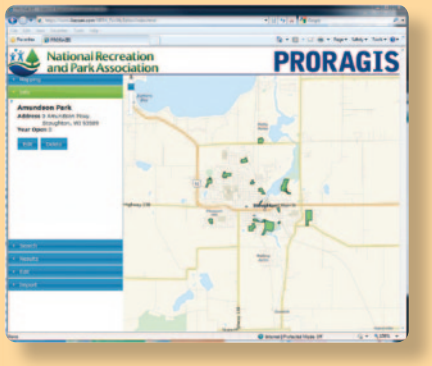
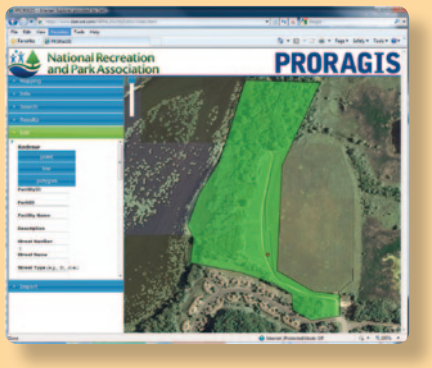
2012

Parks and Recreation

NATIONAL DATABASE REPORT





National Recreation and Park Association

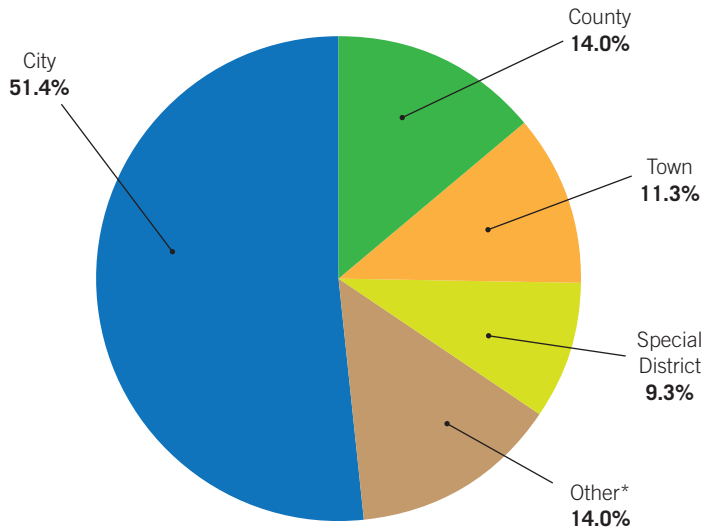
Executive Summary

Thriving parks and park programs depend on public consensus. Consensus that park land is valuable enough to preserve and maintain for public use—and that the array of services park agencies provide is essential to the common good. Most Americans, when surveyed, express positive feelings about parks and all that they represent. Historically, however, parks and recreation professionals have had few concrete, performance-related facts and industry standards to offer the public. And in a time of diminishing budgets and increased competition for public and private funds, favorable public opinions of parks are simply not enough. The profession must be armed with data—data that show in hours, participants, acres, dollars, and cents the value that parks and recreation agencies offer at every jurisdictional level.

The National Recreation and Park Association is committed to providing park professionals with those critical facts and numbers—and in 2011 NRPA launched the first-ever national operating ratio database for park agencies. This report represents the first annual compilation of key data for the 2011 fiscal year from participating agencies across the United States. The system, which relies on agencies to supply their own data through a survey, is still in its early stages—but it offers an informative look at the functions, structures, and budgets of over 200 agencies of various sizes, types, and regions.

FIGURE 1

Jurisdiction Type



*The category of "other" consists of a mix of the following jurisdiction types: independent district/authority, township, regional/metro authority, borough, state, school district, military department, and tribal lands/reservation.

How to Use and Read This Report

The information in this report should be used as a tool for informed decision-making rather than as an almanac of absolute standards. This report is derived from the database as of November 15, 2011; and data can and will change throughout the year. The NRPA online database platform, available 24/7, allows member users to run reports on-demand based on real-time data, thus, the most current data are always available to registered users who have completed profiles.

The report is organized into sections relating to essential park agency functions: governance/responsibilities, staffing/administration, budgeting, operations, programming, maintenance, and planning. The presentations of data within each section indicate the number of responses, with results depicted by average, median (the 50th percentile value), lower quartile (the observation point below which 25 percent of responses occur), and upper quartile (the observation point below which 75 percent of responses occur).

Throughout the report are references to ratios or "operating ratios." This terminology indicates the use of some basis for comparison (e.g., a num-

ber per 1,000 people in a jurisdiction's population). The basis used depends upon the data being compared—and is always identified in the actual table, example, or figure.

Who Participated?

Two-hundred-seventy-five agencies participated in this report. Just over half of those participating (51 percent) are city agencies—and nearly a third (29.3 percent) serve populations between 20,000 and 49,999. Figures 1 and 2 provide further insight into the population sizes and jurisdiction types of the agencies whose profiles form the basis of this report.

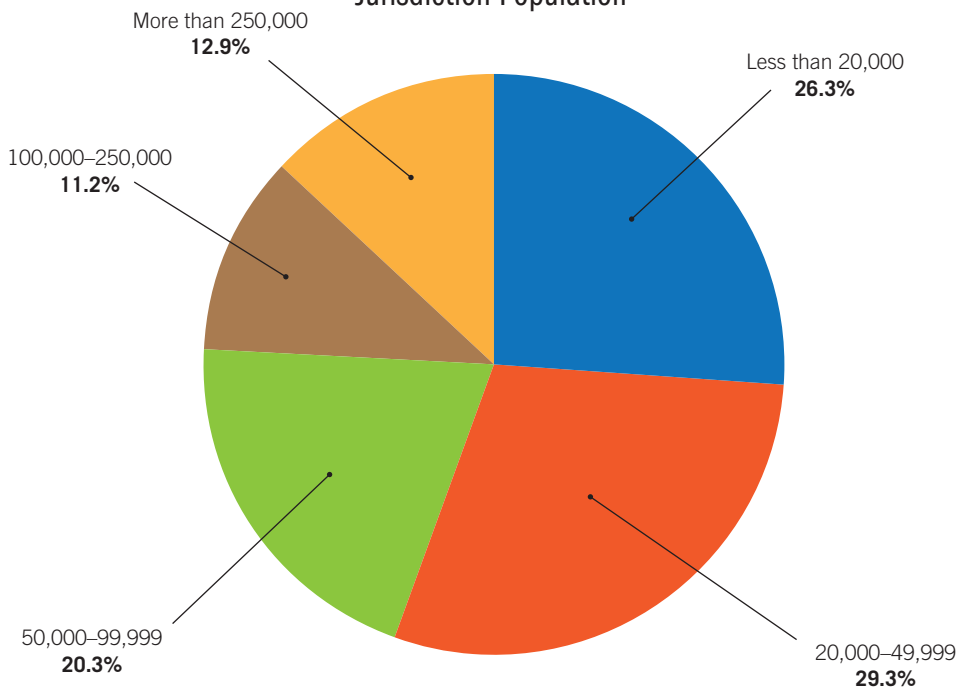
The Importance of Data Analysis for Park Agencies

Programming, maintenance, budgeting, and many other essential park functions demand careful research and monitoring. Not only is this collection of data a resource for conducting such critical research—but the NRPA online database tool can be used for agency-specific performance and benchmarking reports. Beyond providing a set of initial numbers and offering a state-of-the-industry overview, the system lends itself to monitoring performance and impact over time.

