

Demographics & Trends

INTRODUCTION

The consultant team completed the City of Manhattan demographic profile to provide an analysis of household and economic data in the area, helping to understand the historical and projected changes that might impact the community. The demographics analysis offers insight into the potential market for the community's parks, trails, and recreation programs and services by highlighting where and how the community will change.

Population, age distribution, income, race/ethnicity, and other household characteristics referenced throughout this report were sourced from ArcGIS Business Analyst, utilizing the U.S. Census data with estimates generated in December 2023. The City of Manhattan was used as the geographic area for this study. Additional comparisons to the State of Kansas (State, KS) and the United States were provided where applicable for additional context.

Throughout the report, there are various maps that represent the demographic information in a visual format, with data points color coded by block group. Block groups are statistical divisions of census tracts used by the U.S. Census Bureau, and they are often utilized in demographic studies to analyze and understand finer-scale population characteristics within specific geographic areas.

POPULATION

The population in the City of Manhattan was estimated at 54,218 in 2023. That is nearly an increase of over 7,900 from 46,246 in the year 2000. Future projections indicate the City of Manhattan will have a very slight growth to a population of 54,314 by 2028 (Figure 1.1).

Active-Duty Military: Over 2,500 Fort Riley Soldiers and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians live in Manhattan and Riley County. Soldiers and DOD civilians have access to on-post recreational programming and facilities.

Figure 1.1: Population Change (2000-2028)

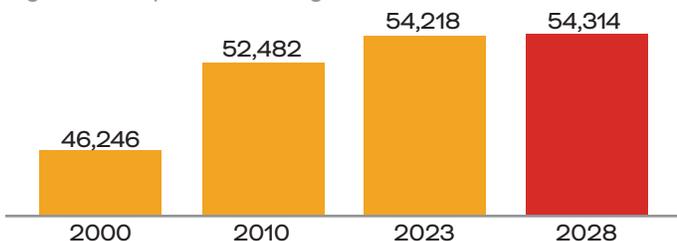
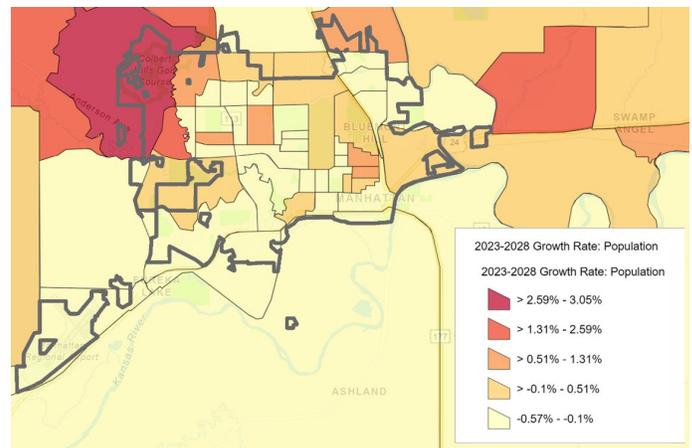


Figure 1.2 shows the population growth rate by block group. The blocks shaded in red and dark orange indicate where the population is expected to grow the most, up to 3% by 2028.

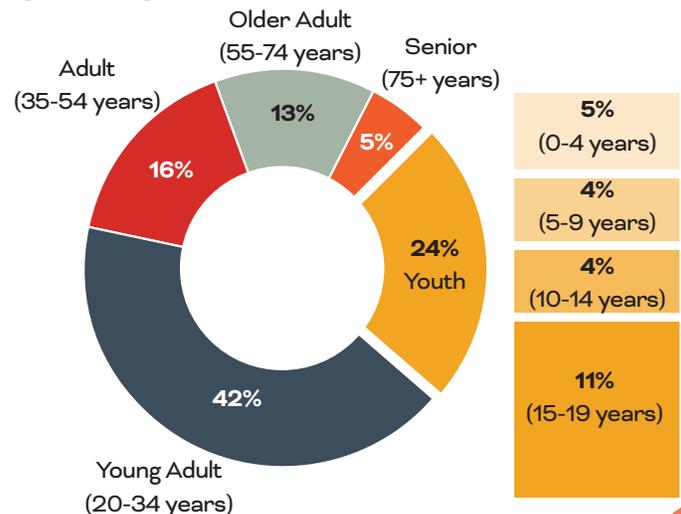
Figure 1.2: Manhattan Population Growth Rate by Block Group (2023-2028)



AGE DISTRIBUTION

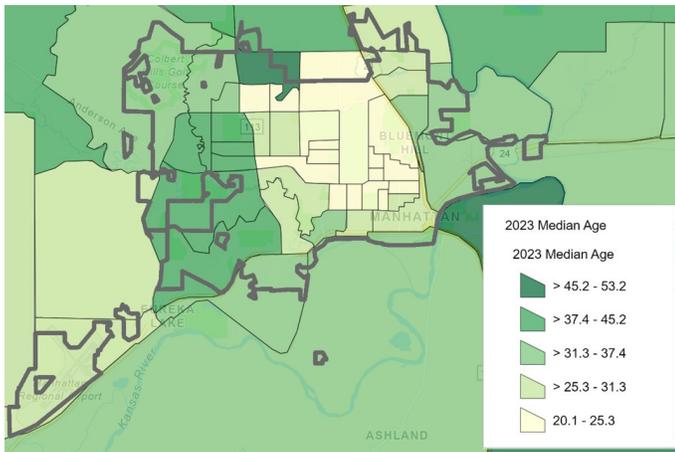
The median age of residents in the City of Manhattan was 33 years old, younger than the 2023 median age in KS (38) and the median age in the United States (39). The age groups making up the largest percentage of the population in the City of Manhattan were young adults (20 – 34 years) at 42%, youth (0 – 19 years) at 24%, and adults (35 – 54 years) at 16%.

Figure 1.3: Age Distribution (2023)



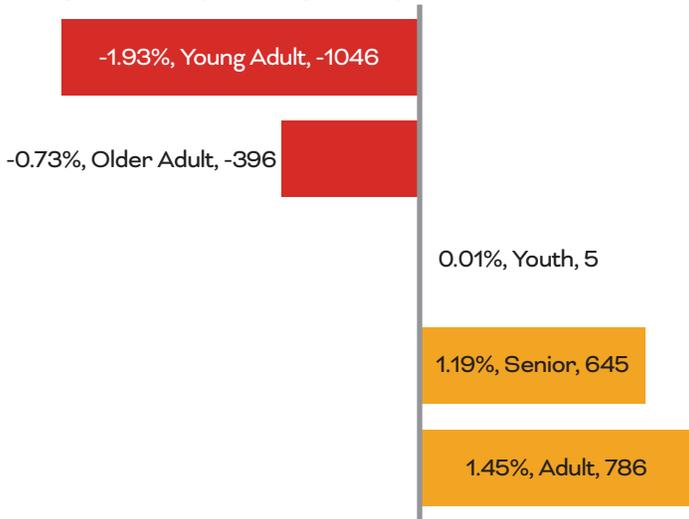
The map in Figure 1.4 shows the median age by block group. The blocks shaded in dark green have the oldest median block group (ages 45 – 53), while the areas in tan have the youngest median age group (20 – 25).

