

Examining barriers to participation in Kansas parks and recreation: a delphi method approach

by

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Abstract

Parks and recreation organizations play a vital role in fostering community well-being by maintaining public spaces for leisure, encouraging social interaction, and improving the community's physical and mental health. Part of serving the community is maintaining accessible and welcoming recreation spaces and programs. Factors that limit an individual's mental or physical ability to participate in a given activity are barriers to participation. These barriers often include proximity to parks and facilities, unsafe facility conditions, language barriers, financial constraints, and more. Parks and recreation practitioners have a unique perspective on barriers to participation that has not been explored at the same scope in the current literature. Their perspective also provides an insider look at the management strategies used to address community barriers to participation. This study takes an exploratory approach to understanding parks and recreation practitioners' perspectives by using the Delphi Method, which employs a flexible, multi-iteration process to reach consensus among subject-matter experts (Lintstone & Turoff, 1975). Kansas Recreation and Parks Association (KRPA) members served as study participants ($n = 69$) through three rounds of surveying. The first survey ($n = 44$) primarily asked participants to rate the significance of each evidence-based barrier to participation in their community. Survey two ($n = 32$) narrowed this list of barriers even further, leaving researchers with a clear conclusion: "Lack of Awareness" was the greatest practitioner-perceived barrier to participation and was significantly more prevalent than the second highest-rated barrier: "Lack of programming that interests people." Survey three ($n = 34$) focuses on the concept of "Lack of Awareness" through a set of free-response questions and a marketing questionnaire. Results indicate that strategies, including partnerships and community networking, diverse outreach methods, and social media presence, are important for building community

awareness of strategies. Given the participants' shared experiences and perspectives, we recommend that Kansas parks and recreation agencies adopt an intentional Relationship Marketing philosophy in order to increase word of mouth promotion, participant retention, and improve brand image.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction to Barriers to Participation

Introduction

Parks and recreation organizations play a vital role in fostering community well-being by maintaining public spaces for leisure, encouraging social interaction, and improving the community's physical and mental health. Parks and recreation organizations/agencies offer a range of outdoor and indoor community spaces and opportunities for engagement, including parks, recreation centers, and structured programming and events. According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), approximately 276 million Americans used parks and recreation resources between June 2023 and July 2024, and 73% of U.S. residents live within walking distance of a local park or recreation center (NRPA, 2024, pp. 4-5). While NRPA's findings demonstrate the presence of parks and recreation agencies in the Nation's communities, they also reveal limited access to recreational resources for the remaining 27% of U.S. residents who do not live within walking distance of a local park or recreation center.

Parks and recreation services provide invaluable resources to the community. For example, proximity to and use of parks and green spaces are associated with increased physical activity (Eichinger et al., 2015; Pretty et al., 2005). This is especially true for youth, as indicated by several studies revealing a significant positive relationship between proximity to park space and youth physical activity (Roemmich et al., 2006; Veitch et al., 2012; Yi et al., 2021).

Physical activity and health have a strong positive association. Research in Houston, Texas found that Hispanic children who live near urban forested areas had lower levels of obesity and higher-related quality of life (Kim et al., 2016). These benefits were significantly enhanced by the quality of the forested area; widely spaced, well-maintained trees were associated with increased perceived safety among parents, leading to greater encouragement of

their children to recreate at local parks regularly (Kim et al., 2016). Children are not the only demographic benefiting from the physical activity that parks provide a space for. Physical activity for all ages reduces risk of cardiovascular disease (Myers et al., 2015), incidents of type 2 diabetes (Helmrich et al., 1994), and colon and breast cancer (Lee, 2003; Sternfeld et al., 2009).

Physical activity has been shown to be linked to positive mental health outcomes, but these outcomes are boosted when physical activity takes place in a natural setting (Pretty et al., 2005). Spending at least 120 minutes per week in the natural environment has been associated with higher self-reported good health and well-being (White et al., 2019). However, another study found that programmed park space (i.e., trails, courts, benches, and landscaped areas) has a greater impact on overall health and reduced stress than general vegetation (i.e., naturally occurring wooded and grass areas), which is negatively correlated with feelings of social support (Fan et al., 2011).

Access to parks and green spaces has a positive impact on mental health, particularly by reducing stress levels (Capaldi et al., 2014; Gidlow et al., 2016; James et al., 2015; Roe et al., 2013), and this effect is especially pronounced in urban settings (Tang et al., 2023). Access to parks and green spaces is an important component of a well-functioning mental health system (Buckley & Brough, 2017). Mental health services and treatments are used less in communities with high levels of green space and tree cover (Taylor et al., 2023). Health professionals have even begun the practice of prescribing nature to patients of all ages and most conditions (Raridan & Kuhn, 2024) to address the rise in mental and physical chronic illness associated with sedentary and screen-based lifestyles (Kondo et al., 2020). Nature prescriptions have been successful with a wide variety of patients and wide variety of health concerns (Nguyen et al.,

2023), including improving mental health in university students (Djernis et al., 2021; Heilmayr & Friedman, 2020; Kim et al., 2021), cancer patients, and the general adult (de Brito et al., 2020; Muller-Riemenschneider et al., 2020) and youth populations (Clutterbuck et al., 2020). However, multiple studies did not find significant results from the prescribed nature prescription (Elseley et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2021). That being said, nature prescriptions take a greater amount of effort and self-determination than many of the traditional medications used to treat conditions. Application of the prescription can be constrained by the individual's resources, location and health safety, and the environment's features (Paquet et al., 2025).

Having public spaces, such as those provided by parks and recreation services, creates a sense of community. A survey in the Netherlands found similar park usage across ethnic groups and increased multi-ethnic interactions within parks (Peterson et al., 2021). Social cohesion benefits community connectedness and is associated with mental health benefits, specifically a reduced level of depression (Perez-Lopez et al., 2017). Conversely, socially isolated individuals tend to be less healthy overall and are more susceptible to stress, depression, and cardiovascular issues than social people (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019).

Recreation programming empowers and facilitates individuals to engage and become active members of the community. Public parks and facilities play an important role in fostering a sense of community and interpersonal connection by serving as third spaces. A third space is defined by Oldenburg (1982) as a community public gathering space that fosters community and communication outside of home or work. Third places are also associated with public health (Baum & Palmer, 2002; Frumkin, 2003) and higher reported of quality of life (Jeffres et al., 2009). Public parks and recreation services help meet the community's need for a third space at a uniquely low cost and with a low barrier to entry.

Equity and accessibility of parks and recreation facilities are essential from a taxpayer perspective and mission perspective. Allison and Hibler (2004) describe the public agency responsibility, writing, “Tax supported recreation and parks programs strive to serve a wide range of constituents regardless of gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, and ability. Most leisure literature presumes some implicit sense of goodness and equity in the profession’s organizational missions and program goals” (p. 261). Recreation agencies must have the vision to welcome and accommodate all community members (Devine et al., 2012). Societal and structural issues present in today’s reality pose threats that require a focused strategic response from community service providers to ensure equitable access to resources (Bikomeye et al., 2021).

Building and promoting recreation places and opportunities is important to community well-being. As a public agency providing a public service, city and county parks and recreation benefits must be accessible and welcoming to all community demographics. Factors that limit an individual mentally or physically from being able to be involved in a given leisure activity are barriers to participation. Understanding the dynamics between these barriers and management actions is essential for creating a space that serves all people within the agency’s community. Barriers to participation in the parks and recreation discipline are best understood through Leisure Constraint Theory.

Leisure constraints are also commonly referred to as “barriers to participation” in practitioner-focused literature (Agans et al., 2024; Allison & Hibler, 2004; O’Brien et al., 2022) and in a variety of disciplines. On the other hand, “leisure constraints” is used mostly in leisure theory development-related literature (Crawford et al., 1991; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Kour et al., 2025; White, 2008).

Leisure Constraint Theory

Leisure constraints are “forces within people’s lives that must be successfully negotiated for leisure involvement is to occur” (Scott, 1991, p.323). Constraints have been categorized and theorized in many ways – internal (personal abilities, knowledge, and interest) versus external (financial, time, geographic distance, facilities) (Fracken & van Raiij, 1981); a six-group classification (Boothbly et al., 1981); or blocking and inhibiting barriers (Jackson & Searle, 1985). Crawford and Godbey’s (1987) model of constraints poses three encompassing categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. Intrapersonal Constraints are characteristics that vary between individuals but are stable within the individual (Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). These variations are due to personality traits, which are significant to variations in an individual’s behavior and experience (Goldberg, 1990; Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). Interpersonal constraints are social factors, such as a lack of belonging and companionship (Crawford et al., 1991). The structural constraints are the traditionally conceptualized barriers, including more physical ones such as lack of facilities, time constraints, financial resources, climate, etc. (Crawford & Godbey, 1987).

These three leisure constraint categories interact within a hierarchical negotiation process, as outlined in Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey’s model (1991), depicted in Figure 1.1. Leisure constraint negotiation is essential to leisure participation (Crawford et al., 1991), and leisure constraints lead to one of two outcomes: a passive response via nonparticipation, or behavior modification to sustain involvement in the given activity (Crawford et al., 1993; Scott, 1991). Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey(1993) write, “Both initiation and outcome of the negotiation process are dependent on the relative strength of, and interactions between, constraints on participating in an activity and motivations for such participation” (p. 9).

Participation only occurs when motivation is strong enough to overcome each level of constraint (White, 2008). Constraints can be overcome either cognitively, by reframing constraints in their mind or by overcoming emotions and aspects of their predisposition, or behaviorally, by actions such as rearranging a schedule, saving money, or improving skills (Jackson et al., 1993). Jackson et al. (1993) also found that most of their study participants who experienced a barrier chose to negotiate through behavior change rather than not participate.

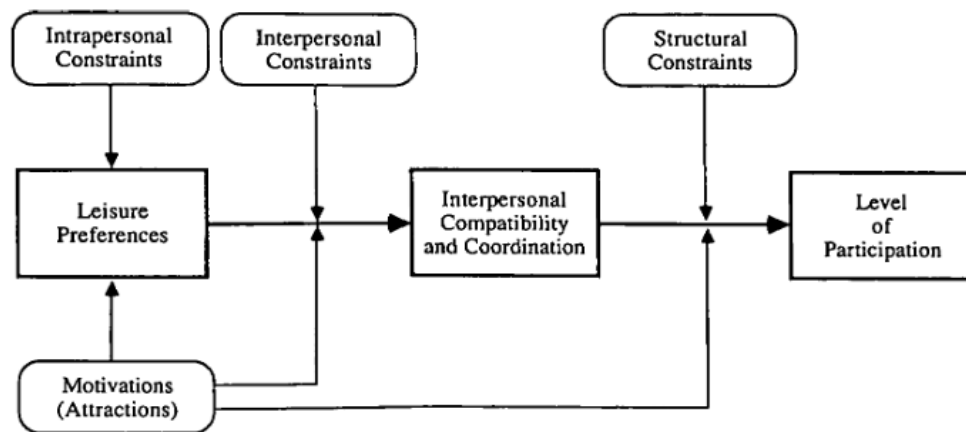


Figure 1. The Leisure Constraint Negotiation Model (Crawford et al., 1993)

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Constraints

Intrapersonal Constraints are characteristics that vary between individuals but are stable within the individual (Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). These variations are due to personality traits, which are significant in shaping an individual's behavior and experience (Goldberg, 1990; Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). Personality is a "configuration of characteristics and behavior that comprises an individual's unique adjustment to life" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Personality traits are best described by the Five-Factor Model (McCrae & John, 1992). These five factors include Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness, as depicted in Figure 1.2. These traits proved to be universal, consistent across

cultures (John & Srivastava, 1999). Interpersonal constraints—constraints that are focused on interactions with other people (Crawford & Godby, 1987), are also dependent and negotiated uniquely based on personality traits, especially regarding community assimilation and the individual's feeling of belonging.

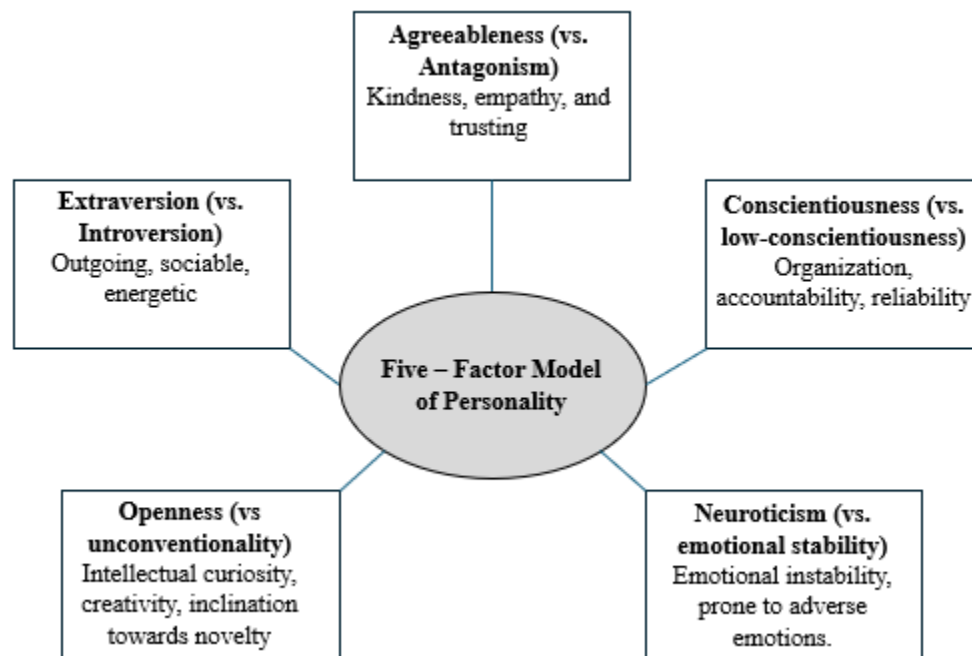


Figure 2. The Five- Factor Model of Personality (McCrae & John, 1992)

Kleiber and Dirkin (1985) call particular attention to the role of extraversion in leisure constraints. Extraversion is a key part of Activation Theory, which describes behavior as the approach or withdrawal of a stimulation (Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). Introverts have a lower threshold for stimulation than extroverts for optimal recreation activation (Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985), implying that extroverts are more inclined to participate in programming and social settings than their introverted counterparts. This is supported by a study that found that aspects of extroversion are associated with fast-paced living (Costa & McCrae, 1985), and by another study suggesting that extraverted individuals seek more stimulation (Brandstatter, 1994). In a similar vein, Wilson and Dishman's (2015) empirical study showed that higher extraversion, combined

with higher conscientiousness and openness, and lower neuroticism, is associated with higher physical activity. Extroverted people are more likely than introverts to participate in team sports and to pursue social interaction (Diener et al., 1984; Furnham & Heaven, 1999). The literature suggests that individuals with higher extroversion are more likely to engage in parks and recreation programming, whereas introverted individuals are more likely to respond to stimulation by withdrawing participation.

Openness has been linked to heightened physical activity during the pandemic (Kekalainen et al., 2021) and to general exploration in nature (Karvonen et al., 2020). Lounsbury et al. (2003) suggest that higher levels of openness lead an individual to be influenced by fellow community members and more likely to adopt the community's norms and values, thereby expediting the group assimilation process and the feeling of belonging. Similarly, conscientiousness is also positively, significantly associated with civic engagement (Rico-Bordera et al., 2023).

Someone who is agreeable is expected to have positive, cooperative interactions with community members and to achieve a sense of belonging in their community (Lounsbury et al., 2003). These individuals are also significantly positively associated with civic engagement (Rico-Bordera et al., 2023). Literature suggests agreeable people are likely to find success in community events like those offered by parks and recreation.

