



2017 NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Park and Recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Executive Summary.....1
- How to Read the *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review*.....2
- Agency Performance Review at a Glance3
- Index of Figures.....4
- Key Findings5
 - Park Facilities5
 - Programming7
 - Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Agencies9
 - Staffing10
 - Budget12
 - Agency Funding14
- New Threats... But New Opportunities.....17
- Conclusion19
- About NRPA19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to the *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, the annual review of data and insights for park and recreation agencies in the United States. The *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, previously known as the NRPA Field Report, summarizes the key findings from 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.

The *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review* is second to none in providing park and recreation professionals and other key stakeholders with a wealth of valuable benchmarks and insights that inform on the state of the industry. These insights help:

1. Guide park and recreation professionals in the evaluation of 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 or sufficiently funded?
2. 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.
3. Show the prevalence of expanded activities and offerings of agencies throughout the nation. This report demonstrates to policymakers, key stakeholders, the media and the general public the full breadth of service offerings and responsibilities of park and recreation departments throughout the United States.

Data is a valuable tool but not the final answer, in terms of decision-making for local park and recreation agencies. Hence, park and recreation leaders should use the *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review* and NRPA Park Metrics to start the conversation with internal colleagues, external consultants and partners, and policymakers. Use the insights from this report to help determine the best decisions for your agency and your community.

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 needs and demands of its community. Knowing who uses your agency’s resources and who may use them 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. This is why NRPA no longer publishes “national standards.”



Consequently, park and recreation professionals should use the *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review* in conjunction with other resources, including those that are proprietary to an agency, from NRPA and outside sources. Some additional NRPA resources to consider include:



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. There are now two types of NRPA Facility Market Reports: Community Profile (with detailed demographic data on the population living near the facility studied) and Health & Wellness (with a focus on the health characteristics of people living near the facility studied).



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-related questions and get insight into trends in the field.



Economic Impact of Local Parks: This study finds that operations and capital spending at America's local and regional park agencies were responsible for nearly \$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).



Americans' Engagement with Parks Survey: This new annual NRPA research survey probes Americans' usage of parks, the key reasons that drive their use and the greatest challenges preventing greater usage. Each year, the study probes the importance of public parks in Americans' lives, including how parks compare to other services and offerings of local governments.



Parks & Recreation magazine: Each issue of NRPA's monthly flagship magazine 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 2017 NRPA AGENCY PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND NRPA PARK METRICS

The *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review* presents most of its data with medians, along with data responses at the lower-quartile (lowest 25 percent) and upper-quartile (highest 25 percent). The data presentation provides insight about 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/metrics.

Whereas the *NRPA Agency Performance Review* provides data for "typical" agencies, you can customize key metrics with NRPA Park Metrics to compare the characteristics of your agency to its peers. This may include filtering by agency type, size, and geographic region. You can enhance this experience further when you enter your agency's data into NRPA Park Metrics, which allows the reports to compare your agency's data with the key metrics of agencies throughout the United States.

This report contains data from 925 park and recreation agencies across the United States as reported between 2014 and 2016. **Note:** *Not all agencies answered every survey question.*

INDEX OF FIGURES

Figures	Top-Line Finding	Page
Park Facilities		
Figure 1: Residents per Park	There is typically one park for every 2,266 residents.	5
Figure 2: Acres of Park Land per 1,000 Residents	The typical park and recreation agency has 9.6 acres of park land for every thousand residents in the jurisdiction.	5
Figure 3: Outdoor Park and Recreation Facilities – Population per Facility	An overwhelming majority of park and recreation agencies have playgrounds (90 percent) and basketball courts (82 percent) in their portfolio of outdoor assets.	6
Figure 4: Indoor Park and Recreation Facilities – Population per Facility	A majority of agencies offer recreation centers, gyms, and community centers, while roughly two in five agencies offer senior centers and fitness centers.	6
Programming		
Figure 5: Programs Offered by Park & Recreation Agencies	Key programming activities include team sports, fitness enhancement classes, and health and wellness education.	8
Figure 6: Targeted Programs for Children, Seniors and People with Disabilities	More than four in five agencies offer summer camp to their residents.	8
Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Agencies		
Figures 7 & 8: Key Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Agencies	Top roles include operating parks, providing recreation programming and services, and operating and maintaining indoor facilities.	9, 10
Staffing		
Figure 9: Park and Recreation Agency Staffing	The typical park and recreation agency is staffed with 35 full-time equivalents (FTEs).	10
Figure 10: Park and Recreation FTEs per 10,000 Residents	The typical park and recreation agency has 7.3 FTEs on staff for each 10,000 residents in the jurisdiction served by the agency.	11
Figure 11: Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Workers	Responsibilities split between maintenance, operations, programming and administration.	11
Budget		
Figure 12: Annual Operating Expenditures	The typical park agency has annual operating expenditures of \$3,500,694.	12
Figure 13: Operating Expenditures per Capita	The typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$77.32 on a per capita basis.	12
Figure 14: Operating Expenditures per Acre of Park and Non-Park Sites	The median level operating expenditures is \$6,561 per acre of park and non-park sites managed by the agency.	13
Figure 15: Operations Expenditures Per FTE	The typical park and recreation agency has \$93,748 in annual operating expenditures for each employee.	13
Figure 16: Distribution of Operating Expenditures	At the typical park and recreation agency, personnel services represent 55 percent of the operating budget.	14
Agency Funding		
Figure 17: Sources of Operating Expenditures	Park and recreation agencies derive three-fifths of their operating expenditures from general fund tax support.	14
Figure 18: Park and Recreation Revenues per Capita	The typical park and recreation agency generates \$19.04 in revenue annually for each resident living in the jurisdiction.	15
Figure 19: Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Expenditures (Cost Recovery)	The typical agency recovers 29.1 percent of its operating expenditures from non-tax revenues.	15
Figure 20: 5-Year Capital Budget Spending	Park and recreation agencies have a median of \$3.0 million in capital expenditures budgeted over the next five years.	16
Figure 21: Targets for Capital Expenditures	On average, just over half of the capital budget is designated for renovation while 30 percent is geared toward new development.	16

KEY FINDINGS

PARK FACILITIES

America's local and regional park agencies differ greatly in size and facility offerings. Whereas the typical agency participating in NRPA Park Metrics serves a jurisdiction (e.g., a town, city, county and/or region) of 40,100 people, there are agencies that serve an area of just a few thousand people while others are a primary recreation resource for millions of people.

Naturally, the offerings of these agencies vary as much as the markets they serve. The typical agency has 19 parks comprising a total 400 acres under its watch. After adding in non-park facilities, the median number of parks and non-park facilities increases to 25 comprising of 491 acres.

At the typical agency, there is one park for every 2,266 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 1,331 residents. The ratio rises to one park for every 2,401 residents in jurisdictions with 50,000 to 99,999 people and one park for every 5,949 people at agencies serving areas with more than 250,000 people.

