

2020

NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW



NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park

BECAUSE EVERYONE DESERVES A GREAT PARK



LIVE OSTEED PARKS & RECREATION



Reading
the
Way

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Park and recreation professionals work tirelessly to enhance the quality of life for all people in every city, town and county in the United States. Thanks to the contributions of more than 160,000 full-time park and recreation professionals — along with hundreds of thousands of part-time and seasonal workers and volunteers — millions of people benefit directly from the services parks and recreation provides. Those services range from gathering places to meet with friends and family to open spaces to exercise, the chance to reconnect with nature to community resources offering a nutritious meal or an opportunity to learn a new skill.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is pleased to present this snapshot of local park and recreation professionals and their agencies: the [2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#). The report summarizes the key findings from the National Recreation and Park Association's [NRPA Park Metrics](#), our benchmarking tool that assists park and recreation professionals in the effective management and planning of their operating resources and capital facilities. Taken together, the [2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#) and [NRPA Park Metrics](#) represent the most comprehensive collection of park- and recreation-related benchmarks and insights that inform professionals, key stakeholders and the public about the state of the park and recreation industry.

Data is a powerful tool, but not the final answer for what is best for your agency. The [2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#) and [NRPA Park Metrics](#) help inform conversations with internal colleagues, external consultants, partners and policymakers about the role of parks and recreation in your community. The combination of insights from this report with information about your community's specific needs and experiences will help identify the optimal mix of facilities and programming your agency should deliver.

The 2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review does not include “national standards,” nor do the benchmarks represent any sort of standards against which every park and recreation agency should measure itself. The reason for this is simple: there is not a single set of standards for parks and recreation because different agencies serve different communities that have unique needs, desires and challenges. Agencies also have diverse funding mechanisms.

For instance, if your agency has more workers per 10,000 residents relative to the “typical” agency, you should not necessarily shed staff to meet that benchmark. An agency

with a larger staff may offer more hands-on programming because of the unique needs of the population it serves. Communities vary in population demographics; so too should their park and recreation agencies.

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

Park and recreation professionals should use the [2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#) in conjunction with other resources, including those that may be proprietary to a specific agency, those from NRPA and others from external sources. This report also provides a list of additional NRPA resources to review.

HOW TO USE THE 2020 NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND NRPA PARK METRICS

The first step is to look at the available data. Most of the data in the [2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#) are presented with medians along with data responses at the lower quartile (lowest 25 percent) and upper quartile (highest 25 percent). The data allow for insights into not only where your agency stands compared to “typical” agencies (i.e., those at the median values), but also compared to the full spectrum of agencies at both the high and low quartiles. Many metrics include the top-line figures, as well as certain cross-tabulations of jurisdiction population or population density. More comprehensive cross-tabulations are available as interactive tables at [NRPA.org/metrics](https://nrpa.org/metrics).

The next step is to build a customized benchmark report based on a peer group you define. Go into [NRPA Park Metrics](#) to filter the data by agency type, size and geographic region. You can enhance this experience even further by entering your agency's data into [NRPA Park Metrics](#), after which you can generate reports that compare your agency's data with the key metrics of agencies throughout the United States.

The [2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review](#) contains data from 1,053 unique park and recreation agencies across the United States, as reported between 2017 and 2019. **Note:** Not all agencies answered every survey question.

2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review Key Findings



Agencies that ban the use of tobacco products at parks and facilities

76%

Full-Time Equivalent Employees (FTES) Per 10,000 Residents:

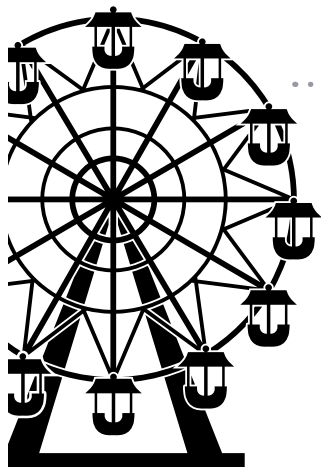
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Operating Expenditures Per Capita:

\$81.19/year

Manages 11.0 miles of walking, hiking, running and biking trails

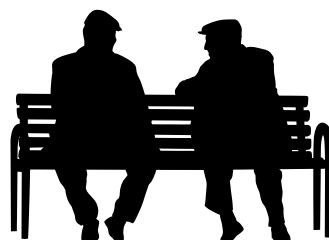


88%

of park and recreation agencies offer themed special events to the public

Residents Per Park:

2,281



Revenue-to-Operating Expenditures:

25.9%



54% of park and recreation agencies deliver STEM programming to children and young adults

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The 2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review highlights characteristics of America’s local public park agencies with graphics categorized into seven sections: park facilities, programming, responsibilities of park and recreation agencies, staffing, budget, agency funding and policies.

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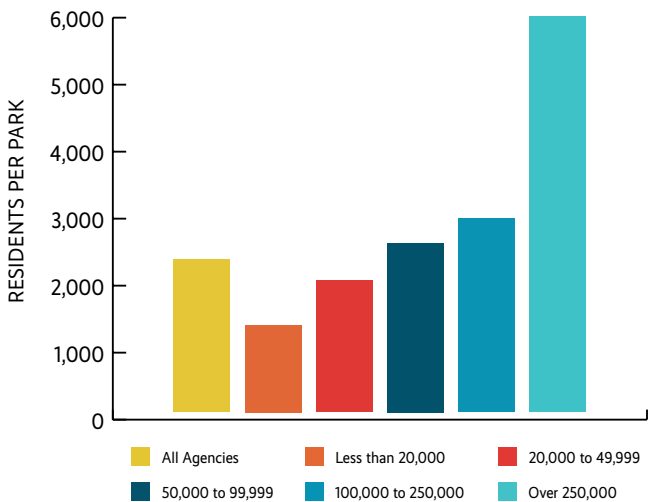
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PARK FACILITIES

Local and regional park and recreation agencies vary greatly in size and the types of facilities they offer. The typical agency participating in *NRPA Park Metrics* serves a jurisdiction — a town, city, county and/or region — of 42,428 people. Other agencies serve an area of just a few thousand people; still others are the primary recreation resource for millions of people.

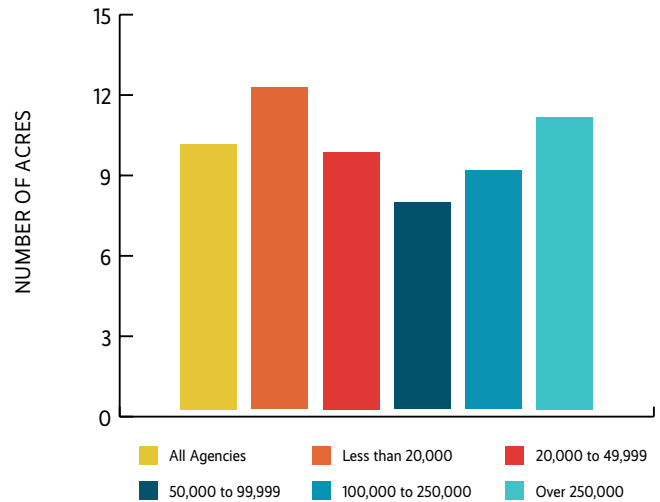
Naturally, the offerings of these agencies are as varied as the markets they serve. The typical park and recreation agency manages 20 parks comprising a total of 437.1 acres. After adding in non-park sites (including open space that an agency may manage, such as city-hall lawns or roadway medians), the median number of parks and non-park sites increases to 27 encompassing 530 acres.