Conscientiousness is associated with greater community involvement through civic engagement (Rico-Bordera et al., 2023), and low conscientiousness, combined with high neuroticism, is associated with negative health behaviors such as unhealthy eating, sedentary behavior, and substance abuse. (Allen et al., 2017; Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Mroczek et al., 2009). In a physical health intervention behavior study, Stieger et al. (2020) found that individuals with

higher conscientiousness were more likely to change their behavior and habits, but the most significant health changes were made when the individual also had a degree of healthy neuroticism. The ability to make change suggests that individuals with high conscientiousness may be more likely to change their habits and choices to participate in parks and recreation-related programming.

Emotional instability(neuroticism), manifesting as depression and anxiety, has been shown to lead to social dysfunction, inhibiting individuals from being able to feel a sense of belonging and perceiving many social cues as negative, regardless of reality (Steger & Kashdan, 2009). Dale et al. (2014) reported similar findings: lower levels of neuroticism are associated with better overall health, and Pretty et al. (1996) found an association between emotional stability and higher levels of psychological sense of community. However, neuroticism is not always a negative personality trait. “Healthy neurotics” experience health-related anxiety (Guthold et al., 2018), and can channel this anxiety into making positive health decisions (Hill & Roberts, 2011; Stieger et al., 2020). The combination of healthy neuroticism and conscientiousness showed significant positive effects in a study on health behavior interventions (Steiger et al., 2020).

The feeling of belonging is a fundamental need in human existence and is interrelated with an individual’s acceptance/rejection within group relationships (Pardede & Kovac, 2023; Pardede et al., 2021). The struggle to find belonging is experienced by individuals from all demographics but can be disproportionately relevant for those who are minorities (Byrne, 2012; Hong & Anderson, 2006), non-heteronormative (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017), or disabled (Dewan et al., 2025).

A Kentucky-based study found park visitors that identified themselves as white were significantly less likely to perceive barriers to park visitation than the non-white visitors (Bradley et al., 2020). While the study was unable to determine the cause this barrier gap, other studies found several possible reasons, including lack of feeling of belonging because of racial identity (Byrne, 2012; Hong & Anderson, 2006), or language barriers (Ibes et al., 2021).

Participants' sense of belonging or lack thereof goes beyond an internal narrative. The prejudices, attitudes, and stereotypes held by recreation professionals can be reflected in program planning and implementation (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). When diverse recreation workers are not visible within the community, feelings of racial or ethnic exclusion persist (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). There is sometimes a disparity between the culture familiar to staff and the culture unfamiliar to them, which manifests as a lack of understanding, ignorance, and even fear that drives negative attitudes (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). Unresponsive programming continues to silence non-dominant cultures and groups within communities (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

Most parks and recreation organizations have formal statements and goals of accessibility and their service to diverse populations, but Allison's (1999) study found many of these efforts to be shallow and superficial, sentiments which were reflected in other studies (Cavanaugh, 1997; Cox, 1994). The representation of individuals from minority groups within the recreation staff is related to the organization's ability to meet diverse community needs and maintain a welcoming place for all community members. Most of Allison and Hibbler's (2004) ethnic-minority study participants emphasized the importance of seeing a diverse staff visible within the organization. It is important to note the time that has passed between these studies and this thesis report; many leaps and bounds in parks and recreation inclusivity have been made, but these

realities from the past could reemerge in the face of complacency or remain present in some communities.

Disabled community members encounter feelings of exclusion to a higher degree, but in a different way than minorities. A study conducted by Dewan et al. (2025) found that disabled individuals feel unwelcome when they encounter unwelcoming and unaccommodating staff, receive discrimination from fellow recreationists, or fear something going wrong with them in relation to their disability and improper accommodations. However, the degree of effort and discomfort the individual is willing to go to negotiate the constraint of feeling unwelcome is highly dependent on the individual.

Intrapersonal constraints are individual-specific, dependent upon personality traits, and affect how individuals view and approach negotiation of interpersonal constraints. The high level of unpredictability and variance between individuals makes both intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints extremely difficult for recreation professionals to manage. Despite the individualistic nature of these constraints, parks and recreation managers still deploy strategies to increase the perceived welcoming of their programs and facilities.

Communication strategy is incredibly important for building community trust and a welcoming presence. The NRPA (n.d.) published a set of “best practices” that includes the designation of community outreach staff. This staff member(s) would have the main goal of building trust within the community by serving as a clear, consistent point of contact for other community organizations and partnerships, and by simply having conversations with patrons. Transparency, consistency, and follow-through are essential to the role. Society and communities are continuously changing; consistent evaluation is important to keep community needs and agency goals aligned. These evaluations, conducted via survey, conversation, or observation,

assess event/program attendance, participant and stakeholder satisfaction, demographic diversity, and overall program and marketing effectiveness (NRPA, n.d.). This general approach not only alleviates intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints by creating welcoming spaces but also helps identify and address structural constraints.

Structural Constraints

Organizational Barriers

Parks and recreation professionals are often constrained in their ability to address community barriers due to limited resources. In a qualitative study of conservation professionals in Kansas, roughly a third of whom worked in parks and recreation, identified themes of resource limitations on agency capacity (Jackson et al., 2025). These themes included inflexible budget allocations, inability to meet grant requirements, lack of funding for programs, facilities, and park upgrades, loss of staff expertise due to turnover, and budget fluctuations. However, further studies concerning the internal barriers within parks and recreation organizations from a general lens are limited. Limited funding is a common challenge because many parks and recreation departments rely on local government budgets and seasonal revenue, both of which can fluctuate. Staffing shortages also make it difficult to offer programs and facilities at various times. These aspects can constrain the agency's efforts to improve and modernize.

Organizational barriers extend beyond access to resources; they can also be limited by their organization's culture and structure. An organizational structure framework highlights the need for transparent communication, authentic leadership, and work-life enrichment, which is essential to employee engagement with their work (Jiang & Men, 2017). A poor work environment can create barriers to achieving goals and can deter team cohesion.

Allison and Hibbler (2004) examine the relationship between organizational culture and inclusive program quality. They wrote, “There are institutional and structural barriers agencies themselves create, or unknowingly promulgate “(Allison & Hibbler, 2004, pp. 261-262). These barriers manifest in the behaviors of management and staff, as well as in the organization's policies and practices, which determine the success of interactions with marginalized community members and enforce corresponding constraints (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

Accessibility

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) finds that, “physical or mental disabilities in no way diminish a person’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society” and,

“individuals with disabilities continually encounter various forms of discrimination, including outright intentional exclusion, the discriminatory effects of architectural, transportation, and communication barriers, overprotective rules and policies, failure to make modifications to existing facilities and practices, exclusionary qualification standards and criteria, segregation, and relegation to lesser services, programs, activities, benefits, jobs, or other opportunities” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

After about 50 years of disability civil rights laws, starting with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, conditions have generally improved, but a gap remains between the current position and the desired equitable position (Lagu et al., 2022).

Accessibility via special accommodation is not just physical. Disability manifests in many ways, including sensory, cognitive, intellectual, and learning disabilities in addition to mobility disabilities (Dewan et al., 2025). Each of these disabilities has a unique accommodation, in which it is the recreation agency’s responsibility to adapt to. Lagu et al. (2022) and Dewan et al. (2025) found a persistent gap between current and desired conditions.

Due to these persistent issues, when people with disabilities face higher degrees of leisure constraints, they are less likely to negotiate the constraint than the average person (Lyu et al., 2013).

Physical accessibility also manifests as proximity to facilities and parks. A history of systemic oppression through discriminatory land and property-owning policy via red-lining, segregation, and disinvestment in public spending has led to low-income and minority neighborhoods having lower quality parks and further distance to recreation centers and parks (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2021; Ibes et al., 2021). The gap disproportionately deepens when paired with a lack of affordable public transportation (Byrne, 2012; Xiao et al., 2017). These disproportionate impacts are illustrated in a Denver case study using historical and geographic analyses (Rigolon & Nemeth, 2018). The case study found that park funding systems tended to allocate more funding to neighborhoods with higher socioeconomic wealth, and that discriminatory city land-use policies have negatively impacted low-income areas' access to parks. Despite the effects of historic, systemic racism in many cities, a study found that low-income and minority communities are most reliant on access to free, accessible, and quality open green spaces for recreation (Lee, 2020).

Additional Barriers

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) conducts an annual, nationwide “Engagement Report” in which it asks a random sample of people about the obstacles they face in using parks and recreation resources. The top answer was “lack of time” with 41% of participants selecting it (NRPA, 2025). Safety concerns, high costs/fees, poor-quality facilities, lack of awareness, and lack of interest in offerings all fell within the range of 17-21%. 29% of

participants claimed that none of these obstacles kept them from enjoying their local parks and recreation services.

Multiple studies explore specific barriers, including language, safety, and interest alignment. One of these serious barriers was the inability to have two-way communication between the recreation workers and their clients (Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Bagheri & Driever, 2018). Language barriers also make it difficult for the organization to do marketing and outreach to spread awareness. However, it is important to note that the study (Bagheri & Driever, 2018) was conducted in the southwest region, where linguistic diversity is greater than in more northern regions.

Fear of unsafe conditions is a strong deterrent from parks and recreation locations due to neighborhood crime (Echeverria et al., 2014), gang activity (Brockman et al., 2011), high traffic, and drug and firearm use (Ibes et al., 2021). The condition of parks and facilities also impacts perceived safety. When park and recreation locations are degraded by graffiti, broken amenities, overgrowth, or litter, they are often perceived as unsafe and undesirable for recreation (Ibes et al., 2021).

People will not pursue parks and recreation services if the amenities and programs do not meet their needs or interests. When amenities and programs do not align with groups' interests, they do not participate (Oliphant et al., 2019). Even when parks and recreation fees are low, research has found a lack of willingness to spend money on them due to perceptions of what expenditures are legitimate (McCreary et al., 2018). Unfortunately, program and access fees are often higher for special access- ADA accessible programs and accommodations (Chikuta et al., 2019; Dewan et al., 2025).

Conclusion

Leisure constraints/barriers to participation affect individuals to varying degrees; no subgroup of a population is entirely free from leisure constraints. Individual personality traits and leisure types/styles are conceptually significant to variations in leisure behavior, motivations, and experience (Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). While many of these barriers must be negotiated at the personal level, organizations can take action to facilitate participation (Agans et al., 2024). Identifying these barriers and biases, both external to the organization and internal, is one of the most difficult challenges organizations face (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

Effective management of parks and recreation facilities is essential for encouraging community use (Cohen et al., 2013; Hunter et al., 2019) and fostering community cohesion (Wood et al., 2017). Management via recreational programming, outreach, and communication has significant impacts on usage rates (Cohen et al., 2013; Hunter et al., 2015). Park improvements and outreach campaigns have shown significant impacts on park usage rates and physical activity (Hunter et al., 2015). Public space quality is positively associated with greater community attachment to these spaces (Wood et al., 2017). Effective management of the space and barriers to participation is essential to encourage community health and well-being.

Chapter 2 - Manuscript

Introduction

Parks and recreation organizations play a vital role in fostering community well-being by maintaining public spaces for leisure, encouraging social interaction, and improving the community's physical and mental health. They offer a range of outdoor and indoor community spaces and opportunities for engagement, including parks, green spaces, and recreation centers, along with structured programming. According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), approximately 276 million Americans used parks and recreation resources between June 2023 and July 2024, and 73% of U.S. residents live within walking distance of a local park or recreation center (NRPA, 2024, pp. 4-5). These findings not only demonstrate the presence of parks and recreation agencies in the Nation's communities; they also reveal limited access to recreational resources for the remaining 27% of U.S. residents who do not live within walking distance of a local park or recreation center.

Proximity to and use of parks and green spaces are correlated with higher levels of physical activity (Eichinger et al., 2015; Pretty et al., 2005). The association is especially evident among youth, as indicated by several studies revealing a significant positive relationship between proximity to park space and youth physical activity (Dong et al., 2021; Roemmich et al., 2006; Veitch et al., 2021). A Houston, Texas, study found that Hispanic children living near urban forested areas had lower rates of obesity and a higher quality of life (Kim et al., 2016). These benefits were significantly enhanced by the quality of the forested area. Widely spaced, well-maintained trees were associated with increased perceived safety among parents, leading to greater encouragement of their children to recreate at local parks regularly (Kim et al., 2016). Children are not the only demographic to benefit from parks and the physical activity they

provide a space for. Physical activity for all ages reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease (Myers et al., 2015), incidents of type 2 diabetes (Helmrich et al., 1994), and colon and breast cancer (Lee, 2003; Sternfeld et al., 2009).

Physical activity has been shown to be linked to positive mental health outcomes, but these outcomes are heightened when the physical activity takes place in a natural setting (Pretty et al., 2005). Spending 17-20 minutes per day in the natural environment has been associated with higher immediate levels of self-reported good health and well-being (White et al., 2019).

Access to parks and green spaces has a positive impact on mental health, especially in reducing stress levels (Capaldi et al., 2014; Gidlow et al., 2016; James et al., 2015; Roe et al., 2013). Accessing parks and green spaces is an important part of a well-functioning mental health system (Buckley & Brough, 2017). Mental health services and treatments are used less in communities with high levels of green space and tree cover (Taylor et al., 2023). While general vegetation, characterized by unprogrammed woodland, shrubbery, or grassland, is positively correlated with reduced stress, it is also negatively correlated with feelings of social support (Fan et al., 2011). Programmed park space, including trails, landscaping, and infrastructure, has a greater impact on overall health than general vegetation (Fan et al., 2011).

Having a public space like those provided by parks and recreation services creates a sense of community. A Netherlands-based survey found similar park usage across ethnic groups and increased multi-ethnic interactions within parks (Peterson et al., 2021). Social cohesion benefits community connectedness and is associated with mental health benefits, specifically a reduced level of depression (Perez-Lopez et al., 2017). Conversely, socially isolated individuals tend to be less healthy overall and are more susceptible to stress, depression, and cardiovascular issues

than social people (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019). The impact of these benefits on the quality of life in cities makes welcoming and accessible public spaces essential.

Equity and accessibility of parks and recreation facilities are essential agency goals due to the public agency's moral obligation to the tax-paying community. Allison and Hibler (2004) capture the agency's responsibility, writing, "Tax-supported recreation and parks programs strive to serve a wide range of constituents regardless of gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, and ability. Most leisure literature presumes some implicit sense of goodness and equity in the profession's organizational missions and program goals" (p. 261). Recreation agencies must have the vision to welcome and accommodate all community members (Devine et al., 2012). Public agencies such as city and county parks and recreation departments aim to make benefits accessible and welcoming to all community demographics. Factors that limit or deter an individual's ability to participate in a given activity are barriers to participation. The term is prominent in practitioner-focused literature (O'Brien et al., 2022; Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Agans et al., 2024; NRPA, 2025), but in leisure theory research, the term "leisure constraints" is used with the same meaning (Crawford et al., 1991; White, 2008; Kour et al., 2025; Jackson et al., 1993; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001). The literature paints a picture of the crucial nature of the organization's role in helping community members overcome barriers (Agans et al., 2024; Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Dewan et al., 2025; Ghimire et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2022), but it is easier said than done. Societal and structural issues present in today's reality pose threats that require a focused strategic response from community service providers to ensure equitable access to resources (Bikomeye et al., 2021). However, identifying barriers in the community and biases within the organization through systematic analysis is one of the greatest challenges an organization can pursue (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

Barriers to participation are regularly assessed on the national level via the Annual Engagement Report (NRPA, 2025). Understanding how parks and recreation professionals view these barriers is important for identifying potential shortcomings and for adapting the most appropriate agency strategy and training. Here, we find a gap in recent research on barriers, priorities, and corresponding strategies. Research focused on a specific geographic area is beneficial when considering the wide variety of cultural and infrastructure in the United States. While Kansas does not serve as a representative subset of the nation's population, it does narrow the scope, allowing us to gain deeper context-specific insights that will enable higher-quality findings and applications, all while conducting research in an often-overlooked area of the US.

