

New Hampshire Recreation & Park Association COVID-19 Summer Programming and Facilities Study



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1. INTRODUCTION

Municipal park and recreation departments are responsible for providing recreation and leisure services to thousands of children, adults, and seniors in towns and cities across New Hampshire. Park and recreation departments provide programs such as summer day camps, youth and adult sports, instructional programs, trips, outdoor and environmental education, senior meals, community events and festivals, concerts, and others. Likewise, such departments manage thousands of acres of built and natural recreation resources, including community centers, playgrounds, athletic fields, skate parks, gymnasiums, trails, and parks.

With the recent stay-at-home orders instituted because of the COVID-19 pandemic, park and recreation departments have had to readjust their programming and facility operations to comply with public health guidelines. As New Hampshire begins to draft and initiate its reopening strategies, state recreation leaders are seeking data to better document the scope of park and recreation operations, as well as to understand the potential future impacts of COVID-19 on park and recreation planning and management. The purpose of this study was to collect data to answer these questions, and to assist the state and region in crafting policy related to the safe reopening of park and recreation departments in New Hampshire.

This study had the following aims:

1. To understand the scope of park and recreation programming and facility operations in New Hampshire;
2. To understand the potential impacts of COVID-19 on recreation programming in general and summer camp programming in particular;
3. To understand the potential future impacts of COVID-19 on park and recreation departments in New Hampshire.

2. STUDY METHODS

Approximately 97 municipal park and recreation directors were sent a link to an online survey through the New Hampshire Recreation and Park Association's (NHRPA) email database. ***Fifty-nine (59) surveys were returned with enough data for analysis, for a 61% response rate.*** The survey was comprised of questions designed to provide insight on the specific aims of the study. The survey was developed by faculty in the University of New Hampshire's Department of Recreation Management and Policy, and was reviewed by a subset of veteran park and recreation directors who serve on NHRPA's Legislative Committee for content coverage and readability. Changes were made to the survey per the advice of the expert reviewers, and a pilot test was conducted with all of the Directors who sit on the state's Legislative Committee. The survey was then sent to the rest of the park and recreation directors in the state. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all responses were anonymous. The survey took an average of 15 minutes to complete.

Table 1 shows the demographics of the survey respondents. The majority of respondents (68.5%) served towns with fewer than 10,000 residents, and most park and recreation departments service area extends beyond their town's borders. Survey participants represented all 10 counties in the state, with Rockingham, Hillsborough, and Grafton counties representing more than half of all of the total participants. The vast majority of agencies included both parks and recreation, and had a revolving fund for cost-recovery. On average, respondents reporting having 2.0 full-time, 2.0 permanent part-time, 20 part-time seasonal, and 40 volunteer staff.

Table 1: Survey Respondents

Demographic	Descriptive Statistic	
Population of Town/City	%	N
Under 5,000	35.2%	19
5,000-9,999	33.3%	18
10,000-14,999	11.1%	6
15,000-19,999	7.4%	4
20,000-24,999	1.9%	1
25,000-above	11.1%	6
Population of Park and Recreation's Service Area	%	N
Under 5,000	31.5%	17
5,000-9,999	22.2%	12
10,000-14,999	13%	7
15,000-19,999	7.4%	4
20,000-24,999	5.6%	3
25,000-above	20.4%	11
County	%	N
Belknap	9.1%	5
Carroll	9.1%	5
Cheshire	1.8%	1
Coos	7.3%	4
Grafton	12.7%	7
Hillsborough	18.2%	10
Merrimack	7.3%	4
Rockingham	23.6%	13
Strafford	5.5%	3
Sullivan	5.5%	3
Agency Scope	%	N
Parks and recreation	78.2%	43
Recreation only	21.8%	12
Agency Staffing	Median	Mean
Average # full-time parks and/or recreation staff	2.0	4.31
Average # of permanent, year-round part-time staff	2.0	5.97
Average # of part-time seasonal staff	20.0	25.77
Average # of volunteers	40.0	56.16
	%	N
Revolving or Enterprise Fund?	81.8%	45
Friends of Recreation or other non-profit group?	27.3%	15