FIGURE 1: RESIDENTS PER PARK (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | 2,281 | 1,300 | 1,963 | 2,523 | 2,889 | 5,908 |
| Lower Quartile | 1,316 | 908 | 1,233 | 1,560 | 1,914 | 2,818 |
| Upper Quartile | 4,140 | 2,037 | 3,140 | 4,518 | 5,135 | 15,286 |

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



| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | 9.9 | 12.0 | 9.6 | 7.7 | 8.9 | 10.9 |
| Lower Quartile | 5.1 | 5.2 | 5.4 | 4.7 | 5.0 | 5.3 |
| Upper Quartile | 17.1 | 20.8 | 15.0 | 17.1 | 14.9 | 17.9 |

The typical agency has one park for every 2,281 residents. The number of people per park rises as the population of the town, city, county or region served by an agency increases. For those agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 residents, there is one park for every 1,300 residents. The ratio increases to one park for every 2,523 residents in jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, and rises further to one park for every 5,908 people at agencies serving areas with a population over 250,000.

The typical park and recreation agency manages 9.9 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents in its jurisdiction. The smallest agencies — those serving less than 20,000 residents — typically have 12.0 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. That ratio narrows to 10.9 acres per 1,000 residents in jurisdictions where agencies serve a population of over 250,000 people. Agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 100,000 and 250,000 have 8.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Parkland refers to both maintained parks and open space areas, such as greenspace and courtyards.

Park and recreation professionals oversee a wide variety of facilities and features at their agencies. Ninety-four percent of park and recreation agencies provide playground facilities in their communities and the typical agency has 12 playgrounds in its catalogue of offerings. At least 50 percent of agencies have basketball courts, tennis courts, diamond fields for baseball and/or softball, multi-purpose rectangular fields, dog parks and outdoor swimming pools.

For each amenity, the typical park and recreation agency has:

- One playground for every 3,750 residents
- One basketball court for every 7,400 residents
- One outdoor tennis court for every 5,004 residents
- One dog park for every 45,899 residents

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

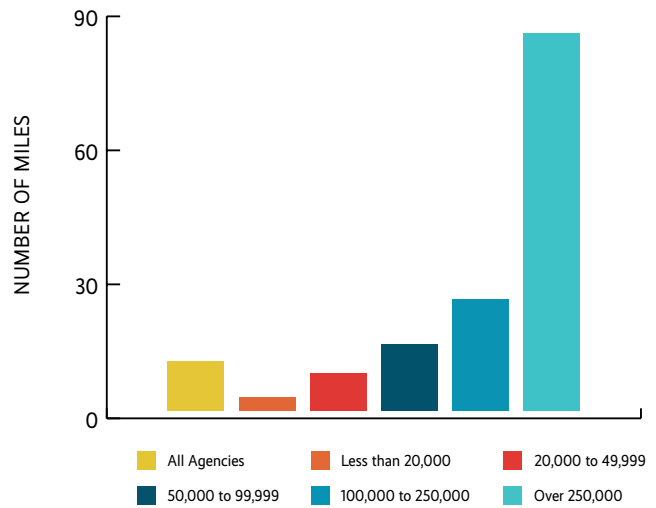
| Types of Facilities | | Median Number of Residents per Facility | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | | Population of Jurisdiction | | | | | |
| | Percent of Agencies | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
| Playgrounds | 93.9% | 3,750 | 2,523 | 3,157 | 3,859 | 4,623 | 8,291 |
| Basketball courts | 86.5 | 7,400 | 4,090 | 7,067 | 8,557 | 8,792 | 11,468 |
| Tennis courts (outdoor only) | 81.1 | 5,004 | 2,922 | 4,347 | 6,242 | 5,589 | 9,224 |
| Diamond fields: baseball - youth | 78.3 | 6,779 | 3,396 | 5,132 | 7,222 | 12,293 | 19,286 |
| Diamond fields: softball fields - adult | 64.8 | 13,510 | 5,072 | 10,849 | 15,500 | 26,714 | 30,511 |
| Rectangular fields: multi-purpose | 64.5 | 8,150 | 4,683 | 7,297 | 10,467 | 13,233 | 15,527 |
| Dog parks | 62.9 | 45,899 | 10,000 | 28,132 | 58,000 | 99,707 | 135,457 |
| Diamond fields: softball fields - youth | 59.0 | 11,511 | 5,691 | 9,785 | 12,000 | 23,220 | 44,398 |
| Diamond fields: baseball - adult | 52.8 | 19,518 | 7,804 | 17,185 | 22,876 | 47,754 | 46,196 |
| Swimming pools (outdoor only) | 50.9 | 35,837 | 8,023 | 25,107 | 45,825 | 64,250 | 84,884 |
| Tot lots | 47.6 | 11,173 | 6,998 | 10,900 | 11,200 | 20,715 | 27,284 |
| Community gardens | 47.2 | 29,273 | 7,914 | 22,562 | 50,000 | 66,645 | 102,625 |
| Rectangular fields: soccer field - youth | 46.9 | 7,325 | 3,294 | 4,833 | 9,085 | 12,875 | 29,559 |
| Multiuse courts - basketball, volleyball | 43.1 | 19,814 | 7,866 | 20,040 | 22,250 | 34,565 | 66,967 |
| Rectangular fields: soccer field - adult | 40.7 | 12,446 | 7,665 | 10,576 | 16,644 | 20,478 | 22,485 |
| Skate parks | 38.2 | 49,500 | 10,118 | 29,491 | 62,567 | 107,773 | 232,297 |
| Rectangular fields: football field | 37.2 | 26,771 | 7,500 | 16,971 | 32,420 | 44,580 | 114,831 |
| Multi-purpose synthetic fields | 19.4 | 49,493 | 8,530 | 22,000 | 51,110 | 61,250 | 118,791 |
| Ice rinks (outdoor only) | 17.4 | 18,526 | 9,860 | 13,542 | 29,830 | 122,902 | 422,692 |
| Rectangular fields: lacrosse field | 11.4 | 27,500 | 6,690 | 14,605 | 29,046 | 60,155 | 144,398 |
| Rectangular fields: cricket field | 11.0 | 133,045 | ISD | 29,228 | 59,227 | 105,715 | 389,255 |
| Overlay fields | 8.0 | 14,887 | 3,771 | 8,468 | 9,774 | 36,348 | 104,684 |
| Rectangular fields: field hockey field | 3.4 | 27,418 | ISD | 19,135 | 39,514 | 91,941 | 316,067 |

In addition, 77 percent of park and recreation agencies have trails, greenways and/or blueways as part of their outdoor offerings. 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 residents have a median of 84.5 miles of trails under their purview. Geography plays a role in the amount of trail miles managed by park and recreation agencies. Agencies on the West Coast of the U.S. have a median of 16 miles of trail, while those on the East Coast typically have approximately nine miles of trails.

Park and recreation agencies also offer a number of indoor facilities to their residents. A majority of agencies offer community centers and recreation centers. Also common are senior centers, performance amphitheaters and nature centers. The typical agency with community centers has a facility for every 28,939 residents, while those agencies with at least one recreation center have one such facility for every 31,141 residents. Two in five agencies offer senior centers, with one facility for every 60,513 residents in their jurisdiction.

The typical park and recreation agency operates six buildings. Those agencies serving populations of less than 20,000 community members often operate three buildings, while those serving populations between 100,000 and 250,000 oversee 16. Those agencies serving a population of over 250,000 typically have 43 buildings under their purview.

