

Recreation Program Assessment & Analysis

MANHATTAN RECREATION PROGRAM ANALYSIS

The consultant team broadly assessed the department's recreation programs. This evaluation was intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the department's public recreation programs and serves as a general overview attempting to answer some basic questions:

- What are the core programs, and do they match community desires?
- Does the recreation program mix meet the needs of the community?
- Is there a good match between access for programs and revenue?
- What challenges exist that may act as barriers to the department delivering high-quality programs and services?
- Does the City of Manhattan (City) invest an appropriate level of resources in recreation?

To accurately assess the effectiveness of the recreation programs, the consultant team used data from 2022 and 2023. This assessment is based on available data, most of which was provided by the Department.

Organization of the Recreation Division

The program is overseen by the Recreation Superintendent, who is supported by five Recreation Supervisors (Sports, Programs, Facilities & Events, Aquatics, and the Douglass Activity Center).

The primary locations that offer recreation programs include:

- The Anthony Recreation Center
- The City Auditorium
- The Eisenhower Recreation Center
- The Flint Hills Discovery Center (FHDC)
- The Frederick Douglass Recreation Complex
- The City Park Waterpark
- The CiCo Park Waterpark
- The Northview Waterpark

The Parks and Recreation Department also oversees many athletic fields and courts, an ice rink and the Sunset Zoo that provide recreation programming

opportunities but were not a significant part of this assessment.

Core Program Areas

Programs and activities are offered in the following categories:

- Sports programs
 - Youth sports
 - Adult sports
- Enrichment and instructional programs
 - Dance
 - Instructional programs
- Facilities-based recreation programs
 - Douglass Recreation Complex programs
 - FHDC programs
- Aquatics facilities and programs
 - Waterparks (seasonal)
 - Aquatic exercise
 - Swimming instruction
 - Lifeguard certification classes
 - Aquatic special events
- Senior and adapted recreation programs
 - Lifelong recreation 50+
 - Special communities' events
- Youth enrichment
 - Early childhood programs
 - Camps

Community Member Use and Satisfaction with Recreation

The statistically valid needs assessment survey conducted as part of the master planning process provides insight into recreation program use and general user satisfaction.

The survey concluded that almost half of respondents (48%) or their households report participating in any recreation activity, class, or sports program the City offered between 2022 and 2023. Most respondents (72%) rated these programs as either "good" (52%) or "excellent" (20%). Those not using recreation programs

reported not knowing what is offered or being too busy/lack of interest as their biggest barriers to participation (31%).

Aquatic Facility Use

The highest percentage (31%) of respondents use the City Park Waterpark most often, followed by the CiCo Waterpark (20%). Residents who do not use the aquatic facilities report being too busy/lack of interest as their main barrier (82%).

Unmet Need for Recreation Programs and Services

The survey suggested that some recreation programs may be prioritized to add or improve upon based on both importance and unmet need. It is important to acknowledge that the top eight activities most important to community members are also the top eight activities reported as having unmet needs. This provides a clear blueprint for which activities the department should focus on.

The survey estimated the number of households impacted by unmet need. Most activities with unmet need are adult oriented. Three of the top five are aquatic activities. See Figures 4.1 and 4.2. on the following page.

Table 4.1: Top Eight Programs and Activities to Focus On

Program Area of Focus	Importance % of survey respondents rating program areas among top four choices of recreation activities	Households with Needs Partially or Not Met
Adult Fitness & Wellness Programs	31%	8,561
Community Special Events	26%	5,954
Adult Water Aerobics & Fitness	25%	8,668
Adult Lap Swimming	19%	8,118
Adult Nature Programs	17%	6,746
Outdoor Water Recreation	15%	7,290
Cultural Enrichment Programs	14%	6,711
Senior Health & Wellness Programs	11%	5,142

Recreation Staffing

Recreation staffing (42.27 Full-time equivalents (FTE) makes up 39% of the total Parks and Recreation Department staffing. Typically, comparable departments may invest approximately 41% of total resources in recreation. Recreation staffing is sufficient to deliver services. See Table 4.2. Note that staffing positions supporting the FHDC are not included in Table 4.2 as that facility is considered unique and would not accurately support comparisons with other agencies.

Table 4.2: Recreation Staffing

Recreation Staffing	Full-Time	Part-Time	Part-Time Temporary	Total
Recreation, enrichment, sports, instructional programs, senior, and special communities' programs	12	0	9.37	21.37 FTE
Facilities-based recreation programs	2	1	5.3	8.3 FTE
Aquatics facilities and programs	0	0	12.6	12.6 FTE
Total	14	1	27.27	42.27

PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAM REVENUE

The consultant team assessed revenues specific to core recreation areas. The FHDC was mostly analyzed separately in separate section of this report.