3. SCOPE OF TYPICAL SUMMER PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAMMING

In a typical summer, New Hampshire park and recreation departments serve a wide-variety of ages with diverse recreation programs and services. The vast majority of park and recreation departments offer full or partial summer day camp programs (81.4%), as well as summer specialty day camp programs (71.2%) focused on sports, art, nature, etc. Summer camp programs provide a range of developmental and recreational experiences for young people in a fun and engaging environment. Summer camp programs also serve a critical need for affordable child-care during a time when parents are working and school is not in session. In addition, a majority of New Hampshire's park and recreation departments provide events and activities that bring the community together, such as special events like parades and fireworks, and outdoor concerts and movies. These are activities that serve the needs of the entire community. Most park and recreation departments provide programs and trips for seniors (50.8%), and a majority of park and recreation departments provide adult recreational sport opportunities (50.8%). Park and recreation departments in New Hampshire truly serve the entire age-spectrum in their communities. An array of other recreation programs and services were also identified by respondents and are reported in the table below.

Table 2: Typical Summer Parks and Recreation Program Offerings

Program	% of Agencies	N
Organized full or partial day summer camp program	81.4%	48
Community special events (holiday parades, fireworks, etc.)	74.6%	44
Summer specialty day camp programs (sports, art, nature, etc.)	71.2%	42
Summer concerts or movies	64.4%	38
Group fitness or strength programs/lessons	61.0%	36
Senior summer programs or trips	50.8%	30
Adult recreational sports	50.8%	30
Youth recreational sports	47.5%	28
Open gyms/drop-in recreation programs for youth or adults	45.8%	27
Sports lessons or instruction	45.8%	27
Swimming lessons at beaches or waterfront areas	35.6%	21
Swimming lessons in pools	28.8%	17
Summer informal drop-in park or playground programs	23.7%	14
Outdoor education or nature programs	16.9%	10
Summer meals programs for children/youth	15.3%	9
Recreation programs for participants with disabilities	13.6%	8
Senior meals	11.9%	7
Other recreation programs or services	10.2%	6

Other summer recreation programs and services noted by park and recreation directors in this study included Lego/robotics, theatre, adult activities and trips, sports tournaments and road races. Park and recreation directors noted that they typically provide access to a diverse array of indoor and outdoor facilities in the summer as well. These are described in the "Facilities" section on page 10.

The graphic below (Figure 1) provides some information on the scope of park and recreation services per New Hampshire town based on the information provided by respondents to this survey.

Figure 1: Scope of Selected Park and Recreation Services Per New Hampshire Town



2,058

The average number of people served through park and recreation sponsored special events per NH town



426

The average number of people served through park and recreation sponsored concerts/movies per NH town



100

The average number of senior citizens served through park and recreation sponsored summer programs per NH town



150

The average number of children/youth served through park and recreation sponsored summer programs per NH town



50

The average number of children served in park and recreation summer meals programs per NH town



4. SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMMING

Approximately 88.1% of New Hampshire park and recreation departments offer some type of summer camp program for children and youth. The information below is meant to provide summaries of the types of municipal recreation summer camp programs being offered in the state as reported by respondents to this survey. *The typical municipal summer camp program is offered for 8 weeks, with a majority of agencies (59.3%) offering camp in one (1) week sessions.* Agencies typically take an average of 16.1 off-site field trips during the course of the summer, and 72.0% offer swimming or water-based programming. Municipal summer camps are key places for youth and college-age employment, as *67.8% of agencies hire staff under the age of 18 to work at camp, and 79.7% hire staff who are between the ages of 18-25.* On average, municipal summer camps hire 19 staff to serve their children, with an *average staff-to-camper ratio of 9:1.* Finally, approximately *15.4% of children who attend a municipal summer camp receive a scholarship or fee waiver to be able to attend.* Information on municipal summer camp operations is listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Municipal Summer Camp Program Delivery