The typical park and recreation agency has 9.6 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 agencies, serving fewer than 20,000 residents, typically have 10.5 acres per 1,000 residents, compared to 12.2 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 7.9 acres of park land per 1,000 residents.

Park and recreation agencies offer a wide variety of facility types and features. **An overwhelming majority of park and recreation agencies have playgrounds (90 percent) and basketball courts (82 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.

Figure 1

Residents per Park
(by Jurisdiction Population)

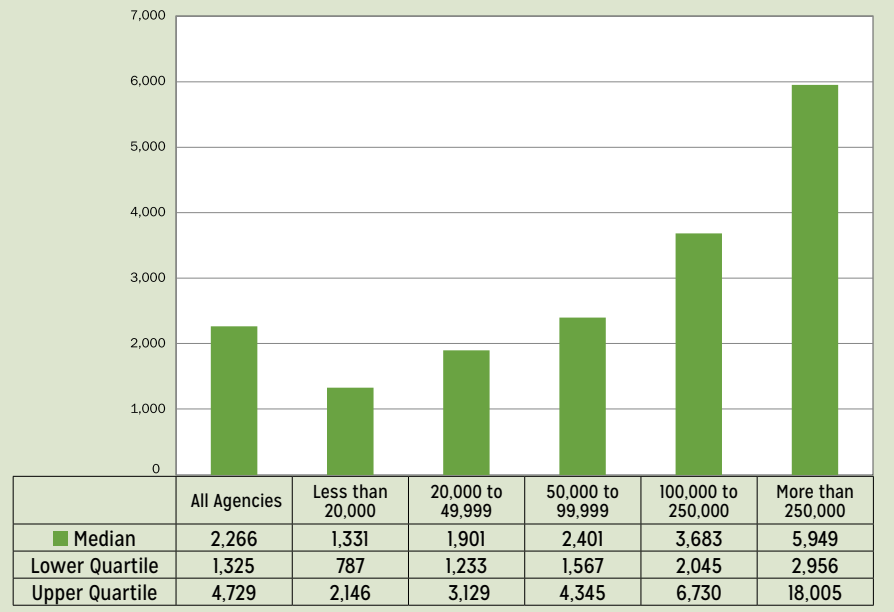


Figure 2

Acres of Park Land per 1,000 Residents
(by Jurisdiction Population)

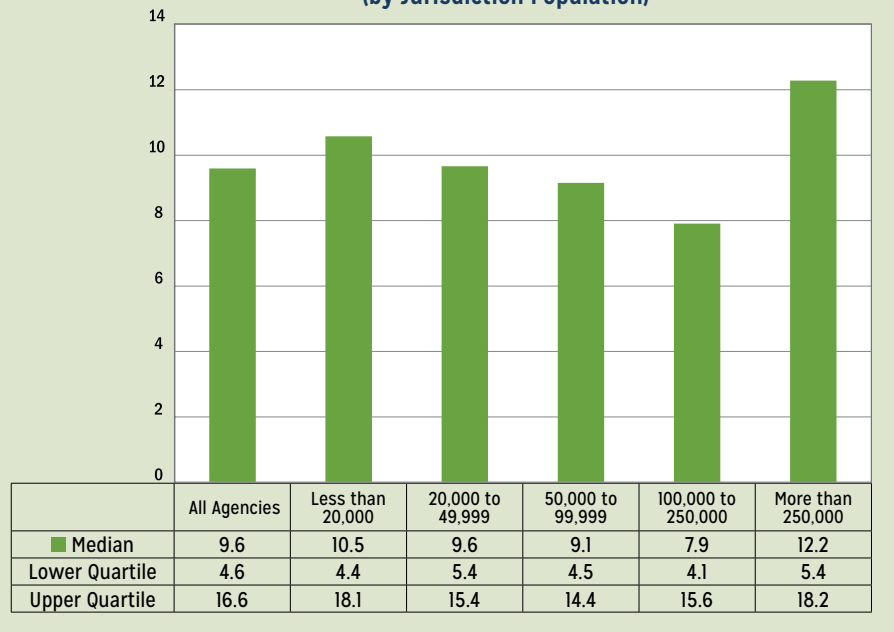


Figure 3

Outdoor Park and Recreation Facilities

Outdoor Facility	Agencies Offering this Facility	Median Number of Residents per Facility
Playgrounds	90.0%	3,633
Basketball courts	82.4%	7,080
Tennis courts (outdoor only)	71.5%	4,375
Diamond fields: baseball - youth	68.4%	6,453
Diamond fields: softball fields - adult	64.9%	12,468
Rectangular fields: multi-purpose	64.9%	12,468
Diamond fields: softball fields - youth	60.1%	8,500
Swimming pools (outdoor only)	52.7%	33,040
Dog park	52.1%	42,500
Diamond fields: baseball - adult	49.2%	19,226
Totlots	46.4%	12,195
Community gardens	44.8%	31,000
Rectangular fields: soccer field - youth	44.8%	6,199
Rectangular fields: soccer field - adult	41.0%	12,226
Rectangular fields: football field	37.0%	26,250
Diamond fields: tee-ball	34.5%	15,439
Multiuse courts -basketball, volleyball	32.5%	15,250
Ice rink (outdoor only)	17.1%	16,572
Multipurpose synthetic field	10.9%	34,242
Rectangular fields: lacrosse field	10.3%	27,332
Rectangular fields: cricket field	8.5%	147,500
Overlay field	5.1%	10,820
Rectangular fields: field hockey field	3.7%	20,340

Figure 4

Indoor Park and Recreation Facilities

Indoor Facility	Agencies Offering this Facility	Median Number of Residents per Facility
Recreation centers	58.2%	27,591
Gyms	56.2%	28,856
Community centers	50.7%	29,227
Senior centers	40.1%	48,822
Fitness center	37.0%	40,946
Performance amphitheater	27.0%	48,000
Nature centers	24.8%	105,000
Stadiums	15.3%	77,129
Ice rink	15.3%	30,642
Teen centers	10.5%	51,448
Indoor track	10.3%	50,667
Arena	7.6%	57,300

Note: Some of these facilities may be included as part of another facility; for example, a fitness center may be part of a recreation center.

In addition, the typical park and recreation agency that manages or maintains trails for walking, hiking, running and/or biking has 10.0 miles of trails in its network. Agencies serving more than 250,000 people in their area have a median of 69 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, gyms and community centers, while approximately two in five agencies offer senior centers and fitness centers.**

Figure 4 provides median populations served by the following facility and/or activity area.

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 nearly 200,000 contacts per year**, while an agency at the 75th percentile has 700,000 annual 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 his or her local aquatic center 10 times and runs on the local trail five times counts as 15 contacts.