In short, the detailed surveying provided by this database guarantees a full picture of both your agency and other agencies across the nation. Whether the top priority is staffing or land acquisition, NRPA collects the data you need to make—and justify—sound decisions.

FIGURE 2

Jurisdiction Population



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Responsibilities and Governance

Traditionally, parks and recreation agencies have been defined by their dual roles of managing parks and running recreational facilities and programs. While department profiles indicate that those continue to be the two most common roles for park agencies, responses also reflected a wide range of typical duties, including caring for and conserving open spaces, managing major sports or aquatic complexes, assisting in historic preservation, and overseeing community gardens (Figure 3). Not shown in this graph were duties such as managing large indoor or outdoor entertainment venues (35.4 percent), administering farmer's markets (19.3 percent), and maintaining public cemeteries (26.6 percent).

For any agency conducting a benchmark analysis, it is helpful to compare data with agencies structured and governed similarly. In other circumstances, boards, commissions and even elected officials may be seeking ways to increase productivity of board meetings, procedures, or decision-making. The table below shows how responding agencies are using each type of governance structure:

Governing/Trustee/Policy Board

For what is the governing board responsible?

Approves policies	92.1%
Approves staff hires	29.0%
Approves budgets	92.8%
Sets tax rates	60.5%
Trustees of fees and charges revenue	51.3%
Capital budgets and projects	84.2%
Interacting with the public	80.9%
Other	5.3%

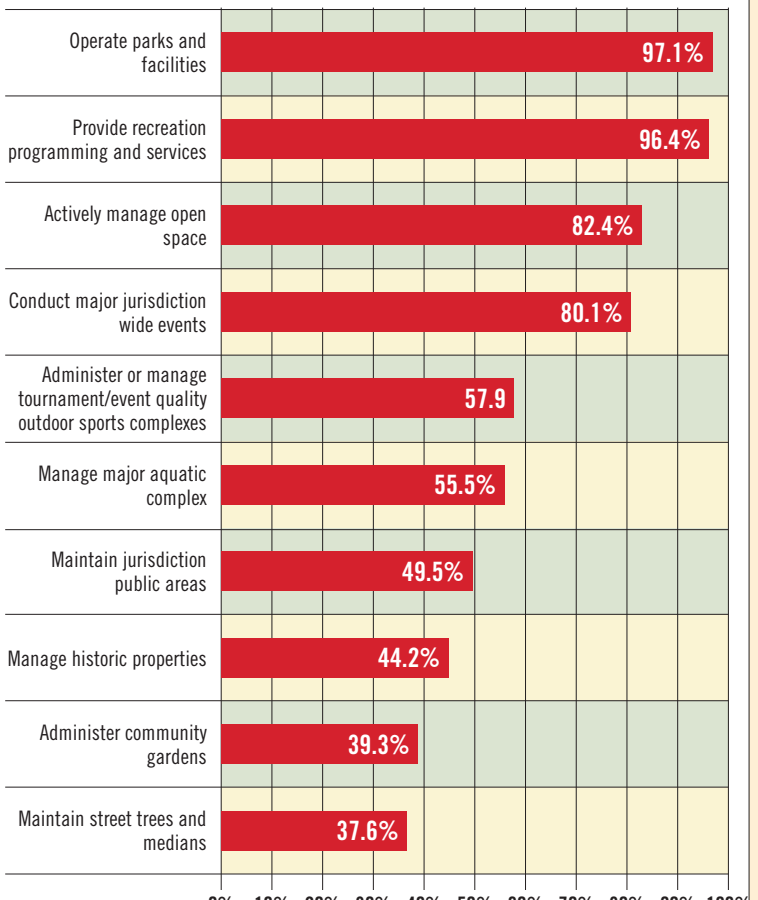
Advisory Board

For what is the advisory board responsible?

Reviews budgets	44.3%
Reviews policies	80.8%
Reviews staff hires	5.4%
Reviews fees and charges	72.5%
Reviews capital projects	78.4%
Interacting with the public	85.0%
Other	6.6%

FIGURE 3

Percentage of Responding Agencies that. . .



Staffing and Administration

Whether an agency is conducting benchmark studies or calculating the cost of its programming and operations, staffing and administrative information is critical. The NRPA database offers insight into work activities, distribution of paid and volunteer staff by function, skills and abilities needed, ratios of staff to attendance for programming, and park acres maintained.