Camp Delivery	Frequency	N
Camper Age Groups		
Under 4 years old	8.5%	5
5-6 years old	78.0%	46
7-8 years old	83.1%	49
9-10 years old	84.7%	50
11-12 years old	84.7%	50
13-14 years old	45.8%	27
15 years old or older	20.3%	12
Length of Camp Day		
Full Day	68.0%	34
Half Day	2.0%	1
Both Full and Half Day	24.0%	12
Other	6.0%	3
Staffing		
Hire staff under the age of 18	67.8%	40
Hire staff between the ages of 18-25	79.7%	47
Hire staff over the age of 25	59.3%	35
Registration		
Registration-Based	90.0%	45
Drop-In Only	0.0%	0
Registration-Based and Drop-In Options	10.0%	5
Licensed through DHHS	12.0%	6
Hire a camp nurse or other medical professional	4.0%	2
Offer swimming or water-based programming	72.0%	36
Average % of campers who receive a scholarship to attend	15.4%	NA
Average Staff-to-Camper Ratio	9 to 1	NA

5. COVID-19 IMPACTS ON SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMMING

We asked a series of questions specifically related to COVID-19 and its perceived impact on summer camp operations. Respondents were also provided the opportunity to provide open-ended comments related to their concerns about camp management and programming in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. ***One of the principal overarching concerns of park and recreation directors was related to facility access.*** Almost three-fourths (72.9%) of park and recreation departments use either indoor (52.5%) or outdoor (69.5%) facilities located on school property for summer programming, and almost half (44.1%) use private facilities not controlled by the town or school. At the time of the survey, more than half (52.8%) of survey respondents did not anticipate being able to use school property and almost half (44.2%) did not anticipate being able to use private facilities this summer as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A large percentage of respondents were unsure of whether they would have access to school (43.4%) or private (40.4%) facilities at the time of the survey. Given the amount of time it takes to prepare for camp, being unsure about where camp would be held at this late date places a significant burden on park and recreation staff, and creates multiple logistical challenges in delivering a functional summer camp program. Additional management and programming concerns that park and recreation directors agreed or strongly agreed would be in play this summer are listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Potential COVID-19 Impacts on Summer Camp Programming

Management/Programming Impact	% Agree or Strongly Agree
We plan to implement new handwashing protocols in camp this summer	95.9%
We will have to restrict or limit the types of activities	93.9%
It will be harder to partner with other agencies because of COVID-19	89.6%
I have concerns about our ability to obtain proper safety equipment	87.7%
I am concerned about increased liability because of COVID-19	87.7%
We will have to cancel offsite field trips	85.7%
We will require staff to wear masks at least some of the time	85.7%
We will generate less revenue than anticipated from camp this year	85.5%
We will have restrictions on the use of indoor facilities	85.4%
Summer camp will have fewer participants than usual	81.6%
We plan to implement physical distancing measures in camp	79.2%
Parents will be reluctant to sign their children up for camp	69.4%
We will have restrictions on use of outdoor facilities	68.1%
More families will struggle to pay the camp registration fees	67.4%
We plan to monitor the temperature of campers daily prior to attending	66.7%
I have concerns about staff's ability to implement safety protocols	65.3%
I am concerned about our ability to hold staff training prior to camp	63.3%
We will require campers to wear masks at least some of the time	59.2%
We will need to limit summer camp to town residents	51.0%
We will have a difficult time finding enough summer camp staff	48.9%
Summer camp programs will start later than usual	41.7%
Given the circumstances, summer camp should be cancelled	36.7%
We will not be able to hire as many summer camp staff	34.7%
It is likely that town administration will cancel summer camp	22.4%
We will likely hire a nurse or other medical professional to assist	10.2%

Items measured on 5-point scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree/Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

6. SCOPE OF PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Because facilities are such an integral part of park and recreation programming, we asked a series of questions related to the range and scope of facilities that are controlled, managed, and/or scheduled by municipal parks and recreation departments in New Hampshire. We also attempted to understand whether these facilities were currently open or if there were plans to open them to the public this summer. Figure 2 shows the size and scope of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities managed by municipal parks and recreation departments, and Tables 5 and 6 show the inventory of specific indoor and outdoor recreation facility spaces in the state.

