



2016 NRPA Field Report

Park and Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks



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Executive Summary

Welcome to the *2016 NRPA Field Report*, the most comprehensive resource of data and insights for park and recreation agencies in the United States. The *2016 NRPA Field Report* contains data and key insights from PRORAGIS, NRPA's benchmarking tool that assists park and recreation professionals in the effective management and planning of their operating resources and capital facilities.

Why is the 2016 NRPA Field Report an important resource to park and recreation agencies? There is no other resource that provides park and recreation professionals and other key stakeholders with this wealth of valuable benchmarks and insights that informs on the state of the industry. These insights help:

1. Show the prevalence of expanded activities and offerings of agencies throughout the nation.
2. Provide guidance to park and recreation professionals to evaluate the performance of their agencies. Do their agencies provide as much open space, recreation opportunities and programming as their peers? Is the agency properly staffed? Sufficiently funded?
3. Make informed decisions on the optimal set of service and facility offerings based on the demographics and, therefore, the needs of a specific community while also providing comparative agency data from other communities/agencies.

So, is the information in the 2016 NRPA Field Report the final answer in terms of decision making for local park and recreation agencies? No. Instead, park and recreation leaders should use findings from this report to start the conversation with internal colleagues, external consultants and partners, and policymakers. Data is only a tool — albeit a very valuable tool — to help determine the best decisions for an agency.



Consider that no two park and recreation agencies are the same. They serve different residents with different needs, desires and challenges and have different access to funding. For example, just because an agency may have more workers per 1,000 residents relative to “typical” park and recreation agencies does not mean that agency should shed staff. It is possible that the agency with more staff offers more hands-on programming because of the unique needs of the population it serves.

A successful agency is one that tailors its services to meet the demands of its community. Knowing who uses your agency's resource and who may use it in the future (including age, race, income trends) are also factors in shaping the optimal mix of facilities and services to be offered. Every park and recreation agency and the public it serves are unique. Communities look different and so too should their park and recreation agency. It is this reason why NRPA no longer publishes “National Standards.”



Consequently, the *2016 NRPA Field Report* should be used in conjunction with other resources, including those that are proprietary to an agency, from NRPA and from outside sources. The following are some NRPA resources to consider:



PRORAGIS: The information contained in the NRPA Field Report comes from PRORAGIS, NRPA's park and recreation benchmarking resource. Whereas the NRPA Field Report provides data for "typical" agencies, you can customize key metrics with PRORAGIS to compare the characteristics of your agency to its peers. This may include filtering by agency type, size and geographic region. The experience is further enhanced when you enter your agency's data into PRORAGIS, which allows the reports to compare your agency's data with the key metrics of agencies throughout the United States.



NRPA Facility Market Reports: These customized reports offer key census and marketing data and insights about the market served by your agency's facilities. Your agency will gain a greater understanding of the residents served by a park, aquatic center, recreation center or any other facility, with a particular focus on their habits and interests.



NRPA Connect: There may be no better resource to answer your park and recreation questions than your peers. NRPA Connect is an online professional networking tool that connects you with like-minded park and recreation professionals from across the country and is a valuable resource to receive information, ask industry questions and get insight into trends in the field.



Economic Impact of Local Parks: This study finds operations and capital spending at America's local and regional park agencies was responsible for approximately \$140 billion in annual economic activity and nearly 1 million jobs in 2013. The report also includes estimates of the economic impact of operations and capital spending at local and regional park agencies for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.



Americans' Broad-Based Support for Local Recreation and Park Services: This survey of more than 1,100 Americans affirms their passion for their local public parks. In fact, virtually all Americans agree that their communities benefit from their local public parks, *even if they themselves are not regular park users*. The support for local public parks crosses nearly every demographic segment of Americans (including age, income, household formation and political affiliation) and has gone unabated for the past 25 years even as our nation and the ways we interact and entertain each other have dramatically evolved.



Parks & Recreation magazine: No other publication covers trends and issues affecting the industry like NRPA's monthly flagship magazine. Each issue features content on a number of topics, including conservation, health and wellness, social equity, advocacy, law review and operations.

All of these resources can be found at www.nrpa.org

How to Read the 2016 NRPA Field Report

The 2016 NRPA Field Report presents most of its data with medians, along with data responses at both lower-quartile (lowest 25 percent) and upper-quartile (highest 25 percent). The data presentation provides insight as to where your agency stands compared not only to typical agencies (i.e., those at the median values), but also to the full spectrum of agencies at both the high and low quartiles of values. Many metrics presented include the top-line figures as well as certain cross tabulations of jurisdiction population or population density. A more comprehensive set of cross tabulations of the data presented in the following pages is available as a set of interactive tables at www.nrpa.org/2016-Field-Report.

As noted above, we encourage you to use the *2016 NRPA Field Report* as a first step and then turn to the reporting tools available in PRORAGIS to get more in-depth statistical cuts of the metrics you care about the most. Your agency can receive even more valuable insights when it updates and completes its PRORAGIS profile and therefore is eligible to receive an Agency Performance Report. This report specifically addresses the metrics for your agency as it relates to statistically similar agency characteristics such as population or density.

The *2016 NRPA Field Report* contains data from more than 950 park and recreation agencies across the United States as reported between the years 2013 and 2015. Note: Not all agencies answered every survey question.

NRPA FIELD REPORT AT A GLANCE

The Typical Park and Recreation Agency...

Has 9.5 acres of park land
per 1,000 residents

Has operating expenditures
per capita of

\$76.44



Has

7.4

staff members
per 10,000 residents



Recovers
29%

of operating expenditures
through revenue generation

ADMIT
ONE

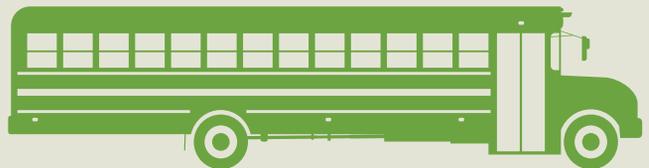
Has 1 Park for every
2,277 residents



80% of agencies
offer summer camps



50% of agencies
offer afterschool programs



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Key Findings

Park Facilities

America's local and regional park agencies differ greatly in size and facility offerings. Whereas the typical agency participating in PRORAGIS serves a jurisdiction (e.g., a town, city, county and/or region) of 40,800 people, there are agencies that serve an area of just a few hundred people while others are a primary recreation resource for millions of people. Naturally, the offerings of these agencies vary as much as do the markets they serve. The typical agency has 19 parks under its watch comprising a total 400 acres. Adding in non-park facilities, the median number of parks and non-park facilities rises to 24 comprising 490 acres.

At the typical agency, there is 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 the agency increases. At agencies located in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 residents, there is one park for every 1,335 residents. The ratio rises to one park for every 2,396 residents in jurisdictions with 50,000 to 99,999 people and one park for every 6,250 people at agencies serving areas with more than 250,000 people.

The typical park and recreation agency has 9.5 acres of park land for every thousand residents in the jurisdiction. So, which agencies offer the most park land acreage per 1,000 residents? The smallest and largest agencies: those serving fewer than 20,000 residents typically have 10.6 acres per 1,000 residents compared to 12.5 acres per 1,000 residents at jurisdictions serving more than 250,000 people. At the same time, agencies serving jurisdictions between 100,000 and 250,000 people have 7.4 acres of park land per 1,000 residents.

