2020-2024 PA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan:

Pennsylvania Local Park and Recreation Provider Survey

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020-2024 PA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: Pennsylvania Local Park and Recreation Provider Survey was designed to evaluate the opinions and experiences of those who provide or make decisions about local park and recreation services. A total of 1,092 respondents completed the web survey between April 2 and May 31, 2019, with 81.9% indicating that they represented a local or municipal government or agency. One-third (34.4%) were Elected Officials, one-quarter were Appointed Officials (28.6%), one-fifth were park and recreation or public works directors (19.1%), and the remaining 17.9% were some other type of position. A plurality of respondents represented populations of less than 5,000 individuals (44.1%), while 36.2% represented 5,000 to 24,999 people, and 19.7% represented 25,000 or more.

The largest benefits respondents perceived as being offered by their local governments or agencies were providing children with a safe place to play, making the community a more desirable place to live, and enhancing a sense of community. Providing opportunities for social interaction was the third-most valuable benefit in the 2014 iteration of this survey, but this slipped to number six in this year's survey. Generally, and consistent with the 2014 results, directors saw more value in the benefits provided than other respondents, as did respondents who served larger populations.

A majority of directors indicated that their agency provides outdoor natured-based programs(60.1%), but only 38.6% were Get Outdoors PA partners. Most directors indicated that they were not Get Outdoors PA partners because their agency has limited staff, resources, or knowledge to conduct outdoor recreation programming (53.1%), but one-quarter (28.4%) had never heard of Get Outdoors PA. An additional 38.8% of directors reported working with health care providers on health-related programming.

Looking at sustainable practices that directors believe they will use in their park systems over the next five years, more than three-fifths said that they were extremely likely to plant trees and streamside buffers (72.8%), utilize LED lighting (61.8%), and manage storm water run-off through open space (61.2%). Half of directors said that they were extremely likely to incorporate recycling and composting (53.8%) and to use rain gardens or plantings to retain water (53.8%). However, 18.2% said that they were not at all likely to use renewable energy sources in the next five years.

While the opioid crisis has had a substantial impact in Pennsylvania, 42.8% of directors indicated that opioids have not impacted their park or recreation services. An additional 40.4% reported finding drug paraphernalia in parks, and 25.9% have encountered drug use in restrooms or pavilions. A small portion of directors have developed substance abuse or awareness programs (10.2%) or new recreation programs for those with mental health and addiction issues (4.8%) in response to this crisis.

Playgrounds were, once again, identified as the highest priority for facility investment over the next five years, although they were followed closely behind by community or regional trail systems and

community or regional parks, which replaced neighborhood parks as a top priority. Overall, results were similar to the 2014 survey, but respondents indicated a higher level of priority for all items in the 2019 survey. In a repetition of the 2014 results, directors provided the highest levels of priority for facility investment, followed closely behind by Elected Officials, and then by Appointed Officials. Consistent with other results in this survey, respondents who supported large populations generally indicated higher levels of priority for facility investment.

In consideration of funding needs, directors reported higher levels of tax-supported funding increases for capital expenses than for operational expenses. Overall, fewer directors reported decreases in tax-supported funding in the 2019 survey than in the 2014 survey. Looking at overall funding priorities, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their top funding priority for their outdoor recreation and conservation efforts was to maintain existing park and recreation areas, with 52.0% of respondents selecting this item. The next-highest funding priority, when respondents were asked to select only one, was building walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas. However, when looking at the relative priority of all responses, building more greenways and trails and providing recreation programs at parks and recreation areas were seen as more important. Consistent with other topics, directors reported higher priorities for funding recreation and conservation efforts than Elected Officials and Appointed Officials, as did those respondents who supported larger populations. Overall, funding priorities for recreation and conservation efforts increased significantly between the 2014 and 2019 surveys.

Top maintenance and management challenges identified by respondents included creating new park and recreation facilities, creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity, and maintaining existing local parks, although creating new park and recreation facilities was identified by slightly fewer respondents as a challenge in 2019 than in 2014. In addition, half of respondents identified providing inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities as being a significant or major challenge, which was significantly higher than those reporting this challenge in 2014. Compared to 2019, fewer respondents identified lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities as a significant or major challenge, with 40.3% citing this particular problem.

Looking at emerging trends, the top challenges identified by respondents included responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities, providing park and recreation facilities or services that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation, improving public health through outdoor recreation, and adapting to an aging population, all of which were mentioned by half of respondents. The proportion of respondents concerned about adapting to an aging population more than doubled from 2014 to 2019, indicating a significant shift in the five-year period.

When given the opportunity to share individual comments, respondents overwhelmingly mentioned funding concerns. Other common themes included trails, grants, programming, maintenance concerns, and lack of space.

INTRODUCTION

The 2020-2024 PA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: Pennsylvania Local Park and Recreation Provider Survey was conducted by the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Penn State Harrisburg at the request of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The survey was designed to evaluate the opinions and experiences of those who provide or make decisions about local park and recreation services.

At the conclusion of the data collection period, a total of 1,092 respondents had completed the web survey. All data were collected between April 2 and May 31, 2019.

Data Analysis Notes

The following notes should be taken into account when reviewing the final dataset:

1. Because the survey was open-access and is not a random sample, the final dataset is considered to be representative only of the respondents who chose to participate.
2. While results are included from the 2014 iteration of the survey for comparison purposes, all data are from the 2019 administration of the survey unless otherwise indicated.
3. Percentages may not total to 100% due to the exclusion of 'Don't know' responses.
4. See Appendix A of the report for a map and list of the regions.
5. See Appendix B for the survey instrument used in data collection.

METHODOLOGY

Institutional Review Board

The study protocol and survey instrument were submitted to Penn State University's Office for Research Protections and were subsequently approved as non-research under study number 00011522 by Penn State University's Office for Research Protections.

Instrument Development

During February and March 2019, the CSR project team worked with DCNR to develop and refine a survey instrument for collecting data from Pennsylvania's park and recreation providers. The survey instrument was adapted from a previous survey that was administered in 2014. Certain series of questions were only administered to those who identified as park and recreation directors or coordinators, public works directors, or park superintendents.

The instrument was then programmed using Qualtrics web survey software. Qualtrics' online survey platform allows for complex question patterns and automatic skipping when appropriate to create a seamless flow from one question to the next for respondents.

Data Collection

Surveys were self-administered through Qualtrics Online Survey Platform. Survey responses were collected through CSR's Qualtrics web survey account between April 2 and May 31, 2019. Distribution of the survey link was the responsibility of DCNR. DCNR partnered with various organizations to share the survey link through various distribution lists. These organizations included: County Commissions Association of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, Pennsylvania Municipal League, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, and Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society. Four different populations were targeted in data collection: Appointed Officials, Elected Officials, Park and Recreation and Public Works Directors, and County Planners. Due to the open access nature of this survey, the sample is not considered to be randomly selected; consequently, results are considered to be representative only of those who chose to participate.

Survey Response

Due to the open access nature of the survey, the total number of invited respondents is unknown. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate a response rate for this survey.

Data Preparation and Analysis Notes

All completed survey data were extracted from Qualtrics into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data were verified for accuracy of variable coding, and verbatim text was edited and re-coded into additional categories for analysis purposes before final review by the senior staff of the Center for Survey Research. It should be noted that respondents who indicated that their position was something other than the list of options provided were retained in the survey results; however, future surveys should include an option allowing respondents to specify their positions. A final survey dataset was created in SPSS for Windows version 25.0.

Study Limitations

Because the survey was open access, the total number of invited respondents is unknown. In addition, this non-random sampling method prevents the use of traditional statistical methods, meaning that a margin of error cannot be calculated for the survey. The results are only representative of those who chose to participate. Finally, CSR did not receive a completed survey from every possible respondent. Because the answers from these non-respondents could be different from those who did participate, non-response bias exists.

RESULTS

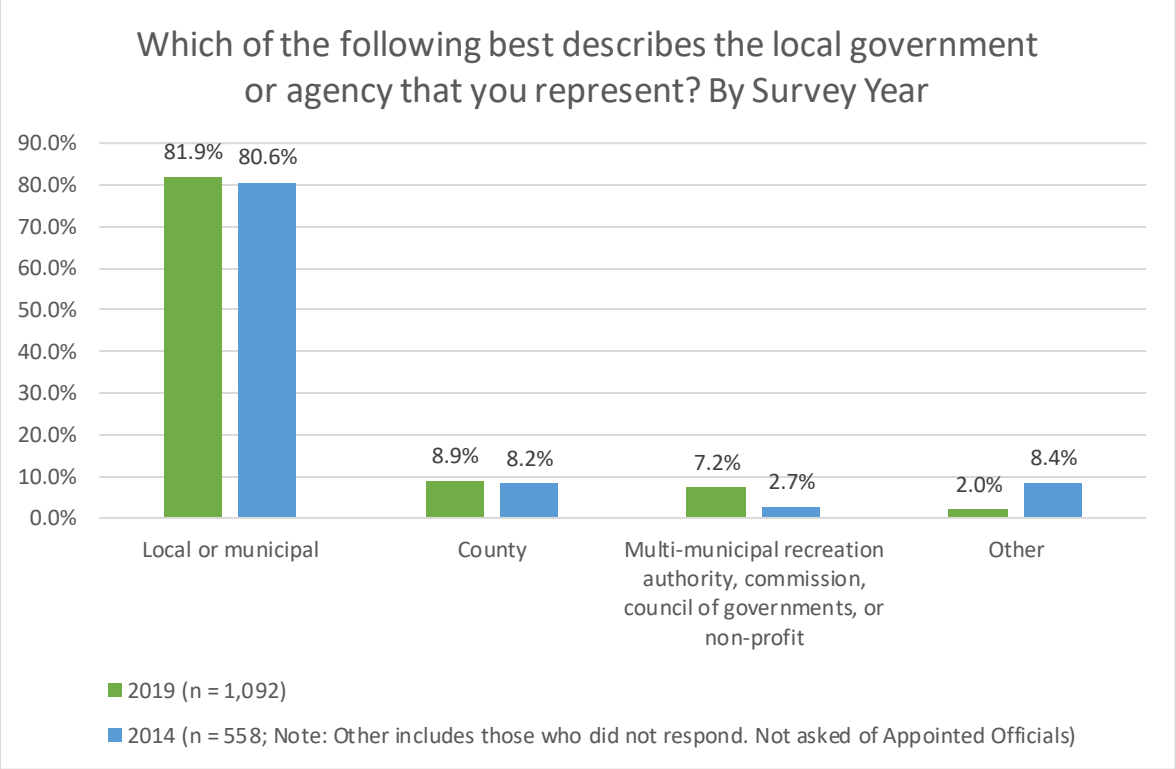
Respondent Profile

In total, 1,092 respondents provided data to at least some questions in the survey. A series of questions was asked to develop a profile of the respondents completing the survey. The following section describes the government or agency that the respondents represented, the job description of the respondents, geographic representation, and the sizes of populations served by the respondents.

Government or Agency Represented

In terms of the types of municipalities or agencies represented, the results were very similar to the 2014 survey administration. About one-in-five (81.9%; $n = 1,092$) respondents represented a local or municipal government or agency, as compared to 80.6% ($n = 558$) in 2014. In addition, 8.9% in the current survey represented a county, 7.2% came from a multi-municipal recreation authority, commission, council of governments, or non-profit; and 2.0% said Other (as compared to 8.2%, 2.7%, and 8.4%, respectively, in 2014), as seen in the next figure. It should be noted that, in 2014, this question was not asked of Appointed Officials, which accounts for the drastic difference in sample size. In addition, the Other response in 2014 included those who did not respond to the question. Of those who identified as representing a local or municipal government or agency ($n = 894$), 55.4% represented a township, 38.9% represented a borough, and 5.7% represented a city.

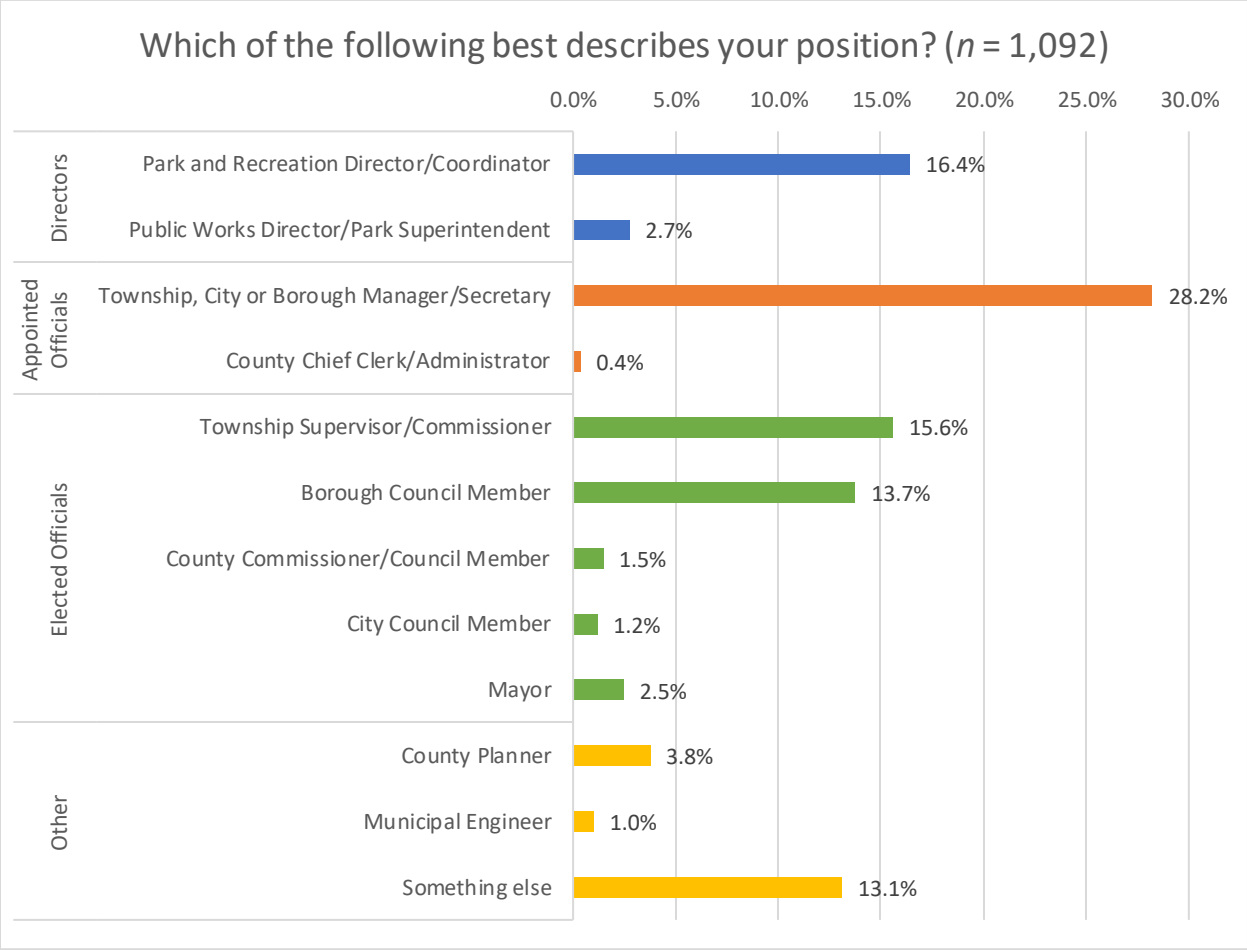
Figure 1. Government or Agency Represented, by Survey Year



Respondent Position Descriptions

Respondents were then asked to select the position that best-related to their role in completing the survey. The most-common positions represented in the survey were township, city, or borough managers/secretaries (28.2%; *n* = 1,092), park and recreation directors/coordinators (16.4%), township supervisors/coordinators (15.6%), and borough council members (13.7%). A few respondents identified as county planners (3.8%), public works directors/park superintendents (2.7%), mayors (2.5%), county commissioners/council members (1.5%), city council members (1.2%), municipal engineers (1.0%), and county chief clerks/administrators (0.4%). It should also be noted that 13.1% identified as something else, as seen in the next figure. All respondents selecting Something else were retained in the survey results, but future surveys should include an option allowing respondents to specify their positions.

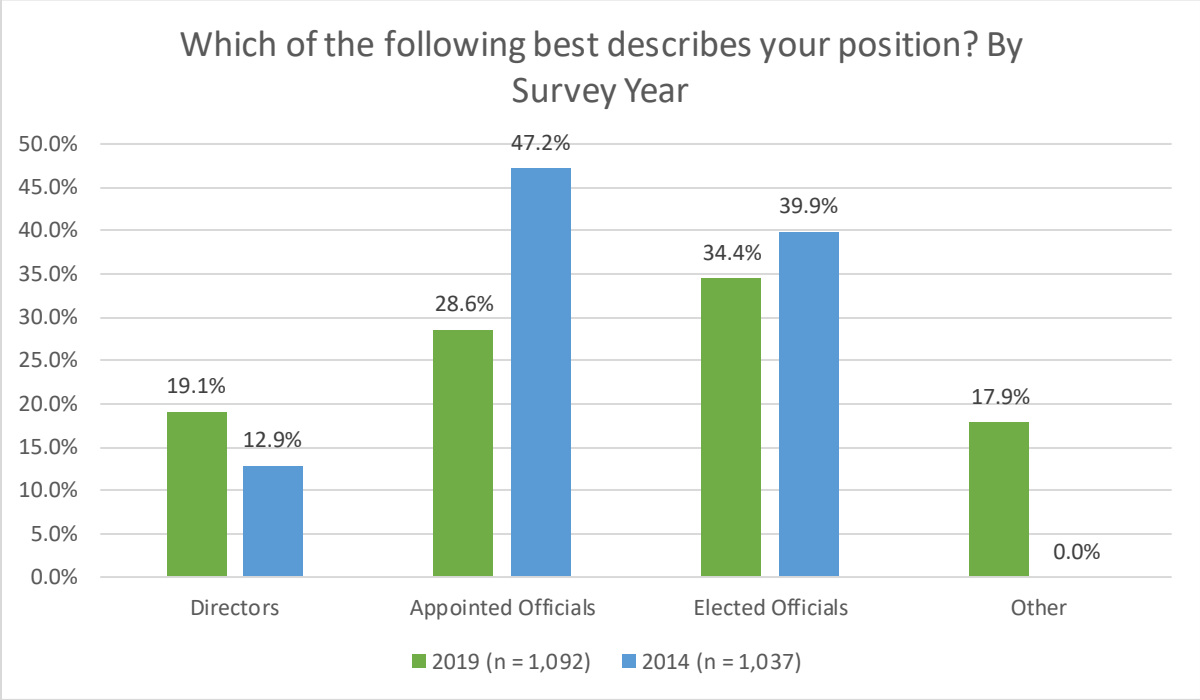
Figure 2. Respondent Position Descriptions



Since more categories were available for respondents in 2019 as compared to 2014, a direct comparison of results is difficult. In this survey, 19.1% of respondents (*n* = 1,092) identified as a Director (park and recreation director/coordinator or public works director/park superintendent), as compared to 12.9% (*n* = 1,037) in 2014. In this year's survey, 28.6% of respondents were categorized as Appointed Officials (township, city or borough manager/secretary or county chief

clerk/administrator), as compared to 47.2% in 2014. About one-third (34.4%) were Elected Officials in this iteration (township supervisor/commissioner, borough council member, county commission/council member, city council member, or mayor), compared to 39.9% in 2014. Finally, 17.9% were categorized as Other (county planner, municipal engineer, or something else), as seen in the next figure; these categories were not available in 2014.

Figure 3. Respondent Position Descriptions, by Survey Year



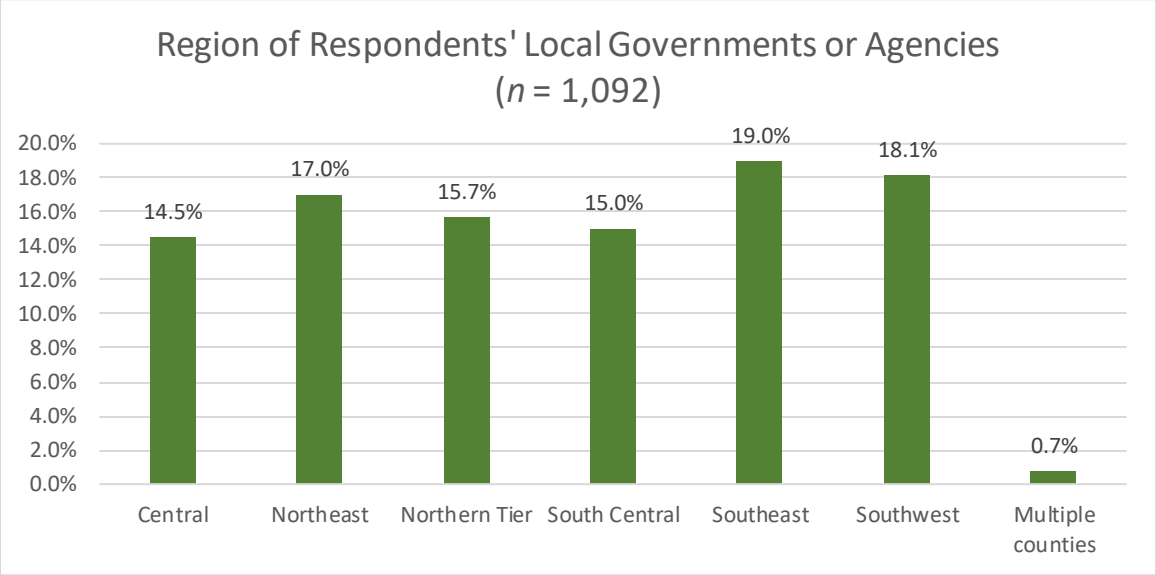
Nearly all Appointed Officials (97.8%; *n* = 312) and most Elected Officials (93.4%; *n* = 376) represented a local or municipal government, while a smaller proportion of directors (73.7%; *n* = 209) and those with some Other position (43.1%; *n* = 195) said the same, as seen in the next table.

Table 1. Local Government or Agency Represented, by Position Type

Which of the following best describes the local government or agency that you represent? By Position type								
	Directors		Appointed Officials		Elected Officials		Other	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Local or municipal	154	73.7%	305	97.8%	351	93.4%	84	43.1%
County	23	11.0%	4	1.3%	15	4.0%	55	28.2%
Multi-municipal recreation authority, commission, council of governments, or non-profit	30	14.4%	0	0.0%	6	1.6%	43	22.1%
Other	2	1.0%	3	1.0%	4	1.1%	13	6.7%
Total	**209**	**100.0%**	**312**	**100.0%**	**376**	**100.0%**	**195**	**100.0%**

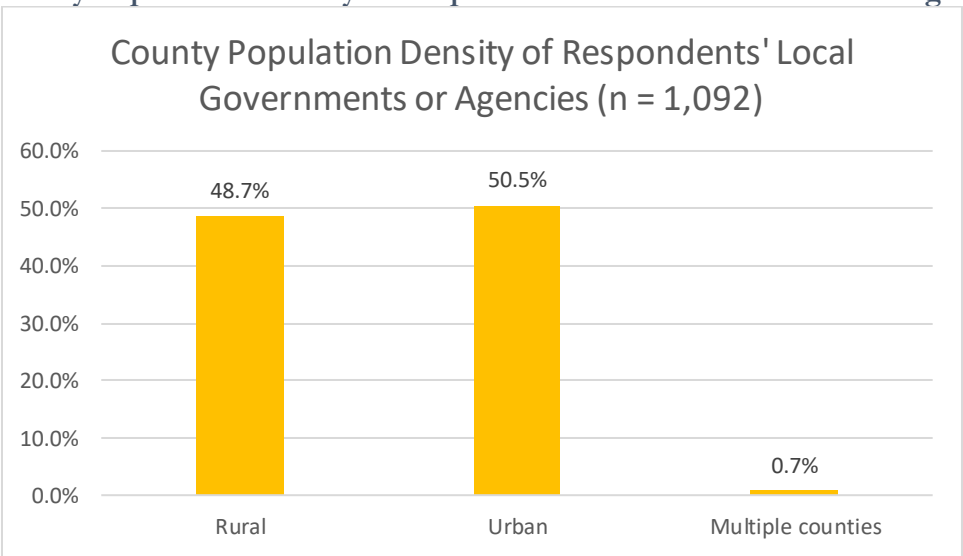
Looking at geographic representation, respondents were fairly evenly distributed across Pennsylvania's regions, with nearly equal numbers of respondents representing the Central (14.5%; *n* = 1,092), Northeast (17.0%), Northern Tier (15.7%), South Central (15.0%), Southeast (19.0%), and Southwest (18.1%) regions. In addition, eight respondents (0.7%) indicated that they represented more than one county, as seen in the next figure. Responses were unable to be compared to the 2014 results due to the use of different regions in the two surveys. For a map and list of the survey regions by county, see Appendix A.

