

# The Impact of COVID-19 on the Future of Parks and Recreation

MRPA Annual Conference 2021

Elvis Cordova | Vice President of Public Policy & Advocacy

Roxanne Sutton | Director of Communications

Allison Colman | Director of Health



# Agenda

1. The Essential Role of Parks and Recreation During COVID-19
2. Making the Case for the Future
3. Legislative Overview and Activating Our Advocacy Movement in COVID-19 Recovery





# The Pandemic.



# COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts in U.S.

- 29.3 million cases in U.S. (CDC)
- 534,000+ deaths in the U.S. (CDC)
- 113 million vaccines administered in U.S. (CDC)
- 10.1 million people unemployed (January, Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- Estimated 50 million people experiencing Food Insecurity (Feeding America)

# COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts in U.S.

- 4 in 10 households facing serious financial problems (NPR, RWJF & Harvard survey)
- 6 in 10 households with childcare challenges; 1/3 having serious problems keeping children's education going (NPR, RWJF & Harvard survey)
- 20% of households struggling to pay mortgage or rent (NPR, RWJF & Harvard survey)
- 41% of adults reporting symptoms of anxiety disorder and/or depressive disorder (compared to 11% in 2019)(Kaiser Health Tracking Poll)

# COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts in U.S.

- Disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other people of color
  - Black people have died at 1.4x the rate of white people (The COVID Tracking Project)
  - Pacific Islanders, Latinx, Black and Indigenous people all have a COVID-19 death rate of **double or more** than White and Asian Americans (APM Research Lab)
  - Job and wage losses have impacted Black and Latinx families at higher rates (PEW)

# COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts in U.S.

- 40% of students concerned about family financial situation
- 30% concerned about having basic needs met
- 30% of young people have felt unhappy or depressed more often
- 29% of students do not feel connected to school adults
- 23% of students do not feel connected to classmates
- $\frac{3}{4}$  of students are spending fewer than 4 hours in class/doing schoolwork per day
- \*All data from America's Promise survey of HS students



So, it has been a challenging  
(maybe the worst) year, BUT,  
there have been some  
positives...

# Parks and Recreation is Essential



NRPA defines **essential services** as the services and programs that are absolutely necessary to maintain the health and well-being of the public.

NRPA defines **essential infrastructure** as the spaces, facilities and built environment features, such as parks, trails, open spaces and pools, that are absolutely necessary to maintain the health and well-being of the public.

*Parks & Recreation Response to COVID-19, NRPA 2021*

# COVID-19: Parks and Recreation is Essential

When most other sectors closed, at the height of shelter in place orders, **75% of agencies kept some or all parks open** and **86% of agencies kept trails open** to allow for safe, physically distant use.

More than **190 million** U.S. residents (3 in 5 people) visited a park, trail or other public space at least once during the first three months of the pandemic.



# COVID-19: Parks and Recreation is Essential

## ACCORDING TO NRPA'S PARKS SNAPSHOT May 27-29, 2020 Survey Results

### TWO IN THREE

park and recreation leaders report increased usage of their agency's parks compared to this time last year (with a median rise of 25 percent)



WHILE MORE THAN 80% report increased usage of their trails (with a median rise of 35 percent)



Mayors from cities across the country noted that **public appreciation of parks and recreation is at an all-time high**, including appreciation for the unique, physically distanced services and programs agencies have provided throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Parks & Recreation Response to COVID-19, NRPA 2021*

[www.nrpa.org/COVID-19](http://www.nrpa.org/COVID-19)