Figure 1

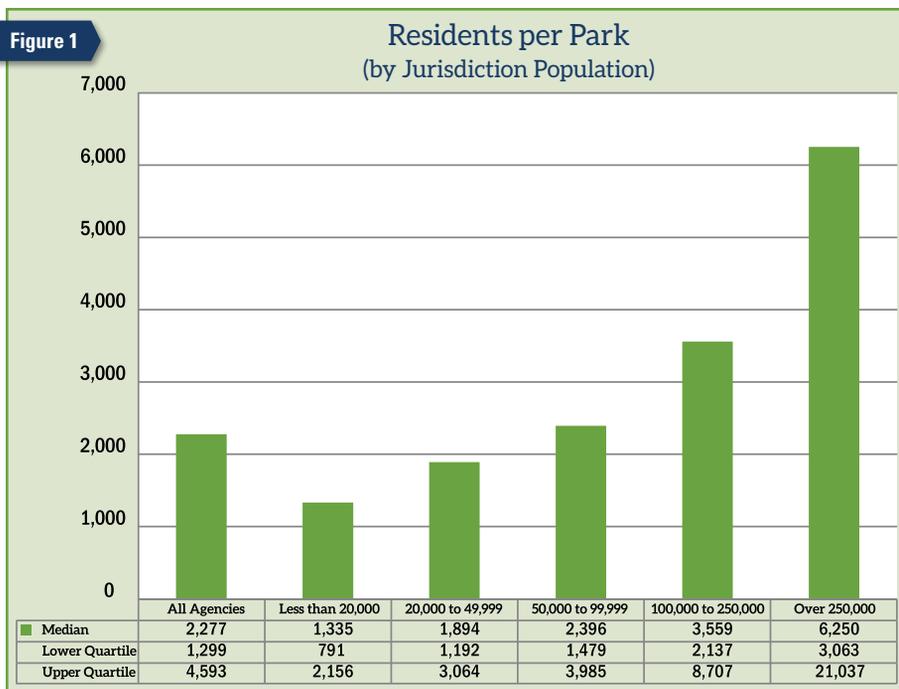


Figure 2

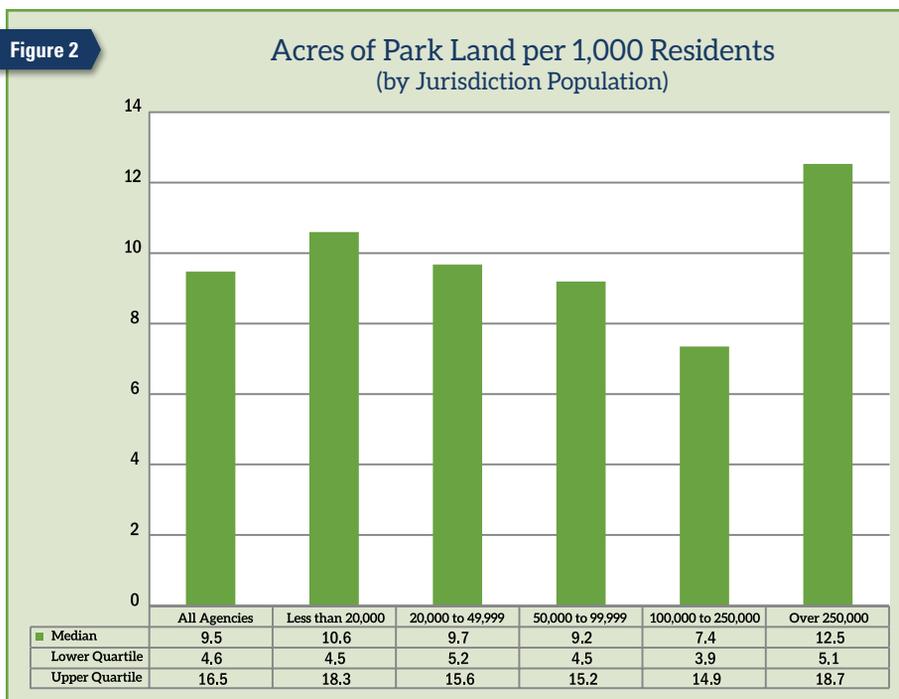


Figure 3

Outdoor Park and Recreation Facilities

Outdoor Facility	Agencies Offering this Facility	Median Number of Residents per Facility
Playgrounds	91%	3,560
Basketball courts	85%	7,000
Diamond fields: softball fields - adult	65%	12,463
Tennis courts (outdoor only)	61%	4,295
Diamond fields: softball fields - youth	59%	9,687
Diamond fields: baseball - youth	58%	6,599
Swimming pools (outdoor only)	54%	34,686
Rectangular fields: multipurpose	50%	8,060
Community gardens	47%	32,376
Tot lots	45%	12,112
Dog park	41%	43,183
Diamond fields: baseball - adult	39%	19,694
Rectangular fields: football field	38%	25,523
Rectangular fields: soccer field - youth	37%	6,671
Rectangular fields: soccer field - adult	34%	12,365
Diamond fields: tee-ball	28%	12,771
Multise courts -basketball, volleyball	25%	13,736
Ice rink (outdoor only)	21%	16,572
Rectangular fields: lacrosse field	7%	26,639
Rectangular fields: cricket field	6%	199,199
Multipurpose synthetic field	5%	34,915
Rectangular fields: field hockey field	3%	22,767
Overlay field	3%	7,257

Park and recreation agencies offer a wide variety of facility types and features. **An overwhelming majority of park and recreation agencies have playgrounds (91 percent) and basketball courts (85 percent) in their portfolio of outdoor assets.** Further, a majority of agencies have diamond fields for baseball and/or softball, tennis courts, outdoor swimming pools and multipurpose rectangular fields.

In addition, the typical park and recreation agency that manages or maintains trails for walking, hiking, running and/or biking has 11.0 miles of trails in its network. Agencies serving more than 250,000 people in their area have a median of 90.1 miles of trails under their purview.

Park and recreation agencies also offer a number of indoor facilities for their residents. **A majority of agencies offer recreation centers and gyms, while at least two in five agencies offer community centers, senior centers and fitness centers.** Figure 4 provides median populations served by the following facility and/or activity area.

Figure 4

Indoor Park and Recreation Facilities

Indoor Facility	Agencies Offering this Facility	Median Number of Residents per Facility
Recreation centers	69%	26,650
Gyms	63%	26,418
Community centers	45%	30,000
Senior centers	43%	49,500
Fitness center	40%	39,765
Performance amphitheater	28%	45,817
Nature centers	27%	114,620
Stadiums	15%	57,051
Ice rink	15%	28,500
Teen centers	9%	62,700
Indoor track	7%	49,715
Arena	5%	57,637

Note some of these facilities may be included as a part of another facility. For example, a fitness center may be a part of a recreation center.

Programming

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 has a quarter million contacts per year.** An agency at the 75th percentile has 811,816 annual contacts while one at the 95th percentile has more than 4.3 million contacts each year.

So what is a contact? These can be visits to a local park, running or biking on a local trail, visits to the local recreation center or any other interaction with any of the agency's park and recreation facilities. And to be clear, a person can have more than one contact; for example, a person who visits their local aquatic center ten times and runs on the local trail five times would be counted as 15 contacts.

Programming is a key outreach method to drive usage of park and recreation facilities and, when associated with registration fees, also happens to be the largest non-tax revenue source for most agencies. The typical agency generates more than 23,000 contacts from its free and fee-based programming events, with annual contacts rising to more than 100,000 at the 75th percentile agency and surging to more than a half million contacts arising from both free and fee-based park and recreation programming at the 95th percentile agency.

Programming spans across many differing types of park and recreation activities, with many touching one or more of NRPA's Three Pillars of Conservation, Health & Wellness and Social Equity. Key programming activities offered by at least 60 percent of park and recreation agencies include:

- Team sports (84 percent)
- Fitness enhancement classes (83 percent)
- Health and wellness education (81 percent)
- Safety training (69 percent)
- Visual arts (67 percent)
- Trips and tours (66 percent)
- Martial arts (60 percent)
- Performing arts (60 percent)
- Aquatics (60 percent)

Agencies serving larger populations are more likely than agencies serving smaller towns to present a number of programming offerings, including:

- Health and wellness education
- Aquatics
- Golf
- Cultural crafts
- Performing arts
- Natural and cultural history activities
- Trips and tours
- Visual arts