FIGURE 4: MILES OF TRAIL (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 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | 11.0 | 3.0 | 8.5 | 15.0 | 25.0 | 84.5 |
| Lower Quartile | 3.0 | 1.5 | 3.4 | 4.1 | 11.0 | 38.0 |
| Upper Quartile | 32.0 | 6.8 | 15.0 | 28.5 | 47.0 | 158.2 |

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

| Types of Facilities | Median Number of Residents per Facility | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Percent of Agencies | All Agencies | Population of Jurisdiction | | | | |
| | | | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
| Recreation centers | 61.0% | 31,141 | 8,916 | 25,716 | 40,898 | 49,999 | 64,392 |
| Community centers | 59.7 | 28,939 | 9,601 | 26,280 | 42,491 | 54,042 | 93,302 |
| Senior centers | 40.9 | 60,513 | 12,209 | 32,639 | 68,701 | 123,988 | 318,255 |
| Performance amphitheaters | 35.0 | 62,475 | 10,812 | 30,577 | 57,304 | 112,611 | 385,525 |
| Nature centers | 29.3 | 109,796 | 10,816 | 35,854 | 65,000 | 125,000 | 381,434 |
| Stadiums | 17.9 | 66,972 | 8,625 | 24,910 | 59,074 | 134,557 | 321,434 |
| Ice rinks | 14.8 | 53,000 | 9,028 | 26,500 | 56,847 | 100,867 | 310,925 |
| Teen centers | 13.8 | 64,000 | 13,622 | 28,400 | 60,268 | 138,101 | 390,918 |
| Arenas | 7.5 | 57,711 | 8,148 | 24,736 | 61,556 | 110,168 | 405,201 |

PROGRAMMING

Residents interact with park and recreation amenities and programming throughout the year, resulting in thousands, if not millions, of contacts annually. “Contacts” may include many different types of interactions with a park and recreation agency, such as visits to a local park, running or biking on a local trail, visits to a local recreation center or other interaction with any of an agency’s park and recreation facilities. Moreover, a person can have more than one contact. For example, someone who swims at his/her local agency’s aquatic center 10 times a year and bikes along a local trail five times a year would have 15 contacts.

The typical park and recreation agency registers approximately 225,000 contacts every year. But, the number of contacts varies dramatically from agency to agency. For example, the typical agency at the 75th percentile has more than 1 million annual contacts. Interaction between large park and recreation agencies and visitors is even greater — the typical agency serving a population of over 250,000 has 2 million contacts per year, with those at the 75th percentile serving nearly 4.4 million people annually.

Programming is a key method of engagement that drives the use of park and recreation facilities. When associated with registration fees, it is also the largest source of non-tax revenue for most agencies. The typical agency offers 187 programs each year; 120 of those programs are fee-based events. Agencies serving a population of less than 20,000 typically hold 40 fee-based programs per year, while large jurisdiction agencies serving over 250,000 residents provide more than 535 fee-based programs annually. The typical park and recreation agency generates 15,000 contacts through their programs alone. Those agencies serving more than 250,000 residents may have quadruple the number of contacts.

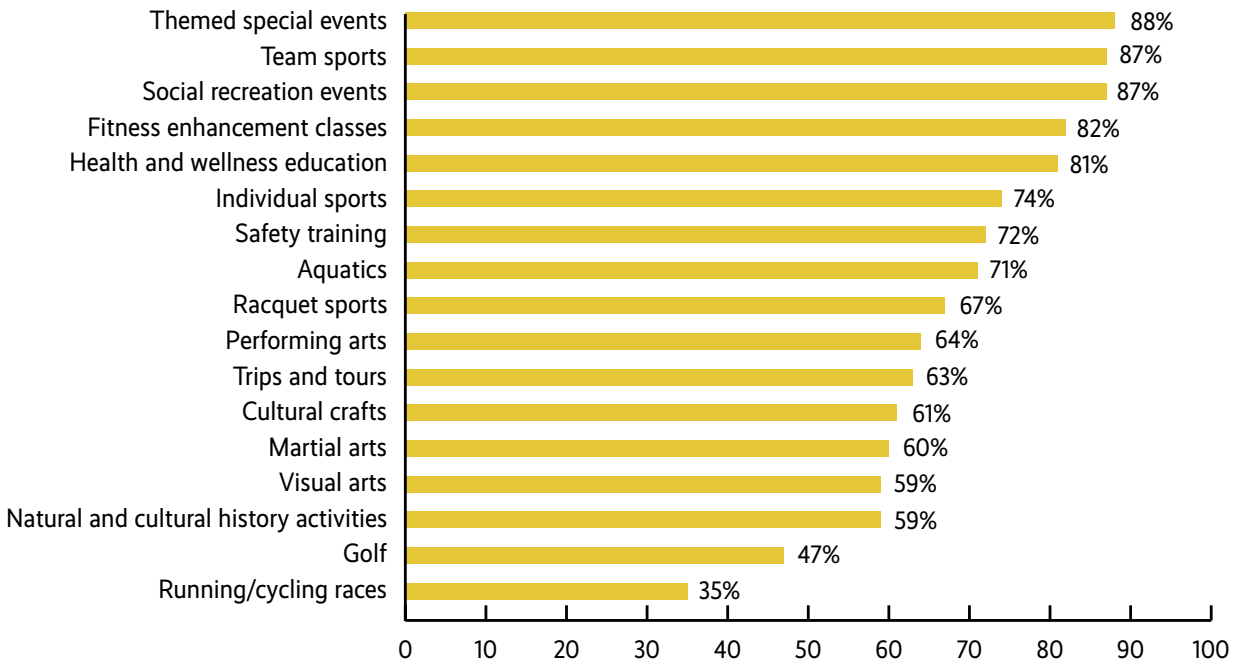
Programming can span a variety of park and recreation activities, with many touching one or more of NRPA’s Three Pillars: Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity. Key programming activities offered by at least 60 percent of park and recreation agencies include:

- Themed special events (offered by 88 percent of agencies)
- Team sports (87 percent)
- Social recreation events (87 percent)
- Fitness enhancement classes (82 percent)
- Health and wellness education (81 percent)
- Individual sports (74 percent)
- Safety training (72 percent)
- Aquatics (71 percent)
- Racquet sports (67 percent)
- Performing arts (64 percent)
- Trips and tours (63 percent)
- Cultural crafts (61 percent)
- Martial arts (60 percent)

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

- Health and wellness education
- Aquatics
- Golf
- Cultural crafts
- Performing arts
- Natural and cultural history activities
- Themed special events
- Visual arts

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



Delivering high-quality services to all members of the community is a key commitment of park and recreation professionals. That promise includes those professionals being leaders in providing services and programming for children, seniors and people with disabilities. Eighty-three percent of park and recreation agencies offer summer camp programs for their communities' children, and a majority delivers programs for teens and after-school care as parts of their out-of-school-time (OST) offerings. Fewer agencies include before-school care or all-day child care as a part of their program offerings. Out-of-school-time programs are commonplace offerings by agencies of nearly all sizes, but most especially by those that serve populations of at least 20,000 residents.

In addition, most park and recreation agencies offer specific programming for other segments of their communities, including older adults (78 percent) and people with disabilities (62 percent). Agencies in larger communities are most likely to offer these types of programming. For example, 83 percent of park and recreation agencies in jurisdictions serving 100,000 to 250,000 residents offer programming designed for people with disabilities compared to 32 percent of agencies serving less than 20,000 residents that offer such programs. More than half of all park and recreation agencies provide science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-specific programs to community members.