FIGURE 4

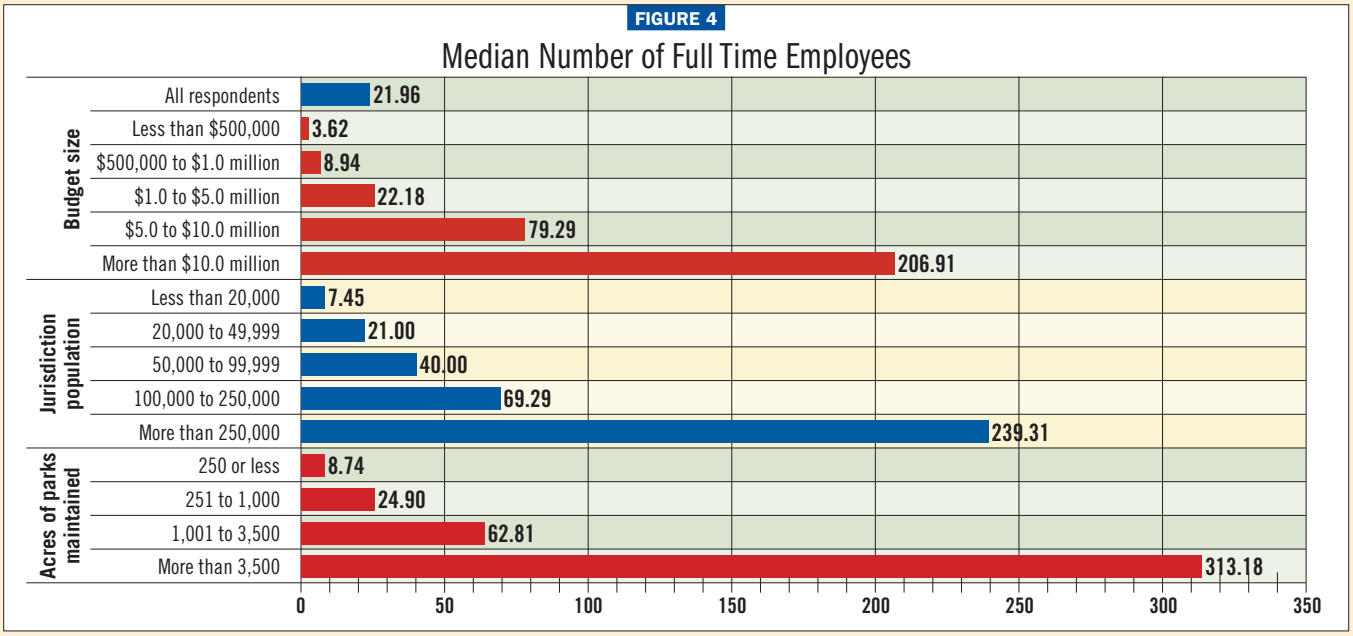


FIGURE 5

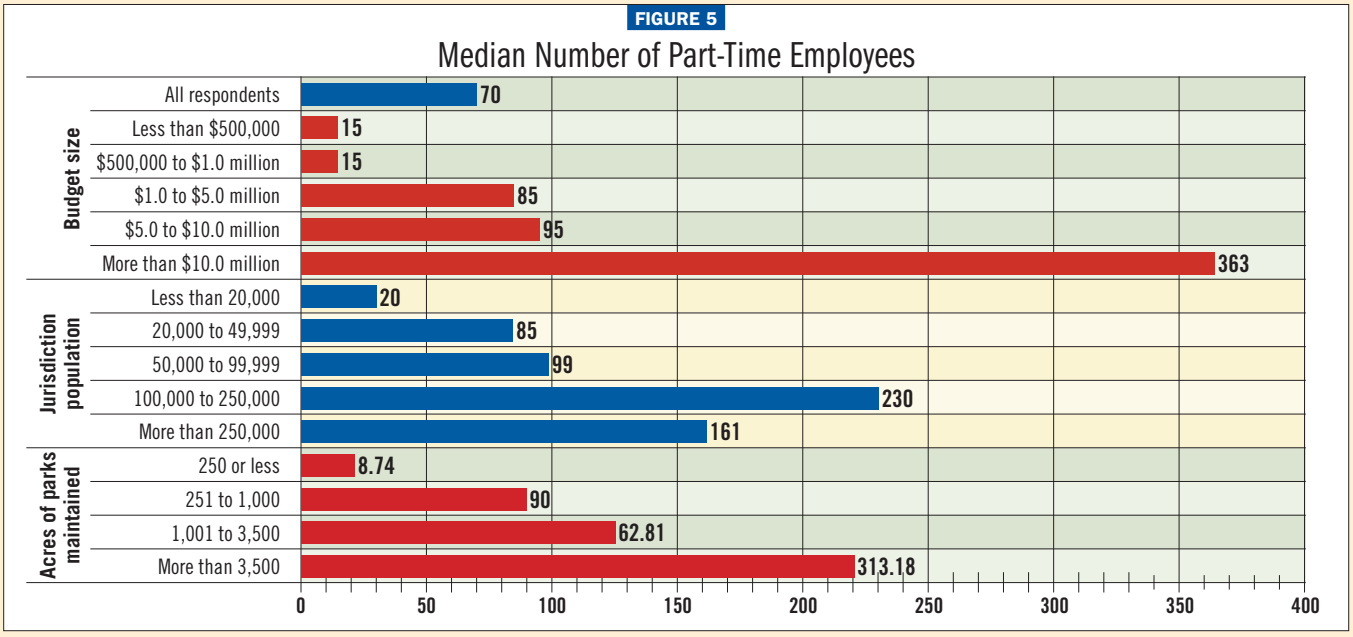


FIGURE 6

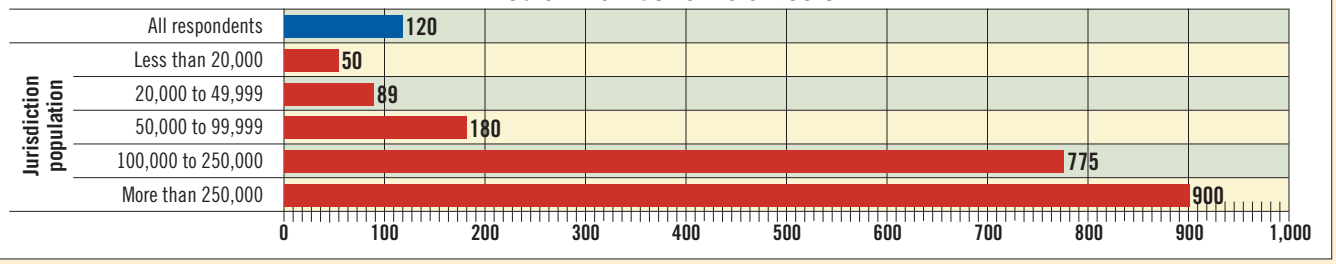
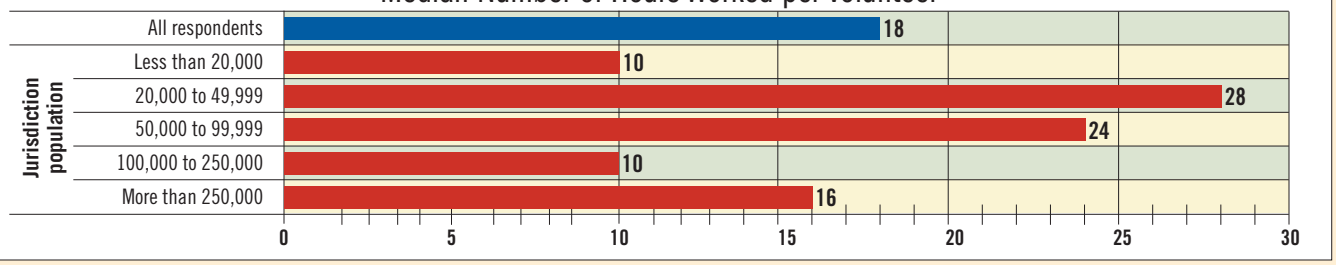


FIGURE 7



In Figures 4 and 5, for example, the median numbers of full-time-equivalent and part-time employees (by budget size, jurisdiction population, and park acres maintained) demonstrate that all but the largest departments responding employ significantly more part-time than full-time staff. Other data available on volunteer numbers and hours (Figures 6 and 7) can also help a department better understand the nature and balance of its staff—and compare its volunteer training and retention practices to similar agencies.