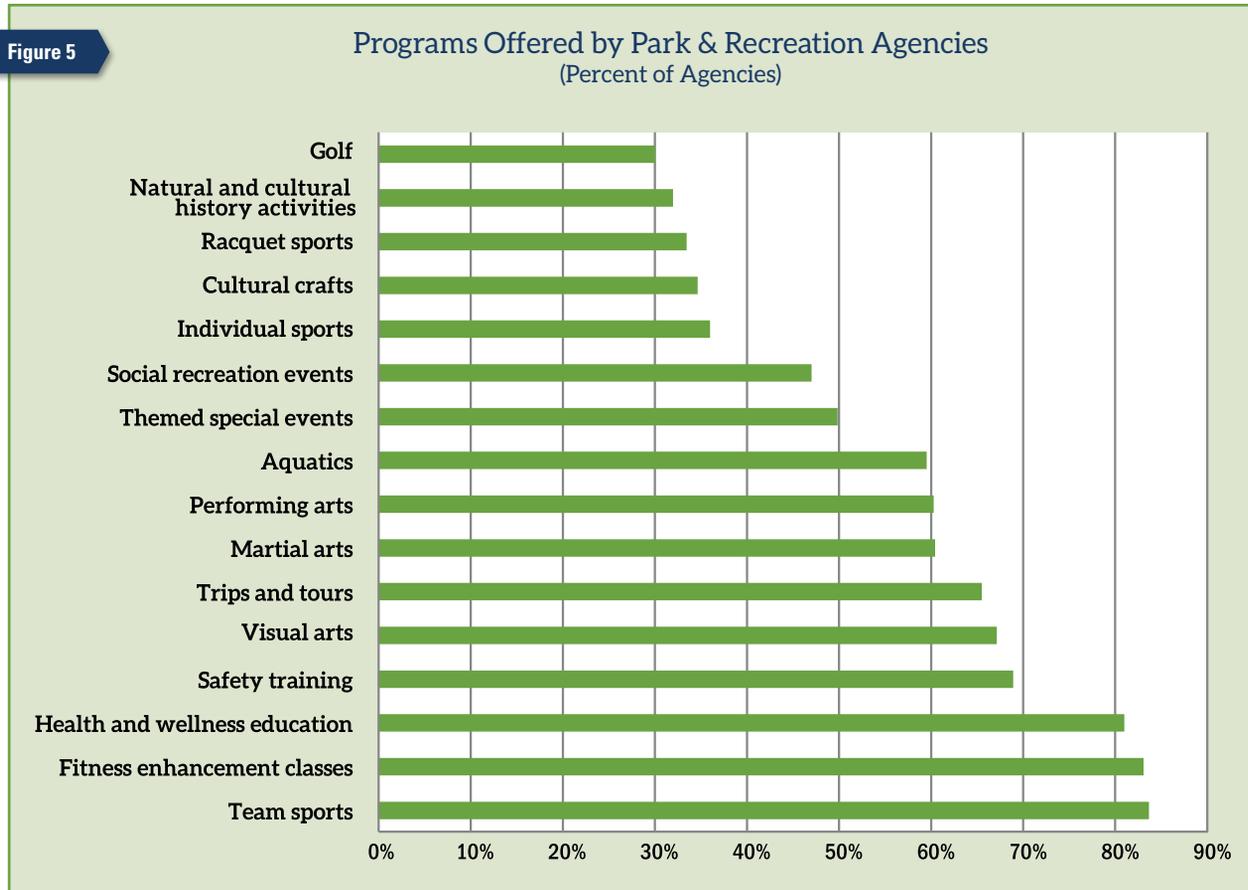


Figure 6 Targeted Programs for Children, Seniors and People with Disabilities
(Percent of Agencies, by Jurisdiction Population)

	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	Over 250,000
Summer camp	80%	73%	81%	83%	85%	87%
Before school programs	31%	22%	24%	38%	35%	46%
After school programs	50%	44%	36%	64%	62%	66%
Preschool	34%	25%	36%	41%	31%	38%
Full day care	9%	2%	7%	12%	12%	18%
Specific teen programs	60%	44%	59%	74%	73%	68%
Specific senior programs	73%	62%	75%	88%	80%	72%
Programs for people with disabilities	58%	39%	55%	72%	69%	78%

Park and recreation agencies are leaders in providing services and programming for children, seniors and people with disabilities. Larger agencies are more likely to offer programming for children, whether in the form of a summer camp or before and after school care and full day care. Four in five agencies offer summer camps to their residents. This rises to 87 percent at agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people. Similarly, agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 residents are more likely to offer before and after school care and day care.

In addition, 78 percent of park and recreation agencies in larger jurisdictions offer programming designed for people with disabilities versus fewer than two in five agencies serving less than 20,000 residents.

Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Agencies

Park and recreation agencies take on many responsibilities for their communities, beyond their “traditional” roles of operating parks and facilities and providing recreation programming and services. In addition to those two functions, the top responsibilities for park and recreation agencies are as follows:

- Operate and maintain indoor facilities (92 percent)
- Conduct major jurisdiction-wide special events (73 percent)
- Have budgetary responsibility for their administrative staff (54 percent)
- Administer or manage tournament/event-quality outdoor sports complexes (54 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage trails, greenways and/or blueways (TGB) (44 percent)
- Manage major aquatic complex (43 percent)
- Administer community gardens (40 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage special purpose parks and open spaces (38 percent).

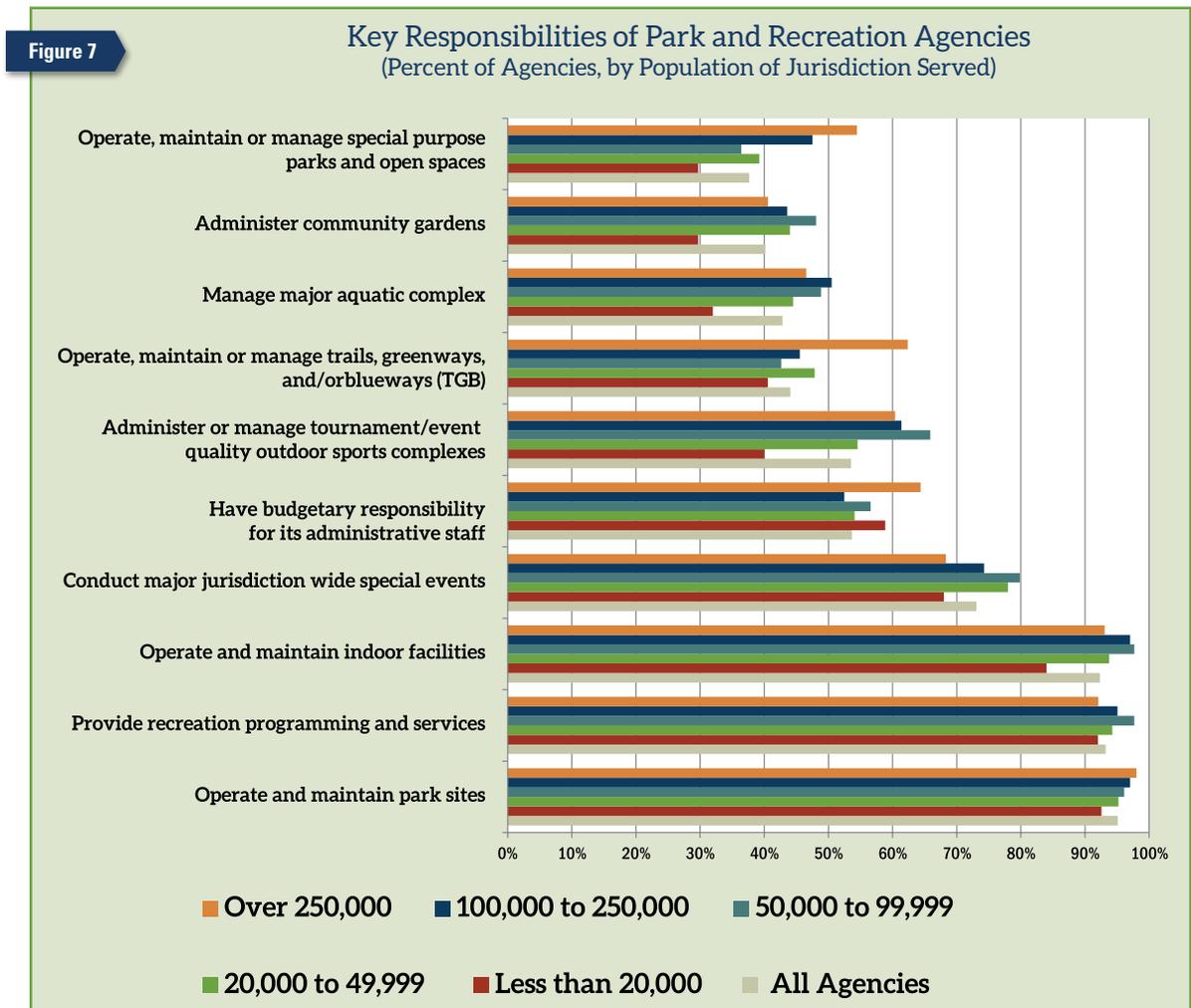


Figure 8

Other Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Agencies (Percent of Agencies)

Operate and maintain non-park sites	37%
Include in its operating budget the funding for planning and development functions	35%
Operate, maintain or contract water parks	30%
Operate, maintain or contract golf courses	29%
Operate, maintain or contract other attractions or facilities	27%
Manage large performance outdoor amphitheaters	24%
Operate, maintain or contract tennis center facilities	24%
Administer or manage tournament/event-quality indoor sports complexes	22%
Administer or manage farmer's markets	19%
Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts center	18%
Operate, maintain or contract campgrounds	16%
Operate, maintain or contract tourism attractions	14%
Administer or manage professional or college-type stadium/arena/racetrack	10%
Operate, maintain or contract indoor swim facility	8%
Manage or maintain fairgrounds	5%