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

| | Percent of Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Summer camp | 83% | 62% | 89% | 91% | 89% | 90% |
| Specific senior programs | 78 | 66 | 78 | 86 | 86 | 79 |
| Specific teen programs | 65 | 48 | 64 | 73 | 71 | 77 |
| Programs for people with disabilities | 62 | 32 | 61 | 70 | 83 | 75 |
| After-school programs | 57 | 50 | 44 | 60 | 63 | 73 |
| STEM programs | 54 | 34 | 52 | 56 | 61 | 69 |
| Preschool | 36 | 25 | 43 | 40 | 39 | 33 |
| Before-school programs | 20 | 16 | 20 | 26 | 20 | 21 |
| Full daycare | 8 | 5 | 8 | 11 | 6 | 13 |

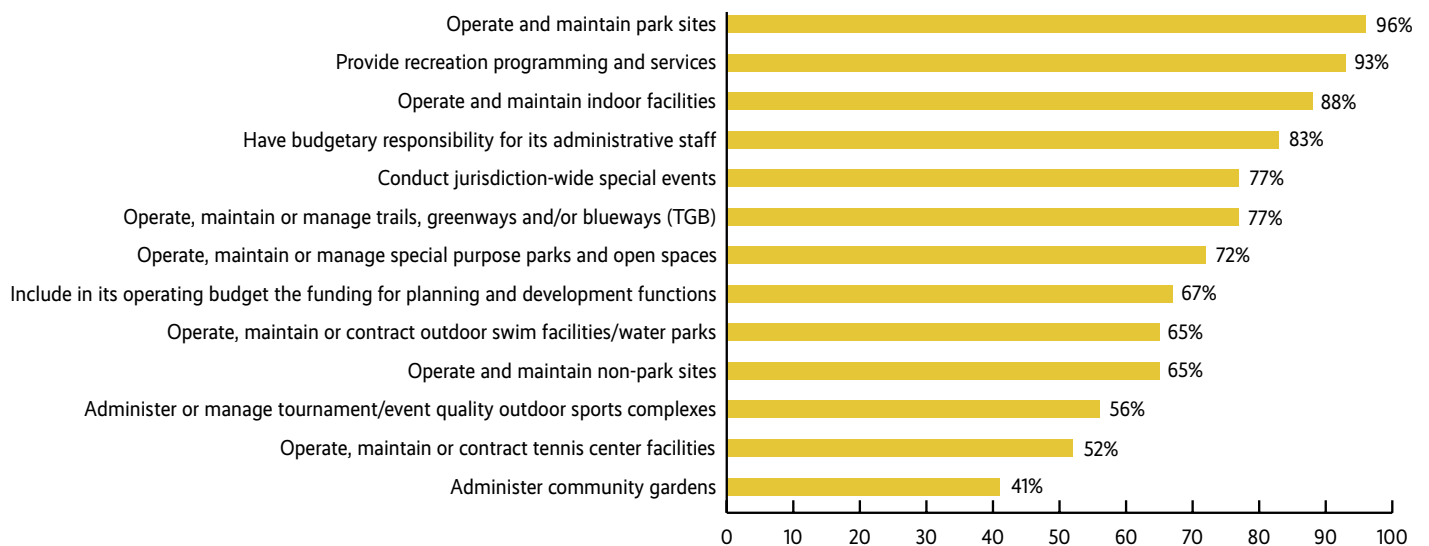


RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES

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

- Operate and maintain indoor facilities (88 percent of agencies)
- Have budgetary responsibility for their administrative staff (83 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage trails, greenways and/or blueways (TGB) (77 percent)
- Conduct major jurisdiction-wide special events (77 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage special-purpose parks and open spaces (72 percent)
- Operate and maintain non-park sites (65 percent)
- Operate, maintain or contract outdoor swim facilities/water parks (65 percent)
- Administer or manage tournament/event-quality outdoor sports complexes (56 percent)
- Operate, maintain or contract tennis center facilities (52 percent)
- Administer community gardens (41 percent)

**FIGURE 8: KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**



**FIGURE 9: OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**

| | |
|--|-----|
| Operate, maintain or contract tourism attractions | 34% |
| Operate, maintain or contract golf courses | 33 |
| Manage large outdoor performance amphitheaters | 33 |
| Operate, maintain or contract indoor swim facilities/water parks | 31 |
| Administer or manage farmers markets | 19 |
| Administer or manage tournament/event quality indoor sports complexes | 18 |
| Operate, maintain or contract campgrounds | 18 |
| Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts centers | 17 |
| Administer or manage professional or college-type stadiums/arenas/racetracks | 9 |
| Maintain or manage beaches (inclusive of all water-body types) | 9 |
| Manage or maintain fairgrounds | 5 |
| Operate, maintain or contract marinas | 5 |



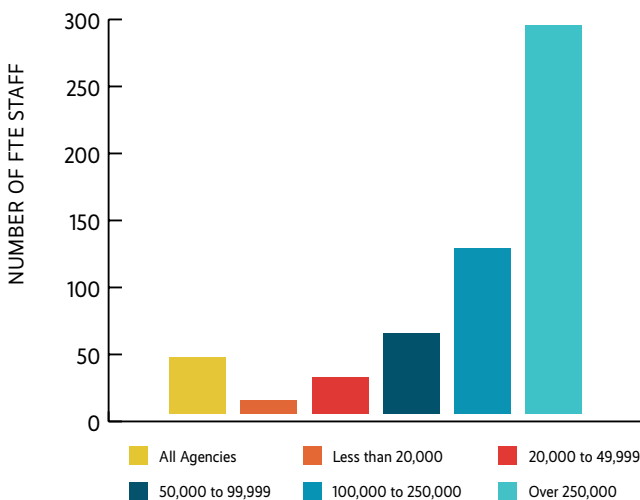
STAFFING

Staffing at the typical park and recreation agency includes 41.9 full-time equivalents (FTEs) with a mix of both full-time and part-time staff. The size of a staff, however, expands rapidly as the size of the jurisdiction served by an agency expands. Park and recreation agencies serving jurisdictions with a population of less than 20,000 have a median of 10.0 FTEs on staff. Agencies serving areas with 50,000 to 99,999 people have a median of 60.2 FTEs, while those serving areas with over 250,000 residents have a median of 289.7 FTE staff.

Median counts of FTEs on staff also positively correlate with:

- Number of acres maintained: 250 or fewer acres–15.9 FTEs; more than 3,500 acres–294.6 FTEs
- Number of parks maintained: less than 10 parks–12.9 FTEs; 50 or more parks–221.2 FTEs
- Operating expenditures: less than \$500,000–3.7 FTEs; more than \$10 million–201 FTEs.
- Population served by the agency: less than 500 people per square mile–17.5 FTEs; more than 2,500 people per square mile–79.1 FTEs.