For example, Figures 6 and 7 indicate that the most substantial volunteer commitment among respondents is taking place in agencies serving jurisdiction populations of 20,000 to 49,999. The median volunteer number in agencies that size (89) just surpasses the number of part-time employees for agencies in that category (85). What are those agencies, with median FTEs of only 21, doing to get the full benefit of their large combined part-time and volunteer staffs?

These and other similar questions can be answered by doing further research within the system and contacting participating agencies in that category for ideas, policies, and best practices.

Staffing Data: Comparing Apples to Apples

Comparing your staffing details with departments that have completely different operations and structures will yield misleading results. One difficulty of reviewing data from various departments is that a multitude of factors contributes to staffing levels. They include:

- Seasonal vs. year-round operation;
- Cold weather vs. warm weather;
- Overall duty emphasis on programming vs. land management and operations;
- External duties related to jurisdiction (e.g., street trees, special events, grounds care of public facilities, etc.)

All of this data can be found in the profile data for your department and others with which you wish to compare.

The use of automation tools and systems is another important component of department administration. Figures 8 and 9 show the current use among database participants of two of the most common types of computer-aided automation.

FIGURE 8

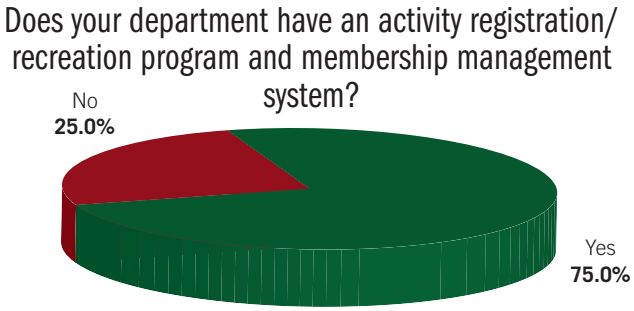
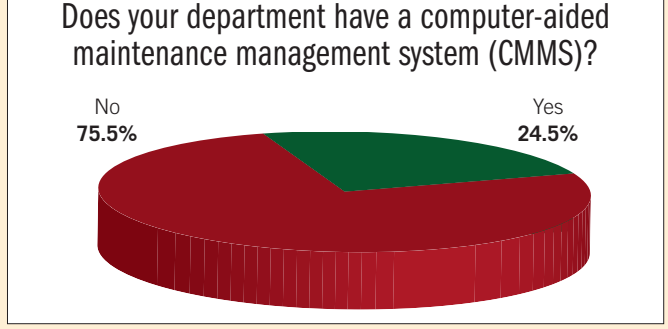


FIGURE 9



Budget

All agencies must justify their budget requests—and all successful budget proposals base their numbers on data. The NRPA database offers a variety of operating ratios that can supply budget justification criteria, as well as calculate agency-specific costs.

Figures 10-15 provide a variety of useful budget-related data—operating expenditures (indexed by jurisdiction population in Figure 10 and portrayed according to magnitude and category in Figures 11 and 12), most common revenue source percentages (Figure 13), capital budget (indexed by jurisdiction population in Figure 14), and respondents' renovation vs. new capital needs amounts (Figure 15).

FIGURE 10

What are your department's total operating expenditures for your fiscal year?

	All Respondents	Jurisdiction Population per Square Mile			
		Less Than 500	500 to 1,500	1,501 to 2,500	More than 2,500
Number of Responses	156	34	25	34	39
Lower Quartile	$1,027,201	$390,051	$1,034,033	$2,335,266	$1,854,444
Median	$2,659,668	$1,136,424	$2,891,515	$4,667,446	$5,125,010
Upper Quartile	$6,157,247	$2,217,927	$4,755,357	$10,386,867	$17,114,754

FIGURE 11

Operating expenditures

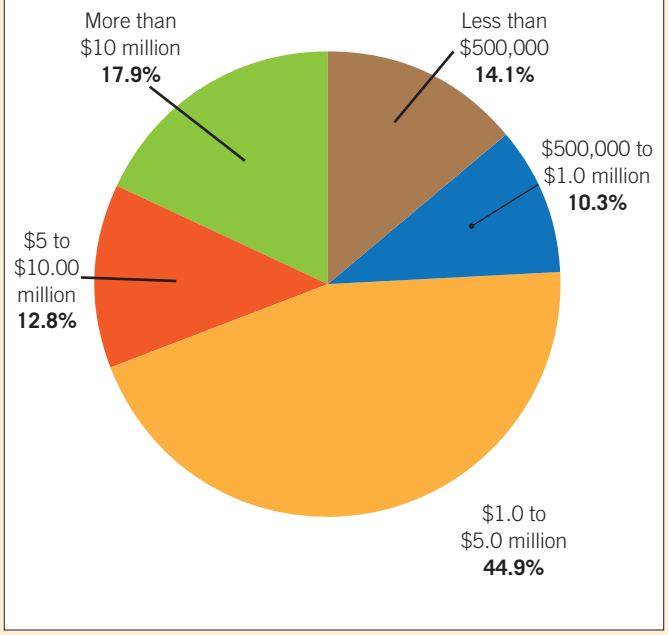


FIGURE 12

Operating expenditures by category

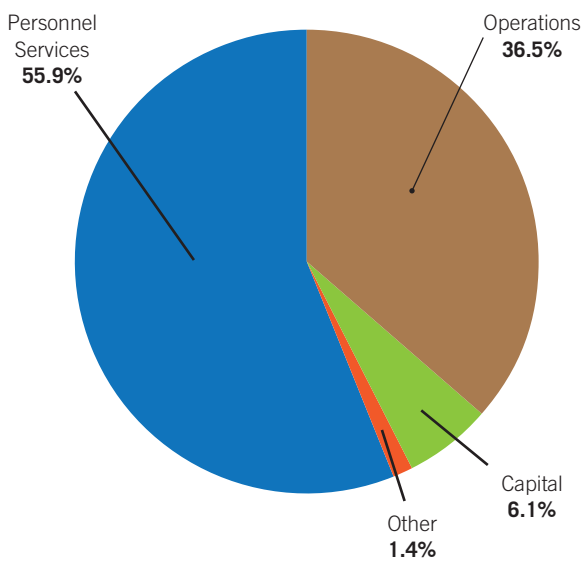


FIGURE 13

Percentage of annual revenues that came from. . .