Programming is a key outreach method that drives 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 offers 175 programs; more than 90 of those programs are fee-based events. Agencies serving a population less than 20,000 typically hold 35 fee-based programs, while large jurisdictions of 250,000+ residents can provide more than 350 fee-based programs.

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

- Team sports (86 percent)
- Fitness enhancement classes (80 percent)
- Health and wellness education (80 percent)
- Themed special events (72 percent)
- Social recreation events (70 percent)
- Safety training (69 percent)
- Aquatics (66 percent)
- Trips and tours (65 percent)
- Martial arts (62 percent)
- Performing arts (61 percent)
- Visual arts (61 percent)

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

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

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 afterschool care and full day care. **More than four in five agencies offer summer camps to their residents.** This increases to 90 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 school care and full day care.

In addition, 77 percent of park and recreation agencies in larger jurisdictions offer programming designed for people with disabilities versus one in three agencies serving less than 20,000 residents.



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	83.1%	70.9%	85.9%	87.3%	84.5%	90.1%
Before school programs	24.6%	16.2%	20.6%	34.5%	24.7%	35.7%
After school programs	52.4%	41.1%	38.6%	69.3%	61.7%	69.3%
Preschool	35.5%	26.7%	37.2%	43.9%	34.7%	36.6%
Full day care	9.3%	2.1%	7.1%	13.4%	9.5%	18.3%
Specific teen programs	62.1%	46.7%	58.9%	76.3%	73.4%	69.8%
Specific senior programs	76.3%	68.2%	77.5%	85.8%	80.3%	74.7%
Programs for people with disabilities	58.8%	33.8%	55.8%	75.0%	71.1%	77.3%

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 (90 percent)
- Have budgetary responsibility for their administrative staff (77 percent)
- Conduct major jurisdiction-wide special events (72 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage trails, greenways and/or blueways (TGB) (64 percent)
- Operate, maintain or manage special purpose parks and open spaces (55 percent)
- Administer or manage tournament/event-quality outdoor sports complexes (53 percent)
- Manage major aquatic complex (41 percent)
- Administer community gardens (40 percent).

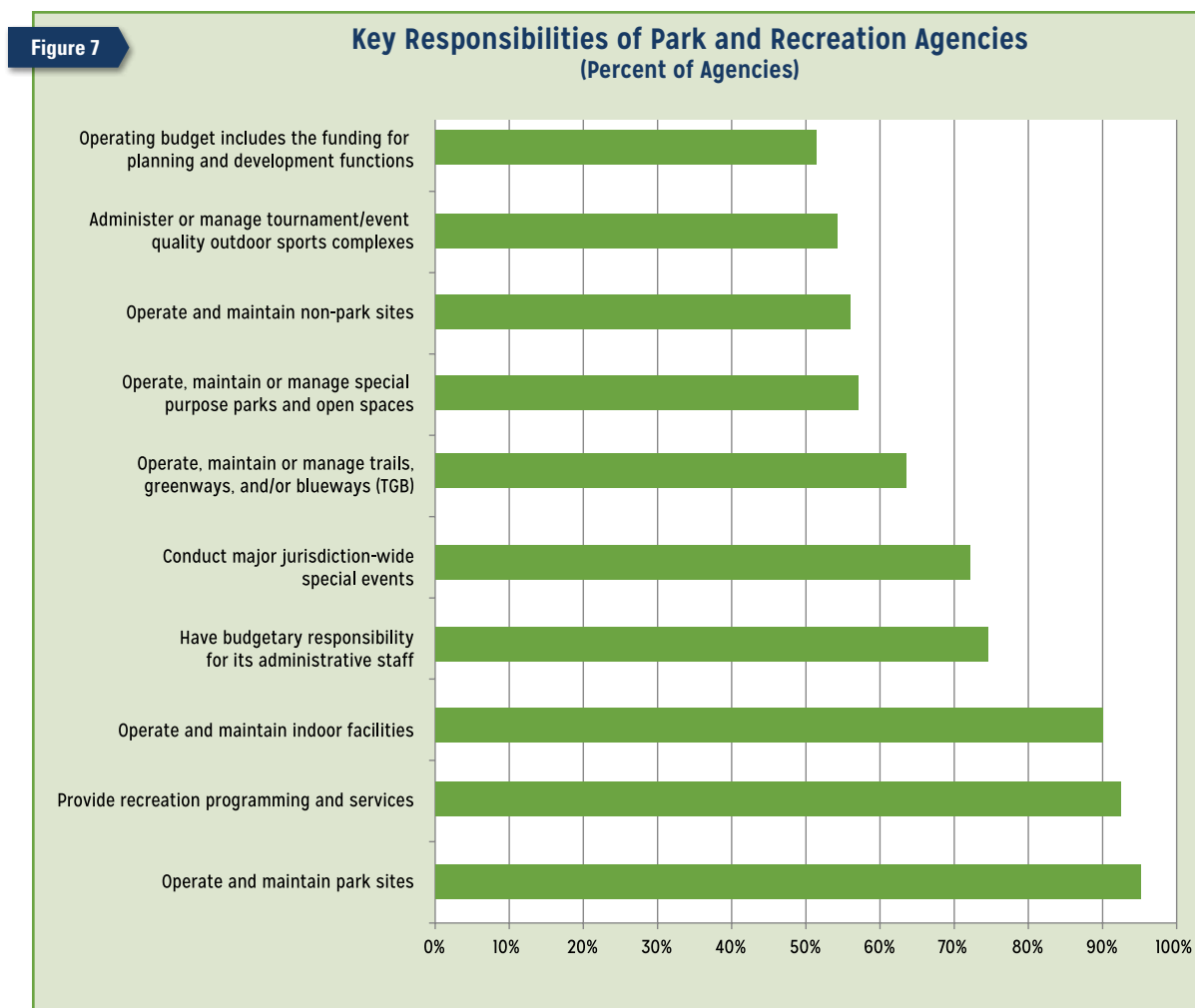


Figure 8

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

Manage major aquatic complex	41%
Administer community gardens	40%
Operate, maintain or contract other attractions or facilities	38%
Operate, maintain or contract tennis center facilities	37%
Operate, maintain or contract waterparks	34%
Operate, maintain or contract golf courses	31%
Manage large performance outdoor amphitheaters	23%
Operate, maintain or contract tourism attractions	22%
Administer or manage tournament/event-quality indoor sports complexes	18%
Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts center	18%
Administer or manage farmer's markets	17%
Operate, maintain or contract indoor swim facility	17%
Operate, maintain or contract campgrounds	15%
Administer or manage professional or college-type stadium/arena/racetrack	9%
Manage or maintain fairgrounds	5%