Figure 4. Region of Respondents' Local Governments or Agencies



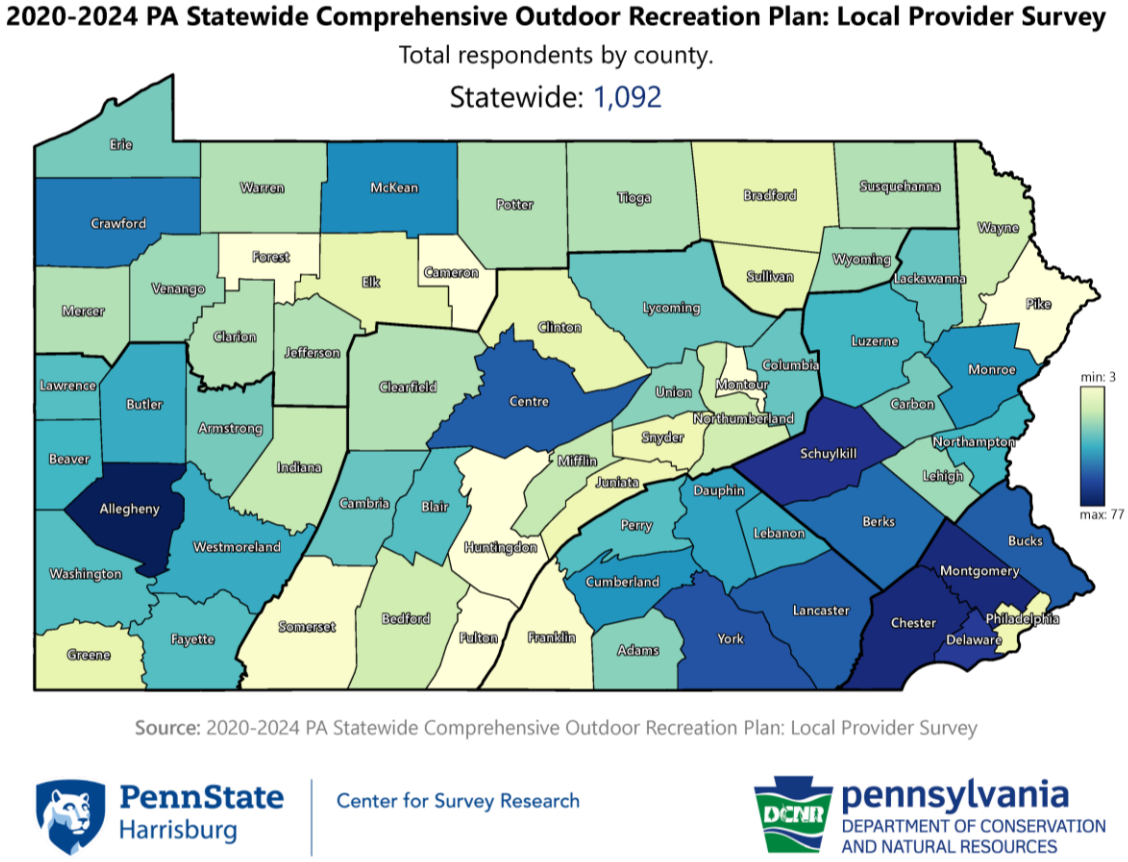
Respondents' local governments or agencies were nearly evenly divided between those located in urban counties (50.5%; *n* = 1,092) and rural counties (48.7%), as seen in the next figure.

Figure 5. County Population Density of Respondents' Local Governments or Agencies



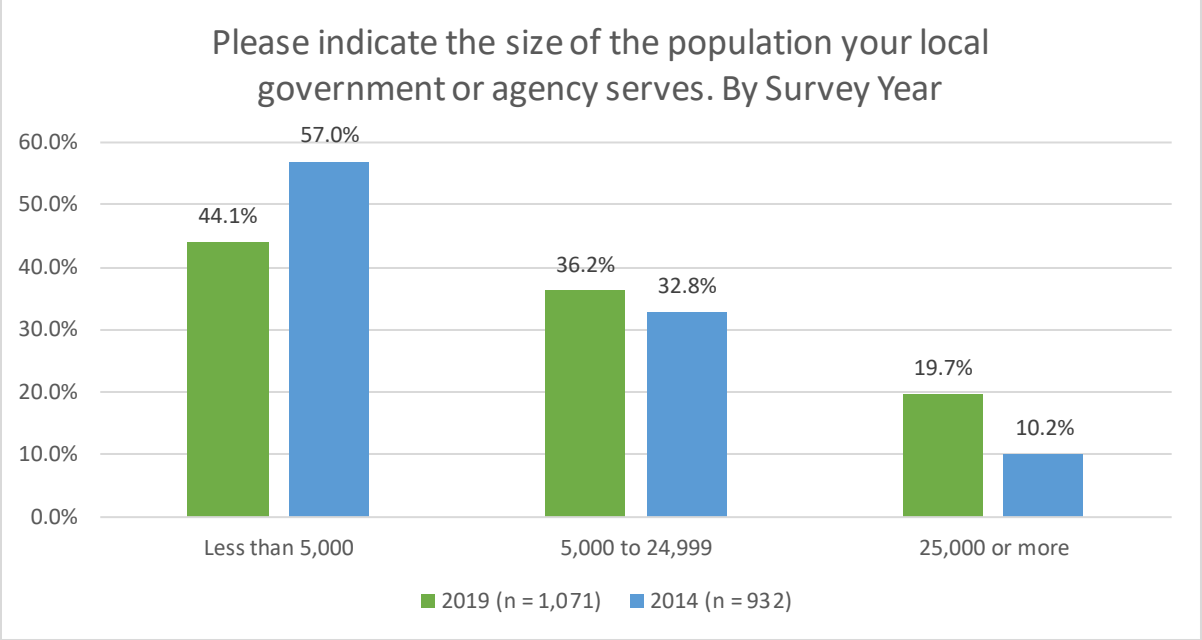
The number of respondents per county ranged from three in Cameron, Forest, Fulton, Huntingdon, Montour, and Pike counties to 77 in Allegheny county, as seen in the next map. Darker colors indicate a higher proportion of survey respondents that worked in the specified county.

Figure 6. Total Respondents by County



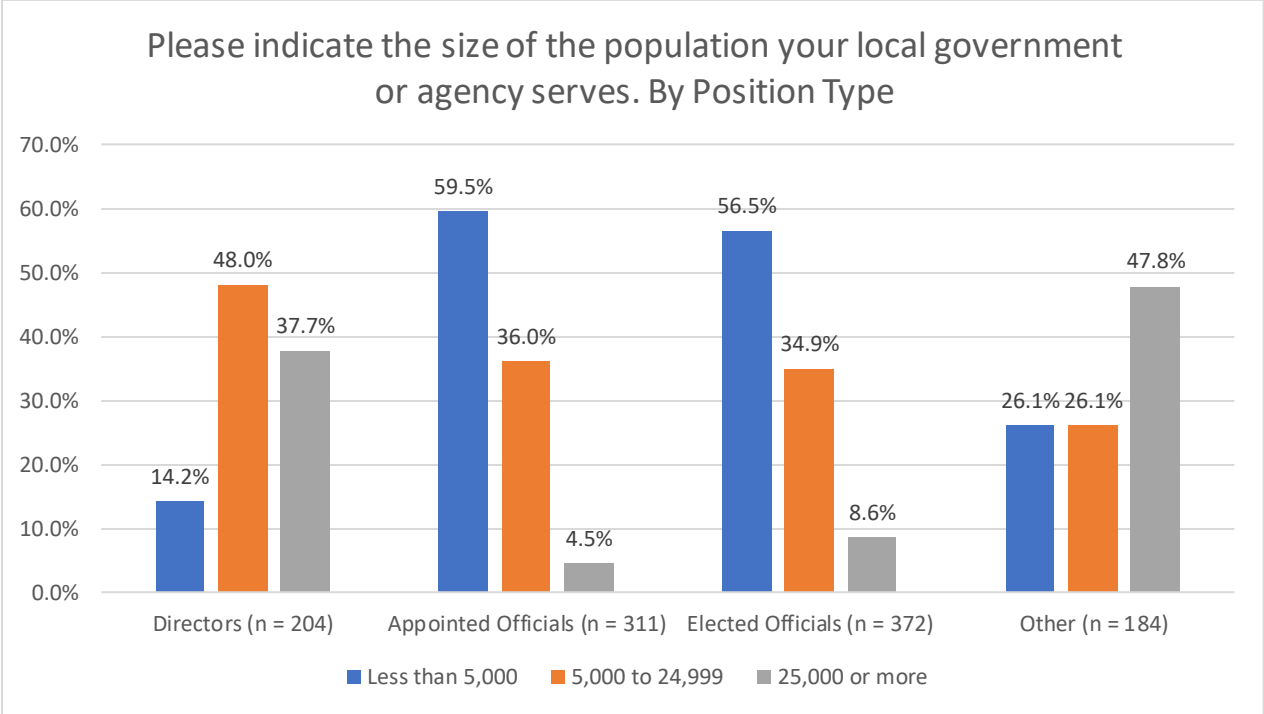
The 2019 sample skewed toward slightly larger populations served than the 2014 sample. In this year's survey, nearly one-in-five (19.7%; $n = 1,071$) responses came from a respondent whose local government or agency served a population of 25,000 people more, as compared to just 10.2% of those from the 2014 survey. In comparison, 44.1% of the 2019 respondents served a population of less than 5,000, compared to 57.0% in 2014, as seen in the next figure. About one-quarter of all of the respondents in this year's survey (26.7%) represented a population of less than 2,500 individuals; however, this level of detail was not available for comparison in the 2014 iteration. Looking at responses from those who represented population sizes of 25,000 or more, 9.8% of all respondents represented populations of 25,000 to 49,999, 4.5% had populations of 50,000 to 99,999, and 5.4% had populations of 100,000 or more.

Figure 7. Population Size Served, by Survey Year



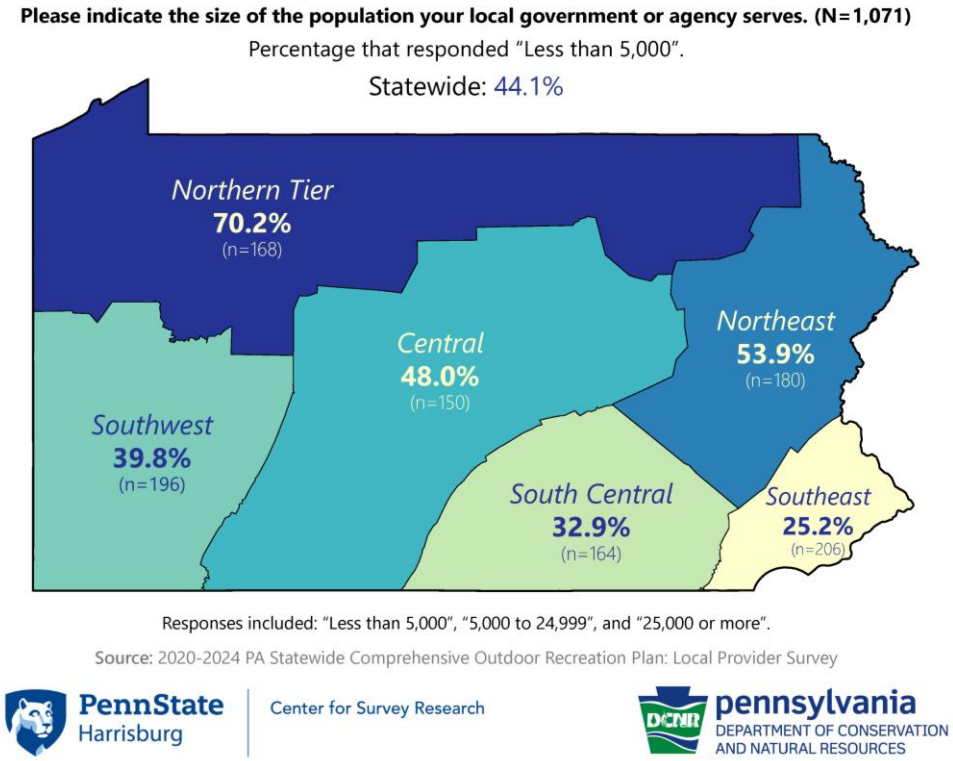
Respondents who identified as park and recreation or public works directors tended to serve larger populations. Just 14.2% of Directors (n = 204) served a population of less than 5,000, as compared to 59.5% of Appointed Officials (n = 311), 56.5% of Elected Officials (n = 372), and 26.1% of those with some Other position (n = 184). Nearly half of directors (48.0%) served a population of 5,000 to 24,999, and 37.7% served a population of 25,000 or more, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 8. Population Size Served, by Position Type



Regions with respondents who indicated that they served populations of less than 5,000 ranged from lows of 25.2% (n = 206) in the Southeast region and 32.9% (n = 164) in the South Central region to highs of 70.2% (n = 168) in the Northern Tier region and 53.9% (n = 180) in the Northeast region, as seen in the next map. Darker colors represent a higher proportion of respondents that served Less than 5,000 people in the specified region.

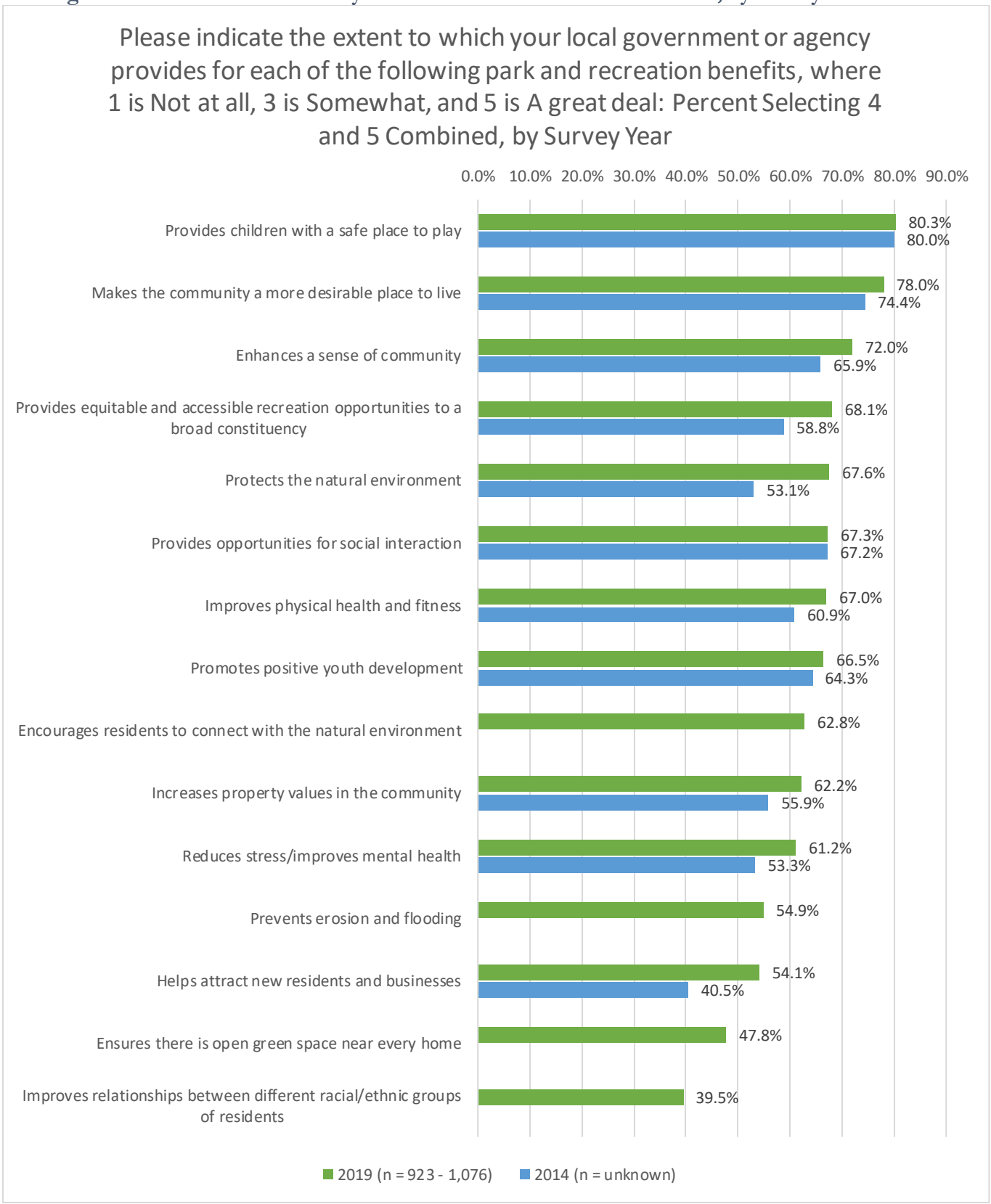
Figure 9. Population Size Served, by Region



Benefits Delivered by Local Park and Recreation Services

Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent to which their local government or agency provides for a number of park and recreation benefits on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was Not at all, 3 was Somewhat, and 5 was A great deal. Choices of 4 and 5 were then combined to provide an indication of the proportion of respondents indicating a high extent of benefit provision by the local government or agency. About four-fifths of respondents (n = 923 – 1,076) selected scores of 4 or 5 for Provides children with a safe place to play (80.3%) and Makes the community a more desirable place to live (78.0%). In addition, 72.0% of respondents selected 4 or 5 for Enhances a sense of community. Less than half of respondents provided high scores for Ensures there is open green space near every home (47.8%) and Improves relationships between different racial/ethnic groups of residents (39.5%). Results were similar to the 2014 survey (n = unknown); the largest differences were seen in: Protects the natural environment (2019 = 67.6%; 2014 = 53.1%), Helps attract new residents and businesses (2019 = 54.1%; 2014 = 40.5%), and Provides equitable and accessible recreation opportunities to a broad constituency (2019 = 68.1%; 2014 = 58.8%), as seen in the next figure. Four items have no data for 2014, as these items were not asked in the 2014 survey.

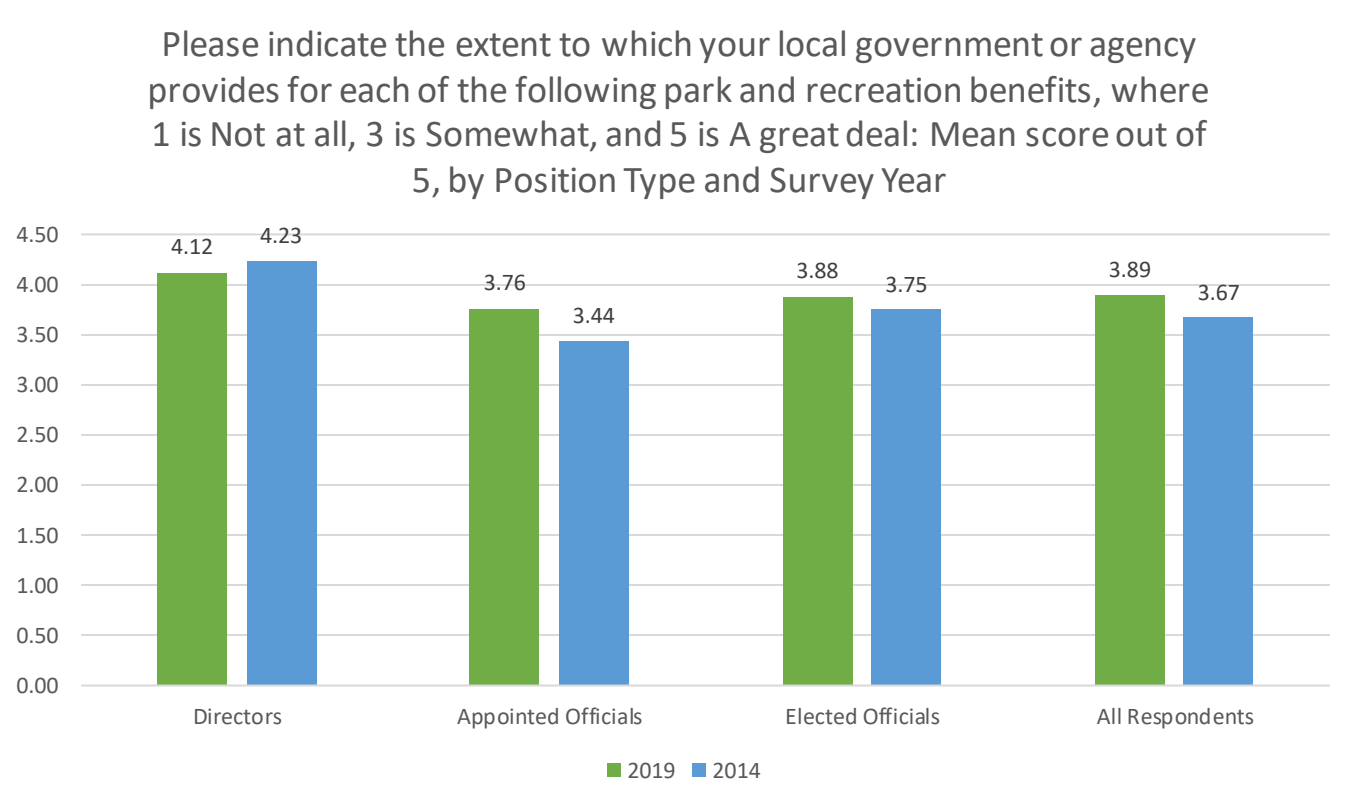
Figure 10. Benefits Delivered by Local Park and Recreation Services, by Survey Year



Scores were also averaged on a scale of 1 to 5 to develop an overall mean assessment of the extent to which local governments or agencies provided for the various park and recreation benefits mentioned. It should be noted that the overall mean score for all items was 3.77 (n = 923 - 1,076); however, for comparisons purposes, the mean score for items that appeared in both the 2014 and 2019 was 3.89. Since items that appeared in 2019 but not 2014 were lower on average, the following discussion ignores those scores when looking at the overall means. The 2019 mean of 3.89 was higher, overall, than the mean score of 3.67 (n = unknown) from 2014.

The mean score for Directors actually decreased slightly from 4.23 (n = unknown in 2014) to 4.12 (n = 193 – 208 in 2019), while the scores for Appointed Officials increased significantly from 3.44 in 2014 (n = unknown) to 3.76 in 2019 (n = 272 – 308). Scores for Elected Officials increased slightly, averaging 3.75 in 2014 (n = unknown) and 3.88 in 2019 (n = 337 – 369), as seen in the next figure. We can conclude that the higher mean score across all items can be attributed to the higher mean scores from Appointed Officials; although it is offset slightly by the lower mean scores from Directors. It is difficult to determine whether the higher mean scores from Appointed Officials is due to a change in attitudes or experiences or to a difference in the final respondent sample.

Figure 11. Benefits Delivered by Local Park and Recreation Services, Overall Means by Position Type and Survey Year



Looking at individual items, mean scores ranged from a low of 3.18 out of 5 for Improves relationships between different racial/ethnic groups of residents to 4.22 for Provides children with a safe place to play. Generally, average scores followed a similar pattern to the scores found in 2014, with a few exceptions. First, overall mean scores were higher, as mentioned previously. Second, the Protects the natural environment item increased from a mean of 3.49 in 2014 to a mean of 3.91 in 2019. The Helps attract new residents and businesses score also increased from 3.20 in 2014 to 3.54 in 2019. These scores significantly out-performed the overall average mean increases that were seen across all items. No items decreased in overall score from 2014 to 2019, as seen in the next figure. Four items from the figure have no data for 2014, as these items were not asked in the 2014 survey.

The tables that follow display the mean scores for the extent to which local governments or agencies provide for various park and recreation benefits by position type of the respondent and population size served of the respondent's local government or agency. Generally, and consistent with the 2014 results, Directors provided higher mean scores for each item (Mean = 3.98 out of 5; n = 193 - 208) than Appointed Officials (Mean = 3.65; n = 272 - 308), Elected Officials (Mean = 3.77; n = 337 - 369), and those with some Other position (Mean = 3.74; n = 171 - 193). For most items, Appointed Officials and Elected Officials provided similar scores. However, Elected Officials provided slightly higher scores than Appointed Officials for Protects the natural environment (Mean = 3.96 versus 3.77, respectively), Prevents erosion and flooding (Mean = 3.55 versus 3.37), Increases property value in the community (Mean = 3.74 versus 3.56), and Provides equitable and accessible recreation opportunities to a broad constituency (Mean = 3.87 versus 3.71).

Looking at the responses by the size of population served by the respondent's local government or agency, those representing populations of less than 5,000 had lower mean scores overall (Mean = 3.54 out of 5; n = 404 - 462) than those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (Mean = 3.95; n = 357 – 387), and 25,000 or more (Mean = 3.91; n = 194 – 209). However, it should be noted that Directors were more likely to serve larger populations. Generally, those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999 provided similar responses to those serving populations of 25,000 or more, with the exception of one item, Provides children with a safe place to play, which received a mean score of 4.47 for those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999 and a mean of 4.01 for those serving populations of 25,000 or more. The top item for larger populations of 25,000 or more was Makes the community a more desirable place to live, which is notably different from the top item indicated by smaller communities.