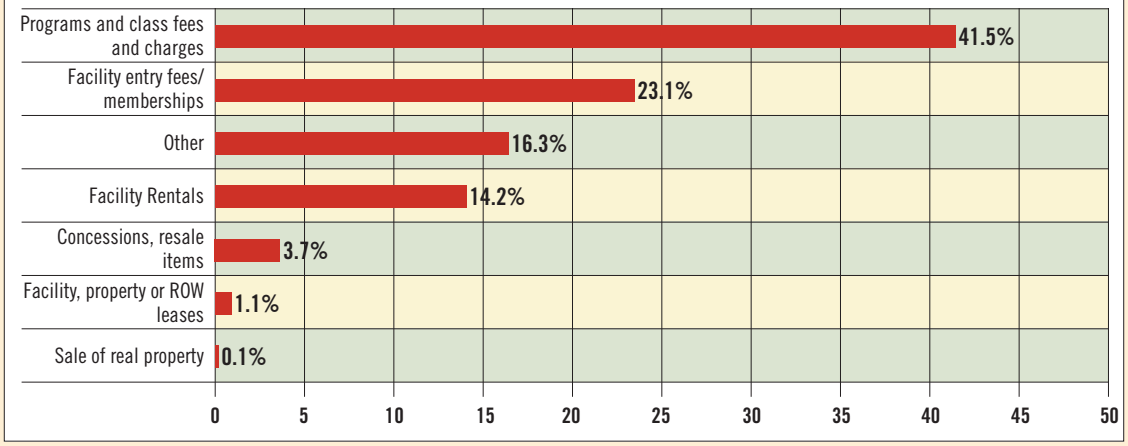


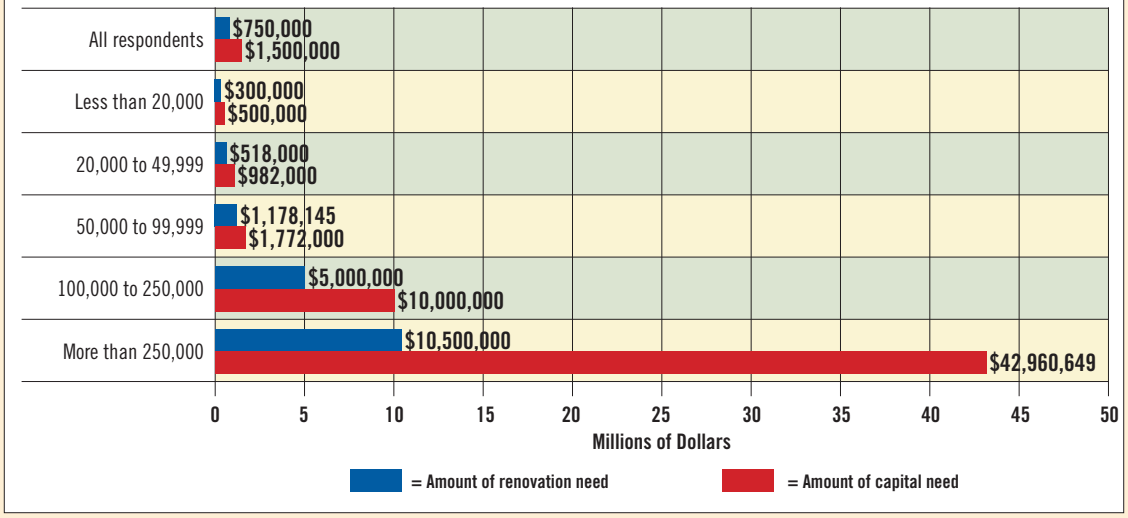
FIGURE 14

What is your department's total capital budget?

	All Respondents	Jurisdiction Population				
		Less Than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Number of Responses	126	30	39	23	9	15
Lower Quartile	$8,125	$750	$36,000	$15,750	$263,700	$1,381,150
Median	$233,991	$38,000	$287,500	$404,310	$3,100,000	$6,105,000
Upper Quartile	$1,637,321	$125,750	$914,778	$1,611,643	$9,900,000	$19,791,5636

FIGURE 15

Renovation versus capital needs



What is the relationship between renovation need and new capital need? Why are new capital-need dollars so much higher?

Renovations are often incorporated into the capital development budgets without designation as new or renovation. For agencies that don't do their own capital budgets it is probable that they only address the renovations scheduled for the next five years. Additionally, funding for new capital development is often more accessible than funding to repair or upgrade assets.

Programming

From social services programs to purely recreational offerings, parks and recreation agencies offer a vast array of programs. Programming data can help agencies both compare their program attendance and offerings and demonstrate the range of services they are providing their constituents.

Figure 16, for example, shows ratios of program attendance to staffing levels: Other data (Figures 17 and 18) provide insight into programmatic scope such as sports, arts, and social recreation.

Programming is also subject to cost versus revenue (and other measures of cost). For example, in offering a fitness class, an agency might try to recover at least the cost of the infrastructure—with a pro rata share for marketing, operations, and equipment. For a learn-to-swim class—even if there is no fee charged—it is important also to determine the cost of the program. These kinds of program cost determinations allow agencies to better establish and defend a hierarchy of fees. They also serve to ensure social equity in programming. Figure 19, for example, shows program fees per participant according to several different agency size measures.

FIGURE 16

Programming attendance per program staffing (FTE)

		Number of Responses	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
	All Respondents	75	746	1,955	6,000
Jurisdiction Population	Less Than 20,000	15	543	983	1,656
	20,000 to 49,999	23	1,006	2,115	4,915
	50,000 to 99,999	13	1,667	3,974	13,609
	100,000 to 250,000	7	284	645	2,083
	Over 250,000	13	889	8,803	14,214
Number of FTEs	Less Than 10 FTEs	9	1,646	1,667	2,229
	10 to 24 FTEs	19	833	1,895	2,586
	25 to 49 FTEs	12	358	1,089	8,776
	50 to 99 FTEs	13	1,000	3,100	6,250
	100 or More FTEs	22	652	3,060	13,216
Acres of Parks Maintained	250 Or Less	21	656	1,646	2,473
	251 To 1,000	26	987	1,907	4,931
	1,001 To 3,500	12	380	1,100	3,762
	Over 3,500	13	889	5,054	14,214

FIGURE 17

Percentage of responding agencies offering the following programs or classes:

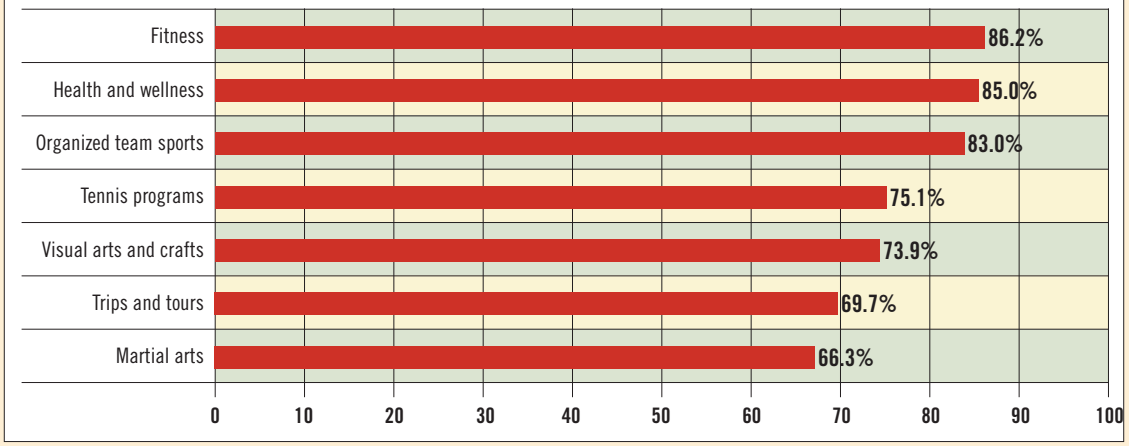


FIGURE 18

Percentage of responding agencies offering the following opportunities:

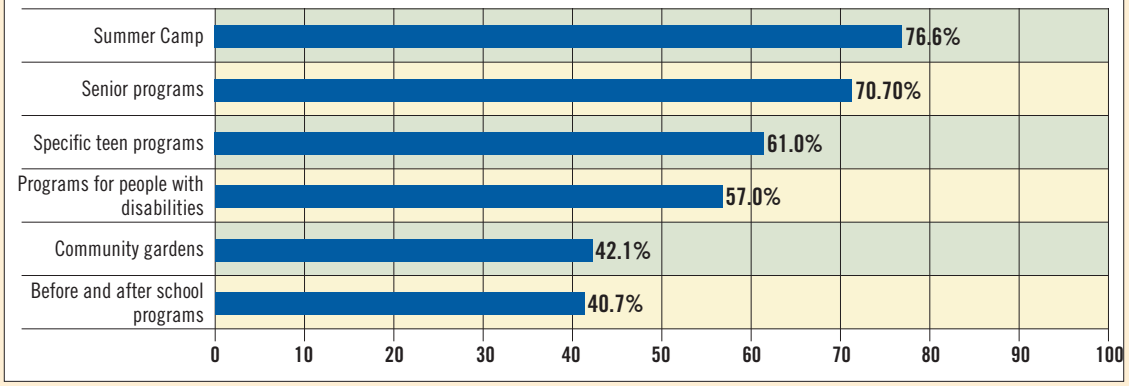


FIGURE 19

Programming attendance per program staffing (FTE)

		Number of Responses	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
	All Respondents	55	3.49	13.12	34.49
Jurisdiction population per square mile	Less than 500	12	4.38	13.05	226.09
	500 to 1,500	11	1.92	6.05	15.35
	1,501 to 2,500	11	4.11	17l.34	52.74
	More than 2,500	16	486	14.92	28.82
Budget size	Less than $500,000	7	5.86	13.12	27.39
	$500,000 to $1.0 million	ISD*	ISD	ISD	ISD
	$1.0 to $5.0 million	22	5.72	26.16	33.81
	$5 TO $10.0 million	7	3.49	9.28	15.53
	More than $10 million	15	0.87	4.11	42.75
Acres of parks maintained	250 or less	18	7.13	16.16	33.24
	251 to 1,000	17	5.33	18.35	77.68
	1,001 to 3,500	9	3.54	17.59	47.50
	More than 3,500	7	0.59	2.25	3.67

***Insufficient Data**

Facts at a Glance: Parks and Social Services Programs

- Nearly 80 percent of agencies offer a summer camp.
- Of those agencies offering summer camps, the median number of weeks is 8, the median number of campers per week is 115, and 39 percent offer meals to campers.
- Over 40 percent of departments responding offer before- and after-school programs.
- Of those departments, 9 percent offer before-school feeding programs—and 39 percent offer after-school feeding programs.

(Facts like these—on such critical services as caring for and feeding children—can help agencies demonstrate their local impact and procure grant monies.)

Operations

The NRPA data inventory encompasses a wide variety of facilities-related topics that help equip agencies of all sizes and jurisdiction types for comprehensive, cost-effective operations. Figures 20-23 depict some of the facilities data and breadth-of-scope insights the database offers.

FIGURE 20

Facilities Data

		Median number of recreation/ community centers	Median square footage per recreation/ community center	Median number of fitness centers	Median square footage per fitness center	Median number of senior centers	Median square footage per senior center
	All Respondents	1	20,000	2	2,500	1	10,000
Jurisdiction population	Less than 20,000	1	17,750	1	ISD	1	3,105
	20,000 to 49,999	1	26,692	1`	2,200	1	9,000
	50 to 99,999	2	25,000	1	14,450	1	12,948
	100,000 to 250,000	3	15,453	ISD	ISD	1	10,000
	More than 250,000	6	17,343	5	1,967	2	16,466
Jurisdiction population number of FTEs	Less than 10 FTEs	1	10,000	ISD	ISD	1	ISD
	10 to 24 FTEs	1	20,000	1	1,500	1	4,600
	25 to 49 FTEs	1	17,045	1	12,000	1	2,960
	50 to 99 FTEs	2	30,333	1	3,500	1	17,000

FIGURE 21

Facilities

Facility type	Percentage offering	Median jurisdiction population per facility
Recreation/community center	70.9%	24,431
Playground	94.8%	3,800
Tennis court (indoor)	5.9%	16,034
Tennis court (outdoor)	84.9%	4,292
Basketball court (outdoor)	84.2%	7,362
Swimming pool (indoor)	24.6%	42,028
Swimming pool (outdoor)	50.8%	30,000
Rectangular fields (e.g. football/soccer)	87.8%	3,523
Diamond fields (e.g. baseball/softball)	87.4%	3,139
Golf Course (9 holes)	31.6%	21,600
Dog Park	42.9%	48,260
Community gardens	41.4%	31,936