Recreation Revenues

Revenues from recreation programs and services budgeted in 2023 are in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: 2023 Budgeted Recreation Revenues

Recreation Staffing	2023 Budgeted Program Revenue Budgets
Douglass Community Center	\$14,550
Anthony Middle School Recreation	\$75,000
Eisenhower Middle School Recreation	\$75,000
Recreation Programs	\$669,300
Water Parks	\$480,750
Total Recreation Revenues	\$1,314,600

Figure 4.1: Recreation Programs Most Important to Households

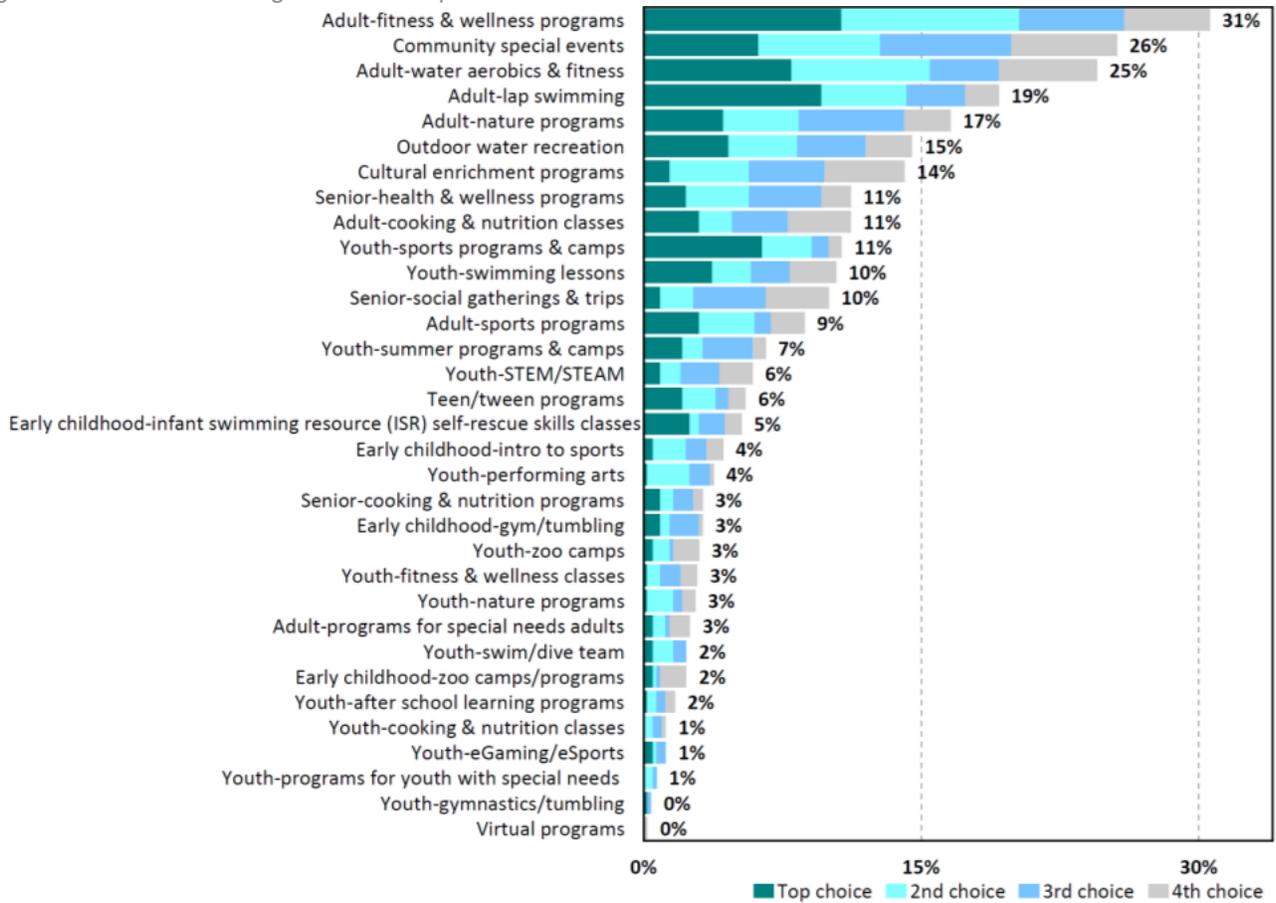
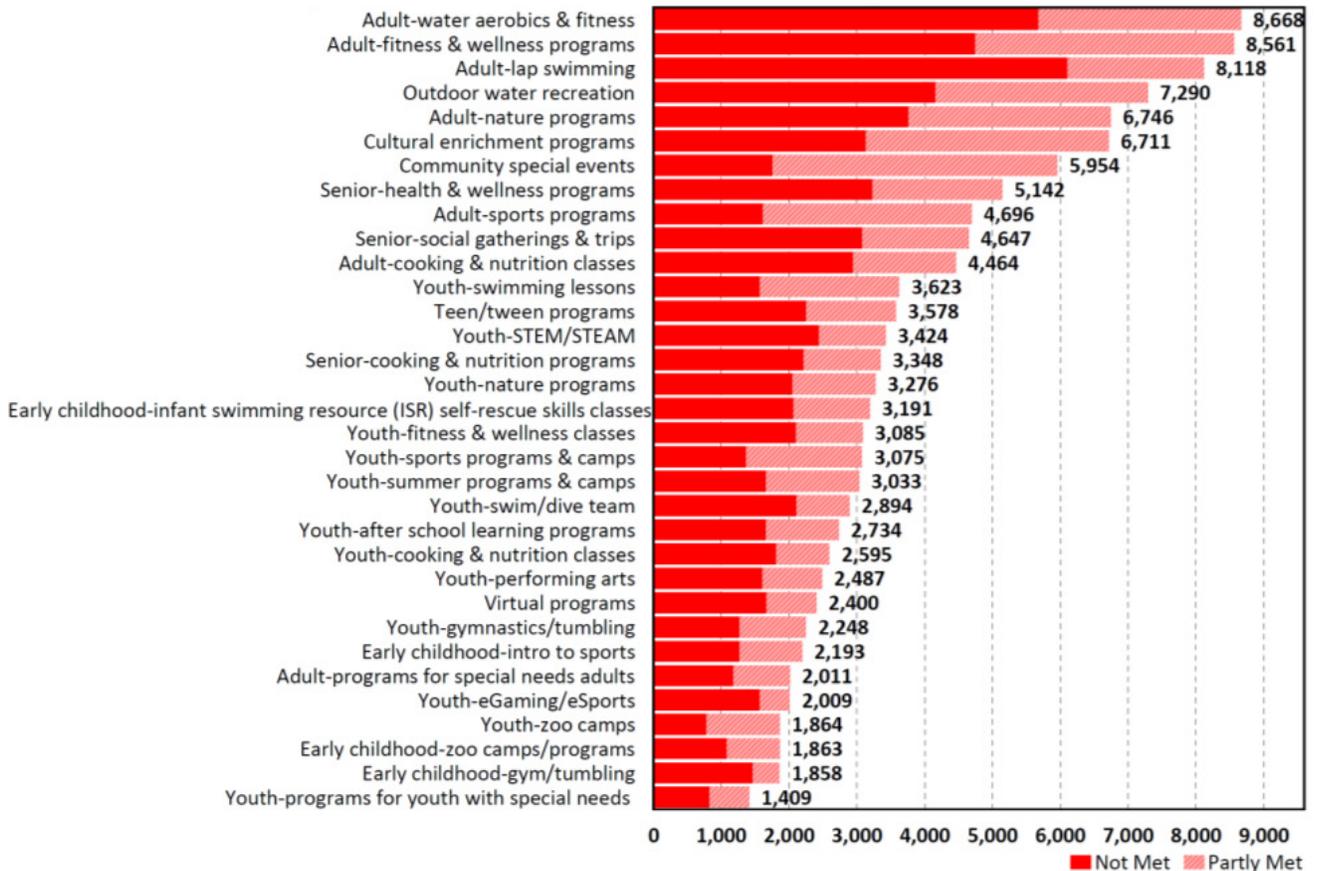