Parks and recreation staff hold a unique perspective on barriers to participation through their interface with the community and their knowledge of behind-the-scenes management practices. This study aimed to explore the practitioner's unique perspective through an exploratory series of surveys following the Delphi Method, a method used to identify consensus among subject-matter experts (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Survey questions were guided by the following central research questions:

1. What barriers to participation do Kansas parks and recreation professionals perceive and prioritize in their community?
2. What strategies are perceived as effective and appropriate to alleviate barriers to participation among Kansas parks and recreation professionals?

Background Literature

Leisure constraints are "forces within people's lives that must be successfully negotiated for leisure involvement to occur" (Scott, 1991, p.323). Crawford and Godbey's (1987) model of constraints poses three encompassing categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural

constraints. Intrapersonal Constraints vary between individuals but are stable within the individual (Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). These variations are due to personality traits, which are significant to variations in an individual's behavior and experience (Goldberg, 1990; Kleiber & Dirkin, 1985). Interpersonal constraints are social factors, such as a lack of belonging and companionship (Crawford et al., 1991). Structural constraints are more tangible, including lack of facilities, time constraints, financial resources, climate, etc. (Crawford & Godbey, 1987).

These three leisure constraint categories interact within a hierarchical negotiation process as outlined in Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey's model (1991), depicted in Figure 3. Leisure constraint negotiations are essential to leisure participation (Crawford et al., 1991), and leisure constraints lead to one of two outcomes: a passive response via nonparticipation, or behavior modification to sustain involvement in the activity (Crawford et al., 1993; Scott, 1991).

Constraints can be overcome either cognitively, by reframing constraints in their mind or by overcoming emotions and aspects of their predisposition, or, more commonly, behaviorally, by actions such as rearranging a schedule, saving money, or improving skills (Jackson et al., 1993).

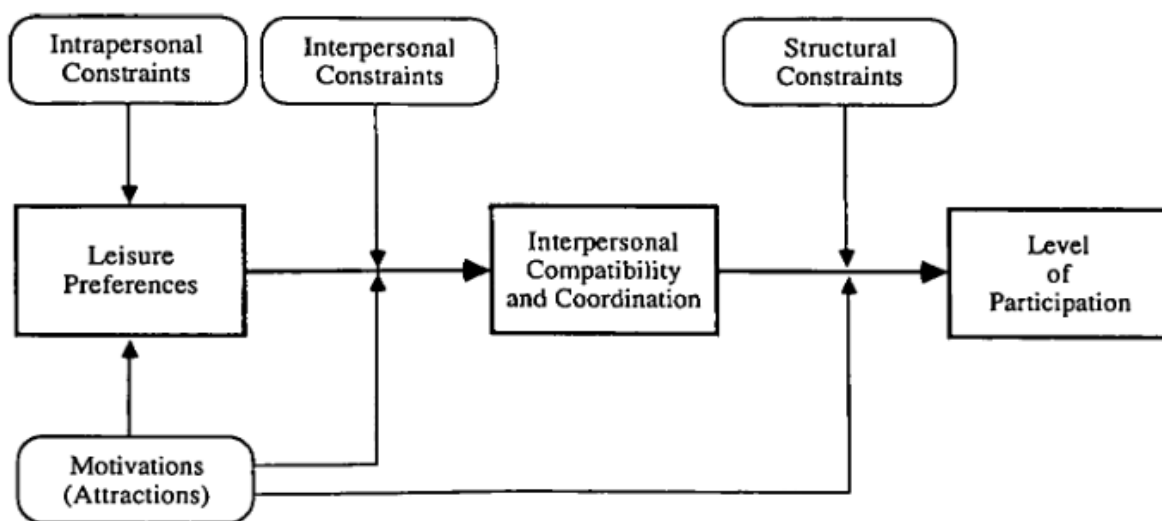


Figure 3. The Leisure Constraint Negotiation Model (Crawford et al., 1993)

The National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) annual Engagement Report aims to understand public perceptions of municipal parks and recreation services in the United States. Participants were asked to select obstacles they encounter when they use or try to use recreation resources. The top answer was “Lack of time” (41%), followed by safety concerns (21%), and “Excessive costs” (19%), among others depicted in Figure 4 (NRPA, 2025).

LACK OF TIME IS THE TOP OBSTACLE TO USING PARKS AND RECREATION.

% of respondents reporting obstacles for using park and recreation facilities



Figure 4 Top barriers to participation from a nation-wide study (NRPA, 2025)

Some demographics, including racial and ethnic minorities and disabled community members, encounter barriers to a greater degree. Many low-income and minority communities experienced a history of systematic oppression through red-lining, segregation, and disinvestment in public spending, leading to lower quality parks and further distance to recreation centers and parks (Ibes et al., 2021). However, low-income and minority communities are most dependent on access to free and accessible green spaces for recreation (Lee, 2020).

Proximity to parks and recreation facilities can disproportionately effect these communities when paired with a lack of affordable public transportation (Byrne, 2012; Xiao et al., 2017).

A Kentucky state parks study found that visitors who identified themselves as white were significantly less likely to perceive barriers to park visitation than the non-white visitors (Bradley et al., 2020). While the Kentucky-based study was unable to determine the cause of this barrier gap, other studies found several possible reasons, including a lack of feeling of belonging because of racial identity (Byrne, 2012; Hong & Anderson, 2006), or language barriers (Ibes et al., 2021). Race is not the only demographic that faces barriers disproportionately.

Disabled community members also face a higher degree of barriers, but in a different way. Over 50 years of accessibility legislation has improved access to public services, but a gap remains between current and the ideal positions (Dewan et al., 2025; Lagu et al., 2022).

Accessibility via special accommodation is not just physical. Disability manifests in many ways, including sensory, cognitive, intellectual, and learning disabilities in addition to mobility disabilities (Dewan et al., 2025). Each of these disabilities has a unique accommodation, for which it is the recreation agency's responsibility to adapt. Adaptations are costly for recreation organizations, leading to higher program and access fees for ADA-accessible programs and accommodations (Chikuta et al., 2019; Dewan et al., 2025). Disabled demographics also experience interpersonal barriers stemming from negative public attitudes, fear of inconveniencing others, and unaccommodating staff (Dewan et al., 2025).

Parks and recreation professionals are often limited in their ability to address community barriers due to insufficient resources. In a 2024 qualitative study of conservation professionals in Kansas, roughly a third of whom worked in parks and recreation, the authors found themes of organizational resource limitations (Jackson et al., 2025). These themes included inflexible

budget allocations, inability to meet grant requirements, lack of funding for programs, facilities, and park upgrades, loss of staff expertise due to turnover, and budget fluctuations. While research on these organizational barriers is limited, the common resource strain many parks and recreation organizations face makes it necessary to find affordable and effective strategies and solutions.

Barriers to participation from a parks and recreation user perspective have been researched on the national level, and across a variety of community-specific studies (Dewan et al., 2025; Ibes et al., 2021; NRPA, 2025; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). However, understanding the problems from the user perspective and the parks and recreation organization's ability to fix them are two distinct battles. Understanding practitioners' viewpoints and their associated strategies is essential for identifying management areas and accessibility improvements. Herein lies the literature gap: literature on practitioners' perspectives on barriers from a broad, overarching lens, and recreation research in Kansas parks and recreation is limited. Exploring perspectives and management practices in Kansas parks and recreation professionals can point us towards geographically relevant management implications for state recreation practitioners and identify areas for future research.

Methods

This study used the Delphi Method to understand how Kansas parks and recreation professionals view barriers to participation in their communities. This exploratory study was designed to address a gap in the literature regarding practitioners' perceptions of barriers to participation and their corresponding management. The Delphi Method was an appropriate methodology for this study because of its flexible structure and ability to find consensus among subject-matter experts (Lintstone & Turoff, 1975). The Method's "collective wisdom in

decision-making can lead to more complete and comprehensive decision-making” (Habibi et al., 2014, p. 9). The Delphi Method allowed for exploration while still yielding conclusive results from practitioners from a variety of parks and recreation areas.

Delphi Method Study Design

The Delphi Method, also referred to as the Delphi Technique, uses multiple rounds of surveys to reach consensus among experts, allowing flexibility in tackling complex problems by adapting surveys based on participants’ previous responses (Lintstone & Turoff, 1975). Figure 5 depicts the Delphi Method’s iterative structure (Habibi et al., 2014). The Delphi Method is often applied in medicine and health research (de Meyrick, 2003; Steurer, 2011; Trevelyan & Robinson, 2015) and in curriculum development research (Khurana et al., 2022; Taymoori & Moshki, 2014). Use of this method in published park management and recreation research is limited (Brunson et al., 2026; Fefer et al., 2016).

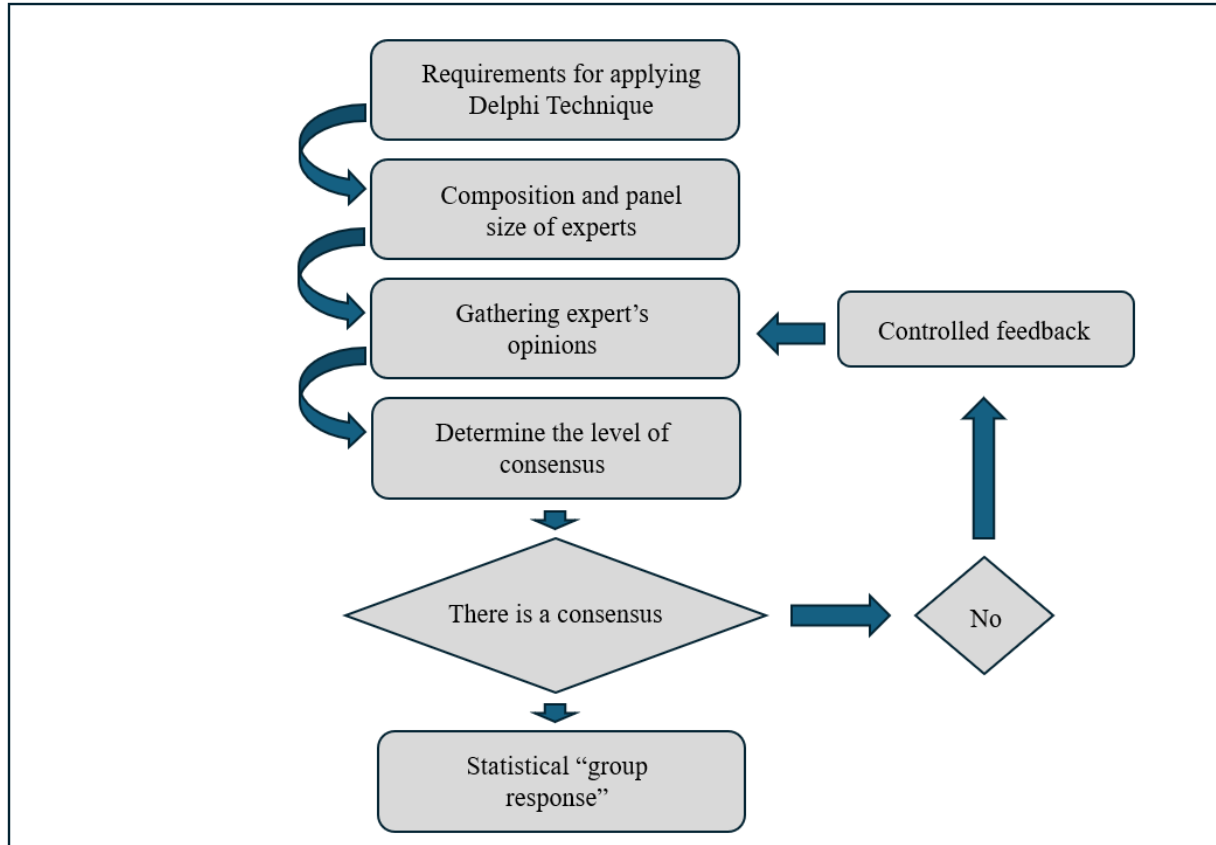


Figure 5. Delphi Method theoretical framework (Habibi et al., 2014)

The Delphi Method has a few conditions for appropriate use, including the need for multiple expert's judgements, anonymous data collection, a complex, multidisciplinary problem, a lack of currently established consensus, access to a wide dispersion of experienced and capable experts, and no time limitation (Cowan et al., 2013; Ku Fan & Cheng, 2006; Habibi et al., 2014; Landeta, 2006; Meijering et al., 2013; Walker & Selfe, 1996). Our study met each condition, further justifying the use of the Method in our research. Additionally, interaction among study participants through the feedback loop is an essential component in reaching consensus (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Interaction was facilitated in the Delphi Method survey iterations by using the results to narrow the issue's scope in the subsequent survey iterations. An electronic survey instrument was chosen over the more traditional focus groups to protect participant confidentiality and ensure convenience.

In this study, we approached the Delphi Method using free-response, multiple-choice, and constant-sum questions. Free-response questions were an important part of data collection because they are well-suited to capturing complex, multifaceted issues (Creswell, 2009), such as those related to leisure constraints. Free-response data analysis involves identifying themes (Creswell, 2009). Theme definition and occurrence vary slightly between disciplines and within the context of the study (Mishra & Dey, 2022) and is often used interchangeably with the terms “concepts” or “categories” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In our data analysis, themes were the most prominent expressions in responses (Mishra & Dey, 2022). We let themes naturally emerge from responses after the data were collected and organized through manual, inductive coding to draw meaningful conclusions (Creswell, 2009; Mishra & Dey, 2022; Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Multiple-choice and point-allocation questions were also used in the survey instrument. A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure participants’ level of agreement, and a four-point Likert scale was used to measure the magnitude of barriers (Habibi et al., 2014; Vagias, 2006). We also used point-allocation, also referred to as constant-sum, questions, in which survey respondents assigned a fixed total number of points among a set of variables (Collewet & Koster, 2023). Point-allocation provides more nuanced information about participants’ preferences (Marley & Louviere, 2005). Multiple-choice, measured through selection frequencies, was also used.

Within the greater context of the Study, each survey iteration serves a different purpose. The purpose of Survey 1 in the Delphi Method process is to identify what elements to include in the consensus process in Surveys 2 and 3. Survey 1 was split into two parts: the presence of barriers to participation in their community, and their organization’s capacity to address these issues. The first part used a four-point Likert scale: (1) Not a barrier, (2) Somewhat of a barrier,

(3) Moderate barrier, and (4) Extreme barrier (Vagais, 2006) to measure participant perceptions of barriers to participation within their community. Likert statements were developed from the current literature.

Results of Survey 1 Likert questions must indicate a level of agreement to be relevant to the next stages of the Delphi Method study. The level of agreement or consensus was measured in the number of participants who ranked a barrier as at least “Somewhat of a barrier” (Sumsion, 1998) and were compared against a set of thresholds. McKenna (1994) suggests consensus is reached when responses are at least 51% in agreement. Other sources recommend 70% (Sumsion, 1998) or even 80% (Green et al., 1999), while Crisp et al. (1997) questioned the use of percentages and recommended basing consensus on the consistency of responses across all stages of the Delphi Technique. We opted for the 51% threshold for Survey 1 due to the breadth of the content. The more rigorous thresholds were applied to Survey 2 and Survey 3 because the survey content was narrower.

