Methodology Notes
City Park Fact Survey 2023-2024
Updated May 2024

Sample
Trust for Public Land (TPL) maintains a list of all public and private agencies that manage or financially support park space in each of the 100 most populous cities. This list is updated each year through TPL staff review of each city and self-reported updates to include, edit, or remove organizations from the list. In 2023, this included 581 active organizations:
- 102 city parks & recreation agencies (some cities have separate parks and recreation agencies)
- 156 other public agencies such as county or federal agencies
- 62 special purpose public entities such as special districts
- 261 private organizations such as park conservancies

The survey was sent to these organizations in October 2023 with a final deadline of January 31st 2024.

Survey Design
The survey largely is structured around updates to agency info, policies, park asset inventories and financial information with the following sections:
- Agency information
- Park counts and acreages by type
- Staffing and volunteer counts
- Facility and amenity counts
- Schoolyard and park access policies

The survey is a web-based instrument designed and developed by Trust for Public Land that allows each organization's staff to simultaneously work on different components of the survey at the same time. Each organization's survey requires a unique URL with an embedded passcode that ensures only that organization can update information. Responses from the prior year's survey are provided for each question to make it easier for respondents to confirm no changes from prior years.

The most notable update to this year's survey is the alignment of common definitions and questions with the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Park Metrics Survey. This updated guidance can be viewed as part of a jointly developed 'Counting Notes' document.

Additionally, each year TPL asks a set of questions related to an emerging trend in the city park and recreation field. In 2023, we included a set of questions on the range of strategies and partners that park & recreation organizations are employing to build social connection and increase civic participation.

The surveys are adapted to each organization type. See each organization type's survey:
- Primary City Parks & Recreation Agency
- Other public park and recreation agencies (long form and short form)
- Conservancies and private organizations without any acres under management

Response Rate
Data was collected or estimated for 92% of the 581 organizations that received the survey through one of three ways:
- 52% completed the core components of the survey (303 organizations, including 94 of the 102 city park and recreation agencies)
- 19%, or 108 organizations, were completed with publicly available data (e.g. IRS 990 forms which provide financial information for non-profits)
- 22% did not have significant changes from prior years and used last year's data as a reasonable estimate for this year (126 organizations).

For the community portion of the survey, 206 organizations completed at least some of this section (35% of organizations who received a survey and 68% of organizations who completed some of the survey). This included 87 of the primary city park and rec agencies, 22 other public agencies, 8 special purpose public agencies, and 89 private organizations.

ParkScore Index Analysis ([Link](#))
A subset of the City Park Facts survey is used to produce the ParkScore Index – acreage, amenity counts, and investment amounts. Upon survey submission, TPL staff validate responses for this subset of data by following up with respondents when a submission is significantly different than the prior year ('significantly different' varies by metric, but generally is a change of greater than 25%).

This same subset is then aggregated across all organizations for each of the 100 most populous cities to produce a draft ParkScore Index (more on the ParkScore Index methodology can be found here). These draft results, including the specific survey results, are then shared with each city's primary park and recreation agency staff in March for their data quality review. Suggested edits or fixes are discussed and updated with TPL staff before finalizing the ParkScore Index calculations for the given year.

Analysis for *How Parks Strengthen Community* Report ([Link](#))
This year, we included a set of survey questions to document the range of strategies and partners that park & recreation organizations are employing to build social connection and increase civic participation. The survey questions are included in the survey links shared above and included both open-ended and multiple choice questions. Open-ended questions were analyzed by TPL staff and 'coded' based on an emergent set of themes across the responses.

When reporting on prevalence trends in the report, responses were aggregated in one of two ways:
- As a percentage of the 100 cities with at least one organization that affirmed a given practice (e.g. hosting volunteer events)
- As a percentage of the responses from the primary city park and recreation agencies who completed the given question

For more information or to request access to the underlying survey data, please email Will Klein, Associate Director of Parks Research, at william.klein@tpl.org