FIGURE 22

Median annual park attendance

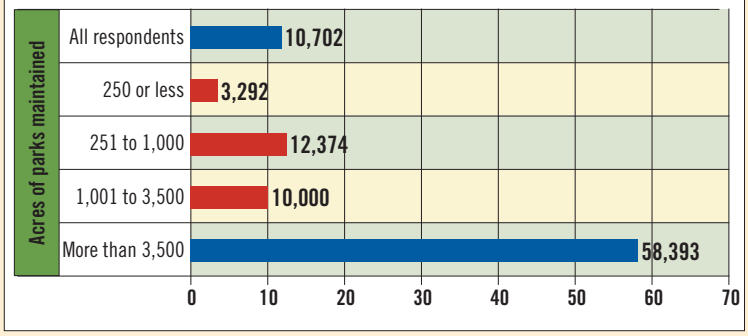
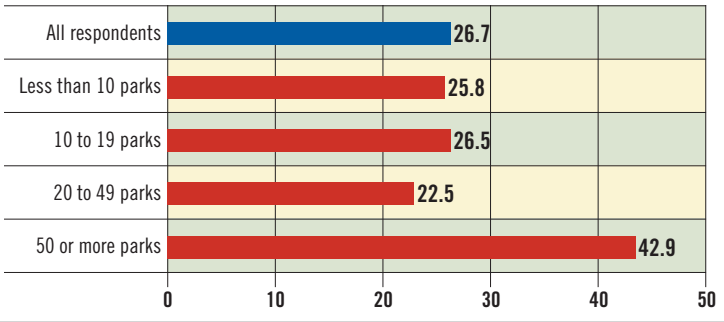


FIGURE 23

Median acres per park site



Maintenance

Character, magnitude, frequency, service level, material and environment are the key factors in determining maintenance costs and budget. (See Figure 24.) Number of acres of parkland maintained per full-time-equivalent employee (FTE) is the primary comparative number in use (Figure 25). Use of this index should take into account the variability of the other factors (e.g., climate, soils, size of parks, natural vs. formal care, and specialty grasses vs. native grasses).

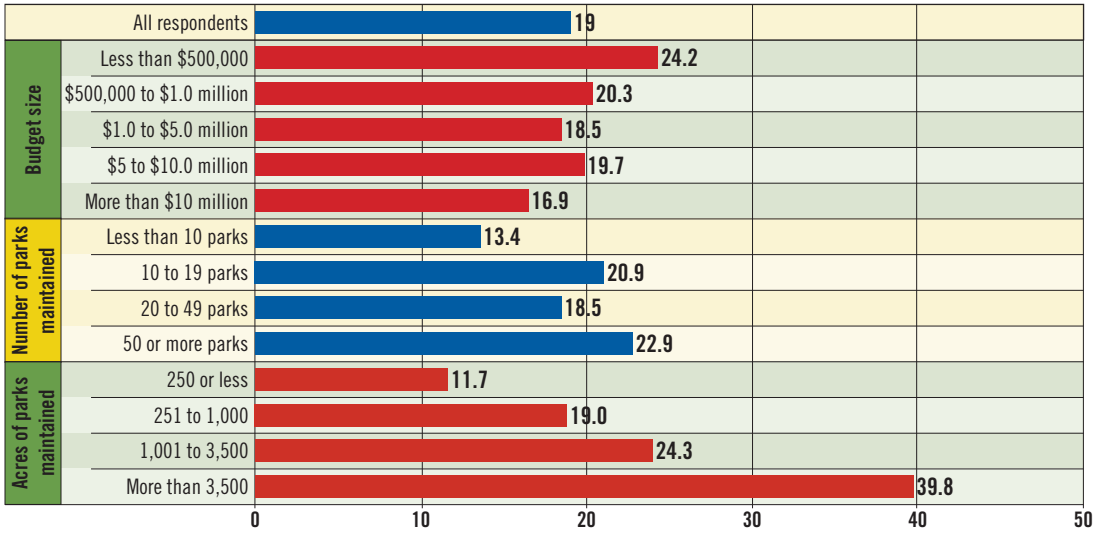
FIGURE 24

Maintenance costs and budget

		Operating expenditures per acre of land managed or maintained				Acres of parkland maintained per FTE			
		# of Resp.	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	# of Resp.	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
	All Respondents	120	$2,483	$4,752	$12,076	113	9.7	19.0	36.1
Budget Size	Less Than $500,000	16	$1,929	$3,527	$10,371	15	9.7	24.2	54.4
	$500,000 to $1.0 Million	14	$2,161	$3,840	$5,232	13	8.9	20.3	36.1
	$1.0 to $5.0 Million	49	$2,607	$5,288	$9,583	43	10.7	18.5	37.9
	$5 to $10.0 Million	16	$3,932	$4,752	$12,144	15	10.2	19.7	27.6
	Over $10 Million	25	$3,404	$9,043	$15,366	22	8.8	16.9	24.0
Jurisdiction Population	Less Than 20,000	33	$2,498	$5,236	$20,849	30	6.5	15.5	32.8
	20,000 to 49,999	30	$4,349	$8,244	$11,830	31	10.7	18.5	25.0
	50,000 to 99,999	24	$3,572	$5,884	$20,286	20	7.5	13.4	31.2
	100,000 to 250,000	12	$1,407	$3,196	$4,561	12	24.0	32.0	49.4
	Over 250,000	15	$1,616	$3,100	$6,390	14	12.0	18.8	57.4
Number of Parks	Less Than 10 Parks	28	$3,884	$11,009	$30,168	28	5.7	13.4	23.7
	10 to 19 Parks	29	$1,523	$4,273	$6,879	29	11.6	20.9	58.8
	20 to 49 Parks	37	$3,153	$5,288	$9,813	31	10.2	18.5	32.5
	50 or More Parks	26	$2,150	$4,056	$8,765	25	12.7	22.9	37.7
Acres of Parks	250 Or Less	41	$4,426	$11,333	$29,997	40	4.9	11.7	20.5
	251 To 1,000	37	$2,997	$6,558	$11,970	34	9.2	19.0	33.9
	1,001 To 3,500	24	$1,657	$3,912	$4,747	22	13.5	24.3	46.6
	Over 3,500	18	$493	$2,042	$3,785	17	19.0	39.8	119.8

FIGURE 25

Median number of acres of parkland maintained per FTE



The more formal the maintenance, the fewer the acres that can be maintained by one FTE. For example, a maintenance department that cares for a number of formal gardens and lawn areas such as those found at courthouses or city halls may have 8 to 12 acres per FTE. Conversely, a state park system consisting mostly of natural areas may have 75 acres or more for each FTE.