Figure 12. Benefits Delivered by Local Park and Recreation Services, Means by Survey Year

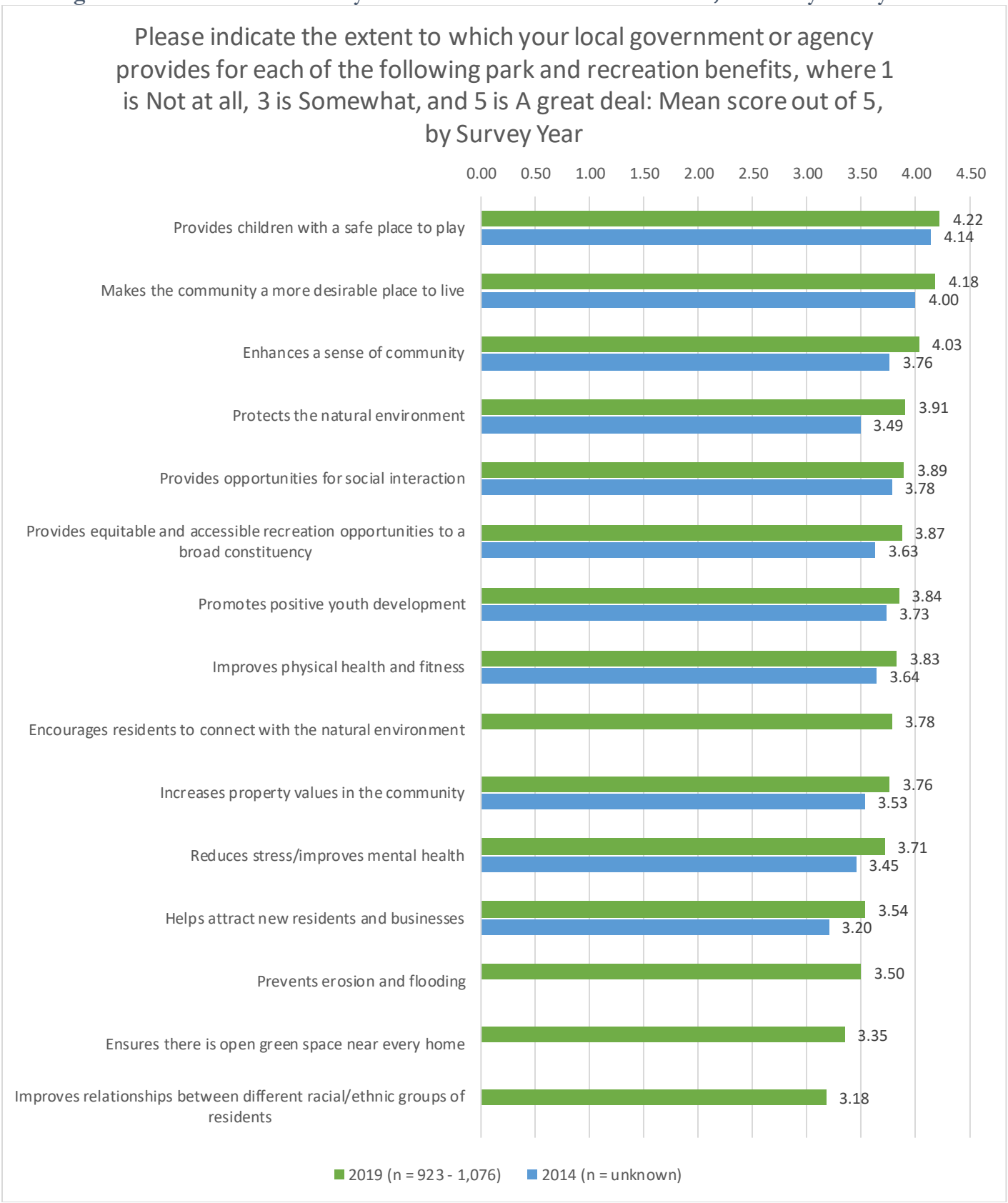


Table 2. Benefits Delivered by Local Park and Recreation Services, Means by Position Type

Please indicate the extent to which your local government or agency provides for each of the following park and recreation benefits on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Not at all, 3 is Somewhat, and 5 is A great deal: Mean score out of 5, by Position Type				
	Directors (*n* = 193 - 208)	**Appointed Officials (*n* = 272 - 308)**	**Elected Officials (*n* = 337 - 369)**	**Other (*n* = 171 - 193)**
Provides children with a safe place to play	4.47	4.22	4.25	3.92
Makes the community a more desirable place to live	4.35	4.02	4.17	4.30
Provides opportunities for social interaction	4.19	3.79	3.87	3.79
Enhances a sense of community	4.19	3.92	4.03	4.04
Promotes positive youth development	4.15	3.74	3.85	3.67
Improves physical health and fitness	4.06	3.71	3.78	3.85
Provides equitable and accessible recreation opportunities to a broad constituency	4.09	3.71	3.87	3.89
Increases property values in the community	4.07	3.56	3.74	3.79
Protects the natural environment	4.01	3.77	3.96	3.90
Reduces stress/improves mental health	4.00	3.58	3.69	3.64
Helps attract new residents and businesses	3.75	3.36	3.50	3.64
Prevents erosion and flooding	3.61	3.37	3.55	3.49
Encourages residents to connect with the natural environment	3.87	3.64	3.77	3.92
Ensures there is open green space near every home	3.47	3.27	3.36	3.31
Improves relationships between different racial/ethnic groups of residents	3.44	3.10	3.17	3.00

Table 3. Benefits Delivered by Local Park and Recreation Services, Means by Population Size Served

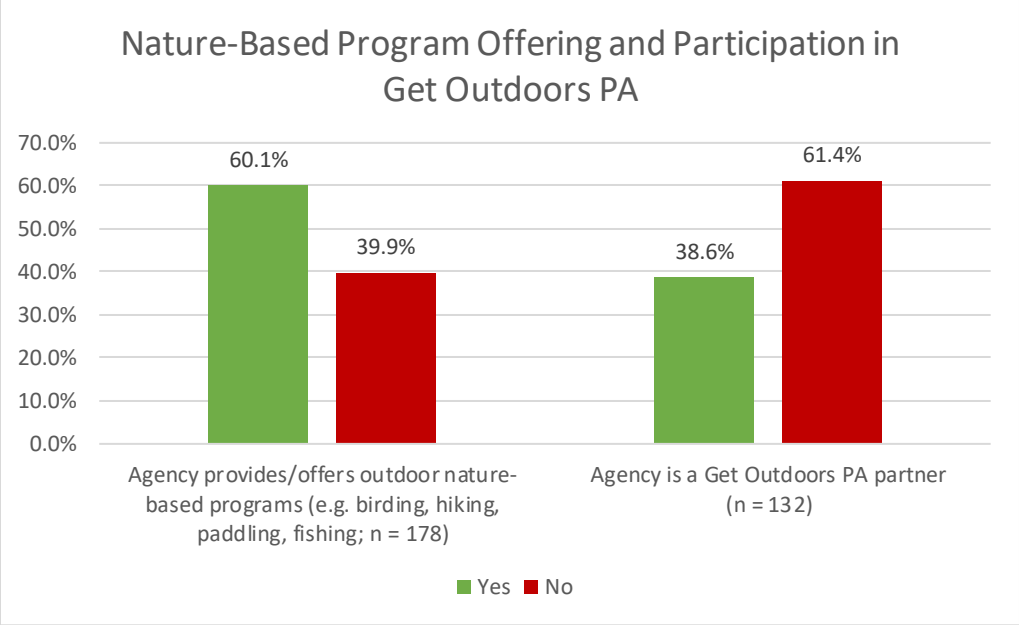
Please indicate the extent to which your local government or agency provides for each of the following park and recreation benefits on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Not at all, 3 is Somewhat, and 5 is A great deal: Mean score out of 5, by Population Size Served			
	Less than 5,000 (*n* = 404 - 462)	**5,000 to 24,999 (*n* = 357 - 387)**	**25,000 or more (*n* = 194 - 209)**
Provides children with a safe place to play	4.10	4.47	4.01
Makes the community a more desirable place to live	3.94	4.35	4.38
Provides opportunities for social interaction	3.69	4.08	4.00
Enhances a sense of community	3.84	4.19	4.13
Promotes positive youth development	3.61	4.03	3.95
Improves physical health and fitness	3.55	4.03	4.00
Provides equitable and accessible recreation opportunities to a broad constituency	3.64	4.04	4.05
Increases property values in the community	3.45	3.97	4.04
Protects the natural environment	3.76	4.06	3.91
Reduces stress/improves mental health	3.49	3.88	3.86
Helps attract new residents and businesses	3.18	3.72	3.93
Prevents erosion and flooding	3.28	3.71	3.58
Encourages residents to connect with the natural environment	3.54	3.95	3.97
Ensures there is open green space near every home	3.08	3.55	3.52
Improves relationships between different racial/ethnic groups of residents	3.01	3.30	3.25

The following questions about Outdoor Programming, Meal Service Programs, Sustainable Practices, and the Opioid Impact were asked only of Park and Recreation Directors and Public Works Directors.

Outdoor Programming

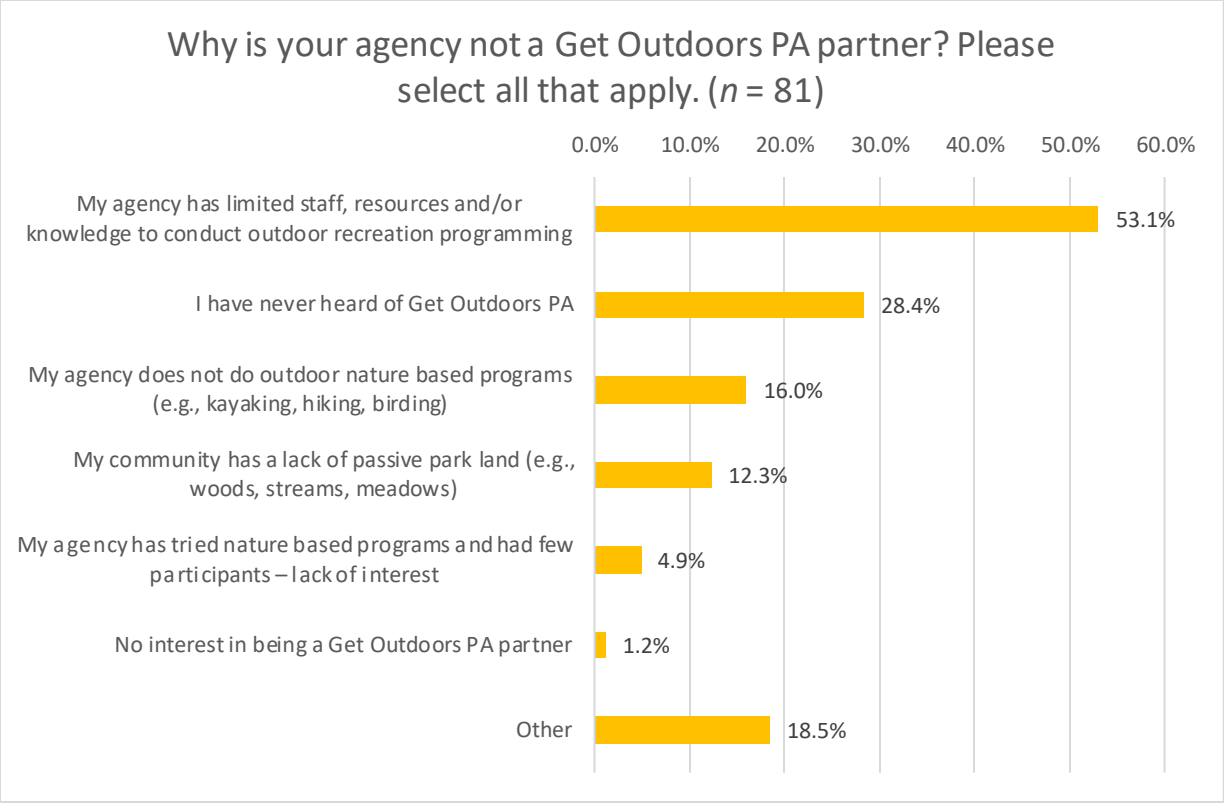
Respondents who identified as a park and recreation director or public works director were then asked a series of questions about programming offered by their agency. First, Directors were asked whether their agency provided or offered outdoor nature-based programs, such as birding, hiking, paddling, or fishing, and whether their agency was a Get Outdoors PA partner. About three-fifths (60.1%; *n* = 178) reported offering outdoor nature-based programs, but just 38.6% (*n* = 132) indicated that they were Get Outdoors PA partners, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 13. Nature-Based Program Participation



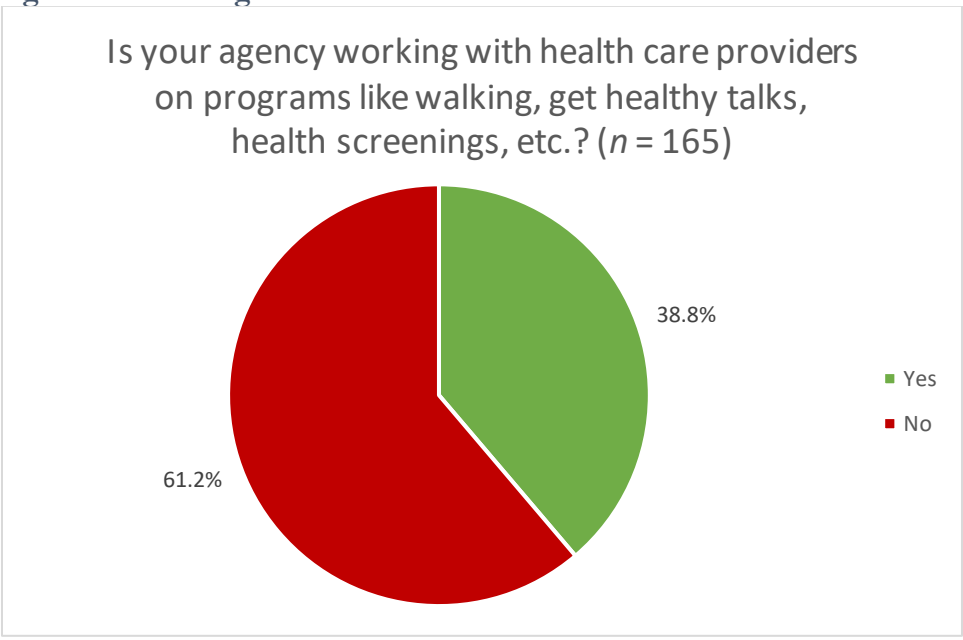
Respondents who indicated that their agencies were not Get Outdoors PA partners were then asked why their agencies were not a Get Outdoors PA partner. Respondents were able to select all responses that applied to their agency. About half (53.1%; *n* = 81) pointed to having limited staff, resources, or knowledge to conduct outdoor recreation programming, and about one-fourth (28.4%) said that they had never heard of Get Outdoors PA. The remaining respondents said that their agencies do not do outdoor nature-based programs (16.0%), their communities lack passive park land (12.3%), or their agencies have tried nature-based programs and had few participants (4.9%). Just 1.2% said that they had no interest in being a Get Outdoors PA partner, and 18.5% selected Other, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 14. Reason for Not Participating in Get Outdoors PA



Directors were then asked whether their agency was working with health care providers on programs like walking, get-healthy talks, or health screenings, and 38.8% ($n = 165$) indicated that they were, as seen in the next figure.

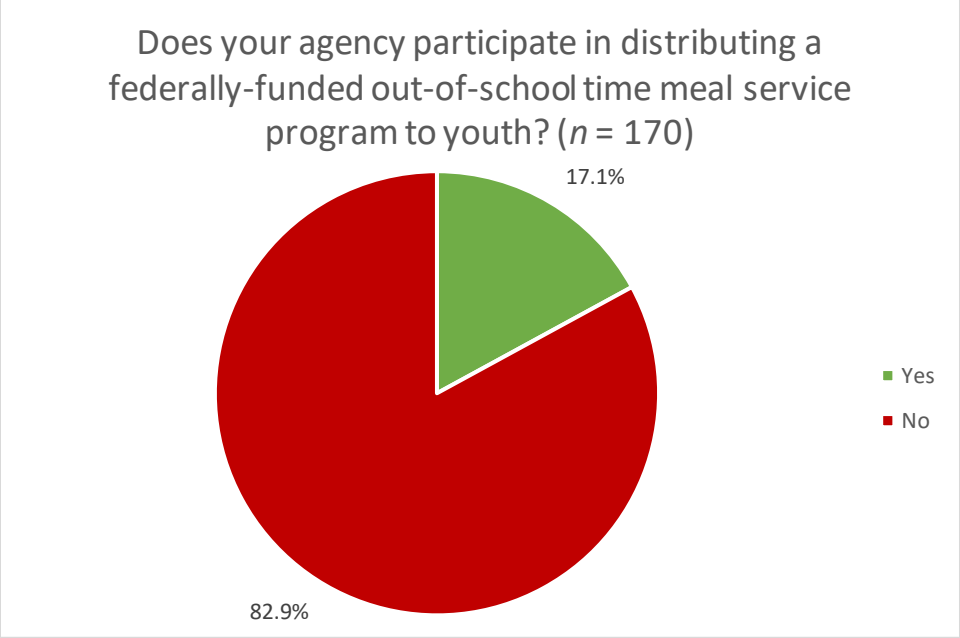
Figure 15. Agencies Working with Health Care Providers



Meal Service Programs

Directors were also asked whether their agencies participated in distributing a federally funded out-of-school time meal service program to youth. Just 17.1% indicated that their agencies participated in such a program, as seen in the next figure. Of the 29 respondents who said that their agencies participated in such a program, 20 provided information about the number of meals and individuals served in the last year. Reponses ranged from 40 to 7,500 meals served, with a mean of 3,957, and 20 to 800 individuals served, with a mean of 258.

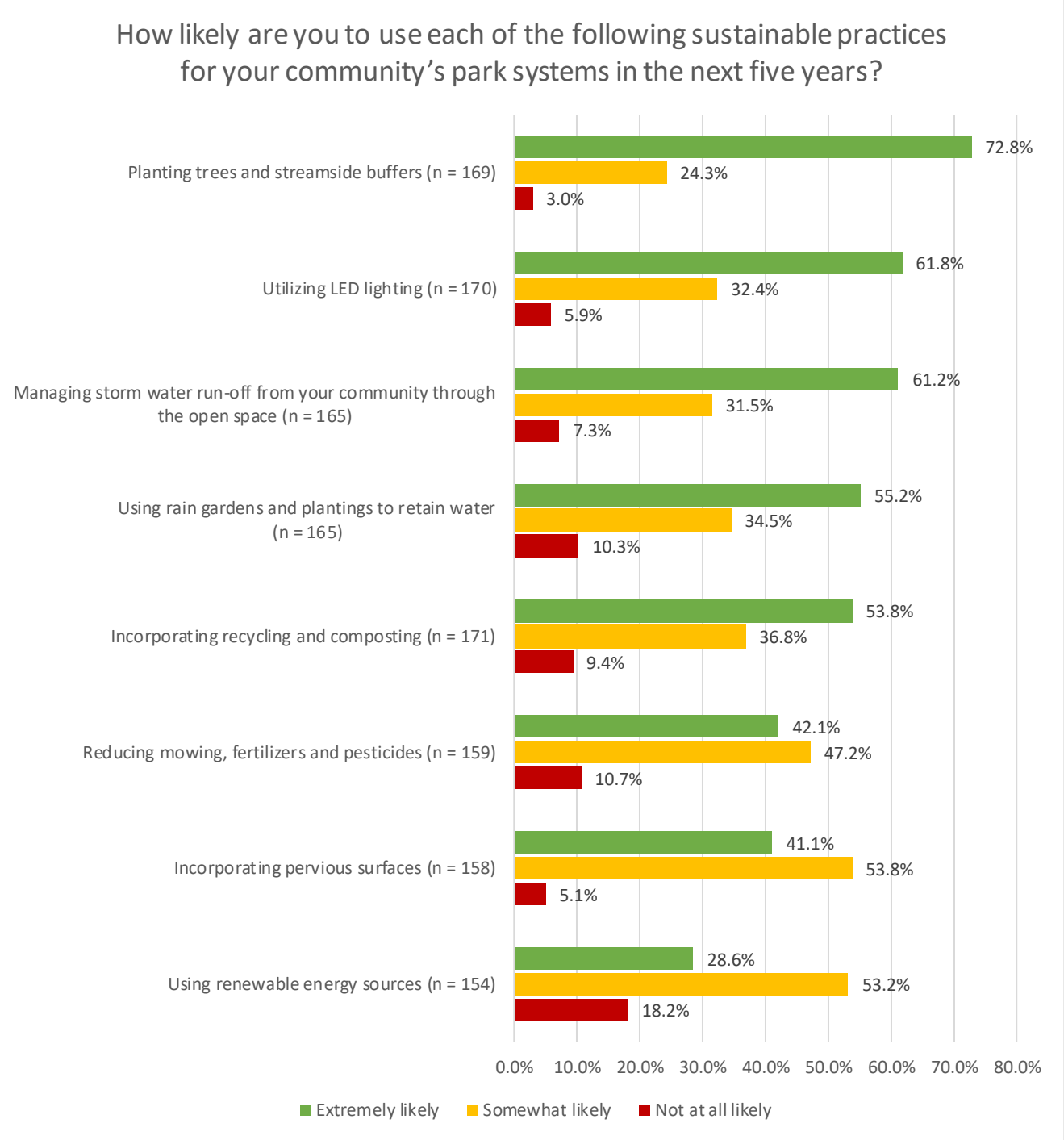
Figure 16. Participation in Out-of-School Time Youth Meal Service Program



Sustainable Practices

Directors were then asked how likely they were to utilize a series of sustainable practices in their communities' park systems in the next five years, regardless of whether or not they were currently using them. Nearly all directors said that they were extremely likely (72.8%; $n = 169$) or somewhat likely (24.3%) to incorporate planting trees and streamside buffers as a sustainable practice. Similarly, 61.8% ($n = 170$) said that they were extremely like to utilize LED lighting, and 61.2% ($n = 165$) were extremely likely to manage storm water run-off from the community through open space. About half said that thy were extremely likely to use rain gardens and plantings to retain water (55.2%; $n = 165$) and to incorporate recycling and composting (53.8%; $n = 171$), while two-fifths said they were extremely likely to reduce mowing, fertilizers, and pesticides (42.1%; $n = 159$) and to incorporate pervious surfaces (41.1%; $n = 158$). Just one-fourth said that they were extremely likely to use renewable energy sources (28.6%; $n = 154$), and nearly one-in-five said that they were not at all likely to use renewable energy sources (18.2%). It should also be noted that one-in-10 said that they were not at all likely to reduce mowing, fertilizers, and pesticides (10.7%), use rain gardens and plantings to retain water (10.3%), and incorporate recycling and composting (9.4%), as seen in the next figure.

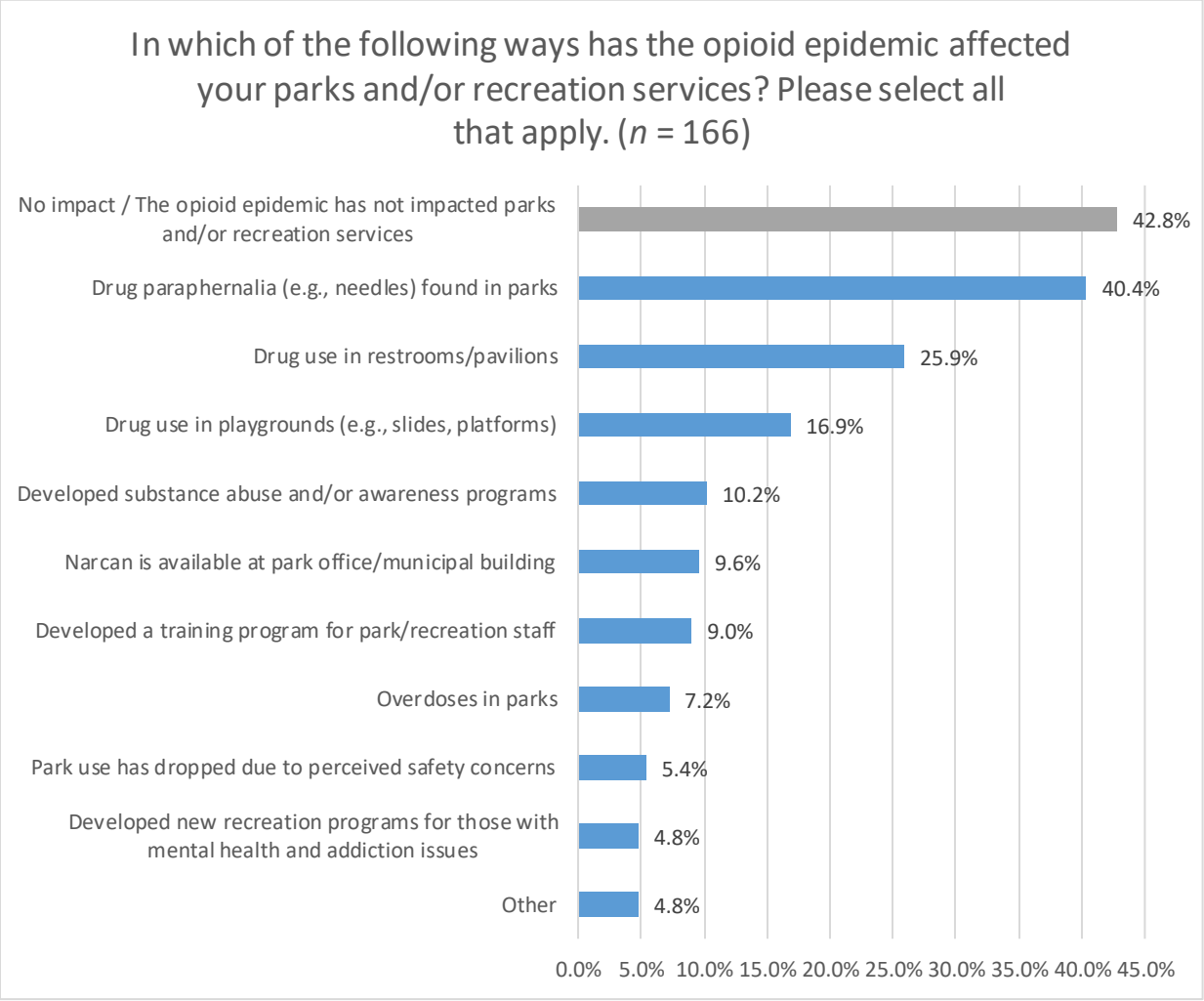
Figure 17. Sustainable Practice Utilization