Figure 1.4: Manhattan Median Age by Block Group (2023)



Over the next five years, the age groups of older adults and young adults are expected to decline slightly within the City of Manhattan (Young Adults, -1.93%, Older Adults, -0.73%), while the age groups of seniors and adults are expected to have a slight growth in the next five years (Seniors, 1.19%, Adults, 1.45%).

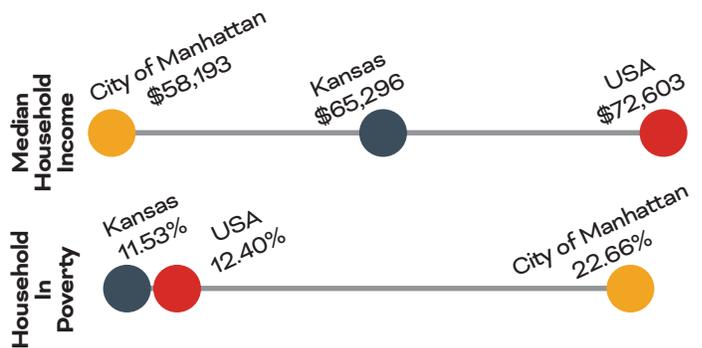
Figure 1.5: Projected Age Change Over Time (2023-2028)



HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

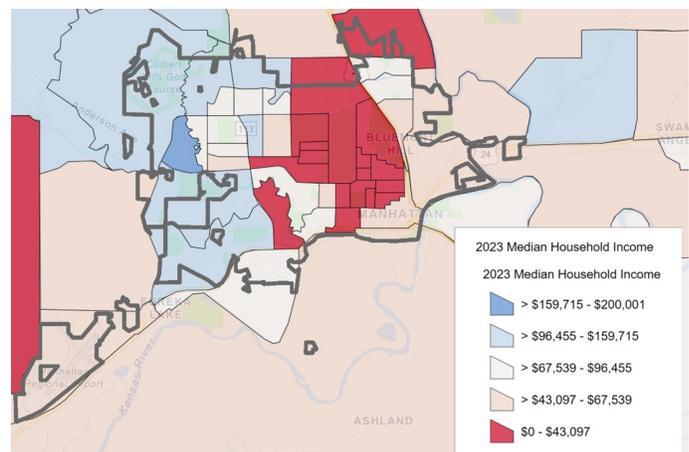
The household characteristics in the City of Manhattan indicate that the community earns a lower median household income than KS and the United States (Figure 1.6). More than 22% of the population lives below the federal poverty line, and the median household income is lower than both the State and the United States.

Figure 1.6: Household Characteristics (2023)



The map in Figure 1.7 shows the median household income by block group. The areas shaded in blue and light blue show where the higher income earners reside (\$96,000-\$200,000). The areas in red indicate the lowest household income of \$0-\$43,000.

Figure 1.7: City of Manhattan Median Household Income by Block Group (2023)

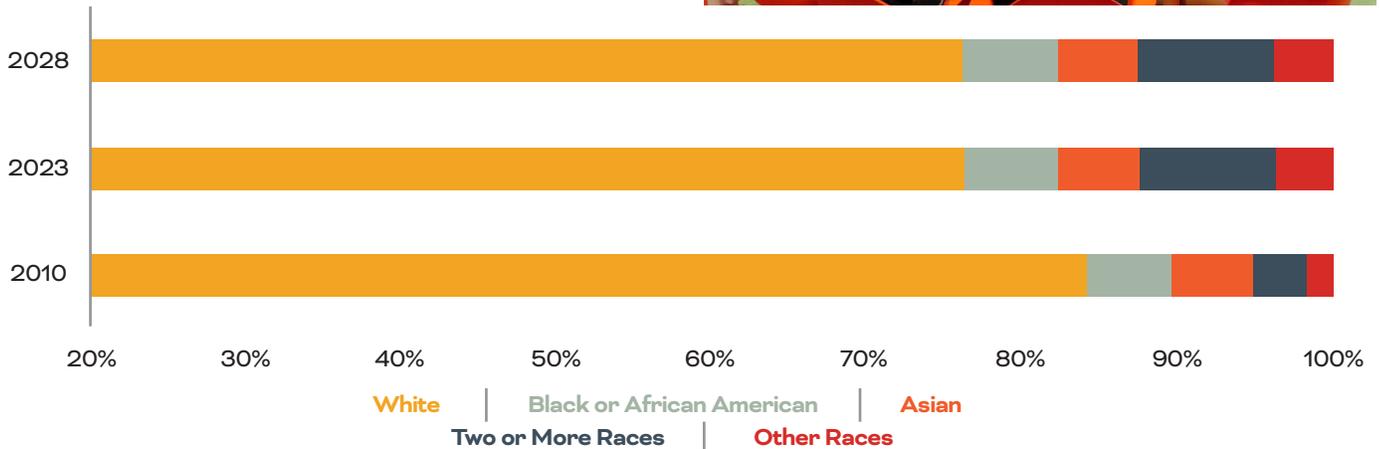


RACIAL DIVERSITY

Manhattan has become slightly more diverse over time. From 2010-2023, the white population decreased by 9%. Those of two or more races increased 6%. Those who identify as being of Hispanic origin (regardless of race) are expected to increase from 6% to 10% from 2010-2028.



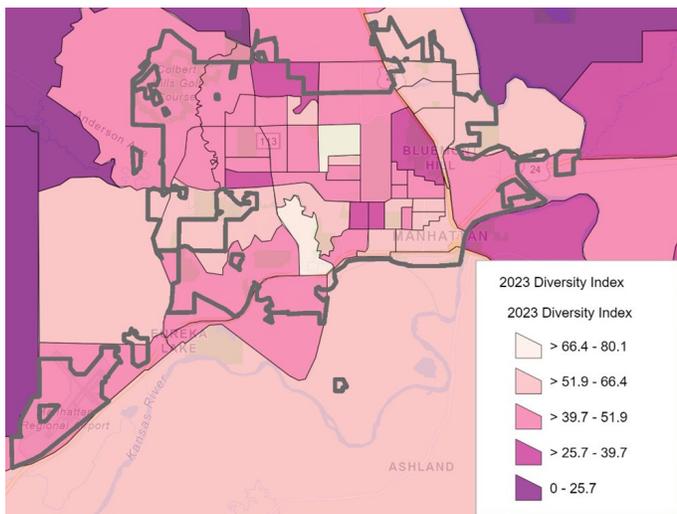
Figure 1.8: Racial Diversity (2010-2028)



The diversity index measures how diverse a population is within a geographic area. The diversity index score ranges from 0-100. The score is limited to each block group. A score of zero means all within the block group are of the same race or ethnic group (no diversity). A score of 100 means maximum diversity.

Figure 1.9 shows the diversity index by block group. The areas shaded in light pink rank the highest in the diversity index at 66-80, while the areas in dark purple rank the lowest (0-25).

