

2018 NRPA URBAN AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW



NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park

In April 2018, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) published the [2018 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#). This annual report summarizes the key findings from [NRPA Park Metrics](#)—NRPA’s benchmarking tool that assists park and recreation professionals in the effective managing of their operating resources and capital facilities. The *2018 NRPA Agency Performance Review* features 22 charts and tables highlighting the characteristics and offerings of 1,069 park and recreation agencies across the United States.

The 2018 NRPA Agency Performance Review and NRPA Park Metrics together represent the most comprehensive collection of park and recreation benchmarks and insights which inform professionals, key stakeholders and the public on the state of the park and recreation industry. In addition to the insights within the *NRPA Agency Performance Review*, *NRPA Park Metrics* provides tools to build customized reports easily and compare your agency to others to gain more funding support, improve operations and better serve your community.

Park and recreation agencies are as diverse as the populations they serve, and no two park and recreation agencies are the same. Different agencies serve different constituencies with unique needs, desires and challenges.

This white paper highlights data from those park and recreation agencies based in urban locales with populations of at least 250,000 participating in NRPA Park Metrics. Because these agencies are significantly larger than other ones, they may deliver a broader set of services, offerings and amenities. They may also face some unique challenges. This white paper presents data not only for larger agencies, but also for those agencies smaller than the median size in NRPA Park Metrics (36,000 residents) to highlight key differences between urban and larger agencies and those serving fewer residents.

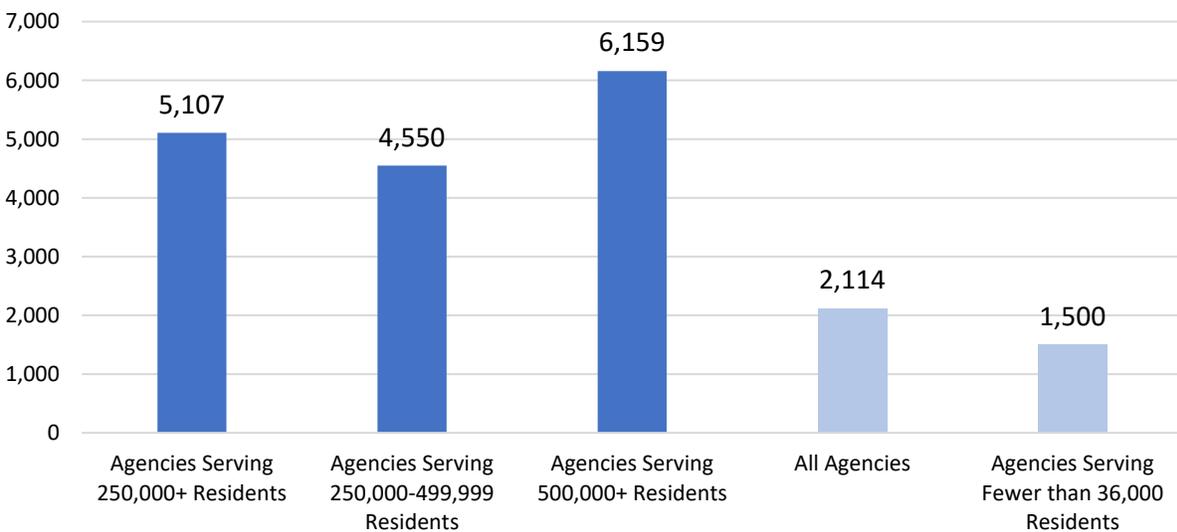
Data show that even urban agencies differ from each other; they tend to serve more residents with each of their facilities and do so with fewer resources (on a per capita basis) than do smaller agencies. Urban and larger park and recreation agencies:

- Have a median of one park for every 5,107 residents in their community
- Have a median of 12.7 acres of park land per 1,000 residents
- Are more likely than smaller agencies to offer natural and cultural history activities, visual arts programming and cultural crafts activities. They are less likely to offer team sports and racquet sports.
- Offer a wide variety of programming targeted to children (summer camps, after-school programs, teen programs), older adults and people with disabilities
- Have a median payroll staff of 4.3 full-time equivalents (FTEs) for every 10,000 residents
- Have median annual operating expenditures of \$44.01 per capita and operating expenditures of \$3,515 per acre of park land
- Generate a median of \$7.16 per capita of revenue annually, including revenue from admission and registration fees and sponsorships. Agencies typically recover 20.7 percent of its operating expenditures through revenue recovery.