Opioid Impact

Directors were then asked to select all of the ways in which the opioid epidemic has affected their parks or recreation services. Two out of five respondents (42.8%; *n* = 166) said that the opioid epidemic has not impacted their park or recreation services, while 40.4% said that they have found drug paraphernalia in their parks. An additional 25.9% said that they have encountered drug use in restrooms or pavilions, while 16.9% have had drug use in playgrounds. One-in-10 have preventative measures in place, such as substance abuse or awareness programs (10.2%), Narcan availability at the park office or municipal building (9.6%), or training programs for park /recreation staff (9.0%). The remaining respondents indicated that they have had overdoses in parks (7.2%), park use has dropped due to perceived safety concerns (5.4%), or that they have developed new recreation programs for those with mental health and addiction issues (4.8%), and 4.8% indicated some other impact, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 18. Opioid Epidemic Impact



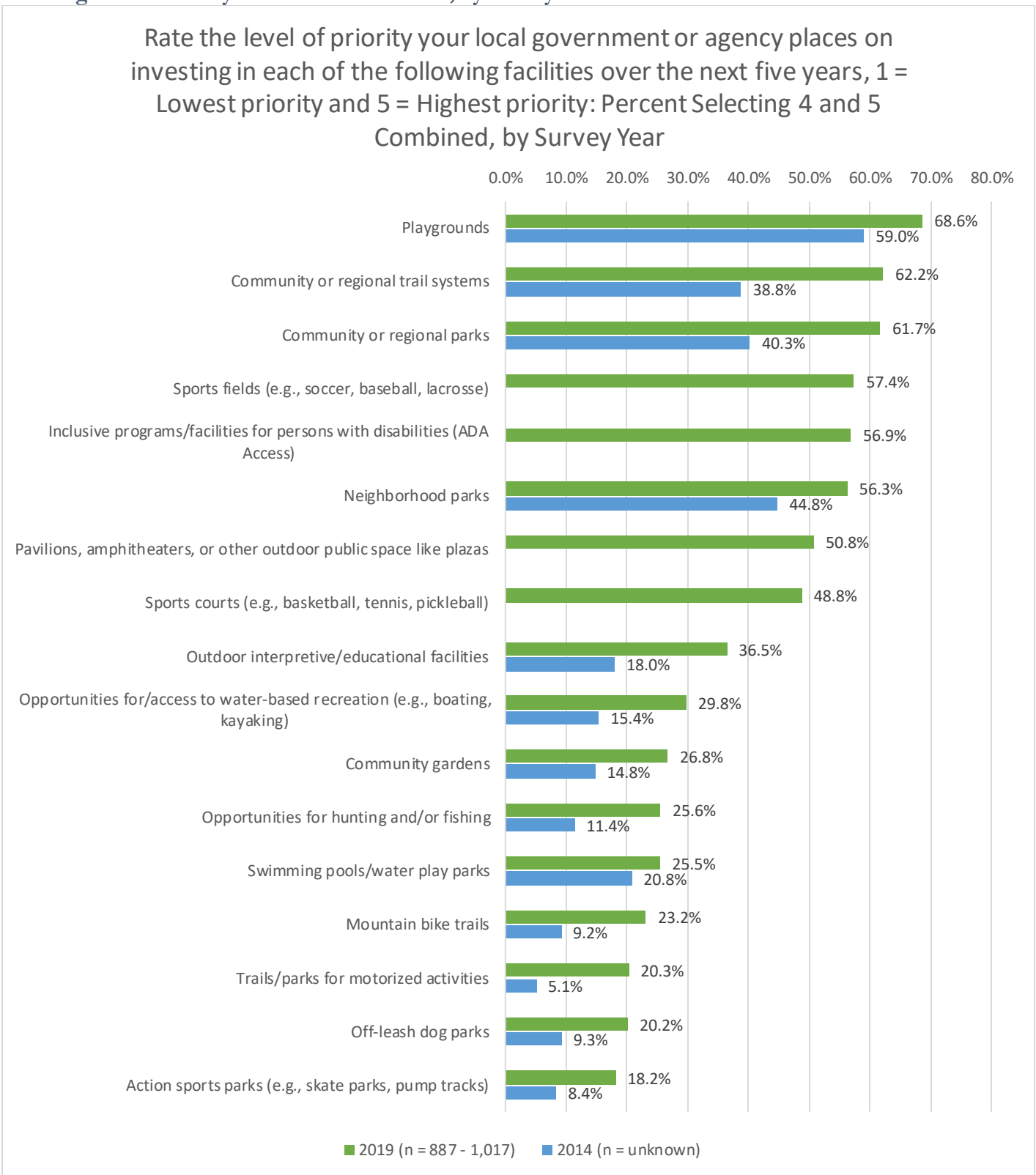
The questions on the following pages were asked of all respondents.

Facility Investment

All respondents were then asked to rate the level of priority their local governments or agencies place on investing in a variety of facility types over the next five years, with 1 being the lowest priority for investment and 5 being the highest priority for investment. Choices of 4 and 5 were then combined to provide an indication of the proportion of respondents indicating that they believe their local government or agency will place a high priority on the particular type of facility investment over the next five years. Generally, the 2019 responses were much higher than the 2014 responses, indicating that respondents believe that there will be more facility investment in 2020-2024 than they believed there would be in 2015-2019 when they were last surveyed. In both surveys, playgrounds earned the top spot; more than two-thirds of respondents provided 4 or 5 ratings in 2019 (68.6%; n = 1,017) and nearly three-fifths did so in 2014 (59.0%; n = unknown).

In 2014, less than half of respondents selected 4 or 5 for all remaining responses, which ranged from a high of 44.8% for Neighborhood parks to a low of 5.1% for Trails/parks for motorized activities. In comparison, seven items besides playgrounds had about half of respondents (or more) select 4 or 5, indicating that they believed their local governments or agencies would place high priorities on investing in each facility type over the next five years. These facilities included: Community or regional trail systems (62.2%); Community or regional parks (61.7%); Sports fields (57.4%); Inclusive programs/facilities for persons with disabilities (56.9%); Neighborhood parks (56.3.%); Pavilions, Amphitheaters, or other outdoor public space like plazas (50.8%); and Sports courts (48.8%). The lowest items still saw significant increases from 2014 to 2019 in anticipated priorities for investment. For example, Action sports parks had 18.2% of respondents select 4 or 5 in 2019, as compared to just 8.4% who did so in 2014. Similarly, 20.2% of respondents selected 4 or 5 for Off-leash dog parks in 2019, compared to 9.3% in 2014, and 20.3% did so for Trails/parks for motorized activities in 2019, as compared to just 5.1% in 2014. It should be noted that the Sports fields and Sports courts items were asked as one item, Team sports facilities, in 2014, so the results are not directly comparable. The next figure shows all combined 4 and 5 responses to this question by survey year.

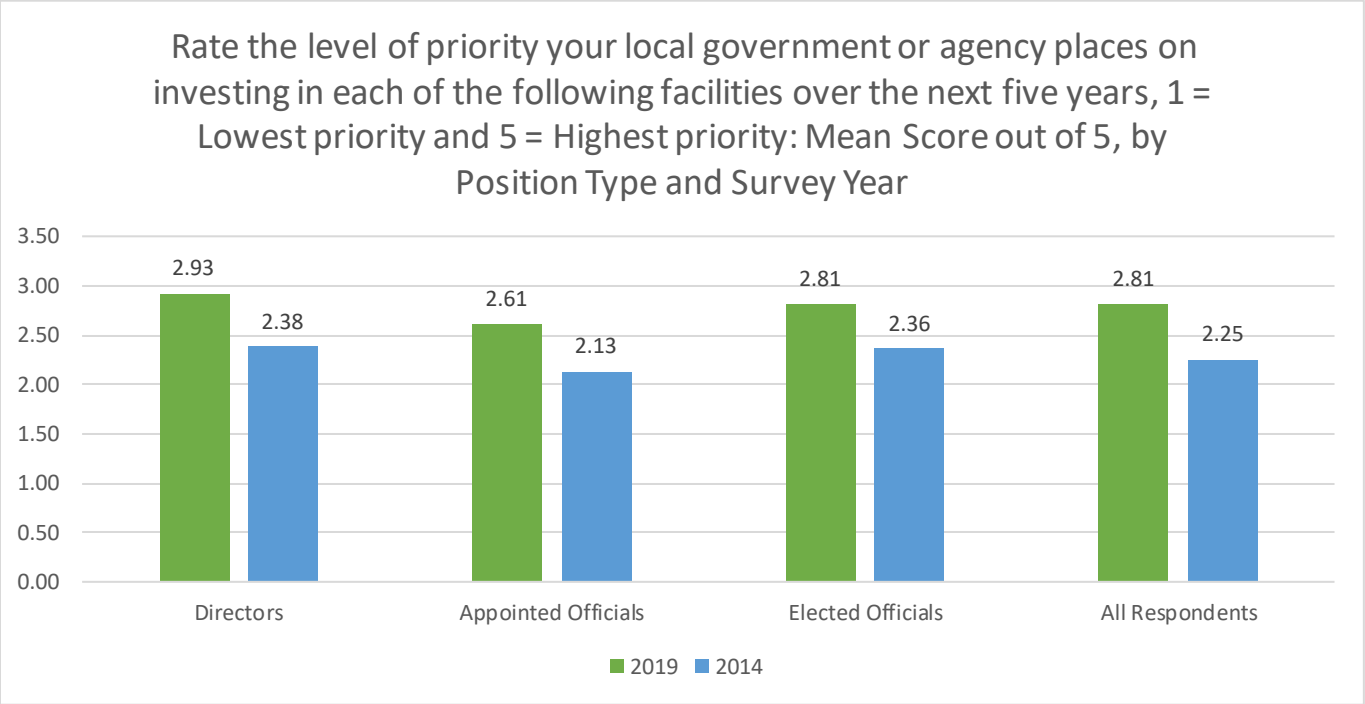
Figure 19. Facility Investment Priorities, by Survey Year



Scores were also averaged on a scale of 1 to 5 to develop an overall mean assessment of the extent to which respondents believed that their local governments or agencies would place on investing in the various facility types over the next five years. As with before, there were items that appeared in the 2019 survey that did not appear in the 2014 survey. The overall mean score for all items was 2.96 (n = 887 - 1,017); for comparisons purpose, the mean score for items that appeared in both the 2014 and 2019 surveys was 2.81 for the 2019 responses and 2.25 (n = unknown) for 2014 responses.

Scores generally increased from 2014 to 2019, and this pattern held true when looking at the responses by position type of the respondent. For each survey iteration, Directors indicated the highest mean score of priority investment (2019 Mean = 2.93, n = 168 – 197; 2014 Mean = 2.38; n = unknown), followed by Elected Officials (2019 Mean = 2.81, n = 226 – 288; 2014 mean = 2.36; n = unknown), and finally by Appointed Officials (2019 Mean = 2.61, n = 314 – 362; 2014 Mean = 2.13; n = unknown), as seen in the next figure.

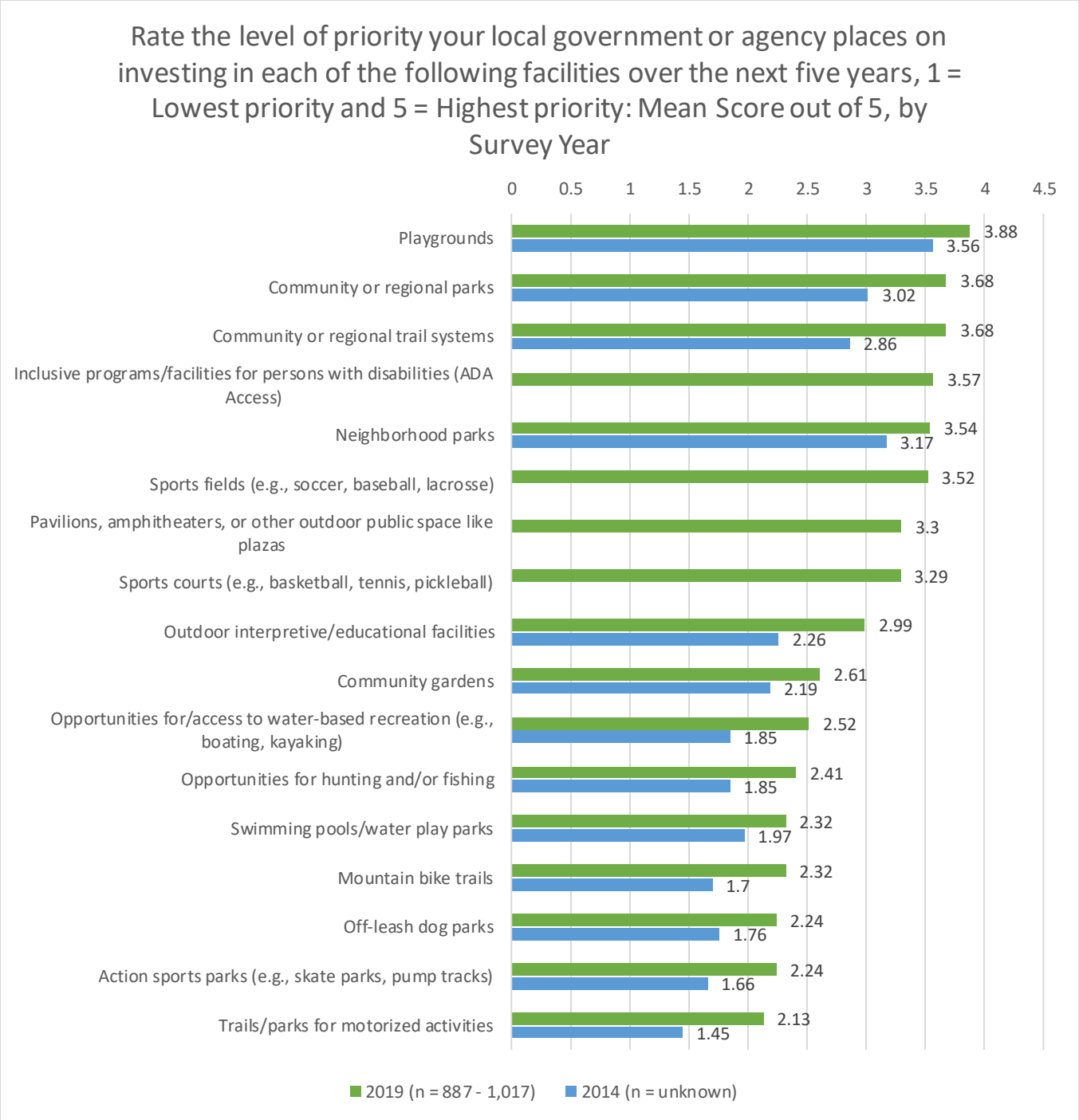
Figure 20. Facility Investment Priorities, Selected Means by Position Type and Survey Year



Looking at individual items, mean scores ranged from a low of 2.13 out of 5 for Trails/parks for motorized activities to a high of 3.88 for Playgrounds. Generally, average scores followed a similar pattern to the scores found in 2014, with a few exceptions. First, overall mean scores were higher, as mentioned previously. The overall mean increased by 0.56 points out of 5. Items with scores that significantly out-performed the overall average mean increases that were seen across all items included: Community or regional parks (2019 Mean = 3.68; 2014 Mean = 3.02); Community or regional trail systems (2019 Mean = 3.68; 2014 Mean = 2.86); Outdoor interpretive/educational facilities (2019 Mean = 2.99; 2014 Mean = 2.26); Opportunities for/access to water-based recreation (2019 Mean =2.52; 2014 Mean = 1.85); Mountain bike trails (2019 Mean = 2.32; 2014

Mean = 1.70); and Trails/parks for motorized activities (2019 Mean = 2.13; 2014 Mean = 1.45). No items decreased in overall score from 2014 to 2019, as seen in the next figure. Four items have no data for 2014, as these items were not asked in the 2014 survey. One of the items, Inclusive programs/facilities for persons with disabilities, received a mean of 3.57, which rated it as the fourth-highest priority overall. As mentioned previously, the Sports fields and Sports courts items were asked as one item, Team sports facilities, in 2014, so the results are not directly comparable.

Figure 21. Facility Investment Priorities, Means by Survey Year



The tables that follow display the mean scores of respondents' perceptions of the levels of priority their local governments or agencies will place on investing in various facility types, by position type of the respondent and population size served of the respondent's local government or agency. As with scores from other questions in the survey, and, again, consistent with the 2014 results, **Directors generally provided higher means scores for most items** (Mean = 2.93 out of 5; *n* = 168 - 197) than both Elected Officials (Mean = 2.81; *n* = 226 – 288) and Appointed Officials (Mean = 2.61; *n* = 314 – 362). **However, those with some Other position provided the highest scores overall** (Mean = 2.98; *n* = 157 – 181). There were some notable exceptions.

- Directors scored Neighborhood parks with a mean of 3.46, compared to higher scores of 3.51 from Appointed Officials, 3.65 from Elected Officials, and 3.47 from Other positions.
- Directors rated Opportunities for/access to water-based recreation with a score of 2.45 out of 5; although this was higher than the Appointed Official score of 2.16, it was lower than the Elected Official score of 2.49 and the Other position score of 3.14.
- Similarly, Directors rated Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing with a score of 2.35, compared to a lower score of 2.11 from Appointed Officials, but a higher score of 2.43 from Elected Officials and a score of 2.86 from Other positions.
- Directors also scored Mountain bike trails with an average of 2.45, compared to 1.96 for Appointed Officials, 2.36 for Elected Officials, and 2.63 for Other positions.
- Finally, Directors provided similar scores for the Trails/parks for motorized activities item (2.06) to Appointed Officials (2.03) and Elected Officials (2.09), but their mean scores were all lower than the score of 2.44 for those with some Other position.

Looking at the responses by the size of population served by the respondents' local governments or agencies, results were similar to those found for other questions, where those representing **populations of less than 5,000 had lower mean scores overall** (Mean = 2.71 out of 5; *n* = 352 - 430) **than those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999** (Mean = 3.08; *n* = 329 – 378), **and 25,000 or more** (Mean = 3.19; *n* = 183 – 205). Again, there were some exceptions.

- Respondents who served populations of less than 5,000 people provided slightly higher scores for Playgrounds (3.82) than those serving populations of 25,000 or more (3.79). They also provided slightly higher mean scores for Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing (2.36) than those with populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (2.28).
- Generally, **respondents with populations of 25,000 or more provided higher scores than those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999. However, in addition to Playgrounds, respondents who served populations of 5,000 to 24,999 provided higher scores than those with populations of 25,000 or more for several items**, including Neighborhood parks (3.63 versus 3.55); Community or regional parks (3.83 versus 3.77); Sports fields (3.80 versus 3.57); Sports courts (3.55 versus 3.37); Off-leash dog parks (2.49 versus 2.47); and Pavilions, amphitheaters, or other outdoor public spaces (3.52 versus 3.35).
- Although it was the third-highest priority overall, the mean for those with populations of 25,000 or more was Community or regional trail systems (4.24).

Table 4. Facility Investment Priorities, Means by Position Type

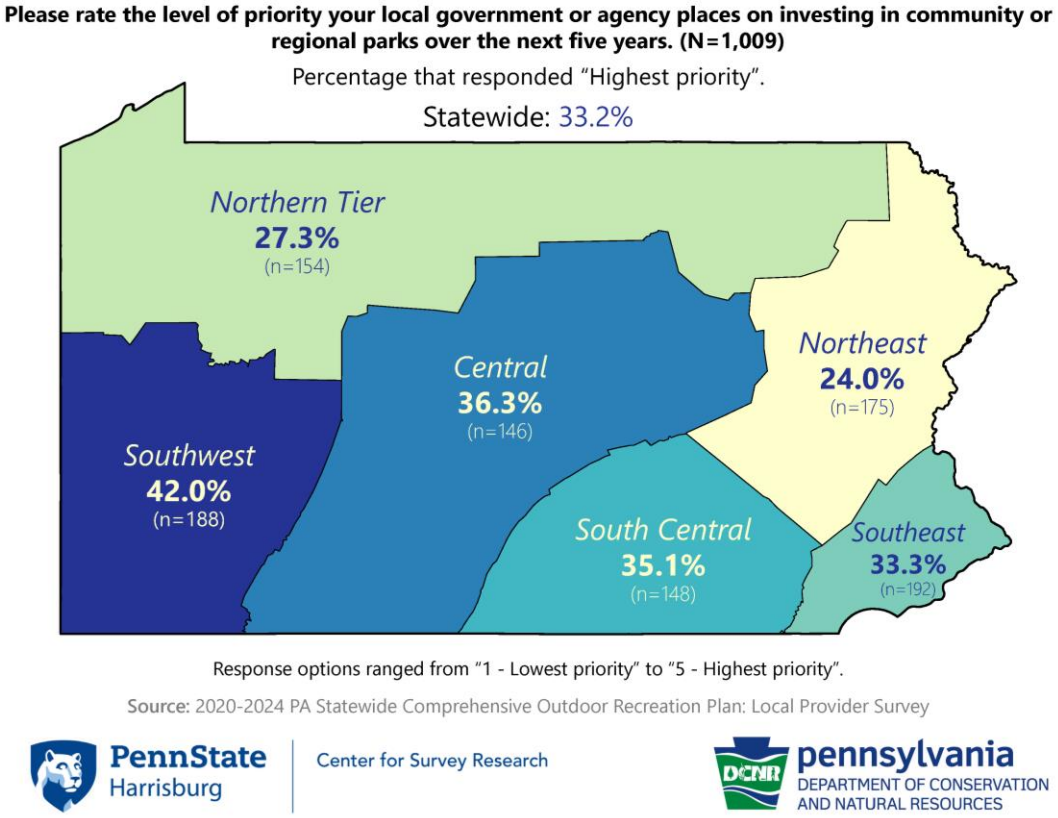
Please rate the level of priority your local government or agency places on investing in each of the following facilities over the next five years, where 1 is Lowest priority for investment and 5 is Highest priority for investment: Mean score out of 5, by Position Type				
	Directors (*n* = 168 - 197)	**Appointed Officials (*n* = 314 - 362)**	**Elected Officials (*n* = 226 - 288)**	**Other (*n* = 157 - 181)**
Playgrounds	4.02	3.95	3.92	3.50
Neighborhood parks	3.46	3.51	3.65	3.47
Community or regional parks	3.73	3.66	3.68	3.67
Sports fields (e.g., soccer, baseball, lacrosse)	3.65	3.51	3.56	3.31
Sports courts (e.g., basketball, tennis, pickleball)	3.57	3.32	3.27	2.98
Community or regional trail systems	3.94	3.39	3.59	3.99
Outdoor interpretive/educational facilities	3.16	2.72	3.00	3.16
Community gardens	2.71	2.42	2.67	2.65
Swimming pools/water play parks	2.69	2.04	2.19	2.53
Opportunities for/access to water-based recreation (e.g., boating, kayaking)	2.45	2.16	2.49	3.14
Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing	2.35	2.11	2.43	2.86
Off-leash dog parks	2.63	2.00	2.20	2.24
Mountain bike trails	2.45	1.96	2.36	2.63
Action sports parks (e.g., skate parks, pump tracks)	2.39	1.95	2.30	2.37
Trails/parks for motorized activities	2.06	2.03	2.09	2.44
Inclusive programs/facilities for persons with disabilities (ADA Access)	3.79	3.60	3.47	3.47
Pavilions, amphitheaters, or other outdoor public space like plazas	3.41	3.33	3.35	3.05

Table 5. Facility Investment Priorities, Means by Population Size Served

Please rate the level of priority your local government or agency places on investing in each of the following facilities over the next five years, where 1 is Lowest priority for investment and 5 is Highest priority for investment: Mean score out of 5, by Population Size Served			
	Less than 5,000 (*n* = 352 - 430)	**5,000 to 24,999 (*n* = 329 - 378)**	**25,000 or more (*n* = 183 - 205)**
Playgrounds	3.82	4.02	3.79
Neighborhood parks	3.47	3.63	3.55
Community or regional parks	3.51	3.83	3.77
Sports fields (e.g., soccer, baseball, lacrosse)	3.24	3.80	3.57
Sports courts (e.g., basketball, tennis, pickleball)	3.03	3.55	3.37
Community or regional trail systems	3.16	3.92	4.24
Outdoor interpretive/educational facilities	2.63	3.14	3.36
Community gardens	2.38	2.71	2.89
Swimming pools/water play parks	1.94	2.43	2.82
Opportunities for/access to water-based recreation (e.g., boating, kayaking)	2.38	2.44	2.89
Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing	2.36	2.28	2.73
Off-leash dog parks	1.87	2.49	2.47
Mountain bike trails	2.04	2.34	2.68
Action sports parks (e.g., skate parks, pump tracks)	1.90	2.42	2.50
Trails/parks for motorized activities	1.92	2.12	2.49
Inclusive programs/facilities for persons with disabilities (ADA Access)	3.36	3.70	3.74
Pavilions, amphitheaters, or other outdoor public space like plazas	3.08	3.52	3.35

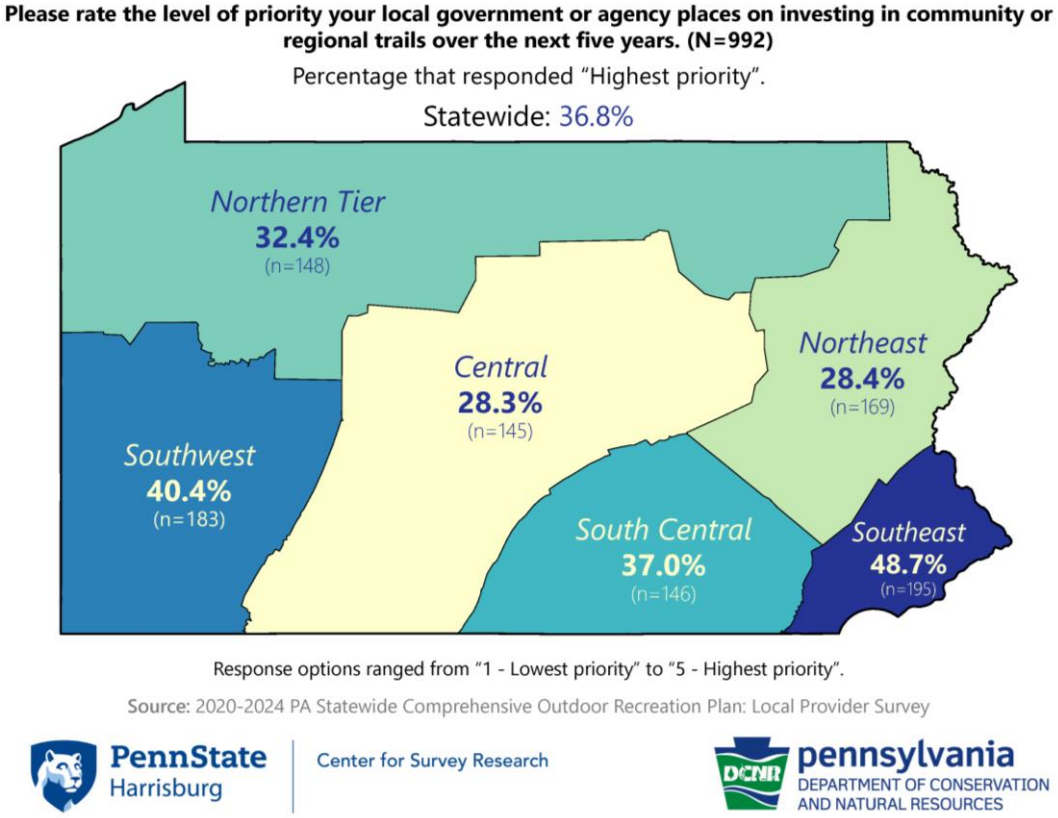
Respondents who indicated that their local government or agency will place their highest priority of investment in community or regional parks over the next five years ranged from lows of 24.0% (n = 175) in the Northeast region and 27.3% (n = 154) in the Northern Tier region to a high of 42.0% (n = 188) in the Southwest region, as seen in the next map. Darker colors represent a higher proportion of respondents that selected Highest priority for the specified item.

