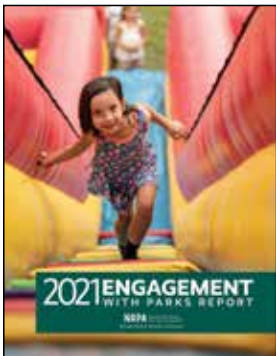




2021 ENGAGEMENT WITH PARKS REPORT

NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park



Cover image:
A child plays during Riverfest, an arts and recreation festival, at McGregor Park in Clarksville, Tennessee. *Photo courtesy of Clarksville Parks and Recreation.*

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Introduction

A child enjoys the last day of summer camp at Pavilion Center Pool in Las Vegas.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF LAS VEGAS PARKS AND RECREATION

Park and recreation professionals make lives better for millions of people every day. Over the past year, 260 million people accessed their local parks or recreation facilities. In a time of uncertainty, parks and recreation demonstrated that it is essential, providing opportunities for peace and solace in local parks, trails and public spaces. From checking in on older adults and the most vulnerable to connecting children to nutritious meals and enabling parks and recreational facilities to serve as coronavirus (COVID-19) testing sites and vaccination centers, park and recreation agency professionals stepped up to the plate for their communities as never before.

As in almost every other facet of life, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways in which people engage with parks and recreation. In the first weeks and months of the pandemic, when many avenues for social interaction shut down or were sharply restricted, parks and trails remained open in nearly every community across the nation. Park and recreation professionals developed innovative ideas, worked closely with public health officials and shared knowledge with their peers to reintroduce services to their communities throughout the pandemic.

Since 2016, the Research team of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has conducted a yearly survey to better understand how people connect with parks and recreation across the United States. The results from

the survey form the basis of NRPA's annual *Engagement With Parks Report*. The report provides park and recreation professionals and advocates, policymakers and other key stakeholders with insights into how local parks and recreation facilities impact the lives of every person in our nation.

On behalf of NRPA, Wakefield Research surveyed 1,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and older between May 28 and June 9, 2021. The firm used quotas to ensure the responses represent a reliable and representative reflection of the U.S. adult population. The margin of error for data in this report is +/-3.1 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Infographic

Key Findings of the 2021 Engagement With Parks Report

More than **7 in 10** U.S. residents have at least one local park, playground, open space or recreation center within walking distance of their homes



260 million people in the United States visited a local park or recreation facility at least once during the past year

Nearly **9 in 10** people agree that it is important to fund local park and recreation agencies to ensure every member of the community has equitable access to amenities, infrastructure and programming



4 in 5 U.S. adults seek high-quality parks and recreation when choosing a place to live

87% of people agree that parks and recreation is an important service provided by their local government



Key Findings

Parks and recreation is an essential part of life. It brings communities together by providing places where people can increase physical activity, meet with friends and family, reconnect with nature or help a neighbor in need. People from all walks of life have a personal relationship with their local park and recreation agency. Some may walk on a trail, take a fitness class at a community center, access a nutritious meal, gain a new skill or hobby or reap the benefits of clean air and water because of preserved open spaces. Being within a walkable distance of park and recreation infrastructure, amenities and programming increases the likelihood that one will take full advantage of such benefits.

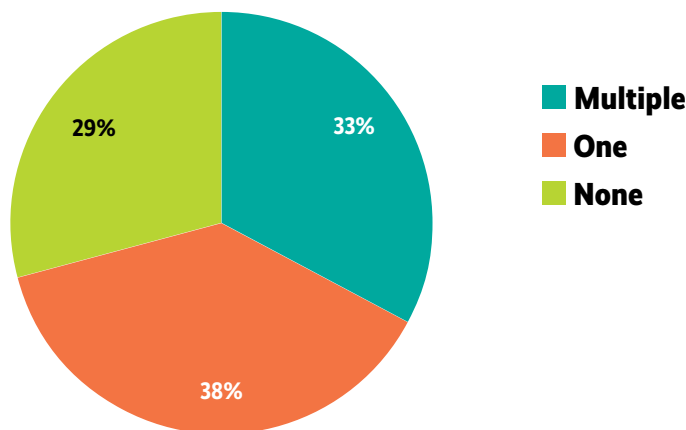
More than seven in 10 U.S. residents have at least one local park, playground, open space or recreation center within walking distance of their homes, and one-third of survey respondents have two or more nearby parks and/or other recreation opportunities. Unfortunately, 29 percent of people do not live within walking distance of at least one park or recreation opportunity.

The percentage of people living near a park or other recreation opportunity varies significantly by region and demographics. Eighty percent of respondents in the Northeast report that they can walk to a local park, while 75 percent of those in the West and 73 percent in the Midwest report the same. Only 63 percent of respondents living in the South indicate that there is a park within a walkable distance of their homes.

Adults identifying as Hispanic (90 percent) and non-white (80 percent) are more likely to report having walkable access to a park. Additionally, parents are more likely than non-parents to live within walking distance to a park or other recreation opportunity (79 percent and 66 percent, respectively). Eighty-one percent of Gen Zers and 80 percent of millennials report having walkable access to parks, while access for Gen Xers (71 percent) and especially baby boomers (60 percent) is far less common.

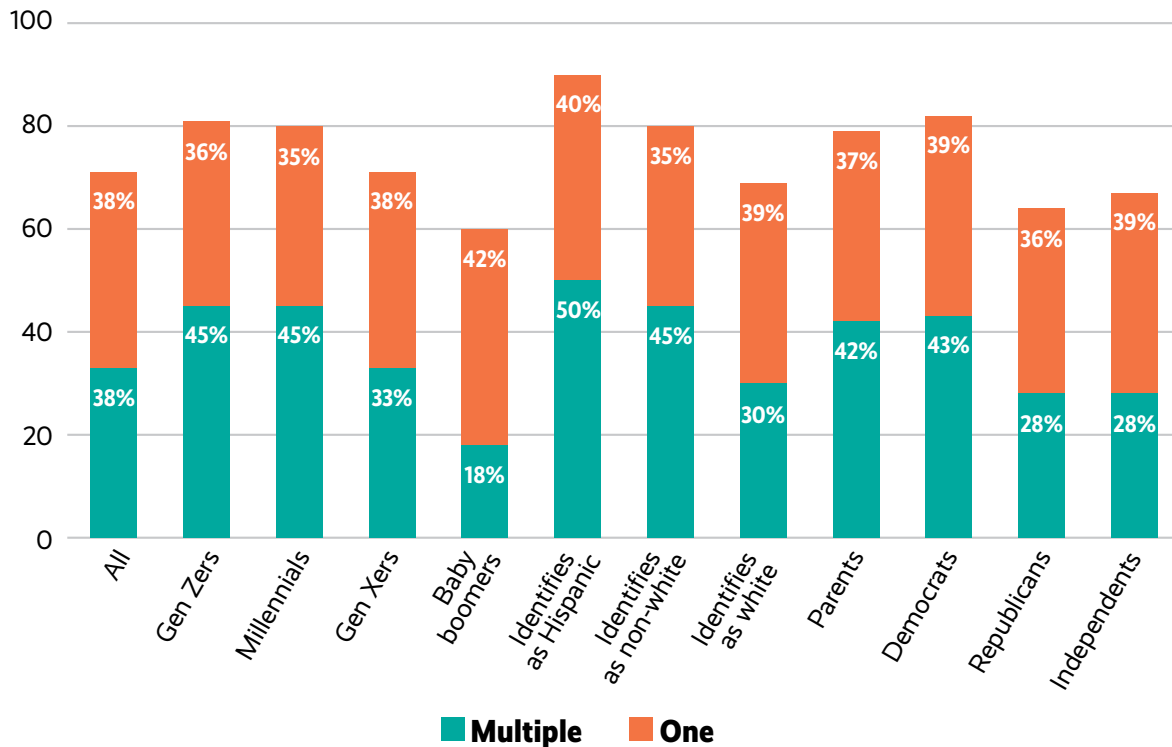
MORE THAN SEVEN IN 10 U.S. RESIDENTS LIVE WITHIN A WALKABLE DISTANCE OF AT LEAST ONE LOCAL PARK OR OTHER RECREATION OPPORTUNITY

(Percentage Distribution)



NUMBER OF PARKS OR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN A WALKABLE DISTANCE

(Percent of Respondents)



Access to high-quality park and recreation opportunities is a vital factor in a superior quality of life for all. It is not surprising then that proximity to great parks and quality recreation opportunities plays a significant role in determining where many people choose to live. Four in five U.S. adults indicate access to high-quality parks and recreation is an important factor when choosing a place to live; 53 percent indicate having such access is “extremely” or “very” important to them.