Figure 1.9: City of Manhattan Diversity Index by Block Group (2023)



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

- Future population growth projections suggest that the population will stay relatively the same, with minimal growth by 2028.
- Over 2,500 Fort Riley Soldiers and DOD civilians reside in Manhattan and Riley County.
- Young adults constitute the largest age group at 42%, followed by youth at 24%, and adults at 16%.
- Over the next five years, older adults and young adults are expected to decline slightly, while seniors and adults will experience a slight growth.
- More than 22% of the population lives below the federal poverty line.
- The City of Manhattan has become slightly more diverse, with a 9% decrease in the white population from 2010 to 2023. Those of two or more races increased by 6% during the same period. The Hispanic population is expected to increase to 10% by 2028.
- The City of Manhattan shows varying diversity levels by block group, with areas scoring between 25 and 80. This is higher than the rest of the county that has block groups that dip down to 0. This may be a result of diverse military families living within the City.

TRENDS INTRODUCTION

This analysis examines current and future multipurpose facility trends, levels of interest and participation in various activities, and overall trends in recreation relevant to the Department. This process provides insights into the evolving needs and preferences of the community.

This report will focus on relevant local and national recreation trends—an overview of recreational trends that may impact the provision of services. The following topics will help in understanding the landscape of recreational activities and the potential implications for services and programming in City of Manhattan.

- Inactive Aspirational Activities by Age
- Estimated Local Adult Participation for Outdoor Fitness and Recreational Activities
- Trends Highlights
- Recreational Sports and Facilities

- Outdoor Fitness
- Outdoor Recreation
- Outdoor Programming

Inactive American’s Aspirational Activities by Age

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) report provides data related to what inactive Americans were most interested in participating in by age. The City has a median age of 33. By comparing the SFIA “inactive aspirational activities by age,” the top activities for most City residents (falling in the category of 25 – 34 years) are likely working out with weights, working out using machines, cardio fitness, camping, and yoga.

The inactivity rate in the U.S. continued its downward trendline and inactivity at every age group was significantly lower in 2023 than it was in 2018. In 2023, 64.9 million people were inactive, or 21.2% of

SFIA Inactive Aspirational Activities by Age

YEARS OF AGE

	6-12	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
1	Fishing	Fishing	Running/Jogging	Working out with weights	Working out with weights	Fishing	Fishing	Fishing
2	Running/Jogging	Running/Jogging	Working out with weights	Working out using machines	Cardio Fitness	Working out with weights	Camping	Working out using machines
3	Bicycling	Swimming for Fitness	Cardio Fitness	Cardio Fitness	Fishing	Camping	Working out with weights	Camping
4	Sledding	Working out with weights	Working out using machines	Camping	Working out using machines	Working out using machines	Working out using machines	Working out with weights
5	Swimming for Fitness	Camping	Bicycling	Yoga	Swimming for Fitness	Cardio Fitness	Cardio Fitness	Swimming for Fitness
6	Cardio Fitness	Cardio Fitness	Swimming for Fitness	Fishing	Running/Jogging	Hiking	Swimming for Fitness	Cardio Fitness
7	Yoga	Bicycling	Camping	Running/Jogging	Camping	Yoga	Shooting	Shooting
8	Camping	Working out using machines	Fishing	Hiking	Yoga	Shooting	Hiking	Yoga
9	Soccer	Hiking	Yoga	Swimming for Fitness	Hiking	Swimming for Fitness	Yoga	Hiking
10	Tennis	Skateboarding	Trail Running	Bicycling	Shooting	Running/Jogging	Running/Jogging	Hunting

RANK

Americans. This is a 5.3 percent drop from the 2022 figure of 68.6 million people.

It has become clear that the pandemic has changed priorities for many Americans. Before the pandemic, the inactivity rate had been flat for several years, hovering around 27%. Since 2020, the inactivity rate has steadily declined. This is the lowest the inactivity rate has been since SFIA started tracking inactivity in 2008.

Estimated Local Adult Participation for Fitness and Sports

Data from ArcGIS Business Analyst shows comparative participation data for adult residents of the City and the state of Kansas aged 25 years and older. For outdoor fitness and recreation in Manhattan, Kansas, adults aged 25 and older exhibit slightly higher participation rates in various fitness activities compared to the broader state. Walking for exercise, weight-lifting, and

swimming were particularly popular. Yoga and jogging or running participation did not fall too far behind. Jogging or running and yoga scored slightly higher in the City versus state. This may be due to younger median age in Manhattan versus the state.

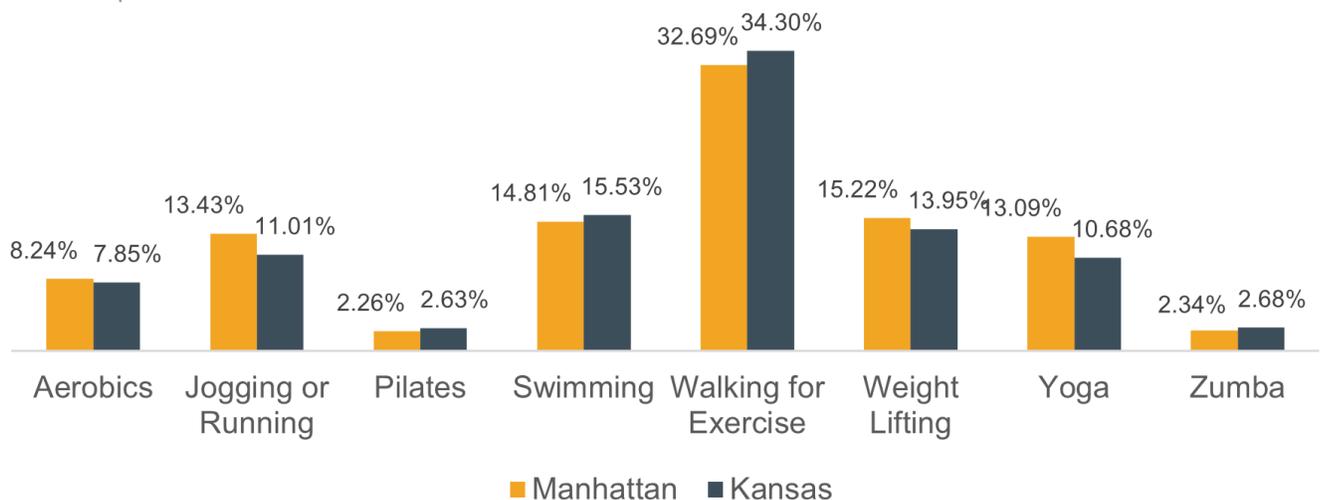
Golf, basketball, and tennis ranked highest in terms of participation in the City and state. Although rankings were slightly higher for the state.