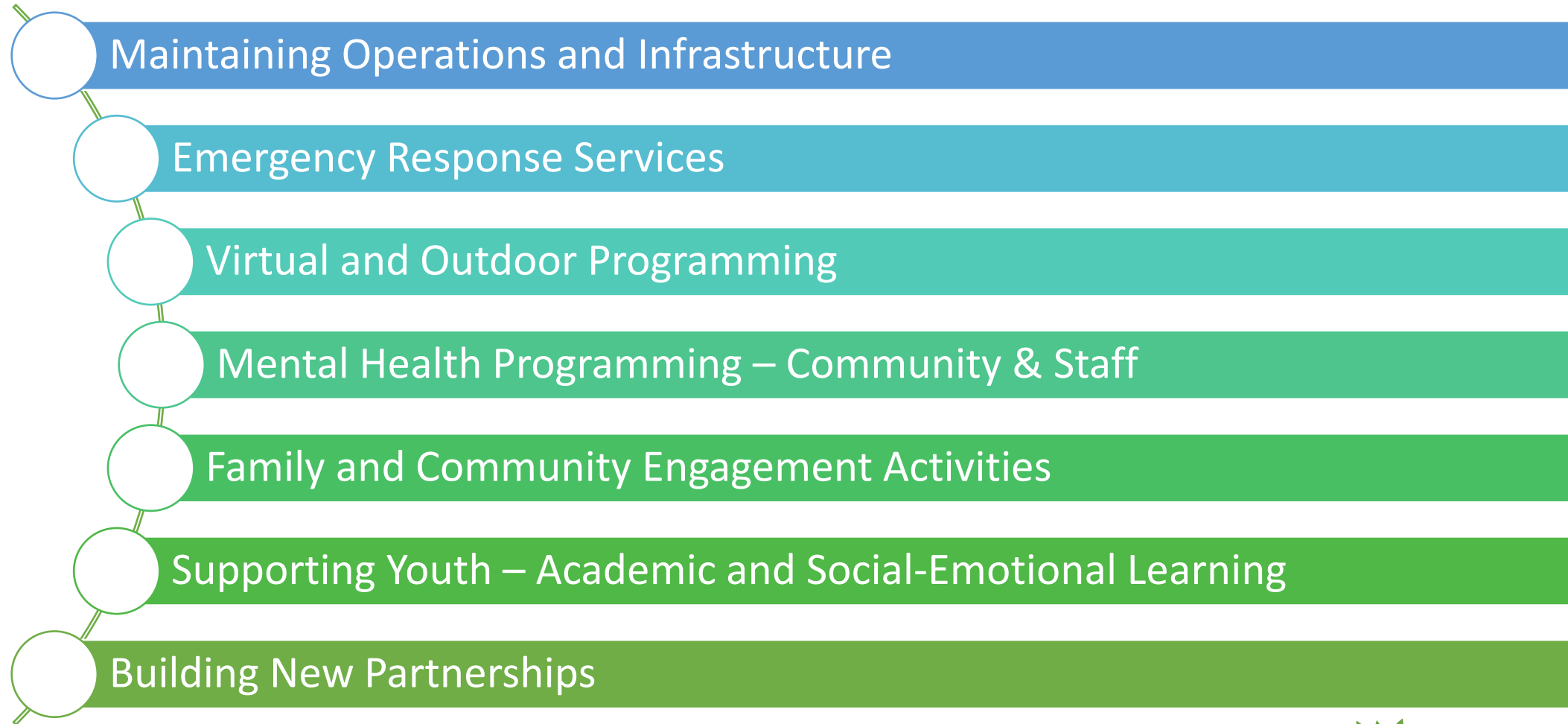
While parks and recreation have been essential to so many, 30% of people do not have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of home.



Over 60% of Agencies are Supporting Essential COVID-19 Response Services Across Multiple Sectors



# COVID-19: Innovation, Creativity and Commitment



What is (at least) one thing  
that your agency did this year  
that you are proud of?

# COVID-19: Lasting Impacts on Parks and Recreation

## Focus on Equity

- Building relationships and trust with community, decision-making power
- Deeper understanding of who benefits from practices, policies, operations and programs
- Prioritization of disinvested communities

## Staff Well-Being

- Normalizing conversations about mental health and reducing stigma
- Need for greater focus on staff mental health and well-being - addressing staff morale challenges, burnout, vicarious trauma
- Supporting staff in remote environment

## Task Shifting

- Providing or supporting a host of rapid emergency response and relief services
- Models of collocating social services in parks and recreation to meet community needs
- Creation of community resources centers/networks

## Virtual World and Fresh Community Programming

- Virtual world here to stay – how can all community members benefit from virtual programming? How will remote culture impact public spaces?
- Creative approaches to community engagement and programming to cultivate belonging/needed fun

## Partnerships

- Improved coordination with local public health agencies and other municipal depts
- Removal of “red tape”
- Leveraging of resources and assets to fill gaps; colocation of services in trusted gathering spaces (Community Wellness Hubs)

# NRPA'S PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

## PHASED REOPENING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cross-Sector Planning
- Meeting Health Indicators
- Risk Assessment Tools
- Centering Health Equity
- Emergency Plans
- Communications Tools

## PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTION MEASURES FOR STAFF AND PUBLIC

- Cleaning and Disinfection
- Community Education and Awareness
- Administrative, Operations and Environmental Modifications
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Staff Training

## MANAGEMENT OF SPACES AND FACILITIES

- Parks, Trails, Beaches, Dog Parks and Open Space
- Playgrounds, Exercise Equipment and Splashpads
- Pools, Outdoor Courts and Athletic Fields
- Indoor Recreation Centers and Senior Centers
- Restrooms and Hygiene Stations
- Workplaces

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

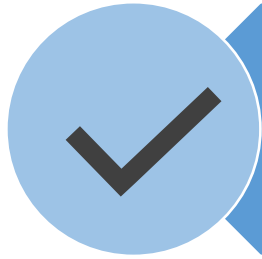
- Childcare and Summer Camps
- Youth Sports
- Virtual Programming
- Older Adult Programming
- Essential Services and Emergency Relief
- Nutrition Programs and Farmers Markets



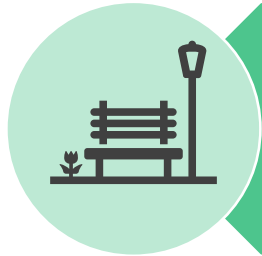
# Parks and Recreation: Making the Case for the Future

# RECAP:

## Throughout COVID-19, Parks and Recreation



Took on additional essential service provider roles



Continued to provide core services, with accommodations



Created partnerships to promote community health and well-being

Acknowledge that the past  
year has been hard.

Take pride in the small and big  
things you accomplished.

# Making the Case for the Future

## Talking Points

- General
- Community Specific

## Message Tips

- Audience
- Make every word count

## Graphics

- Visualize Your Impact
- Templates to help!

## Next Steps

- Advocate
- Keep Learning

# Talking Points





# Tips for Communication

- Who is your audience?
- What do they care about?
- What persuades them? Data? Stories?
- How do they prefer to receive communications?

# Tips for Communication

## Fictional Example of How to Construct Message

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down our senior centers, park and recreation staff served an essential role in ensuring the physical and mental well-being of Smithville's older adults. Park and recreation staff placed more than 5,000 calls to older adults in our community and increased meal service to older adults by 20 percent.

← Overarching statement

← Supporting data

Mary Washington, a 90-year-old Smithville resident, said that without park and recreation staff, she may have not made it through the pandemic. "Not only did their phone calls make me feel less lonely, on one call, Shonda from the parks department detected a slur in my speech and was able to direct medical attention to me. Without her, I may not be here."

← Real world example

Given their existing relationship with Smithville older adults, park and recreation staff were best suited to provide this essential support during a critical time. Currently, the park and recreation department faces a budget cut of 25 percent, putting our older adult services at risk. Given your interest in increasing services for Smithville's older adults, I urge you to support Bond Measure 221 to protect critical park and recreation funding.

← Call to action

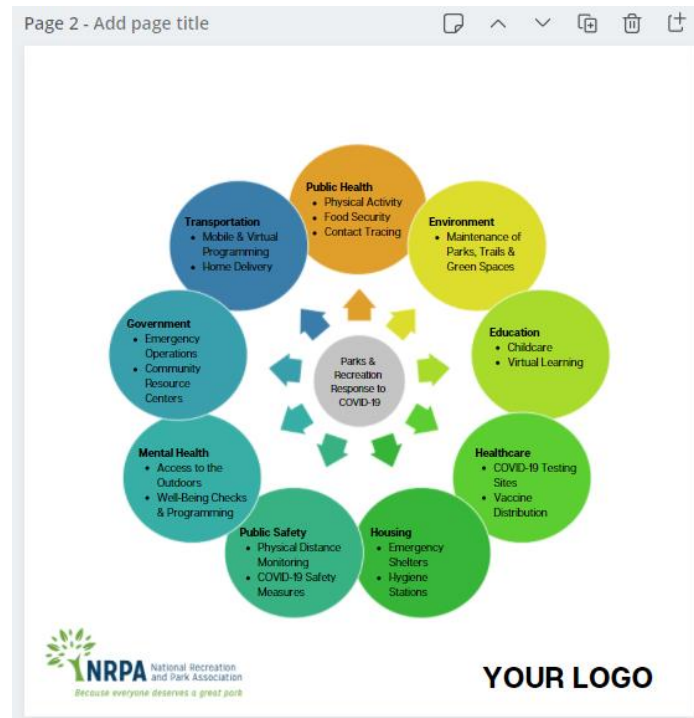
# Graphics

Page 1 - Add page title

## How to Use Templates

All text on the following graphics can be edited. Things you may want to consider updating:

- Add your agency's name to "Parks & Recreation's Response to COVID-19"
- Be specific about the exact activities your agency did under each heading
- Update headings (page 3) to be the ones most relevant to you and your agency. This template also has room to include more stats and details about your efforts.