Easy access to high-quality parks, playgrounds, open spaces or recreation centers is of greatest importance to millennials, Democrats, those already residing near a park, respondents who are physically very active, parents and individuals who identify as Hispanic. More than 60 percent of these survey respondents indicate proximity to a park is “extremely” or “very” important.

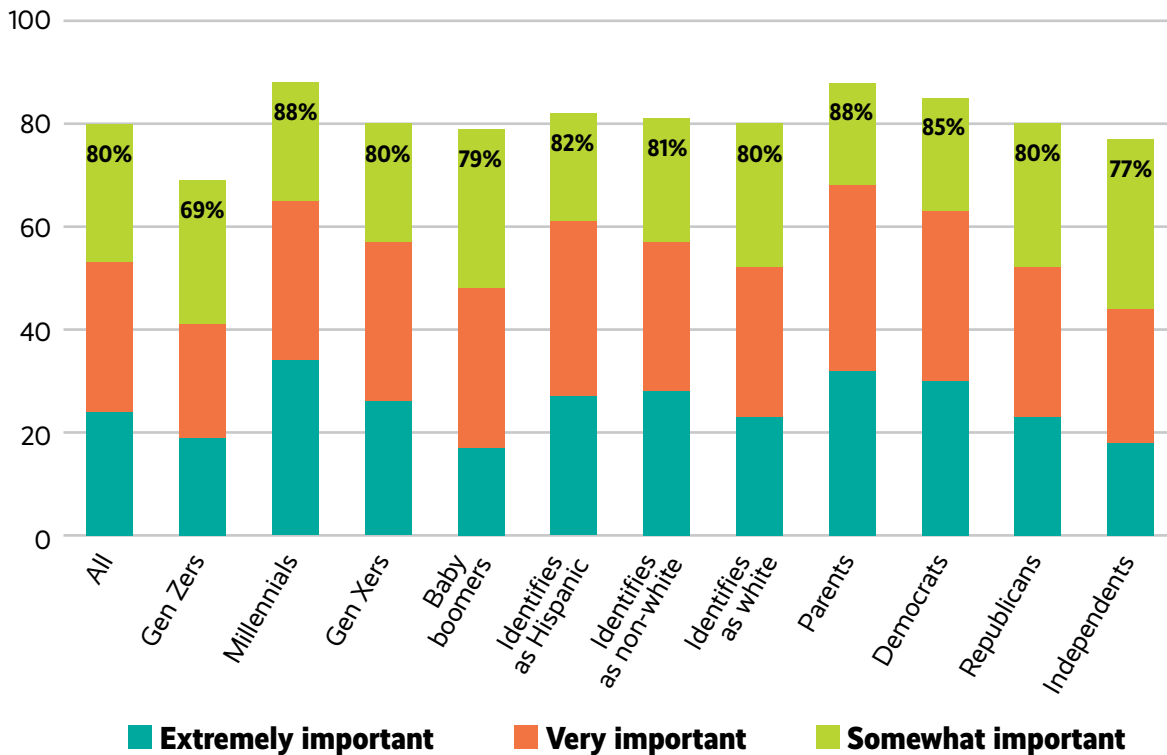


Children play in the pool during Family Fun Day at Discovery Island Waterpark in Greenville County, South Carolina.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENVILLE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND TOURISM

ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PARK AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IS IMPORTANT WHEN CHOOSING WHERE TO LIVE

(Percent of Respondents)



Embracing the concept that “there is something for everyone,” park and recreation professionals oversee diverse landscapes and facilities — from historic homes to shorelines, vast mountain ranges to humble community gardens. When it comes to outdoor recreation opportunities, parks and recreation shines.

Virtually everyone agrees it is vital that their communities have nearby access to a wide variety of outdoor recreation options. Having many diverse outdoor options allows people to enjoy the activity of their choosing. Eighty-five percent of U.S. residents indicate it is important to have access to a secluded, outdoor, quiet place where they can relax and reflect, while 81 percent look to nearby trails for opportunities to walk, run, hike and bike.

Outdoor recreation activities in and around water (e.g., lakes, ponds, oceans) are another favorite. More than half (52 percent) of survey respondents indicate having nearby access to water is “extremely” or “very” important. Furthermore, viewing nature — both scenery and wildlife — also are desired outdoor recreation activities (cited by 79 percent and 78 percent of respondents, respectively).

Additional popular outdoor recreation options include:

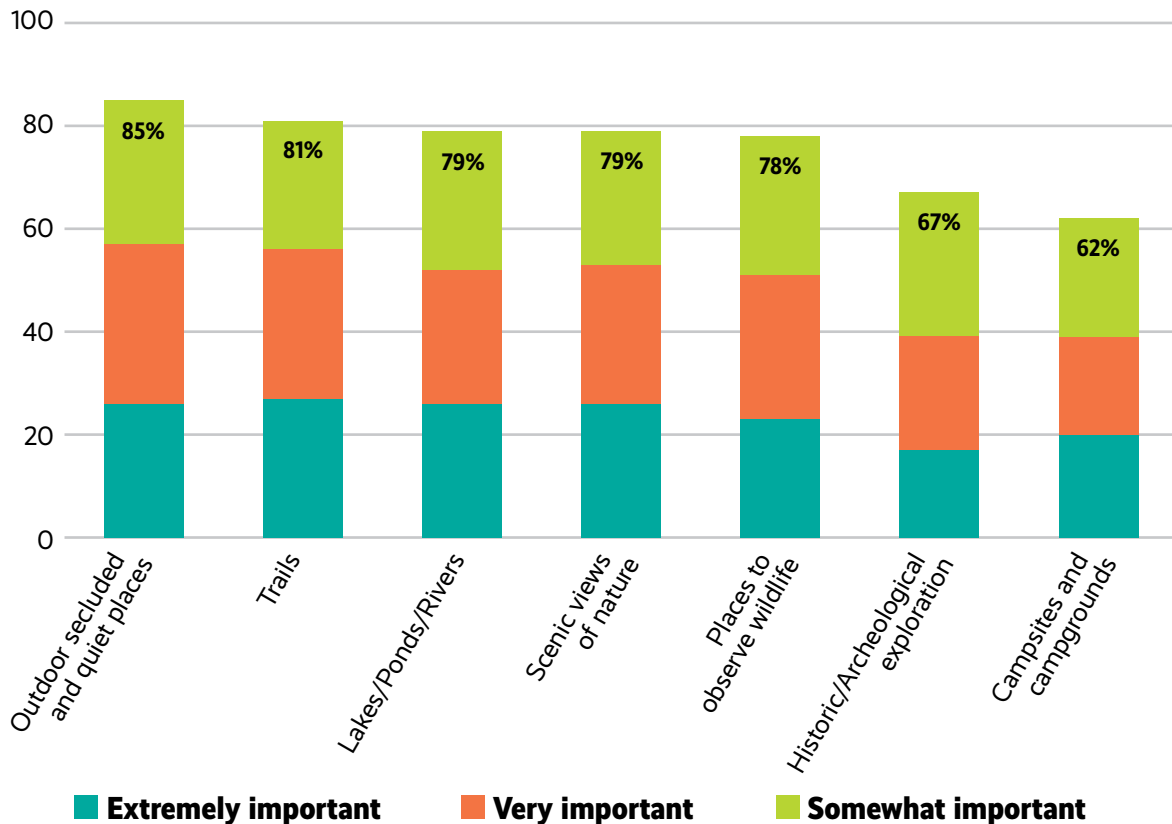
- Exploring historical or archeological areas (cited by 67 percent of respondents)
- Campsites and campgrounds (62 percent)

Top outdoor recreation options by select demographics are:

- Outdoor secluded and quiet places
 - Parents (92 percent)
 - Gen Xers (88 percent)
 - Those living in the Northeast (88 percent)
- Trails
 - Parents (89 percent)
 - Millennials (86 percent)
 - Those living in the Northeast (86 percent)
- Lakes/Ponds/Rivers
 - Parents (87 percent)
 - Gen Xers (83 percent)
 - Millennials (83 percent)
- Scenic views of nature
 - Parents (86 percent)
 - Gen Xers (85 percent)
 - Those living in the Northeast (85 percent)
- Places to observe wildlife
 - Parents (85 percent)
 - Millennials (82 percent)
 - Those living in the Midwest (82 percent)
- Sites that offer opportunities for historic/archeological exploration
 - Parents (75 percent)
 - Millennials (73 percent)
 - Gen Xers (70 percent)
 - Those living in the South (70 percent)
- Campsites and campgrounds
 - Millennials (74 percent)
 - Parents (73 percent)
 - Those who identify as Hispanic (73 percent)

PEOPLE PLACE A HIGH LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE ON HAVING NEARBY OUTDOOR RECREATION OPTIONS

(Percent of Respondents)





Momoyo Crane (center front) has attended City of Olympia (Washington) Parks, Arts and Recreation's Women's Fitness class at the Olympia Center for more than 25 years.