STAFFING

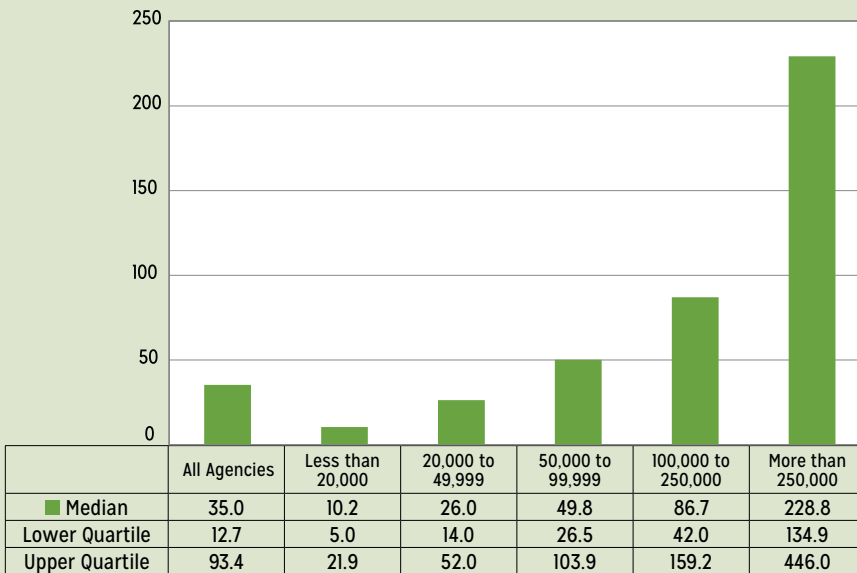
Staffing at the typical park and recreation agency includes **35 full-time equivalents (FTEs)** that include a mix of full-time and part-time staff. But, the size of the staff expands exponentially as the size of the jurisdiction served by the agency expands. Park and recreation agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people have a median of 10.2 FTEs on staff. Agencies serving areas with 50,000 to 99,999 people have a median of 49.8 FTEs, while those serving areas with more than 250,000 have a staff with a median of 228.8 workers.

Median counts of FTEs on staff also positively correlates with:

- Number of acres maintained – 250 or less acres: 13.9 FTEs versus more than 3,500 acres: 251.4 FTEs.
- Number of parks maintained – Less than 10 parks: 12.7 FTEs versus 50 or more parks: 200.9 FTEs.
- Operating expenditures – Less than \$500,000: 4.0 FTEs versus more than \$10 million: 200.3 FTEs.
- Population served by agency – Less than 500 people per square mile: 15.8 FTEs versus more than 2,500 people per square mile: 54.4 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 7.3 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 10.5 FTEs for each 10,000 residents, with this measure falling to 4.3 FTEs for 10,000 residents in areas with more than 250,000 people.

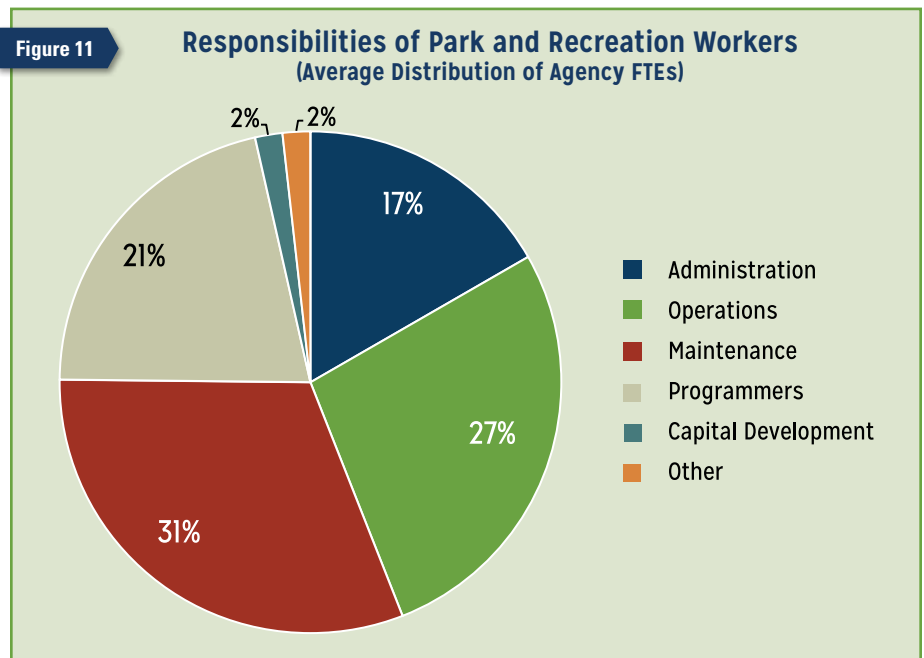
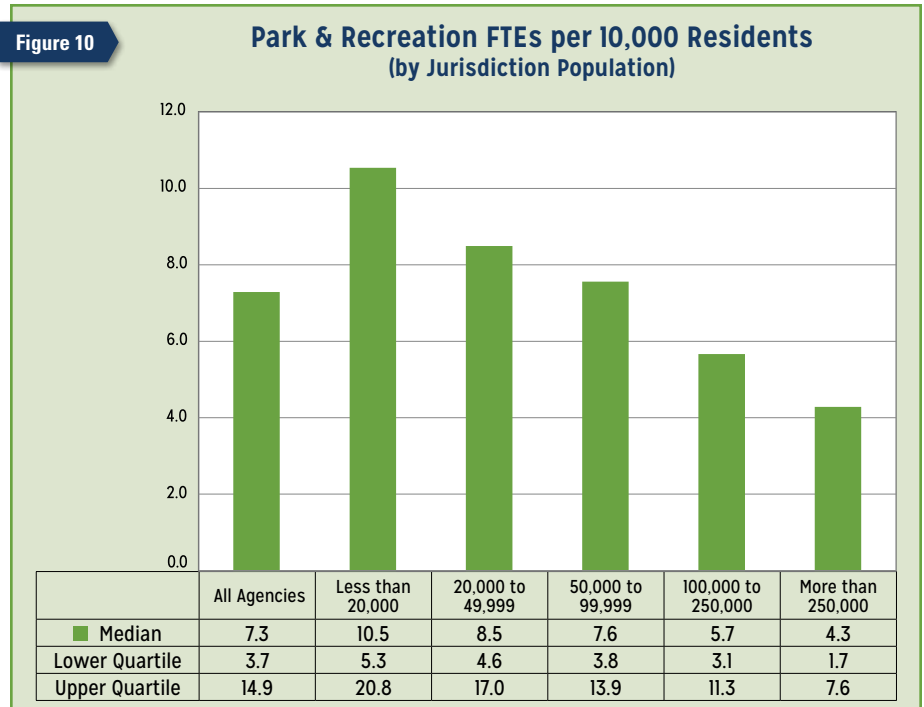
Agencies also tend to have more FTEs per residents when they serve areas with greater population density. Agencies operating in areas with less than 500 people per square mile have 3.6 FTEs per 10,000 people served versus 9.8 FTEs per 10,000 residents in areas with more than 2,500 people per square mile.