Page 3 - Add page title

**Parks & Recreation's Response to COVID-19**

**NRPA** National Recreation and Park Association  
Because everyone deserves a great park

**YOUR LOGO**

**Public Health**

- Physical Activity
- Food Security
- Contact Tracing

**Mental Health**

- Access to the Outdoors
- Well-Being Checks & Programming

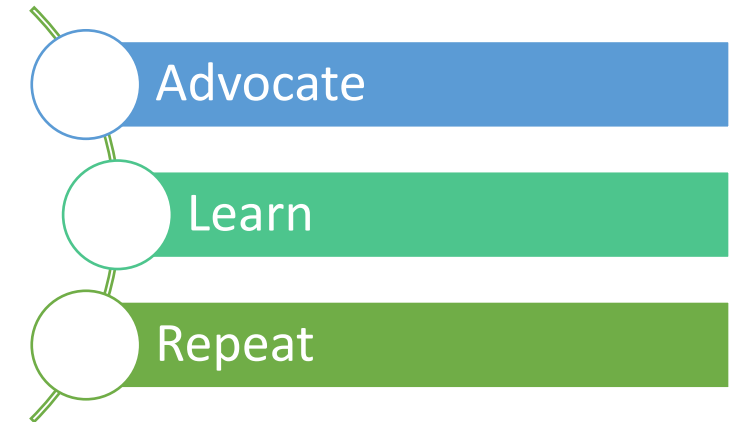
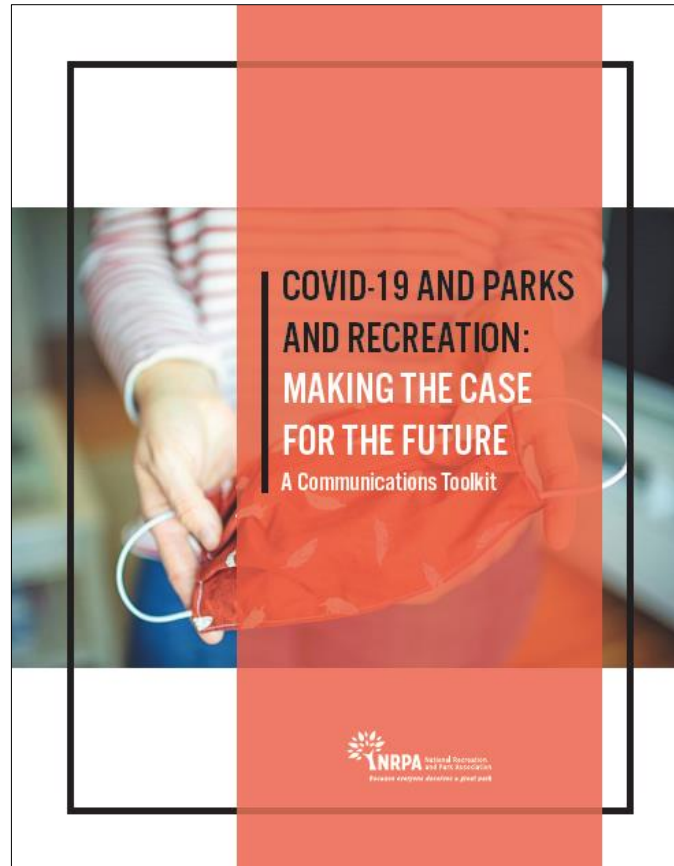
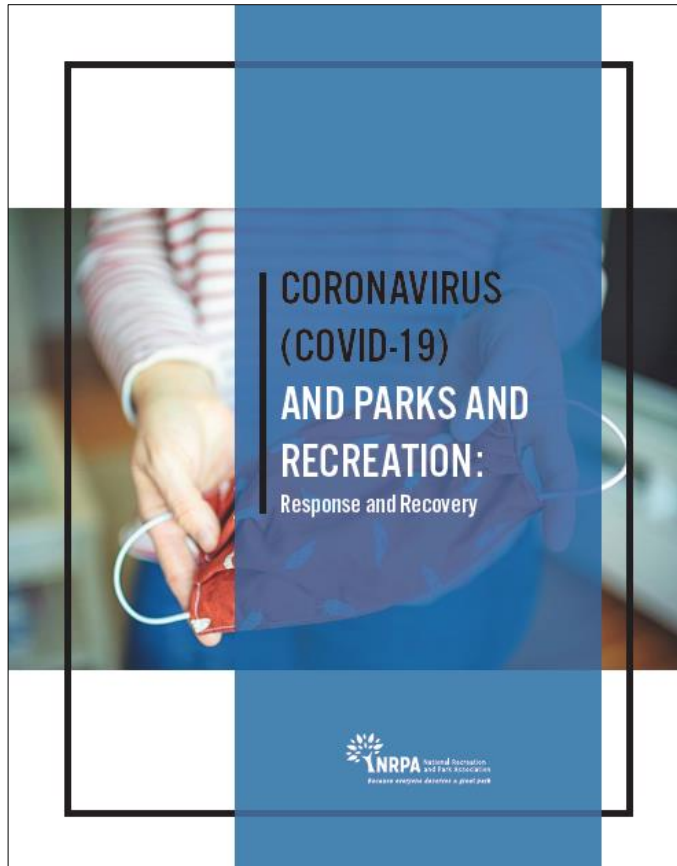
**Government**