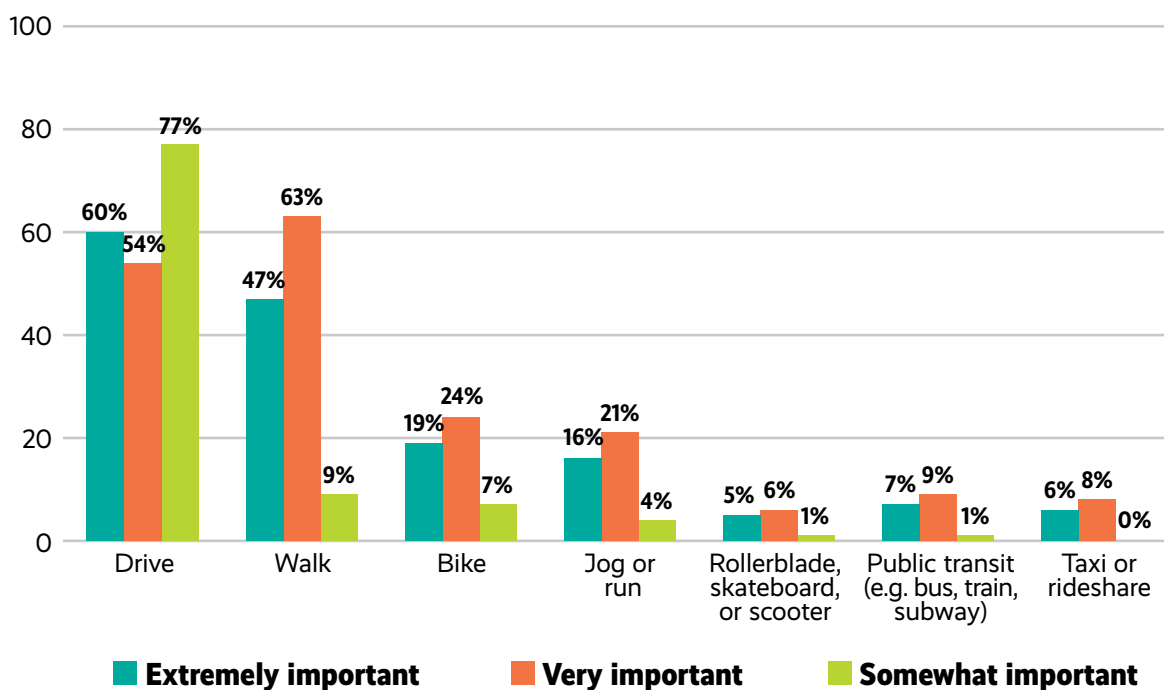
Even if they live within walking distance of at least one park or recreation opportunity, a majority of people travel to those destinations by automobile. Three in five U.S. adults drive to parks, playgrounds, open spaces or recreation centers and nearly half (47 percent) walk to those locations. Other common travel methods include:

- Biking (cited by 19 percent of respondents)
- Jogging/Running (16 percent)
- Public transit (seven percent)
- Taxi/Rideshare (six percent)

Living near a park or recreation opportunity is one of the major determinants of how one travels to enjoy those amenities. Individuals living near at least one park are much more likely to arrive at that park by an "active" means (e.g., walking, biking, running), with walking the most common method of transport. Sixty-three percent of respondents with at least one park nearby indicate they walk to local parks. Driving is the dominant transportation method for individuals with no parks nearby. Seventy-seven percent of U.S. adults who do not live within a walkable distance to parks or recreation opportunities travel to those amenities by car.

DRIVING AND WALKING ARE THE MOST TYPICAL WAYS PEOPLE TRAVEL TO PARK AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

(Percent of Respondents Who Have Visited a Park in the Past Year)



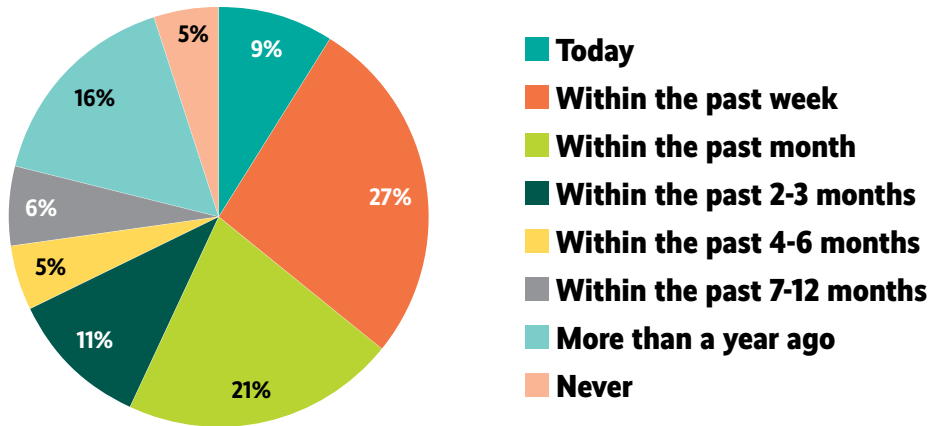
Park and Recreation Usage

Parks and recreation is an essential part of the lives of people coast to coast. Even a global public health emergency did not keep people away from their favorite parks, trails and recreation opportunities. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents – the equivalent of 260 million people in the United States – visited a local park or recreation facility at least once during the 12-month period ending in May 2021.

Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents report having visited a local park and/or recreation facility at least once within the month prior to completing this survey, including 36 percent of people who visited a park and/or recreation amenity at least once within the prior week. Eleven percent of survey respondents enjoyed a park and/or recreation amenity within two to three months prior to completing the survey. Five percent of respondents indicate their most recent visit was between four and six months and 11 percent report their most recent visit was between seven and 12 months prior to completing the survey.

260 MILLION PEOPLE VISITED A LOCAL PARK OR RECREATION FACILITY DURING THE PAST YEAR

(Percentage Distribution of Most Recent Visit)

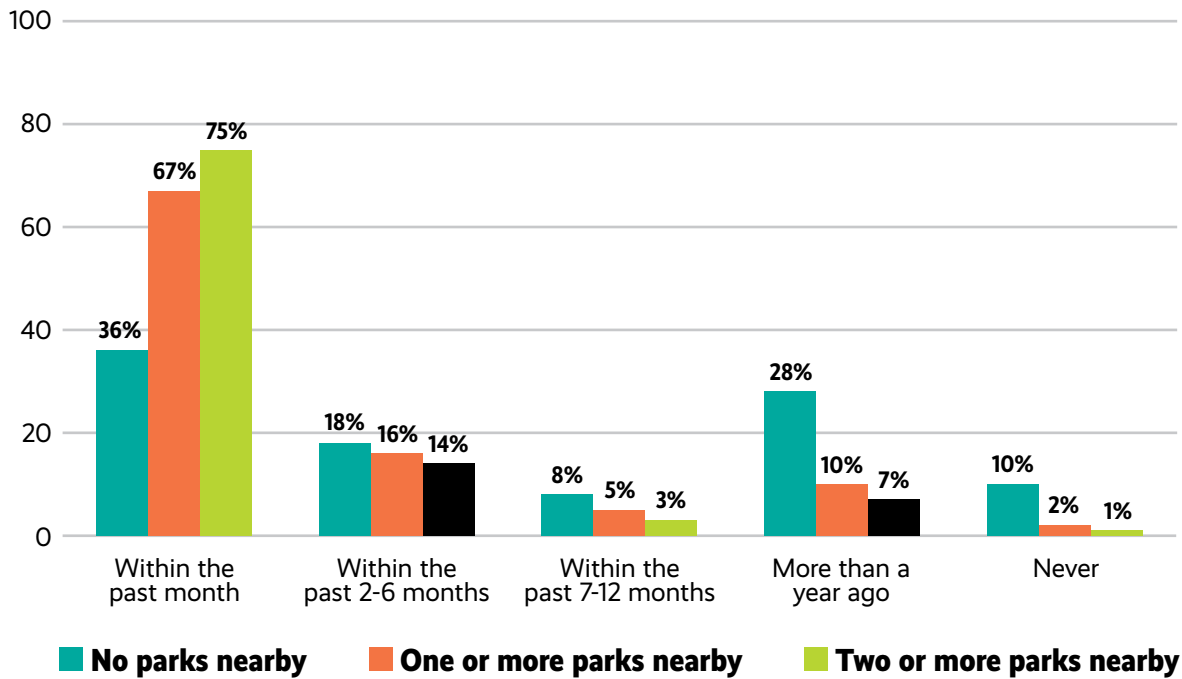


People are more likely to have visited a park or recreation facility if they live a walkable distance from such an amenity. Two-thirds of survey respondents who live within a walkable distance of a park and recreation opportunity visited such an opportunity at least once within a month of completing the survey. This compares favorably to the 36 percent of respondents who do not live within walking distance of a park and recreation opportunity who report the same.