Figure 22. Community or Regional Park Investment Priorities, by Region



Respondents who indicated that their local government or agency will place their highest priority of investment in community or regional trails over the next five years ranged from lows of 28.3% (n = 145) in the Central region and 28.4% (n = 169) in the Northeast region to highs of 48.7% (n = 195) in the Southeast region and 40.4% (n = 183) in the Southwest region, as seen in the next map. Darker colors represent a higher proportion of respondents that selected Highest priority for the specified item. Only the Investing in community or regional parks and Investing in community or regional trails items were significantly different by region.

Figure 23. Community or Regional Trail Investment Priorities, by Region



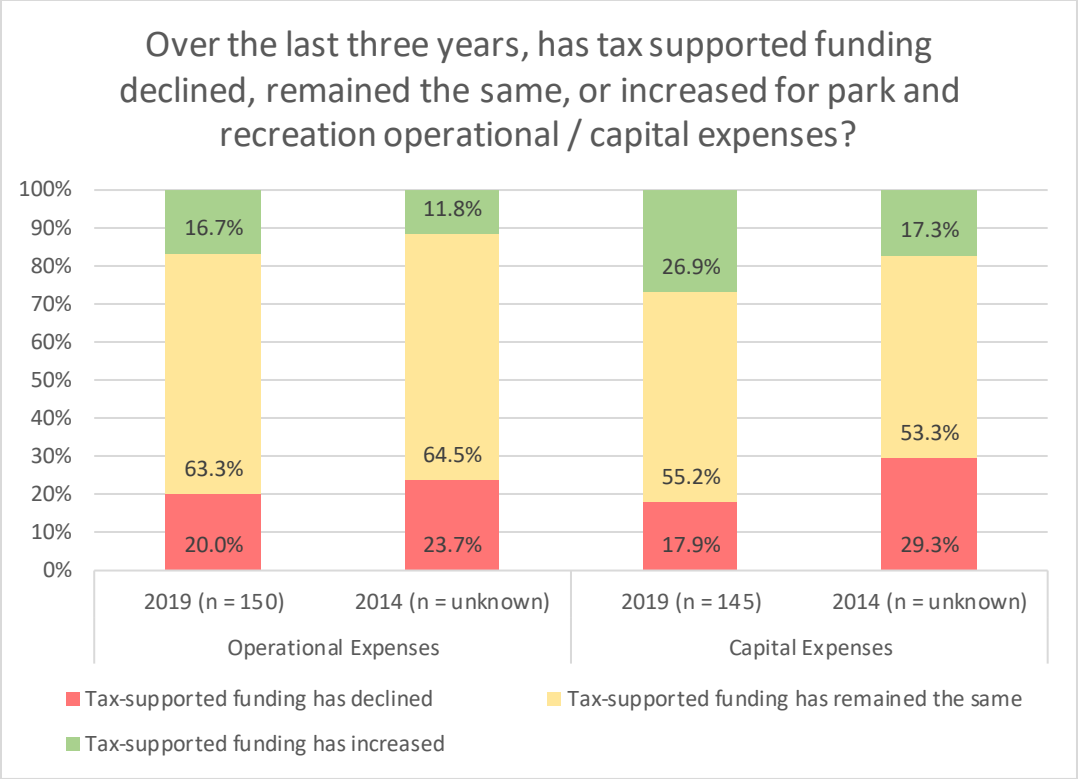
Funding

The following question about changes in tax-supported funding was asked only of Directors. The remaining questions related to funding were asked of all respondents.

Directors were then asked to indicate whether tax-supported funding for park and recreation operational and capital expenses had declined, remained the same, or increased over the last 3 years. Responses for Operational expenses were fairly similar between the 2019 and 2014 surveys, with about two-thirds of respondents indicating that Tax-supported funding remained the same over the last three years both in 2019 (63.3%; *n* = 150) and in 2014 (64.5%; *n* = unknown). The 2019 results did see a slight uptick in those who said that tax-supported funding for Operational expenses has increased in the past 3 years, increasing from 11.8% in 2014 to 16.7% in 2019.

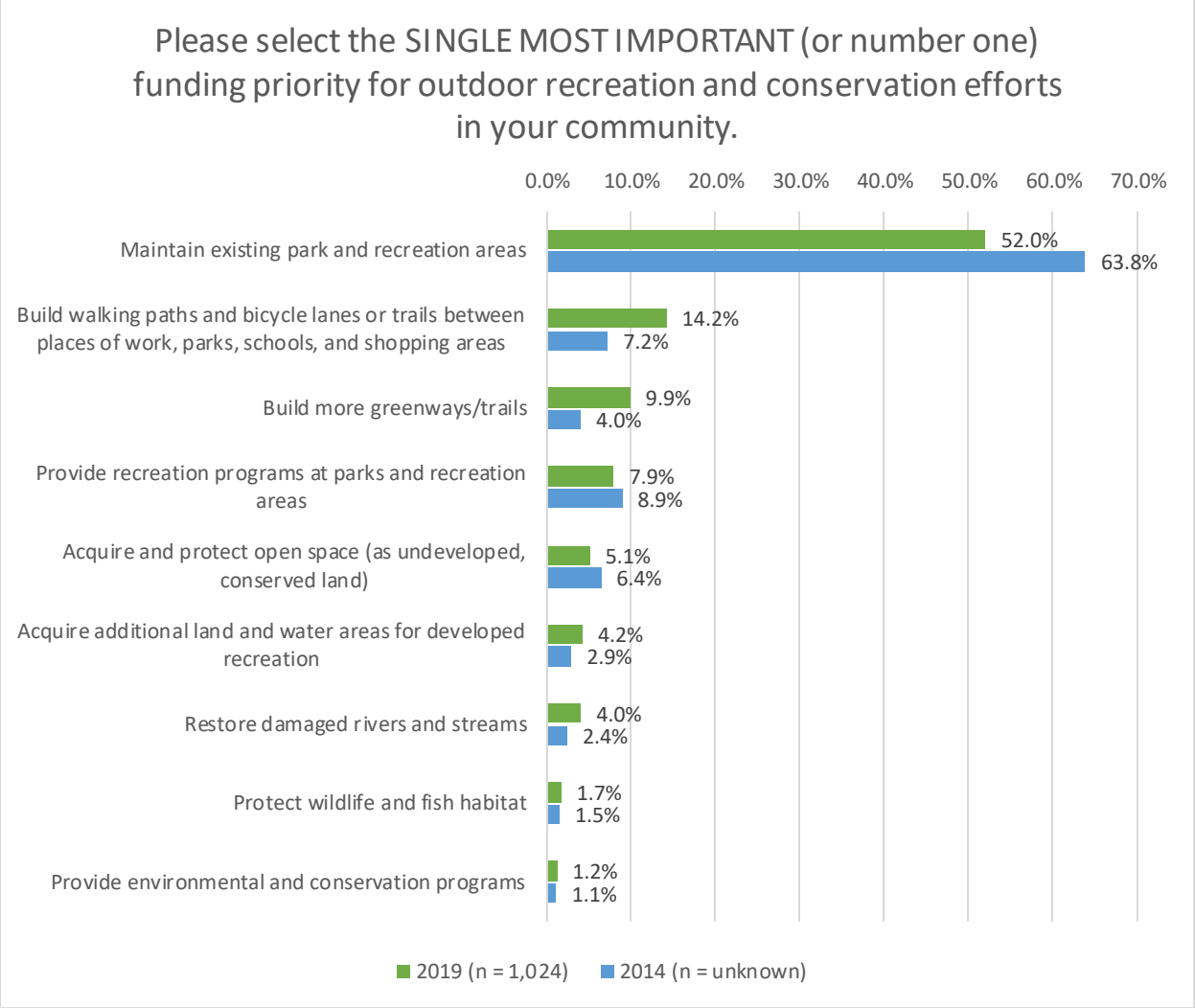
More differences were evident between the 2014 and 2019 surveys when looking at tax-supported funding for Capital expenses. Notably, 26.9% of respondents in the 2019 survey (*n* = 145) indicated that Capital expense funding had increased in the last 3 years, as compared to just 17.3% who said the same in 2014 (*n* = unknown). Conversely, 17.9% of respondents from the current year said that Capital expense funding had decreased, as compared to 29.3% who said that it had decreased in 2014, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 24. Changes in Tax Supported Funding, by Survey Year



All respondents were then asked two questions related to funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts in their communities. The first question asked them to rate the importance of a number of items, where 1 was Not at all important and 5 was Extremely important. They were then asked to select the single most important funding priority for outdoor recreation and conservation efforts in their communities. About half of respondents (52.0%; $n = 1{,}024$) selected Maintain existing park and recreation areas as their top funding priority. This was significantly lower than the 63.8% (n = unknown) who chose this option in the 2014 survey. The difference appears to have been made up in two areas. In 2014, 7.2% of respondents chose Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas; this number grew to 14.2% in 2019. Similarly, 4.0% of respondents in 2014 chose Build more greenways/trails as their top funding priority, which increased to 9.9% in 2019. There were no other differences between the surveys in the remaining responses. Rounding out the top five included: Provide recreation programs at parks and recreation areas (7.9%) and Acquire and protect open space (5.1%). Receiving the least number of selections was Provide environmental and conservation programs, which was selected by just 1.2% of respondents, as seen in the next figure.

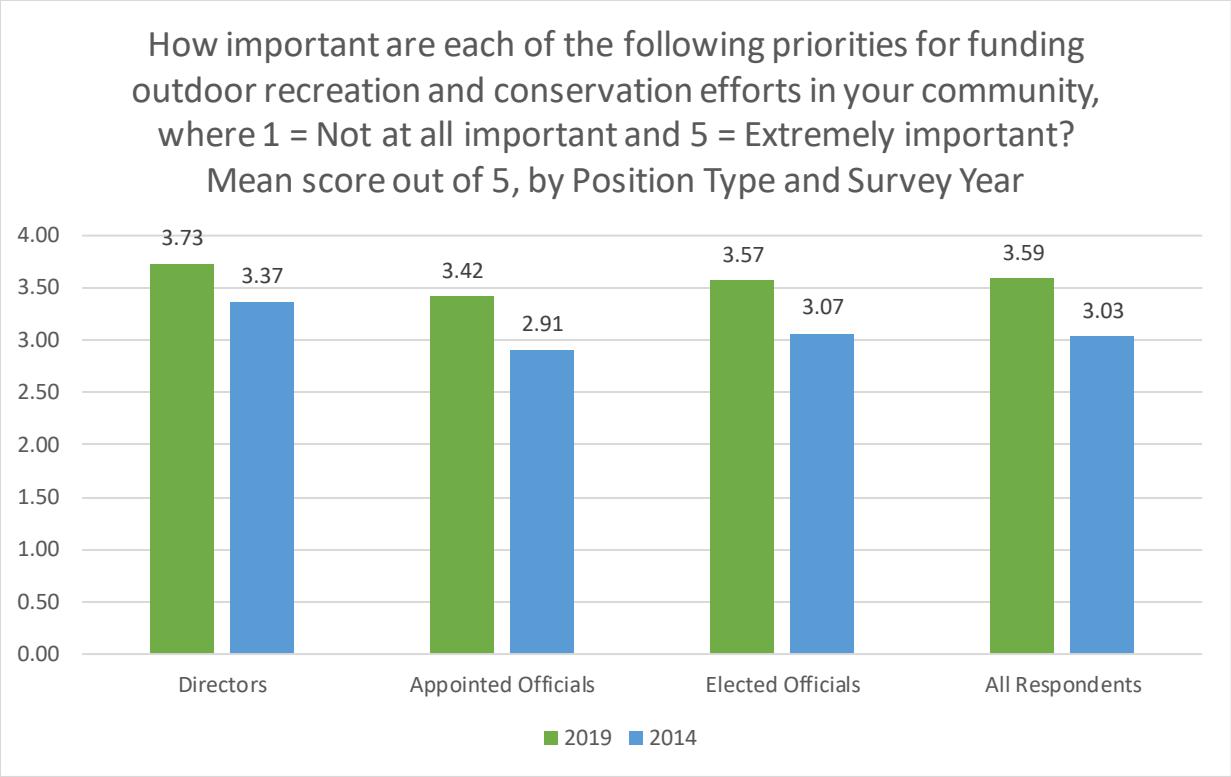
Figure 25. Top Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Funding Priority, by Survey Year



Looking at the mean scores on the 1 to 5 scale paints a more complex picture of respondents' funding priorities. Overall, the mean score for all items increased from 3.03 in 2014 to 3.59 in 2019. As with other survey questions, the mean score of 3.73 out of 5 for Directors (n = 186 – 203) was greater than the mean scores for Appointed Officials (3.42; n = 238 – 288) and Elected Officials (3.57; n = 328 – 360), but it tied the mean score for those with some Other position (3.73; n = 177 – 187).

Comparing the two survey administrations, the mean score for Directors rose by 0.36 points out of five, from 3.37 in 2014 (n = unknown) to 3.73 in 2019. The mean scores for Appointed Officials and Elected Officials rose by 0.51 and 0.50 points respectively, indicating that the ratings from the Appointed Officials and Elected Officials closed some of the gap that was seen in the 2014 survey administration. The next figure shows all mean scores by position type and survey year.

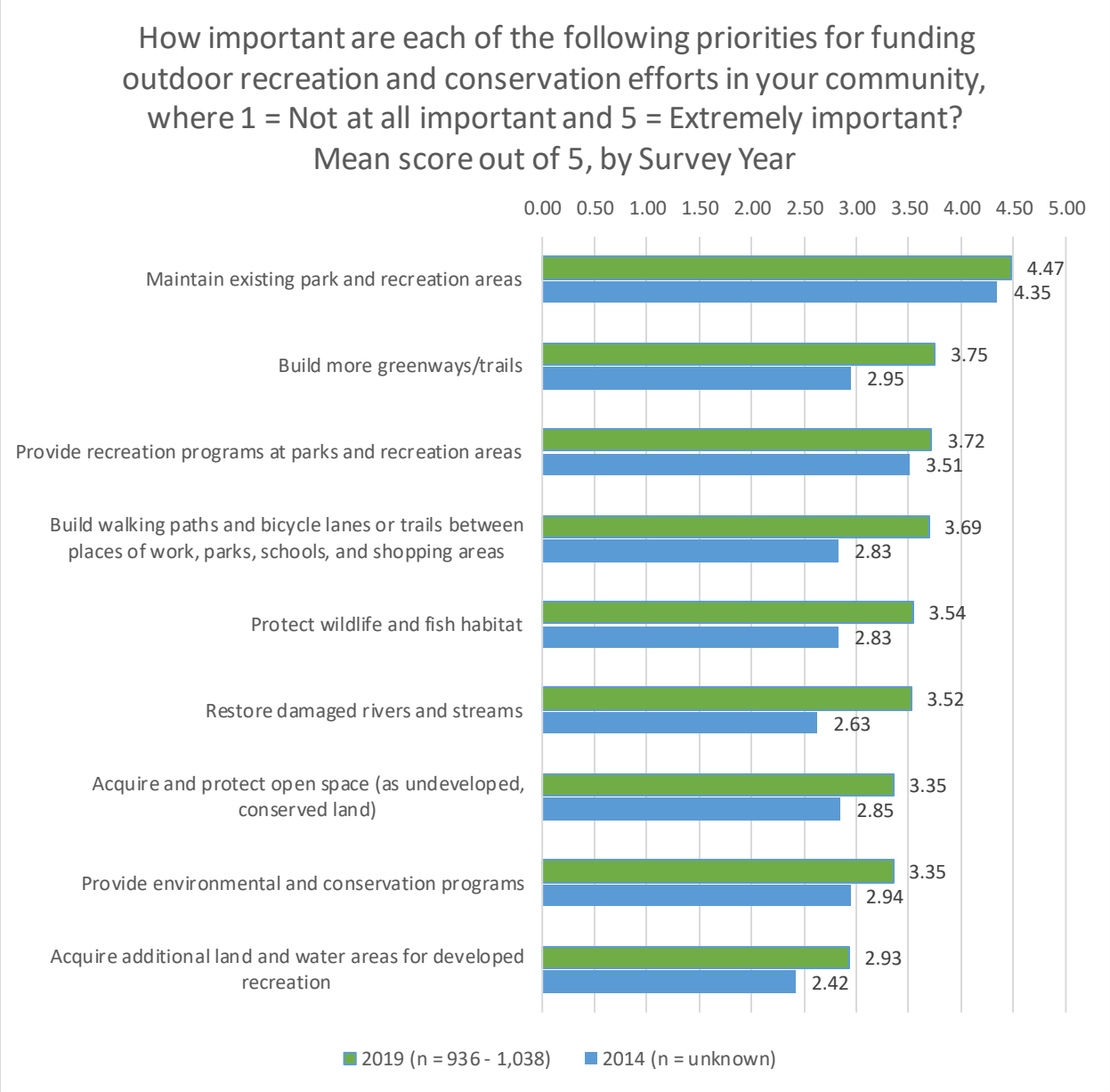
Figure 26. Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Funding Priorities, Overall Means by Position Type and Survey Year



Looking at individual items, Maintain existing park and recreation retained the top mean score, with an average of 4.47 out of 5 in 2019 (n = 936 – 1,038), as compared to 4.35 in 2014 (n = unknown). This item saw the smallest mean increase between surveys, but it also had the highest starting mean in 2014, so there was not as much room for growth as compared to the other items. Rounding out the top five in the 2019 survey were: Build more greenways/trails (Mean = 3.75); Provide recreation programs at parks and recreation areas (Mean = 3.72); Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas (Mean = 3.69); and Protect wildlife and fish habitat (Mean = 3.54). The lowest mean score of 2.93 was given to Acquire additional land and water areas for developed recreation.

As mentioned previously, the mean score for all items increased by an average of 0.56 points from 2014 to 2019. Four items significantly outpaced the mean score growth from 2014 to 2019; they included: Restore damaged rivers and streams (2019 Mean = 3.52; 2014 Mean = 2.63); Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas (2019 Mean = 3.69; 2014 Mean = 2.83); Build more greenways/trails (2019 Mean = 3.75; 2014 Mean = 2.95); and Protect wildlife and fish habitat (2019 Mean = 3.54; 2014 Mean = 2.83). No items decreased in average score from 2014 to 2019, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 27. Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Funding Priorities, Means by Survey Year



As with other questions, Directors generally provided higher mean scores for outdoor recreation and conservation funding priorities in their communities (Mean = 3.73; *n* = 186 – 203) than Elected Officials (Mean = 3.57; *n* = 328 – 360), who, in turn, generally gave higher mean scores than Appointed Officials (mean = 3.42; *n* = 238 – 288). There were three exceptions to this trend. Appointed Officials scored Maintain existing park and recreation areas slightly higher (Mean = 4.49) than Elected Officials (Mean = 4.39), but lower than Directors (Mean = 4.70). Appointed Officials also scored Restore damaged rivers and streams higher (Mean = 3.56) than both Directors (Mean = 3.49) and Elected Officials (Mean = 3.46). Finally, Elected Officials scored Protect wildlife and fish habitat higher on average (Mean = 3.58) than both Directors (Mean = 3.50) and Appointed Officials (Mean = 3.35), as seen in the next table.

Table 6. Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Funding Priorities, Means by Position Type

How important are each of the following priorities for funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts in your community, where 1 = Not at all important and 5 = Extremely important? Mean score out of 5, by Position Type	Directors (n = 186 - 203)	Appointed Officials (n = 238 - 288)	Elected Officials (n = 328 - 360)	Other (n = 177 - 187)
Acquire and protect open space (as undeveloped, conserved land)	3.48	3.14	3.31	3.60
Acquire additional land and water areas for developed recreation	3.07	2.68	2.90	3.15
Maintain existing park and recreation areas	4.70	4.49	4.39	4.37
Provide environmental and conservation programs	3.49	3.11	3.35	3.54
Provide recreation programs at parks and recreation areas	4.03	3.58	3.68	3.70
Protect wildlife and fish habitat	3.50	3.35	3.58	3.75
Build more greenways/trails	3.94	3.49	3.69	4.02
Restore damaged rivers and streams	3.49	3.56	3.46	3.61
Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas	3.85	3.38	3.74	3.86

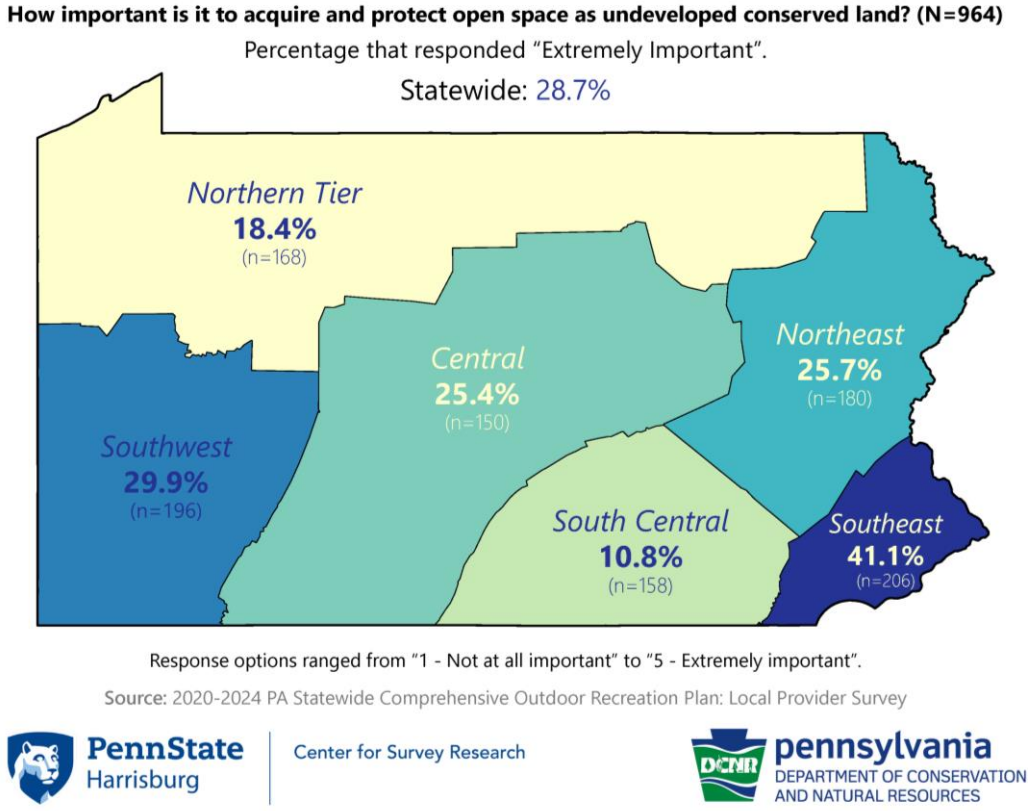
Following trends found in other questions, respondents who represented populations of less than 5,000 generally provided lower mean scores for outdoor recreation and conservation funding priorities in their communities (Mean = 3.33; $n = 371 – 434$) than those supporting populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (Mean = 3.72; $n = 349 – 381$), who, in turn, provided lower mean scores than those supporting populations of 25,000 or more (Mean = 3.84; $n = 196 – 203$). The only exception to this trend was the Maintain existing park and recreation areas item, which obtained a slightly higher score from those supporting populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (Mean = 4.56) than those supporting populations of 25,000 or more (mean = 4.49). Also notable was the Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, school, and shopping areas item, which had a mean score of 4.16 for those with populations of 25,000 or more. This score significantly exceeded the average differences seen between the different populations, indicating more relative importance for this particular item, as seen in the following table.