The goal of Survey 2 was to narrow our set of barriers to participation and organization barriers even further to the key 1-3 factors. These 1-3 factors were the subject of further research in Survey 3. To compare the barriers relative to each other, we designed survey questions in the constant-sum/point-allocation format.

Participants were asked to distribute 100 points among six barriers to participation. This distribution was based on the perceived prevalence of each barrier in their community, how they would prioritize action towards addressing the barriers, how they believe their organization prioritizes barriers, and how much influence their actions can have on addressing the barriers. Participants answered a one-point allocation question about their greatest organizational barrier.

We also requested that participants provide reasoning for their point allocation decisions via free-response questions.

Survey 3's goal was to explore the barrier(s) in depth, understanding the issue and strategies towards the barriers that were narrowed through Surveys 1 and 2. We used both free response, qualitative, questions and multiple choice questions. Full survey questionnaires and corresponding results are available in Appendix C.

Source Selection

Source selection is one of the most important aspects of the Delphi Method; the validity of the results depends on the quality of the experts' knowledge and their responses (Habibi et al., 2014; Powell, 2003). Participation invitations and informed consent forms were distributed by email to all Kansas Recreation and Parks Association (KRPA) members. The Association's mission is "To advance park and recreation opportunities that enhance the quality of life through education, communication, and advocacy" (KRPA, n.d.). KRPA comprises over 1,500 parks and recreation professionals working within the state of Kansas. The target participant works for a city or county parks department. Out of the 1,500 KRPA members, only a portion fit our target source description. Many KRPA members are retired, educators, students, or work for organizations that are not considered public services. Study participation was voluntary. Study promotional materials aided in getting participants to self-filter out if they did not fit the source description.

KRPA members were sent a promotional flier and enrollment form via email, seen in Appendix B, to opt in to the study. The enrollment form collected participants' informed consent, contact information, professional history, and demographic information. All individuals who completed the enrollment survey and gave consent were sent three surveys.

For each round of the Delphi Method, participants received an email and had 10 business days to complete the attached survey via a Qualtrics electronic survey link. Surveys generally took between 10 and 15 minutes. Response times varied with the level of detail participants provided in free-response questions. Participants were sent a reminder to participate eight business days after the initial invitation.

The Delphi Method does not have a strict guideline for study size. One guiding Delphi Method source states, “the Delphi technique is particularly suitable for complex issues where the outcome is not dependent on the sample size of the respondent, but rather on the different perspectives and expertise of respondents and their indirect group interactions” (Mukherjee et al., 2015, p.15). However, our goal was to achieve at least 30 responses per survey round, as 30 is the commonly accepted threshold for saturation in qualitative data (Baker & Edwards, n.d.). If the goal was not met by the end of the collection period, the survey was extended an additional five days. This procedure was followed for all three survey rounds.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by Kansas State University’s Institutional Review Board (#IRB – 12982). The study approval letter is found in Appendix A. Participation was voluntary, and participants were requested to electronically sign an informed consent statement. Participants’ identities stayed confidential in all reports. Participants were allowed to drop out of the study at any time without consequence. Participants were at no risk of harm, and the survey data were kept in a password-protected cloud storage accessible only to the research team and will be deleted within five years of the study’s conclusion.

Results

Participant Response Rate and Demographics

The goal of the study was to explore how Kansas parks and recreation practitioners view barriers to participation in their community. 69 KRPA members enrolled in the study and all of them were invited to participate in each of the three total rounds of surveys sent out between August, 2025 and February, 2026.

Response rates remained acceptable for each stage of the study. Of the 69 participants who enrolled in the study, 18 responded to all survey iterations. Participants were mostly women (59-75%), in their 40's (M = 44.9, SD = 9.9), and predominantly white (84.3-95.3%). The study participants also came from a wide range of management levels within their parks and recreation agency and averaged 12.2 years of experience within their position (SD = 10.0).

Table 1. Participant demographics throughout the Delphi Method rounds

Round	Response Rate	Gender (M/F)	Race	Average Age	Management Level	Years in Position
Enrollment	(n=69)	M = 38% F = 59%	White 92% Hispanic 4.3% Asian 1.4% Black 1.4%	M = 44.9 SD = 9.9	41% Upper 35% Middle 23% Lower	M = 12.2 SD = 10.0
Survey 1	(n = 44) 64%	M= 30% F= 68%	White 95.3% Hispanic 2.3% Asian 2.3%	M = 43.9 SD = 8.3	41% Upper 34% Middle 23% Lower	M = 12.0 SD = 10.2
Survey 2	(n = 32) 46%	M = 25% F = 75%	White 84.3% Hispanic 3.1% Asian 3.1%	M = 47.5 SD = 7.9	38% Upper 25% Middle 31% Lower	M = 12.6 SD = 10.0
Survey 3	(n = 34) 49%	M = 38% F = 62%	White 85.3% Hispanic 8.8% Asian 2.9%	M = 44.2 SD = 7.8	41% Upper 29% Middle 26% Lower	M = 10.4 SD = 9.9

All enrolled individuals were assigned a unique participant code to distinguish responses and provide a quick identifier of their agency background. Throughout the study, the participating practitioners are referred to by their code, especially in qualitative analysis. The code consists of three placeholders delineated by a dash. The first signifies the type of agency (M

= municipal, L = local/county, O = other, C = commission), and the second represents their level of leadership within their organization (L = lower management, M = middle management, and U = upper management), which was determined by examining staff directories and their position title and determining their position relative to their agency's size and organization. The final holder is the unique participant number (01 – 69). For example, if a participant is coded LC-L-45, they work for a county recreation commission agency, are a lower-level manager within the organization, and were the 45th person to enroll in the study.

RQ1: What barriers to participation do Kansas parks and recreation professionals perceive and prioritize in their community?

Participants were asked to select the barriers to participation that they believe affect their community. For each barrier selected, participants had to rate it from (1) “Not a Barrier” to (4) “Significant Barrier” (Vagias, 2006). The highest-rated answer was “Lack of Awareness,” with 84% of responses indicating it is at least “Somewhat of a Barrier” on the Likert Scale and meeting the most strenuous of consensus thresholds of 80% (Green et al., 1999). “Facility and Program Fees,” at 54.5% of participants agreeing, met the most relaxed, 51% agreement threshold found in literature (McKenna, 1994). The remaining barriers did not meet the thresholds, as shown in the more detailed results in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant reported barrier extent

	Selection frequency	Not a barrier	Somewhat of a barrier	Moderate barrier	Significant barrier
Parks and recreation regulations	1	0	0	1	0
Poor or degrading park and facility conditions	11	2	6	2	1
Proximity to their nearest park or recreation facility	13	0	6	7	0

Lack of affordable public transportation to parks and recreation sites	9	1	3	4	1
Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks	37	0	10	17	10
Absent feeling of belonging because of identity	6	0	2	4	0
Language barriers	18	0	8	10	0
Unsafe conditions (i.e. neighborhood crime, drug use, gang activity, etc.)	7	0	3	3	1
Lack of programming that interests people	19	0	6	10	3
Facility and program fees	24	0	15	7	2
Lack of physically accessible facilities and programs	10	1	4	5	0
Lack of cognitively accessible facilities and programs	5	0	4	1	0

Participants were asked to identify any additional barriers to participation that had not already been listed. 12 participants responded. After filtering and sorting participant themes, the most prevalent theme was “Not enough time” ($n = 3$). Other themes were either mentioned only once or did not answer the question in context. We added “Not enough time” to the list of barriers to participation for comparison in Survey 2.

As per the Delphi Method process, we narrowed the list of barriers from Survey 1 to Survey 2. Survey 2 questionnaires included only the barriers that met the 51% threshold established by McKenna (1994) or were mentioned in the free-response section at least twice.

Participants were asked to allocate 100 points among six barriers to participation, based on their perceived prevalence in their community. “Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks” was the highest scoring barrier ($M = 31.16$, $SD = 19.047$), followed by “Lack of

programming that interests people” ($M = 17.03$, $SD = 12.029$). The two barriers met the assumptions and requirements for comparison using a paired-samples t-test. Differences between barriers were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk’s test ($p = .063$), and there were no outliers, as assessed visually using a boxplot. The paired-sample t-test revealed that participants assigned statistically significantly more points to “Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks” compared to the next most common answer, “Lack of programming that interests people” with a mean difference of 14.129 points, 95% CI[4.766, 23.492], $t(30) = 3.082$, $p < .05$, $d = .55$. Full Survey 2 results are available in Table 3.

Table 3. Barrier prevalence as measured through the constant-sum questionnaire

Barrier	Participant prioritization (100 points total)	Perceived <i>agency</i> prioritization (100 points total)
Proximity to parks and facilities	$M = 10.3$ $SD = 12.1$	$M = \mathbf{15.9}$ $SD = 14.5$
Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks	$M = \mathbf{38.4}$ $SD = 19.4$	$M = 24.9$ $SD = 17.9$
Language barriers	$M = 7.6$ $SD = 10.6$	$M = 5.0$ $SD = 5.9$
Lack of programming that interests people	$M = \mathbf{21.6}$ $SD = 11.6$	$M = 20.2$ $SD = 13.9$
Facility and program fees	$M = 15.2$ $SD = 12.8$	$M = \mathbf{21.2}$ $SD = 13.1$
Lack of time in their schedule	$M = 6.9$ $SD = 5.4$	$M = 6.6$ $SD = 6.4$

Participants were asked to describe why they allocated the points the way they did and to explain any point allocation discrepancies between agency priorities and their personal viewpoint on priorities. 17 out of the 31 participants increased prioritization from their agency score to their personal score. 15 out of 26 total free-response comments mentioned increasing marketing and efforts to increase awareness in their communities, including the following responses:

“I think we spend a lot of time on programming but not enough on reaching a wide audience to attract them to our programming.” (M-M-69)

“...Trying to get the word out about these programs and benefits is what the main focus is on. We need to keep our people informed ...” (MC-U-59)

“I think we need more focus on advertising and marketing and I do not believe my agency agrees.” (M-L-35)

“I believe that awareness of what is offered is the biggest hurdle in a continually changing community. Once a person is aware we can better provide services and gather feedback on program needs, program offering time and day, ect. to reduce barriers. We must continually work to be relative and focusing on delivering great services to the public.” (M-U-15)

However, three people allocated lower scores to their personal views of barrier participation.

One of these individuals said, “I think lack of awareness at some point has to be put on the individual. They need to change how they receive information” (Participant MC-U-13). Eight participants kept a consistent score between agency priorities and their own, one writing, “since I am the Director, my answers are the same” (Participant MC-U-04).

“Lack of awareness” was consistently and notably the highest-scoring barrier. The barrier was perceived as the highest for both their organization and their individual priorities in their management strategy. “Lack of awareness” scored highest in terms of the influence the parks and recreation organization has over a barrier to participation, followed closely by “facility and program fees.” Because findings remained consistent between the two surveys, we can make the assumption that “lack of Awareness” has met consensus as the most relevant issue (MacCarthy & Atthirawong, 2003; Nevo & Chan, 2005; Turoff & Linstone, 1975), and focus on awareness as the main topic of Survey 3 and to frame our second research question.

RQ2: What strategies are perceived as effective and appropriate to alleviate barriers to participation among Kansas parks and recreation professionals?

The practitioners were prompted to share barriers to participation mitigation strategies they have had success with. The most prominent theme, as depicted in Table 4, was “program

target and marketing strategy diversification” ($n = 12$), followed by “social media presence” ($n = 8$), “offering scholarships” ($n = 8$), and “partner with local organizations” ($n = 8$).

Table 4. Practitioner strategies for alleviating community barriers

Theme	Example
Program and marketing diversification ($n = 12$)	“Using different marketing avenues to promote programs, events, classes.” (M-L-34) “diversifying marketing distribution, identifying gaps in programming based on community demographics (ex: we have little to no senior programming, but our community was 35% senior citizens)” (M-U-46)
Social media presence ($n = 8$)	“Using a variety of social media platforms that appeal to different generations to gain awareness of programs, events, etc.” (M-L-34)
Offering scholarships ($n = 8$)	“The additional funding by the [city] Parks and Recreation Foundation to those who cannot afford fees to participate in the programs” (M-U-43)
Partner with other local organizations ($n = 8$)	“We strive to be a community partner (other organizations, user groups, city, USD...)” (MC-U-32) “Partnership with other parks agencies and other government entities to reach more people and provide more opportunities for programming, facilities, and events for the public.” (LC-M-54)
Lowering program fees ($n = 6$)	“Offering some free programs” (M-U-11) “Keeping fees low. Trying to be inclusive for all.” (O-L-16) “Keeping our classes, camps, fitness center memberships, facility rental fees affordable.” (M-L-34)
Gathering information about trends and community needs ($n = 6$)	“Understanding and listening to the community you serve and what other options are being offered by surrounding communities. This helps identify what is a priority for the community and best approach to covering the need.” (M-U-50) “consulting studies that show where facilities fall short and how to address them” (LC-L-58)
Face-to-face communication ($n = 5$)	“Attending community events and promoting the agency and its offerings including parks, trails, free programs and locations.” (LC-M-01) “Attending school fairs prior to the start of school and PTO events.” (M-L-36) “Talk to the patrons.” (LC-L-41)

To understand how parks and recreation professionals' framing of the very broad term "Lack of Awareness", we asked participants to reflect on the causes of "Lack of Awareness" of their agency's offerings among the community and to list 3-5 causes in the order they occur to them. Results are depicted in Table 5. The most common theme was "more resources and attention need to be allocated to marketing" ($n = 11$), followed by "recreation offerings in my community are oversaturated" ($n = 6$).

Table 5. Participant-reported reasons for "lack of awareness"

Theme	Example
More resources and attention need to be allocated to marketing. ($n = 11$)	"No direct marketing for our programs/amenities. Staff spread too thin to get the word out on programming as we are consistently catching up rather than being ahead." (M-L-35) "Lack of funds for dedicated communications or marketing staff" (M-U-67) "multiple weakly run sources for information" (M-M-66)
Recreation offerings and/or advertisements in my community are oversaturated. ($n = 6$)	"Market is over saturated: so many specialty groups in the area promoting program offerings and there are so many programs being offered, folks tend to avoid all marketing things altogether." (LC-M-01) "Too many ways to receive information, too much to keep up with" (LC-M-21) "Information overload; Too many options;" (M-U-67)
Marketing efforts are not reaching the target market. ($n = 5$)	"Not subscribed to social media Text message services not enabled Fliers do not get home from School" (MC-U-22) "E-newsletters are going to junk mail boxes" (LC-M-01)
Marketing strategy needs to be intentional/formalized. ($n = 5$)	"inconsistent marketing, brand identity" (MC-U-04)

Marketing methods need to remain diverse. (n = 5)	“Older community doesn't use social media. We don't print anymore” (MC-U-44) “Lack of traditional media outreach (radio, newspaper, tv)” (M-L-23) “Community members connect to information in different ways, and our agency is good at print work, but lacks in the ways it engages younger audiences with social media.” (LC-L-45)
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Parks and recreation practitioners were then asked to rate their agreement with Survey 2 “lack of awareness” related themes on a 5-point Likert scale, as seen in Table 6. While a degree of agreement was met for all prompts, statement L5, concerning the benefits of community partnerships in marketing and outreach efforts, was the highest with 75.8% of participants reporting they “Strongly Agree” and the remainder reporting “Somewhat agree.” L4, regarding the importance of having a social media presence to build community awareness, was a close second with 75.8% of responses being “Strongly Agree,” but with one participant reporting “Strongly Disagree” and the remaining as “Somewhat Agree.”

