

Methodology Notes
City Park Fact Survey 2025-2026
Updated May 2026

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 2026, this included 582 active organizations:

- 101 city parks & recreation agencies (some cities have separate parks and recreation agencies)
- 159 other public agencies such as county or federal agencies
- 65 special purpose public entities such as special districts
- 257 private organizations such as park conservancies

The survey was sent to these organizations in October 2025 with a final deadline of January 30th 2026.

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 core survey questions and definitions are aligned with the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Park Metrics Survey. This 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 2026, we included a set of questions on the importance of parks and recreation as a driver of economic vitality as well as driving forces in the telling of each community's history and culture in light of the upcoming celebration of America's 250th.

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 89% of the 582 organizations that received the survey through one of three ways:

- 54% completed the core components of the survey (312 organizations, including 95 of the 101 city park and recreation agencies)
- 16%, or 94 organizations, were completed with publicly available data (e.g. IRS 990 forms which provide financial information for non-profits)
- 19% did not have significant changes from prior years and used last year's data as a reasonable estimate for this year (108 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 *Undeniable ROI of Community Parks and Green Spaces Report* ([Link](#))

This year, we included a set of survey questions to document the extent to which park & recreation organizations are finding the economic benefits of parks to be a primary motivator of support, whether political, financial, or other. 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 as a percentage of the 100 cities with at least one organization that affirmed a given practice (e.g. hosting volunteer events).

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