AMENITIES AND OFFERINGS OF URBAN AND LARGER PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

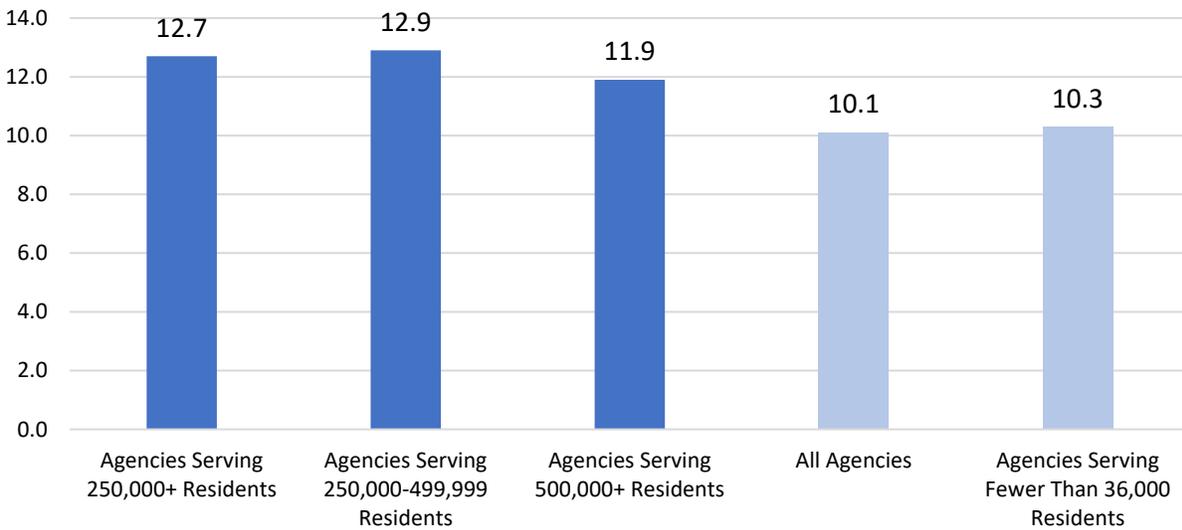
At the typical agency, there is one park for every 2,114 residents. The number of people served per park rises as the population of the town, city, county or region served by the agency increases. A park managed by urban and larger park and recreation agencies typically serve far more people than one managed by smaller agencies. Agencies in a jurisdiction of at least 250,000 people serve a median of 5,107 people per park, with one park for every 6,159 residents at agencies serving more than 500,000 residents.

Residents Per Park Served
(Median, By Jurisdiction Population)



While more residents living in urban and larger jurisdictions may have to “share” each park with a larger number of their neighbors, they live in areas that typically have more park acreage to enjoy. The typical park and recreation agency oversees 10.1 acres of park land for every 1,000 residents in its jurisdiction. The median park acreage per 1,000 residents rises to 12.7 acres at agencies that serve at least 250,000 people. Urban areas are more likely to have benefited from formal planning and design that included parks, trail networks and other space amenities. Also, urban locales—particularly in medium to large cities—are more likely to include larger regional and flagship “central” parks in their portfolios, which add to their park acreage.

Acres of Park Land Per 1,000 Residents (Median, By Jurisdiction Population)



Park and recreation agencies may have thousands, if not millions, of interactions with their residents and visitors each year. The typical park and recreation agency in the United States has nearly 200,000 contacts annually. The number of interactions, however, rises sharply at urban and larger agencies. For example, the typical agency that serves at least 250,000 residents has 2.3 million “contacts” per year, with the 75th percentile agency registering nearly 4.3 million contacts with residents annually.

(“Contacts” include visits to a local park, running or biking on a local trail, visits to the local recreation center or other interaction with any of an agency’s park and recreation facilities.)

Programming is a key method of engagement that drives the use of park and recreation facilities. The typical urban and larger agency offers 620 programs each year; 297 of those programs are fee-based events. These figures increase sharply with any population increase in the jurisdiction. For example, park and recreation agencies serving at least 500,000 people typically offer 804 program events per year with the agency at the 75th percentile offering 5,000 program events annually.

Urban and larger park and recreation agencies offer a diverse set of program and activity offerings to meet the various needs and desires of their residents. Urban agencies are more likely than other agencies to offer their residents programming and activities for:

- Health and wellness education
- Natural and cultural history activities
- Visual arts
- Cultural crafts
- Performing arts

Conversely, urban park and recreation agencies are less likely than other ones to offer team sports and racquet sports in their communities. (To be clear, a majority of urban agencies offers their residents both.)