Recreational Sports and Facilities

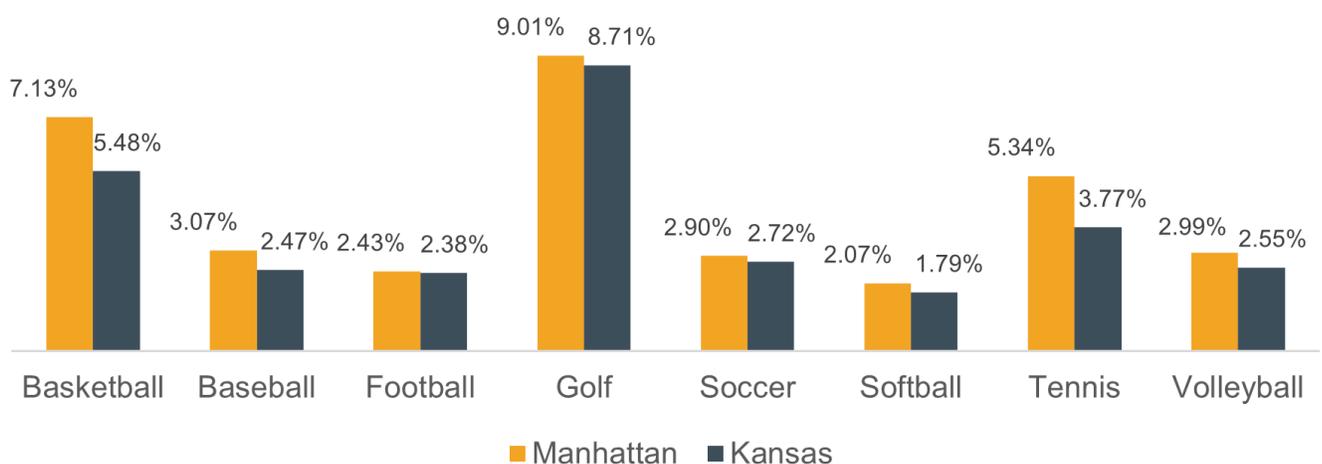
Tennis

The United States Tennis Association (USTA) reports that growth slowed in 2023, but did not stop. Following an extraordinary and anomalous jump in players in 2020, U.S. tennis participation experienced subsequent years of additional 4% and 5% gains, erasing doubts that the surge in engagement was simply a fleeting, Covid-fueled craze. In 2023, the growth curve flattened but didn't change course, with a gain

Local Participation in Fitness Activities



Local Participation in Sports



of approximately 250,000 players (+1%) that marks a fourth consecutive year of net increases. Especially in what's become an increasingly competitive sports and recreation environment, even holding steady should be viewed as a success.

A 1% increase in U.S. tennis participation may give the appearance that nothing really changed in 2023. But a deeper look reveals some noteworthy shifts – among them, continued racial and ethnic diversification, and another year of “give-back” in the youth ranks (ages 6-17), marking a net decline of approximately one million under-age-18 players (-14%) since 2021 (from 6.9 million to 5.9 million). As much as anything else, this decline speaks to the return of organized team sports following an extended period of facility closures and league shutdowns in 2020 and 2021. The U.S. tennis population still maintains a strong skew towards younger people (more than half of players are ages 6 to 34, compared to 40% of the U.S. 6+ year-old population), and the decline in youth “Core” participants over that same time is much less (-8%).

There were just over 25 million Americans in 2023 who didn't play tennis but suggested they are “very interested” in doing so now, which makes a better than 1-to-1 ratio of current players to prospects, and points to significant upside for the industry. The challenge is that only a small fraction of these hopeful participants will self-activate – the rest will let their interest lie, and therefore require innovative approaches that attract them, engage them, and convert them to committed players.

Pickleball

A significant trend in park planning is the incorporation of pickleball facilities in response to the sport's rapid rise in popularity. To meet the need, some agencies are addressing the trend by re-purposing existing spaces or incorporating pickleball into their capital improvement plans, working to ensure that this sport becomes an integral part of the evolving landscape of recreational activities. This strategic approach allows cities to not only keep up with the pickleball surge but also enhance the diversity and appeal of community spaces. Note, recreation facilities such as tennis or basketball courts can be temporarily or permanently converted to pickleball courts through lining a court. One consideration to recreation professionals before lining tennis courts is potential inference with competitive tennis requirements. Best practices regarding pickleball setup and programming can be found on usapa.com, the official website for the United States Pickleball Association.

Disc Golf

Disc golf is experiencing notable trends in 2024 that are reshaping the sport's landscape. These trends

include explosive growth in participation, with more individuals embracing the sport due to its accessible courses and low-cost equipment. Manufacturers are continually evolving disc technology, introducing new materials and designs to enhance disc performance. The professionalization of disc golf is also on the rise, with competitive circuits attracting top-tier players and sponsors, leading to increased visibility and prize money. Course design is evolving to offer diverse challenges, incorporating elevation changes and natural features to enhance player experience. Sustainability and eco-friendly practices are becoming integral, with a focus on environmental conservation in course design and tournament operations. Community building efforts aim to foster inclusivity, organizing events for players of all ages and backgrounds. Technological integration is enhancing player experience through mobile apps and GPS technology, providing real-time statistics and connecting players globally.

Cricket

In recent years, cricket has experienced a notable resurgence in the United States, fueled by a combination of factors. The nation's increasing diversity, with a significant influx of immigrants from cricket-playing countries, has infused the sport with enthusiasm and support within various communities. Moreover, the globalization of sports and advancements in media coverage have made cricket more accessible to American audiences, facilitating its growth in popularity. The establishment of professional leagues like Major League Cricket (MLC) and Minor League Cricket (MiLC), alongside the proactive efforts of the United States of America Cricket Association (USACA), has further bolstered the sport's presence by organizing tournaments and enhancing infrastructure. Additionally, grassroots development initiatives and the proliferation of cricket facilities across the country have provided more avenues for active participation, fostering a new generation of players and enthusiasts. Despite challenges posed by entrenched American sports and cricket's complex rules, ongoing efforts from cricket organizations, coupled with growing youth involvement and increased accessibility, suggest a promising trajectory for cricket in the United States. As cricket continues to carve out its place among the nation's sports scene, it holds the potential to become a widely recognized and celebrated sport across diverse communities in the years ahead.

Sports Complexes

Several prominent trends are reshaping sports facilities. Multipurpose flexibility stands out as venues increasingly accommodate a diverse range of activities beyond traditional sports, optimizing space utilization for various needs efficiently. Technology integration plays a pivotal role in enhancing functionality and user experience, with advanced systems such as LED lighting

and high-speed connectivity transforming operations and engagement with spectators. Sustainability and green design have become focal points, driving the incorporation of eco-friendly materials and energy-efficient systems like solar panels and natural ventilation to minimize ecological footprints. Health and wellness are prioritized in facility design, with dedicated spaces for fitness, training, and sports medicine, fostering safe and inclusive environments that promote physical activity and overall well-being. Moreover, there's a heightened emphasis on fan engagement and experience, with venues designed to offer enhanced sightlines, comfortable seating, and premium amenities, alongside advanced audiovisual systems and digital displays, creating immersive environments that captivate and entertain spectators, enriching the overall enjoyment of sporting events.

TRENDS HIGHLIGHTS

This section of the report details the trends and interests identified within the public engagement process as well as some relevant trends recognized on a regional or national level. The information contained in this report can be used by staff when planning new programs, considering additions to parks and new park amenities, and creating the annual budget and capital improvement plan. Understanding trends can also help an organization reach new audiences and determine where to direct additional data collection efforts within an organization.

Inclusive Playgrounds

Well-designed inclusive parks and inclusive playgrounds welcome children of all abilities to play, learn, and grow together. An inclusive playground takes away the barriers, both physical and social, providing a “sensory rich” experience for all. Accommodating physical disabilities is one component of an inclusive playground—this refers to providing wheelchair-accessible routes and ramp transfer points. Customized equipment, such as special swings, allow all kids to enjoy the playground as it is meant to be enjoyed.