- Emergency Operations
- Community Resource Centers

**Education**

- Childcare
- Virtual Learning

# Next Steps



[www.nrpa.org/COVID-19](http://www.nrpa.org/COVID-19)

# National Political Overview & NRPA's Legislative Priorities



# The Big Picture

**117<sup>th</sup> Congress presents opportunity for progress on NRPA's priorities**

**Biden Administration began term with a heavy focus on:**

- Covid-19 response
- expanding healthcare access

**Economic stimulus package expected in late summer/early fall 2021**

- Modernizing aging national infrastructure
- Job-creation in renewable energy, active transportation, & green infrastructure

**Job creation, climate change, & racial inequality are priorities for Congress**

- Continuing trend of historic increases to climate-friendly gov't programs

# NRPA 2021 Legislative Priorities

## **COVID Relief / Economic Stimulus Priorities:**

- One time \$500 million investment in urban parks via ORLP program
- ✓ Funding for state & local governments
- Ensure special units of government are eligible

## **Ensure Access for All:**

- Land & Water Conservation Fund (Non-Federal Match Waivers)
- Parks, Jobs, & Equity Act
- Protecting America's Wilderness & Public Lands Act (Outdoors For All Act)

## **Advance Community Health and Well-Being:**

- Child Nutrition Reauthorization
- Funding for trauma-informed care & mental health training
- Community Wellness Hub model

# NRPA 2021 Legislative Priorities

## **Build Community Resiliency:**

- ✓ Pre-disaster mitigation preparedness funding
- Green Infrastructure project expansion
- Funding for operations & maintenance

## **Prepare the Profession for the Future:**

- 21st Century Conservation Corps Act
- Skills Renewal Act
- Freedom To Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act

# American Rescue Plan Act

## **\$350 billion in direct aid to states, counties & cities (via local gov'ts)**

- \$195.3 billion for states
  - \$65.1 billion for counties
  - \$45.57 billion for cities with populations of 50,000 or greater
  - \$19.53 billion for cities with populations less than 50,000
  - \$20 billion for tribal governments
  - \$4.5 billion for territories
- 
- **\$10 billion for funding local capital projects (via the U.S. Treasury)**
    - “shovel ready” job creation initiatives
    - Educational support
    - health monitoring (includes remote options)

# American Rescue Plan Act

## **\$123 billion for state education programs (via Dept. of Education)**

- \$8.8 billion for state level for afterschool & summer education
- \$22 billion at the local level for afterschool & summer education
- \$3 billion for grants & programs via the Individuals w/ Disabilities Education Act

## **\$1.15 billion for nutrition assistance**

- This funding will go to states for SNAP programs
- Extends 15% increase for the SNAP benefits through September 30, 2021
- Extends Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program, which provides food aid to families impacted by school closures.