Staffing

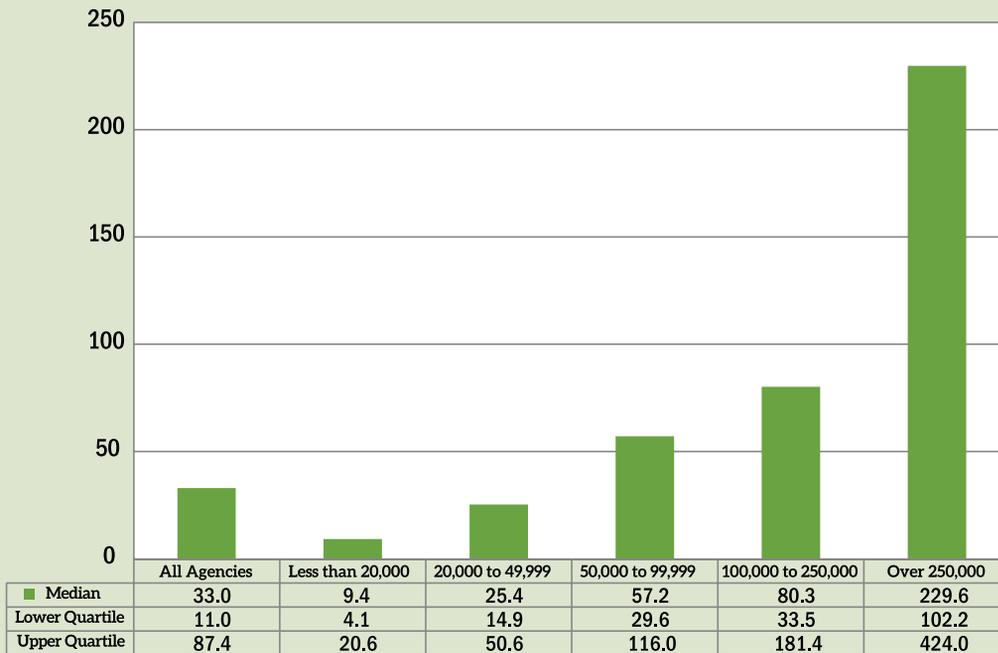
The typical park and recreation agency is staffed with 33 full-time equivalents (FTEs) that include a mix of full-time and part-time staff. But, the size of the staff expands exponentially as the size of the jurisdiction served by the agency expands. Park and recreation agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people have a median of 9.4 FTEs on staff. Agencies serving areas with 50,000 to 99,999 people have a median of 57.2 FTEs, while those serving areas with more than 250,000 have a staff with a median of 229.6 workers.

Median counts of FTEs on staff also positively correlates with:

- Number of acres maintained – 250 or less acres: 13.9 FTEs versus over 3,500 acres: 266.1 FTEs
- Number of parks maintained – Less than 10 parks: 11.0 FTEs versus 50 or more parks: 200.3 FTEs
- Operating expenditures – Less than \$500,000: 3.2 FTEs versus over \$10 million: 201.4 FTEs.
- Population served by agency – Less than 500 people per square mile: 14.4 FTEs versus more than 2,500 people per square mile: 56.9 FTEs.

Figure 9

Park and Recreation Agency Staffing: Full-Time Equivalents (by Jurisdiction Population)



One way to view agency staffing is to measure it relative to the population of the area that the agency serves. **The typical park and recreation agency has 7.4 FTEs on staff for each 10,000 residents living in the jurisdiction served by the agency.** Agencies tend to have fewer FTEs on staff when located in more populated areas. Agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people have 9.3 FTEs for each 10,000 residents, with this measure falling to 3.9 FTEs for 10,000 residents in areas with more than 250,000 people.

Agencies also tend to have more FTEs per residents when they serve areas with greater population density. Agencies operating in areas with less than 500 people per square mile have 4.2 FTEs per 10,000 people served versus 9.7 FTEs per 10,000 residents in areas with more than 2,500 people per square mile.

There are many responsibilities covered by an agency's park and recreation professionals. Park and recreation staff members have duties that span across many functional areas:

- Maintenance (30 percent)
- Operations (27 percent)
- Programming (22 percent)
- Administration (18 percent)

Just over a third of park and recreation agencies (35 percent) have workers that are covered by collective bargaining. Union members are more likely to be part of an agency's park and recreation staff at agencies that:

- Have larger staffs – 21 percent of agencies with staffs of less than 10 FTEs versus 52 percent of agencies with 100 or more FTEs.
- Serve larger populations – 21 percent of agencies in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people versus 53 percent of agencies in jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.
- Have more parks – 13 percent of agencies with less than 10 parks versus 61 percent of agencies with at least 50 parks.
- Maintain more park land – 27 percent of agencies that maintain 250 or less acres of parkland versus 59 percent of agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland.

Figure 10

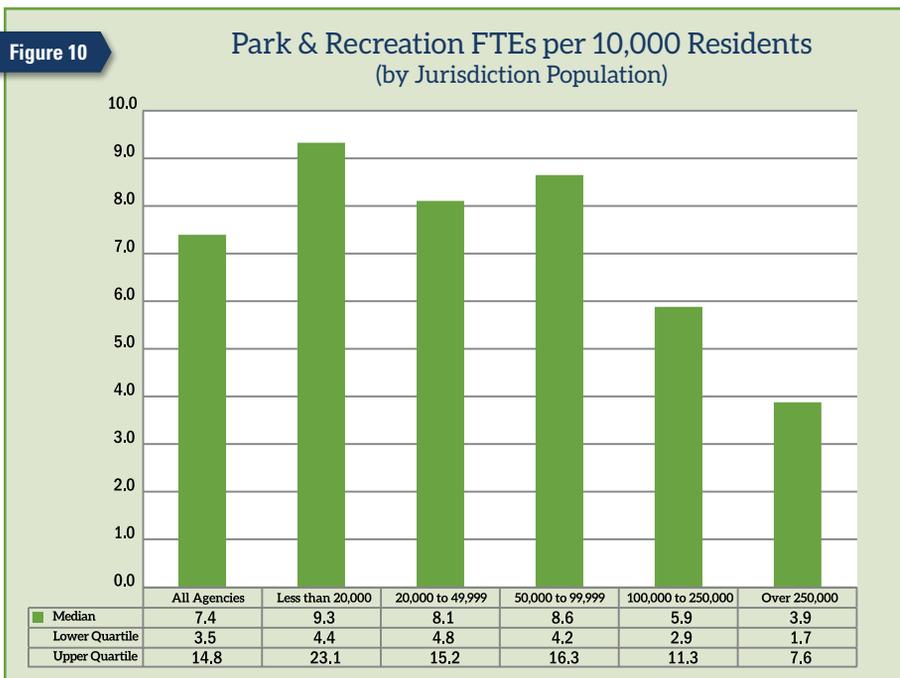
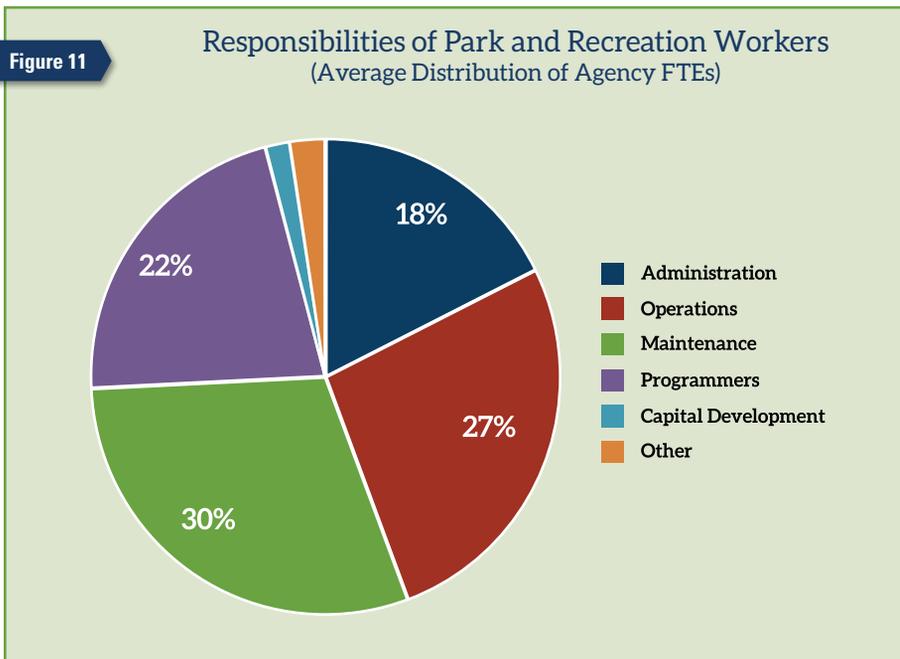