Figure 2: Size of Indoor and Outdoor Recreation Space By New Hampshire Towns



67.2%

The percentage of municipal park and recreation departments that directly manage or operate indoor recreation space



6,000

Average square feet of indoor recreation space managed or operated by municipal park and recreation departments that report having indoor recreation facilities



56

Average number of acres of outdoor recreation space managed or controlled by municipal park and recreation departments that report having outdoor recreation facilities



Table 5: Indoor Recreation Facility Space Inventory

Indoor Facility Space	Percent	Median # of Spaces
Multipurpose activity rooms	83.8%	2
Office space	64.9%	3
Conference/meeting room	59.5%	2
Full kitchen	56.8%	1
Basketball courts	43.2%	1
Fitness/weight area	18.9%	1
Swimming pool	8.1%	2
Walking/jogging track	5.4%	1
Indoor ice rink	5.4%	2

At the time of the survey, there were 0 (0.0%) indoor community centers open to the public. Approximately half (51.4%) of park and recreation directors with such facilities reported that they planned to open to the public in the Summer of 2020.

Table 6: Outdoor Recreation Facility Space Inventory

Outdoor Facility Space	% of PR Depts Managing	Currently Open?	Plan to Open in Summer?
Playgrounds	83.1%	14.3%	36.7%
Baseball/softball	78.0%	32.6%	58.7%
Outdoor basketball	76.3%	NA	NA
Multiuse rectangle fields	69.5%	39.0%	68.3%
Tennis courts	57.6%	44.1%	50.0%
Multiuse non-motorized trails or paths	55.9%	90.9%	36.4%
Town common/public green space	50.8%	80.0%	33.3%
Municipal parks or forests	47.5%	89.3%	50.0%
Beach or waterfront	40.7%	20.8%	45.8%
Pickleball courts	39.0%	43.5%	56.5%
Skate parks	32.2%	31.6%	63.2%
Boat launch	27.1%	87.5%	43.8%
Community gardens	23.7%	85.7%	28.6%
Swimming pools	22.0%	0.0%	46.2%
Volleyball areas	16.9%	NA	NA
Inline/street hockey rink	16.9%	NA	NA
Pet/dog parks	16.9%	70.0%	50.0%
Disc/frisbee golf	15.3%	55.6%	77.8%
Splash pads/water elements	13.6%	12.5%	25.0%
Public camp sites	3.4%	100.0%	100.0%
Motorized recreational trails	3.4%	100.0%	100.0%

25.4% of respondents reported that “other outdoor courts” were currently open, and 40.7% reported that they planned to open

Other indoor spaces mentioned by respondents included large metal storage building, environmental center, food pantry, game rooms, childcare areas, senior center space, church, racquetball and pickleball courts. Additional outdoor space areas included mini-pitch soccer courts, cemeteries, mountain bike parks, outdoor ice rink, rope tow ski area, and stadiums.

7. COVID-19 POLICIES AND IMPACTS ON PARK AND RECREATION SERVICES

We asked questions related to likely policy implementation in park and recreation facilities and areas as a result of COVID-19 to better understand the potential impacts on facility management. While there were some clear areas of commonality with regards to likely policy implementation (increased signage, physical distancing, cleaning of facilities and equipment), there were a large percentage of policy areas where park and recreation directors were still unsure. ***These appear to be in areas with unclear guidance or areas where resources or logistics might impact the ability to implement these policies effectively.*** These include requiring staff and participants to wear masks outdoors, requiring that participants wear masks indoors, closing bathrooms (both permanent and portable), and placing limits on the number of people who can use parks at any one time. Table 7 shows the likelihood that COVID-19-specific policies would be implemented this summer at the time of the survey.