An inclusive playground also provides several different opportunities for children to explore. They can integrate all the senses, and the amenities encourage social play. A true inclusive playground does not mean that there is a special piece of equipment in a separate area off to the side but rather that the space is designed as a cohesive community where play opportunities are integrated throughout. These types of park facilities stress the importance of inclusion in daily activities, regardless of ability level. More parks and recreation agencies across the country are installing inclusive playgrounds to better meet the needs of all constituents.

Dog Parks

A dog park is a great way to give people an opportunity to get some fresh air, enjoy time with their dog, and bring communities together. With 90 million dogs residing in the United States, dog parks continue to be the fastest growing type of park (according to NRPA-National Recreation and Park Association)—especially in urban areas. Not everyone wants to live next door to a dog park, but dog parks are desired in nearly every community.

Dog parks continue to see high popularity and have remained among the top planned addition to parks and recreational facilities over the past three years. According to an article from Recreation Management titled “Four-Legged-Friendly Parks,” dog parks help build a sense of community and can draw potential new community members and tourists traveling with pets (2016).

Recreation Magazine suggests dog parks can represent a relatively low-cost way to provide an frequently visited popular community amenity. Dog parks can be as simple as a gated area, or more elaborate with “designed-for-dogs” amenities like water fountains, agility equipment, and pet wash stations. Even “spray grounds” are being designed just for dogs. Dog parks are also places for people to meet new friends and enjoy the outdoors.

The best dog parks cater to people with design features for their comfort and pleasure but also with creative programming. Amenities in an ideal dog park might include the following:

- Benches, shade, and water – for dogs and people
- At least one acre of space with adequate drainage
- Double gated entry
- Ample waste stations well-stocked with bags
- Sandy beaches/sand bunker digging areas
- Custom designed splashpads for large and small dogs
- People-pleasing amenities such as walking trails, water fountains, restroom facilities, picnic tables, and dog wash stations.

ENVIRONMENTAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces waste through composting • Improves water infiltration • Increases biodiversity of animals and plants • Improves air and soil quality

SOCIAL

- Increases intake of vegetables and fruits
- Promotes relaxation and improves mental health
 - Increases physical activity
- Reduces risk of obesity & obesity-related diseases

Community Gardens

Communities around the country are building community gardens for a number of far-reaching environmental and social impacts. According to GreenLeaf Communities, which supports scientific research in environmental and human health, community gardens offer benefits including:

Many studies show that community gardens can improve the well-being of the entire community by bringing residents together and creating social ties. This activity can reduce crime, particularly if gardens are utilized in vacant lots. In fact, vacant land has the opposite effect of community gardens, including increased litter, chemical and tire dumping, drug use, and decreased property values. By creating community gardens, neighborhoods can teach useful skills in gardening, food production, selling, and business. The NRPA published an in-depth guide to building a community garden in parks through the Grow Your Park Initiative, which can be found on their website.

Aquatic Trends

Pool Design

Municipal pools have shifted away from the traditional rectangle shape and instead have shifted to facilities that include zero-depth entry, play structures that include multiple levels, spray features, small to medium slides, and separate play areas segmented by age/ability.

Indoor warm water therapy pools continue to grow in popularity with the aging population, creating a shallow space for low-impact movement at a comfortable temperature enables programming options to multiply. “Endless” or current pools that are small and allow for “low-impact, high-intensity movement” are becoming popular as well.

Water Fitness

The concept of water fitness is a huge trend in the fitness industry, with many new programs popping up such as aqua yoga, aqua Zumba, aqua spin, aqua step, and aqua boot camp. Whether recovering from an injury, looking for ease-of-movement exercise for

diseases such as arthritis, or simply shaking up a fitness routine, all demographics are gravitating toward the water for fitness. Partnerships can be important for parks and recreation agencies, such as working with hospitals to accommodate cardiac patients and those living with arthritis or multiple sclerosis.

Youth Programming

Swim lessons generally include the most significant number of participants and revenues for public pool operations. Programs can be offered for all ages and levels, including private, semi-private, and group lessons. Access to swimming pools is a popular amenity for summer day camp programs, too.

Spray Parks

Spray parks (or spray grounds) are now a common replacement for aging swimming pools, particularly because it provides the community with an aquatic experience without the high cost of traditional pools. Spray parks do not require high levels of staffing, require only minimal maintenance, and offer a no-cost (or low-cost) alternative to a swimming pool. A spray park typically appeals to children ages 2 – 12 and can be a stand-alone facility in a community or incorporated inside a family aquatic center.

Community Recreation Centers

Parks and recreation agencies serve their communities in many ways; one of the primary facilities that many agencies operate are community centers. These facilities may host a variety of amenities, such as sport courts, multipurpose rooms, fitness gyms, and aquatic facilities. There has been a shift from traditional fitness and general activities in community centers to a more modern approach, which includes healthy living classes, computer classes/internet access, and older adult transportation. Data from the NRPA indicates that recreation centers play an important role in communities across the country. The following info-graphic (Figure 1.10) demonstrates the potential for community services in offering non-traditional services.

Some of the activities, both traditional and non-traditional are listed below:

- Fitness classes such as yoga, meditation, martial arts, and spin cycling
- Esports such as competitive video gaming competitions or events such as tournaments and classes
- Swimming
- Indoor gardening
- Art/dance/exercise studio
- Drama/voice/instrument instructional studio
- Health club/fitness center

Figure 1.10: Non-Traditional Services Desired in Community Centers



- Roller skating
- Indoor archery and shooting range
- Indoor play center (rock climbing or inflatable party place)
- Indoor soccer facility
- Laser tag
- Tennis, handball, badminton, racquetball, pickleball

Fitness Trends

Each year, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) conducts a survey of worldwide fitness trends. Now in its 15th year, the ACSM circulates an electronic survey to thousands of fitness professionals around the world to determine health and fitness trends. The list below includes the top 10 fitness trends for 2024.

1. Wearable Technology

Wearable technology is the #1 trend and has been a mainstay in the top 3 trends since 2016. Wearable technology includes a variety of devices that a person

can wear or attach to themselves and are commonly connected to a smartphone. This technology provides real-time information such as heart rate, stepcounts, active minutes, and sleep time. Wearable technology allows exercise professionals to further individualize day-to-day physical activity for their clients, tracking patterns, performance, and progress over time.

2. Worksite Health Promotion

Worksite health promotion is new to the trends list at #2. This seems to further support an increased interest in health and quality of life, which impacts many areas, including workplace productivity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average American will spend approximately one-third of their life at the workplace when participating in a 40-hour work week. Employers have an opportunity to encourage health-promoting behaviors (e.g., physical activity and preventative screenings). These benefits often lower insurance costs, increase workplace productivity, and improve mental health. Some examples of worksite health promotion include access to fitness facilities, employee athletic leagues, and health education classes.

3. Fitness Programs for Older Adults

Increasing fitness program options for older adults moves up to #3. The 2021 Profile of Older Americans reports a 38% increase in Americans aged 65 and older since 2010, with approximately 27% of this population living independently. The older adult population of Americans is projected to continue its growth through 2040. Aging increases the risk of chronic illness, cognitive impairment, and falls in this population. Regular aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activity is an essential strategy for reducing the impact of disease, maintaining independence, and improving quality of life throughout the aging process.