More parks and recreation options lead to even more engagement with those amenities. Individuals with walkable access to two or more parks or recreation facilities are more than twice as likely (75 percent) to have visited one of these areas when compared to those without any walkable access.

WALKABLE ACCESS LEADS TO MORE PARK AND RECREATION FACILITY VISITS

(Percentage Distribution)



A child sleds during a snow day at Tilden Woods Local Park in Montgomery County, Maryland.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARILYN SKLAR, MONTGOMERY PARKS, MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted nearly every facet of life, parks and recreation facilities remained open and available. For many people, parks, trails and other public spaces provided opportunities for crucial respites from home during the pandemic. This vital infrastructure gave millions of people a place to exercise safely and connect to nature.

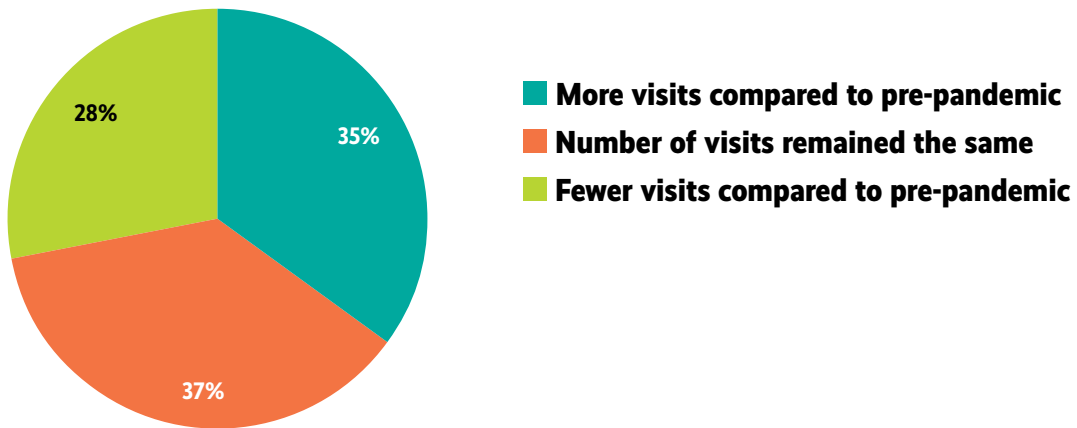
Seventy-two percent of U.S. adults either maintained or increased the frequency of their visits to outdoor parks, trails and other public spaces during the past year compared to the time before the pandemic. Thirty-five percent of survey respondents report increased park, trail and/or other public space usage during the pandemic compared to the previous year. For 35 percent of survey respondents, their use of parks and recreation facilities was unchanged.

Very active individuals, millennials, individuals identifying as Hispanic and parents took the greatest advantage of parks, trails and/or other open spaces. Fifty-two percent of very active adults increased their use of parks, trails and/or other open spaces, while 48 percent of millennials, 47 percent of individuals identifying as Hispanic and 46 percent of parents did so as well.

At the other end of the spectrum, older populations were more likely to have decreased their use of parks and open spaces. Thirty-seven percent of respondents 55 years of age and older report they visited parks, trails and other open spaces less frequently than they did before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

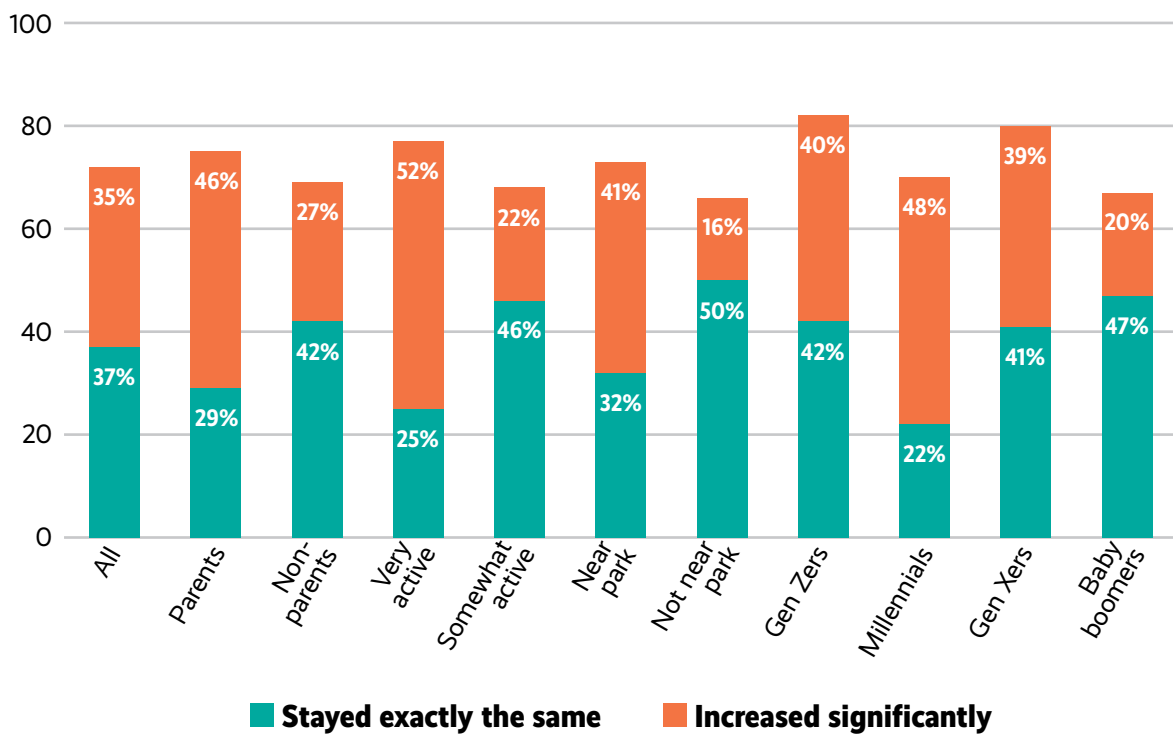
SEVEN IN 10 PEOPLE MAINTAINED OR INCREASED PARK, TRAIL AND PUBLIC SPACE USAGE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(Percentage Distribution)



NEARLY HALF OF ALL MILLENNIALS INCREASED VISITS TO LOCAL PARKS, TRAILS AND OTHER PUBLIC OPEN SPACES DURING THE PANDEMIC

(Percent of Respondents)

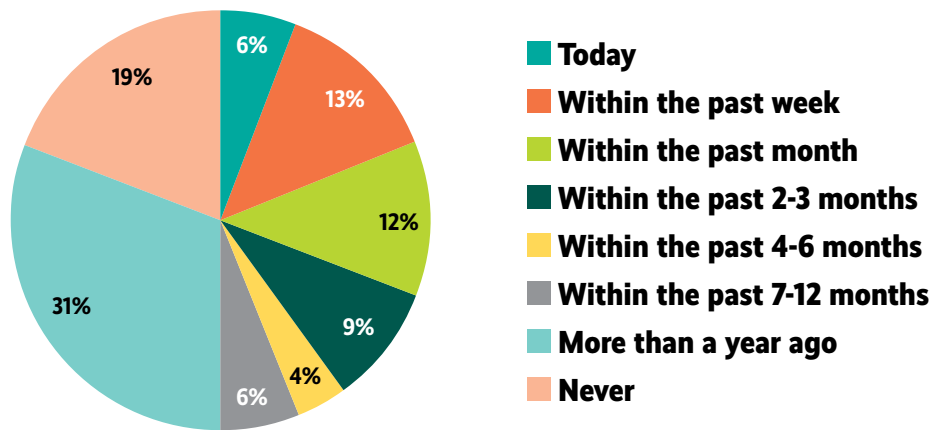


Park and recreation professionals demonstrated great innovation, flexibility and creativity during the past year. One example was agencies across the nation developed and expanded virtual programming options in the face of physical distancing requirements and stay-at-home orders. This quick pivot provided community members with ways to learn, socialize and have a bit of fun while staying safely at home. As communities lifted stay-at-home orders and increased vaccinations, more people began leaving their homes. Park and recreation agencies responded by delivering more in-person programming.