Figure 11



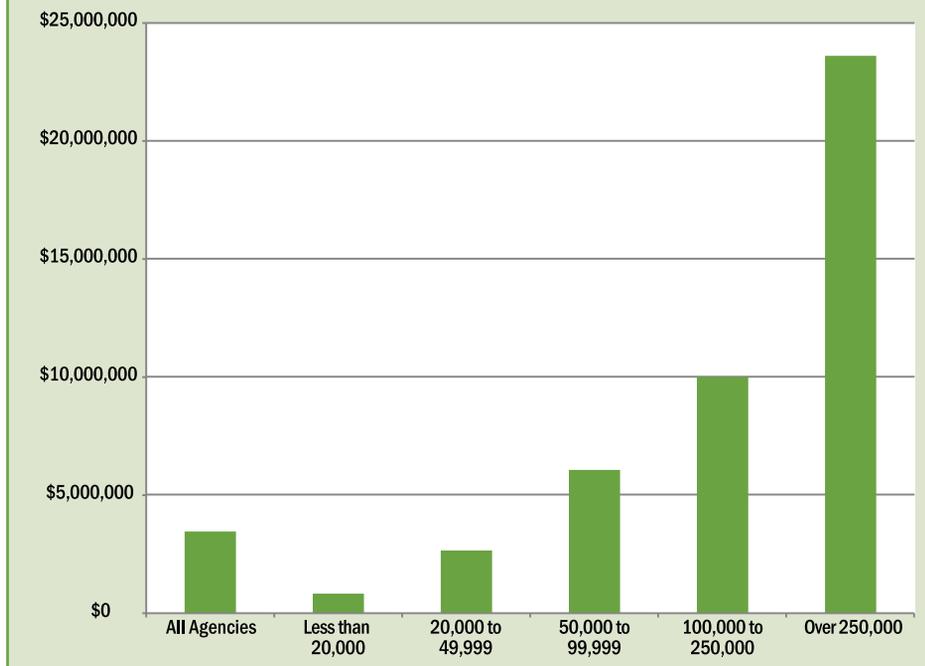
Budget

How does the funding at your park and recreation agency compare with funding levels at other agencies? Does your agency have access to the same level of funding as its peers? As noted in the NRPA report, [The Economic Impact of Local Parks](#), local and regional park agencies had operations expenditures of \$32.3 billion in 2013. This amount is split across the thousands of park and recreation agencies throughout the nation with **the typical park agency having annual operating expenditures of \$3,459,846**.

But, the size of an agency's operating expenditures varies dramatically by the size of the agency (e.g., in terms of park and non-park acres managed and the population of the jurisdiction), the mission and responsibilities of the agency, and so forth. One way to start the comparison is to normalize operation expenditure data by the size of the agency.

Figure 12

Annual Operating Expenditures
(by Jurisdiction Population)



As shown in Figure 13, **the typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$76.44 on a per capita basis**. The denser the population served by the agency, the higher per capita operating expenses, with the typical agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 500 people per square mile having per capita operating expenses of \$37.84 and one serving an area with more than 2,500 people per square mile with median operating expenses rising to \$100.63 per resident. At the same time, per capita operations spending is *inversely* related to the population of the area served: agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people have median operations spending of \$85.84, which drops to \$42.69 per resident for agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.

Figure 13

Operating Expenditures per Capita
(by Population Density per Square Mile)

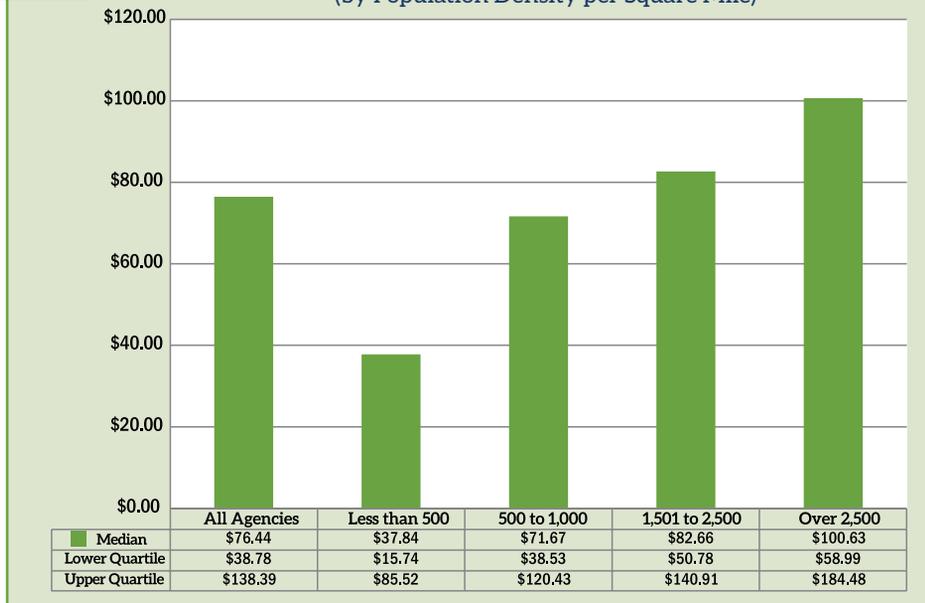
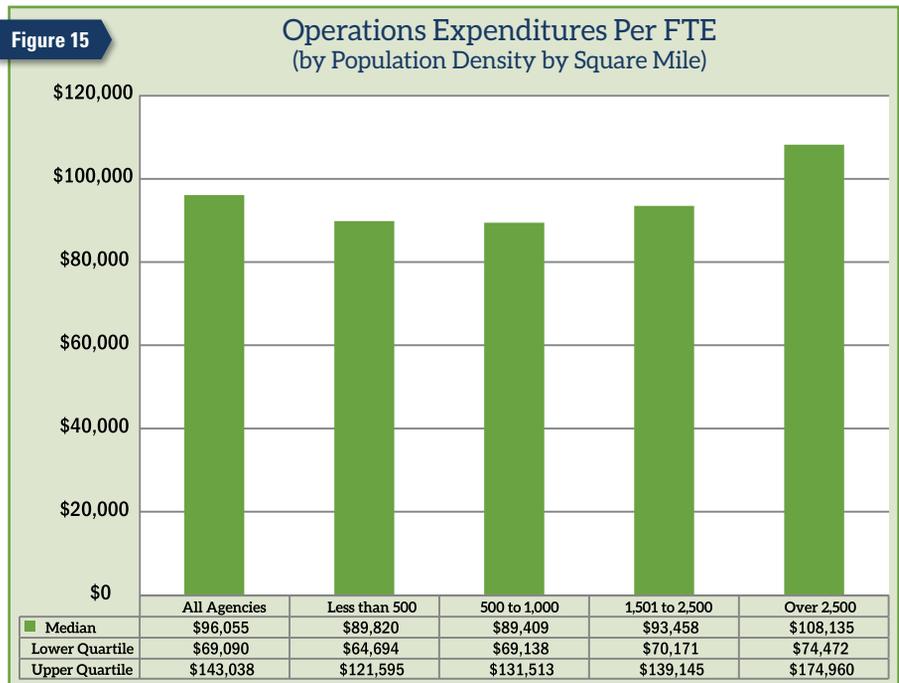
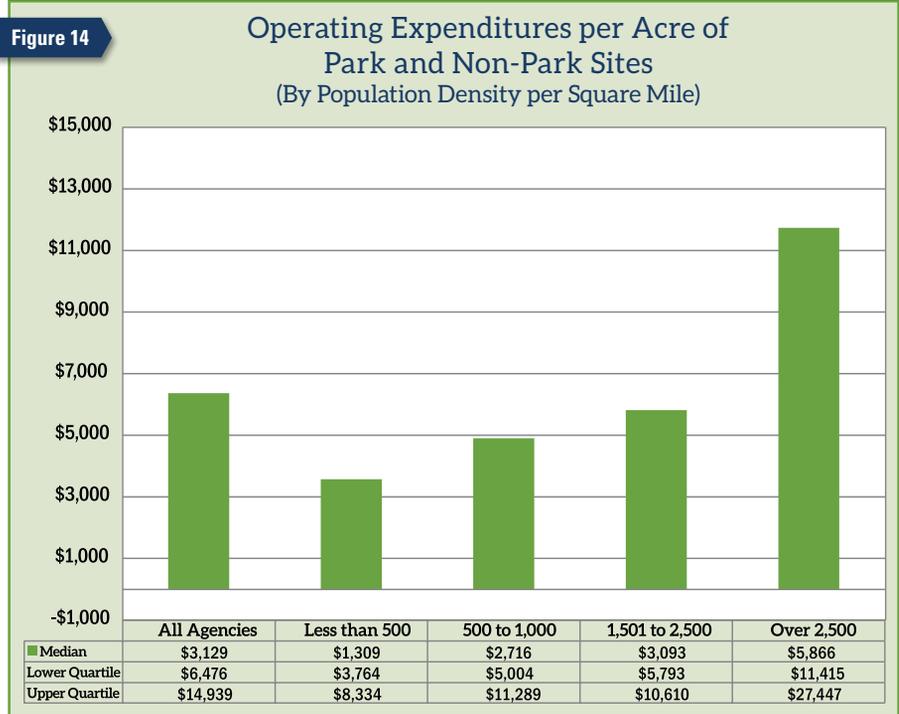


Figure 14 shows that **the median level operating expenditures is \$6,476 per acre of park and non-park sites managed by the agency.** Non-park sites are defined as public spaces (such as lawns at a city hall) that are not designated as parks but are budgeted for maintenance and/or operation by the park and recreation agency. The typical operating expenditures rise with population density. For example, the typical agency serving a jurisdiction with fewer than 500 people per square mile spends \$3,764 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median rises to \$11,415 per acre at agencies serving a jurisdiction with a population density greater than 2,500 per square mile.

