



# 2023 NRPA PARK AND RECREATION **SALARY SURVEY**



**Cover image:**  
A summer camper shows off her mermaid art in Kettering, Ohio.

Photo courtesy of City of Kettering Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department

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# INTRODUCTION

The success of parks and recreation would not be possible without the dedicated, passionate, adaptable and versatile staff working tirelessly behind the scenes to create the vibrant, healthy communities in which we live. This group of inspirational professionals strives to ensure everyone has access to high-quality parks, trails and recreational opportunities that benefit both body and mind.

The more than 10,000 local park and recreation agencies in the United States employ more than 160,000 full-time staff and hundreds of thousands of part-time and seasonal workers. Their work has a ripple effect for positive change throughout their communities. Park and recreation professionals serve as mentors, advocates, teachers and coaches. From out-of-school time programming for children to activities and enrichment opportunities for older adults, all communities are made stronger by local parks and recreation.

In the years preceding and during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a robust U.S. labor market forced many park and recreation agencies to compete actively with other employers — inside and outside parks and recreation — to recruit and retain workers. This continued into early 2023; there were more than 10 million unfilled jobs nationwide (per the Bureau of Labor Statistics). Consequently, park and recreation agencies must offer compensation packages to their staff, including competitive salaries and robust benefits, in order to attract and retain the best and brightest for their teams.

Comprehensive compensation data guide park and recreation agency leaders on attracting the best candidates for their staff. Such data also can give park and recreation professionals insights into salary and benefits potential employers offer. To amass that data, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Research team sent a 43-question survey in March 2023 to elicit the salary and other compensation data of 13 positions at park and recreation agencies and general information about benefits and salary policies. The responses from leaders of more than 400 park and recreation agencies across the United States are the basis of this report. *Note: Percentages shown in tables, charts and graphs may not total 100 due to rounding.*

The *2023 NRPA Park and Recreation Salary Survey* report features detailed base salary and bonus data for 13 typical park and recreation agency positions:

- Park and Recreation Agency Director (or Executive Director or Superintendent)
- Planning Director (or Superintendent)
- Director of Finance (or Administrative Director or Business Manager)
- Recreation Director (or Recreation Superintendent or Assistant Director – Recreation)
- Park Operations Director (or Maintenance Director or Maintenance Superintendent)
- Park Operations (or Maintenance Foreman)
- Facilities Manager
- Athletics Supervisor (or Athletics Manager)
- Aquatics Supervisor (or Aquatics Manager)
- Recreation Programs Coordinator (or Recreation Programs Manager)
- Marketing and Communications Director (or Manager) *\*New position to this report in 2023*
- Fitness Center Manager *\*New position to this report in 2023*
- Administrative Assistant *\*New position to this report in 2023*

No two park and recreation agencies are exactly alike. Neither are the compensation packages they offer their teams. The *2023 NRPA Park and Recreation Salary Survey* report presents compensation data by agency size, type and specific demographic characteristics of incumbents in the positions (e.g., education, certifications and years in the profession). The analysis also examines factors determining pay raises and bonuses (if offered) and highlights other benefits of park and recreation professionals' compensation packages.

## 2023 PARK AND RECREATION SALARY SURVEY KEY FINDINGS

### MEDIAN YEAR-TO-YEAR SALARY CHANGES

Park and Recreation Agency Director	+4.8%
Planning Director	+4.1%
Director of Finance	+5.5%
Recreation Director	+4.5%
Park Operations Director	+4.7%
Park Operations	+4.8%
Facilities Manager	+5.2%
Athletics Supervisor	+5.0%
Aquatics Supervisor	+5.0%
Recreation Programs Coordinator	+5.0%
Marketing and Communications Director	+5.7%
Fitness Center Manager	+5.0%
Administrative Assistant	+5.0%



**MEDIAN ANNUAL VACATION DAYS:**

- 10 days upon hire
- 20 days after 10 years of employment

PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES TYPICALLY COVER **80%** OF THEIR FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES' HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS




**79%** of park and recreation agencies offer their full-time employees a **defined benefit** retirement plan

**66%** of agencies offer their full-time employees a **defined contribution** retirement plan

### BENEFITS MOST LIKELY PAID FOR IN FULL BY PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES:



Dental



Continuing education



Life insurance

# KEY FINDINGS

Base salaries are only one component of compensation. Employee benefits — such as paid vacation and sick leave, health and dental insurance, and retirement plans — will not only put thousands of additional dollars into workers’ pockets and improve their standard of living, but also will attract better candidates and retain high performers.