Programming Offered by Park and Recreation Agencies

(Percent of Agencies)

	Agencies Serving 250,000+ Residents	Agencies Serving 250,000 – 499,999 Residents	Agencies Serving 500,000+ Residents	All Agencies	Agencies Serving Fewer than 36,000 Residents
Themed special events	86%	84%	88%	84%	80%
Health and wellness education	86	86	87	78	69
Natural and cultural history activities	84	82	87	53	37
Social recreation events	78	77	79	81	35
Fitness enhancement classes	76	73	79	78	74
Visual arts	73	75	71	56	42
Safety training	72	75	69	70	64
Cultural crafts	70	64	75	58	47
Team sports	70	73	67	86	86
Aquatics	70	75	65	69	62
Individual sports	67	68	65	68	66
Performing arts	67	68	65	61	51
Trips and tours	63	59	65	64	59
Martial arts	58	61	56	61	54
Racquet sports	57	57	58	62	56
Golf	53	55	52	47	35

Parks and recreation is an invaluable provider of services and programming for children, seniors and people with disabilities. One area in which parks and recreation is a leader is out-of-school time (OST) offerings. OST programs are critical providers of child care, affording parents and caregivers the opportunity to earn a living. These programs include education about nature and nutrition, tutoring, mentoring and enrichment opportunities that improve the mental, physical and emotional health of youth. Even more, OST programs often fill a critical need by providing healthy meals to children during out-of-school times.

Eighty-seven percent of urban and larger park and recreation agencies offer summer camp programs for their communities' children, with more than seven in ten of these agencies also delivering programs for teens and after-school care as a part of their OST offerings. Urban and larger agencies also are more likely to offer before-school programs and full daycare as a part of their offerings, although these programs are offered by only 31 percent and 16 percent of these agencies, respectively.

Urban agencies also are more likely than other park and recreation agencies to deliver programs specifically for people with disabilities (75 percent). In addition, three-quarters of urban and larger agencies deliver programming designed for older adults in their communities.

Targeted Programs for Children, Seniors and People with Disabilities

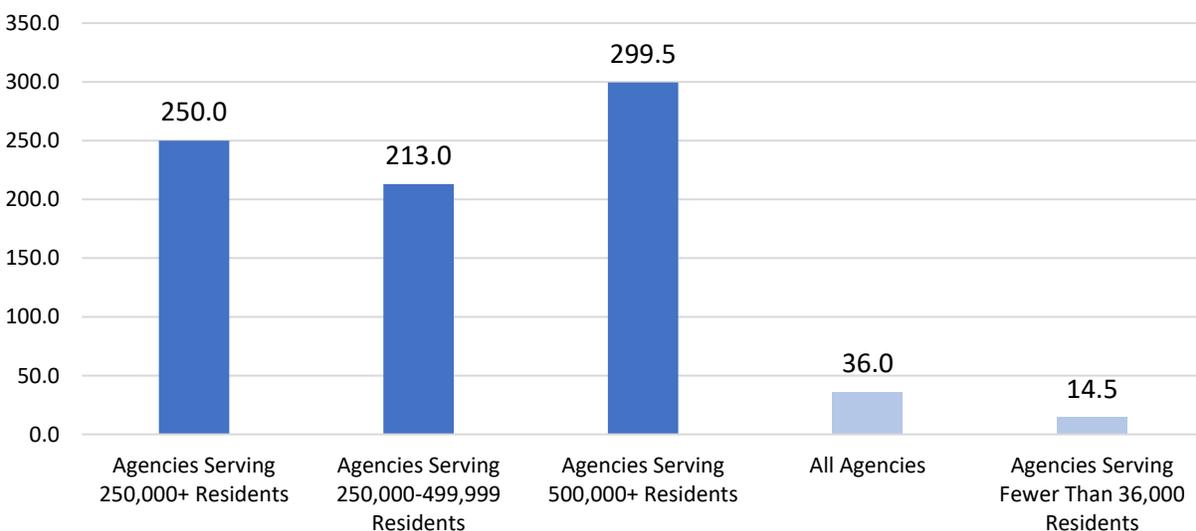
(Percent of Agencies)

	Agencies Serving 250,000+ Residents	Agencies Serving 250,000 – 499,999 Residents	Agencies Serving 500,000+ Residents	All Agencies	Agencies Serving Fewer than 36,000 Residents
Summer camp	87%	84%	90%	84%	78%
Specific senior programs	75	77	72	79	75
Programs for people with disabilities	75	80	70	62	47
Specific teen programs	73	67	77	63	53
After-school programs	72	73	71	55	45
Preschool	35	40	30	36	33
Before-school programs	31	42	21	21	16
Full daycare	16	20	13	8	6

STAFFING

Staffing at the typical park and recreation agency includes 36 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) comprised of a mix of both full-time and part-time staff. The size of the staff, however, expands greatly as the size of the jurisdiction served by the agency expands. Agencies serving populations of at least 250,000 typically have 250 FTEs on their payrolls. The median count of FTEs rises to nearly 300 at agencies that serve at least half a million residents.