Planning and Best Practices

NRPA's online database platform allows departments to conduct side-by-side evaluation for characteristics that fit selected benchmarking criteria. Demographic characteristics, as the example in Figure 26 shows, may include racial or ethnic mix, age, economic status or one of the other data points collected in the profile survey. (Each column shows demographic data from a different agency—A1, A2, etc.) When departments are viewed side-by-side, the differences and similarities become readily apparent.

FIGURE 26

Demographics

Jurisdiction demographic distribution	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
White/Caucasian	66.90%	84.30%	44.10%	41.80%	39.70%	92.40%
Black/African American	3.80%	1.00%	10.10%	7.30%	15.50%	0.70%
Hispanic or Latino (any race) or Spanish origin	25.70%	2.80%	39.40%	48.30%	24.40%	1.30%
Percentage of jurisdiction population that is younger than 18 years of age	32.00%	25.30%	37.90%	29.70%	27.00%	20.80%
Percentage of jurisdiction population that is below the poverty line	12.00%	12.70%	18.40%	33.00%	7.50%	8.40%

FIGURE 27

Similar departments and revenue generation

Agency fee revenue as percentage of total operating expenditures	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
b. Agency fees and charges	32.00%	35.00%	13.00%	0.00%	0.00%	39.00%
Percentage distribution of annual revenues						
a. Facility entry fees/membership	15.00%	25.00%	17.00%	0.00%	17.00%	14.00%
b. Programs and class fees	80.00%	65.00%	70.00%	30.00%	74.00%	61.00%
c. Facility rentals	5.00%	5.00%	13.00%	70.00%	9.00%	1.00%
e. Concessions, resale items		5.00%	0.00%		0.00%	1.00%

FIGURE 28

Hard data

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
Park attendance	500,000	2,300,000	60,000	300,000	650,000
Number of parks or sites	45	48	12	16	25
Total number of acres	778	1,741	51	876	853
Number of FTEs	65	88	26	64	117

FIGURE 29

Ratio

Average	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
Operating expenditures per capita	$542	$98	$33	$60	$116	$180
Acreage of parkland per 1,000 population	13	26	1	14	14	39
Acres of parkland maintained per FTE	12	20	2	14	7	13

FIGURE 30

Standards

Jurisdiction population per facility	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
Recreation/community center	30,000	33,500	13,459	62,592	20,262	61.272
Playground	1,333	2,233	10,767	4,815	4,052	1,751
Tennis court (outdoor)	5,000	1,595	17,945	10,432	4,052	4,713
Basketball court (outdoor)	3,333	8,375	8,972		7,598	20,424
Diamond baseball—90 ft base paths	30,000	11,167	53,834	20,864	30,393	15,318
Diamond baseball—50–65 ft base baths	4,615	2.481	6,729	8,942	30,393	30,636
Diamond fields—softball (youth)	20,000	4,786	26,917	12,518	12,157	NA

Revenues

Business planning and revenue generation opportunities are important aspects of current operation. The table below (Figure 27) offers an example of how you the database can enable your department to find like departments that are excelling at revenue generation. How do they do it? Note that in the side-by-side data depicted, agency A6 generates 39 percent of its total operations expenditures in fees and charges. In the following rows we see that 61 percent of the revenue comes from program and class fees. Is this scenario better than your numbers? A phone call or email to that agency may yield further insights for improving your own department's revenues.

Hard data

NRPA's online database also provides the hard data your department needs for planning. Such hard data is useful (as the agencies shown side by side in Figure 28 demonstrate) as a comparative anchor for the goals and strategies you set.

Ratios

The hard data can also be used to generate a variety of ratios that make the review of other departments' data more accurate and productive. For example, even though all of the jurisdictions in Figure 29 are between 50,000 and 75,000 population, it is easier to understand the acres-of-parkland-scale when each number is shown as a ratio of acres per 1,000 population.

Standards

Land and facility standards are a continuing issue for planners. Standards used in the past were too generic and did not account for regional or cultural differences. These new standards, however, reflect actual service levels within communities. Note the variability between them (Figure 30). Aggregated numbers flatten clearer that variance by using averages or medians. Most importantly, these data points allow an agency to track the service levels consistent with its own community's needs.

Conclusions

In its first year of existence, NRPA's national online database holds great promise for becoming the standard research, management, and planning tool among park and recreation professionals. While it will be difficult to chart trends authoritatively for several years, comparisons of current profile data with NRPA's original 2009 Operating Ratio Study point to some notable dynamics across the field. Using current and 2009 data, we have projected some of the trends indicated by the data—trends viewed through a prism of social, economic, technology, and management perspectives. These dynamics, outlined below, represent both opportunities and challenges for the field of parks and recreation—and, in some cases, they create sharp conflicts with accepted practices.

FIGURE 31

Trends

Past and Current Practices	Future Direction	Presents…
Departments function as **providers** of programs, services facilities and lands	P & R Departments function as **facilitators** of public, nonprofit and private recreation opportunities in the community	Opportunity
Departments use **public employees** to provide operations, maintenance and programming	Departments use **nonprofit partners, private vendors, and contractors** for operation, maintenance and programming	Challenge
For cost-effective operations and maintenance, **smaller parks are eliminated**	For child health and obesity issues the goal is to eliminate "Recreation Deserts" by **creating smaller neighborhood parks**	Conflict
Park site and mobile programming in neighborhoods to **ensure social equity goals**	Department **revenue increase goals** sought to offset tax subsidies even at cost of social equity	Conflict
Departments provide **targeted programs and services for vulnerable populations**, such as seniors and youth	**Reduced federal, state and local funding** is reducing departments' ability to provide for vulnerable populations.	Challenge
"What market will bear" guides revenue generation strategies for Department	Revenue generation guided by **market research and business practices**	Opportunity
Acquisition and installation of **automated Recreation Management Systems** to improve registration services and monitoring	Acquisition and installation of **computer-aided Maintenance Management Systems** to improve asset management and cost effective maintenance	Opportunity
Undeveloped **open space left unmanaged and unimproved**; environmental sustainability practices take low priority	Residents want **managed, useable, but not overdeveloped open space**; environmental sustainability takes high priority	Opportunity

NRPA's Mission:
To advance parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance thequality of life for all people.

As NRPA continues to add profiles to its inventory, the database will offer even more information, data and reporting capabilities—all to help you address trends in the industry, carry out day-to-day functions, build credibility with decision-makers and the public, and position your department to be a major positive force in your community's health, culture, and economy.

NRPA makes its interactive database available at no charge to members and non-members alike. It is marketed to members under the trade name "PRORAGIS." To find out more, to fill out an agency profile, or to view online tutorials for using the platform, visit www.nrpa.org/proragis.

This special report on the parks and recreation field—as well as the PRORAGIS database from which it is drawn—is produced by the
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