4. Exercise for Weight Loss

Exercise for weight loss comes in at #4 (#8 for 2023). It is being recognized that regular exercise is a contributor to improving metabolic function and reducing body fat. Exercise should include aerobic activity, strength training, and accompany dietary changes to create a caloric deficit. Exercise aids in preserving lean body mass through weight loss efforts and helps consumers maintain long-term weight loss.

5. Reimbursement for Qualified Exercise Professionals (QEPs)

This trend appears at #5 and is a revised trend from previous years, which advocated for licensure for QEPs. Licensure never peaked in the top 10, and significant policy level barriers exist that make licensure less realistic for the fitness industry in many regions worldwide. However, reimbursement for the services that QEPs are trained to provide supports recog-

dition of exercise professionals (i.e., personal trainers and exercise physiologists) as a part of the health-care continuum. An ACSM Task Force was formed in 2021 to advocate for policy change allowing insurance billing for patient services performed by QEPs within their scope of practice to improve physical activity outcomes and quality of life.

6. Employing Certified Exercise Professionals

Employing certified professionals, appearing at #6 for 2024, has been a consistent top 10 trend. Health and fitness companies recognize the importance of hiring trained professionals to lead fitness programs. Obtaining an accredited certification communicates to consumers that a professional has obtained proficient knowledge to support them with their fitness goals. Certified professionals can be trusted to have the minimum skill level to safely prescribe exercise within their scope of practice. Maintaining accredited certifications requires evidence of continued education, which is important for decreasing injury risk for consumers and reducing liability for employers. To find a certified exercise professional near you, check the US Registry of Exercise Professionals (<https://usreps.org/>). To look at certifications available through ACSM go to: <https://www.acsm.org/certification/get-certified>.

7. Mobile Exercise Apps

Mobile exercise apps break into the top 10 trends list at #7. It is a part of the digital technology trend category. This trend first appeared in the top 20 at number 17 in 2016, under the name Smart phone exercise apps. The use of mobile exercise apps allows for flexibility in program delivery. Exercise apps have impacted the market with many unique options for consumers and demonstrate effectiveness in increasing physical activity for users. Consumers can use mobile apps to track exercise activities and receive feedback on performance. Some apps integrate mechanisms for social support and provide tips for behavioral skill acquisition, both key components of health behavior change theory.

8. Exercise for Mental Health

Programming exercise for improved mental health lands at #8 as individuals begin to acknowledge the importance of movement on cognition and mood. Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Approximately one in every eight individuals globally is affected to varying degrees by mental illness (WHO), and regular exercise can serve as a protective factor. Physical activity and exercise can boost mood and improve mental health. ACSM offers resources to exercise professionals for incorporating physical activity to support mental health.

9. Youth Athletic Development

The #9 trend represents an approach to youth training that focuses on developing motor skills, strength, and coordination. There is a rise in training facilities and programs such as KidStrong® designed to improve confidence, develop social skills, and enhance sports performance. Children and adolescents learn basic movement patterns and prepare for skill acquisition. Exercise professionals should consider continuing education or specialty training when working with this special population.

10. Personal Training

As the #10 trend, personal training has remained a staple in the top 10 fitness trends list since its inception in 2007. Personal training provides one-on-one training involving fitness testing, goal setting, and program implementation. Consumers may benefit from this service to learn effective exercise selection, safety, and recovery methods. Earning a nationally accredited credential such as those certifications offered by ACSM can prepare exercise professionals to work with a variety of clients.

Trails Inclusivity and Accessibility

Many organizations such as the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) are working to promote trail and hiking accessibility for all individuals. The IWA along with other associations emphasize the importance of designing and managing outdoors spaces with inclusivity in mind. Some of the recommendations to achieve inclusivity in trails is to design and, where physically possible, clearly designate multi-access or, where not physically possible, challenging access. Multi-access trails are wide and flat Level 1 trails with no obstacles such as steps or gates and allow access with regular footwear, wheelchairs, or bicycles. In areas where not physically possible to modify, yet still accessible by all, challenging access signs should mark Level 2 trails which may feature narrower paths, slightly rougher terrain, and steeper gradients. Level 2 trails will be better suited for fitter individuals.

Nature Centers

Nature centers are experiencing a wave of innovation. One notable trend is the embracing of sustainable construction practices where organizations build or renovate to achieve the full Living Building Challenge (LBC). The LBC sets a high standard for eco-friendly building practices within the field. Another emerging trend is nature centers facilitating virtual gatherings and workshop for children by taking the “nature center” to their school.

Age-Related and Generational Trends

Activity Participation varies based on age, but it also varies based on generational preferences. The SFIA issues a yearly report on generational activity. In

the 2024 SFIA report, Across every generation, fitness and outdoor activities are the top two most participated sport categories. Team sports had the largest one year increases for each generation except for Millennials, which was second behind winter sports. Team sports participation increased by over 10% year-over-year for Gen Z, Gen X, and Boomers. Millennials were the only generation to have some year-over-year decreases. Fitness sports, outdoor sports, and racquet sports all had small declines of less than 1.5%..

A condensed list of generational trends which may impact recreational services are below, consolidated from Pew Research Center:

- Baby boomers are staying in the workforce longer than generations before them (2019)
- Almost a third of millennials are not affiliated with religion, and half of them describe themselves as political independent (2014)
- Millennials have more financial hardships, such as student loan debt, poverty and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth, but are optimistic about their future (2014)
- Approximately 13% of teens (Generation Z) said they have had a major depressive episode in the last year (2019)
- Those 60 and older (baby boomers) spend more than half of their leisure time (about 4 hours) a day in front of a screen (2019)
- Generation Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation, with only 52% identifying as non-Hispanic whites (2018)

Generation Alpha	Born 2010-Present
Generation Z	Born 1997-2010
Millennials	Born 1981-1996
Generation X	Born 1965-1980
Baby Boomers	Born 1946-1964
Silent Generation	Born 1928-1945

Generational Programming

There has been an increase in the number of offerings for families with children of all ages. This is a departure from past family programming that focused nearly entirely on younger children and preschoolers. Activities such as Family Fossil Hunt and Family Backpacking and Camping Adventure have proven very popular for families with teens. This responsiveness to

the Generation X and Generation Y parents of today is an important step, as these age groups place a high value on family. GameTime’s “Challenge Course” is an outdoor obstacle course that attracts people of all ages and backgrounds to socialize with family and friends while improving their fitness. This type of playground encourages multi-generational experiences.

Trends for Youth Ages 13 and Younger

Traditional Sport Programming

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of youths involved in team sports was beginning to decline. From 2008 to 2018, the participation rate of kids between the ages of 6 and 12 dropped from 45% to 38% due to the increasing costs, time commitments, and the competitive nature of organized sports leagues.

According to the Aspen Institute, after most athletic programs were shut down in the spring of 2020, 30% of children who previously played team sports now say they are no longer interested in returning. It is estimated that up to 50% of the private travel sports clubs will fold following the pandemic, putting pressure on municipal recreation programs to fill the gaps for those children who do want to continue playing organized sports. There is a heightened need to save and build low-cost, quality, community-based sports programs that can engage children of all abilities in large numbers.

STEM and STEAM Programs

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics STEM or STEAM programs — including arts programming — are growing in popularity. Some examples include: learn to code, design video games, Minecraft, create with Roblox (an online gaming platform and game creation system), engineer robots, print 3D characters, and build laptops.