Park and Recreation Agency Staffing: Full-Time Equivalents
(Median, By Jurisdiction Population)



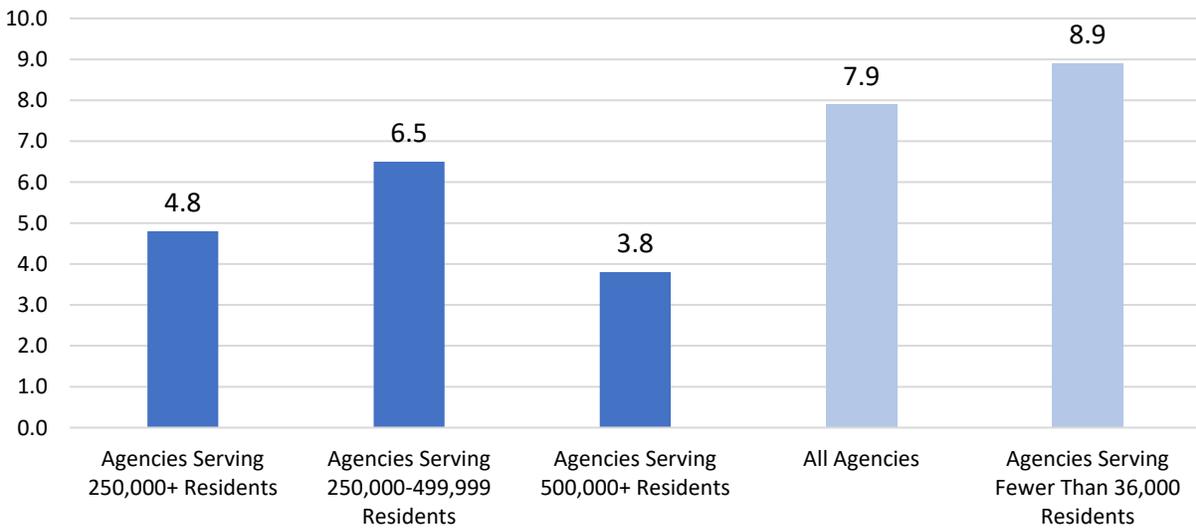
One way to gauge agency staffing is to measure it relative to the population of the area that the agency serves. The typical park and recreation agency has 7.9 FTEs on staff for every 10,000 residents in the jurisdiction served by the agency. Agencies located in more-populated areas tend to have fewer FTEs on staff. Agencies serving jurisdictions with at least 250,000 people have 4.8 FTEs on staff for every 10,000 residents served. This ratio declines to 3.8 FTEs at agencies serving more than 500,000 residents. Lower per capita staffing is in part a function of increased scale and efficiencies from serving a larger population.

Urban and larger agencies are more likely than other ones to have staff members who belong to a labor union as a part of their team. Fifty-six percent of park and recreation agencies serving populations of at least 250,000 have staff covered by a collective bargaining agreement. This percentage rises to 65 percent at agencies that serve at least half a million residents.

Operations and maintenance is the primary responsibility of park and recreation professionals. However, there are other areas where staff devote their energies. On average, full-time staff at urban and larger agencies dedicate their time to the following general activities:

- Operations/Maintenance (57 percent)
- Programming (22 percent)
- Administration (11 percent)
- Capital development (three percent)
- Other (seven percent)