Table 6. Participant-rated agreement with “lack of awareness” related themes from Survey 2.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
L1. People are oversaturated with advertising and information about community offerings.	6.1%	27.3%	9.1%	39.4%	18.1%
L2. Using a diverse set of marketing methods (e.g., Instagram, fliers, email, etc.) helps reach the community's diverse demographics.	12.1%	0%	3.0%	39.4%	45.5%
L3. "Lack of Awareness" will always be an issue parks and recreation agencies will have to deal with. Outreach is forever a moving target.	0%	12.1%	6.1%	36.4%	45.5%
L4. Having a social media presence is important for building awareness in your community.	6.1%	0%	0%	18.2%	75.8%

L5. Community partnerships and in-person networking are valuable tools for building awareness of your agency's offerings.	0%	0%	0%	24.2%	75.8%
L6. Email newsletters are an important tool for building awareness of your agency's offerings.	0%	12.1%	15.2%	42.4%	30.3%
L7. Word of mouth is an effective way to spread awareness throughout the community.	0%	3.0%	3.0%	39.4%	54.5%
L8. Your parks and recreation agency should allocate more resources to marketing and outreach.	0%	3.0%	21.2%	54.5%	21.2%

When participants were asked what platforms their agency uses to market their programs, “Facebook” was a leading response, with 100% of participants selecting the option. Facebook was followed shortly after with “The Organization’s Website” with 97%, “Email Newsletters” with 88%, “Fliers” with 85%, and “Instagram” with 70%, as depicted in Figure 2.4. Participants were also given space to add a free-response under “Other”. These free-response entries included mentions of the value of partnerships in their marketing efforts (Participant M-U-15; M-U-67), the use of TV media monitors (Participant M-L-36; M-U-67; MC-U-14), and printed materials such as an activity guide or city magazine (Participant M-U-51; LC-L-49, M-U-67), among other single-response marketing strategies.



Figure 6. Reported marketing platforms used by the participant’s agency

Study participants were then asked about their agency’s usage of a formal marketing plan. Most (51%) participants reported their agency did not have a formal marketing plan. Then they were asked who holds responsibility for marketing programs within their agency. The leading response was “The marketing department or designated marketing specialist” with 25 selections. Second was “The staff member who leads/ coordinates the program” (n = 9), followed by “The facility manager” (n = 7), and the “Other (please specify)” (n = 5) last. Two of these “Other” free responses were that marketing is anyone and everyone’s job, and the other three responses listed specific positions within the agency that hold the responsibility. 36% of participants reported that their agency had a formal marketing plan, but only 41.7% reported following the plan closely. Three park professionals (Participant MC-M-57; LC-M-01; LC-L-45) indicated in the optional free-response section that, while their agency had a marketing plan, it was not widely shared as a resource throughout the organization.

The final study question was a free response asking for any further comments or observations about “Lack of Awareness.” Six participants responded to the topic of awareness as a barrier:

“Lack of awareness [it] is a tricky topic as it is a good excuse for many, but if they are looking for it, then they could find the information. Out of sight, out of mind, unfortunately.” (MC-U-14)

“It not a plug and play situation. Every community has its own personality and niche as does each program and park. There is no cookie cutter way to increase awareness. Trying is the common denominator. Try something and see if it works. And you have to have a budget to do it.” (MC-L-63)

“... Parents are just lazy when it comes to having their child participate in other activities. I think social media becomes a burden that parents would rather watch than spend some quality time with their kids. Just my two cents.” (MC-U-31)

“Having a plan that ebbs and flows with the changing trends is important to reach all your different demographics.” (LC-L-45)

“I agree with an earlier comment that it is something we will always have to deal with. There is only so many hours in a day/week/month and people have to really choose how they want to spend their time and money. We have to make ourselves relevant in a fast-paced, overstimulated world.” (M-L-35)

“It still floors me when we mail [redacted number] copies of our guidebook out to every household in our county, that people will come in and say I have lived here for years and did not know you were here. How??” (MC-M-57)

As one participant said, “outreach is forever a moving target” (M-U-62). While participants reported issues with reaching community members, they also reported success using diverse marketing methods, community partnerships, networking, and social media, nearly unanimously. Most of the park practitioners also emphasized the importance of leveraging word-of-mouth promotions, the need for more attention and resources allocated to outreach/marketing, and the complications of oversaturation in the market and community recreation. Despite “lack of awareness” being a primary concern for participants, over half reported not having a marketing plan or being unable to access one.

Discussion

According to Kansas parks and recreation practitioners across all stages of the study, “Lack of Awareness” is the leading barrier to participation. The finding is contrary to the National Recreation and Park Association 2025 report, which surveyed 1,000 randomly selected adults in the U.S.A. and found a lack of time to be the top obstacle to using parks and recreation (41% of survey participants). On the other hand, unawareness of locations and offerings was towards the bottom of the list (17% of survey participants) (NRPA, 2025). The discrepancy in findings could be due to differences in study scope and survey instruments. The discrepancy could also be from differences in perspective, shaped by the unique context of their parks and recreation professional and community participant identities, past experiences, and external influences (Gaither & Wu, 2024).

Perspectives would differ between a general community member and a park and recreation worker because of cognitive proximity to parks and recreation and the level of control over barriers. Parks and recreation professionals hold negligible influence over the barrier “lack of time,” as reflected in the barrier’s low scores in our study. Someone who works with and interacts with parks and recreation daily is likely to internalize the issues, especially if they have high self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), more so than the average community member with limited interaction with and knowledge of parks and recreation agencies and services. In our study, this sentiment could be tied to the notably lower points allocated to “Lack of time in their schedule” when participants were asked about the barriers they felt they had the most influence over. One participant commented, “People can always use a lack of time as an excuse” (Participant MC-U-04), a sentiment that reinforces the idea that practitioners consciously and subconsciously choose

to focus on barriers they can control. Further research is needed to draw firm conclusions and to explore the complications of dissonance in practitioners' attitudes and motivation.

Survey participants report partnerships with local businesses, school districts, residential associations, other public service departments, neighboring municipalities, and government entities. Interdisciplinary partnerships and collaborations are instrumental to reaching community-based health initiatives (Colistra et al., 2017). A study found schools to be the most common partners in parks and recreation, while health-specific agency partnerships are less common (Risisky & MacGregor, 2022). Practitioners describe the benefits of their partnerships as including the increased capacity to create bigger events, advertising reaching a greater number of people, increased word-of-mouth promotion, sponsorships, more opportunities for the community, lower cost for participants, more space, and improved community connections:

“...we have been fortunate enough to make more partnerships with local businesses to sponsor programs so we didn't have to cut them due to budget constraints.” (M-U-39) (Survey 1)

“Partnering with other places to gain space such as our school district.” (MC-M-02) (Survey 1)

“Partnership with other parks agencies and other government entities to reach more people and provide more opportunities for programming, facilities, and events for the public.” (LC-M-54) (Survey 1)

“Collaborating with community partners has worked really well for us, both in creating bigger events and advertising through to multiple client lists” (MC-M-40) (Survey 3)

“Partnering, not only with huge businesses around the county, but also with the local mom and pop shops, can help spread the word better about different programs we offer.” (LC-L-58) (Survey 3)

“I think it's smart to partner in your community to reach a new audience.” (M-L-35) (Survey 3)

Social media utilization and diverse marketing are closely related. Engaging and marketing to a variety of generations takes a variety of methods. According to Generational

Cohort Theory, people born within a similar time will share many of the same formative experiences and technology, thus producing common attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within generations (Inglehart, 1977). With that understanding, each generation finds its information in different ways, through different technologies. As digital natives, Generation Z looks to social media more than older generations do, whereas the use of fliers and radio advertisements may prove more fruitful for older generations. Given that the average survey participant is 44 years old, the emphasis on social media in their responses may reflect an effort to bridge this generational gap. However, modernization of marketing efforts could lead the agency to lose the older demographic that is reached through more traditional methods. Balancing social media outreach and traditional marketing, such as fliers and radio, is important for reaching all demographics in a community.

“Using different marketing avenues to promote programs, events, classes. Using a variety of social media platforms that appeal to different generations to gain awareness of programs, events, etc.” (M-L-34) (Survey 1)

“We’ve tried to increase our marketing to include more social media platforms and printed material.” (M-L-35) (Survey 1)

“Older community doesn’t use social media. We don’t print anymore” (MC-U-44) (Survey 3)

Often, younger employees rely heavily on social media marketing, but there is much more available. (M-U-67) (Survey 3)

“...the social media version of the information is looked at more.” (MC-M-57) (Survey 3)

One of the more unexpected and somewhat divisive themes to emerge from the free response was the oversaturation of recreational services advertised to the community.

Participants outline multiple reasons for the oversaturation, the first being competing recreation services.

“Market is over saturated: so many specialty groups in the area promoting program offerings and there are so many programs being offered, folks tend to avoid all marketing things altogether.” (Participant LC-M-01) (Survey 3)

“Competitive market” (Participant M-U-51) (Survey 3)

Community members may feel overwhelmed by too many options or by too many ways they receive information.

“Too many ways to receive information, too much to keep up with...” (LC-M-21) (Survey 3)

“The lack of one central information source ... information overload; too many options” (M-U-67) (Survey 3)

These comments suggest that agencies develop a more focused and intentional approach to marketing. Practitioners walk a fine line between marketing and outreach for awareness and the point of being overbearing.

The key takeaway from examining “lack of awareness” is the need to partner with other community organizations. Partnerships have the potential to overcome other barriers to participation and for the organization. Partnerships and community networking are important factors to consider while developing management and outreach plans.

Management Recommendations

This study highlights the value of community partnerships in spreading awareness and stretching limited resources. Partnerships are an important aspect of a concept, relational marketing, where focus is on developing a positive relationship and confidence between the public and the public agency (Borrie et al., 2002). In relationship marketing the agency maintains, builds, and strengthens a network of individuals for the long-term mutual benefit of both groups (Shani & Chalasani, 1992). This marketing strategy extends beyond individual transactions through three dimensions described by Borrie et al. (2002):

- Social trust – the degree to which individuals perceive the agency shares their views, goals, and values.
- Commitment- the long-time relationship between community members and the agency
- Social responsibility- the attitudes towards the goals and public purposes of the agency.

As public agencies, parks and recreation agencies have a social responsibility different from that of for-profit organizations, and marketing needs to reflect that. Using the same tactics as for-profit businesses undermines the public agency's intended perception as a welcoming and inclusive space (Borrie et al., 2002; Bright, 2000). Nolan (2014) describes three negative parks and recreation agency symptoms that stem from a poor brand image within the community: (1) increased competition from private-sector companies begins to erode services, (2) the parks division is merged with another municipal department, or (3) operating and capital budgets have been reduced at a greater rate than other departments within a community. Once a public parks and recreation agency finds itself down one of these paths, with increasingly limited budgets and capabilities, getting back to a place of high regard in the public and local government eye is difficult. Developing a plan, or at the barest level, a marketing and outreach philosophy, is necessary.

An NRPA report from 2019 outlines six basic steps (Figure 7) to developing a marketing and communications plan. The steps are intended to be accessible to all agencies, even those without the resources to employ marketing specialists. These steps include: (1) develop a consistent brand, (2) develop goals for the marketing and awareness effort as a whole, (3) define target market segments, (4) define goals for each channel of communication, (5) define content guidelines for each channel, and (6) define evaluation methods (NRPA, 2019).

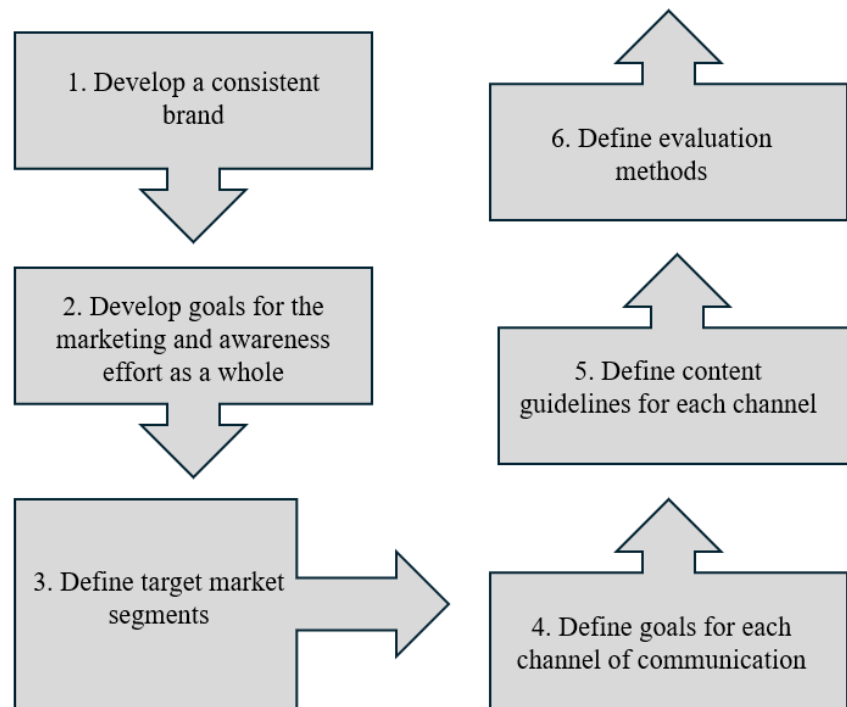


Figure 7. Six basic steps to build a marketing and communications plan (NRPA, 2019)

When the plan, or at the very least a guideline or philosophy, is established, it must be communicated throughout the agency. Over half of practitioners report that marketing is conducted by the staff member who leads or coordinates the program. Some of whom shared comments about their inability to access the marketing plan or uncertainty about whether a plan even exists. Half of the participants reported that their agency lacks a marketing plan. The development and sharing of a marketing plan is essential to executing focused and consistent relationship marketing.

Relationship marketing is also well-suited for expanding the limited resources most agencies have by saving on marketing costs, spreading costs, and pooling staff. Relationship marketing is essential to the long-term financial success of park and recreation agencies (Homburg et al., 2005; Payne, 2009). Partnerships and collaboration with other organizations expand the potential pool of participants and has the opportunity to reach sections of the

community that may encounter disproportionately greater barriers to participation. The combined influence of two or more organizations lowers an organization's marketing costs not only because of the shared participant pool but also because the built loyalty among current patrons leads to increased unpaid word-of-mouth promotion (Bhatia & Tandon, 2025). Word-of-mouth promotion from one trusted peer to another is more influential to individuals than general advertising (Agans et al., 2024). Additionally, patron loyalty is linked to relationship marketing for public agencies (Bhatia & Tandon, 2025). A loyal patron gained is a future marketing dollar saved. Partnering and networking also allow parks and recreation agencies to host events/programs of greater magnitude and influence by pooling financial and manpower resources with those of other local organizations.

Leaning into relationship marketing strategies, including fostering partnerships, strong community presence, and local networking, reinforces community perceptions of parks and recreation spaces as welcoming. We encourage agencies to develop a management plan or set of guidelines that center around building and maintaining community ties. Relationship marketing is essential to the long-term success of a parks and recreation agency and a vital tool for alleviating barriers to participation by increasing awareness within the community.

Limitations

Our qualitative findings are a snapshot of participant perspectives at a specific time and exist only in the context of a specific site (Creswell, 2009), and do not always represent the perspectives of all Kansas parks and recreation professionals. However, results are transferable, and the depth of responses provides insight and direction towards implications and future research. Consideration is also given to the production of generally shallow feelings elicited by survey questionnaires (Spickard, 2017), and response quality may have been influenced by

survey fatigue or time constraints. Despite efforts to mitigate error through providing definitions where appropriate, there was also a degree of measurement error due to differences in the researchers' and the surveyed practitioners' conceptualizations of terms and worldviews (Field & Kafai, 2009). Additionally, there was a degree of researcher-internal bias, despite best efforts at objectivity—an unavoidable reality of any research (Fields & Kafai, 2009).