Figure 4.2: Recreation Programs with the Greatest Unmet Needs



Revenues generated by the department shown in Table 4.3 illustrate revenue of \$24.20 per capita. Nationally, other agencies are typically between \$12.85 on the lower quartile and \$77.41 on the upper quartile or a median of \$32.91. The department's revenues are within the mid-range of comparable parks and recreation departments although lower than the median.

Recreation Participation and Direct Subsidy

Due to the manner in which expenditures are accounted for in different categories, it was not possible to calculate program subsidies. While revenues and expenditures are easily identified in a variety of budget categories, labor is not broken out in the budget documents. Implementing a cost recovery philosophy and policy would give the City a much better idea of subsidy levels.

Approximate participation estimates are provided from the published 2022 City Budget. A subsidy of \$5.69 per participant in recreation programs and facilities is somewhat high. However, the waterpark subsidy is generally between \$5.00 and \$10.00 for aquatic facilities and programs. The City's subsidy at the waterparks is at a similar level to what would be anticipated. See Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Recreation Attendance and Subsidy

	All Attendance	Direct Subsidy	Direct Subsidy per Attendant
Douglass Recreation Center	37,500	(\$310,685)	-\$8.20
Water Park	105,000	(\$687,849)	-\$6.55
Eisenhower Recreation Programs	35,000	(\$258,299)	-\$7.38
Youth Program Registration	35,000	\$47,000	+\$1.34
Total	212,500	\$1,209,833	\$5.69

Programs to Meet the Demographic Profile of the City

The City's population is anticipated to change very minimally over the next five years. In keeping with that, no additional programs or activities are needed to remain at a similar level of service. However, the program mix should still be ever-changing to help ensure the collective program is novel and fulfilling the programmatic trends of the industry.