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

- Maintenance (31 percent)
- Operations (27 percent)
- Programming (21 percent)
- Administration (17 percent).

Just over a third of park and recreation agencies (34 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 – 20 percent of agencies with staffs of less than 10 FTEs versus 47 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 – 15 percent of agencies with less than 10 parks versus 59 percent of agencies with at least 50 parks.
- Maintain more park land – 25 percent of agencies that maintain 250 acres or less of parkland versus 56 percent of agencies that maintain more than 3,500 acres of parkland.



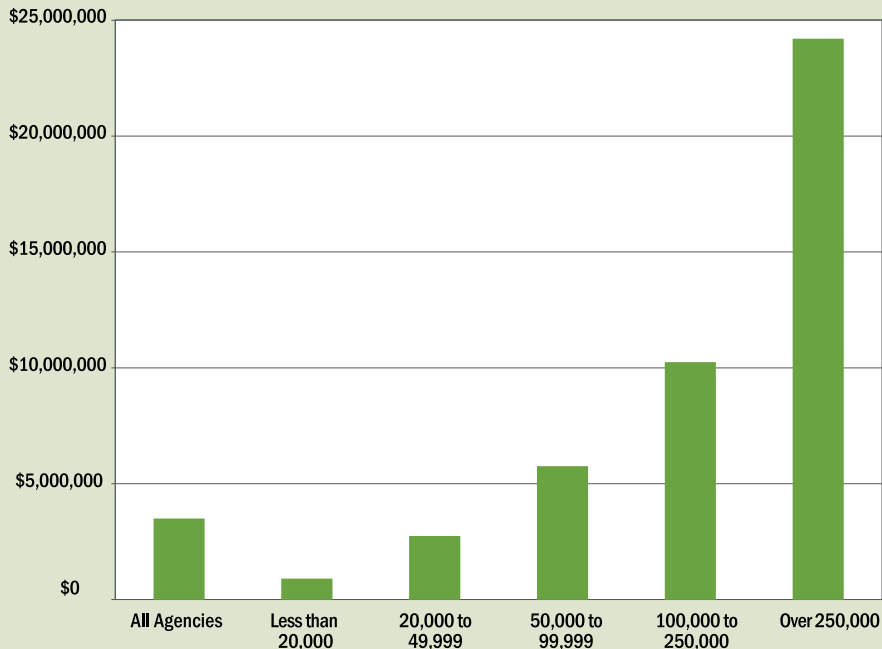
BUDGET

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? Per the U.S. Census Bureau, local and regional park agencies had operations expenditures of \$37.4 billion in 2014. 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 \$3,500,694**.

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

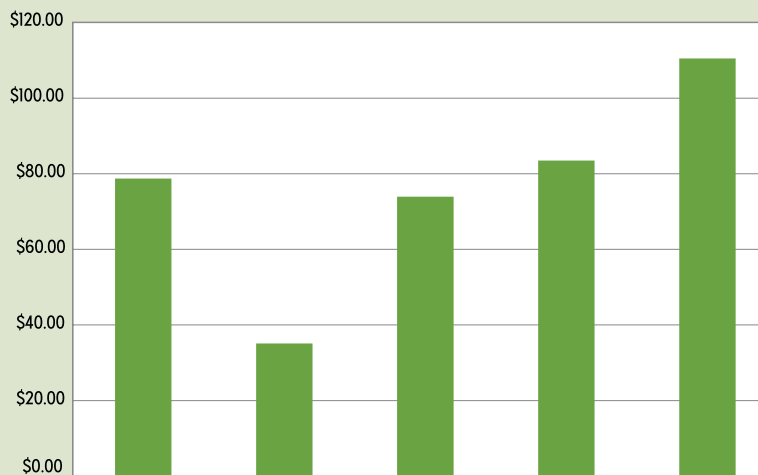
Annual Operating Expenditures (by Jurisdiction Population)



As shown in Figure 13, the **typical park and recreation agency has annual operating expenses of \$77.32 on a per capita basis**. The denser the population served by the agency, the higher the 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 \$34.46 and one serving an area with more than 2,500 people per square mile with median operating expenses rising to \$108.57 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 operating spending of \$91.27, which drops to \$42.78 per resident for agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people.

Figure 13

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



	All Agencies	Less than 500	500 to 1,000	1,501 to 2,500	More than 2,500
■ Median	\$77.32	\$34.46	\$72.63	\$82.02	\$108.57
Lower Quartile	\$39.84	\$14.38	\$41.23	\$50.53	\$61.91
Upper Quartile	\$141.89	\$82.11	\$126.70	\$140.70	\$202.42

Figure 14 shows that **the median-level operating expenditures is \$6,561 per acre of park and non-park sites managed by the agency.** Non-park sites are public spaces (such as lawns at a city hall) 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 \$3,657 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median rises to \$11,921 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 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 \$8,073 per acre of park and non-park sites. The median slips slightly to \$7,141 per acre for agencies serving jurisdictions with between 50,000 and 99,999 people and then falls rapidly to \$3,995 per acre managed at agencies serving jurisdictions greater than 250,000 people.

The typical park and recreation agency has \$93,748 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 \$85,169 for each FTE. The median rises to \$103,730 per FTE for agencies serving areas with more than 2,500 residents per square mile. Similarly, the measure rises from \$86,667 for agencies with less than 10 parks to \$101,580 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 operating expenditures fund 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 6 percent of the operations spending include 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.

Figure 14

Operating Expenditures per Acre of Park and Non-Park Sites (By Population Density per Square Mile)

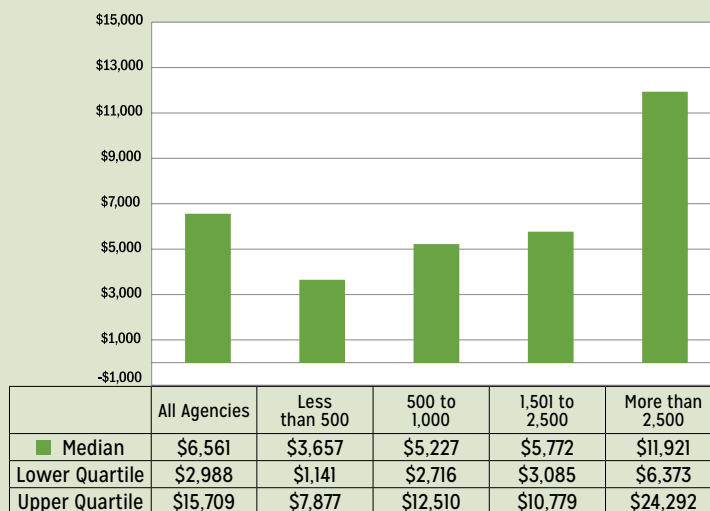
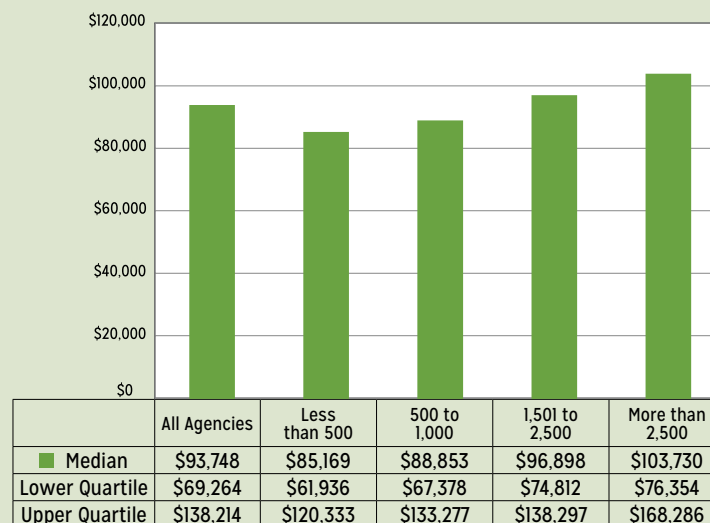