The Delphi Method's flexibility makes the study's three iterations impossible for precise study replication and Method ambiguities make the instrument reliability and validity have a degree of uncertainty (Hasson & Keeny, 2011). Consensus is also loosely defined, with one literature review discovering at least 15 different ways to achieve consensus (von der Gracht, 2012). Despite the uncertainty that comes with using the Delphi Method, it was vital to the exploratory nature of the study and suited to the participant pool. Researchers approached these areas with care, guided by the current literature.

Conclusion

The study aimed to understand the most pressing barriers to participation in Kansas parks and recreation and explore management strategies and implications surrounding these issues. We found “lack of awareness” is the most pressing barrier to participation. Participants suggested agencies should maintain a diverse set of marketing tools, have an intentional social media presence, and foster strong community partnerships. Partnerships are particularly relevant to the research's practical implications. We recommend that parks and recreation organizations make an intentional and well-communicated effort to prioritize relational marketing over traditional business marketing strategies. Relational marketing can build on the organization's personal connections within the community and promote a brand image of a public resource that is accessible and inclusive to all community members. Parks and recreation agencies have a

responsibility to provide equitable, welcoming spaces for all members of the community. Their services are essential to the community's physical, mental, and social health. Continued research on barriers, the barrier-negotiation process, and management practices is important for maintaining a healthy community in an ever-changing social environment.

Chapter 3 - Further Management Implications

Introduction

As I explored barriers in this research project, I collected more data and rich qualitative quotes from parks and recreation professionals than I could include in my Chapter 2 Manuscript. Implications for organizational behavior were among the more notable sub-themes throughout the study. In a world of rising costs and budgets that do not always grow proportionally to funding, being constrained by funding and staffing is an emerging theme in the literature (Barrett et al., 2017; Mueller et al., 2019) and in my personal experience. In my personal work experience, I find these limitations are exacerbated by poor management within the organization. Organizational behavior, management, and general dynamics have become a topic of great personal interest to me. Through my personal experience and conversations with my cohort, I have found that parks and recreation work, which should be inherently rewarding, is overshadowed and spoiled by poor leadership or workplace culture. When organizations do not intentionally manage personnel, they often diminish employees' energy, ingenuity, and overall performance. I feel this is especially true concerning seasonal positions. In this chapter, I highlight some of these participant insights and reflect on connections to theory and management implications.

Organization Barriers

Within the context of this analysis, organization barriers are any internal factors, such as attitudes, staff turnover, policy, budget, and leadership structure, that limit the organization from reaching its goals or maximum capacity. The term "organizational barriers" is often used interchangeably with "administrative barriers" and "institutional barriers". These barriers can also occur at the level of cultural diversity. Researchers, Allison and Hibbler explain, "There are

institutional and structural barriers agencies themselves create, or unknowingly promulgate, that inhibit program access and opportunity to diverse constituents” (Allison and Hibbler, 2004, p. 262). Like this trickle-down effect illustrated by Allison and Hibbler, all organization barriers have the potential to trickle down to impact the community services they offer.

Many parks and recreation agencies face funding and staffing obstacles. A 2025 Kansas for Conservation Agency Needs Report (Jackson et al., 2025), which included interviews with 27 conservation professionals, over half of whom were from parks and recreation organizations, found that a lack of funding and staff capacity are the primary inhibitors to the financial support and prioritization of conservation-related efforts. When asked about where their agency/organization has low/limited capacity, the result themes were limited funding for conservation (n=16), limited staffing (n=15), and incentives to retain employees and producers (n=6). When these organizations were asked about their barriers, they overwhelmingly reported funding availability (n=18), followed by labor capacity (n=10). Similar themes were present in the thesis research. While Chapter 2’s manuscript discusses findings on practitioner-perceived community barriers to participation, the study also had multiple sub-findings related to organization barriers. These were explored in the broader, early stages of the study.

When participants were asked about their strategies to overcome organization barriers, 36 responded. The most prominent response theme was methods of expanding current resources (n = 17), followed by building staff teamwork and cohesion (n = 8), as depicted in Table 7. All enrolled individuals were assigned a unique participant code to differentiate qualitative responses and provide a quick identifier of their agency background.

Throughout the study, the participating practitioners are referred to by their code, especially in qualitative analysis. The code consists of three placeholders delineated by a dash.

The first signifies the type of agency (M = municipal, L = local/county, O = other, C = commission), the second represents their relative level of leadership within their organization (L = lower management, M = middle management, and U = upper management), and the final holder is the unique participant number (01 – 69). If a participant is coded LC-L-45, they work for a county recreation commission agency, are a lower-level manager within the organization, and were the 45th person to enroll in the study.

Table 7. Participant-reported successful strategies to address organization barriers

Theme	Quotes
Expand capacity through community connections (n = 8)	“We work with the local schools and colleges to use their facilities. We also lean on them to help provide staff for our programs.” (MC-U-59) “Partnering with other places to gain space such as our school district.” (MC-M-02) “...joint study sessions with City Council/Mayor/City Manager” (MC-U-03) “...This year, we have been fortunate enough to make more partnerships with local businesses to sponsor programs so we didn't have to cut them due to budget constraints.” (M-U-39)
Staff teamwork and cohesion (n = 8)	“RACKO motto, Remaining A Close Knit Organization. The employee committees and being able to share updates at monthly meetings or various luncheons or social events where we can discuss. Hearing directly from mid-level staff of what they are working on versus getting a generalized report. Those post meeting conversations or social setting conversations have so much value and resources that someone may not have considered are presented and greatly help grow or advance a program/project while also saving funds.

	When upper admin staff try to control what is shared- silo's form and there isn't cohesion amongst staff.” (LC-M-01) “Staff pulling together to get the job done. Showing appreciation & offering discounts or incentives to our volunteers so they will continue to help coach.” (M-M-24) “We have become super good at being fluid, and able to adapt.” (MC-U-32) “Discussing issues up front” (LC-L-41) “Analyzing department culture and making changes. Setting clear goals and expectations.” (M-U-51) “Getting great buy in from employees on projects/programs that they are passionate about. Administration being willing to take chances and give opportunities to try new things.” (LC-M-54) “...Mission Driven-Value Based Culture...” (M-U-15) “...Fostering a standard of open communication across divisions.” (M-M-69)
Expand Financial and Personnel Resources (n = 6)	“We used to have yearly pay increases tied with performance evaluations. Those have been paused in the last couple years.” (M-M-12) “We have a good grant finder” (M-L-18) “...Increasing salaries and wages to retain employees.” (M-M-69)
Other responses...	

(n = 13)	
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The first theme, “expand capacity through community connections” (n = 8) is in direct alignment and support of Chapter 2 findings. Partnerships and community networking not only aid in building community awareness and interest, but also in stretching limited financial and personnel resources. Several other resource expansions are described within the theme, “expand Financial and Personnel Resources” (n = 6), including acquiring grants (Participant M-L-18) and adjusting salaries/wages (Participant M-M-69; M-M-12) as a reflection on job performance (Participant M-M-12). This theme brings to the forefront the impact of pay on employee motivation and performance, especially when it could be intertwined with the third theme highlighted, “staff teamwork and cohesion” (n = 8).

While wage is an initial attractor for a position, a Singapore-based study on employee retention reveals wage is only weakly connected to long-term employee loyalty (Fuller et al., 2026). The same study links company culture with employee retention. However, it is not a company’s mission statement that creates a culture attractive to retention, but rather the system the agency has in place, including the hiring models, pay structures, and advancement philosophies, all of which reinforce each other (Fuller et al., 2026). Essentially, people are more likely to have company loyalty if there is proper job design. If effective, job design stimulates employee interest in work and increases job satisfaction, leading to higher performance and productivity (Belias & Sklikas, 2013).

Raises and pay are considered extrinsic motivators—motivators which come from the outside, artificially created by a boss, supervisor, or manager (Russell, 2005). Given the fiscal constraints described by many participants, employers in the field of public recreation agencies can offer very little extrinsic motivation. Management must then set its eyes on facilitating

intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals find the behavior itself rewarding, such as when someone pursues a hobby simply because they find it interesting (Russell, 2005).

Job Design and Role Management Implications

Even those who have a passion for parks and recreation may lose their initial passion when their position is not managed to foster their intrinsic motivation. Motivation-hygiene theory suggests employee satisfaction is intrinsic to “motivators” the organization provides, which include recognition, achievement, responsibility, upward mobility, and personal growth (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Intrinsic motivation in the workplace can be dependent on how the position is structured. The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) depicts five core elements of intrinsically motivating job design as defined by Hackman and Oldham (1976, pp. 257-258).

- Skill Variety- *The degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities to carry out the work.*
- Task Identity- *The degree to which the job requires completion of a 'whole identifiable piece of work; that is, doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome.*
- Task Significance- *The degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people.*
- Autonomy- *The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion.*

- *Feedback- The degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance.*

The first three, skill variety, task identity, and task significance, contribute to a feeling of experienced meaningfulness. The final two elements contribute to an experience of responsibility through autonomy and feedback. The relationship between variables is depicted in Figure 8. These five elements combine to create an overall “motivating potential” (Hackman & Oldman, 1976).

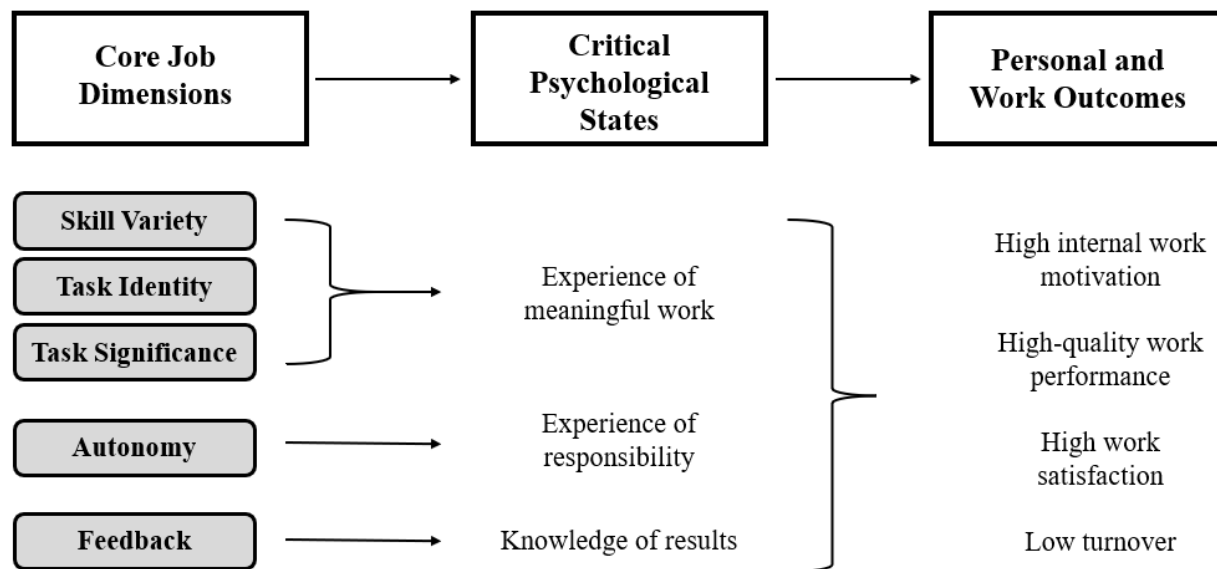


Figure 8. The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976)

The Job Characteristics Model suggests a personnel management system that avoids the standard conveyor-assembly structure to make the work feel more internally meaningful. May opt to designate one individual for a single task, such as mowing or serving as the recreation front-desk clerk, for efficiency. However, this monotony makes for an intellectually dull and unrewarding environment. When companies assign duties to employees that require multiple skills, employees' interest and engagement will increase. Employees will find greater satisfaction

when they see a project through from start to finish rather than work on just a section of it.

Additionally, a manager should communicate the project's full impact and the individual's role to their constituents to provide the broader context when the worker cannot be involved in the process as a whole.

Managers should also aim to maintain clear employee responsibility through autonomy. Multiple studies have linked autonomy with increased intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1982, Vallerand, 1997; Vo et al., 2022). When employees have greater control over their work, they naturally feel more motivated at work (Vo et al., 2022). When their performance relies more on their skills rather than on the system and direction given by the organization, employees feel more invested. Greater autonomy can be introduced in parks and recreation workplaces by giving workers freedom over their work pace, schedule, problem-solving process, and day-to-day tasks. Managers and supervisors can also encourage young or new employees by letting them nurture their creativity and innovative sides. Make them feel heard and give them a chance! One participant echoes this sentiment, writing:

“Getting great buy in from employees on projects/programs that they are passionate about. Administration being willing to take chances and give opportunities to try new things.” (Participant LC-M-54)

While the diversified responsibilities may put managers on edge, especially for those managing younger staff, this risk can be handled through clear communication of expectations and frequent feedback. The importance of communication is expressed by multiple participants:

“...Fostering a standard of open communication across divisions.” (Participant M-M-69)

“Discussing issues up front” (Participant LC-L-41)

“Analyzing department culture and making changes. Setting clear goals and expectations.” (Participant M-U-51)

Receiving feedback provides knowledge of results and opportunities for personal growth. Drouvelis and Paiardini (2022) found a positive causal relationship between the quality of feedback on task performance and workers’ intrinsic motivation. On the flip side, when workers receive low-quality feedback, they are demotivated to produce higher output. People who receive negative feedback intervention are more likely to put in more effort than those who receive positive (Anderson & Rodin, 1989). However, negative feedback can be a fine line to tread. One study shows that a repetitive, strong negative feedback intervention results in a learned helplessness response among participants, in which their effort declines after the series of interventions (Mikulincer, 1988).

Responses to management adjustments based on the Job Characteristics Model are also dependent on their personality, specifically their degree of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the individual’s belief in their ability to behave in the way that is necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997). Despite this caveat, managers should still aim to employ the Job Characteristics Model wherever they reasonably can to improve retention and productivity.

Conclusion

As parks and recreation agencies face limitations that affect their ability to extrinsically motivate employees, attention must turn to management strategies that foster intrinsic motivation. According to the Job Characteristic Model, managers should assign responsibilities, give employees regular feedback, and avoid an assembly-line job setup. Too often, park and

recreation managers rely on an individual's passion for the topic to determine if they will be motivated to be a high-performance worker. I consider this a pitfall; not investing time and attention in personnel management may come back to bite managers through low worker performance, productivity, and retention. Spending the time and effort to develop these intentional structures is worth it in the long run.

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Appendix A - IRB Approval Document

Appendix Figure A.1. KSU Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Sarah Jackson
Horticulture & Nat Resources

Proposal Number: IRB-12982

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE:
06/16/2025

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Exploring the viewpoints of Kansas Parks and Recreation professionals on barriers to participation in their community using the Delphi method."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category: Exempt Category**
Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the **Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 06/16/2025 11:16 AM ET

Appendix B - Recruitment and Communications Material

This Appendix contains materials used to recruit study participants, sent to Kansas Recreation and Park Association (KRPA) members on the researcher's behalf by KRPA Executive Director, Erika Devore. This appendix also contains examples of email correspondence with participants. Participants were given 10 business days to complete the survey and received a reminder email on business day eight.

Appendix Figure B.1. Recruitment electronic flier.