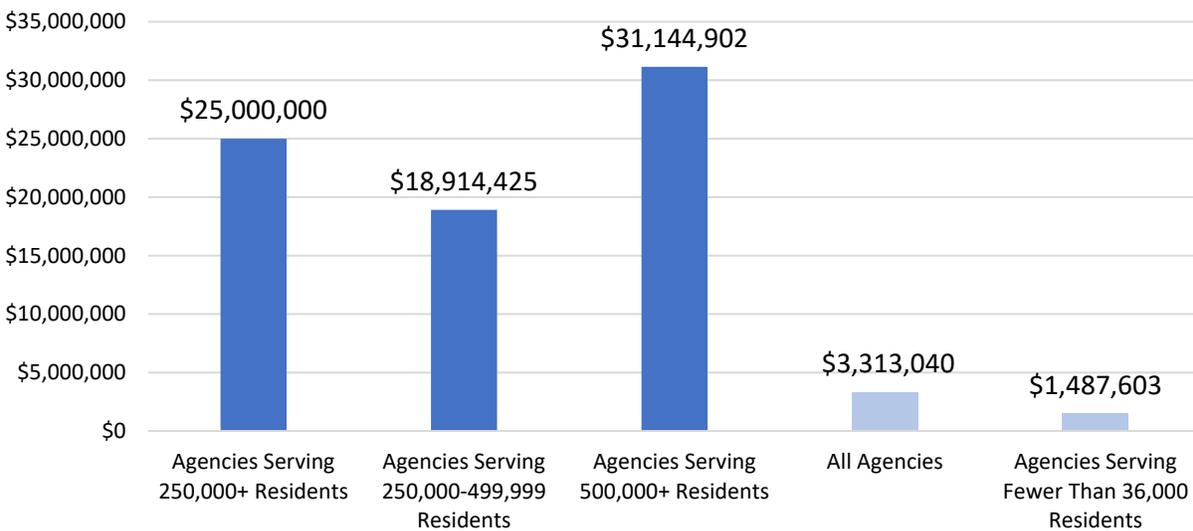
Park and Recreation FTEs per 10,000 Residents
(Median, by Jurisdiction Population)



FINANCE

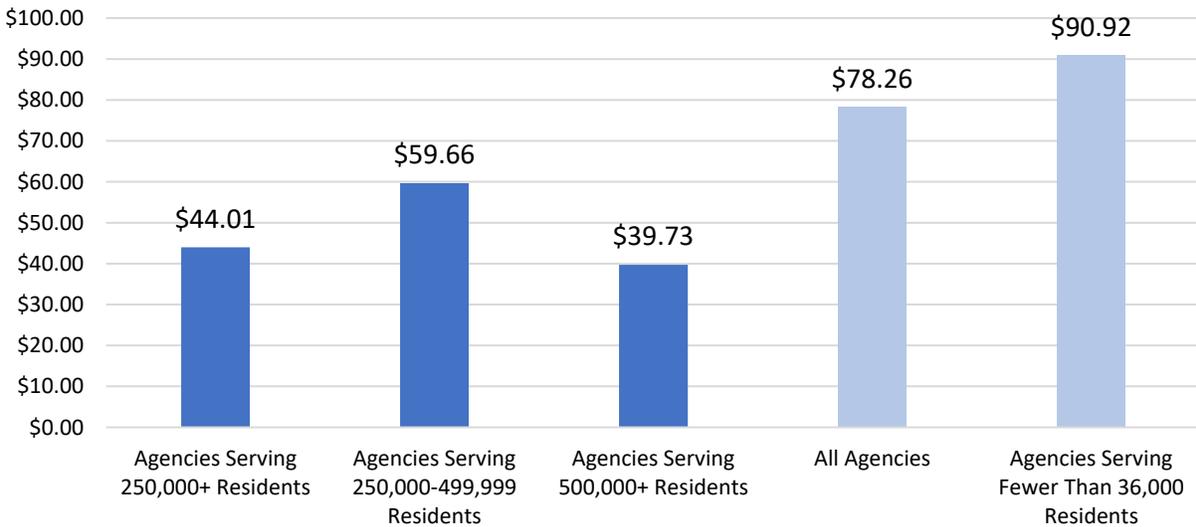
The typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenditures of \$3,313,040. Operating expenditures are much higher at urban park and larger recreation agencies. For example, the median annual operating expenditure for agencies serving at least 250,000 residents is \$25.0 million, with the median rising to \$31.1 million at agencies serving at least half a million residents.

Annual Operating Expenditures (Median, by Jurisdiction Population)



One way to get a better handle on agency funding is to normalize operation expenditure data by the size of the population an agency serves. The typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$78.26 on a per capita basis. Per capita operations spending is, however, inversely correlated to the population of the area served, reflecting in part greater scale and efficiency among urban and larger agencies. Median per capita operations expenditures are \$44.01 per resident at agencies serving jurisdictions with at least 250,000 people, and \$39.73 at agencies in areas with populations of at least half a million.