Figure 15

Operations Expenditures Per FTE (by Population Density by Square Mile)



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 26 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 approved by citizens by referendum for specified park and recreation purposes.

The typical park and recreation agency generates \$906,000 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 the mandate from leadership and policymakers. Agencies with annual operating budgets under \$500,000 typically derive \$60,000 in non-tax revenues, while those with annual budgets greater than \$10 million generate a median of \$6.117 million from non-tax revenue sources.

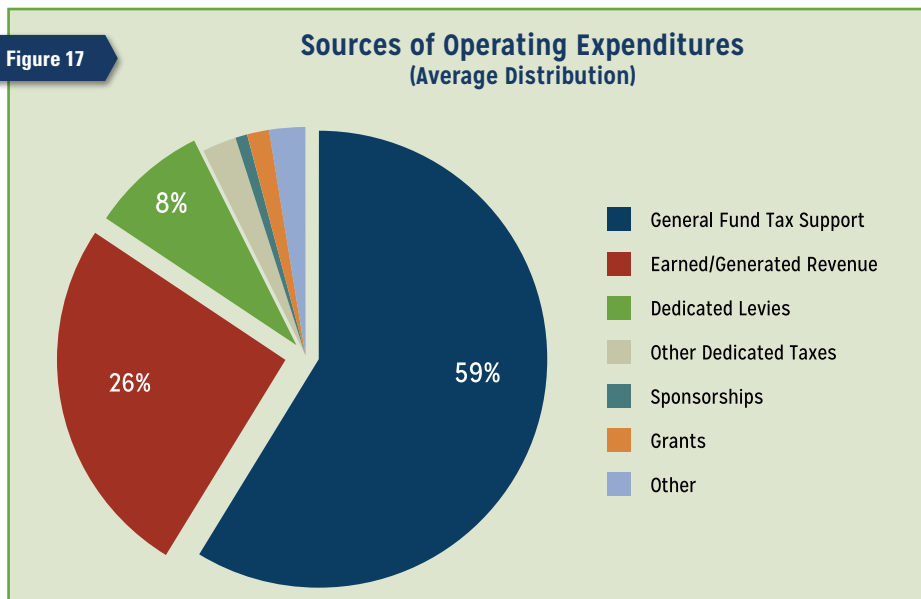
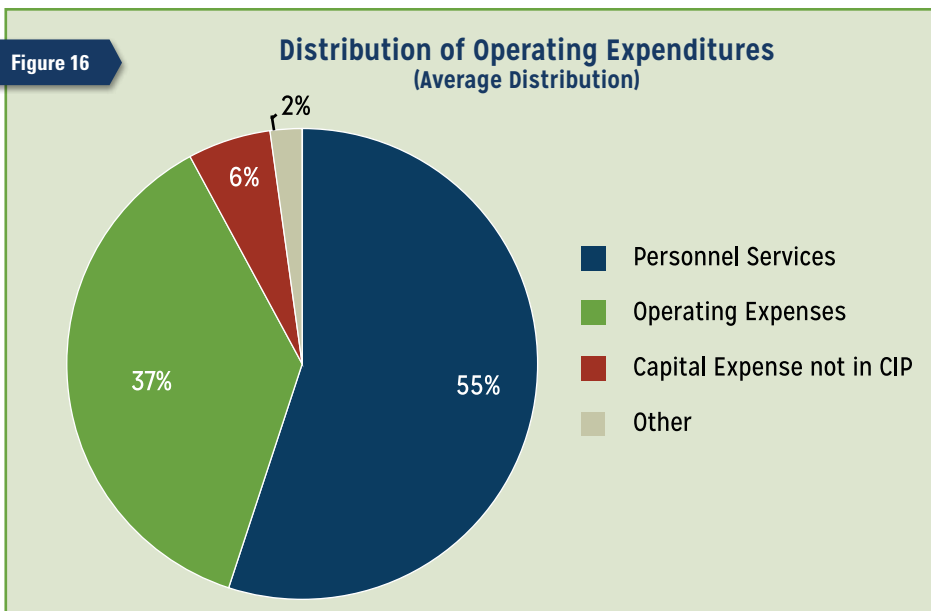


Figure 18 shows that **the typical park and recreation agency generates \$19.04 in revenue annually for each resident living in the jurisdiction it serves.** Agencies operating in less population-dense areas generate less revenue than those in areas with higher population density. The typical agency, operating in a jurisdiction with less than 500 people per square mile, generates \$6.96 in revenue on a per capita basis per year compared to a median of \$31.11 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 \$25.58 in revenue per resident each year versus agencies serving jurisdictions with less than 20,000 people that generate \$23.75 in per capita revenue per resident and agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 250,000 people that generate \$8.36 per capita.

Another way to look at the revenues is in the form of cost recovery as a percentage of operating expenditures. **The typical agency recovers 29.1 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 the agency's 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 cost recovery of 22.7 percent. Cost recovery increases to 33.6 percent of operating expenditures for agencies serving jurisdictions with more than 2,500 people per square mile.