Summer and School Break Camps

Participation in parks and recreation youth camp programs continues to be very strong. For some agencies, these programs are the most significant revenue producers.

Nature-Related Programming

There is an international movement to connect children, their families, and their communities to the nature world called the New Nature Movement, and it is having an impact. In addition to new nature programming, nature-themed play spaces are becoming popular. Some park and recreation agencies are now offering outdoor preschool where the entire program takes place outside.

Youth Fitness

The organization Reimagine Play developed a list of the top eight trends for youth fitness. The sources for this

information include the ACSM's Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends, ACE Fitness, and SHAPE America. The top eight trends include:

- Physical education classes are moving from sports activities to physical literacy curriculums that include teaching fundamentals in movement skills and healthy eating.
- High Intensity Interval Training classes that involve bursts of high-intensity exercise followed by a short period of rest with classes ranging 30 minutes or less.
- Wearable technology and digital fitness media, including activity trackers, smartwatches, heart rate monitors, GPS tracking devices, and smart eyeglasses and virtual headsets.
- Ninja warrior training and gyms because of NBC's premier shows American Ninja Warrior and Spartan Race.
- Outdoor recreational activities including running, jogging, trail running, and BMX biking.
- Family (intergenerational) fitness classes such as family fitness fairs, escape rooms, and obstacle races are gaining in popularity among Gen X and Millennial families who place a high value on family time.
- Kids' obstacle races in conjunction with adult obstacle races such as the Tough Mudder, Spartan Race, and Warrior Dash.
- Youth running clubs that also teach life skills such as risk taking, goal setting, and team building.

Trends for Teens/Younger Adults Ages 13 – 24

Local parks and recreation agencies are often tasked with finding opportunities for teen programming beyond youth sports. As suicide is the second highest causes of deaths among United States teens, mental health continues to be a priority for this age group. Activities such as meditation, yoga, sports, art, and civic engagement can help teens develop life skills and engage cognitive functions. Beyond interacting with



those of their own age, many agencies are developing creative multi-generational activities which may involve seniors and teens assisting one another to learn life skills. Agencies that can help teens develop career development skills and continue their education are most successful in promoting positive teen outcomes and curbing at-risk behavior.

Esports

Esports (also known as electronic sports, e-sports, or eSports) is a form of competition using video games. Forbes reported in December 2019 that eSports audiences exceed 443 million people across the world, and the International Olympic Committee is considering it as a new Olympic sport. Local recreation offerings can include training classes, open play, tournaments, and major competition viewing. A new recreation center in Westerville, Ohio includes a dedicated eSports room, and college campuses across the country are also launching eSports programs.

The NRPA reports that esports reach a demographic that traditional sports cannot:

“Not all children have the ability to participate in traditional sports. Some kids lack physical function, others lack the ability to be around others, and more still have illnesses that make them susceptible to injury.

Esports allow individuals with disabilities, illnesses, immuno-compromising conditions or other health issues to gain the same experience of being on a team that traditional sports provide. Many gaming consoles and games even have adaptations for specific individuals, including those with paralysis and amputations.”

Parkour

Parkour is a physical training discipline that challenges the participant to move their body through obstacle courses like military training. Using body movements such as running, jumping, and swinging, the participant moves through static indoor courses or outdoor urban environments.

Outdoor Recreation

The 2023 Outdoor Participation Trends Report by the Outdoor Foundation reported that,

“The outdoor recreation participant base has grown significantly over the past three years, but the frequency of participation is dropping. The Covid-19 pandemic spurred growth in 2020, and that growth continued through 2022. Over the past three years, the participant base expanded by 14.5 million participants.”

The report goes on to say that today's participants of

outdoor recreation are more casual, more diverse, and older. Younger generations including Gen Alpha and Gen Z participated slightly less in outdoor recreation in 2022 while their elders in Gen X and the Baby Boomers participated more. Seniors represent 1 in every 5 outdoor recreation participants and a total of 1 million new participants was seen in 2022. New and young outdoor participants are more likely to be BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, or other People Of Color) and are driving more ethnic/racial diversity into the participant base.

Approximately 80% of outdoor activity categories experienced participation growth in 2022. The most popular outdoor activities include hiking, camping, fishing, biking (road, bmx, and mountain), snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Outdoor recreation categories that experienced decline in 2022 included trap and skeet shooting, overnight backpacking, road running, and adventure racing. These categories have experienced year-over-year declines since 2020.

Bicycling

According to the Aspen Institute, bicycling became the third most popular sport for kids in 2020. A 2022 U.S. Bicycling Participation Study by People for Bikes found that more Americans rode a bicycle in 2022 than had been measured in previous years. In addition, more riders were using their bicycles to ride for transportation than ever before. The study reports that there has been a steady increase in ridership among Americans with a household income greater than \$60,000, Americans in the Northeast and West, and Americans ages 25 to 54 years old. While ridership grew among some demographic groups, other types of riders saw decreases in participation. The study estimates that ridership among youth ages 3 to 17 is continuing a downward trend from 2016. Still, about half of the youth in America (53% of kids 3 to 9 and 47% of kids ages 10 to 17) rode a bicycle in 2022.

Life Sports

According to the Learning Resources Network “Top Trends in Recreation Programming, Marketing and Management” article, “life sports” are a new priority in the recreation world, where the focus is on developing youth interests in activities they can enjoy for a lifetime, such as biking, kayaking, tennis, golf, swimming, and jogging/walking.

Holistic Health

Parks and recreation’s role in maintaining a holistic lifestyle will continue to grow. People are seeking opportunities to practice mindfulness, authentic living, and disconnection from electronic media. Programs

to support mental health, including those that help to combat anxiety, perfectionism, and substance abuse in youth and young adults, are increasingly needed. The United Nations has urged governments around the world to take the mental health consequences of COVID-19 seriously and help to ensure the widespread availability of mental health support to constituents.

Trends for Adults ages 25 – 54

Aerobic Activities

For most age groups, swimming for fitness and weight training are the two most frequently mentioned activities in which people indicate interest. Running, walking, and biking for fitness continue to show strong and consistent growth. A good balance of equipment and classes is necessary to keep consistent with trends.

Fun Fitness

“Fun” fitness is a current trend. Exercises such as “P90x,” “Insanity,” and “CrossFit” have proven that a lot of equipment is not required to get fit. Since these programs have become popular, newer versions have become available, some cutting the time it takes to look and feel fit in half. These types of classes have been growing and will continue to grow in popularity at recreation departments and fitness centers.

Group Cycling

Group cycling, also known as spinning, continues in popularity as the younger fitness enthusiasts embrace this high-performance group exercise activity as well as program variations that are developed to attract the beginner participant.

Yoga

While Pilates has shown an incredible 10-year growth trend, the past three years have seen a decline in participation. Perhaps participation migrated to yoga, as participation is up across all levels for the year. Yoga is more class based, while Pilates is more of an individual activity. The millennial fitness participants (ages 25 – 39) are showing a higher propensity to go with group-oriented programs.

Cornhole (or Bags)



Cornhole is a low-impact, low-cost activity that can be played by people of all ages. Young adults are signing up for leagues (that can be held indoors or outdoors and are offered all year long). It does not take any skill, and it is a social activity. Although it can be offered recreationally, some competitive leagues are offered, as well.