## VACATION AND SICK LEAVE

One of the most valuable components of employee compensation after salary is the amount of vacation and sick leave provided to workers. Paid time off (PTO) is not a luxury, but a necessity. This is certainly true for the park and recreation profession — a field that celebrates the importance of leisure as a part of a healthy lifestyle. Further, vacation benefits that increase over time are essential for retaining quality staff.

Most park and recreation agencies divide PTO into separate vacation and sick-leave accounts. Fourteen percent of agencies provide PTO in a single account, combining vacation and sick leave.

Park and recreation agencies typically provide 10 days of annual vacation to their newly hired full-time (FT) employees (after any preliminary probation period). After five years of employment, the median number of vacation days increases to 15 days per year and swells to 20 days after 10 years of service. With a few exceptions, the typical number of vacation days does not differ significantly by agency size or type.

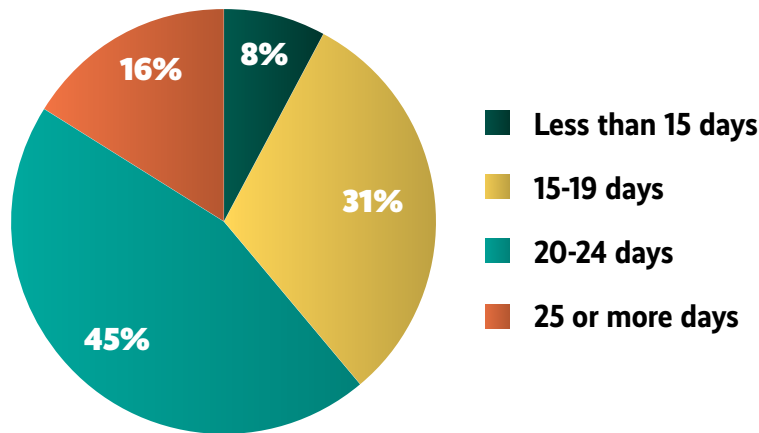
The amount of annual vacation time employees earn increases when they stay with the same agency for a long time. At 61 percent of agencies, FT park and recreation professionals with more than 10 years of service earn 20 or more vacation days annually (including 16 percent of agencies that provide at least five weeks — or more than 25 days — of annual vacation to their longest-tenured employees). Thirty-one percent of park and recreation agencies provide between 15 and 19 days of annual vacation to employees with at least 10 years of service.

## MEDIAN NUMBER OF VACATION DAYS OFFERED TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/Town/Borough	County	Special Park District/Regional Authority	Urban
Annual days of vacation upon hire	10	10	10	10	10	11	10	10	10	10
Annual days of vacation after 5 years of employment	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Annual days of vacation after 10 years of employment	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20

## NUMBER OF ANNUAL VACATION DAYS OFFERED TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES AFTER 10 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE AGENCY

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)



Most park and recreation agencies also provide employees with PTO that they can use when they or a member of their family are ill. The typical FT park and recreation professional receives 12 days of annual sick leave; this figure does not vary significantly by agency size or type. Unlike vacation time, annual sick leave offered to park and recreation professionals typically does not increase with employee tenure.

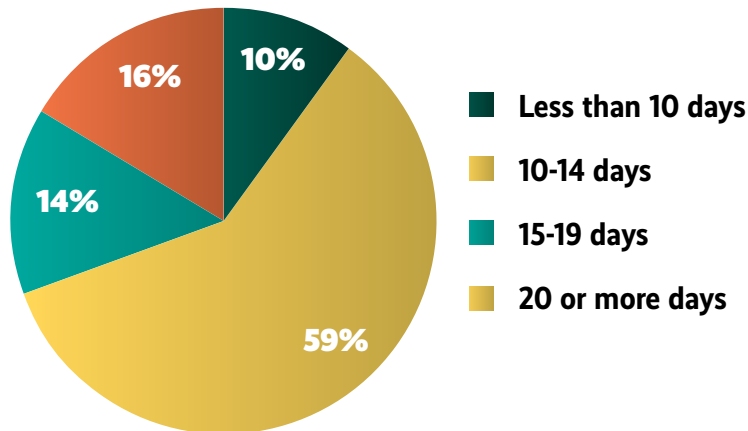
Upon hire, nearly three in five park and recreation agencies offer employees 10 to 14 days of sick leave each year. Ten percent of agencies offer fewer than 10 days of sick leave per year; at the other end of the spectrum, 30 percent of agencies offer their employees 15 or more days of annual sick leave.