Figure 18

Park and Recreation Revenues per Capita (by Population Density per Square Mile)

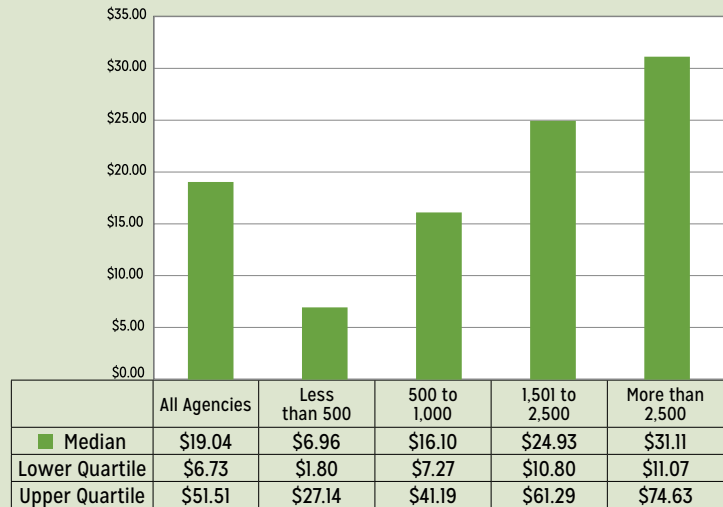
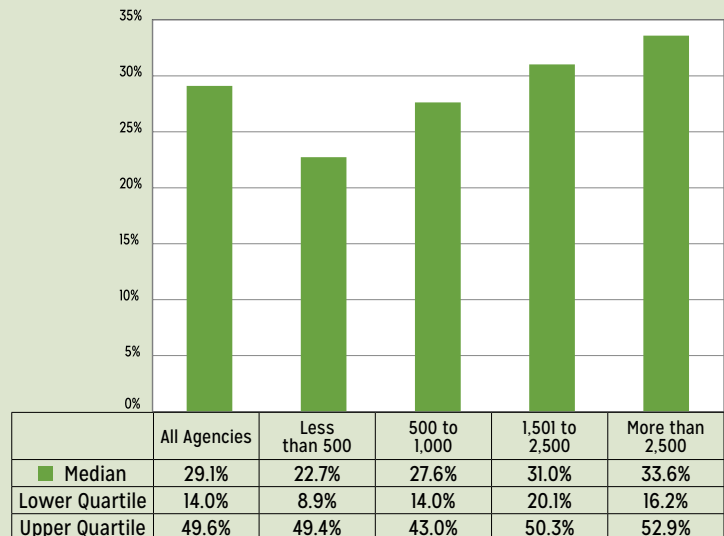


Figure 19

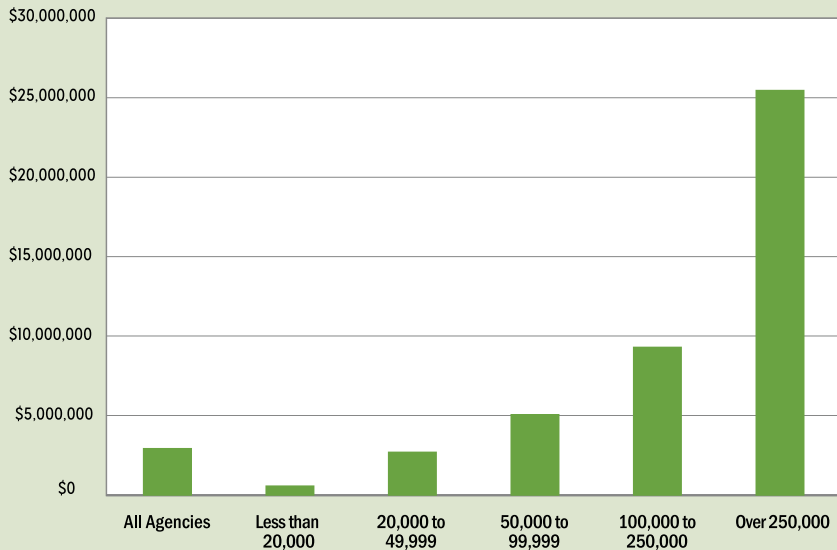
Revenue as a Percentage of Operating Expenditures (Cost Recovery) (by Population Density per Square Mile)



Beyond day-to-day operations, **park and recreation agencies have a median of \$3.000 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 \$649,500. This five-year capital budget expands to \$5.1 million at agencies serving jurisdictions with 50,000 to 99,999 people and to \$25.440 million at agencies in areas with more than 250,000 residents.

Figure 20

5-Year Capital Budget Spending (by Jurisdiction Population)



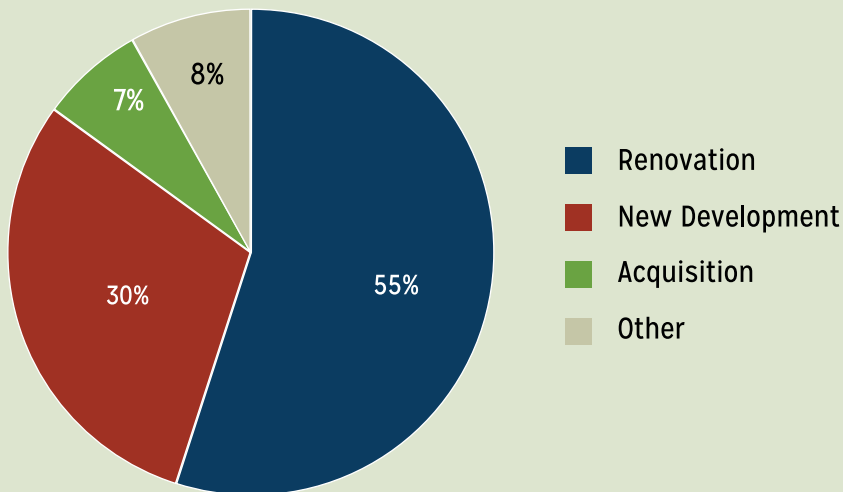
Also, the following are positively related to the size of five-year capital budgets:

- The number of parks maintained – Less than 10 parks: \$1.132 million versus 50 or more parks: \$20.544 million.
- Acreage of parks maintained – 250 or less acres: \$1 million versus more than 3,500 acres: \$30 million.
- Operating budgets – Annual operating budgets less than \$500,000: \$197,098 versus annual operating budgets greater than \$10 million: \$22.498 million.
- Population density – Less than 500 people per square mile: \$1.633 million versus more than 2,500 people per square mile: \$4.967 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, 35 percent of capital budgets are for new development, while 50 percent are for renovating current properties.

Figure 21

Targets for Capital Expenditures (Average Distribution)



NEW THREATS... BUT NEW OPPORTUNITIES

While the 2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review focuses on current performance benchmarks, a look at present-day uncertainties and future trends and prospects also should be part of park and recreation professionals' decision-making. We asked William Beckner, president of CEHP, Inc., for his insights:

Throughout the history of parks and recreation, when times of uncertainty have gripped the country and its people, the impact on the field has generally been positive: from the settlement houses and playground movement arising from the monetary crisis of the 1890s, the recreation programs that maintained morale amongst recruits in WWI mobilization camps and the federal programs introduced during the Great Depression, right up to the tax revolt of the late 70s and early 80s.

From 1980 to 2007, we experienced economic recessions, rapid changes in technology and communications, increased partisanship and political divisiveness; yet, we survived and often thrived during most of those years. In the last decade, reduced budgets, job loss, more invasive terrorism and similar events built an atmosphere of uncertainty that we face going into 2017.