Kansas State University
Park Management and
Conservation

**We Want to
Hear Your
Perspective!**

This study aims to analyze how parks and recreation professionals perceive participation barriers based on their lived experiences. The study will follow the Delphi Method, meaning the questions asked in each of the three survey rounds will be shaped by responses from the previous round. Three total surveys will be sent out between July and October.

Your Contribution

- Complete the study consent form.
- Take three 15-minute surveys, spread between July and October.
- Your identity will remain confidential in all reports

Contact Information

Dr. Sarah Jackson – Research Advisor
sjackso@ksu.edu

Evelyn Peat – Lead Graduate Student
peateve@ksu.edu

**Become a study
participant today!**



https://kstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_abppUt9WaEDM2gK



Appendix B.2. Example Email Contact

Subject: KSU Research – Barriers to Participation in Parks and Recreation – Survey [#]

Bcc: [Participant emails]

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your continued participation in this study and contributing to Kansas-centered parks and recreation research. Survey [#] is now live, linked below, and will take 10-15 minutes of your time. The goal of the research is to understand how park and recreation professionals view and approach barriers to participation through a series of three rounds of surveys.

Participation is completely voluntary, and your identity will remain confidential in all reports. You are free to skip any question or stop at any time without any penalty.

Please click the link below to begin Survey [#]:

[Insert link here]

[Insert QR code here]

Please complete the survey by **[Insert date here]**.

Your contribution makes a meaningful difference, and we are very grateful for your time and insight. For any questions or feedback, please contact me at peateve@ksu.edu or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Sarah Jackson, at sjackso@ksu.edu. If you have questions concerning institutional review and ethics, please contact the Research Compliance Office at comply@k-state.edu and reference Study Number IRB-12982.

Warm regards,

Evelyn Peat

Graduate Student | Park Management and Conservation
Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources
Kansas State University

Appendix B.3. Example Survey Reminder Email

Subject: CLOSING SOON – Survey [#] Barriers to Participation Research

Bcc: [Participant emails who have not taken the survey yet]

Dear Participant,

This is a quick reminder that Survey [#] for the Barriers to Participation in Parks and Recreation research study is still open, and we would greatly appreciate your input. If you haven't had a chance to complete it yet, there's still time to participate before it closes the evening of **[Insert date here]**.

The survey only takes 10-15 minutes to complete, and your responses are vital in helping us gain a deeper understanding of participation barriers in your community.

As always, your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop at any time without penalty.

To access Survey [#], please click here:

[Insert link here]

[Insert QR code here]

The survey will close on the evening of [Insert date here].

Thank you again for contributing your valuable time and insights to this project.

Best regards,

Evelyn Peat

Graduate Student | Park Management and Conservation
Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources
Kansas State University

Appendix C - Survey Instrument and Results

This Appendix contains all four survey instruments used in the study and the 2data associated with each question. All identifiable information is removed to protect study participant identities.

Appendix C.1. Consent, Enrollment, and Demographics Survey

Understanding Barriers to Participation in Municipal Parks and Recreation Settings

The goal of this study is to understand your perspectives on barriers to participation in relation to your experiences.

You will be sent three 10-15 minute surveys between July and October. Answer to the best of your ability. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation. You are free to opt out of the study at any point without penalty.

We value your privacy and will do everything we can to separate your identity from reported study results. Responses will be viewed by Kansas State University graduate researcher, Evelyn Peat, and supervising professor, Dr. Sarah Jackson. Still, your identity will not be revealed outside of the KSU research team. All related documentation will be securely stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. Your personal contact information will not be sold to a third-party company. The study's raw data will be deleted five years after the final date of this project. It is possible that your responses, without your personal information, could be stored and used for future research studies without asking for further consent.

Please direct any questions you have to Dr. Sarah Jackson from the Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources at Kansas State University at *sjackso@ksu.edu*. Kansas State University also has a Research Compliance Office (*comply@k-state.edu*).

1. Do you acknowledge the information above and consent to participating in this study?

- a. Yes, I consent $(n=69)$
 - b. No, I do not consent
2. What is your first and last name? (free response)
3. What is your email? (free response)
4. What parks and recreation organization do you work for? (free response)
5. How many years have you been employed at your current parks and recreation organization? (free response)
 - a. $M = 12.2$ years
 - b. $SD = 10.0$ years
 - c. Range = 6 months – 34 years
6. What is your current position title? (free response)
7. What is your gender?
 - a. Male $(n = 26)$
 - b. Female $(n = 41)$
 - c. Other or I prefer not to say $(n = 2)$
8. What is your age? (free response)
 - a. $M = 44.9$ years
 - b. $SD = 9.9$ years
 - c. Range = 25 years – 69 years
9. Are you Hispanic or Latino?
 - a. Yes $(n = 3)$
 - b. No $(n = 66)$
- i. 10. Which of these categories best indicates your race? Please select one or more.
 1. American Indian or Alaska Native
 2. Asian $(n = 1)$
 3. Black or African American $(n = 1)$
 4. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 5. White $(n = 61)$
 6. I prefer not to say $(n = 3)$

Appendix C.2 Survey 1

Understanding Barriers to Participation in Kansas Parks and Recreation Settings, Part 1

Thank you for participating in this study! This is the first of three surveys you will be sent between now and the end of October. The survey will consist of questions that ask you to rate the extent of barriers and elaborate upon free-response questions. Before starting, please ensure you are able to dedicate around 15 minutes of your time on this survey, in order to provide thoughtful and reflective responses.

Participation is voluntary, and you are free to end the survey at any time without consequence. Any personally identifiable information will be kept confidential in all reports. Responses will be viewed by Kansas State University graduate researcher, Evelyn Peat, and supervising professor, Dr. Sarah Jackson. Your identity will not be revealed outside of the KSU research team. All related documentation will be securely stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. Your personal contact information will not be sold to a third-party company. The study's raw data will be deleted five years after the final date of this project. It is possible that your responses, without your personal information, could be stored and used for future research studies without asking for further consent. Please direct any questions you have to Dr. Sarah Jackson from the Park Management and Conservation program at Kansas State University at sjackso@ksu.edu, or to graduate student, Evelyn Peat at peateve@ksu.edu. If you have questions concerning institutional review, please contact the Research Compliance Office at comply@k-state.edu and reference Study Number [IRB-12982].

1. What is your name?

In this first section, focus on the barriers to participation you believe are present for your community members. These barriers to participation are any factor that deters or prevents an individual from using parks and recreation facilities and programs.

2. Select all barriers to participation that you believe affect individuals in the community you serve.

- a.* Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks ($n = 37$)

- b. Absent feeling of belonging because of their identity (n = 6)
 - c. Language barriers (n = 18)
 - d. Lack of programming that interests people (n = 19)
 - e. Facility and program fees (n = 24)
 - f. Poor or degrading park and facility conditions (n = 11)
 - g. Proximity to their nearest park and recreation facility (n = 12)
 - h. Lack of affordable public transportation to parks and recreation facilities (n = 9)
 - i. Unsafe conditions (i.e. neighborhood crime, drug use, gang activity, etc.) (n = 7)
 - j. Parks and recreation regulations (n = 1)
 - k. Lack of physically accessible facilities and programs (n = 10)
 - l. Lack of cognitively accessible facilities and programs (n = 5)
3. Are there any barriers to participation that exist, but were not listed above? If so, please list them.
- a. “Lack of commitment from participants or anxiety. I see lots of people on Facebook saying "oh wow, that's such a cool program, we should do this!" and then don't. So it could be the cost, or they forgot, but with our teens in particular, I feel like there is an anxiety component as well.” (M-U-39)
 - b. “Lack of a neighborhood pool (may be same as the last one..). To elaborate - a few of our pools were made into splash pads a few years ago.” (M-L-34)
 - c. “Lack of recreation facilities” (MC-U-44)
 - d. “Our older population prefers physical flyers, and they are not always sent out or available at places where they may be (ie, retirement homes, libraries)” (L-L-42)
 - e. “schedule of projects that require park closures, lack of resources at facilities, i.e., electricity, water outlet, functioning water fountains/restrooms, grills, etc.” (LC-L-58)
 - f. “Demands on time - overscheduled children” (M-U-05)
 - g. “Program availability, often have the program they want but the days and/or times don't coordinate with their schedules.” (M-U-50)
 - h. “Fees, some participants are not aware of the scholarship program and or the scholarship program does not cover enough for them to be able to afford to participate.” (LC-M-01)

- i. “Access by means of trails or sidewalks to destinations points.” (LC-M-21)
 - j. “Market flooded with similar programs and services.” (M-U-67)
 - k. “Most people complain that they don't have the time to participate.” (MC-U-14)
4. What is the extent of each barrier to participation in your community?
- a. *only barriers selected in Question 2 are listed*
 - b. Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 10$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 17$)
 - 4. Extreme barrier ($n = 10$)
 - c. Absent feeling of belonging because of their identity
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 2$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 4$)
 - 4. Extreme barrier
 - d. Language barriers
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 8$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 10$)
 - 4. Extreme barrier
 - e. Lack of programming that interests people
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 6$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 10$)
 - 4. Extreme barrier ($n = 3$)
 - f. Facility and program fees
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 15$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 7$)
 - 4. Extreme barrier ($n = 2$)
 - g. Poor or degrading park and facility conditions

1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 6$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 2$)
 4. Extreme barrier ($n = 3$)
- h. Proximity to their nearest park and recreation facility
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 6$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 6$)
 4. Extreme barrier
- i. Lack of affordable public transportation to parks and recreation facilities
1. Not a barrier ($n = 1$)
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 3$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 4$)
 4. Extreme barrier ($n = 1$)
- j. Unsafe conditions (i.e. neighborhood crime, drug use, gang activity, etc.)
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 3$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 3$)
 4. Extreme barrier ($n = 1$)
- k. Parks and recreation regulations
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 1$)
 4. Extreme barrier
- l. Lack of physically accessible facilities and programs
1. Not a barrier ($n = 1$)
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 4$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 5$)
 4. Extreme barrier
- m. Lack of cognitively accessible facilities and programs
1. Not a barrier

2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 4$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 1$)
 4. Extreme barrier
5. From your perspective and experience, what strategies have been most successful in helping your agency address participation barriers?
- a. “We are currently in process of addressing these. A proactive approach with an update master plan or at least a statistically valid survey on community needs that is updated every five years.” (M-U-51)
 - b. “Working with different groups throughout the City: Chamber, Library, etc. I'm not sure what to do about some of the other things. We have gotten better at asking for sponsorships to off-set or lower the cost for some programs that we fell are beneficial for people to participate in (make & take meals for seniors.)” (M-U-39)
 - c. “We have established more inclusive and a broader spectrum of events and programs” (M-L-18)
 - d. “We began a healthy neighborhood program to build trust within residents of neighborhoods that felt they didn't "belong" or have an identity in our community. This has allowed us to gain trust through meaningful relationships, and in turn, allowed for better programming that fits resident desires. We've also equipped them with the proper tools necessary to speak to city officials and other key decision makers who have a strong say in parks and recreation budgets and quality of life issues.” (MC-U-03)
 - e. “Trying to spread the word among citizens who are not current users. It feels like we are constantly pushing programs and activities to the people already utilizing our facilities but not garnering new interest. We've started to add more programming options to get new faces through the door. They have been met with a lukewarm response.” (M-L-35)
 - f. “I wouldn't say we have any major strategy but social media is always something that works. We also try and pass out information about upcoming programs during events.” (MC-U-04)

- g. “Using different marketing avenues to promote programs, events, classes. Using a variety of social media platforms that appeal to different generations to gain awareness of programs, events, etc. Keeping our classes, camps, fitness center memberships, facility rental fees affordable.” (M-L-34)
- h. “A robust Scholarship program, Broadening program offerings for all ages, Activating parks and facilities with good uses to discourage less valued uses.” (M-U-15)
- i. “Word of mouth, social media but there are still a lot of customer that say they are missing things.” (MC-M-02)
- j. “Being willing to try new pilot programs, creating a coalition made up of parents, teachers, coaches, officials etc to learn more about potential barriers or opportunities to create new opportunities for participants. Surveys, evaluating programs each year to see what worked, what didn't, and if any changes need to be made.” (M-U-62)
- k. “Becoming partners with other businesses.” (MC-U-44)
- l. “All of our parks are free, and activities are moderately priced. For things such as Special Olympics and Adaptive Recreation, we are very flexible with working with patrons regarding fees. We also have a very strong 50+ program, and the things we off with that are very reasonably priced and often free. Our before and after school programs offer discounts for people who are on free and reduced lunch and accept DCF as well. We do offer scholarships for families that may not be able to afford activities such as gymnastics, swim lessons and sports.” (L-L-42)
- m. “Experimentation and partnership with other agencies. Experimentation being a willingness to try new things and search for ways to build on what works. Partnership with other parks agencies and other government entities to reach more people and provide more opportunities for programming, facilities, and events for the public.” (LC-M-54)
- n. “consulting studies that show where facilities fall short and how to address them” (LC-L-58)
- o. “We have tried to make programs available throughout the community so that everyone has opportunities to participate.” (L-M-64)

- p. “We offer scholarship programs that cannot afford our programs. We also use several ways to distribute our information to the public.” (MC-U-59)
- q. “Prioritizing needs, Planning for larger participation levels in the future” (M-M-69)
- r. “Increasing accessibility at our facilities and programs” (M-M-12)
- s. “Understanding and listening to the community you serve and what other options are being offered by surrounding communities. This helps identify what is a priority for the community and best approach to covering the need.” (M-U-50)
- t. “Talk to the patrons.” (LC-L-41)
- u. “Attending school fairs prior to the start of school and PTO events.” (M-L-36)
- v. “Social media and constant contact emails” (M-L-60)
- w. “We have tried different marketing strategies” (MC-M-57)
- x. “Attending community events and promoting the agency and its offerings including parks, trails, free programs and locations. The metro is saturated with specialty programs from private groups, residents tend to get overwhelmed by all the offerings in the area they tend to overlook local park and rec offerings.” (LC-M-01)
- y. “Getting information out in a timely manner, utilizing our local connections to continually pushing our information out. We strive to be a community partner (other organizations, user groups, city, USD...)” (MC-U-32)
- z. “determination to work with other municipalities” (LC-M-21)
- aa. “I don't believe many have been addressed. For fees, we do offer scholarships.” (LC-L-49)
- bb. “Different forms of advertising” (MC-U-13)
- cc. “additional advertising of programs, advertising of the repairs facilities are receiving to highlight how we are trying to address them. Violence is the issue that I think has a major impact as it is well known in the community that if you call 911, expect to wait hours.” (M-M-38)
- dd. “Scholarships, Translation App” (M-M-07)

- ee. “Posting information on social media about programs. Face-to-face contact with students at schools encouraging their participation. Having a great experience when they do participate & then deciding to come back.” (M-M-24)
- ff. “Research, community partners/collaborations, and addressing gaps in service.” (M-U-67)
- gg. “Social media” (M-L-23)
- hh. “More lenient on refunds for programs, diversifying marketing distribution, identifying gaps in programming based on community demographics (ex: we have little to no senior programming, but our community was 35% senior citizens)” (M-U-46)
- ii. “Word of mouth has been very helpful in making people aware of what we offer. Increasing social media presence/advertising and emailing past participants have helped make people aware of our increasing offerings.” (MC-U-14)
- jj. “Keeping fees low. Trying to be inclusive for all.” (O-L-16)
- kk. “Creating an adaptive recreation programmer to provide programs for those that accessibility is an issue. Offering a scholarship program and receiving CDBG funding to help provide access to low income families” (M-U-68)
- ll. “More active social media presentation. Having a variety of programs for a variety ages. Offering some free programs.” (M-U-11)
- mm. “We have Spanish speakers on staff and have translated materials. We send out more communication on deadlines and activities. Coming up with what the public wants to participate in can be hard and discouraging.” (MC-M-65)
- nn. “offer programming at a reasonable/cheap rate - offer diverse programming to attract all demographics and ages” (M-M-47)

This section focuses on the barriers your parks and recreation organization experiences while serving the community. These factors are often related to resource, administrative, policy, or outreach constraints.