Park and recreation agencies serving larger populaces tend to have lower operations expenditures than do agencies serving smaller and medium-sized jurisdictions. The typical park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 20,000 people spends a median of \$7,644 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median slips slightly to \$7,547 per acre for agencies serving jurisdictions with between 50,000 and 99,999 people and then falls rapidly to \$3,533 per acre managed at agencies serving jurisdictions greater than 250,000 people.

The typical park and recreation agency has \$96,055 in annual operations expenditures for each employee (as measured by full time equivalents, or 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 operations expenditures of \$89,820 for each FTE. The median rises to \$108,135 per FTE for agencies serving areas with more than 2,500 residents per square mile. Similarly, the measure rises from \$88,056 for agencies with less than 10 parks to \$100,995 for agencies with 50 or more parks.

At the typical park and recreation agency, personnel services represent 55 percent of the 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 operations expenditures are dedicated to operations of the agency, including operational support for force accounted employees where the capital fund repays the operating budget; all enterprise funds; interdepartmental transfers; and, in some cases, the capital debt service. Another six percent of the operations spending includes capital expenses not included in the agency's capital improvement plan (CIP). This includes expenditures for capital equipment (e.g., computers, vehicles, large area mowers, tractors, boats, etc.), some periodic cyclical maintenance (carpets, conference chairs, push mowers, etc.) and, perhaps, debt services paid from the agency's operating funds.



Agency Funding

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 next biggest source of revenue for most agencies is earned/generated revenues, responsible for an average of 25 percent of operating expenditures. Many agencies depend on special dedicated taxes for part of their budget. Many park and recreation districts obtain the majority of their funding from tax levies that are approved in referendum by citizens for specified park and recreation purposes.

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$795,500 in non-tax revenues on an annual basis, although this can vary greatly based on agency size, services and facilities offered by the agency and mandate from leadership and policy-makers. Agencies with annual operating budgets under \$500,000 typically derive \$74,414 in non-tax revenues while those with annual budgets greater than \$10 million generate a median of \$6.469 million from non-tax revenue sources.

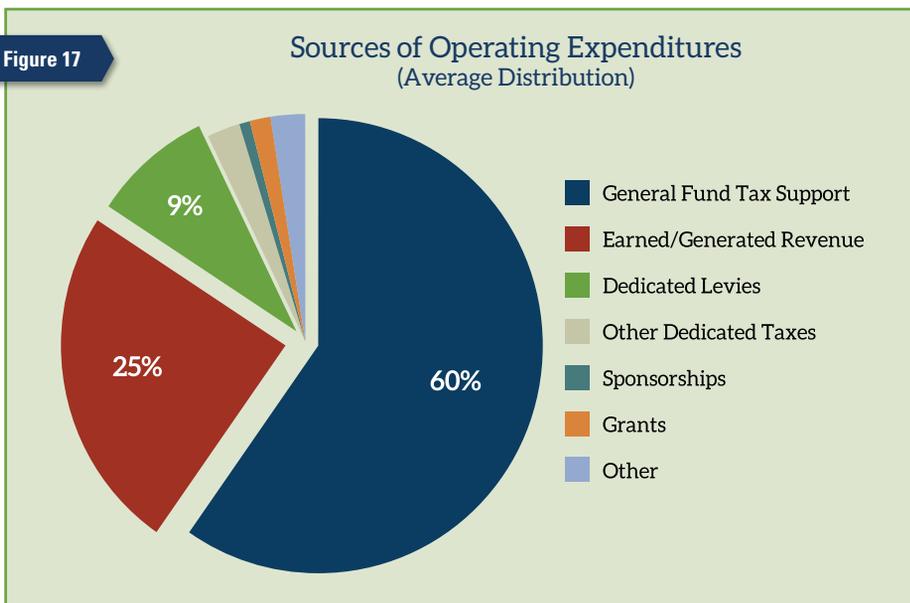
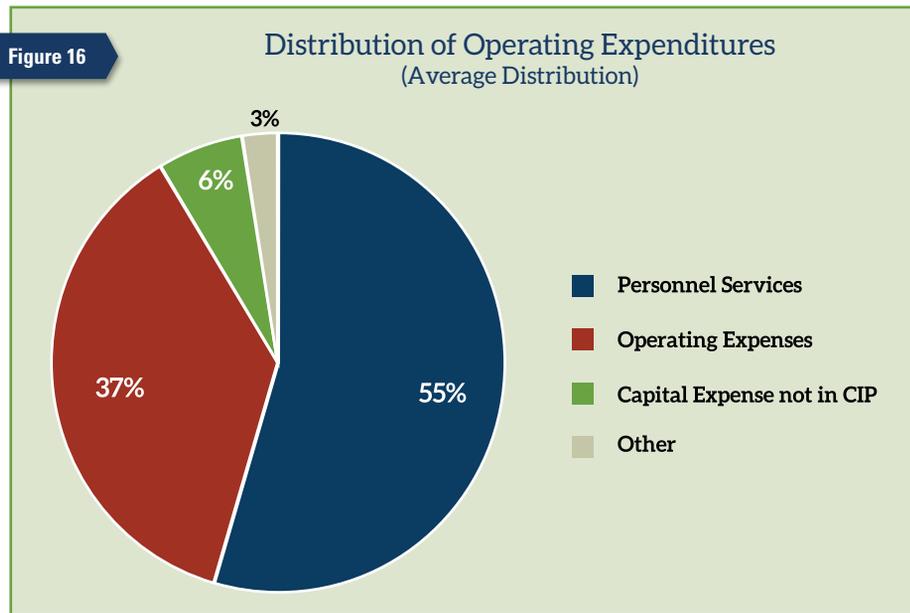
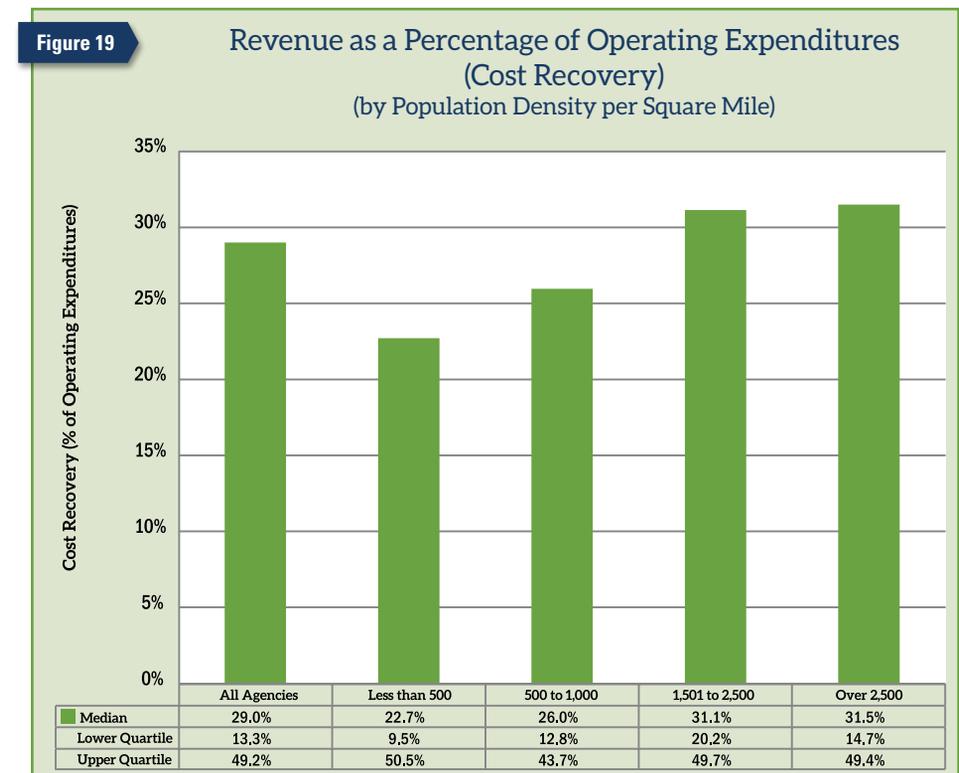
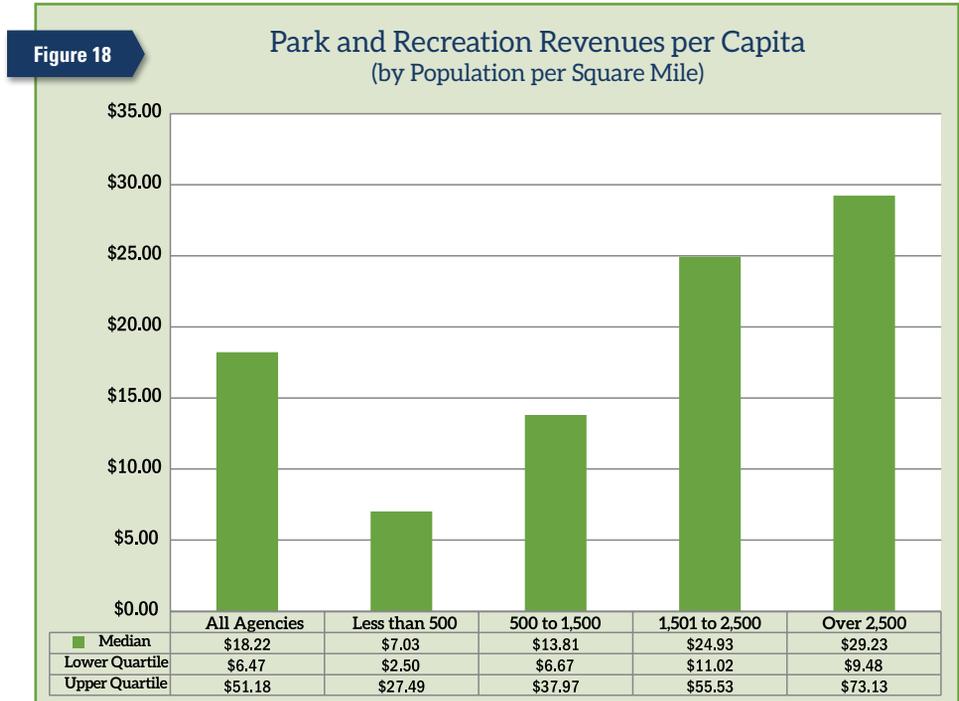