## MEDIAN NUMBER OF SICK DAYS OFFERED TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/Town/Borough	County	Special Park District/Regional Authority	Urban
Annual days of sick leave upon hire	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Annual days of sick leave after 5 years of employment	12	12	12	12	12	13	12	12	12	12
Annual days of sick leave after 10 years of employment	12	12	12	12	12	13	12	12	12	12

## NUMBER OF ANNUAL SICK DAYS OFFERED TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES AFTER 10 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE AGENCY

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)



### THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT OF 1993

Under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), qualified employees are guaranteed up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year with no threat of job loss. FMLA also requires employers subject to the law to provide the same health benefits for eligible workers during this time off as these employees had while working. All public agencies — including state, federal and local employers — must follow FMLA rules. Employees are eligible for such benefits under FMLA if they meet any of the following situations:

- The employee cannot work due to a serious medical condition
- The employee must care for an immediate family member with a serious medical condition
- The birth, placement and/or subsequent care of the employee’s child (including adoption or foster care)
- A “qualifying exigency” due to an employee’s spouse, child or parent being on active duty or having been called to active duty by the National Guard or Reserve in support of a contingency operation

### FAMILY LEAVE

Whereas FMLA guarantees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, workers can continue to receive paychecks by drawing from their vacation, sick leave and/or PTO allotments. In addition, some employers choose to pay employees for a portion or all of the time employees are on leave. Maternity and paternity leave benefits are examples of this.

Sixty-one percent of park and recreation agencies do not offer specific paid leave benefits associated with birth or adoption. Nineteen percent of park and recreation agencies provide specific paid maternity benefits, while 30 percent provide specific paid maternity and paternity benefits.



## PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES' PROVISION OF MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE

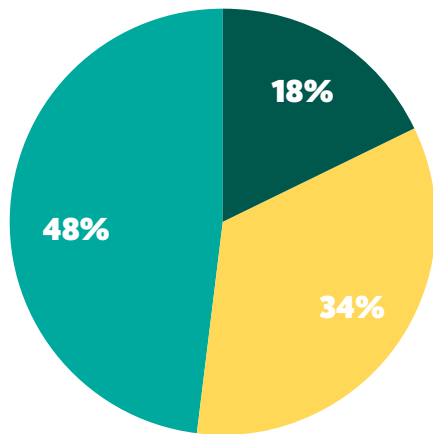
(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

Type of Leave	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/Town/Borough	County	Special Park District/Regional Authority	Urban
Offers paid maternity leave	9%	17%	9%	4%	*	*	11%	2%	2%	10%
Offers both paid maternity and paternity leave	30	18	27	35	37	53	29	47	22	47
Does not offer specific paid leave benefits associated with the birth or adoption of a child	61	65	64	61	63	47	60	51	76	43

\* = less than 1%

### NUMBER OF WEEKS OF PAID MATERNITY LEAVE

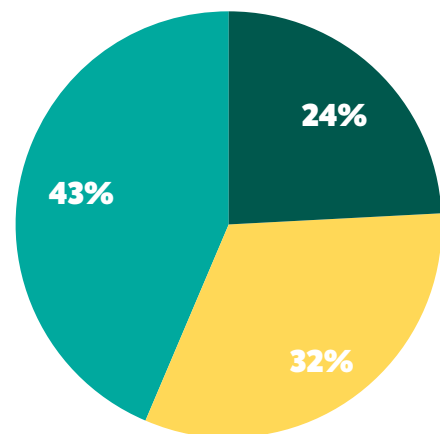
(Percentage Distribution of Agencies Providing Paid Maternity Leave)



■ 1-5 weeks   ■ 6-8 weeks   ■ 9-12 weeks

### NUMBER OF WEEKS OF PAID PATERNITY LEAVE

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies Providing Paid Paternity Leave)



■ 1-5 weeks   ■ 6-8 weeks   ■ 9-12 weeks

## HEALTH INSURANCE

Access to quality healthcare options is another valuable component of employee compensation. Virtually all park and recreation agencies offer health insurance coverage to staff and their families. Most agencies (91 percent) offer benefits for both employees and their families, while nine percent provide benefits to employees only. In addition, most agencies require employees to share in health insurance costs, including having their staff contribute to insurance premiums. The share of premiums an agency pays and the share that an employee must cover may vary significantly between agencies.