Program Age Segmentation

Comparing programs offered to age population in the City can offer insight into an optimal mix of program opportunities. The consultant team calculated the percentage of program opportunities from programs offered in the 2024 Activity Guide, Vol.2 and senior program flyers.

Table 4.5: Population and Programs Offered Analysis

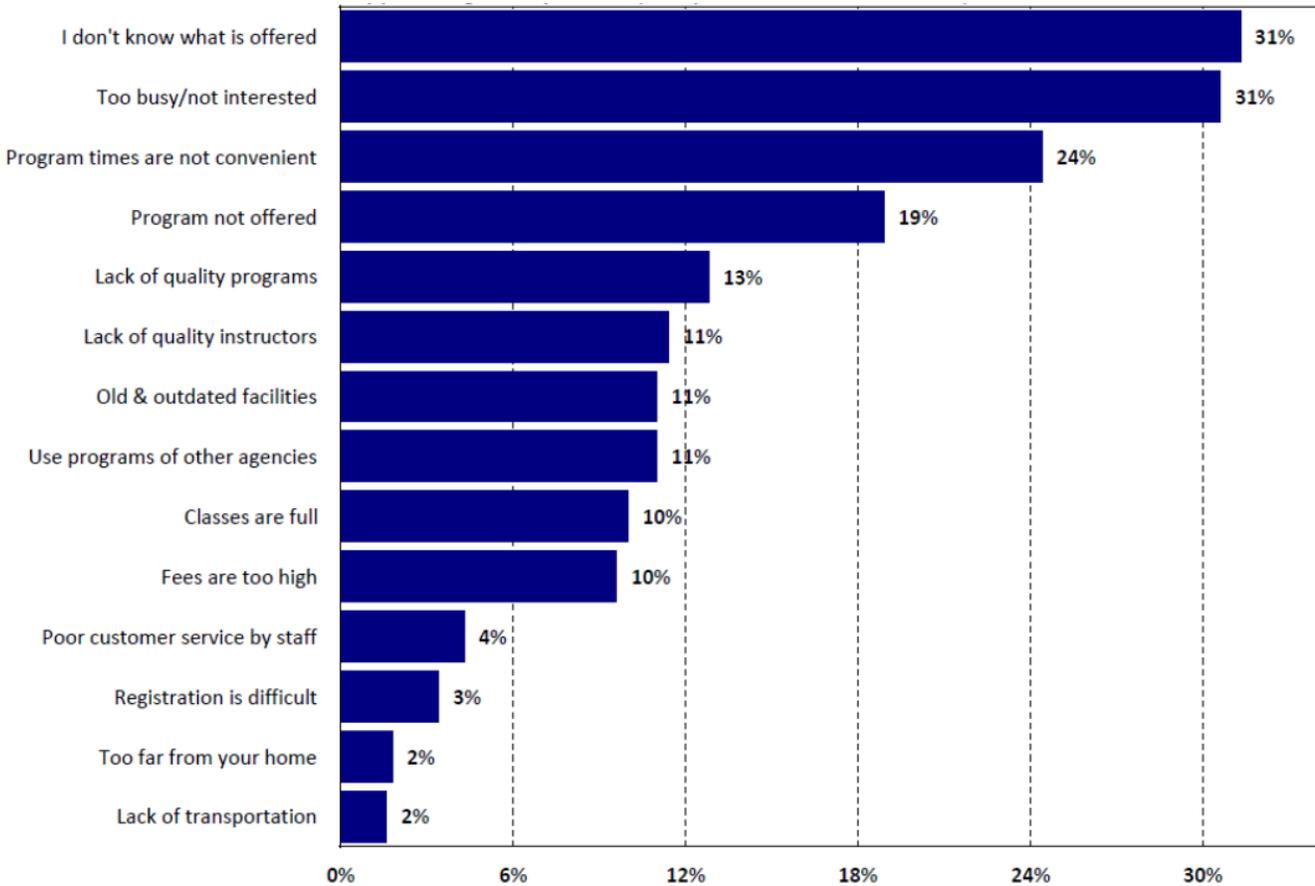
	% of Population	% of Programs Offered
0-4 Preschool/Toddler	5%	11%
5-9 Youth	4%	42%
10-14 Preteen/Teen	4%	30%
15-19 Teen	11%	11%
20-54 Adult	58%	4%
55+ Older Adults/Seniors	18%	2%
Total	100%	100%

There is no right, or wrong percentage of programs offered in any given age group, and those decisions are driven by the City's values, policies, and competitive markets. However, as demonstrated in the needs assessment survey, adult residents have the least level of satisfaction (needs not being met) of any age group. Comparing the population of adults 20 – 54 years old (58%) to the percentage of programs offered for adults (4%), it is understandable why a gap exists in this age group and why needs are not being met. Typically, there is less subsidy necessary for this age group and therefore additional net revenues can be expected. There are also substantial gaps in programs offered to 55+ older adults and seniors.