Regardless of your political preferences, now is the time to develop strategies to meet the challenges or opportunities that may impact your department and jurisdiction. Both federal and state actions are likely to impact your goals and strategies. Below are issues/trends that may change how you plan and execute your capital projects, and the ways and means of your operations.

EMPLOYMENT

There are many potential factors that could affect your agency's ability to hire qualified labor:

- The American Society of Civil engineers (ASCE) reported in November that 200,000 entry labor jobs were unfilled.
- Even with inflated unemployment levels in some areas, many jobs go unfilled as the available workers lack the needed skill set and/or level of experience.
- Potentially more stringent immigration policies and labor rules may further reduce the labor pool that your agency has tapped previously to fill seasonal or entry-level permanent positions.

EMPLOYEE COSTS

Depending on potential legislative action at local, state and federal levels, employee costs could either increase or decrease. Factors to consider:

Potential Cost Reductions:

- Going into 2017, regulations requiring overtime for employees making less than about \$48,000 annually have been delayed. The future of these regulations, if any, is uncertain.
- Regulations requiring health benefits for employees working more than 90 days may change or go away.

Potential Cost Increases:

- The most immediate cost pressure is the efforts across the United States to increase the minimum wage.
- A tight supply of skilled labor could lead to bidding wars for the best job candidates, potentially increasing labor costs.

PRIVATIZED OPERATIONS

Because of increased employee costs, many agencies are seeking private individuals or companies to provide specified services instead of hiring permanent employees. Many functions of the agency are candidates for privatization. Factors include:

- The agency's knowledge of the cost and specifications required for the potentially privatized service. Not being aware of what it costs you to do the job and define its specific tasks can lead to unsatisfactory performance, unnecessarily high costs or both.
- The market factors that lead you to seek privatized service providers may also increase the private sector costs. This cost places additional cost pressures on your agency.
- Consider reviewing internal barriers and constraints to operations, equipment and organization to determine if changes in these areas can generate cost savings.

P3 DEVELOPMENT

Congress is considering several bills designed to create jobs and improve the condition of various infrastructures. Public Private Partnerships (P3s) are the focus of these and similar bills. They include:

- The White House has proposed a bill costing \$1.67 trillion to provide 50 percent matching funds with the remainder provided by private and non-federal investors. The proposal includes 50 projects, mostly transportation-related, and assumes that investors would have a revenue stream to recoup their investment.
- There are other bills focused on Corps of Engineer (USCOE) projects related to dams, lakes, hydropower, flood control, water transportation and ports.
- Still others focus on infrastructure such as sewer, water, electrical grids and similar investments.
- A new addition to the P3 menu is the social impact bonds (SIB), which provide funding for matching investor monies in social and economic development projects. Examples include affordable housing and public facilities intended to increase economic development. Some officials have suggested merging Community Development Block Grants (CBDG) grants into SIBs.
- Your agency needs to be involved early in the planning stage to realize the funding opportunities these projects represent.

SPORTS PROGRAMS, HEALTH AND SPECIALIZATION

The cliché, “the only constant is change,” is particularly true for the youth and adult sports programs. Consider that:

- Pay-for-play in schools and nonprofit leagues is increasing interest in club teams at both the recreational and elite levels.
- A four-year research study of 1,500 athletes released last fall by the National High School Sports Association showed there was a 70 percent greater risk of injury for athletes who specialized in one sport throughout the year versus athletes who participated in multiple sports.
- The concerns about concussions, particularly related to the pre-teen susceptibility, have led to a national reduction in tackle football of about 20 percent over the last two years. Only a few jurisdictions have discontinued tackle football entirely, but many other jurisdictions are switching to flag football, 7-on-7 football, smaller fields and modified tackle programs.
- Consider the inclusion of tough-mudder activities for youth and young adults that incorporate personal, physical “best” with a cooperative spirit.
- Individual sports and training competitions are on the rise. Consider organizing a track and field program by age groups for your community.

TRANSFER OF FEDERAL LANDS

Although quite controversial, Congress is considering several bills to transfer ownership or control of federal lands to states, regional and local governments. They, in turn, may be able to sell, lease or permit properties for private development, mining or other activities that might reduce available recreation land in your area. If this happens, consider the following:

- Transfers may include recreation areas currently managed by USCOE, USFS, BLM, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) and related land management agencies.
- Land to be sold for development should be reviewed for park lands or open space needs.
- Federal recreation areas may have private commercial support. It would be advantageous to meet early with those entities to determine future strategies to save these open spaces.

Once again, 2017 looks to be more challenging than most recent years. It may also offer more opportunities. If your agency does not currently have an NRPA Park Metrics profile, now may be the time to ensure you have the operating numbers you need to be a credible player in your jurisdiction.

CONCLUSION

As shown in the *2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review*, park and recreation agencies are as diverse as the towns, cities and counties 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.

This report also reveals the wide breadth of service offerings that park and recreation agencies provide to their local community. Some residents may think of their local agency when they hike on a trail, take their children to the playground or enjoy a picnic at the community park. For others, their touchpoint with their local agency may be the out-of-school time offerings that care for the children of working parents, a sports league that teaches teamwork and sportsmanship or a class that teaches more healthy lifestyles. It is the diversity of offerings of local park and recreation agencies that demonstrates their vast impact on people of all stripes.

NRPA Research finds that Americans are passionate about their local park and recreation offerings. Per the *2016 NRPA Americans' Engagement with Parks Survey*, an overwhelming majority of people agree that parks and recreation is an important service delivered by their local government and support increased funding for their local agency. The success of bond ballot initiatives during the 2016 elections highlight the fact that Americans are willing to pay more to ensure high-quality park and recreation offerings in their community.

We challenge all park and recreation professionals to enter their agency's data in NRPA Park Metrics so they can gain a more detailed analysis of their agency's performance against its peers throughout the United States. Linking the insights contained in this report and NRPA Park Metrics 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.

ABOUT NRPA

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 55,000 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, non-profits 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.

NRPA PARK METRICS



NRPA Park Metrics is a suite of tools that help evaluate your agency's performance so you can more effectively manage and plan operating resources and capital facilities. You can use these tools to easily build customized reports and compare your agency to others to gain more funding support, improve operations and better serve your community.



AGENCY PERFORMANCE SURVEY

Enter your agency's data into NRPA's newly streamlined Agency Performance Survey to gain access to dashboards and custom reports that compare your agency to that of its peers. By entering your data, you ensure that your agency will be a part of NRPA's annual Agency Performance Review.

CUSTOMIZED AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Create a custom report that will feature median values on budgets, staffing and facilities and highlight the responsibilities and activities of agencies that you identify as your peers.

INTERACTIVE TOOLS

Dig deeper into the data in the 2017 Agency Performance Review with interactive figures presenting detailed crosstabs of the data for every table and chart.

www.nrpa.org/Metrics



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