# American Rescue Plan Act Overview

## **\$21.6 billion for housing assistance to states & localities**

- rental assistance payments, household financial assistance (includes utilities)
- \$10 billion for Homeowner Assistance Fund
- \$5 billion for safe housing for those experiencing homelessness

## **\$1.4 billion Older Americans Act programming**

- support for nutrition programs & community-based support programs

## **\$1 billion for AmeriCorps volunteers responding to impacted communities**

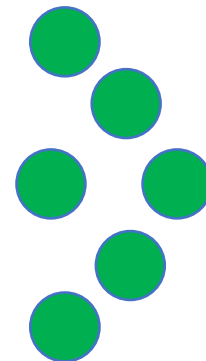
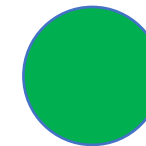
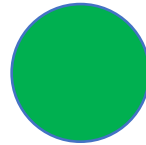
## **\$1.25 billion for Shuttered Venue Operators Grant program**

# Coordinated Advocacy Approach & NRPA Advocacy Tools

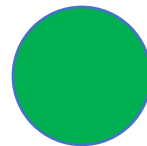


# Coordinated Framework Approach

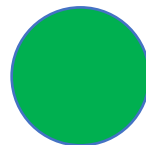
## Federal Advocacy



## State/Local Advocacy



## Coalition Partners Advocacy

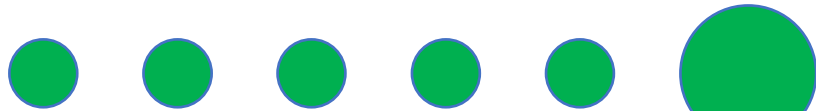


# Coordinated Framework Approach

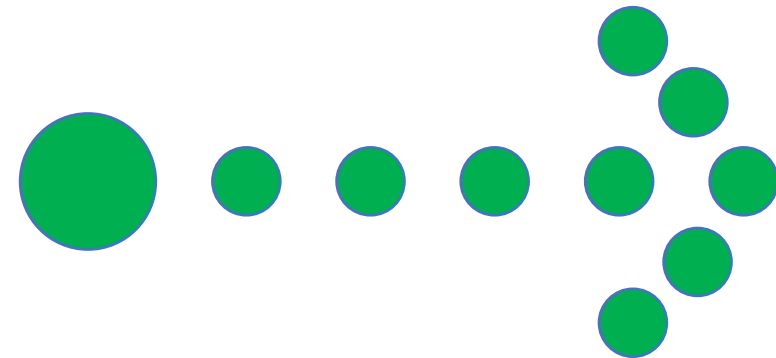
**NRPA Advocacy Committee**



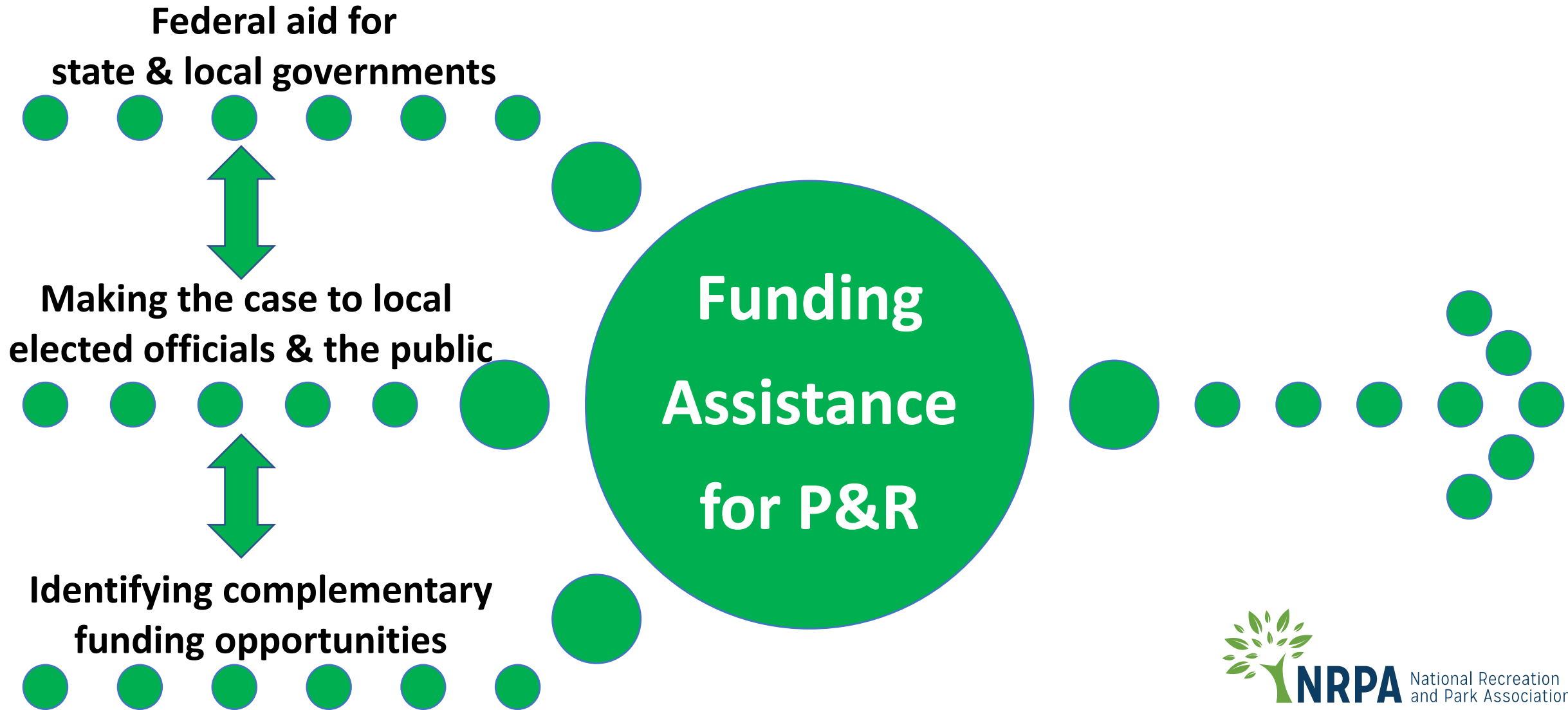
**Local Advocacy Committees**



**Coalition Group Activities**



# Practical Example



# Local & National Advocacy Strategies

## Focus on Equity

Local: Encourage elected officials to prioritize an **equity-based master plan**

National: Advance equitable access to **outdoor recreation opportunities**

- Public Health Funding Restoration Act
- Transit to Trails Act
- Parks, Jobs, & Equity Act

# Local & National Advocacy Strategies

## Parks & Recreation as a Social Determinant of Health

Local: Create cross-sectional task force to better understand community conditions, cultivate trust, analyze data & create **upstream solutions** that leverage local resources

National: Invest in parks & recreation as a vital community service that advances **health outcomes & overall well-being**

- Social Determinants of Health Act
- Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act
- Expand USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program & SNAP-Ed

# Local & National Advocacy Strategies

## Combat Climate Change with Green Infrastructure

Local: Prioritize & incentivize green infrastructure in parks

- Establish resiliency officer to work with municipal leadership or cross-sectional community task force

National: Incentivize projects to increase resilience & connection to parks

- Local green infrastructure investments via economic recovery package
- Fund FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities program
- Expand Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) & Water Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act (WIFIA)

# Local & National Advocacy Strategies

## Establish Community-Based Supports that Focus Holistically on Health

Local: Training for **frontline staff** to better support community members on mental health & substance use challenges, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, & adverse community environments

National: Expand access to community **healthcare services**

- Mental Health Services for Students Act & RISE from Trauma Act
- Increase funding for OJJDP Youth Mentoring programs & CDC Drug-Free Communities program
- Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act