MARKETING RECREATION PROGRAMS

Marketing and promotions rely on a multimodal approach to disseminating information about programs and facilities. It is important to acknowledge that the needs assessment survey suggested the top reason for not using recreation programs and facilities was that residents are unfamiliar with programs offered. See Figure 4.3. A rebranding effort may greatly assist the department to disseminate and promote program opportunities. Part of this rebranding effort goes beyond logos, colors, etc. and may include assessment of new or additional vision, mission, values, core program areas, etc.

Figure 4.3: Barriers to Recreation Participation



Rebranding the Department

The department may benefit greatly by developing a marketing strategy that includes rebranding, development of a cost recovery and pricing strategy, and promotions plan. Once completed, the department should be guided by the brand that should influence business decisions, especially related to marketing, promotions, and pricing. The department's brand tells its story, and can be used by each function, including the FHDC. The brand creates awareness of department offerings and establishes a sense of pride in the city.

The Recreation Activity Guide

The recreation activity guide should be a key part of the department's marketing strategy. Along with posts to websites, emails, social media, and community presentations, the activity guide can be effective in branding and creating excitement for events and registrations. Even as different residents may have different preferences for how they receive information, activity guides continue to be the most widely preferred method for disseminating parks and recreation program

information.

The consultants reviewed the most recent, published activity guides and found some opportunities for improvement. The activity guides had some inconsistencies with regard to age. In some instances, programs were offered by age group, others by school grade. In several cases, no age group was published for a particular class or activity. Program descriptions are also very important in residents' registration decisions and are an area for potential improvement.

The following are some guidelines for producing high-quality activity guides that may assist the coordinators producing the programs and activities:

- To maximize return on investment (ROI) from the guide, the department should make it as easy as possible for patrons to enroll in classes and activities.
- Welcome notes and letters to patrons should not be placed on the front or back cover or on the first couple of inside pages. These are prime spaces

for attracting registrants. In the case of the 2024 Activity Guide Vol 2, the second page, or inside cover, included logos and registration policies. The logos could be on the front cover and the policies could be smaller footnotes.

- The current Senior 50+ Program Flyer lacked creativity and imagination. It also included parents’ night out without an explanation why the program is advertised to senior populations.
- Scholarship policy on the inside cover suggests the patron’s responsibility to show proof of eligibility. It is always best to refer patrons to an online application portal to avoid driving potential scholarship customers away. Using the school district’s free or discounted lunch list each year is an easy way for participants to confirm eligibility.
- Flyers for special events are appropriate to be in the activity guide. However, the center section is best. Special events do not generally contribute greatly to program ROI.
- Descriptions are best when carefully crafted and updated. They should be written and approved prior to use. Program descriptions should follow five “C”s to attract registration:
 - CLEAR – Be clear in a broad sense. Describe the activity in a way that does not limit the instructor: “This class may include crafts and music projects.”
 - CONCISE – Don’t use phrases like “This class will” or “You will learn.” Assume that the reader will know it will be fun, but don’t say it. All recreation classes should be fun. Do not say the age in the title or in the body of the description—it should already be listed in the activity category.
 - CREATIVE – Use different descriptive words. Try not to repeat the same words if possible.
 - CONSISTENT – Confirmation information should be at the end of the description. For example, “Bring sunscreen and a hat.”
 - CATCHY – Descriptions should be unique. A customer should not look at a page of activities where the language all starts the same way.

both unique registrations and actual participation. Actual participation is counted in participant contact units (PCUs), which are the number of times the individual took part in the class or activity. For instance, one child registering for a camp that meets five times would be one registration and five PCUs. PCUs provide a much clearer picture of the effort required to provide a service than individual registrations.

In 2022, the FHDC received a significant number of registrations in its Discovery Camps and Summer Camp programs. The number of contacts made were very high and directly relate to the level of staffing, resources, and effort required to deliver the program. See Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: FHDC Core Registered Education Programs

Core Registered Activity	Unique Registration	PCUs
Discovery Camp	407	18,315
Summer Camp	579	26,055
Preschoolers in the Flint Hills	217	3,906
Walk and Talk	110	2,180
Tallgrass Tours	36	216
Nature Together	33	66

Many programs were filled to capacity and had waiting lists. Specifically, the Breakfast with Santa event and Preschoolers in the Flint Hills educational program both had over 100 people on waiting lists.