Table 7. Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Funding Priorities, Means by Population Size Served

How important are each of the following priorities for funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts in your community, where 1 = Not at all important and 5 = Extremely important? Mean score out of 5, by Population Size Served			
	Less than 5,000 (n = 371 - 434)	**5,000 to 24,999 (n = 349 - 381)**	**25,000 or more (n = 196 - 203)**
Acquire and protect open space (as undeveloped, conserved land)	3.07	3.52	3.60
Acquire additional land and water areas for developed recreation	2.67	3.03	3.21
Maintain existing park and recreation areas	4.38	4.56	4.49
Provide environmental and conservation programs	3.07	3.48	3.65
Provide recreation programs at parks and recreation areas	3.38	3.95	3.97
Protect wildlife and fish habitat	3.42	3.58	3.68
Build more greenways/trails	3.36	3.92	4.16
Restore damaged rivers and streams	3.33	3.64	3.67
Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas	3.28	3.84	4.16

Respondents who indicated that it is extremely important to acquire and protect open space as undeveloped conserved land ranged from lows of 10.8% (n = 158) in the South Central region and 18.4% (n = 168) in the Northern Tier region to a high of 41.1% (n = 206) in the Southeast region, as seen in the next map. Darker colors represent a higher proportion of respondents that selected Extremely important for the specified item.

Figure 28. Importance of Acquiring and Protecting Open Space, by Region



Maintenance and Management Challenges

All respondents were then asked to indicate whether various challenges faced by their local governments or agencies when providing park and recreation facilities and services were Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge. Items were broken into two categories: Maintenance and Management Issues and Emerging Trends. Looking at Maintenance and Management Issues, the top items identified as Major challenges were Creating new park and recreation facilities (36.6%; n = 996), Maintaining existing local parks in the community (25.3%; n = 1,024), Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity (25.2%; n = 970), Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities (22.5%; n = 1,005), and Providing inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities (15.0%; n = 984). The items of least concern to respondents, where higher proportions of respondents chose Not a challenge, included Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities (30.9%; n = 1,005),

Complaints from citizens about park conditions (31.7%; *n* = 1,013), and Ensuring public safety in parks and recreation areas (20.1%; *n* = 1,021). Interestingly, lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities was both a top Major challenge and the top mention as Not a challenge by respondents, indicating different priorities among respondents.

The percentages of respondents that chose Significant challenge and Major challenge were then combined and compared to responses from the 2014 survey. On average, 47.4% of respondents chose Significant challenge or Major challenge to this series of items (*n* = 970 – 1,024), compared to 42.6% in 2014 (*n* = unknown), indicating a 4.8% increase in the average number of Significant and Major challenge selections for Maintenance and Management Issues. Two items actually decreased from 2014 to 2019: The percentage of respondents selecting Significant or Major challenge for Creating new park and recreation facilities decreased from 75.2% in 2014 to 70.3% in 2019, although it remained the top response, while the percent that selected these options for Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities decreased from 48.1% in 2014 to 40.3% in 2019. All other items increased from 2014 to 2019. The largest increases were seen in Maintaining existing local parks in the community, which increased from 46.6% in 2014 to 61.1% in 2019, and Providing inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities, which increased from 37.4% in 2014 to 49.8% in 2019. It should be noted that nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity was a Significant or Major problem, landing it in the second-highest position.

The figures on the following pages depict respondents' indications of how much of a challenge maintenance and management issues are for their local governments or agencies and the comparison of corresponding Significant challenge and Major challenge responses between the 2014 and 2019 surveys.

Figure 29. Maintenance and Management Challenges

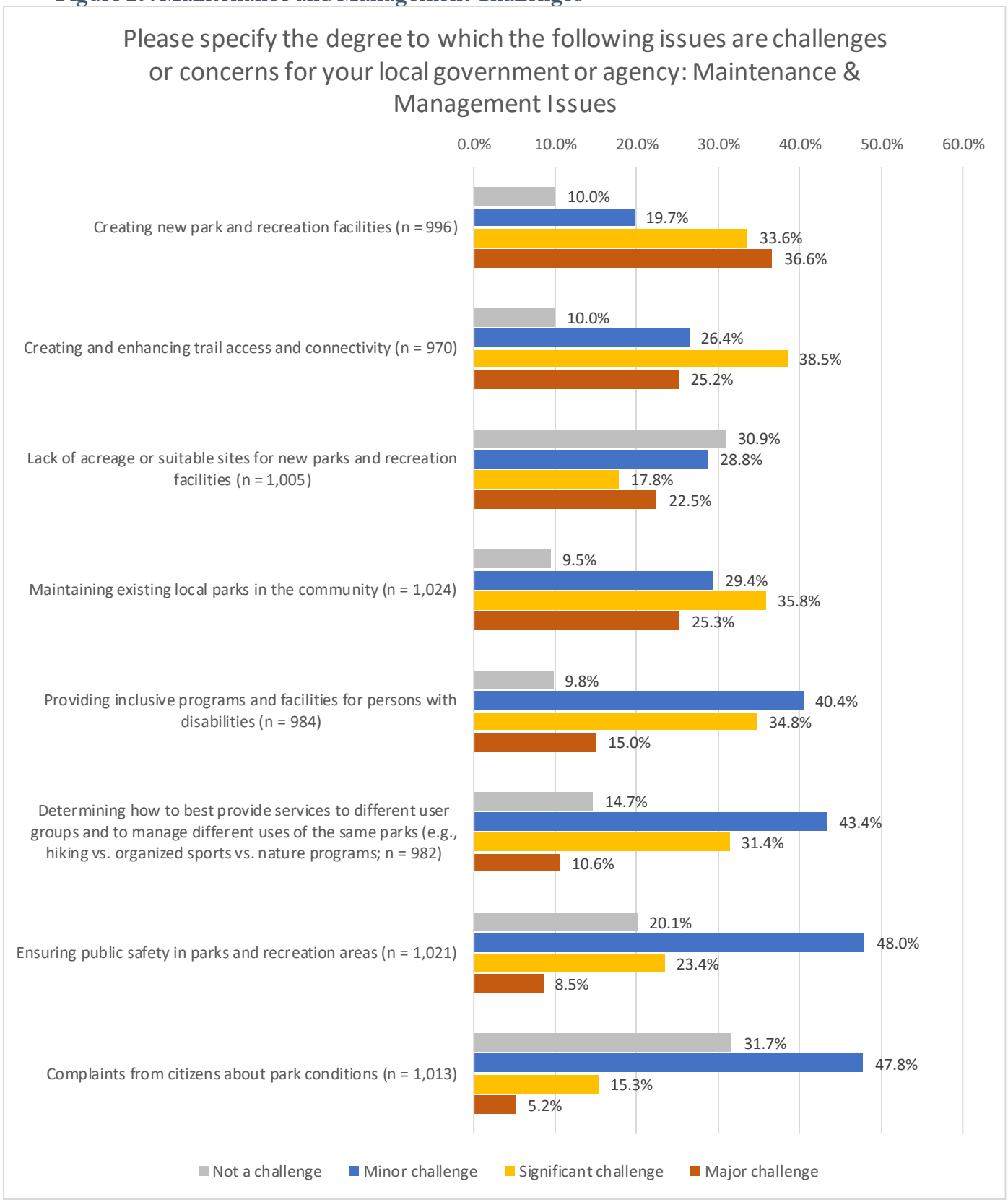
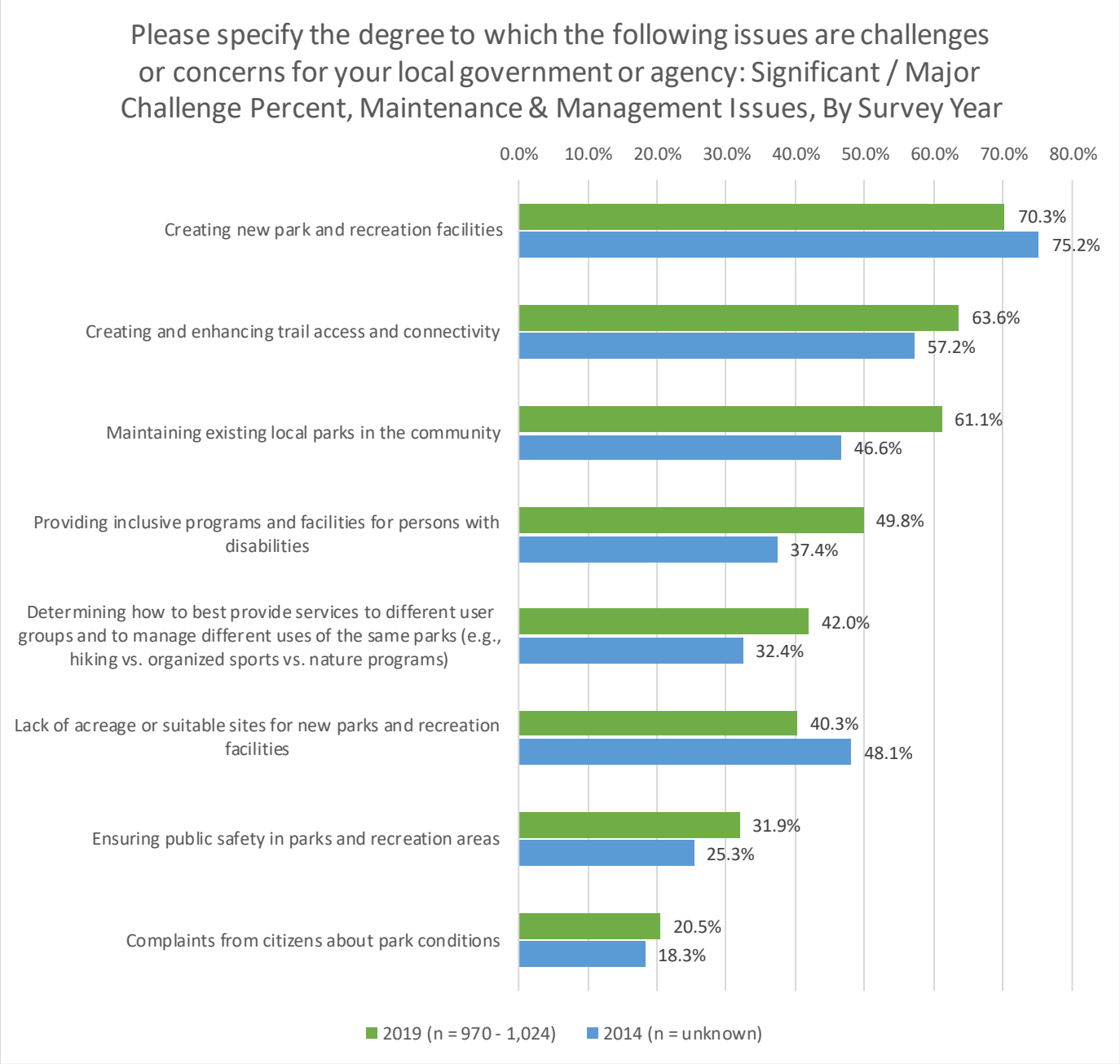


Figure 30. Maintenance and Management Challenges, by Survey Year



Looking at the various challenges faced by their local governments or agencies when providing park and recreation facilities and services by position type, on average, 47.1% of Directors (n = 195 – 202) said that the Maintenance and Management Issues were a Significant challenge or Major challenge, as compared to 50.7% of Elected Officials (*n* = 378 – 357), 48.2% of those with Other positions (*n* = 169 – 182), and just 42.9% of Appointed Officials (*n* = 253 – 281). Although Directors tended to have a higher proportion of members that rated these items as Significant or Major challenges, Appointed Officials were equally likely to say that Determining how to best provide services to different user groups and to manage different uses of the same parks was a

Significant or Major challenge (Director = 37.7%; Appointed Officials = 37.9%). Similarly, despite the fact that Elected Officials had higher overall percentages rating Maintenance and Management Issues as Significant or Major challenges, Directors were equally likely to say that Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities (Directors = 43.9%; Elected Officials = 43.8%) and Maintaining existing local parks in the community (Directors = 61.5%; Elected Officials = 61.3%) were Significant or Major challenges, as seen in the next table.

Table 8. Maintenance and Management Challenges, by Position Type

Please specify the degree to which the following issues are challenges or concerns for your local government or agency by indicating whether each is Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge: Total Percent for Significant/Major Challenge Combined, by Position Type				
Maintenance / Management Issues	**Directors (n = 195 - 202)**	**Appointed Officials (n = 248 - 288)**	**Elected Officials (n = 347 - 357)**	**Other (n = 169 - 182)**
Creating new park and recreation facilities	69.5%	64.9%	73.7%	72.6%
Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity	58.5%	55.6%	67.4%	72.8%
Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities	43.9%	38.6%	43.8%	31.8%
Maintaining existing local parks in the community	61.5%	58.3%	61.3%	64.8%
Providing inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities	51.0%	43.1%	55.7%	47.3%
Determining how to best provide services to different user groups and to manage different uses of the same parks (e.g., hiking vs. organized sports vs. nature programs)	37.7%	37.9%	46.7%	43.4%
Ensuring public safety in parks and recreation areas	34.2%	28.5%	34.7%	29.2%
Complaints from citizens about park conditions	20.4%	16.5%	22.3%	23.6%

Looking at the sizes of populations served, on average, respondents serving less than 5,000 residents saw similar proportions saying that Maintenance and Management Issues were a Significant or Major challenge (46.8%; $n = 382 – 429$) to both those serving populations with 5,000 to 24,999 residents (47.5%; $n = 366 – 379$) and 25,000 residents or more (49.2%; $n = 190 – 202$). However, looking at

individual items suggests that those serving populations of 25,000 or more faced different challenges than those serving smaller populations. Higher proportions of these respondents rated Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity as a Significant or Major challenge (72.8%) and Determining how to best provide services to different user groups and to manage different uses of the same parks (47.2%) than those serving populations of less than 5,000 (58.6% and 37.8%, respectively). In fact, **Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity was identified as the biggest challenge by those serving populations of 25,000 or more.** In addition, more of those serving populations of 25,000 or more saw Maintaining existing local parks in the community as a Significant or Major challenge (67.0%) than those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (56.2%). Conversely, fewer respondents who served populations of 25,000 or more saw Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities as a Significant or Major problem (31.8%) than those serving populations of less than 5,000 (41.8%) and 5,000 to 24,999 (44.5%), as seen in the next table.

Table 9. Maintenance and Management Challenges, by Population Size Served

Please specify the degree to which the following issues are challenges or concerns for your local government or agency by indicating whether each is Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge: Total Percent for Significant/Major Challenge Combined, by Population Size Served			
Maintenance / Management Issues	**Less than 5,000 (n = 382 - 429)**	**5,000 to 24,999 (n= 366 - 379)**	**25,000 or more (n= 190 - 202)**
Creating new park and recreation facilities	68.5%	73.9%	68.7%
Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity	58.6%	63.4%	72.8%
Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities	41.8%	44.5%	31.8%
Maintaining existing local parks in the community	63.1%	56.2%	67.0%
Providing inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities	51.1%	49.3%	47.9%
Determining how to best provide services to different user groups and to manage different uses of the same parks (e.g., hiking vs. organized sports vs. nature programs)	37.8%	44.5%	47.2%
Ensuring public safety in parks and recreation areas	31.9%	31.4%	34.0%
Complaints from citizens about park conditions	21.4%	16.8%	24.4%

Emerging Trends Challenges

All respondents were then asked to indicate whether various emerging trends challenges faced by their local governments or agencies were Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge. Looking at just those who rated items as a Major challenge, top responses included Addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation (18.1%; *n* = 989), Keeping up with technological changes (16.5%; *n* = 999), Providing park and recreation facilities/services that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities (15.6%; *n* = 1,005), Responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities (15.5%; *n* = 986), and Improving public health through outdoor recreation (12.0%; *n* = 986). Items with the highest proportions of respondents indicating that the trends were Not a challenge included Decline in team sports (40.0%; *n* = 944) and Adapting to a more ethnically/racially diverse population (37.0%; *n* = 955).

The percentages of respondents that chose Significant challenge and Major challenge were then combined and compared to responses from the 2014 survey. On average, 44.2% of respondents chose Significant challenge or Major challenge to this series of items (*n* = 944 – 1,005), compared to 34.7% in 2014 (*n* = unknown), indicating a large 9.5% increase in the average number of Significant and Major challenge selections for Emerging Trends Issues. This suggests that the items identified as emerging trends were found to be larger challenges, on average, than in the 2014 survey. This change was driven by the Need to adapt to an aging population, which increased from 23.9% of respondents who identified it as a Significant or Major challenge in 2014 to 49.2% who said so in 2019. This 25.3% increase clearly indicates that this is an emerging problem for respondents. About half of respondents indicated that Responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities (54.6%), Providing park and recreation facilities/services that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities (53.4%), Addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation (51.9%), Improving public health through outdoor recreation (49.8%), and Adapting to an aging population (49.2%) were Significant or Major problems in the 2019 survey.

The figures on the following pages depict respondents' indications of how much of a challenge emerging trends issues are for their local governments or agencies and the comparison of corresponding Significant challenge and Major challenge responses between the 2014 and 2019 surveys.

Figure 31. Emerging Trend Challenges

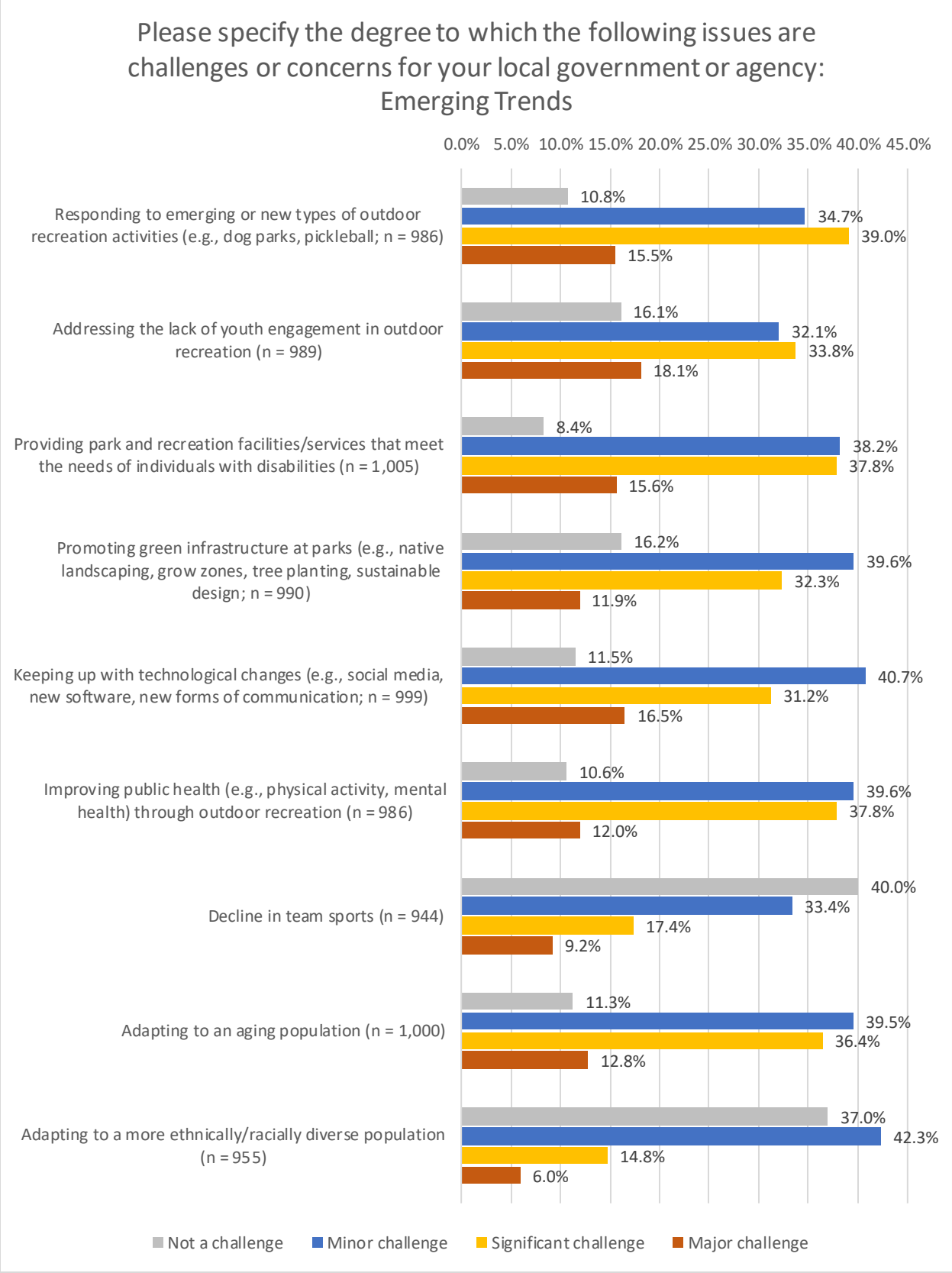
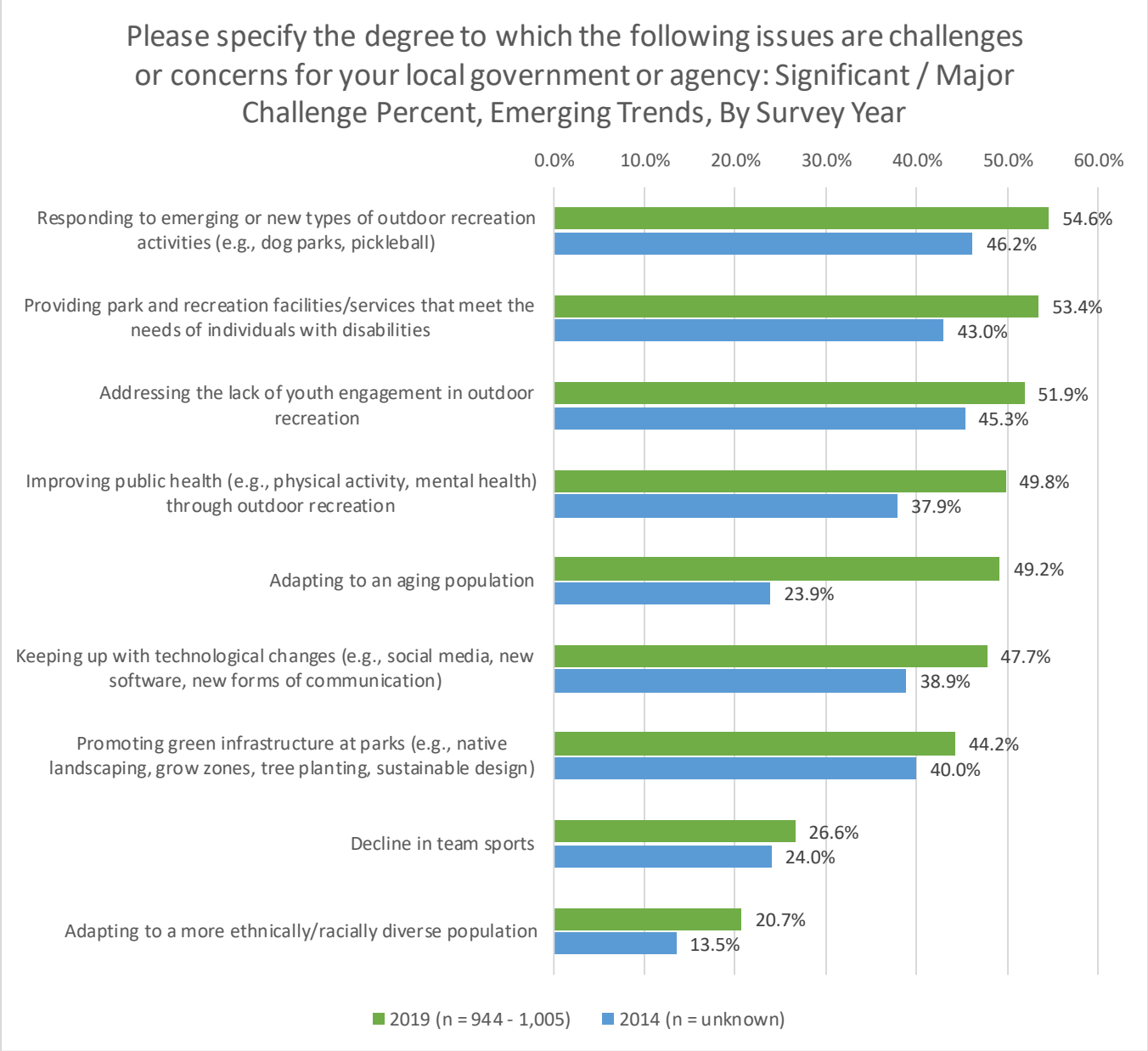


Figure 32. Emerging Trend Challenges, by Survey Year



Looking at the various challenges faced by their local governments or agencies when providing park and recreation facilities and services by position type, on average, 48.6% of Elected Officials (*n* = 335 – 355) said that Emerging Trends Issues were a Significant challenge or Major challenge, as compared to, just 43.6% of those with Other positions (*n* = 166 – 183), 42.1% of Directors (n = 189 – 200), and 40.6% of Appointed Officials (*n* = 253 – 281). Although Elected Officials tended to have a higher proportion of members that rated these items as Significant or Major challenges, Appointed Officials were equally likely to say that Responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities was a Significant or Major challenge (Elected Officials = 57.1%; Appointed Officials = 57.5%). In addition, despite the fact that Directors tended to have lower proportions

identifying Emerging Trends as Significant or Major challenges than Elected Officials and similar proportions to Appointed Officials, more Directors saw Addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation (56.7%) and Adapting to a more ethnically/racially diverse population (25.1%) as Significant or Major challenges than both Elected Officials (54.5% and 19.2%, respectively) and Appointed Officials (43.9% and 16.5%, respectively), as seen in the next table.