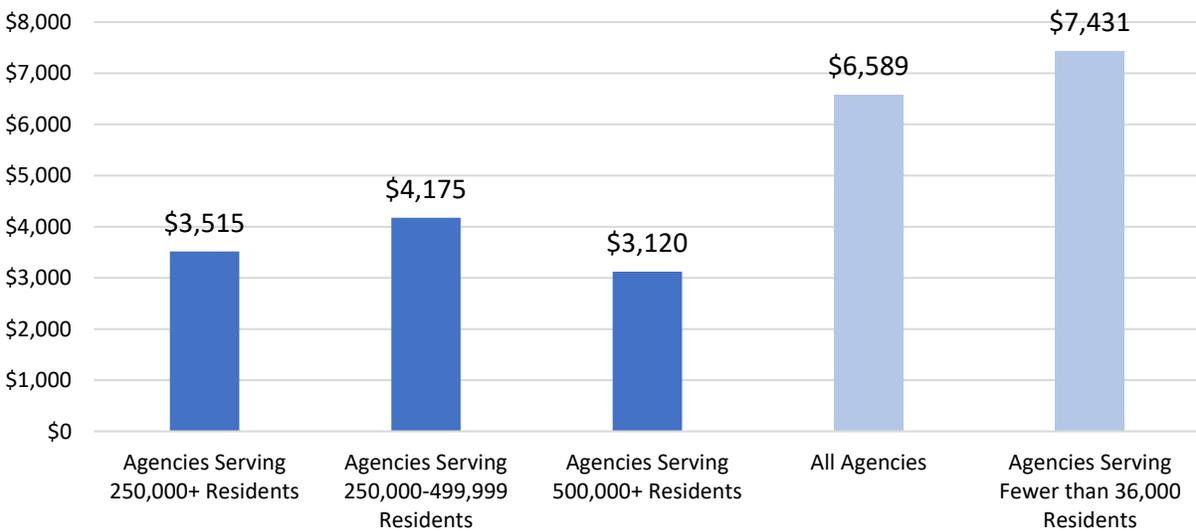
Annual Operating Expenditures Per Capita (Median, by Jurisdiction Population)



Median operating expenditures are \$6,589 per acre of park *and* non-park sites managed by the agency. Non-park sites are also public spaces—such as lawns at a city hall—not designated as parks but whose maintenance and/or operation costs often are borne by the local park and recreation agency.

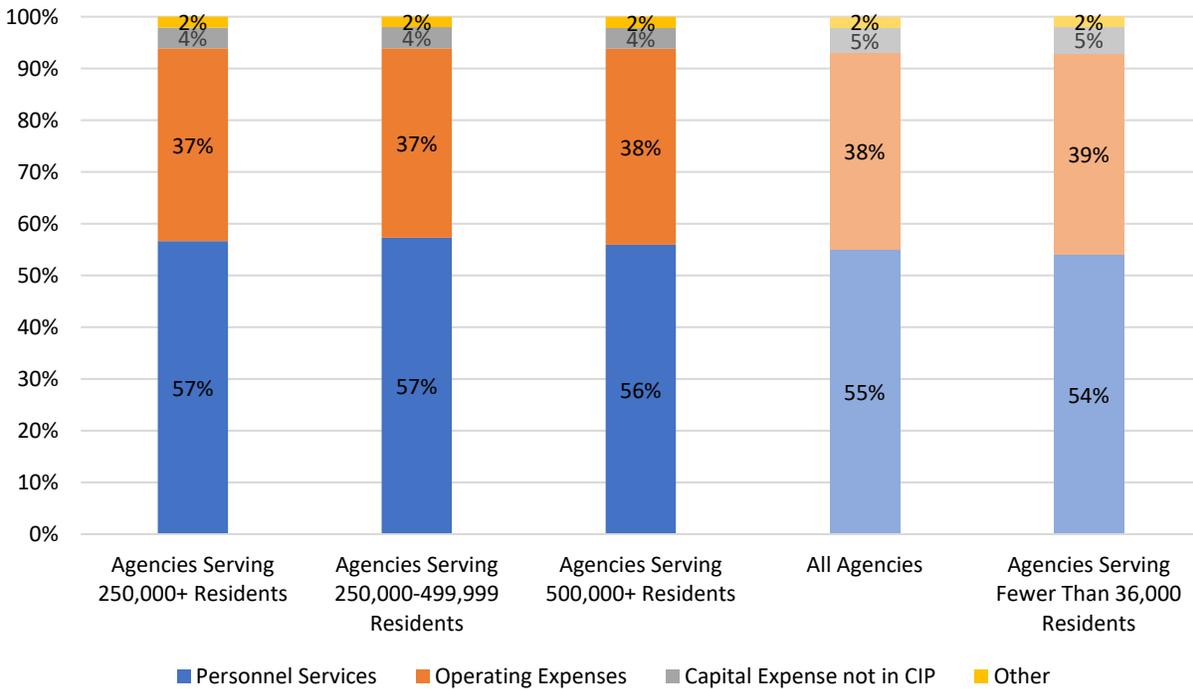
Operating expenditures per acre are lower, however, at urban and larger park and recreation agencies. Agencies serving populations with at least 250,000 residents have a median operating expenditure per acre of \$3,515, dropping to \$3,120 per acre at agencies that serve jurisdictions of at least 500,000 residents.