Typically, park and recreation agencies cover 80 percent of their employees' health insurance premiums. Some agencies pick up an even more significant part of the tab: 36 percent pay for at least 90 percent of their employees' health insurance premiums, including 19 percent of agencies that cover the entire amount. At the other end of the spectrum, 19 percent of agencies cover less than 70 percent of their employees' health insurance premiums. Special park districts tend to pay more of their employees' health insurance premiums (a median of 85 percent) than do other agencies.

### PERCENTAGE OF HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS PAID BY PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/Town/Borough	County	Special Park District/Regional Authority	Urban
100 percent	19%	25%	24%	14%	3%	9%	21%	16%	15%	12%
90-99 percent	17	16	17	10	13	27	15	22	24	18
80-89 percent	27	27	28	16	44	12	30	16	24	29
70-79 percent	17	9	19	15	21	18	15	16	22	22
50-69 percent	11	13	5	12	8	21	12	19	4	7
Less than 50 percent	8	9	7	3	13	12	7	11	11	12
Median agency contribution	80	82	80	80	80	75	80	80	85	80

In addition to health insurance and PTO, an overwhelming majority of agencies offer other valuable benefits as a part of their compensation packages for FT employees, including:

- Dental (offered by 99 percent of agencies)
- Continuing education (95 percent)
- Life insurance (95 percent)
- Vision (94 percent)
- Employee assistance/Counseling (92 percent)

In some cases, the agency pays the total cost of the benefit; in other cases, the agency and employee share the costs. Park and recreation agencies are most likely to bear the total cost of employee assistance, continuing education and life insurance.

## PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS PROVIDED AND FUNDED BY PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

	Benefit Provided, Funded Fully by Agency	Benefit Provided, Funded (at Least) in Part by Employee	Benefit Not Currently Offered
Dental	26%	72%	1%
Continuing education (courses, conferences, certificates)	73	22	5
Life insurance	54	41	5
Vision	25	68	6
Employee assistance/Counseling	77	15	8
Short-term disability insurance	31	54	15
Long-term disability insurance	30	52	18
Tuition reimbursement (college, trade school)	26	44	30

## RETIREMENT PLANS

Employee compensation includes wages and benefits that workers currently receive and often provides a foundation for financial security when employees retire. Virtually all (99 percent) park and recreation agencies' compensation packages include quality retirement benefits — such packages help attract and retain high-performing employees.

Historically, government employees — including park and recreation professionals — have participated in defined benefit (DB) plans. Under these plans, frequently referred to as pension plans, the employer promises the employee specific retirement benefits (either a weekly/biweekly/monthly payment or a lump sum upon retirement) based on the employee's length of service and salary level. Typically, the employer contributes most, if not all, of the funds for these retirement benefits, and guarantees the payments when the employee retires and begins to draw on those benefits.

DB plans are valuable tools for recruiting and retaining high-quality employees. Still, the financial obligations associated with such plans have made them untenable for many local government employers that continue to offer them. In recent decades, private-sector employers have moved away from offering DB plans to new employees. While the shift away from pension plans has been less prevalent in the public sector, park and recreation agencies have been moving toward (or at least supplementing their DB plans with) another increasingly common retirement savings tool: defined contribution (DC) plans.

In DC plans, the employee — and frequently the employer — both make regular contributions to an employee-owned retirement account. Funds held in DC plans — e.g., 401(k), 457(b) or 403(b) accounts — may be withdrawn without penalty by the worker until a certain age, typically 59.5 years old. The worker receives a tax deferral on contributions made to these plans and the income earned over the years until they withdraw funds from the plan during retirement.

Unlike DB plans, DC plans do not guarantee a specific payment amount at retirement. However, they usually give employees a choice in how to invest retirement savings based on employees' appetite for risk. These plans also can be attractive to employees because they are portable: when employees change jobs, they may roll over the funds into their new employer's plan or a bank's or investment company's investment product of their choice. On the other hand, DB plans have vesting schedules that require an employee to remain with the employer for a certain number of years before "earning" any retirement benefits.

Forty-six percent of park and recreation agencies offer their employees DB *and* DC plans, providing a greater diversity of retirement options for their staff. Nearly four in five agencies have a DB program as part of the compensation packages they offer to their newly hired, full-time employees; 66 percent offer a DC plan either in conjunction with a DB plan or as the sole retirement benefit offering.