FIGURE 10: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY STAFFING: FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (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 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | 41.9 | 10.0 | 27.3 | 60.2 | 123.2 | 289.7 |
| Lower Quartile | 14.0 | 5.0 | 14.7 | 32.4 | 61.0 | 118.2 |
| Upper Quartile | 124.2 | 19.4 | 50.5 | 123.1 | 217.7 | 486.9 |

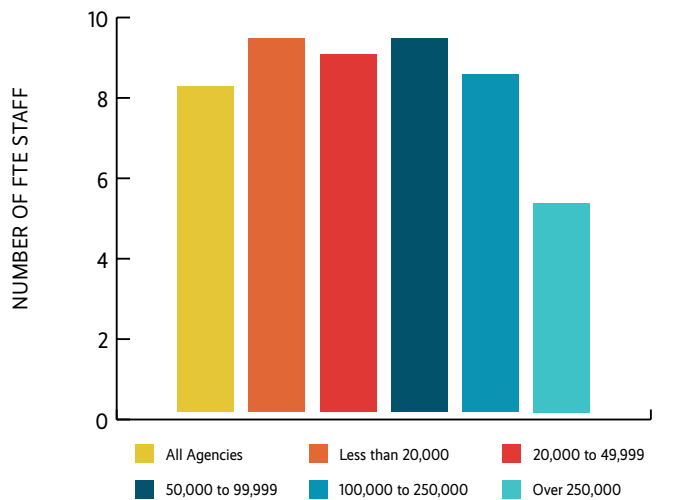
One way to view agency staffing is to measure it relative to the population that the agency serves. The typical park and recreation agency has 8.1 FTEs on staff for every 10,000 residents in the jurisdiction served by that agency. Agencies located in more-populated areas tend to have fewer FTEs on staff per population. Agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people have 9.3 FTEs for every 10,000 residents, with this measure decreasing to 5.2 FTEs for 10,000 residents in areas with over 250,000 people. Those agencies that serve areas with greater population density tend to have more FTEs per number of residents. Agencies operating in jurisdictions with less than 500 people per square mile have 5.1 FTEs per 10,000 people served compared to 10.4 FTEs per 10,000 residents in areas with more than 2,500 people per square mile.



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

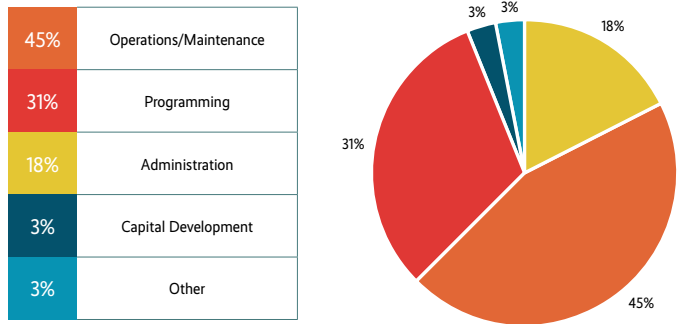
- Operations/Maintenance (45 percent)
- Programming (31 percent)
- Administration (18 percent)
- Capital Development (3 percent)
- Other (3 percent)

FIGURE 11: PARK AND RECREATION FTEs PER 10,000 RESIDENTS (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | 8.1 | 9.3 | 8.9 | 9.3 | 8.4 | 5.2 |
| Lower Quartile | 4.5 | 5.8 | 5.0 | 4.5 | 4.2 | 2.7 |
| Upper Quartile | 14.9 | 23.1 | 15.6 | 17.2 | 13.5 | 7.9 |

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



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

- Have a larger staff: 21 percent of agencies with a staff of fewer than 10 FTEs compared to 52 percent of agencies with 100 or more FTEs.
- Serve larger populations: 18 percent of agencies in jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people compared to 61 percent of agencies in jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.
- Have more parks: 17 percent of agencies with less than 10 parks compared to 62 percent of agencies with at least 50 parks.
- Maintain more parkland: 25 percent of agencies that maintain 250 acres or less of parkland compared to 60 percent of agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland.

BUDGET

The U.S. Census Bureau data indicate that local park and recreation agencies' operating expenditures totaled \$39.0 billion in 2017. Per *NRPA Park Metrics* data, the typical park and recreation agency has current annual operating expenditures of \$4,342,495.

Normalizing operating expenditure data by population served by an agency is a much more accurate and meaningful way of articulating and comparing spending. By this measure, the typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$81.19 on a per capita basis. The denser the population served by an agency, the higher the per capita operating expenses: the typical agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 500 people per square mile has per capita operating expenses of \$47.56, while one serving an area with more than 2,500 people per square mile has a median of \$103.94 per resident.

At the same time, per capita operations spending is inversely related to the population of the area served: agencies serving jurisdictions of less than 20,000 people have a median operating expenditure of \$96.77 per person. That figure declines to \$51.91 per resident for agencies serving jurisdictions with over 250,000 people, declining further to \$41.95 in jurisdictions with more than half a million residents.

FIGURE 13: ANNUAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)

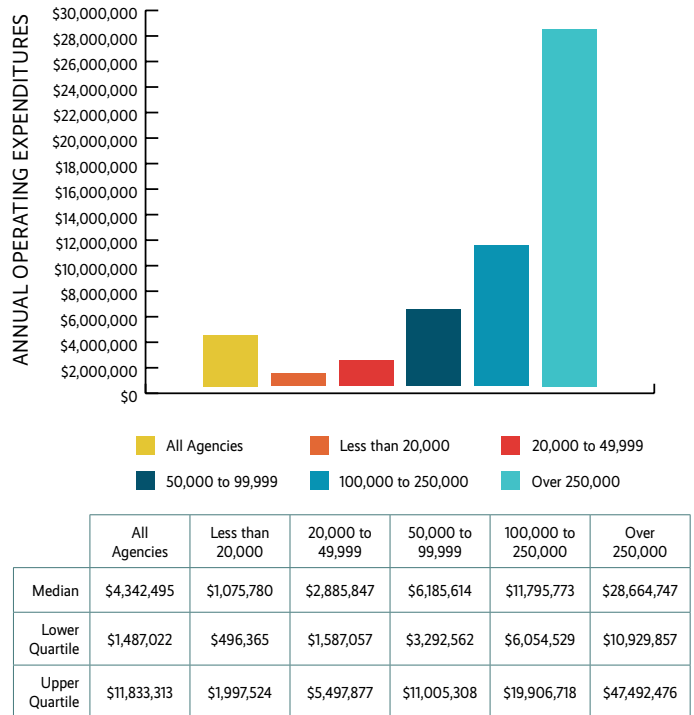
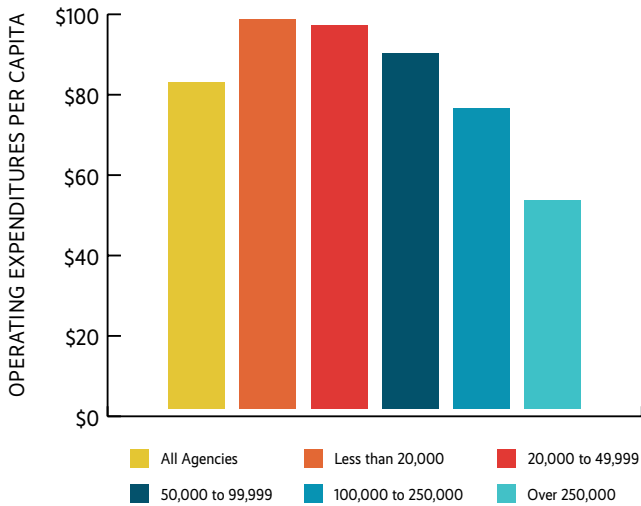


FIGURE 14: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)