Consequently, nearly half of U.S. adults have personally — or have a member of their household who has — participated in a park and recreation offering during the past year. One in three survey respondents report they have personally participated or have a member of their household who has participated in a park and recreation program or offering.

NEARLY HALF OF U.S. ADULTS HAVE PERSONALLY — OR HAVE A HOUSEHOLD MEMBER WHO HAS — PARTICIPATED IN A PARK AND RECREATION OFFERING/PROGRAMMING IN THE PAST YEAR

(Percentage Distribution)



Through a partnership with the Los Angeles Clippers, youth ages 6 to 18 learn the fundamentals of basketball at the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks' EXPO Center.

People visited local park and recreation facilities an average of nearly twice a month between June 2020 and May 2021 (or an average of 22.2 times over the 12-month period). But the frequency of these visits varied significantly. Thirteen percent of survey respondents report that they visited a local park facility between six and 10 times within the past 12 months, while 12 percent made between 11 and 20 visits during the same time period. Twelve percent visited their local park and recreation facilities between 21 and 50 times during the past year, while eight percent did so at least 51 times.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GAIL PARKER

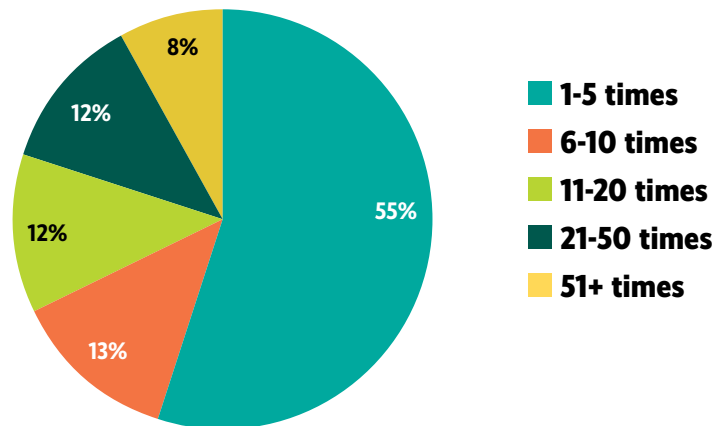


A child participates in the Buncombe County (North Carolina) Special Olympics Spring Games at T.C. Roberson Sports Stadium.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BUNCOMBE COUNTY RECREATION SERVICES

PEOPLE VISITED THEIR LOCAL PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES ON AVERAGE NEARLY TWICE A MONTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

(Percentage Distribution of Respondents Who Visited a Park/Recreation Facility During the Past Year)



Three in four survey respondents indicate there were barriers that kept them from experiencing parks and recreation opportunities as much as they like during the past year. Perhaps not surprisingly, obstacles related to the pandemic have been the most common barrier recently. Nearly two in five respondents report that pandemic-related obstacles — such as closed facilities and/or stay-at-home orders — kept them from enjoying local parks and recreation opportunities during the past year.

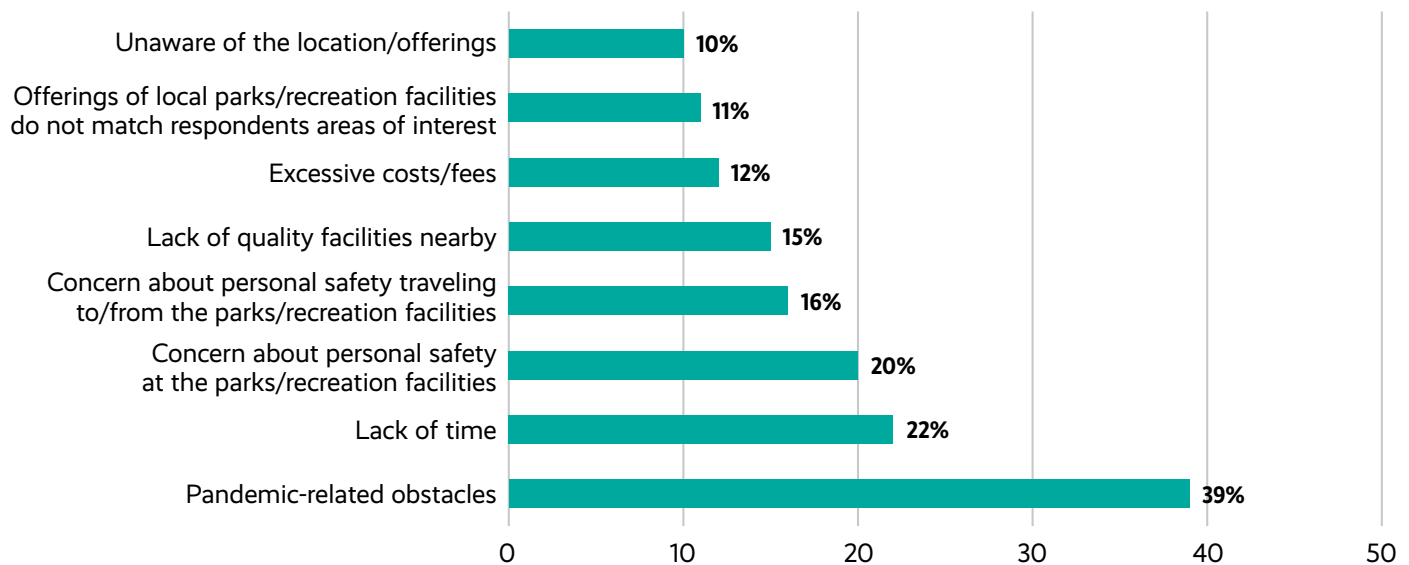
Lack of time was less of a barrier in 2021 than in previous years. Twenty-two percent of survey respondents in 2021 cite lack of time as a reason for keeping them from visiting parks and other recreation facilities compared to 37 percent in 2019 and 45 percent in 2018.

Other frequently cited barriers include:

- Concerns about personal safety at the park and recreation facility (cited by 20 percent of respondents)
- Concerns about personal safety when traveling to/from the park and recreation facility (16 percent)
- Lack of quality facilities near the respondent’s home (15 percent)

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC KEPT PEOPLE FROM GREATER ENJOYMENT OF PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

(Percent of Respondents)



How People Engage With Parks and Recreation

The range of programs and activities that draw individuals and their families to parks reflects the broad mission of park and recreation professionals and their agencies. Whether it is an afternoon at the park to experience nature, a weekend bike ride on the trails to clear one's head or the myriad of sporting options from which to choose, everyone has a favorite park and recreation activity.

The reasons people visit their local park and recreation facilities track closely with what they identify as their favorite activities. For more than six in 10 people, this means visiting a local park, playground, dog park or some other local open space. Parents (73 percent), Gen Xers (70 percent) and baby boomers (70 percent) are most likely to indicate that visiting a local park, playground, dog park or any other local open space is their favorite park and recreation activity. Hiking, biking and walking on local trails is the second most popular activity, with nearly half of all survey respondents (including 57 percent of baby boomers) indicating so.