In those park and recreation agencies that offer DB retirement programs, 90 percent of employees contribute to those retirement accounts. The typical DB employee contribution is six percent.

Sixty-three percent of agencies that offer a DC plan provide a percentage match to participants' contributions. The median employer match is six percent.

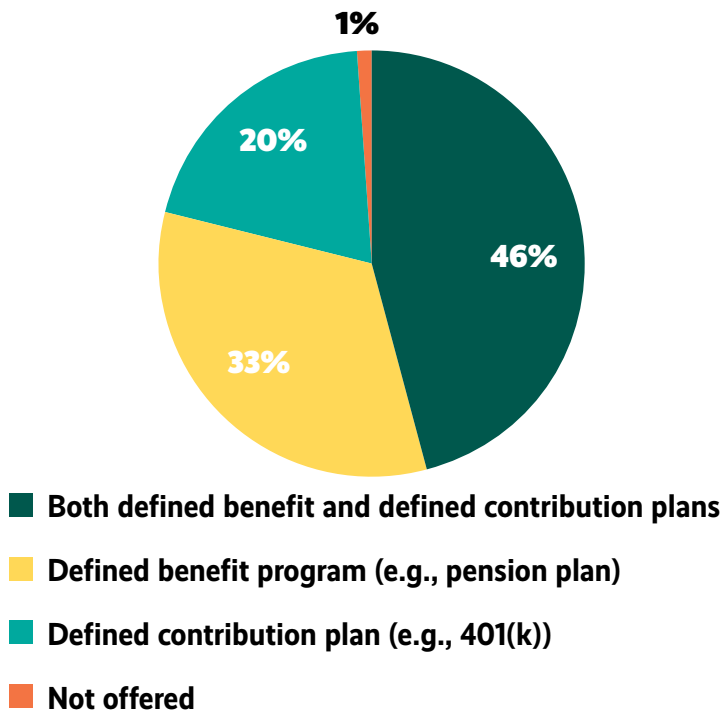
### RETIREMENT PLANS OFFERED TO NEWLY HIRED, FULL-TIME PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY EMPLOYEES

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/Town/Borough	County	Special Park District/Regional Authority	Urban
Defined benefit program (e.g., pension plan)	33%	39%	32%	26%	31%	33%	33%	31%	33%	34%
Defined contribution plan (e.g., 401(k), 457(b), 403(b))	20	28	20	25	13	2	22	9	20	20
Defined benefit and defined contribution plans	46	34	48	49	56	64	45	60	47	46

### RETIREMENT PLAN(S) OFFERED TO NEWLY HIRED, FULL-TIME PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY EMPLOYEES

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)



## PAY RAISES AND BONUSES

Regular salary adjustments are an essential part of a compensation system. With current inflation affecting every household, raises in pay are becoming increasingly necessary. The methods that park and recreation agencies use to set pay raises vary significantly. Between 2022 and 2023, the 13 tracked job titles garnered average pay raises ranging from 4.1 percent to 5.7 percent.

The two most common salary changes result from cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) and individual performance. In the case of COLAs, the salaries of every park and recreation agency staff member increase at a similar rate that matches (or closely meets) the inflation rate in the agency’s local area. Seventy-four percent of park and recreation agencies offer COLAs to their employees. Fifty-seven percent of agencies award merit-based pay raises; high-performing employees receive larger pay adjustments than do other workers.

Park and recreation agencies also may increase employees’ salaries because of:

- Increased employee responsibilities and duties (cited by 46 percent of respondents)
- Predetermined step raises (36 percent)
- Market adjustments (35 percent)
- Jurisdiction-wide raises as granted by the mayor, county executive, council, etc. (28 percent)
- Union contract requirements (28 percent)
- Longevity increases (21 percent)

### KEY DETERMINANTS OF PAY RAISES FOR PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSIONALS

(Percent of Agencies)

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/ Town/ Borough	County	Special Park District/ Regional Authority	Urban
Cost-of-living adjustments	74%	73%	68%	79%	75%	71%	75%	77%	64%	75%
Individual performance	57	48	64	62	57	56	53	43	89	57
Increased employee responsibilities/duties	46	39	39	50	53	44	43	38	75	45
Market adjustments	35	19	35	48	43	42	32	30	49	37
Step raises	36	32	33	37	42	40	40	39	15	42
Jurisdiction-wide raises granted by the mayor, county executive, council, etc.	28	24	28	26	23	40	27	41	17	33
Union/Contract requirements	28	21	25	27	32	45	31	29	13	38
Longevity increases	21	20	20	19	23	16	24	20	6	24
Other	2	1	1	*	6	2	1	4	6	3

\* = less than 1%

Beyond base salaries, many park and recreation agencies have a bonus plan as part of their employee compensation packages. Nearly half of park and recreation agencies offer bonuses to at least some of their employees.