Table 7: Likelihood of Implementing Specific COVID-19 Policies

Policy Area	% Yes	% No	% Unsure
Increasing signage and other communication methods	86.8%	1.9%	11.3%
Recommending physical distancing in parks or outdoor spaces	85.5%	1.8%	12.7%
Recommending physical distancing in indoor rec areas	79.2%	2.1%	18.8%
Cleaning facilities, playgrounds, equipment, etc.	56.6%	9.4%	34.0%
Modifying parking/drop-off areas to facilitate physical distancing	49.0%	7.8%	43.1%
Closing some or all bathrooms	49.0%	3.9%	47.1%
Requiring or recommending participants wear masks while using indoor rec facilities	48.0%	4.0%	48.0%
Placing limits on the number of persons that use parks at one time	45.5%	14.5%	40.0%
Reducing or eliminating the number of porta-toilets in parks and outdoor areas	41.2%	15.7%	43.1%
Setting up handwashing stations or personal hygiene measures	37.7%	17.0%	45.3%
Requiring staff to wear masks while using outdoor recreation facilities	32.7%	5.8%	61.5%
Requiring or recommending participants wear masks while using outdoor recreation facilities	18.5%	27.8%	53.7%

Other policies mentioned by respondents included closing parking at beaches to cut down on use, requiring permits for program participation rather than having them be open and free, placing no-touch trash cans without lids to open, pushing COVID-19 messaging on social media, and prohibiting outside equipment to be used in pools.

In addition to likely policy implementation, we were interested in understanding what impacts COVID-19 might have on department operations over the next 12 months. *The majority of likely impacts appeared to be negative, such as reduced cost-recovery, reductions in part-time staff, hiring freezes, halts on capital spending or plans, and difficulty in recruiting volunteers.* However, park and recreation directors noted that COVID-19 would likely bear some potentially positive impacts, including creating opportunities for new types of programming, creating opportunities for more virtual program offerings, and increasing the demand for park and recreation services. Park and recreation directors reported that the least likely impacts would be temporary furloughs or permanent layoffs of permanent, full-time park and recreation staff. Table 8 lists the likelihood of potential COVID-19 impacts on park and recreation operations in the next 12 months.

Table 8: COVID-19 Impact on Agency Operations in the Next 12 Months

COVID-19 Impact on Agency Operations in the Next 12 Months	% Likely or Very Likely
Opportunities for new types of programming	90.6%
Halt on capital spending projects or plans	88.0%
Reduced operating budgets due to cuts in General Fund allocations	86.5%
More virtual computer-mediated program offerings	86.5%
Reduced operating budgets due to lower cost recovery	80.4%
Reductions in the number of part-time employees	78.5%
Increased demand for park and recreation services	77.3%
Reductions in the number of people willing to volunteer	76.5%
Hiring freezes for open positions	69.8%
Reductions in services to economically vulnerable populations	68.7%
Shifting responsibilities of park and rec staff to non-recreation priorities	63.5%
Temporary furloughs of permanent staff	39.2%
Permanent layoffs of park and recreation staff	17.7%

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all of the park and recreation directors in New Hampshire who took the time to complete the survey that generated the data for this report. It is hoped that the data contained herein will be used show the scope of summer park and recreation programming and facility operations, and provide benchmarking information for COVID-19 reopening within the state.

Faculty in the Department of Recreation Management and Policy Community at the University of New Hampshire are available to assist towns and cities in the state and region with information and services related to parks and recreation planning and management. Please contact Bob Barcelona, Chair and Associate Professor, at bob.barcelona@unh.edu or by phone at (603) 862-5345 for assistance or additional information.



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