# Local & National Advocacy Strategies

## Prepare Workforce & Champion Economic Opportunity

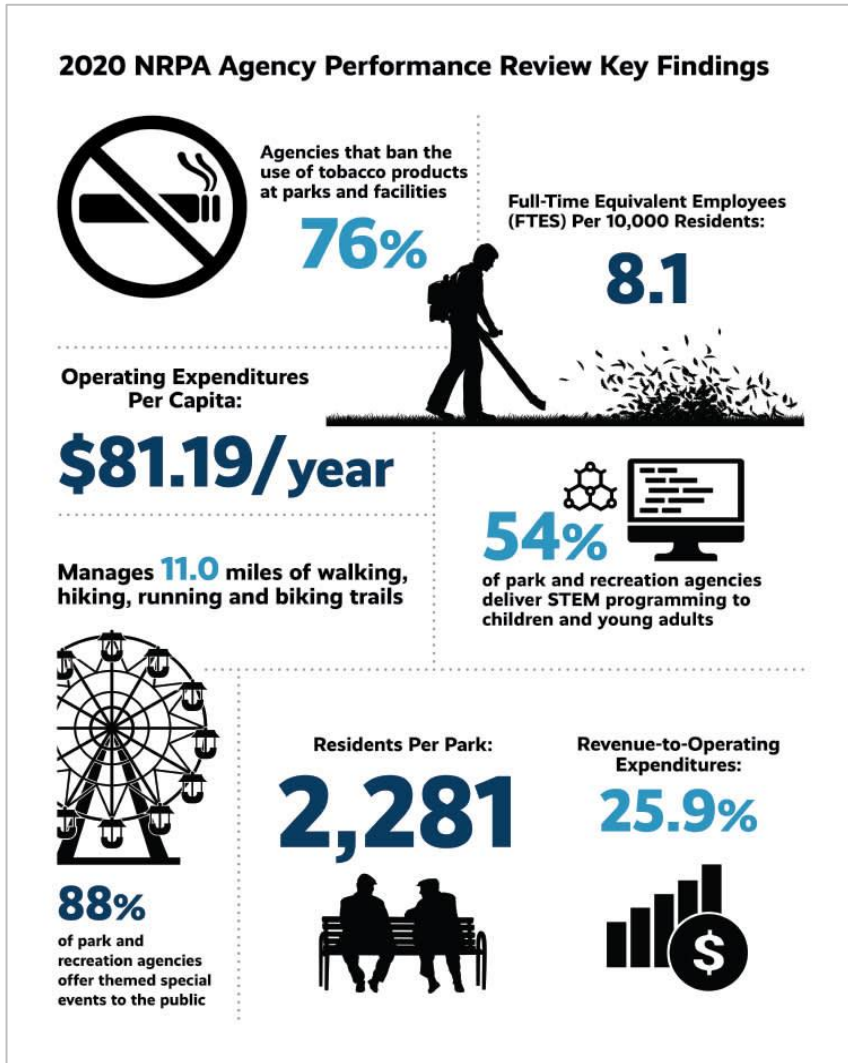
Local: Establish programs & policies that leverage **educational & workforce development** opportunities to grow & empower the next generation of public service providers & close the racial wealth gap

National: Advance legislation that provides necessary resources, **educational tools**, & encourages **public-private partnerships**

- 21st Century Conservation Corps Act
- Equitable local economic opportunities via Great American Outdoors Act
- Incorporate workforce development funding to an infrastructure-focused economic recovery package

# Advocacy Tools:

## NRPA Park Metrics & Agency Performance Reviews



Consider making your own “About My Agency” infographic that highlights:

- Your agency’s key assets (e.g., parks, trails)
- # of people served
- Your staffing (to inform how P&R happens)
- Several “Oh Wow!” elements:
  - Programming or amenities not normally connected to your agency
  - Broadens the view of P&R
  - Connects “Fun” with your agency’s positive impact

# Broad Public Support for Parks & Recreation

**83%**  
of Americans  
**personally benefit**  
from local parks

 **7 IN 10 AMERICANS**  
*GO TO THEIR LOCAL PARK*

**92% of Americans**  
 say their  
**communities benefit**  
from local parks

**Every demographic  
group shares in their  
love of parks**

# Know the Economic Impact of Local Parks

Description	Impact
Output (business transactions)	\$166,367,719,000
Value Added (GDP)	\$ 87,034,317,000
Labor Income (salaries, wages, benefits)	\$ 50,780,569,000
Employment (headcount jobs)	1,125,640

## **Direct effects** *(U.S. Figures for 2017)*

- Ops Spending: \$39.58 Billion
- Ops Payroll: \$8.75 Billion
- Ops Employment (headcount): 379,810
- CapEx: \$28.86 Billion

# The Economic Argument

**Park & Rec is not only a leader for leisure, health & wellness, equity and conservation...**

**...AND also, an important contributor to the economy**

**Economic multipliers work both ways**

- Every \$1.00 taken from park system budget will lower local economic activity by approximately \$1.80
- **Parks drive economic development**
  - Parks are an important element of quality of life, demonstrated in your community today, and will be true post-pandemic
    - Economic development is all about talent attraction and retention

# In Summary

- **Data and facts are on your side...Tell your story and broaden the view of what parks and recreation is.**
- **The public loves Parks & Recreation...but they may not fully know what P&R fully encompasses. So, tell them and make them your most effective advocates.**

Connect with us at:

[advocacy@nrpa.org](mailto:advocacy@nrpa.org)

or

Text “PARKS” to 52886



# Questions?