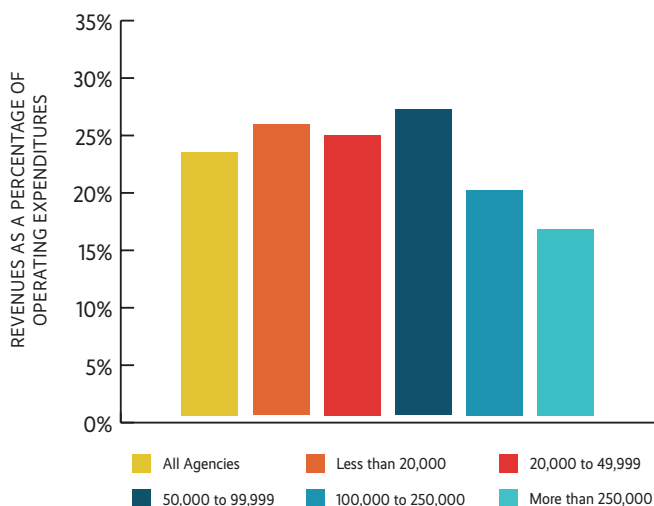
	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Median	\$19.38	\$28.41	\$23.68	\$26.68	\$15.44	\$6.21
Lower Quartile	\$5.84	\$9.04	\$7.71	\$7.74	\$3.61	\$2.83
Upper Quartile	\$49.74	\$70.59	\$61.18	\$58.18	\$45.47	\$18.05

**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	\$6,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$13,626,267	\$45,000,000
Lower Quartile	\$1,000,000	\$250,000	\$1,000,000	\$3,795,910	\$3,490,180	\$11,363,375
Upper Quartile	\$20,000,000	\$3,814,932	\$10,565,000	\$20,510,300	\$40,933,898	\$110,014,250

**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	22.9%	25.3%	24.4%	26.6%	19.6%	16.2%
Lower Quartile	10.1%	11.3%	10.4%	11.6%	8.6%	9%
Upper Quartile	40.5%	47.5%	41.3%	43.1%	36.4%	32.6%

Beyond day-to-day operations, park and recreation agencies have a median of \$6 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 million. Five-year capital budgets increase to \$10 million at agencies serving jurisdictions with 50,000 to 99,999 residents and to \$45 million at agencies in areas with more than 250,000 residents. In addition, factors that are positively related to size of five-year capital budget include:

- Number of parks maintained: less than 10 parks — \$1 million; 50 or more parks — \$32.4 million
- Acreage of parks maintained: 250 or fewer acres — \$1.8 million; more than 3,500 acres — \$46.4 million
- Operating budgets: annual operating budgets less than \$500,000 — \$250,000; annual operating budgets greater than \$10 million — \$28.7 million
- Population density: less than 500 people per square mile — \$1.5 million; more than 2,500 people per square mile — \$10 million

Park and recreation agencies target their capital expenditures to a variety of areas. On average, agencies designate 54 percent of their capital budget for renovation, while they allocate 32 percent toward new development. New development is the focus of a greater percentage of capital budgets, while renovation accounts for slightly less. Agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 residents earmark 37 percent of capital budgets for new development, while they dedicate 49 percent of capital budgets to renovating current properties.

Due to budget limitations, many park and recreation agencies delay repairs to infrastructure and assets. Agencies facing financial challenges reduce or eliminate budgets for maintenance, repairs and major capital investments for rehabilitation. The result is aging infrastructure — everything from swimming pools and playground equipment to bridges and buildings — that goes into disrepair and, frequently, becomes unusable. Even worse, delaying maintenance spending leads to greater decay, which further increases the costs of remedying the problems. Based on imputations of NRPA Park Metrics data, NRPA estimates the total value of deferred maintenance at local park and recreation agencies exceeds \$60 billion.

On average, park and recreation agencies have \$17.4 million of deferred maintenance projects on their books. Agencies operating in less densely populated areas have fewer deferred projects than do those in areas with a greater population density. Agencies operating in jurisdictions with fewer than 500 people per square mile have an average of \$7.1 million in deferred maintenance projects compared to an average of \$30.1 million for agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 2,500 people per square mile. Average deferred maintenance balances rise at agencies that:

- Have higher operating budgets: \$444,000 at agencies with operating budgets less than \$500,000 compared to \$46.6 million at agencies with operating budgets that exceed \$10 million.
- Have a larger staff: \$1.1 million at agencies with a staff of fewer than 10 FTEs compared to \$45.9 million for agencies with 100 or more FTEs.
- Serve larger populations: \$1.1 million for agencies in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people compared to \$63.1 million agencies in jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.
- Have more parks: \$1.3 million for agencies with less than 10 parks compared to nearly \$49.8 million at agencies with 50 or more parks.