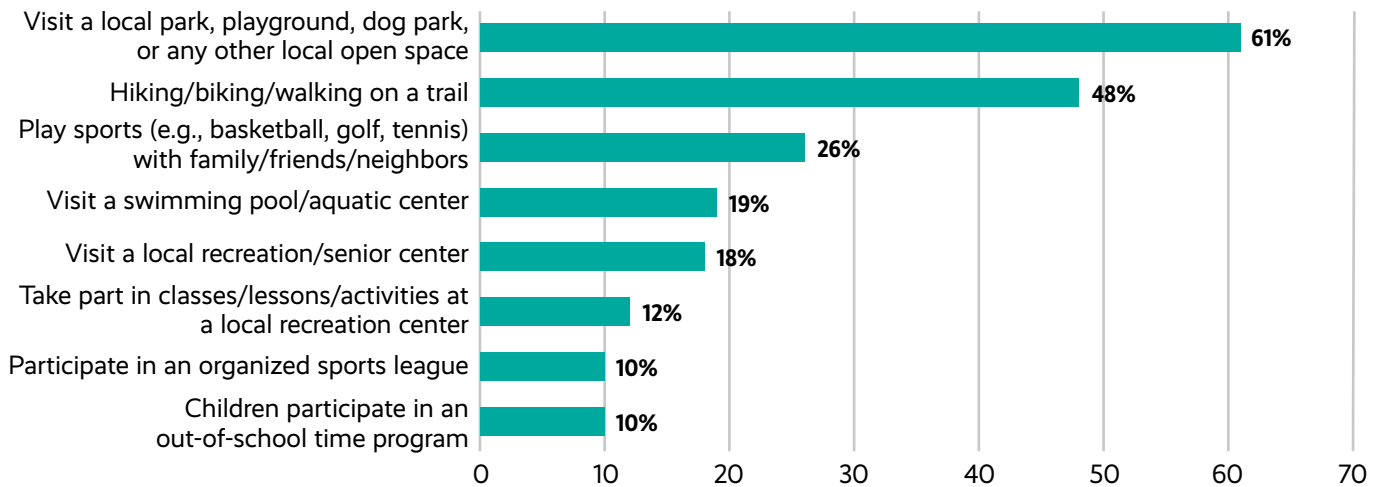
One-quarter of survey respondents report that playing sports — such as basketball, golf and tennis — with friends, family members and neighbors is a favorite park and recreation activity. Forty-five percent of Gen Zers, 34 percent of millennials and 32 percent of parents indicate that playing sports with friends and/or family is a top activity.

Other favorite park and recreation activities include:

- Visiting a local swimming pool/aquatic center (cited by 19 percent of respondents)
- Visiting a local recreation center (or senior center) (18 percent)
- Taking part in classes/lessons/activities or any other offering at a local recreation center (12 percent)
- Children in the household participating in an out-of-school time program (e.g., summer camp, before-/after-school care) (10 percent)
- Participating in an organized sports league (10 percent)

VISITING PARKS AND TRAILS REMAINS FAVORITE PARK AND RECREATION ACTIVITY

(Percent of Respondents Who Personally Have — or Have a Household Member Who Has
— Visited a Local Park/Recreation Facility During the Past Year)



The broad mission of park and recreation agencies to promote inclusive, healthy, connected-to-nature communities inherently draws people to park and recreation amenities and services. People visit their local park and recreation facilities for reasons as diverse as themselves.

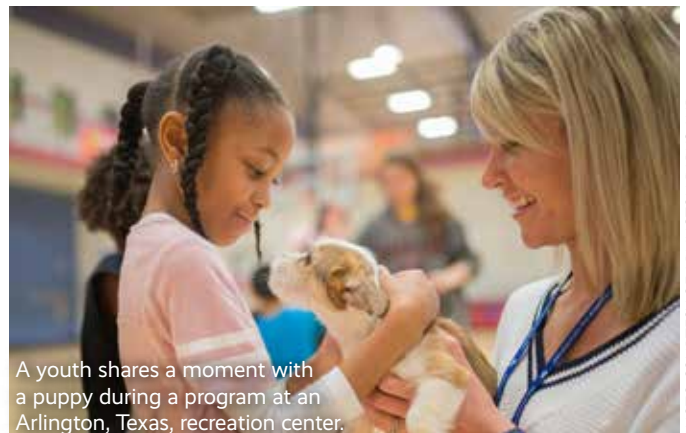
The most frequently cited reasons people gather at their local parks and recreation facilities are to be closer to nature and to be with family and friends (each reason cited by 47 percent of survey respondents). Being with friends and family resonates strongest with parents (58 percent), Gen Xers (54 percent), those living in the Midwest (52 percent) and millennials (49 percent).

Being in nature helps one manage stress levels. Forty-three percent of survey respondents report they take advantage of parks and other recreation opportunities as a way of taking a break from the day-to-day stresses of life. Parents are much more likely than non-parents to use park visits to de-stress (57 percent compared to 39 percent, respectively). Gen Xers (53 percent) and millennials (50 percent) are more likely than baby boomers (41 percent) and Gen Zers (31 percent) to use parks as places to find peace.

Health and wellness is a key component of park and recreation offerings. Opportunities to exercise or be physically fit at a local park or recreation facility are in abundance. Forty-three percent of respondents report “to exercise and be physically fit” as a key reason for visiting their local parks and recreation centers. Forty-eight percent of parents and baby boomers visit their parks and recreation facilities to exercise and be physically fit.

Additional reasons for visiting local parks and/or recreation facilities include:

- To experience excitement/adventure (cited by 24 percent of respondents)
- To connect with members of the community (18 percent)
- To learn a skill or craft (nine percent)
- To have someone care for children while the respondent is at work (five percent)

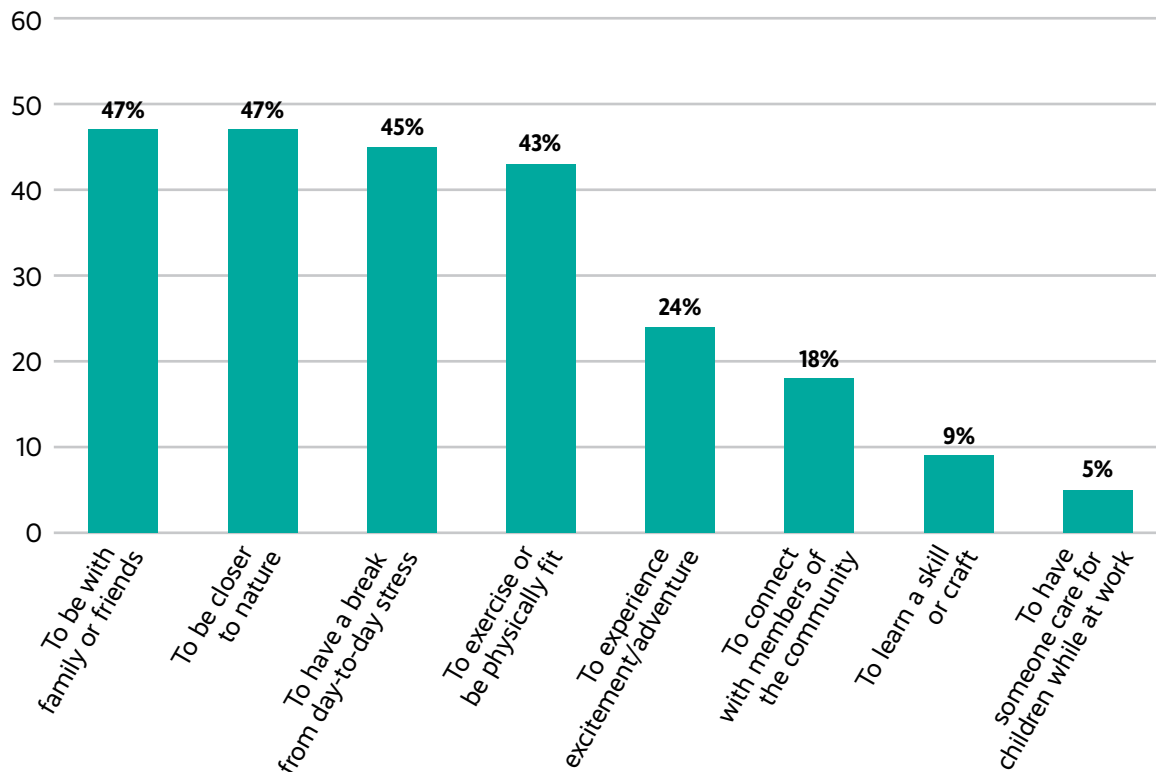


A youth shares a moment with a puppy during a program at an Arlington, Texas, recreation center.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARLINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION

KEY REASONS WHY WE GO TO PARKS: NATURE, FAMILY AND FRIENDS, RELAXATION, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

(Percent of Respondents Who Have Personally — or Have a Household Member Who Has — Visited a Local Park/Recreation Facility During the Past Year)



Parks and Recreation Is Essential

Parks and recreation transforms our cities, towns and counties into vibrant, healthy and resilient communities thanks to the tireless efforts of more than 10,000 agencies and more than 160,000 full-time park and recreation professionals across the United States. Guiding each of these agencies are NRPA's Three Pillars, which ensure that these agencies' efforts enrich every member of their communities.

The NRPA Three Pillars are:

- **Conservation:** Creating a nation of resilient and climate-ready communities through parks and recreation
- **Equity:** Striving for a future where everyone has fair and just access to quality parks and recreation
- **Health and Wellness:** Advancing community health and well-being through parks and recreation

People agree that NRPA's Three Pillars represent what they want as the guiding principles for their local park and recreation agency. Nearly equal shares of survey respondents view each pillar as a critical agency function.