Recreation Participation, and Use of the Facility

The FHDC utilizes Placer AI mobile technology to monitor facility participation. Between December 1, 2022, and November 30, 2023, the facility welcomed 47,300 unique individuals, each visiting an average of 1.25 times. With a total of 59,100 visits, this represents a lower return rate than anticipated by consultants. In 2022, admissions were slightly higher at 67,200, possibly influenced by the influx of tourists visiting the FHDC. Actual total 2023 visitation was 95,507 including program participants.

Placer AI furnishes valuable data, showcased in Figures 4.4 to 4.6, aiding in delineating the typical FHDC user. Figure 4.4 illustrates that, beyond home and work, the primary locations visitors originate from are three hotels, underscoring the

FHDC RECREATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

To accurately count participation in each of the core programs, The consultant team analyzed

tourism aspect. The dataset indicates an average visitor income of approximately \$80,000 per year, with limited diversity.

Figure 4.5 outlines household income distribution among FHDC visitors, while Figure 4.6 depicts visitor diversity. The typical visitor profile leans towards tourists with relatively high incomes, predominantly Caucasian, and if diverse, likely of Hispanic descent.

Figure 4.4: Visitor Flow - Placer AI Data: 2023

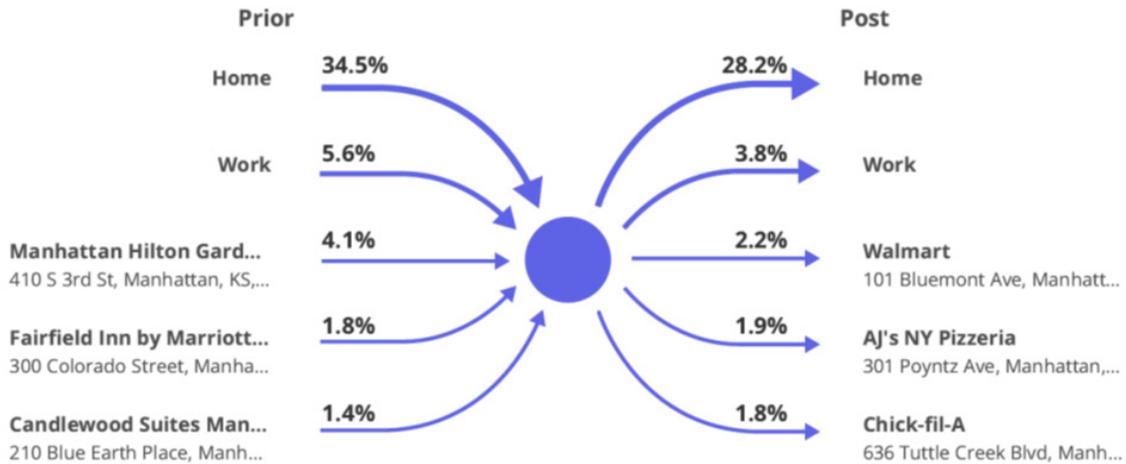


Figure 4.5: Household Income of Visitors to the FHDC – Placer AI Data 2023

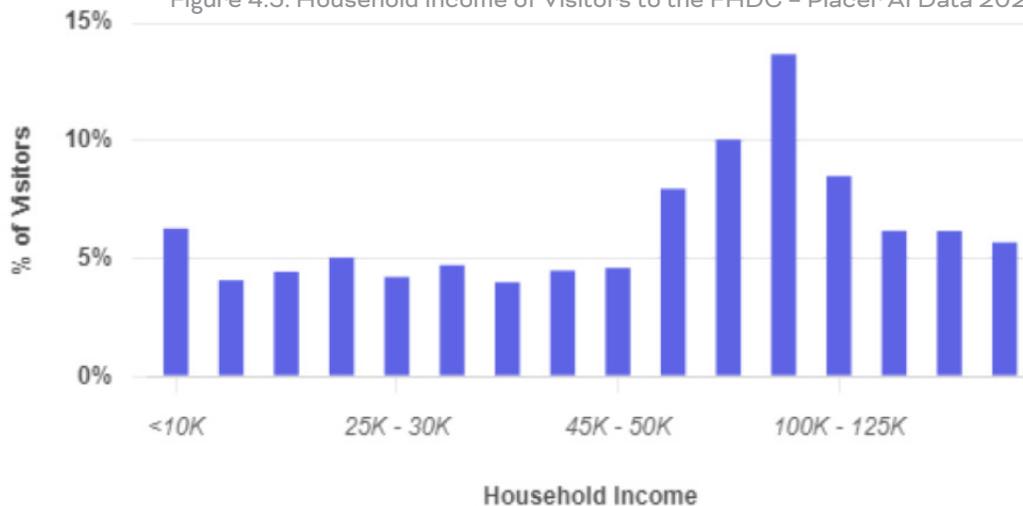
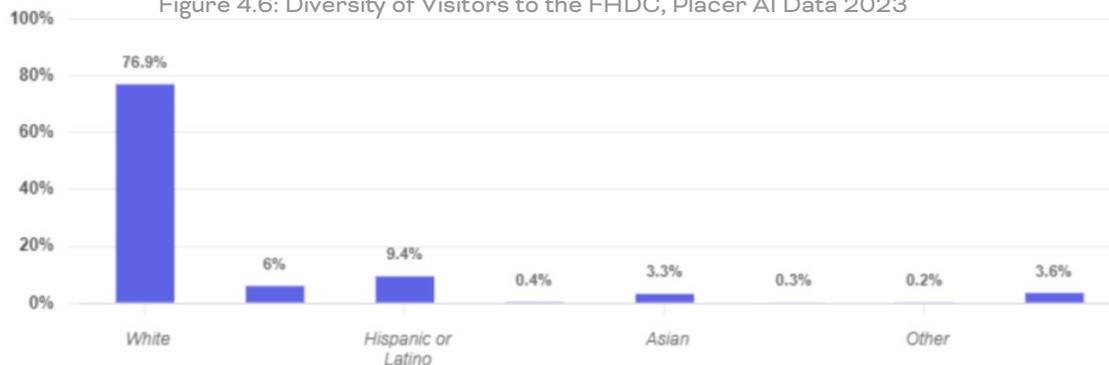


Figure 4.6: Diversity of Visitors to the FHDC, Placer AI Data 2023