Figure 18 shows that **the typical park and recreation agency generates \$18.22 in revenue annually for each resident living in the jurisdiction it serves.** Agencies operating in less population-dense areas generate less revenue than those in greater populated areas. The typical agency, operating in a jurisdiction with less than 500 people per square mile, generates \$7.03 in revenue on a per capita basis per year compared to a median of \$29.23 for agencies serving a jurisdiction with more than 2,500 people per square mile.

Medium-sized agencies generate more revenue on a per capita basis than small and large park and recreation agencies. Agencies serving jurisdictions with between 50,000 and 99,999 people generate a median of \$29.57 in revenue per resident each year versus \$21.85 in per capita revenue in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people and \$9.04 per capita from agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.

Another way to look at the revenues is in the form of cost recovery as a percentage of operating expenditures. **The typical agency recovers 29.0 percent of its operating expenditures from non-tax revenues.** The amount of cost recovery differs greatly from agency to agency based on the agency's portfolio of facilities and programming, the demographics of the populace served, agency mission and possible revenue mandates from their governing jurisdictions.

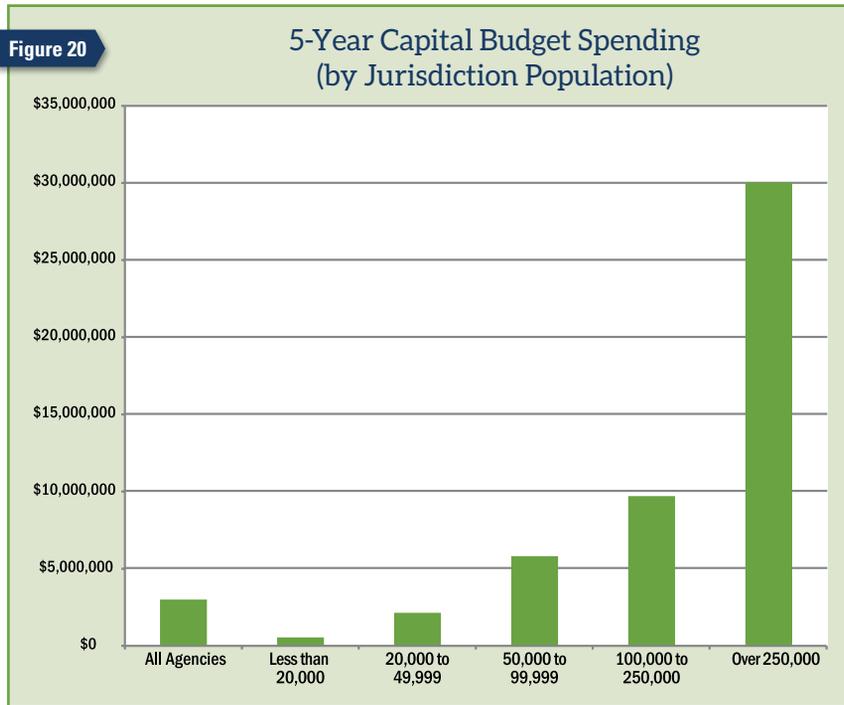
At the same time, agencies serving more population-dense jurisdictions tend to have higher percentages of cost recovery. Agencies serving an area with less than 500 people per square mile have a median percentage of cost recovery of 22.7 percent. Cost recovery rises to 31.5 percent of operating expenditures for agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 2,500 people per square mile.



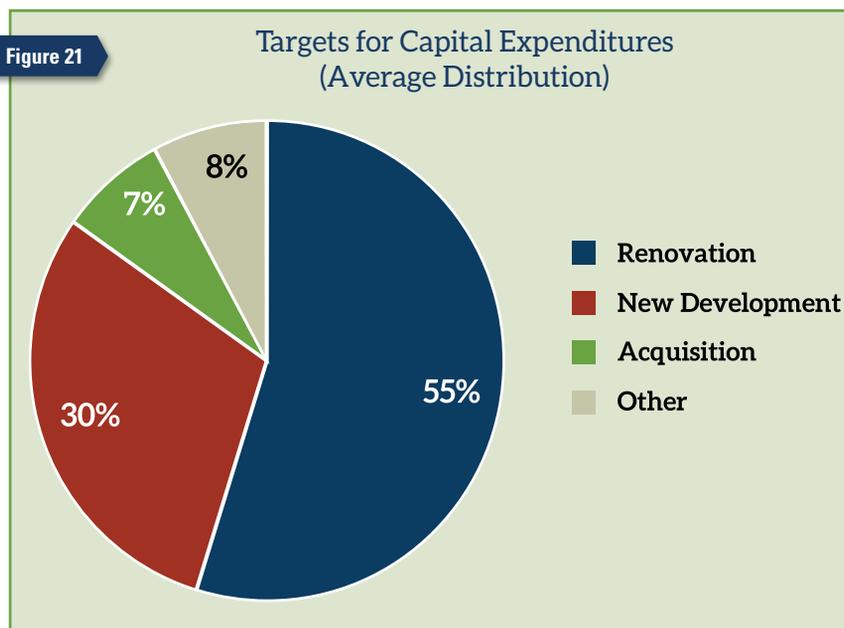
Beyond day-to-day operations, **park and recreation agencies have a median of \$2.981 million in capital expenditures budgeted over the next five years.** Not at all surprising is that the larger the agency, the larger the size of the five-year capital budget. The typical park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 20,000 people has a median five-year capital budget of \$547,000. This five-year capital budget expands to \$5.8 million at agencies serving jurisdictions with 50,000 to 99,999 people and to \$30 million to agencies in areas with more than 250,000 residents.

Also, the following are positively related to the size of five-year capital budgets:

- The number of parks maintained – Less than 10 parks: \$859,059 versus 50 more parks: \$22.247 million
- Acreage of parks maintained – 250 or less acres: \$1 million versus more than 3,500 acres: \$36.759 million.
- Operating budgets – Annual operating budgets less than \$500,000: \$253,598 versus annual operating budgets greater than \$10 million: \$24.811 million.
- Population density – Less than 500 people per square mile: \$1.546 million versus more than 2,500 people per square mile: \$4.843 million.