- Seventy-two percent of respondents rate Conservation as either an "extremely" or "very" important area on which their local park and recreation agency should focus.
- Sixty-nine percent of respondents rate Equity as either an "extremely" or "very" important area on which their local park and recreation agency should focus.

- Sixty-nine percent of respondents rate Health and Wellness as either an “extremely” or “very” important area on which their local park and recreation agency should focus.

Robust support for NRPA’s Three Pillars is found in nearly every segment of the U.S. population.

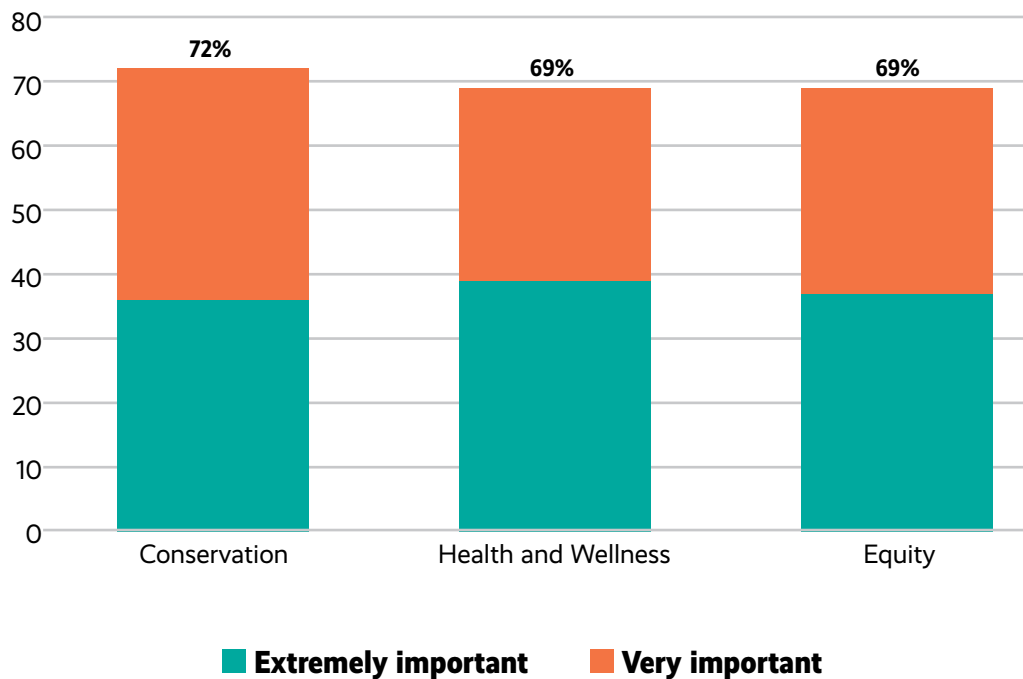
- **Millennials:** Seventy-two percent consider Health and Wellness, 74 percent view Conservation and 76 percent indicate Equity as important areas for park and recreation agencies.
- **Gen Xers:** Seventy-five percent consider Health and Wellness, 73 percent view Conservation and 72 percent indicate Equity as important areas for these agencies.
- **Baby boomers:** Sixty-eight percent consider Health and Wellness, 77 percent view Conservation and 71 percent indicate Equity as important areas for these agencies.
- **Those who identify as Hispanic:** Sixty-five percent consider Health and Wellness, 68 percent view Conservation and 69 percent indicate Equity as important areas for these agencies.
- **Parents:** Seventy-seven percent consider Health and Wellness, 79 percent view Conservation and 80 percent indicate Equity important areas for these agencies.

Even in a divisive political environment, support for the NRPA Three Pillars is not a partisan issue.

- **Democrats:** Health and Wellness (77 percent), Conservation (79 percent) and Equity (79 percent)
- **Republicans:** Health and Wellness (68 percent), Conservation (72 percent) and Equity (68 percent)

THE PUBLIC VIEWS THE NRPA THREE PILLARS AS IMPORTANT PARK AND RECREATION AGENCY PRIORITIES

(Percent of Respondents Indicating the Pillars Are Either “Extremely” or “Very” Important)



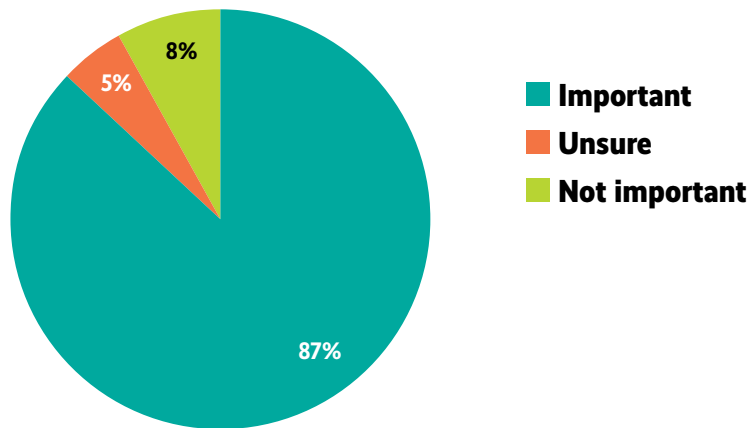
Parks and recreation is one of many functions of local cities, towns and counties — and it is a critical contributor to the quality of life in our communities. Further, local park and recreation agencies' responsibilities often overlap those of other local government departments, including public safety, education, social welfare, health services and economic development.

An overwhelming 87 percent of U.S. residents agree that parks and recreation is an important service provided by their local government. The robust support for parks and recreation as an important government function spans every segment of the population:

- Generations — millennials (89 percent), Gen Xers (90 percent) and baby boomers (89 percent)
- Race — those who identify as white (88 percent)
- Ethnicity — those who identify as Hispanic (87 percent)
- Household formation — households with children (94 percent)
- Political views — Democrats (92 percent) and Republicans (86 percent)
- Region — Northeast (88 percent), South (84 percent), Midwest (89 percent) and West (88 percent)
- Number of parks within walking distance — one park (87 percent), one or more parks (91 percent), two or more parks (94 percent) and no parks (80 percent)

THE PUBLIC AGREES THAT PARKS AND RECREATION IS AN IMPORTANT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE

(Percentage Distribution)

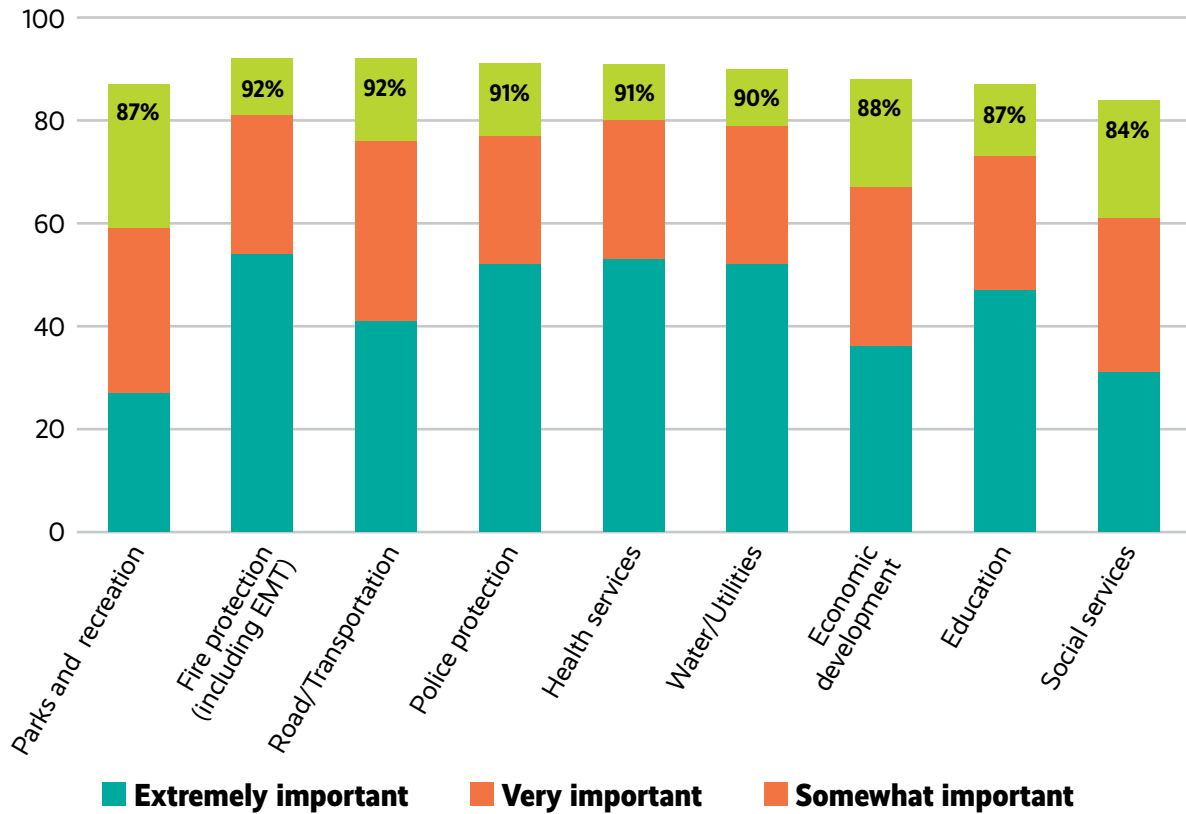


Members of the public place nearly the same level of importance on parks and recreation as they do on virtually every other major service delivered by their local government. Whereas 87 percent of survey respondents view parks and recreation as an important service provided by local government, other services compare favorably, including:

- Fire protection (including an emergency medical technician [EMT]) (cited by 92 percent of respondents)
- Roads/Transportation (92 percent)
- Health services (91 percent)
- Police protection (91 percent)
- Water/Utilities (90 percent)
- Economic development (88 percent)
- Education (87 percent)
- Social services (84 percent)

PEOPLE RATE PARKS AND RECREATION AS HIGHLY AS THEY DO OTHER MAJOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

(Percent of Respondents)



A child participates in a princess ballet class at Conejo Recreation and Park District's Hillcrest Center for the Arts in Thousand Oaks, California.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHIE HARRISON

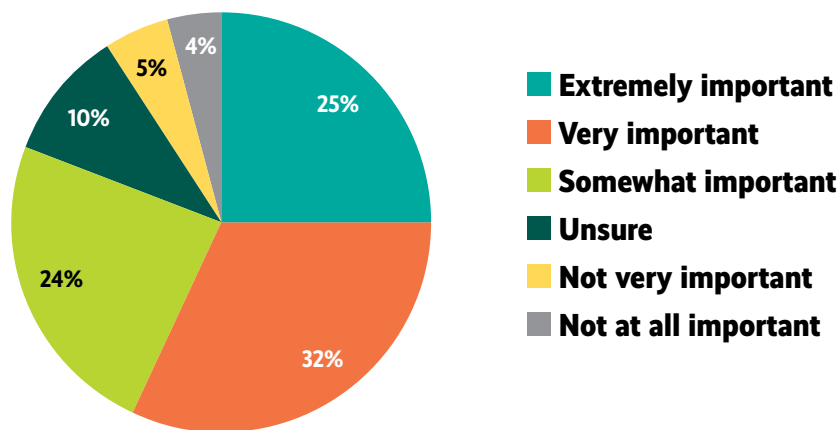
The United States is a diverse nation — diverse in its people and their lived experiences. We live in large cities, suburban enclaves and rural outposts. People live in warm climates, cold environments, arid lands and rainy places. Hence, the public’s needs and desires from parks and recreation vary greatly by location. What may work in one part of a city may not work in another part of town or in a rural county.

Acknowledging what works in one community may not work in another and creating a safe space for all residents to present their needs is vital in establishing lasting public involvement. Eighty percent of U.S. adults agree that park and recreation leaders should engage directly with their communities to deliver appropriate facilities and programs. Fifty-seven percent cite this as “extremely” or “very” important. Groups most likely to report this engagement being “extremely” or “very” important include:

- Those who are very physically active (68 percent)
- Parents (67 percent)
- Millennials (63 percent)

FOUR IN FIVE ADULTS AGREE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES TO ENGAGE WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES TO IDENTIFY NEEDS AND DESIRES

(Percentage Distribution)



Everyone deserves a great park. But as noted earlier in this report, 29 percent of people do not live within a walkable distance of a local park, playground, open space, community center or other recreation opportunity. This means approximately 100 million U.S. residents do not have nearby access to all the lifesaving and life-enhancing benefits that parks and recreation offer people. Removing any inequity in park access is critical to building strong, healthy and resilient communities. One critical step is greater and more sustainable funding of local park and recreation agencies.

Nearly nine in 10 people agree that it is important for local, state and federal governments to fund local park and recreation agencies sufficiently in order to ensure every member of the community has equitable access to amenities, infrastructure and programming. This includes 64 percent of survey respondents who agree that it is either “extremely” or “very” important to fund park and recreation agencies to ensure equitable access.

The support for park and recreation funding spans nearly every demographic group in the United States.

By generation:

- Millennials (89 percent)
- Gen Xers (89 percent)
- Baby boomers (88 percent)

By race/ethnicity:

- People who identify as Hispanic (87 percent)
- Non-white (80 percent)
- White (88 percent)

Household formation:

- Parents (94 percent)
- Non-parents (83 percent)

Political affiliation:

- Democrat (91 percent)
- Republican (85 percent)
- Independent (86 percent)

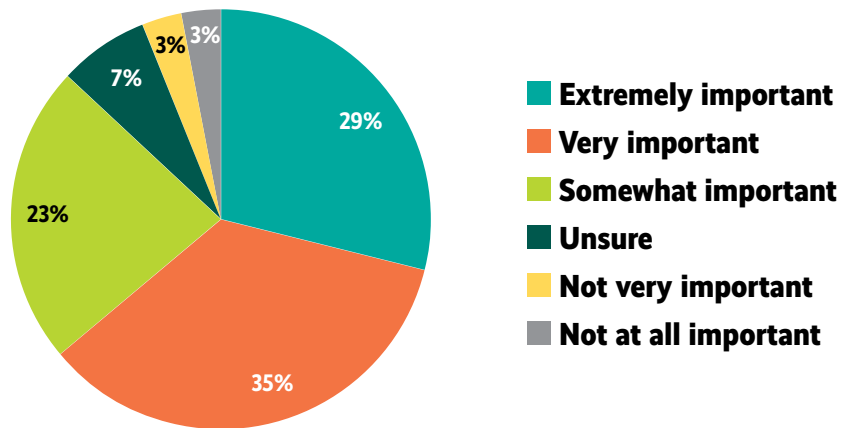


Runners participate in the 38th annual High Line Canal 10K/5K run in Denver, Colorado.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUTH SUBURBAN PARKS AND RECREATION

NEARLY NINE IN 10 PEOPLE AGREE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO FUND LOCAL PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES SUFFICIENTLY IN ORDER TO ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS

(Percentage Distribution)



Conclusions

PHOTO COURTESY OF HONOLULU DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION



Youth participate in the Summer Fun program at Crestview Community Park in Honolulu.

Parks and recreation is essential — a nearly unanimous sentiment held by survey respondents. Six out of seven people visited a local park and/or recreation facility at least once within the past year, and on average did so twice a month. Having nearby access to parks, trails and recreation amenities, along with relevant programming that meets the needs and desires of a community, drives greater usage of those facilities. In addition, people seek places to live that offer high-quality park and recreation amenities and programming.

Parks and recreation's success results from its vast offerings of parks, trail networks and other recreation facilities that deliver critical programs for every segment of a community. Each person's relationship with parks and recreation is unique. Some people flock to their local park to stay physically fit, meet with friends and family, or reconnect with nature. Others depend on their local park and recreation agency for indispensable services that improve their lives. These services include out-of-school time programs that provide after-school and summertime care for millions of children, programming that helps keep older adults active and healthy and other essential offerings that improve the lives of the most vulnerable community members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this also meant delivering vital emergency services, such as nutritious meals, testing for the virus and giving vaccinations.

The more than 10,000 local park and recreation agencies in the United States bring positive change to every member of communities across the nation thanks to their focus on health and wellness, equity, and conservation — as well as their ability to deliver effective solutions to the many challenges facing those communities. Indeed, parks and recreation is not a luxury, it is an indispensable part of the infrastructure in our cities, towns and counties.

The *2021 NRPA Engagement With Parks Report* makes clear this point: people place a high value on the programs and services that park and recreation agencies deliver to their local communities every day and strongly support their mission. The public's strong and broad-based support for parks and recreation solidifies the case made to local political leaders, stakeholders and the media for greater and more sustainable funding for this essential function.

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About NRPA

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

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

NRPA places immense importance on research and data to raise the status of parks and recreation 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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