Operating Expenditures Per Acre of Park and Non-Park Sites (Median, by Jurisdiction Population)



At the typical urban park and recreation agency, personnel services account for 57 percent of the agency’s operations budget. This includes expenditures for all salaries, wages and benefits for both full-time and non-full-time personnel, along with contracted individuals. Another 37 percent of operating expenditures fund agency operations, including operational support where the capital fund repays the operating budget, all enterprise funds, interdepartmental transfers, and, in some cases, the capital debt service. Four percent of operations spending include capital expenses that are not part of the agency’s capital improvement plan (CIP). This includes expenditures for capital equipment (e.g., computers, vehicles, large-area mowers, tractors, boats), some periodic cyclical maintenance (carpets, conference chairs, push mowers) and, perhaps, debt services paid from the agency’s operating funds.

Distribution of Operating Expenditures Average, by Jurisdiction Population

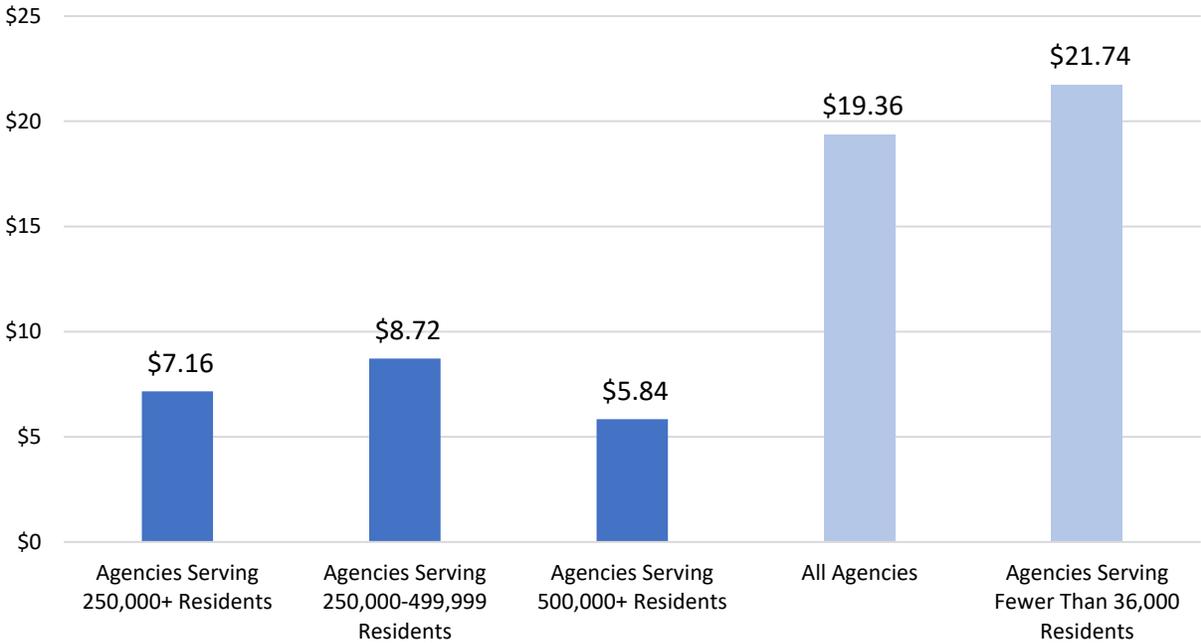


On average, park and recreation agencies derive 54 percent of their operating budgets from general fund tax support. The second largest source of funding for most agencies is earned/generated revenues, accounting for an average of 22 percent of operating expenditures. Some agencies have access to special, dedicated taxes and funding for part of their budgets. These park and recreation districts obtain the majority of their funding from tax levies dedicated to park and recreation purposes approved by citizen referenda.