Table 10. Emerging Trend Challenges, by Position Type

Please specify the degree to which the following issues are challenges or concerns for your local government or agency by indicating whether each is Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge: Total Percent for Significant/Major Challenge Combined, by Position Type				
Emerging Trends	**Directors (n = 189 - 200)**	**Appointed Officials (n = 253 - 281)**	**Elected Officials (n = 335 - 355)**	**Other (n = 166 - 183)**
Responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities (e.g., dog parks, pickleball)	49.5%	57.5%	57.1%	50.9%
Addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation	56.7%	43.9%	54.5%	53.6%
Providing park and recreation facilities/services that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities	50.8%	50.5%	59.9%	48.3%
Promoting green infrastructure at parks (e.g., native landscaping, grow zones, tree planting, sustainable design)	41.8%	36.2%	48.4%	50.8%
Keeping up with technological changes (e.g., social media, new software, new forms of communication)	46.5%	41.5%	54.7%	45.1%
Improving public health (e.g., physical activity, mental health) through outdoor recreation	45.4%	46.6%	55.4%	48.6%
Decline in team sports	22.8%	26.1%	31.9%	21.0%
Adapting to an aging population	40.4%	46.7%	56.3%	48.6%
Adapting to a more ethnically/racially diverse population	25.1%	16.5%	19.2%	25.3%

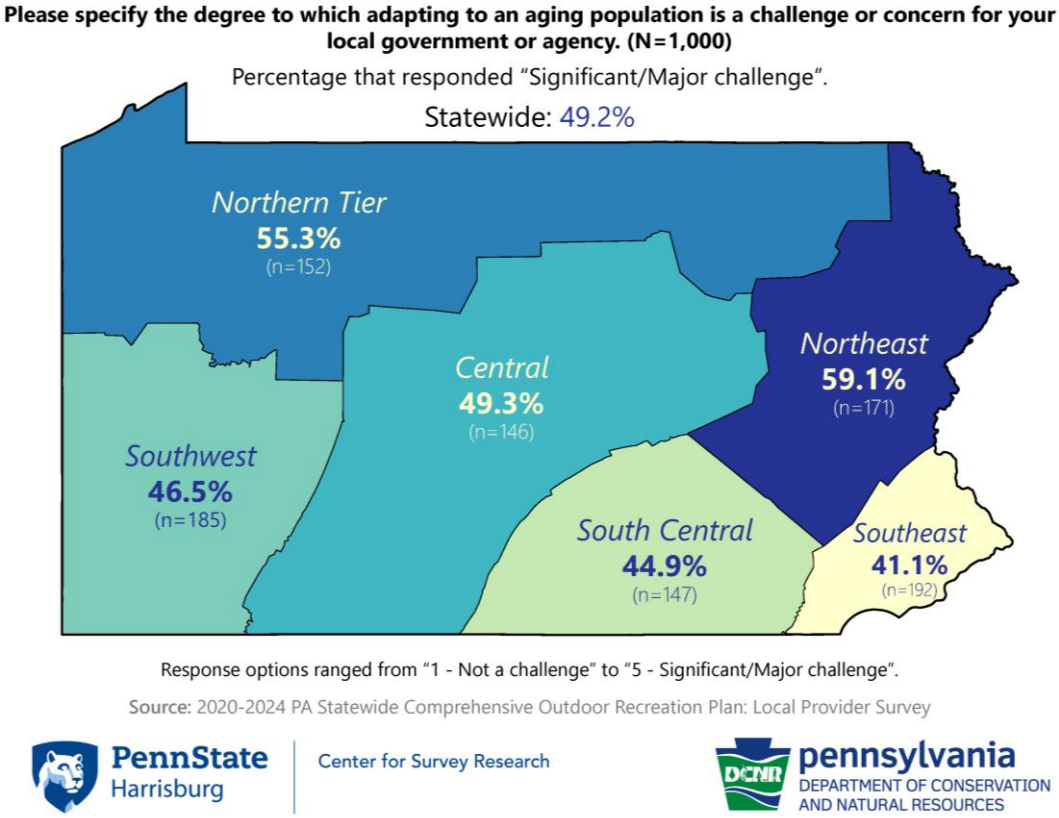
Looking at the sizes of populations served, on average, respondents serving less than 5,000 residents saw similar proportions saying that Emerging Trends Issues were a Significant or Major challenge (45.5%; $n = 381 – 421$) to both those serving populations with 5,000 to 24,999 residents (43.5%; $n = 356 – 371$) and 25,000 residents or more (43.8%; $n = 187 – 199$). More respondents that served populations of 25,000 or more rated Adapting to a more ethnically/racially diverse population as a Significant or Major challenge (32.1%) than those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (21.9%) and less than 5,000 (14.6%). Conversely, more of those serving populations of less than 5,000 saw Decline in team sports as being a Significant or Major challenge (33.9%) than those serving populations of 5,000 to 24,999 (22.6%) and 25,000 or more (20.7%), as seen in the next table.

Table 11. Emerging Trend Challenges, by Population Size Served

Please specify the degree to which the following issues are challenges or concerns for your local government or agency by indicating whether each is Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge: Total Percent for Significant/Major Challenge Combined, by Population Size Served			
Emerging Trends	**Less than 5,000 (n = 381 - 421)**	**5,000 to 24,999 (n = 356 - 371)**	**25,000 or more (n = 187 - 199)**
Responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities (e.g., dog parks, pickleball)	54.7%	56.1%	52.1%
Addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation	54.4%	48.2%	53.3%
Providing park and recreation facilities/services that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities	56.1%	54.1%	48.0%
Promoting green infrastructure at parks (e.g., native landscaping, grow zones, tree planting, sustainable design)	43.3%	44.0%	46.9%
Keeping up with technological changes (e.g., social media, new software, new forms of communication)	47.7%	48.1%	48.0%
Improving public health (e.g., physical activity, mental health) through outdoor recreation	52.2%	48.8%	48.7%
Decline in team sports	33.9%	22.6%	20.7%
Adapting to an aging population	52.9%	47.4%	44.7%
Adapting to a more ethnically/racially diverse population	14.6%	21.9%	32.1%

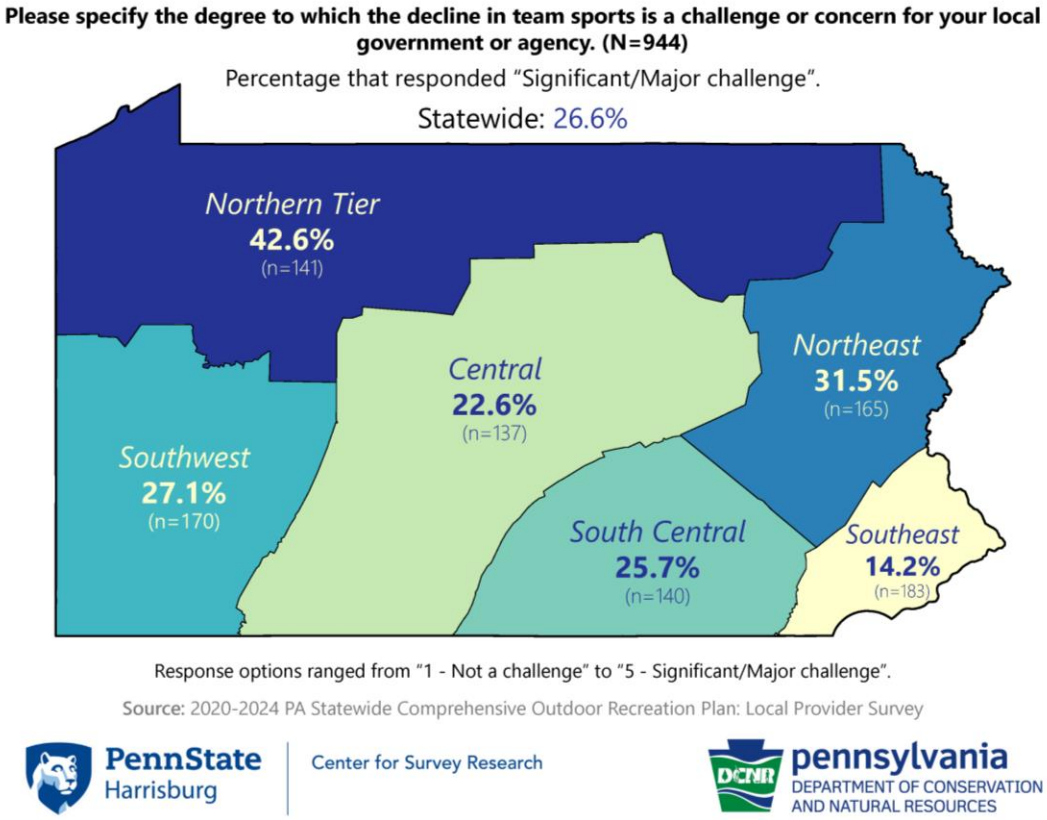
Respondents who indicated that adapting to an aging population was a Significant or Major challenge ranged from lows of 41.1% (n = 192) in the Southeast region and 44.9% (n = 147) in the South Central region to highs of 59.1% (n = 171) in the Northeast region and 55.3% (n = 152) in the Northern Tier region, as seen in the next map. Darker colors represent a higher proportion of respondents that selected Significant/Major challenge for the specified item.

Figure 33. Challenge of Adapting to an Aging Population, by Region



Respondents who indicated that the decline in team sports was a Significant or Major challenge ranged from lows of 14.2% (n = 183) in the Southeast region and 22.6% (n = 137) in the Central region to highs of 42.6% (n = 141) in the Northern Tier region and 31.5% (n = 165) in the Northeast region, as seen in the next map.

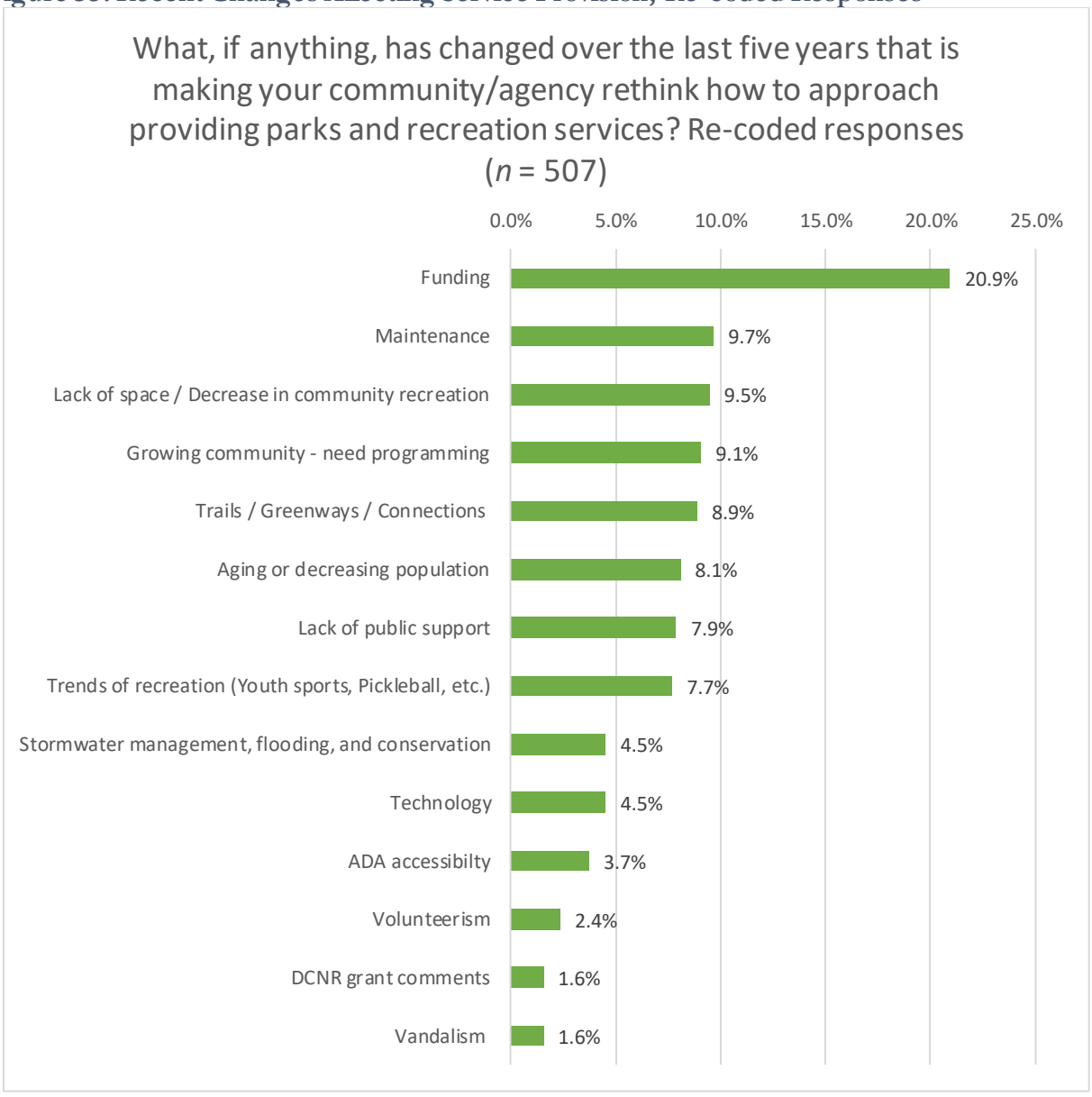
Figure 34. Challenge of Decline in Team Sports, by Region



Changes to Service Provision

Respondents were then asked an open-ended question prompting them to indicate what has changed over the last five years that is making their community or agency rethink how to approach providing park and recreation services, and responses were coded into major categories. The most common theme was funding (20.9%; *n* = 507), while 9.7% mentioned Maintenance, 9.5% discussed a Lack of space / Decrease in community recreation, 9.1% mentioned a Growing community – need for programming, and 8.9% mentioned Trails / Greenways / Connections, as seen in the next figure. It should also be noted that 115 respondents provided responses that were either too specific or too general to fit into a category for analysis. More discussion is provided on each topic following the figure.

Figure 35. Recent Changes Affecting Service Provision, Re-coded Responses



Funding

- Consistent with results from the 2014 survey, funding was the most common theme mentioned by respondents.
- Generally, respondents mentioned a need for more funding in general, both in allocations from their Elected Officials and through grant funds. Respondents need funding for new facilities and infrastructure, maintenance, staff, and programming. Operational funding was a common concern, as grants typically do not address general operational needs.
- Contextually, respondents often mentioned difficulty in obtaining grant funds, especially for smaller communities. They also talked about challenges in raising matching funds for grants and decreasing populations and associated tax bases in certain regions of the state.
- Some discussed a lack of support from state and local governments. Decreasing or stagnant budgets are a problem, particularly when combined with increasing demand and the need to maintain the same number of facilities.
- Some respondents also noted that their populations and associated tax revenues are increasing, but that Elected Officials are not allocating more funding to park and recreation services, making it difficult to meet the needs of their growing populations.

Maintenance

- Maintenance was another common theme mentioned by many respondents. There were many concerns about the increasing costs associated with maintenance, particularly in the face of aging facilities, growing trail usage, and competing priorities in other areas, such as stormwater regulations.
- Respondents noted a need to upgrade equipment, both for the sake of replacing aging equipment and making sure that equipment is safe and ADA compliant.
- As facilities age, they generally see less use. Some respondents are unsure of whether they should invest in maintaining the facilities or replace them with different types of facilities that may better meet the needs of their changing communities.
- In addition, some respondents noted a need to find new ways to maintain their grounds using more environmentally friendly means. Suggestions included limiting herbicide use and building rain gardens, but some pointed out that these solutions can be costly.

Lack of Space / Decrease in Community Recreation

- Many respondents mentioned a lack of usable space as a growing problem, particularly in the Southeast region. Some attribute this to new open space requirements, while others blame overdevelopment.
- Some respondents discussed this issue in terms of the need to preserve open space, indicating that it is difficult to acquire land to properly protect the environment.
- In addition, some respondents noted that their communities are seeing general declines in community recreation, particularly among youth and team sports. This can lead to difficulty in designating space for recreation as priorities change.

- Some respondents blame the lack of space for the changes they see in team sports, while others say that the emergence of private leagues has introduced challenges to space utilization. It is clear that there are opposing trends in different communities, since some communities are seeing decreases in organized sports, while others are having trouble keeping up with the demands of leagues.
- Similarly, there are clear differences across communities regarding their facility utilization. Some communities cite difficulty in keeping up with demand, while others report that demand is waning.

Growing Community – Need for Programming

- Unsurprisingly, "community" comes out as the most common word used by respondents, emphasizing that serving the community is at the heart of the work that the respondents do, regardless of their individual priorities or challenges.
- Many respondents talked about demographic changes and the associated challenges in meeting the expectations of new, younger residents. Some also discussed the need to balance increasing demands of the aging population with creating new opportunities for the growing younger population.
- Some reported challenges associated with meeting the demands of a rapidly growing population. They struggle with finding funds to develop new infrastructure to support the growing demands and keep up with the maintenance associated with increased usage. Closely associated with this is the need to acquire new land for future development, which is potentially in opposition to open space needs.
- Respondents also noted some general changes in their programming. For example, some respondents mentioned adapting their programming to serve larger groups of people and be more generalized, while others are developing family programming to be inclusive of all ages.
- As their communities grow and change, so do their programming needs. Respondents reported a need to develop more family-friendly programming, more programming for youth, and programming that can be presented to larger groups of people. Specific program needs mentioned included summer camps, educational programs, youth sports leagues, and adult recreational leagues.

Trails / Greenways / Connections

- Trails were another popular topic mentioned by respondents, resulting in a plurality of opposing needs. In fact, the word "trail" was mentioned more than any other word by respondents.
- Many respondents indicated that the use of trails has surged in the past five years, resulting in a need to create new trails and expand trail-related programming. A few respondents talked about the changing nature of the role of trails in overall recreation planning. They believe that trails are starting to be seen as more of an active lifestyle necessity and less of a recreation luxury, which is a change to traditional thinking.

- Several respondents also mentioned the need to develop trails to connect adjoining communities and to expand Rails-to-Trails initiatives, while others discussed the need to retain trails for ATV and motorized vehicle use.
- Many respondents also indicated a growing interest in walking and biking trails, which is making it easier to gain support for developing such projects. On the other hand, some respondents expressed concerns that their trails were vastly underutilized, resulting in wasted spending on maintenance.
- Others discussed the need to improve safety on multiuse trails or trails that connect community resources.

Aging or Decreasing Population

- Many respondents mentioned an aging population as a concern, particularly as it relates to developing programming and facilities that meet their needs.
- In many cases, older individuals are becoming more active, resulting in a need to adapt through ADA adjustments and changes to programming. However, some respondents were concerned that their aging populations are resulting in decreased facility usage. These areas are also seeing decreases in the youth population due to overall population decreases and younger individuals moving out of the area. These changes are resulting in a need to evaluate the role park and recreation facilities fill in the communities.
- Another concern voiced was balancing the need to raise taxes to meet the expectations of younger individuals and families while protecting older individuals with fixed incomes.

Lack of Public Support

- Some respondents discussed challenges they have with Elected Officials, such as board members and county supervisors. They expressed concerns that such officials were unaware of the specific benefits their services bring, while others mentioned lack of support or interest from the officials. Overcoming these mindsets and educating officials remains a challenge.
- Respondents also mentioned a culture that rejects change and embraces the status quo. These respondents hope for new leadership that will provide a vision for their community that embraces the roles that park and recreation services play in residents' lives.
- Some respondents also mentioned that their Elected Officials are unwilling to provide funding to meet the needs of their changing demographics and, in some cases, are generally unwilling to fund park and recreation services.

Trends of Recreation (Youth Sports, Pickleball, etc.)

- Some respondents discussed overscheduling of youth by parents and the associated changes they have seen in the regionalization of team sports. They find themselves competing with private sports group. In addition, the lack of parent involvement has also introduced new challenges with staffing recreation leagues.

- Some respondents have seen a decrease of playground usage that they believe is attributed to the increase in organized sports and the competition from technology for youth attention and interest.
- A few noted that the demand for athletic fields is increasing, while others indicated a decline in youth sports programs. For those seeing increases in demand, there was a common desire to acquire more land to meet these needs or to find ways to share existing fields. Some specifically mentioned a shift from park and recreation-run youth sports to specialty sports organizations that are pay-to-play as driving this need.
- Respondents also discussed the challenges associated with finding funds and space to meet the demands of emerging trends, such as dog parks and pickleball. Some expressed concern that the trends would pass, and that they would then be left with facilities that would not be used.

Stormwater Management, Flooding, and Conservation

- Regulations were another popular theme, particularly related to stormwater control and the costs associated with hiring engineers to develop projects. Some discussed projects that they are trying to fund, and others mentioned current projects that are being done to improve stormwater management, sometimes through open space initiatives, and sometimes through the repurposing of existing spaces, like parking lots and playgrounds.
- Many respondents mentioned that these costs prevent them from being able to take on other projects, especially for those serving smaller communities. Some respondents indicated that they must change their thinking as it relates to new facilities and projects. Training and education might be beneficial to assist with this type of planning.
- Related to stormwater, several respondents also mentioned flooding problems that have caused them to need to replace facilities in the past two years.

Technology

- Many respondents mentioned a lack of youth engagement and an associated competition with technology as an ongoing problem for which they have not identified a solution. Identifying best practices in this area and proving training may be beneficial to many of the respondents.
- Some respondents would like to find ways to use technology to engage youth, rather than just blaming technology for the lack of youth engagement.
- Others would like to use technology to engage adult residents and communicate opportunities to them, noting that traditional communication means (e.g., flyers, local media, etc.) have become ineffective in reaching residents. Exploring ways to use social media would be beneficial to many of the respondents.

ADA Accessibility

- The aging population has introduced a number of new needs; specifically, there is a challenge in offering programs and facilities that meet accessibility needs and are ADA compliant. Some identify this as a top priority. Others say that it is a significant problem, but that they do not have the time or money to address it.
- A few respondents mentioned specific needs that they have related to ADA facilities, while others noted that they currently have no ADA facilities.
- In addition to the aging population, some respondents noted a need to better address needs for children with disabilities through the procurement of ADA-compliant playground equipment.

Volunteerism

- The need to increase community engagement, particularly in terms of volunteer numbers, was also emphasized by some respondents.
- Respondents pointed to a general lack of community involvement, occasionally resulting in reduced community input. A few respondents mentioned that they are struggling to staff their local park and recreation boards.
- Others were also concerned that the lack of volunteers is leading to difficulty maintaining spaces and running youth sports leagues. Others indicated that they are running their park and recreation services with a mostly volunteer staff, which is a struggle.

DCNR Grant Comments

- Respondents were also concerned about the ways in which grant funds are allocated. Some noted that they believe that grant opportunities have decreased, while others said that the grant distribution process appears to be uneven.
- A few respondents felt that the same communities continued to get large grants, while smaller communities continually received nothing. They also felt that the available grants tended to favor large projects, like trails, leaving smaller communities struggling to find ways to complete small projects.
- Suggestions for improving the grant process included offering grants for smaller projects, assisting smaller communities with finding matching funds, and offering grants to pay for design and engineering services.

Vandalism

- Respondents mentioned increased levels of vandalism. Suggestions included having more security and implementing more educational programs to combat the lack of respect from community members.

The next figure depicts a word cloud of responses, showing common words that appeared throughout respondents' answers. The larger the word, the more common that it appeared in the responses.