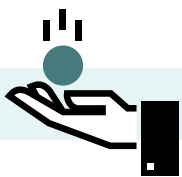
The most common bonus plans — offered by 24 percent of agencies — are longevity based. Employees at 14 percent of park and recreation agencies are eligible for merit-based bonuses based on their performance. One percent of agencies have plans in which employees in a specific department earn a bonus based on the success of their department meeting stated goals.

## PREVALENCE OF BONUSES FOR PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSIONALS BY AGENCY CHARACTERISTICS

(Percent of Agencies)

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/Town/Borough	County	Special Park District/Regional Authority	Urban
Longevity bonus	24%	29%	21%	20%	20%	20%	28%	13%	19%	25%
Individual-based performance bonus	14	7	18	20	10	15	13	7	23	14
Holiday bonus	9	11	14	6	8	*	10	*	8	5
Tenure-based bonus (e.g., length of service)	6	3	6	8	8	5	7	4	4	3
Other	7	4	6	6	12	11	5	15	8	7
Department-based performance bonus	1	1	*	*	4	2	*	2	2	1
Agency does not offer bonuses to its staff	54	53	49	55	55	55	52	65	54	52

\* = less than 1%



*Cost-of-living adjustments are a key determinant of pay raises in most park and recreation agencies.*



## MINIMUM WAGE POLICY AND SEASONAL EMPLOYEES

Part-time and seasonal workers are essential contributors to park and recreation agencies' ability to deliver services, and parks and recreation is a leader in hiring teens and young adults for their first job. The experience gained through a first job can shape that person's future. Whether a summer position, after-school placement or another opportunity, part-time and seasonal workers contribute to park and recreation agencies' success in delivering services and amenities to their communities. In many cases, part-time and seasonal workers are in front-line, customer-service positions, such as lifeguards at a pool, aides or instructors at a summer camp, or staffing the customer help desk at a recreation center.

Part-time and seasonal employees typically receive compensation at or just above minimum wage. At 15 percent of agencies, the minimum wage matches the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour; another 44 percent of agencies pay a locality/state minimum wage higher than the federal minimum. Forty-one percent of park and recreation agencies set their lowest hourly wage above the minimum wage rate to which they are subject. The typical park and recreation agency pays a minimum wage of \$13.50 per hour.

### **PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES' MINIMUM WAGE POLICY**

(Percentage Distribution of Agencies)

	All	1-10 Full-Time Employees	11-20 Full-Time Employees	21-50 Full-Time Employees	51-100 Full-Time Employees	More Than 100 Full-Time Employees	City/ Town/ Borough	County	Special Park District/ Regional Authority	Urban
Agency's minimum wage matches the federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour	15%	23%	9%	14%	11%	5%	16%	17%	4%	14%
Agency's minimum wage matches locality's and/or state's minimum wage, which is higher than the federal minimum wage	44	55	50	26	38	65	43	50	49	41
Agency's minimum wage is higher than the locality and/or state minimum wage	41	30	41	59	51	30	40	33	47	45
Median minimum hourly wage	\$13.50	\$13.18	\$13	\$14	\$13	\$15	\$13.80	\$14.20	\$13	\$14.72

# SALARY INFORMATION

This section of the report presents detailed salary, bonus and demographic data for the 13 park and recreation professions covered in the survey:

- Park and Recreation Agency Director (or Executive Director or Superintendent)
- Planning Director (or Superintendent)
- Director of Finance (or Administrative Director or Business Manager)
- Recreation Director (or Recreation Superintendent or Assistant Director – Recreation)
- Park Operations Director (or Maintenance Director or Maintenance Superintendent)
- Park Operations (or Maintenance Foreman)
- Facilities Manager
- Athletics Supervisor (or Athletics Manager)
- Aquatics Supervisor (or Aquatics Manager)
- Recreation Programs Coordinator (or Recreation Programs Manager)
- Marketing and Communications Director (or Manager)
- Fitness Center Manager
- Administrative Assistant