Generating revenue through registration and admission fees, concessions, and sponsorships are another funding source for park and recreation agencies. The typical park and recreation agency generates just over \$5 million in non-tax revenues on an annual basis, although this amount can vary greatly based on agency size, services and facilities offered by the agency and the mandate from leadership and policymakers. This translates into a median of \$19.36 in generated revenue for every resident living in the agency’s jurisdiction.

Urban and larger park and recreation agencies typically generate \$7.16 in revenue annually for each resident living in the jurisdictions they serve. Larger agencies generate even less—agencies serving at least 500,000 residents generate just \$5.84 in revenue, per capita.

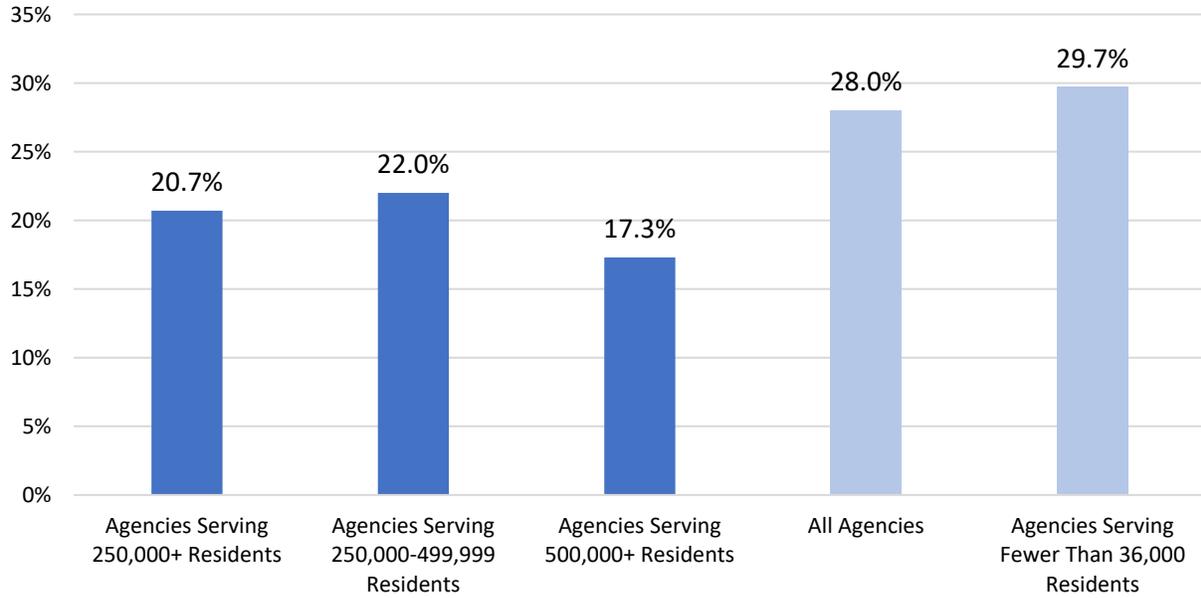
Park and Recreation Revenues per Capita
(Median, by Jurisdiction Population)



Another way to gauge the impact of agency-generated revenue is to examine cost recovery as a percentage of operating expenditures. While the typical agency recovers 28 percent of its operating expenditures from non-tax revenues, the percentage is significantly lower at urban and larger agencies. For example, agencies serving populations of at least 250,000 recover nearly 21 percent of their operating expenditures from revenues, while even larger agencies (serving a population of at least 500,000) have cost recovery of just 17 percent.

Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Expenditures (Cost Recovery)

(Median, by Jurisdiction Population)



CONCLUSIONS

The *2018 NRPA Agency Performance Review* reveals that park and recreation agencies are as diverse as the towns, cities, counties and regions they serve. Agencies differ not only in size and service offerings but also in their core mission and how they fund their offerings.

This diversity is apparent when reviewing the data of urban and larger agencies. Agencies in jurisdictions with populations of at least 250,000 typically have more park acreage per resident and deliver a more extensive menu of service offerings and programming than do other agencies. At the same time, they likely are delivering these amenities with fewer human and financial resources on a per capita basis than are other agencies. However, the only way to truly understand how your park and recreation agency compares to its peers is to interact with *NRPA Park Metrics* and report resources.

The data from these resources certainly help inform park and recreation professionals. We can, however, do better. The wealth of insights gleaned from *NRPA Park Metrics* will be even stronger when all park and recreation agencies—including those in urban settings—enter and update their data in the database. You can start the process today by going to www.NRPA.org/metrics.



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