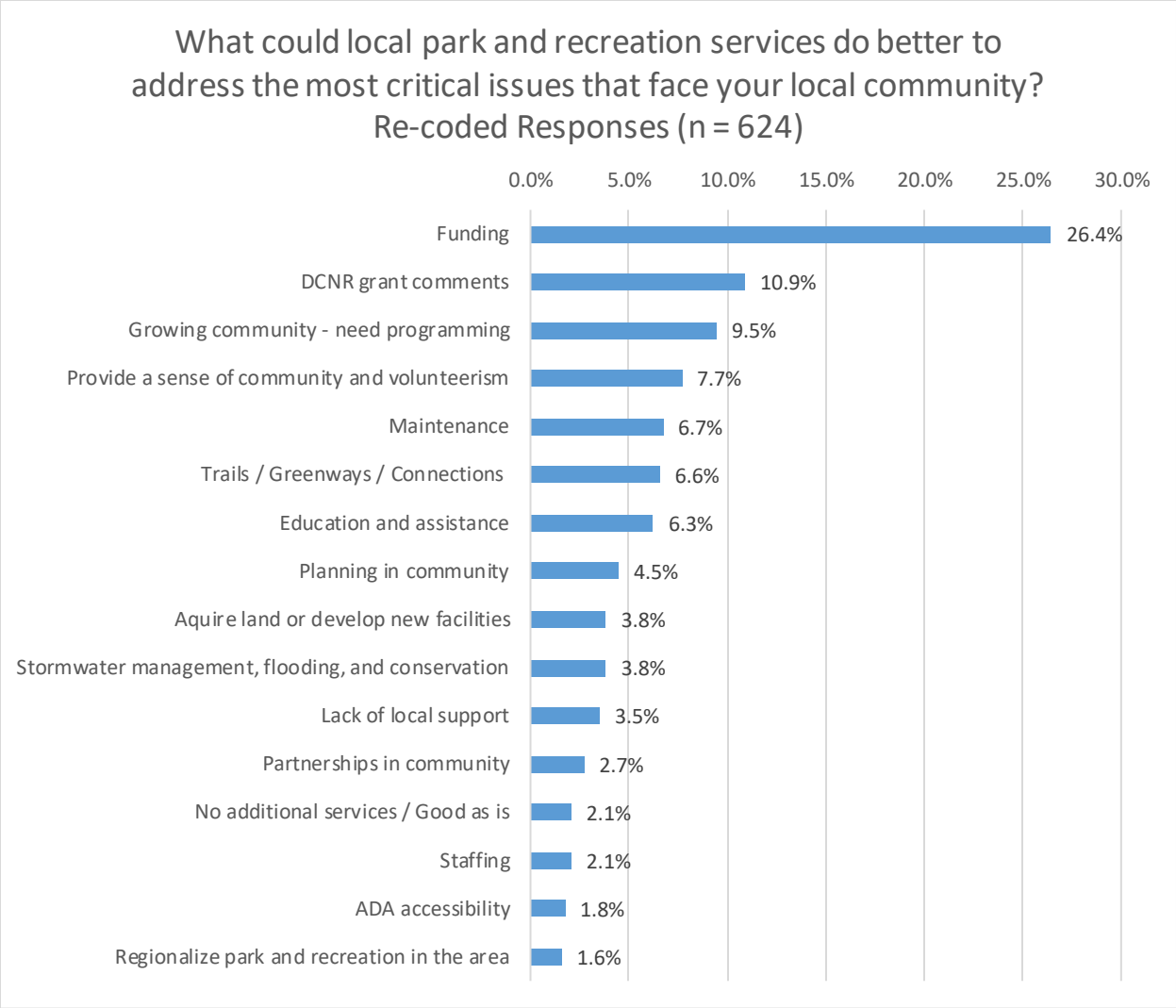
Figure 36. Word Cloud of Recent Changes Affecting Service Provision

What, if anything, has changed over the last five years that is making your community/agency rethink how to approach providing parks and recreation services? (*n* = 655)

Addressing Community Needs

Finally, respondents were given an open-ended question asking them what local park and recreation services could do better to address the most critical issues that face their local communities. Many respondents interpreted this question as asking what DCNR could do better to support them. Again, the most common theme was Funding (26.4%; *n* = 624), while other common responses included DCNR grant comments (10.9%), Growing community- need for programming (9.5%), Provide a sense of community and volunteerism (7.7%), Maintenance (6.7%), Trails / Greenways / Connections (6.6%), and Education and assistance (6.3%), as seen in the next figure. It should also be noted that 33 respondents provided responses that were either too specific or too general to fit into a category for analysis. More discussion is provided on each topic following the figure.

Figure 37. Service Improvement Opportunities, Re-coded Responses



Funding

- As with the previous question, access to funding was the most-common issue mentioned by respondents. Many simply requested more funding, while some called for raising taxes or shifting of funds from other services to better-fund park and recreation services. Funding was requested for a variety of purposes, including maintenance, facilities, staffing, programming, ADA compliance, planning, and engineering consultation.
- In addition to the need for more funding and more variety in the types of funding available, respondents requested help in determining what funding is available to them.
- Increasing maintenance costs continue to be a concern, particularly as new facilities and spaces are acquired. Many respondents indicated that they struggle to provide core services due to a lack of adequate funding.
- The costs associated with building new facilities to meet the needs of growing and/or diversifying populations was also a concern.

DCNR Grant Comments

- Many respondents shared their thoughts on obtaining and using grants. Respondents would like assistance in applying for grants and more flexibility in how the funds can be used. Examples of additional grant opportunities requested included grants for maintenance, equipment upgrades, staffing and park management, technical support, and engineering consultation.
- Several barriers to funding were identified; they included lengthy or cumbersome grant applications, the need to find funds for matching grants, and the lack of resources available to apply for grants from smaller municipalities.
- Some felt that the grant process was cumbersome and inefficient. One respondent mentioned a desire to obtain feedback on denied grants so that they can revise and resubmit. Others felt that it was impossible for smaller communities to compete with larger communities for these grants.
- Respondents also would like more equitable distribution of funding, sometimes indicating that grants seem to be awarded to the same communities.
- Many respondents stressed how different needs are faced across the Commonwealth, and even within communities. There was a concern that a one-size-fits-all approach has not been successful in addressing needs, particularly between small and large communities.

Growing Community – Need for Programming

- Another common theme was the need to develop programming that better meets the needs of a diversifying and/or growing population. In some cases, respondents are dealing with an influx of new residents or a growing subset of younger residents. Respondents need assistance with designing and implementing programming to meet these needs.
- Suggestions for improving programming offerings included developing community centers, providing broader programming to reach more people, hosting community festivals, developing targeted programming for women and minority groups, and designating more programming for children and seniors.
- Respondents also would like to learn about emerging trends in programming for older and younger individuals. They would like to see their parks and facilities become a draw for people, rather than an afterthought.

Provide a Sense of Community and Volunteerism

- Respondents also mentioned needing to find better ways to do outreach to the various constituencies they serve. How do they connect with older individuals while also increasing youth engagement?
- There is a desire to engage community members in new ways. Doing so could expand the reach of the park and recreation services, while also re-engaging those who might no longer use the facilities. They would like to find ways to get people outside, encourage youth recreation, build a sense of community, and develop a sense of pride among community members.
- Suggestions for engagement included developing wellness programs, finding new ways to utilize technology in program development, and working to solicit input from residents to drive program and facility development.
- Community health issues were also of concern to respondents. They would like to have their parks become more prominent in residents' minds as outlets for physical activity.
- Diversity initiatives were also mentioned by respondents. Some respondents indicated that there needs to be better education on how to work with diverse populations. They also suggested developing programs that better meet the needs of the diverse populations they serve.
- As mentioned previously, the need to encourage volunteer participation was also on respondents' minds. Maintaining facilities and programs is becoming increasingly more difficult due to dwindling volunteer support.
- Several respondents also mentioned wanting to find ways to reach their constituents through enhanced communications and public relations campaigns.

Maintenance

- Consistent with the previous question and with other surveys, maintenance was a continued concern among respondents. Maintenance is a primary concern to many respondents to the point where they are unable to devote resources to other initiatives. Some respondents are concerned that new facilities should not be developed until existing facilities can be adequately maintained.
- Respondents requested help with many different maintenance projects, including upgrading and reconditioning equipment and facilities, repairing trails, landscaping, improving safety measures, and keeping parks clean.

Trails / Greenways / Connections

- Another common theme found throughout the responses was the need to connect communities, both physically and otherwise.
- Many noted an increased demand for trails and greenways, especially those that connect different areas.

- Respondents requested assistance with building different types of trails, including walking/biking trails, multi-use trails, ATV/motorized trails, and trails that connect different communities. There was an emphasis that regional trails not only serve as an economic driver, but also as a community-building tool. There were also suggestions to promote walking and biking as primary means of transportation.
- Many respondents also desire more green space, citing a variety of reasons, including to support nature enthusiasts, to promote animal and plant habitats, and to improve stormwater management.
- Respondents also shared concerns about safety, particularly with relation to shared trails, bike paths and lanes, and pedestrian safety.

Education and Assistance

- Many respondents requested assistance from DCNR to provide consultation and guidance on a host of issues. Some common issues included learning about funding opportunities, learning about maintenance options, and planning for use of their space.
- Some respondents would also like to have access to more education and training, particularly with regards to planning for ADA compliance, walkability, stormwater planning, facility placement, and programming. Other ideas included offering webinars on a variety of topics, including promoting parks on social media, park trends, maintenance ideas, and Eagle Scout project ideas. A suggestion was made to offer this training more-often in the off-season so that more staff could attend.
- Several respondents also indicated a desire to have access to a certified planner, possibly available as an in-kind contribution in place of grants.
- Respondents would also like assistance with marketing and promoting what facilities, services, and programs are currently available to their residents.
- Many respondents expressed a desire to learn about best practices in a variety of areas. For example, respondents would like to learn about maintenance best practices, both in terms of sustainability and efficiency.

Planning in the Community

- Respondents requested various types of assistance with planning for their communities. Some mentioned needs like design consultation assistance or engineering help, while others would like help with developing strategic plans or feasibility studies.
- Some respondents requested assistance with assessing and providing feedback on specific ideas they have, such as where to build a trail, how to build a walkable community, or how to best use a particular tract of land.

Acquire Land or Develop New Facilities

- The need to acquire land was another common theme. Some respondents indicated a need to acquire land to develop new facilities, such as playgrounds, pickleball courts, and dog parks, while others intend to build or expand trails for various uses.
- Some respondents indicated that finding new land to acquire is difficult, either because of cost or because most land in the area has already been developed.

Stormwater Management, Flooding, and Conservation

- The need to address stormwater planning and regulations was also mentioned often. Respondents would like to learn about how to best meet these regulations, especially in ways that are most cost-effective. Some would like assistance with coordinating and designing projects to adequately meet regulations. Respondents also mentioned needing help with specific stormwater management projects, such as stream bank restoration, upstream storm water management, mass native plant plantings, and rain garden development. Offering classes or training in this area might be of benefit to many respondents.
- Some respondents, particularly those in the Southeast and Southwest regions, mentioned a significant need to maintain open space, both for future development and for enhancing property values.
- Some were adamant that green space must be maintained, as over-development has become a problem, even within recreational spaces.

Lack of Local Support

- Many respondents felt that park and recreation services were not supported by local officials. They feel that Elected Officials do not see the value in the services they provide, possibly because they do not see any of the direct benefits.
- Several individuals mentioned that the field needs to do a better job with educating Elected Officials and convincing them that parks and recreation are worthy of investment.
- Respondents indicated that they need to find ways to help overcome traditional thinking among Elected Officials, such as county commissioners and park and recreation department boards. Broadly, they expressed a desire to create more champions for recreational development, both within local and state governments and within the broader community.
- Others also mentioned a need to improve relationships, both between park and recreation associations and between these associations and communities.
- Suggestions to overcome some of these obstacles included setting up regular meetings with Elected Officials, proactively keeping government officials informed of needs and opportunities, and involving Elected Officials in activities to help them see the values of the parks.

Partnerships in the Community

- Several respondents also saw an opportunity to develop partnerships and share resources. They would like to see better coordination between local municipalities and non-profit organizations and the development of public / private partnerships. Other ideas included developing agreements with school districts for facility use and finding ways to cross-promote facility use in neighboring communities.
- Participants also recognized that they have a role in promoting public health, but they saw difficulties in how they fulfill this role when their communities are increasingly less engaged. This was a particular challenge for youth, who they believe are forgoing a more active lifestyle in favor of using more electronics and technology.

No Additional Services / Good As-Is

- Some respondents had no suggestions for additional ways in which they could be helped to address critical needs in the community, indicating that the current means of support are excellent. Others simply did not provide ways in which their services could be improved.

Staffing

- Staffing was a common concern, as many communities are under-staffed and over-worked.
- Respondents would like the ability to hire more staff, especially since volunteer numbers are decreasing. Some respondents would simply like the ability to hire one full-time staff member, while others are hoping to develop a regionalized position that could provide oversight for fragmented areas.

ADA Accessibility

- As mentioned previously, many respondents are facing an aging population. They are looking to find ways to meet older residents' needs while also serving the younger residents in their communities.
- Others indicated a need to find the best ways to increase accessibility, both for older and disabled individuals. Suggestions included offering grant money for ADA-accessible playground equipment and providing better walking/wheelchair paths and restroom facilities.

Regionalize Park and Recreation in the Area

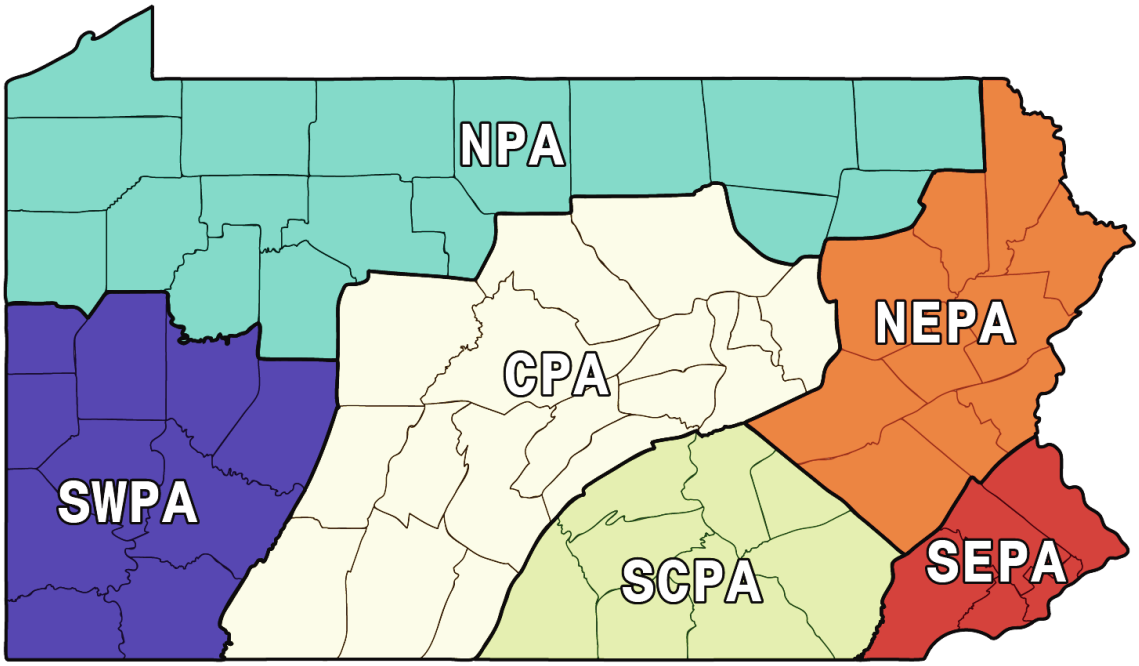
- Some respondents also mentioned a need to pool resources, possibly at the county level, to improve efficiency and reduce task redundancy and duplicative overhead.
- Suggestions on possible regionalized activities included developing regional recreation commissions, county-wide or regional trail systems, and regional aquatics parks.

The next figure depicts a word cloud of responses, showing common words that appeared throughout respondents' answers. Again, the larger the word, the more common that it appeared in the responses.

Figure 38. Word Cloud of Service Improvement Opportunities

What could local park and recreation services do better to address the most critical issues that face your local community? (*n* = 695)

APPENDIX A – MAP AND LIST OF SURVEY REGIONS



Northern	Central	Northeast
Bradford	Bedford	Berks
Cameron	Blair	Carbon
Clarion	Cambria	Lackawanna
Crawford	Centre	Lehigh
Elk	Clearfield	Luzerne
Erie	Clinton	Monroe
Forest	Columbia	Northampton
Jefferson	Fulton	Pike
McKean	Huntingdon	Schuylkill
Mercer	Juniata	Wayne
Potter	Lycoming	
Sullivan	Mifflin	
Susquehanna	Montour	
Tioga	Northumberland	
Venango	Snyder	
Warren	Somerset	
Wyoming	Union	

Southwest	South Central	Southeast
Allegheny	Adams	Bucks
Armstrong	Cumberland	Chester
Beaver	Dauphin	Delaware
Butler	Franklin	Montgomery
Fayette	Lancaster	Philadelphia
Greene	Lebanon	
Indiana	Perry	
Lawrence	York	
Washington		
Westmoreland		

APPENDIX B – SURVEY INSTRUMENT

2020-2024 PA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: Pennsylvania Local Park and Recreation Provider Survey

Does your community need help upgrading and managing your local parks and recreational facilities? The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is partnering with key state associations in seeking your input to determine how to best allocate grant funds and provide assistance.

The information you provide in this survey will help us determine state funding priorities and programs. This survey should take about **10-15 minutes**. You should not have to look up any information to complete the survey. **This survey is intended for elected/Appointed Officials and park/recreation directors.**

To participate, visit the following link:
https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8x03muWL490GN81

We conducted a similar survey for Pennsylvania's 2014 plan. As a result of this survey, DCNR directed more grant funds to rehabilitating existing park facilities – fix it first. To learn more about this plan visit http://paoutdoorrecplan.com/index.html.

This study is being administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources working in cooperation with the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg. If you have questions about the survey, please contact Cheri Matter, DCNR Recreation and Conservation Advisor at chematter@pa.gov.

Thank you for helping us understand your community's park and recreation needs!

Q1. Which of the following best describes the local government or agency that you represent?

- Township
- Borough
- City
- County
- Multi-municipal recreation authority, commission, council of governments or non-profit
- Other

Q2. Which of the following best describes your position?

Programming note: Code the following together:

- *Directors: Park and Recreation Director and Public Works Director*
- *Appointed Officials: Township, City or Borough Manager/Secretary and County Chief Clerk/Administrator*
- *Elected Officials: Township Supervisor/Commissioner, Borough Council member, County Commissioner, City Council Member, Mayor*
- *Other: County Planner, Municipal Engineer, Something else*

- Park and Recreation Director/Coordinator
- Public Works Director/Park Superintendent
- Township, City or Borough Manager/Secretary
- County Chief Clerk/Administrator
- Township Supervisor/Commissioner
- Borough Council Member
- County Commissioner/Council Member
- City Council Member
- Mayor
- County Planner
- Municipal Engineer
- Something else

Q3. What county is your local government or agency located in?

Programming note: Insert dropdown list of 67 PA Counties + Multiple Counties option
Re-code to region, as indicated by DCNR

Q4. Please indicate the size of the population your local government or agency serves.

- Less than 2,500 people
- 2,500 to 4,999
- 5,000 to 9,999
- 10,000 to 24,999
- 25,000 to 49,999
- 50,000 to 99,999
- 100,000 or more
- Don't know / Not sure

Q5. Park and recreation services have the potential to provide a number of benefits for their constituents and local communities. Please indicate the extent to which your local government or agency provides for each of the following park and recreation benefits on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Not at all, 3 is Somewhat, and 5 is A great deal.

Programming note: Responses choices: 1- Not at all, 2, 3- Somewhat, 4, 5-A great deal, Don't know. Rotate responses.

Re-code into categories identified by DCNR on the back-end based on previous PDF draft. These categories will not appear in the survey to the respondent.

- Provides children with a safe place to play
- Makes the community a more desirable place to live
- Provides opportunities for social interaction
- Enhances a sense of community
- Promotes positive youth development
- Improves physical health and fitness
- Provides equitable and accessible recreation opportunities to a broad constituency
- Increases property values in the community
- Protects the natural environment
- Reduces stress/improves mental health
- Helps attract new residents and businesses
- Prevents erosion and flooding
- Encourages residents to connect with the natural environment
- Ensures there is open green space near every home
- Improves relationships between different racial/ethnic groups of residents

Ask only of Park and Recreation Directors/Coordinators.

NAT_PROG. Does your agency provide/offer outdoor nature-based programs (e.g. birding, hiking, paddling, fishing)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / Not sure

Ask only of Park and Recreation Directors/Coordinators.

GET_OUTDOORS. Is your agency a Get Outdoors PA partner?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / Not sure

Ask only if NO to GET_OUTDOORS.

GET_REASON. Why is your agency not a Get Outdoors PA partner? Please select all that apply.

Programming note: Rotate responses.

- I have never heard of Get Outdoors PA
- My agency does not do outdoor nature based programs (e.g., kayaking, hiking, birding)
- My agency has limited staff, resources and/or knowledge to conduct outdoor recreation programming
- My agency has tried nature based programs and had few participants – lack of interest
- My community has a lack of passive park land (e.g., woods, streams, meadows)
- No interest in being a Get Outdoors PA partner
- Other

Ask only of Park and Recreation Directors/Coordinators.

HEALTH_PROV. Is your agency working with health care providers on programs like walking, get healthy talks, health screening, etc.?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / Not sure

Ask only of Park and Recreation Directors/Coordinators.

MEAL_PROG. Does your agency participate in distributing a federally-funded out-of-school time meal service program to youth?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / Not sure

Ask only if YES to MEAL_PROG.

NUM_MEALS. About how many meals were served in the past year? If you do not know a ballpark number, please leave it blank. _____

NUM_IND. About how many individuals were served in the past year? If you do not know a ballpark number, please leave it blank. _____

Ask only of Park and Recreation Directors/Coordinators.

SUSTAIN. How likely are you to use each of the following sustainable practices for your community's park systems in the next five years, regardless of whether you are using them now?

Programming note: Rotate questions.

Response options: Not at all likely, Somewhat likely, Extremely likely, Don't know / Not sure.

- Managing storm water run-off from your community through the open space
- Using rain gardens and plantings to retain water
- Planting trees and streamside buffers
- Reducing mowing, fertilizers and pesticides
- Incorporating pervious surfaces
- Using renewable energy sources
- Incorporating recycling and composting
- Utilizing LED lighting

Ask only of Park and Recreation Directors/Coordinators

OPIOID. In which of the following ways has the opioid epidemic affected your parks and/or recreation services? Please select all that apply.

Programming note: Rotate responses.

- Drug paraphernalia (e.g., needles) found in parks
- Overdoses in parks
- Drug use in playgrounds (e.g., slides, platforms)
- Drug use in restrooms/pavilions
- Park use has dropped due to perceived safety concerns
- Narcan is available at park office/municipal building
- Developed a training program for park/recreation staff
- Developed new recreation programs for those with mental health and addiction issues
- Developed substance abuse and/or awareness programs
- Other
- No impact / The opioid epidemic has not impacted parks and/or recreation services

Q9. Please rate the level of priority your local government or agency places on **investing in each of the following facilities** over the next five years (1 = your lowest priority for investment to 5 = your highest priority for investment).

Programming note: Rotate responses.

1- Lowest priority, 2, 3, 4, 5- Highest priority, Don't know, Not applicable

- Playgrounds
- Neighborhood parks
- Community or regional parks
- Sports fields (e.g., soccer, baseball, lacrosse)
- Sports courts (e.g., basketball, tennis, pickleball)
- Community or regional trail systems
- Outdoor interpretive/educational facilities
- Community gardens
- Swimming pools/water play parks
- Opportunities for/access to water-based recreation (e.g., boating, kayaking)
- Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing
- Off-leash dog parks
- Mountain bike trails
- Action sports parks (e.g., skate parks, pump tracks)
- Trails/parks for motorized activities
- Inclusive programs/facilities for persons with disabilities (ADA Access)
- Pavilions, amphitheaters, or other outdoor public space like plazas

Programming Note: Ask Q10 and Q11 ONLY of Park and Recreation Directors.

Q10. Over the last three years, has tax-supported funding declined, remained the same, or increased for park and recreation **operational expenses**?

Q11. Over the last three years, has tax-supported funding declined, remained the same, or increased for park and recreation **capital expenses**?

- Tax Supported Funding has Declined
- Tax Supported Funding has Remained the Same
- Tax Supported Funding has Increased
- Don't know / Not sure

Q12. How important are each of the following priorities for ***funding*** outdoor recreation and conservation efforts in your community on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Not at all important and 5 is Extremely important?

Programming note: Responses Questions.

1- Not at all important, 2, 3, 4, 5- Extremely important, Don't know/Not sure, Not applicable.

- Acquire and protect open space (as undeveloped, conserved land)
- Acquire additional land and water areas for developed recreation
- Maintain existing park and recreation areas
- Provide environmental and conservation programs
- Provide recreation programs at parks and recreation areas
- Protect wildlife and fish habitat
- Build more greenways/trails
- Restore damaged rivers and streams
- Build walking paths and bicycle lanes or trails between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas

Q12a. From the previous list, please select the SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT (or number one) funding priority for outdoor recreation and conservation efforts in your community.

Transition: In this final section, we would like to know a little more about the challenges your local government or agency faces when providing park and recreation facilities and services. For each of the following areas, please specify the degree to which the following issues are challenges or concerns for your local government or agency by indicating whether each item is Not a challenge, a Minor challenge, a Significant challenge, or a Major challenge.

Programming Note: Response options: Not a Challenge, Minor Challenge, Significant Challenge, Major Challenge, Don't know / Not sure

Q13. Maintenance/Management Issues

- Creating new park and recreation facilities
- Creating and enhancing trail access and connectivity
- Lack of acreage or suitable sites for new parks and recreation facilities
- Maintaining existing local parks in the community
- Providing inclusive programs and facilities for persons with disabilities
- Determining how to best provide services to different user groups and to manage different uses of the same parks (e.g., hiking vs. organized sports vs. nature programs)
- Ensuring public safety in parks and recreation areas
- Complaints from citizens about park conditions

Q14. Emerging Trends

- Responding to emerging or new types of outdoor recreation activities (e.g., dog parks, pickleball)
- Addressing the lack of youth engagement in outdoor recreation
- Providing park and recreation facilities/services that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities
- Promoting green infrastructure at parks (e.g., native landscaping, grow zones, tree planting, sustainable design)
- Keeping up with technological changes (e.g., social media, new software, new forms of communication)
- Improving public health (e.g., physical activity, mental health) through outdoor recreation
- Decline in team sports
- Adapting to an aging population
- Adapting to a more ethnically/racially diverse population

Q15. What, if anything, has changed over the last five years that is making your community/agency rethink how to approach providing parks and recreation services? (open-ended)

Q16. What could local park and recreation services do to better address the most critical issues that face your local community? (open-ended)

END. Please click the right arrow below to submit your survey.
Thank you for your participation!

FINAL SCREEN. Thank you for your participation! Your response has been received. If you have questions about the survey or the planning process, please contact Cheri Matter, DCNR Recreation and Conservation Advisor at chematter@pa.gov. You can now close this browser window.