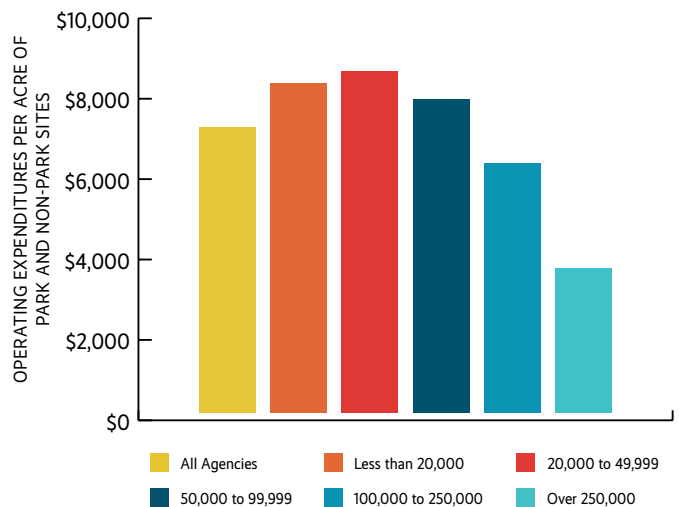


| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | \$81.19 | \$96.77 | \$95.34 | \$88.53 | \$74.67 | \$51.91 |
| Lower Quartile | \$45.97 | \$56.34 | \$54.90 | \$52.91 | \$45.33 | \$22.76 |
| Upper Quartile | \$149.60 | \$199.86 | \$167.50 | \$156.90 | \$136.76 | \$81.04 |

One can also normalize operating expenditures by the amount of parkland managed by an agency. The median operating expenditure is \$7,160 per acre of park and non-park sites managed by the typical agency. (Note: Non-park sites are public spaces — such as lawns at a city hall — not designated as parks but whose maintenance and/or operation costs are included in the park and recreation agency’s budget.) The typical operating expenditure per acre of parkland rises with population density. The typical agency serving a jurisdiction with fewer than 500 people per square mile spends \$3,941 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median rises to \$12,414 per acre at agencies serving a jurisdiction with a population density greater than 2,500 per square mile.

Park and recreation agencies serving larger populations tend to have lower operating expenditures than do agencies serving small- and medium-sized jurisdictions. The typical park and recreation agency serving a jurisdiction with less than 20,000 people spends a median of \$8,208 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median increases to \$8,522 per acre for agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 20,000 and 49,999, but then declines to \$3,661 per acre managed by agencies serving jurisdictions of more than 250,000 people.

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



| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | \$7,160 | \$8,208 | \$8,522 | \$7,891 | \$6,215 | \$3,661 |
| Lower Quartile | \$3,134 | \$3,295 | \$4,578 | \$4,376 | \$3,146 | \$1,590 |
| Upper Quartile | \$17,062 | \$21,265 | \$18,358 | \$20,494 | \$16,385 | \$8,999 |

The typical park and recreation agency has \$97,093 in annual operating 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 operating expenditures of \$91,539 for each FTE. The median rises to \$99,981 per FTE for agencies serving areas with more than 2,500 residents per square mile. Similarly, the measure rises from \$85,958 for agencies with less than 10 parks to \$101,744 for agencies with 50 or more parks.

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

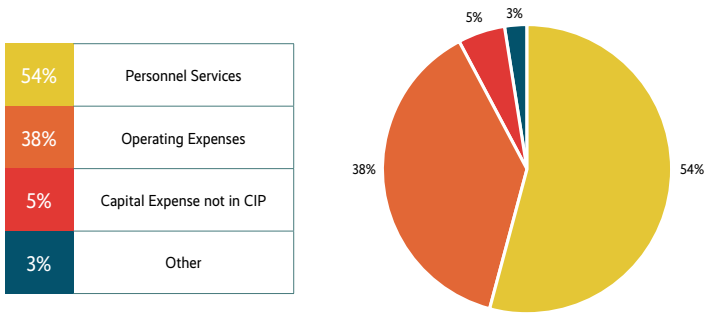
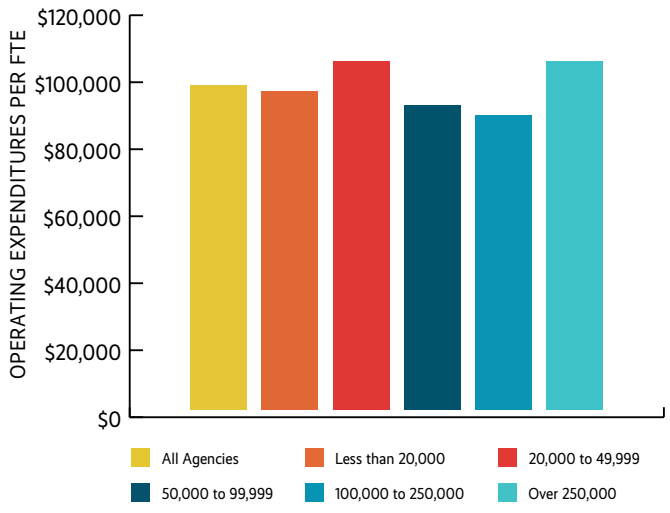


FIGURE 16: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER FTE (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



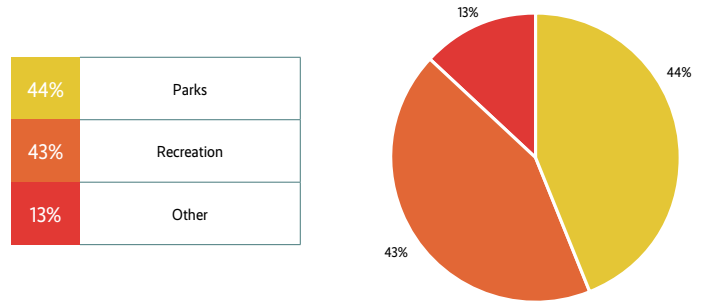
| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | \$97,093 | \$95,109 | \$104,318 | \$91,080 | \$88,714 | \$104,396 |
| Lower Quartile | \$70,329 | \$64,922 | \$73,297 | \$69,870 | \$66,444 | \$75,750 |
| Upper Quartile | \$134,175 | \$133,693 | \$147,274 | \$120,727 | \$119,895 | \$135,941 |

Personnel services account for the largest share of the operations budget at the typical park and recreation agency.

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

The typical park and recreation agency dedicates 44 percent of its annual operating budget to the management and maintenance of parks and open space. Agencies spend a median of 43 percent of their annual operating expenditures to support recreation offerings, including programming (e.g., out-of-school time activities, sports leagues, health and wellness programs) and the facilities for such activities.

FIGURE 18: OPERATING EXPENDITURES DEDICATED TO PARKS OR RECREATION (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES)



AGENCY FUNDING

Funding sources for park and recreation operations vary greatly by agency, but support from the local jurisdiction general fund tax base is common. On average, park and recreation agencies derive three-fifths of their operating expenditures from general fund tax support, although the percentage of funding from general fund tax support tends to be lower at agencies with larger operating budgets. The second-largest source of revenue for most agencies is earned/generated revenues, accounting for an average of 24 percent of operating expenditures. Many agencies have access to special, dedicated taxes that cover a part of their budgets, while others obtain much of their funding from tax levies dedicated to park and recreation purposes approved by citizen referenda.

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$1 million in non-tax revenues on an annual basis, although this amount can vary greatly based on agency size, services and facilities offered by the agency and the mandate from agency leadership and policymakers. Agencies with annual operating budgets under \$500,000 typically derive \$47,038 in non-tax revenues, while those with annual budgets greater than \$10 million generate a median of nearly \$6 million from non-tax revenue sources.

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$20.93 in revenue annually for each resident in the jurisdiction it serves. Agencies operating in less densely populated areas generate less revenue than do those in areas with a greater population density. The typical agency — operating in a jurisdiction with fewer than 500 people per square mile — realizes \$7.92 in revenue on a per capita basis per year compared to a median of \$26.68 for agencies serving a jurisdiction with more than 2,500 people per square mile.