Trends for Adults Ages 55 and Over

Lifelong Learning

A Pew Research Center survey found that 73% of adults consider themselves lifelong learners. Do-it-yourself project classes and programs that focus on becoming a more “well-rounded” person are popular. Phrases such as “how to” can be added to the agency website’s search engine optimization as consumers now turn to the internet as their first source of information regarding how-to projects. Safeguarding online privacy is also a trending course.

Fitness and Wellness

Programs such as yoga, Pilates, tai chi, balance training, chair exercises, and others continue to be popular with the older generation.

Encore Programming

This is a program area for baby boomers who are soon to be retired and focuses on a broad range of programs to prepare people for transitions into retirement activities. Popular programs for 55+ market include fitness and wellness (specifically yoga, mindfulness, tai chi, relaxation, personal training, etc.), drawing and painting, photography, languages, writing, computer and technology, social media, cooking, mahjong, card games, volunteering, and what to do during retirement.

Specialized Tours

Participants are looking for more day trips that highlight unique local experiences or historical themes. For example, a focus on authentic food, guided night walks, bike tours, concentration on a specific artist’s work, and ghost walks are among the themes being sought out.

Creative Endeavors

Improv classes are specifically targeting age groups with classes that promote creative endeavors. Workshops and groups help seniors play, laugh, and let loose while practicing mental stimulation, memory development, and flexibility.

Childcare

According to the NRPA Parks and recreation is a leading provider of childcare and out-of-school

time programming. More than four in five park and recreation agencies offer Out-of-School Time (OST), programs that serve millions of children throughout the United States. OST is a supervised program that young people regularly attend when school is not in session.

Park and recreation agencies deliver out-of-school time programs to children of all ages :

Early childhood programs

(42% of agencies offering OST programs)

Elementary school-aged children

(97% of agencies offering OST programs)

Middle school-aged children

(72% of agencies offering OST programs)

High school and early workforce-aged children

(25% of agencies offering OST programs)

- 82% of park and recreation agencies offer summer camp programs for their communities’ children, and a majority of agencies deliver programs for teens (65 percent) and after school care (53 percent) as part of their OST portfolio.
- 85% of U.S. adults say it is important for their local park and recreation agency to offer before-/after-school childcare and summer camps for youth.
- Parks and recreation is a leader in youth sports, providing opportunities for children of all skills and abilities to play and introducing kids to a wide variety of sports activities.
- 92% of agencies include team sports leagues as a part of their youth sports offerings.
- 58% of agencies have individual leagues for youth to engage in such sports as tennis, track and field, and wrestling.
- Nearly three in five park and recreation agencies provide science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-specific programs to community members.
- Four in five urban park and recreation agencies partner with local schools to coordinate efforts that connect youth to nature, including coordinated after school programs, nature-based field trips, and formal and informal shared usage agreements that transform schoolyards into publicly accessible spaces where children can play outside of school hours.
- Parks and recreation teaches kids about environmental responsibility, provides better cognitive and emotional stimulation, and promotes creativity and imagination

Each year, the NRPA publishes an article about industry trends and predictions in Parks and Recreation Magazine. In the 2024 edition of the article, Top Trends in Parks and Recreation for 2024 (written by Richard Dolesh—former Vice President of Strategic Initiatives for NRPA), the trends identified for 2024 focused on technology, climate change, health and wellness, worker satisfaction, and recreation program trends. Below are a few highlights from Dolesh’s article:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) - There is little doubt that AI will bring disruptive innovation to parks and recreation on a scale that we have never seen before. Park and recreation agencies might want to purchase location-aware data about their customers to better identify who is using their parks, where people are coming from, and what they did before and after they visited their parks. One such company, Placer.ai, provides data which can show that investments in parks directly correlate to benefits to the local economy. Placer.ai analytics include such information as how many people visited parks on a given day, the traffic flow along roadways into parks, or how much time people spent in parks. Placer.ai data is totally anonymous and aggregated. The only data they obtain from a device is latitude and longitude, nothing else.

Climate Change - The connection of parks to climate resiliency will increasingly become one of the most lasting proofs of just how essential parks are to all communities. Parks, from the smallest to the largest, will play an increasingly important role in 2024 and beyond in mitigating urban heat-island effects, preventing destructive effects of stormwater and flooding, measurably improving air quality in cities and densely populated urban areas, and improving community health, livability and sustainability.

Work Place - The park and recreation industry will see a heavy focus on both workforce development and staff well-being in 2024. Results of the American Psychological Association’s 2023 Work in America Survey shows people want to work for an organization that values their psychological well-being, provides support for mental health and respects work/life boundaries. The idea of the four-day work week is also gaining steam across America. According to experiments, the results suggest that paying people the same amount for less time worked leaves them feeling happier and healthier and often boosts business, too. Studies have shown no declines in productivity or work program. But there can be unintended consequences. While the four-day work week could lower carbon emissions and reduce traffic congestion, it would have a negative effect on public transportation systems and the increased public use of local park and recreation services would affect agency work programs and budgets.

Walking Trips - The pandemic caused many people

to spend more time in parks and walking on trails, but paradoxically, since the pandemic began, walking trips have declined precipitously nationwide. The implications for parks and recreation are significant. Recreation programmers, health staff and trail managers should have a ready audience to promote the much needed health benefits of walking by offering more guided and self-guided walking activities in 2024. Other program trends, such as family engagement activities, outdoor youth programs and senior walks, are tailor-made for parks and recreation to lead the way through walking.

Pickleball - Like Godzilla rising from the sea, the recreation behemoth pickleball has still not slowed its seemingly unstoppable march through cities as the fastest growing recreational sport in the nation. Park and recreation agencies have become much more careful when deciding where to site pickleball courts. Some agencies are now conducting sophisticated sound studies when planning new courts, and are looking at sound abatement measures that will reduce the incessant “thwack-thwack” noise that travels improbable distances from pickleball courts.

Cricket - The popularity of cricket is surging in some regions of the US and in some areas it has become one of the most popular sports.

Hot Programs - Family engagement nights, seasonal festivals, fitness programming, holiday karaoke, “eldertainment,” games and activities for “kidults,” and partnerships with libraries are all hot program trends for 2024, according to observations from park and recreation staff around the country.

Dog parks - Dog parks remain the fastest-growing type of park and off-leash dog parks are the fastest-growing type of dog park. Even so, says Beth Miller, CEO of Wagtown, a national group that advocates for responsible dog-friendly people and communities, their survey of park and recreation leaders showed that “the top three barriers to great dog park experiences are available land, financial support and subject matter expertise.”

Public Restrooms - Self-cleaning toilets of various types have been used in Europe and Asia for decades, but they are now appearing in U.S. urban parks. A voice message warns patrons when their time is up, and a sensor ensures that no lingerers will get a human car wash. Disinfectant spray washes all surfaces, and a self-locking door prevents entry during the periodic cleaning cycle. Self-cleaning toilets are not inexpensive, however, costing from \$100,000 up to \$500,000 for a multiple unit, but in certain urban locations they may be a great choice for public restrooms.

Drone Food Delivery - The food service industry is energized by the idea of much more rapid delivery of prepared meals delivered anywhere, and potential