*Demographics are based on a True Trade Area capturing 70% of visits | Data source: Census 2021

The following programs are currently offered, supported by two FTE and seasonal staff who oversee a broader program:

- Nature Together
- Preschoolers in the Flint Hills
- Tallgrass Tours
- Walk and Talk
- Spring Discovery Camp

A review of past activity guides suggests that the same or similar educational and recreation programs are offered year after year with little changes or novelty, at least since 2018. Programming goals and metrics may greatly assist the department as well as keeping the programs and activities updated and fresh.

PROGRAM LIFE CYCLE

Parks and recreation agencies need to acknowledge that certain programs and activities have finite lifespans and require ongoing evaluation. In 2022, only a small number of programs offered by the City’s Park and Recreation Department were canceled due to insufficient registration. When programs face cancellation, it could indicate that they have outgrown their lifecycle.

To assess whether a program has reached the end of its lifecycle, participants and staff should be asked a few straightforward questions. The concept of a program lifecycle is depicted in Figure 4.7, demonstrating that some programs align better with market demands based on their lifecycle stage. Some programs enjoy stronger market positions, while others might be more

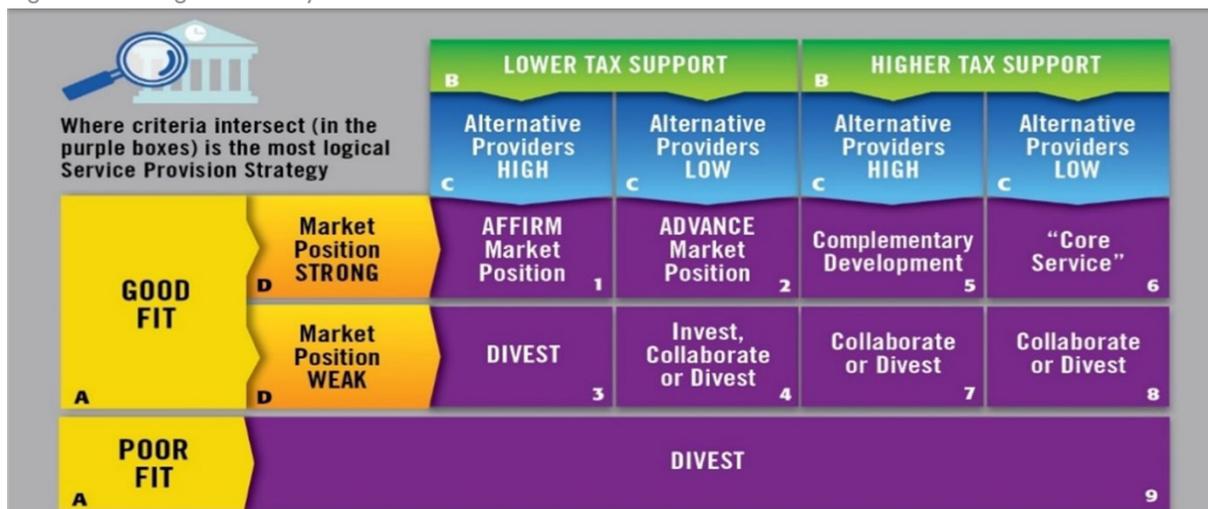
effectively delivered by alternative providers. Overall, understanding the program lifecycle can aid in deciding which programs to retain and which ones to phase out.