Small- and medium-sized park and recreation agencies generate more revenue on a per capita basis than do large ones. Agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people generate \$27.00 in per capita revenue per resident — nearly matching that generated by agencies serving jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999 with a median of \$25.34 in revenue per resident each year. In comparison, agencies serving populations over 250,000 generate \$7.41 per capita in revenue, with the amount declining to \$6.04 in jurisdictions of greater than half a million residents.

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

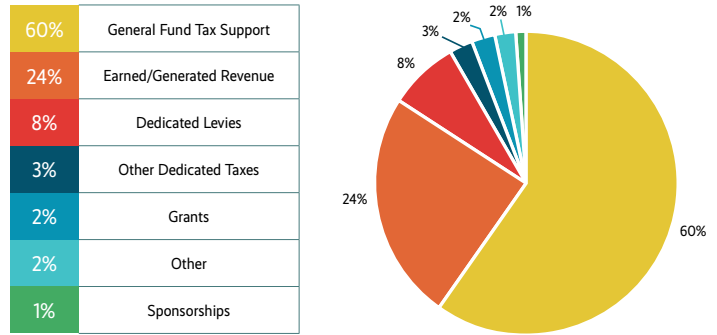
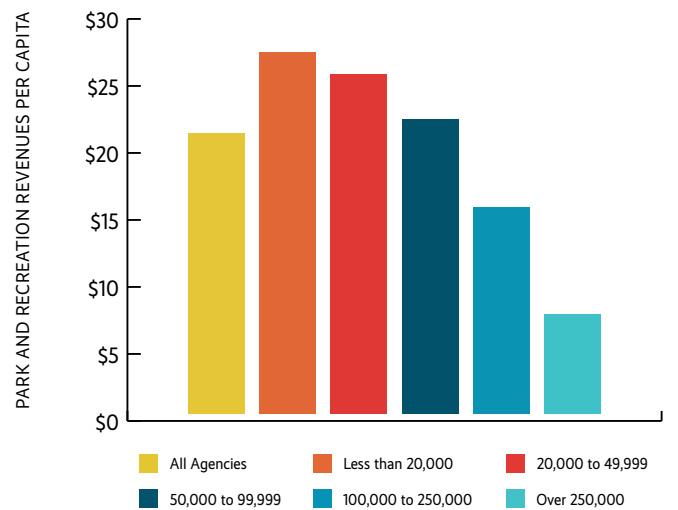
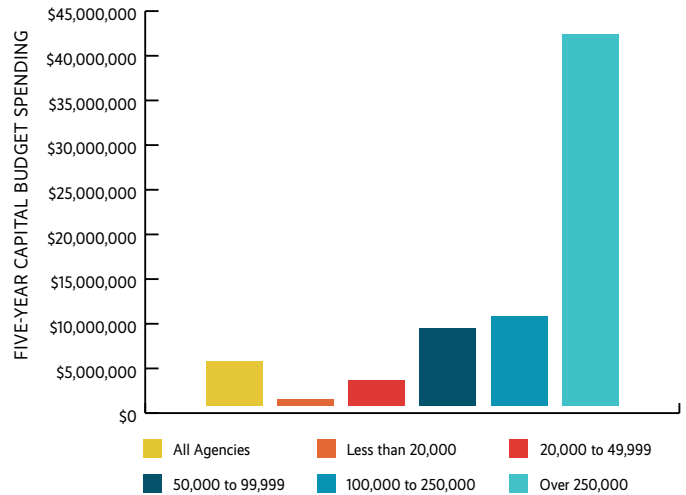


FIGURE 20: PARK AND RECREATION REVENUES PER CAPITA (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



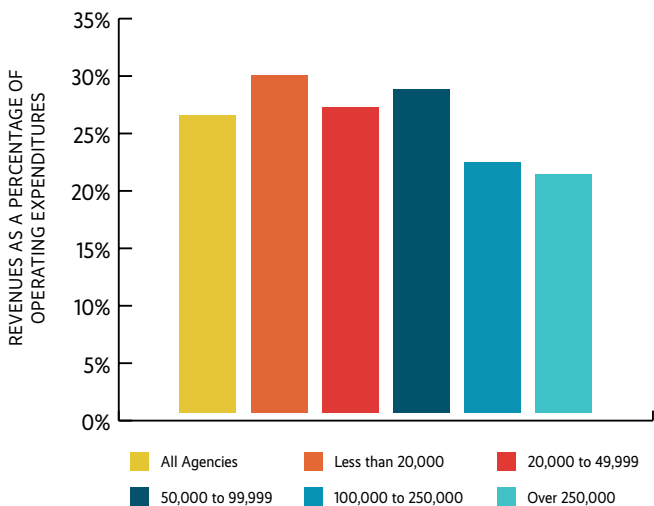
| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | \$20.93 | \$27.00 | \$25.34 | \$21.97 | \$15.44 | \$7.41 |
| Lower Quartile | \$6.45 | \$10.00 | \$8.62 | \$7.53 | \$4.70 | \$2.51 |
| Upper Quartile | \$50.27 | \$74.09 | \$61.43 | \$62.92 | \$41.51 | \$22.06 |

FIGURE 22: FIVE-YEAR CAPITAL BUDGET SPENDING (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Median | \$5,000,000 | \$713,000 | \$2,933,650 | \$8,757,500 | \$10,000,000 | \$41,663,879 |
| Lower Quartile | \$1,000,000 | \$171,563 | \$1,000,000 | \$2,406,500 | \$3,539,666 | \$14,000,000 |
| Upper Quartile | \$16,600,500 | \$2,974,750 | \$9,801,718 | \$16,700,375 | \$30,049,801 | \$110,000,000 |

FIGURE 21: REVENUES AS A PERCENTAGE OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES (COST RECOVERY) (PERCENTAGE OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



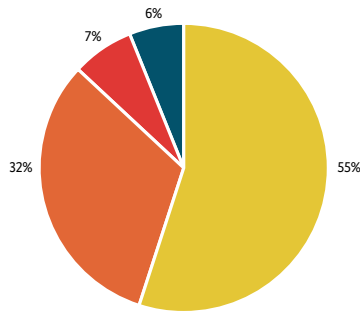
| | All Agencies | Less than 20,000 | 20,000 to 49,999 | 50,000 to 99,999 | 100,000 to 250,000 | Over 250,000 |
|----------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Median | 25.9% | 29.4% | 26.6% | 28.2% | 21.8% | 20.8% |
| Lower Quartile | 12.3% | 12.1% | 13.5% | 13.7% | 11.2% | 9.5% |
| Upper Quartile | 44.0% | 48.5% | 45.2% | 49.7% | 37.5% | 36.9% |

Beyond day-to-day operations, park and recreation agencies have a median of \$5 million in capital expenditures budgeted for the next five years. Not surprisingly, the larger the agency, the larger its five-year capital budget. The typical park and recreation agency serving a population of less than 20,000 has a median five-year capital budget of \$713,000. This five-year capital budget increases to \$8.8 million at agencies serving jurisdictions with 50,000 to 99,999 residents and to \$41.7 million at agencies in areas with over 250,000 residents. The following are also positively related to the size of five-year capital budgets:

- The number of parks maintained: Less than 10 parks—\$1.25 million; 50 or more parks—\$25.2 million
- Acreage of parks maintained: 250 or fewer acres—\$1.7 million; more than 3,500 acres—\$41.6 million
- Operating budgets: Annual operating budgets less than \$500,000—\$100,000; annual operating budgets greater than \$10 million—\$24.8 million
- Population density: Less than 500 people per square mile—\$1.0 million; more than 2,500 people per square mile—\$8.3 million

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

| | |
|-----|-----------------|
| 55% | Renovation |
| 32% | New Development |
| 7% | Acquisition |
| 6% | Other |



Park and recreation agencies designate their capital expenditures to a variety of areas. On average, 55 percent of an agency’s capital budget is designated for renovation, while 32 percent is geared toward new development. At larger park and recreation agencies, new development is the focus of a greater percentage of those agencies’ capital budgets. At agencies serving jurisdictions with over 250,000 residents, 37.8 percent of capital budgets is earmarked for new development compared to 47.9 percent for renovating current properties.