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

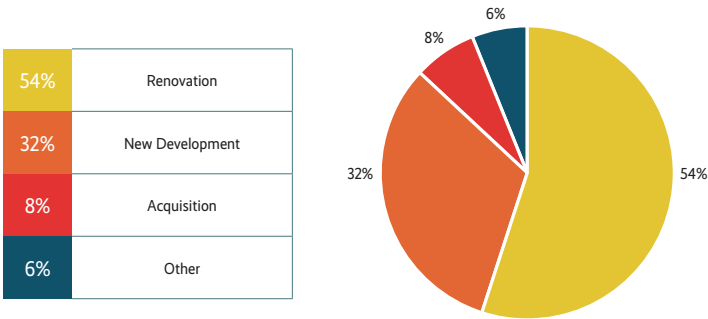
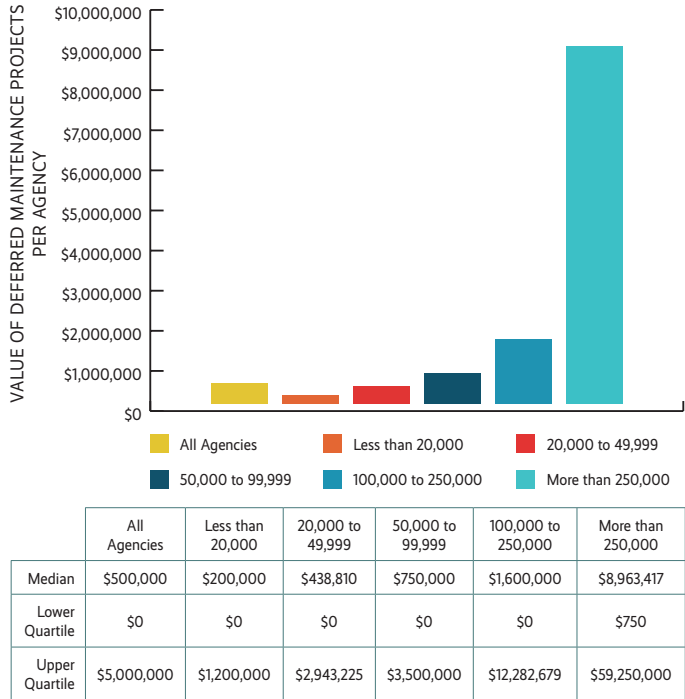


FIGURE 24: VALUE OF DEFERRED MAINTENANCE PROJECTS PER AGENCY (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



- Maintain more parkland: \$2.1 million at agencies that maintain 250 acres or less of parkland compared to \$74.2 million at agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland.

Further, jurisdiction type plays a large role in the amount of deferred maintenance. Agencies located in towns have deferred maintenance totaling an average of \$1.1 million, while the average at city-based agencies is \$23 million. County park and recreation agencies have an average of \$21.8 million in deferred maintenance projects while independent park districts/authorities have an average of \$9 million in deferred maintenance projects.

POLICIES

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

Nearly 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. More than half 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 course).

Seventy-one percent of park and recreation agencies allow the consumption of alcohol by legal-age adults on at least some of their premises. Only 17 percent of agencies have a policy that allows the consumption of

alcohol at all park and recreation agency locations under their jurisdiction.

Agencies are more likely to permit the consumption of alcohol at only a few select locations rather than at all facilities. Further, 47 percent of agencies allow the sale of alcohol on their premises, mainly at select locations and by either the agency itself or an authorized concessionaire.

Park and recreation agencies promote health and wellness by offering healthy food options in 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 their parks. Only 15 percent of agencies charge such fees, while just 16 percent of agencies have parking fees at some of their facilities. In both cases, the agencies that charge either admission or parking fees only do so at select facilities.

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

	Yes, at all locations	Yes, at select locations	No
Agency has a policy barring the use of all tobacco products in its parks, at its facilities and on its grounds	53%	26%	21%
Agency has a policy that allows the consumption of alcohol by legal-aged adults on its premises	17	54	29
Agency sells alcoholic beverages to legal-aged adults on its premises (sold either by the agency or by an authorized concessionaire)	5	42	53
Agency provides healthy food options in its vending machines	25	41	34
Agency provides healthy food options at its concession stands	23	48	30
Agency charges a parking fee at its parks or facilities	>1	16	83
Agency charges an admission fee to enter its parks	1	15	84

ADDITIONAL NRPA RESOURCES

The *2021 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 stable) funding

Included in the vast suite of NRPA Research resources are:

- **Engagement With Parks Survey:** 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 more than 190 million U.S. residents visited a local park, trail, public open space or recreation facility during the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic; four in five adults agree that parks and recreation is an essential local government service; and 77 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 to explore their views on topics related to the park and recreation field. Each poll targets 1000 adults ages 18 and up, representing a cross-section of the population. Questions span from the serious to the more lighthearted — but all demonstrate the power of parks and recreation.
- **NRPA Parks Snapshot Surveys:** In March 2020, NRPA began conducting weekly Parks Snapshot surveys to learn how park and recreation leaders from across the country are confronting the COVID-19 pandemic. NRPA will continue to provide regular data from the NRPA Parks Snapshot surveys as state and local guidance and ordinances regarding COVID-19 continue to change rapidly.
- **The Economic Impact of Parks:** Thanks to the efforts of park and recreation professionals throughout the United States, local park and recreation agencies generated \$166 billion in economic activity and supported more than 1.1 million jobs in 2017. Beyond the nationwide impact, this report shows the economic contribution of parks and recreation on the state-level, too. 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:** This study explores youth sports offerings, partnerships, fees and registration, and equitable access. Key findings include: five in six park and recreation agencies work 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:** 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.



Anthony Calabrese, director of Town of Fairfield (Connecticut) Parks and Recreation, reads to a group of children. *Photo courtesy of Gaylen Brown.*

- **Park and Recreation Agency-Foundation Relationships: Partnering for the Future:** This study shares evidence-based best practices that optimize agency-foundation relationships and detailed snapshots of the benefits and challenges that exist between these relationships. Among the key findings are the top five benefits that park and recreation leaders seek from foundations:
 - Extra fundraising capacity
 - Ability to serve beyond the scope of a traditional park and recreation agency
 - Advocacy for parks and recreation
 - Expertise and skills that complement agency staff
 - Flexibility, since foundations are not government agencies

- **Park and Recreation Marketing and Communications Report:** Getting the word out to the public about what park and recreation agencies do is a great challenge. One solution to this challenge is for agencies to invest in marketing and communications strategies — although accomplishing this is no small feat. This survey explores the various methods and tactics used to market to community members, the use of partners for greater reach, the role of social media in marketing and communications, typical budgets, number of personnel devoted to this effort and much more.



Deborah Varner with the Hayward (California) Area Recreation and Park District poses with a tarantula on her shoulder. *Photo courtesy of Hayward Area Recreation and Park District.*



Leonard “Brien” Hawkins, a tennis attendant II, repairs courts at the Mobile (Alabama) Tennis Center. *Photo courtesy of Jackie Byerley.*

- **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 data on base salary and bonuses for 10 positions at park and recreation agencies.
- **Evaluation Resource Hub:** The NRPA Research team has created several tools to help park and recreation professionals collect and use data, to identify new opportunities for amenities and services and to pinpoint areas for improvement. The hub includes:
 - **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.
 - **Customer Feedback Surveys:** Obtaining customer feedback is challenging for many park and recreation agencies, especially those that have resource constraints. This guide outlines key principles of conducting effective customer satisfaction surveys with a focus on being able to act on the results while keeping your agency’s time, money and staffing in mind.
 - **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.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review and NRPA Park Metrics represent the most comprehensive collection of 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 a variety of tools.

1. Guidance on the resources dedicated to and the 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 allow informed decisions on the optimal set of services and facility offerings.

Park and recreation agency leaders do not make decisions based on a one-size-fits-all standard that does not reflect the unique circumstances and needs of individual communities. Rather, these metrics allow park and recreation professionals to compare their agencies with others they view as peers.

3. Comprehensive data that demonstrate the broad offerings and programs representing 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.



Christie Bruner, community engagement supervisor at City of St. Petersburg (Florida) Parks and Recreation - Healthy St. Pete, and a group of youth show their strength. Photo courtesy of Bruner.

Park and recreation professionals can use the 2021 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

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Doug Kane (left), adult sports coordinator for Whitefish Bay (Wisconsin) Recreation, works with one of his badminton program participants. Photo courtesy of Anthony Iracki.

ABOUT NRPA



Children play and laugh during a program hosted by West Allis-West Milwaukee Recreation and Community Services. *Photo courtesy of Shelly Strasser.*

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

NRPA brings strength to our message by partnering with like-minded organizations, including those in the federal government, nonprofits and commercial enterprises. Funded through dues, grants, registrations and charitable contributions, NRPA produces research, education and policy initiatives for our members that ultimately enrich the communities they serve.

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

Back Cover image

Children receive a meal during a Family Camp Out event hosted by the Plano (Texas) Parks and Recreation department. *Photo courtesy of Plano Parks and Recreation.*



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