Recreation coordinators and supervisors can easily gauge a program’s lifecycle by focusing on those with dwindling participation or limited interest. If a program faces cancellation for multiple consecutive seasons, it likely signifies that the program has run its course and should be discontinued. Below are questions that can facilitate the implementation of this evaluation tool:

- Is participation increasing or decreasing? If participation is increasing, it could mean the program should be continued. If participation is decreasing, are there steps to take to increase interest through marketing efforts or changes to the time/day of the program, format, content, title, or instructor? If not, it may be time to discontinue the program.
- Is there information in the participation/staff feedback that can be used to improve the program?
- Are cost recovery goals being met? If not, can program costs be reduced or can fees be realistically increased?
- Is there another provider of the program that is more suitable to offer it? If yes, the department could create feeder programs and provide referrals for its customers.

The department can also use cancellation rates to help make decisions regarding resource allocation and to focus marketing efforts.

Figure 4.7: Program Life Cycle

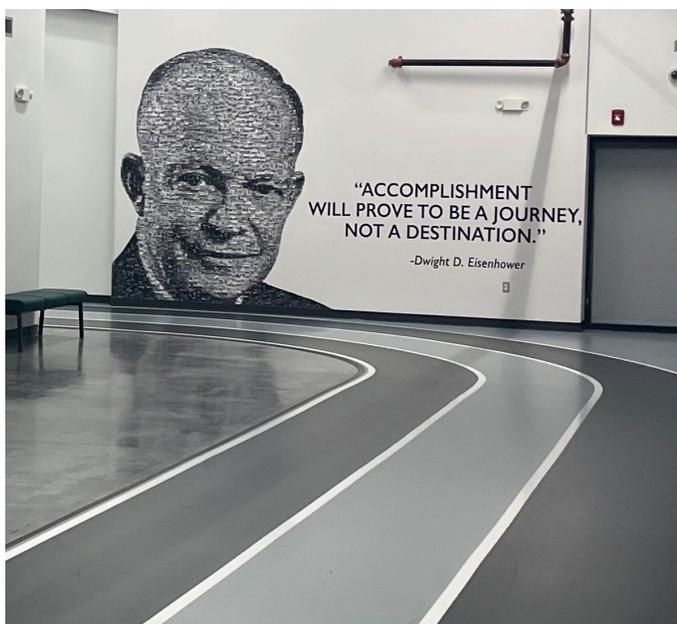


RECREATION PROGRAM EVALUATION AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Successful recreation programs typically track and report on performance measures that help describe the success of recreation program delivery. A maximum of four or five performance measures should be adopted to help ensure appropriate tracking and reporting. A few examples are included for consideration and must consider the department’s mission and vision statements adopted by the appropriate elected body.

Table 2.7: Sample Recreation Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Purpose	Outcome
Number of new classes per quarter	Maintain a fresh and novel recreation program	Attract new and returning participants
Number of program cancellations	Keep programming from stagnating	Make efficient use of coordination time and marketing budget
Participant satisfaction rates	Maintain and attract advocates, strong, sustainable revenues, and word-of-mouth marketing	Encourage high-quality program delivery
Ongoing patron satisfaction surveys	Receive continuing data to improve programs	Survey at least 75% of program participants



CHALLENGES, KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultant team identified many challenges and key findings in this assessment. While residents (survey respondents) report high level of satisfaction with existing programs and services, there is room for improvement.

1. Coordination with the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Management staff at Ft. Riley is recommended on a regular basis to coordinate support and opportunities for military personnel and their families
2. Activity guides should be more consistent with respect to descriptions and age group categories. Use of the activity guide tips shown in the Recreation Activity Guide section above is recommended.
3. Metrics are recommended and should be established for both the overall recreation program and the FHDC with an emphasis on new programs and program registration per quarter. This is important to keep the programs novel.
4. Use of the program life cycle is recommended. Novelty in programs and opportunities can directly impact revenues.
5. Eight program areas are identified as focus areas for recreation in Table 4.1. These programs represent both the most important programs and least needs met.
6. Adult program gaps should be addressed. Additional adult programming and aquatic programming are needed. A new recreation and aquatic center can really assist with this.
7. A rebranding effort may significantly assist the department in it’s marketing efforts and is recommended.
8. A cost recovery and pricing philosophy and policy should be developed based on the direct benefits to the participants versus the overall community/tax payer.