POLICIES

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

Three in four park and recreation agencies have policies that prohibit the use of tobacco products in their parks, at their facilities and on their grounds. Nearly half of agencies ban the use of tobacco at all agency parks and facilities while another 27 percent make exceptions for certain facilities (e.g., a golf course).

Two-thirds of park and recreation agencies allow the consumption of alcohol by legal-age adults on at least some of their premises. Only 19 percent of agencies have

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

Park and recreation agencies also promote health and wellness by offering healthy food options from its vending machines and concessions. At least two-thirds of agencies offer healthy food options at vending machines and/or concession stands at their facilities.

One policy option utilized by relatively few agencies is charging an admission fee to enter their parks. Only 15 percent of agencies charge such fees, while just 14 percent of agencies charge parking fees. In both cases, the agencies that charge either admission or parking fees do so only at select facilities.

**FIGURE 24: PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY POLICIES
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**

| | Yes, at all locations | Yes, at select locations | No |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----|
| Has a policy barring the use of all tobacco products in its parks and at its facilities and grounds | 49% | 27% | 24% |
| Has a policy that allows the consumption of alcohol by legal-aged adults on its premises | 19 | 50 | 31 |
| Agency sells alcoholic beverages to legal-aged adults on its premises (sold either by the agency or by a concessionaire authorized by the agency) | 5 | 42 | 53 |
| Agency provides healthy food options in its vending machines | 22 | 44 | 34 |
| Agency provides healthy food options at its concession stands | 20 | 49 | 31 |
| Agency charges a parking fee at its parks or facilities | >1 | 14 | 86 |
| Agency charges an admission fee to enter its parks | 1 | 15 | 84 |

ADDITIONAL NRPA RESOURCES

The *2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and *NRPA Park Metrics* are just two tools offered by NRPA that champions the work of park and recreation professionals across the United States. The NRPA Research team focuses its efforts on two major areas:

- Collecting and analyzing data to help park and recreation professionals make optimal decisions on operations, programming and spending
- Developing data to help park and recreation professionals make the case for greater (and more stable) funding.

Included in the vast suite of NRPA Research resources are:

- **NRPA Facility Market Reports:** These customized reports offer key census and marketing data and insights about the market served by your agency. Your agency will gain a greater understanding of the residents served by a park, aquatic center, recreation center or any other facility. There are four types of NRPA Facility Market Reports:
 - Community Profile, which highlights detailed demographic data on the population living near the facility studied.
 - Health and Wellness, which focuses on the health characteristics of people living near the facility studied.
 - Older Adults, which focuses on characteristics and needs of adults living near the facility studied over the age of 50.
 - Youth Profile, which focuses on the characteristics and needs of nearby residents under the age of 18.
- **NRPA Connect:** Your peers are the best knowledge base to answer your questions. 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 source of information about industry-related issues and insights into trends.
- **Economic Impact of Local Parks:** Park and recreation agencies not only improve our communities through their activities dedicated to conservation, health and wellness and social equity. They are also engines of economic activity. The study finds that operations and capital spending at America's local park and recreation agencies generated more than \$166 billion in annual economic activity and 1.1 million jobs in 2017. The report also includes estimates of the economic impact of operations and capital spending by local and regional park agencies for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- **Engagement with Parks Survey:** This annual NRPA research survey probes the public's use of parks, the key reasons that drive their use and the greatest challenges preventing greater usage. Each year, the study examines the importance of public parks in our lives, including how parks compare to other services and offerings of local governments. Recent findings show adults and/or their family typically visit local parks and recreation facilities twice a month, nine in ten adults agree that parks and recreation are important local government services, and 85 percent of people consider high-quality park and recreation amenities as a principal factor when choosing a place to live.



- **Local Government Officials' Perceptions of Parks and Recreation:** This study captures the views of elected and appointed local government officials and prioritizes park and recreation services. Public officials see parks and recreation as a critical solution to many of their top concerns. However, they do not perceive agencies as important contributors to their biggest day-to-day concern: economic development. Agencies that contribute more readily to the attraction and retention of businesses to the community are likely to benefit from greater and steadier funding from their local governments.

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



- **NRPA Park and Recreation Salary Survey:** Having access to comprehensive compensation data informs park and recreation agency leaders about how to attract the best staff. This report features detailed base salary and bonus data for 10 positions at park and recreation agencies.



- **Evaluation Resource Hub:** The NRPA Research team has created several tools that helps park and recreation professionals collect and use data to identify new opportunities for amenities and services and to identify areas for improvement. The Hub includes:
 - **Green Infrastructure Evaluation Framework:** This resource helps local governments and park advocates measure the many benefits of green infrastructure in parks. Follow the Framework's three simple steps—Define Benefits and Measures; Collect Data; and Use Data—to improve green infrastructure projects and share the message about project benefits.
 - **Customer Feedback Survey:** Obtaining customer feedback is challenging for many park and recreation agencies, especially those that have resource constraints. This guide outlines key principles of conducting effective customer satisfaction surveys with a focus on being able to act on the results while keeping your agency's time, money, staffing and current survey skills in mind.
 - **Community Needs Assessments:** This resource guides park and recreation professionals through the entire community needs assessment lifecycle—from deciding on clear goals to eliciting a high response rate from your community. Most importantly, it demonstrates how to use the survey data to strengthen your agency in both the short- and long-term.
 - **NRPA Park Check: Parks & Recreation Quality Risk Assessment:** Park and recreation professionals and advocates receive an evaluation of the potential threat their agency is facing in its ability to continue delivering high-quality park and recreation amenities and services to all members of their community in the future. Also included are available resources to help mitigate any risk factors.

CONCLUSIONS

The *2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and *NRPA Park Metrics* represent the most comprehensive collection of park- and recreation-related data, benchmarks and insights that inform park and recreation agency professionals, key stakeholders and the public about the state of the park and recreation industry. These resources provide all those who care about quality parks and recreation with a variety of tools.

1. Guidance on the resources dedicated to and performance of parks and recreation.

How does your local park and recreation agency measure up in terms of providing open space, recreation opportunities and programming relative to your peer agencies? Is your agency properly staffed or sufficiently funded compared to others?

2. Data that allow informed decisions on the optimal set of service and facility offerings.

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

3. Comprehensive data that demonstrate the broad offerings and programming that represent the full definition of parks and recreation.

The information in this report helps demonstrate to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public the full breadth of service offerings and responsibilities of park and recreation professionals and their agencies throughout the United States.



Park and recreation professionals can use the *2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and *NRPA Park Metrics* in conjunction with NRPA’s other research resources and tools to ensure all members of their community have access to high-quality park and recreation amenities and services.



ABOUT NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing parks, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 60,000 recreation and park professionals and advocates, 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 immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation and conducts research with two goals. First, NRPA creates and analyzes data to help park and recreation agencies make optimal decisions on operations, programming and spending. Second, NRPA develops data and insights that support park and recreation professionals making the case for greater and more stable funding to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public. The NRPA research team works closely with internal subject-matter experts, respected industry consultants and the academic community to develop its reports and data resources. Learn more at nrpa.org/Research





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