## MEDIAN BASE SALARIES AND TYPICAL ANNUAL SALARY INCREASES

	January 1, 2023: Base Salary	Median Year-to-Year Percentage Change
Park and Recreation Agency Director	\$114,000	+4.8%
Planning Director	\$97,104	+4.1%
Director of Finance	\$101,234	+5.5%
Recreation Director	\$82,081	+4.5%
Park Operations Director	\$83,000	+4.7%
Park Operations	\$60,000	+4.8%
Facilities Manager	\$68,385	+5.2%
Athletics Supervisor	\$58,892	+5.0%
Aquatics Supervisor	\$58,183	+5.0%
Recreation Programs Coordinator	\$54,566	+5.0%
Marketing and Communications Director	\$70,000	+5.7%
Fitness Center Manager	\$66,428	+5.0%
Administrative Assistant	\$47,672	+5.0%



In the same way park and recreation agencies differ significantly in size, programming and facility offerings, the scope of their mission, and funding, they also differ in the responsibilities and compensation of their professional teams. Therefore, this report presents a broad snapshot of compensation data, including a presentation of the median and average salaries for each of the 13 positions covered in the report and salaries and bonuses at the 10th, 25th, 75th and 90th percentiles. Agencies with broader missions and offerings and those with greater funding resources may be more apt to pay their employees at the 75th or even 90th percentiles, and to better recruit and retain professionals best suited for their agencies. Conversely, agencies with modest offerings or funding resources may offer compensation levels below the median.

Other factors can impact a park and recreation professional's compensation, such as agency size, type, location and employee demographics (education, certification, etc.). This report also looks at the relationship between the characteristics of agencies and employees and their salaries.

- **Agency size:** Generally, base salaries and bonuses are higher at agencies with a larger full-time staff (as measured by the number of full-time staff employed).
- **Agency type:** Agency types include cities, towns, counties, special park districts, regional authorities and agencies located in urban locales. While base salaries and bonuses vary significantly, both tend to be higher at special park districts and agencies in urban locales.
- **Region:** The four census regions are Northeast, South, Midwest and West, with significant regional differences. Agencies in the West tend to offer higher base salaries.
- **Highest level of education attained:** Generally, park and recreation professionals with a bachelor's degree tend to have higher base salaries than do their peers without a four-year college degree. Furthermore, professionals who have earned a graduate degree (e.g., master's, MBA, J.D., Ph.D.) have base salaries higher than do those with only a four-year college degree.
- **Certification:** Many park and recreation professionals have professional certifications in addition to or instead of a degree. Employees holding a professional certification have more success in achieving upward career mobility, finding jobs, or receiving promotions based on the employer's job requirements. Also, for certain job titles, park and recreation professionals who have earned one or more professional certifications, including, but not limited to, the Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) and Certified Park and Recreation Executive (CPRE), tend to earn more than their peers who do not hold these certifications.
- **Years of professional experience:** Experienced park and recreation professionals earn more than their peers who are relatively new to the field.

Following the salary data for each of the 13 jobs is a sample job description outlining the key responsibilities and typical job experience of incumbents in those positions. Park and recreation agencies can use these sample job descriptions as guides when creating or updating the list of key responsibilities at their organizations. Please note that incumbents with greater responsibilities than those listed in the sample job descriptions tend to earn more than those whose job responsibilities match those listed in the samples.



*Experience, region and education  
play a role in higher wages for park  
and recreation professionals.*



# CONCLUSION

The success of park and recreation agencies would not be possible without the dedication of the more than 160,000 full-time professionals and the hundreds of thousands of part-time and seasonal workers who serve these agencies. The ability to make a real difference in the lives of members in their communities is what draws many park and recreation professionals to this work. At the same time, competitive compensation packages — including base salaries and benefits — are critical in attracting and retaining the best employees. Armed with information, such as the compensation data and sample job descriptions presented in this *2023 NRPA Park and Recreation Salary Survey* report, park and recreation agencies can recruit and retain highly qualified professionals to ensure those agencies best serve their communities.

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# ABOUT NRPA

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

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

NRPA places immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation. We conduct 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 about NRPA research reports and resources at [nrpa.org/Research](https://nrpa.org/Research).



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**22377 Belmont Ridge Road  
Ashburn, VA 20148  
800.626.NRPA (6772) | [nrpa.org](http://nrpa.org)**