So, where are park and recreation agencies designating these capital expenditures? **On average, just over half of the capital budget is designated for renovation while 30 percent is geared toward new development.** At larger park and recreation agencies, new development is the focus of a greater percentage of capital budgets. At agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 residents, 37 percent of capital budgets are for new development while 48 percent are for renovating current properties.



Looking Forward: A Perfect Storm?

Whereas most of the 2016 NRPA Field Report focuses on current performance benchmarks, a look at current challenges and future trends also should be a part of park and recreation professionals' future decision making. We asked William Beckner, President of CEHP, Inc., for his insights.

In 1991, Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke made the opening remarks at that year's NRPA Congress. At the time, America's cities were in the midst of the largest recorded violent crime epidemic in American history. Baltimore was experiencing a murder-rate that had the entire city on edge, unemployment was astronomical for minorities, and citizens were seeking answers. The same was true for many cities across the nation. Mayor Schmoke said that in all this turmoil it was the parks that made it possible to have conversations with the residents. The violent crimes epidemic eventually eased, beginning in 1995. But as we know, all is not well.

The challenges many of our cities now face represent opportunities for park and recreation departments to play a significant role in their community. But to be successful, they will require a steady hand and courage in the face of enormous waves in the forms of social equity, finance, global warming, safe play issues and community engagement.

Social Equity/Environmental Justice

As parks are a very visible measure of equitable public service, the community park and recreation departments may be front and center in the public perception of inequitable treatment. Social Equity, one of the three NRPA Pillars, is beginning to merge with social and environmental justice that is part of a rising tide of sentiment for equal and just treatment.

What are the park and recreation department opportunities?

- Ensure that all residents have access to facilities and services that are of similar quality
- Listen to your customers' complaints about unfair treatment
- Use your park and recreation advisory or policy board as an early warning system of issues at hand
- Program speakers and events to address issues that seem important

Capital and Operating Finance

The recently completed NRPA Study, "[Americans' Broad-Based Support for Local Recreation and Park Services](#)" clearly shows the significant public support from Americans for their parks. But, that study's results and NRPA's research findings that local parks create significant economic activity for their communities do not mean the funding for renovation, new development or operation and maintenance will suddenly be easy to obtain. Instead, park and recreation professionals and supporters need to focus their energies on promoting the value of parks to our communities.

Infrastructure Priorities

In his 2016 State of the Union address, President Obama proposed one trillion dollars be spent by the federal government and matched by state and local governments to take on the decaying infrastructure that threatens our safety and our economy. But, where are the dollars coming from to sustain and improve our parks? Opportunities include:

- Getting to the table early; be in place when the deals are made
- Focusing on trails and corridor-type facilities
- Looking to multiple-use such as storm detention basins and rectangular fields
- Constructing in-ground water storage or flood drainage facilities that also provide spaces for athletic facilities
- Creating partnerships with foundations and other third-party groups
- Being flexible and creative

Global Warming and Natural Disasters

The need for infrastructure investment is also exacerbated by the early effects of global warming. Rising seas, higher incidence of catastrophic floods and natural disasters, including drought and fire, can be linked to rising sea temperatures. The increasing volatility of climatic conditions affects park and recreation departments in numerous ways, including:

- Financing infrastructure such as sea walls
- Rising maintenance costs for beaches and other lands subject to flooding
- Costs related to replacement of facilities destroyed in natural events
- Staff becoming the caregivers when park and recreation facilities are the only community resources left standing

Operating Budgets

The federal budget constraints have truncated the economic recovery of state and local governments in much of the country. In turn, many states responded to these tight budgets by pushing the costs of services to the cities and municipalities, making it even more challenging to properly finance park facilities and services. Park and recreation professionals who have the facts and the credibility with budget decision makers are the most likely to prosper. They must:

- Know what it costs to provide the services their agency offers, including for its facilities and programs
- Create a quarterly reporting system that demonstrates accountability in meeting their budget goals
- Define their core services that need to be subsidized
- Partner as appropriate with nonprofit or private sector providers to expand opportunities

Safe Play

Not all of the challenges are external to the park and recreation field. Going forward, the issue of safety is becoming a challenge for traditional team sports. Certainly, football is now in a precarious position with many studies beginning to show that cumulative hits are as impactful as a single violent hit. Some experts are suggesting prohibiting preteens from playing tackle football. Concussions are not isolated to just football as they also appear to be a problem in ice hockey, soccer and other sports. It is not solely a youth issue but can impact any sports programs run by your department. What are the opportunities for park and recreation agencies to encourage safe play?

- Do not make unilateral decisions
- Form committees to address the issues
- Identify knowledgeable resources to educate interested parties about the issues
- Consider alternatives that reduce the concussion potential, such as flag football for ages under 13

What are the implications of a switch to flag football? Your agency may see an increased interest in the sport of flag football with as much demand for fields as before. This scenario would cost less since expensive equipment would not be needed. Another future advantage is that flag football, like soccer, can be played at any age.

Community Engagement

The Internet is filled with stories about youth undertaking community projects. With each reported success, it seems more ideas are emerging. They usually start as volunteer projects and then sometimes morph into an entrepreneurial opportunity. This phenomenon is a result of the desire in many of Generation Z (Born after 2000) to make a difference in their community. There are numerous examples. One compelling example is the 10-year-old who began collecting restaurant cooking oils for use as heating fuels (<http://www.upworthy.com/her-dad-thought-her-clean-energy-idea-was-just-a-kids-project-he-was-wrong?c=upw1>). As of last year, she was able to accumulate enough supply to heat 400 homes of economically disadvantaged folks in the community. If the youth in your community have a strong inclination toward community service, you might consider investigating ways to facilitate their dreams and interests for the benefit of the community.

Conclusion

As shown in the *2016 NRPA Field Report*, park and recreation agencies are as diverse as the towns, cities and counties that they serve. Agencies not only differ in size and service offerings, but also in what their core mission is when serving their communities. It is for that reason the data presented in this report are a valuable tool in the planning and operating of park and recreation agencies.

Beyond comparing one's agency to that of the "typical" agency, we challenge all park and recreation professionals to enter their agency's data in PRORAGIS so they can gain a more detailed analysis of their agency's performance against its peers through the United States. Linking the insights contained in this report and PRORAGIS with other NRPA reports and resources will arm all park and recreation professionals with the tools needed to tell their agency's story and to make the case for further investments in the future.

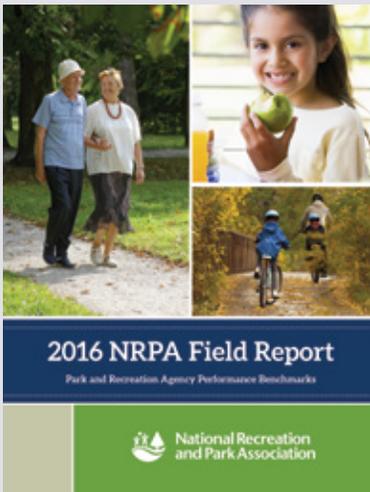


How Can Your Agency's Data be Included in this Report?

The NRPA Field Report is dependent on the data shared by hundreds of agencies every year. By sharing your agency's performance data, not only will you help NRPA create a more comprehensive Field Report, you will be able to access custom reports specific to the information you shared. With access to both of these resources, your agency will be able to gain more support, improve operations, and better serve your community.

NRPA's new streamlined Agency Performance Survey in PRORAGIS allows you to easily input information about your agency's performance, without requiring a lot of time or effort, and get back two extremely useful resources you can't find anywhere else.

To compare your agency's performance today, visit www.nrpa.org/PRORAGIS



A more comprehensive set of cross tabulations of the data presented in this report is available as a set of interactive tables at www.nrpa.org/2016-Field-Report

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of more than 50,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, conservation initiatives and equitable access to parks and public space.

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 great importance on research to understand and improve various aspects of the park and recreation field. Research is vital to ensure park and recreation professionals have the resources to make informed decisions. At NRPA, the development of current research via empirical studies and literature reviews for our members and the public is a key priority.

The Value of Parks and Recreation

Conservation—Public parks are critical to preserving natural resources and wildlife habitats, which offer significant social and economic benefits. Local park and recreation agencies are leaders in protecting open space, connecting children to nature, and providing programs that engage communities in conservation.

Health and Wellness—Park and recreation departments lead the nation in improving the health and wellness of communities. From fitness programs, to well-maintained, accessible, walking paths and trails, to nutrition programs for underserved youth and adults, our work is at the forefront of providing solutions to these challenges.

Social Equity—We believe universal access to public parks and recreation is fundamental to all, not just a privilege for a few. Every day, our members work hard to ensure all people have access to quality parks and programs, and in turn, make our communities more livable and desirable.





National Recreation
and Park Association

22377 Belmont Ridge Road
Ashburn, VA 20148-4501
800.626.NRPA (6772)

www.nrpa.org