6. Select all barriers your parks and recreation organization faces while working to fulfill community needs.

- a. Language barriers ($n = 13$)
- b. Offering program that interests people ($n = 19$)
- c. Poor or degrading facility conditions ($n = 8$)
- d. Inadequate marketing ($n = 19$)
- e. Lack of volunteer involvement ($n = 15$)
- f. Staffing shortages ($n = 23$)
- g. Organization policy, regulations, and procedures ($n = 7$)
- h. Lack of internal communication ($n = 9$)
- i. Staff turnover and loss of expertise ($n = 14$)
- j. Poor leadership ($n = 3$)
- k. Lack of buy-in from staff ($n = 11$)
- l. Inflexible budget allocation ($n = 10$)
- m. Inability to meet grant requirements ($n = 1$)
- n. Grant scarcity ($n = 5$)
- o. Lack of funding ($n = 16$)
- p. Unpredictable budget fluctuations ($n = 5$)
- q. Limited Space ($n = 20$)

7. Are there any barriers to capacity that exist, but were not listed above? If so, please list them.

- a. "Lack of vision; lack of accountability" (M-U-51)

- b. “I’m not sure I’d call it a staff shortage but we want to be able to offer more but staff can only do so much if that make sense? We would love to do more adaptive rec programs, but they would have to be contracted out to someone else. Finding quality contractors that are consistent, fairly priced, and easy to work with is difficult to find. We’ve had to let some contractors go due to their ‘work ethic’.”
(M-U-39)
- c. “New facility development outpacing funding, personnel and ongoing expenses.”
(M-U-15)
- d. “We play some of our youth sports in a league with some nearby communities and sometimes we are handcuffed to not move forward with a certain sport or program if those other organizations are not bought in or have enough participants.” (M-U-62)
- e. “Our before and after school programs and summer camps tend to fill up quickly, leaving patrons with little alternatives and scrambling for child care. I wish we could expand these services to accommodate everyone that wants and needs them, but are limited to a certain amount at each school and can only hire so much staff.” (L-L-42)
- f. “tariffs is a big barrier right now” (LC-L-58)
- g. “budget timelines - most budgets are completed in spring with implementation 8 months later - at times it is almost 20 months from request to use of funding” (M-U-05)

- h. “Too many businesses in the area see us as competition and don't always want to work together to serve our communities, they are chasing the money versus the overall effect.” (LC-M-01)
 - i. “Time and pay for staff” (LC-L-49)
 - j. “Sinking budgets” (M-M-38)
 - k. “Location and flooded market” (M-U-67)
 - l. “Entry level staffing is an issue as our pay has become uncompetitive with entry level jobs in the area such as amazon” (M-M-66)
 - m. “We are unique since we don't have a building, only employee one full time staff member and have lost several sports (soccer and football) under past leadership. Thus, I am rebuilding confidence in our rec programs, establishing trust with our community, and expanding the programs that we offer.” (MC-U-14)
 - n. “Lack of knowledge and participation, lack of dedicated Facebook page, inability to find instructors.” (M-U-11)
 - o. “staff not wanting to work together” (MC-M-65)
8. What is the extent of each barrier in your parks and recreation organization?
- a. *only barriers selected in Question 6 are listed*
 - b. Language barriers
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 8$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 5$)
 - 4. Significant barrier ($n = 0$)
 - c. Offering program that interests people

1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 6$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 9$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 4$)
- d. Poor or degrading facility conditions
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 3$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 3$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 2$)
- e. Inadequate marketing
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 5$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 5$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 9$)
- f. Lack of volunteer involvement
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 4$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 8$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 3$)
- g. Staffing shortages
1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 8$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 9$)

4. Significant barrier ($n = 6$)
- h. Organization policy, regulations, and procedures
 1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 1$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 4$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 2$)
- i. Lack of internal communication
 1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 4$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 2$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 3$)
- j. Staff turnover and loss of expertise
 1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 5$)
 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 6$)
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 3$)
- k. Poor leadership
 1. Not a barrier
 2. Somewhat of a barrier
 3. Moderate barrier
 4. Significant barrier ($n = 3$)
- l. Lack of buy-in from staff
 1. Not a barrier

2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 5$)

3. Moderate barrier ($n = 2$)

4. Significant barrier ($n = 4$)

m. Inflexible budget allocation

1. Not a barrier

2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 2$)

3. Moderate barrier ($n = 4$)

4. Significant barrier ($n = 4$)

n. Inability to meet grant requirements

1. Not a barrier

2. Somewhat of a barrier

3. Moderate barrier ($n = 1$)

4. Significant barrier

o. Grant scarcity

1. Not a barrier

2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 1$)

3. Moderate barrier ($n = 4$)

4. Significant barrier

p. Lack of funding

1. Not a barrier

2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 6$)

3. Moderate barrier ($n = 6$)

4. Significant barrier ($n = 4$)

- q. Unpredictable budget fluctuations
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 1$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 1$)
 - 4. Significant barrier ($n = 3$)
 - r. Limited Space
 - 1. Not a barrier
 - 2. Somewhat of a barrier ($n = 2$)
 - 3. Moderate barrier ($n = 12$)
 - 4. Significant barrier ($n = 6$)
9. From your perspective and experience, what strategies have been most successful in helping your organization address the barriers it faces?
- a. “Analyzing department culture and making changes. Setting clear goals and expectations.” (M-U-51)
 - b. “Our city council loves and supports our department, but with the recession, cuts have to be made. Insurance costs rose over 30% and many other services also increased in expense. Trying to keep our programming the same is difficult. This year, we have been fortunate enough to make more partnerships with local businesses to sponsor programs so we didn't have to cut them due to budget constraints.” (M-U-39)
 - c. “We have a good grant finder” (M-L-18)
 - d. “Healthy Neighborhood Initiative and programming; joint study sessions with City Council/Mayor/City Manager” (M-U-03)

- e. “We've tried to increase our marketing to include more social media platforms and printed materials. Word of mouth is a great way to increase participation, but it feels like we are missing the mark on what people want. If no one comes, no one spreads the word.” (M-L-35)
- f. “It's still a work in progress. Some barriers are out of our control, like the older building.” (MC-U-04)
- g. “We try to have someone on staff that is bi-lingual in Spanish as that's the language that needs a translator. Funding fluctuates year to year as any revenue that we earn goes into the general fund so we don't get to put it back into our facilities.” (M-L-34)
- h. “Consolidation of departments to assist in making facilities better for the community.” (M-U-43)
- i. “New City Administration, Zero based budgeting, 2 year budgeting, Mission Driven-Value Based Culture, expanding programs for all ages beyond youth sports” (M-U-15)
- j. “Partnering with other places to gain space such as our school district.” (MC-M-02)
- k. “we have to schedule wisely meaning gym space, field usage, staff etc. it takes a lot of pre planning, communication, calendar/rec software current so we dont double book. we have added more storage space for some equipment/facility needs and that has helped some.” (M-U-62)
- l. “Working with community parters” (MC-U-44)

- m. "I know childrens services has been able to hire more people to service more families, I just wish there were more offerings outside of us so we were not one of the only providers in the area for before and after school care and summer camps." (L-L-42)
- n. "Getting great buy in from employees on projects/programs that they are passionate about. Administration being willing to take chances and give opportunities to try new things." (LC-M-54)
- o. "consulting studies and word of mouth from the community" (LC-L-58)
- p. "We have been successful in hiring bilingual employees at several community centers, and this has helped tremendously with communication." (L-M-64)
- q. "We work with the local schools and colleges to use their facilities. We also lean on them to help provide staff for our programs." (MC-U-59)
- r. "Documenting processes and operations. Social media for Marketing outreach. Increasing salaries and wages to retain employees. Fostering a standard of open communication across divisions." (M-M-69)
- s. "We used to have yearly pay increases tied with performance evaluations. Those have been paused in the last couple years." (M-M-12)
- t. "Understanding what program(s) is a priority for the community and has the largest impact. The programs higher on the priority list are more likely to receive the funding or space needed to ensure its success." (M-U-50)
- u. "Discussing issues up front" (LC-L-41)
- v. "Master plan creation/ offering open house to get input from the community" (M-L-60)

- w. “RACKO motto, Remaining A Close Knit Organization. The employee committees and being able to share updates at monthly meetings or various luncheons or social events where we can discuss. Hearing directly from mid-level staff of what they are working on versus getting a generalized report. Those post meeting conversations or social setting conversations have so much value and resources that someone may not have considered are presented and greatly help grow or advance a program/project while also saving funds. When upper admin staff try to control what is shared- silo's form and there isn't cohesion amongst staff.” (LC-M-01)
- x. “We have become super good at being fluid, and able to adapt.” (Jason Steadman)
- y. “Surveying the public, finding out what those barriers are then finding ways to address them.” (LC-M-21)
- z. “Programs are full, so we get new spaces but don't hire more staff to help with the increase in activities.” (LC-L-49)
- aa. “Asking for community input for future programs wants” (MC-U-13)
- bb. “Any external funding source helps off set costs, however administration only looks at expenses not caring what the revenue is. Even if you completely cover all costs, if the expense puts you over budget it is an issue” (M-M-38)
- cc. “Staff pulling together to get the job done. Showing appreciation & offering discounts or incentives to our volunteers so they will continue to help coach.” (M-M-24)
- dd. “Again, research, educating others in the profession, and collaboration.” (M-U-67)

- ee. “Ongoing issue that has not been resolved” (M-M-66)
- ff. “Sponsorships” (M-L-23)
- gg. “I have been listening to our community and working to meet its needs rather than spend resources unnecessarily. Also, I collaborate with other entities to enrich the community and strengthen our ties in the community. We have increased our social media and email advertising to assist in growing participation numbers.” (MC-U-14)
- hh. “Creativity in finding instructors and networking with other departments. Keep pushing and taking over making marketing materials.” (M-U-11)
- ii. “Tried new activities and partnerships in the community. Given surveys for people's interests.” (MC-M-65)

Appendix C.3 Survey 2

Understanding Barriers to Participation in Kansas Parks and Recreation Settings,

Part 2

Thank you for participating in this study! This is the second of three surveys you will be sent. The survey will consist of point-allocation questions, each followed by a free-response question. Please plan to spend **up to 20 minutes** completing it to allow time for thoughtful responses. The survey structure and design are **not intended for completion on a mobile device**. Please use a laptop or desktop computer.

Participation is voluntary, and you are free to end the survey at any time without consequence. Any personally identifiable information will be kept confidential in all reports. Responses will be

viewed by Kansas State University graduate researcher, Evelyn Peat, and supervising professor, Dr. Sarah Jackson. Your identity will not be revealed outside of the KSU research team. All related documentation will be securely stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. Your personal contact information will not be sold to a third-party company. The study's raw data will be deleted five years after the final date of this project. It is possible that your responses, without your personal information, could be stored and used for future research studies without asking for further consent. Please direct any questions you have to Dr. Sarah Jackson from the Park Management and Conservation program at Kansas State University at sjackso@ksu.edu, or to graduate student, Evelyn Peat at peateve@ksu.edu. If you have questions concerning institutional review, please contact the Research Compliance Office at comply@k-state.edu and reference Study Number [IRB-12982].

1. What is your name?
2. You have 100 points to show how much **you perceive the presence** of the following barriers to participation in your community. Please distribute the points based on your **personal experience and observations** from working for your parks and recreation agency and interacting with the community. Barriers that you believe are more present in your community should receive more points.
 - a. Proximity to parks and facilities $(M = 10.55, SD = 12.81)$
 - b. Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks $(M = 31.16, SD = 19.05)$
 - c. Language barriers $(M = 8.74, SD = 9.46)$
 - d. Lack of programming that interests people $(M = 17.03, SD = 12.03)$
 - e. Facility and program fees $(M = 15.81, SD = 8.95)$

- f. Lack of time in their schedule $(M = 16.39, SD = 9.43)$
3. Briefly explain why you chose to allocate your points this way.
- a. “I work in registration; money is a barrier for a lot of people. When things are tight financially, people can't spend \$10 when they are having to choose between food, rent and something fun for the kids to do. That also includes our elderly population.” (L-L-42)
 - b. “Transportation for senior citizens to our programs is a barrier and fees for some families.” (LC-U-61)
 - c. “I think language barrier may be higher, but we don't currently offer anything to help with this so I don't believe people would sign up for programs due to this.” (LC-L-49)
 - d. “I feel like the programming is youth based and not directed towards adults. I feel there can be a language barrier and others don't know what is being offered.” (L-M-64)
 - e. “We have a 1/3 of a mile plan to have public park or green space accessible to every Shawnee resident and there are still a few areas that we better access (sidewalks, trails) as well as areas that are still identified to develop. I feel we do a good job of informing the residents of our Parks and Recreation system through print, social, events, and word of mouth. We are making improvements to communication to reduce language barrier issues. People are over-programmed and I think that limits their ability to participate.” (M-U-68)
 - f. “Awareness about the programs and spaces. We regularly get people who don't get out and walk or explore to see what all is around them. They go from point A

to B, only where they need to. Fees are a huge issue, even if folks are on a fixed income and getting a scholarship, if it's not free or cheap, they won't spend the money on it or their budget is too tight or they can't swing it without sacrificing something else.” (LC-M-01)

- g. “Equally distributed the top four that seem to be what residents tell us in reasons they either choose to or did not know about activities, programs, events in our parks and facilities across the city.” (MC-U-03)
- h. “My low points would be for the following: We are a small town and close to most patrons. We are a majority English-speaking community. People can always use a lack of time as an excuse

My high points: Our facilities are aging, something that is mentioned more than anything, and we rely on the school district. Our pricing is fair and reasonable. We do lack in some programming, and we have heard this as well. Awareness is always something we deal with, no matter how much you feel you let people know. If people want to know, they will seek you out; if not, good luck making them aware!” (MC-U-04)

- i. “Parks and trails have been a top priority for residents and we've come through meeting those requests. There are other City/County programs we compete with, so it's hard to keep up with all of the opportunities. We have a growing population. Older generations request classes such as Tai Chi, Volleyball league, but we cannot justify creating it without a high enough demand. Rental and membership fees can be a bit much, but we are comparable, and we offer scholarships for memberships and programming.” (M-M-07)

- j. “If an individual doesn't take the local newspaper, doesn't listen to local radio and doesn't follow our organization on facebook, it is hard to reach them.” (MC-U-13)
- k. “Our community has a lot of attrition annually. With students, military and workforce coming and going keeping awareness of P&R is challenging. Barriers like language, interests and available time are always present and must be reviewed when deciding to continue programs, offering new programs and communication of offerings. Our community has a robust scholarship program aimed to eliminate fees as a barrier providing those that need it reach out for the programs and the access to the scholarship program. We are in the mid sixty percent of households within a 10 minute walk of a park. If public school grounds and KSU campus was added in access would be much higher.” (M-U-15)
- l. “There seems to be a lack of advertising and marketing for programming. If people are not on social media sites, or do not know to follow parks and rec, spreading the word is challenging. There is minimal language barrier, but that's not to say there isn't any. With few facilities, and the necessity to charge for some events and activities, it creates an obstacle for our participants.” (M-L-23)
- m. “We have seen a decline in participation in our Youth Sports programs over the last decade. Kids just seem not as interested in the traditional sports anymore. Parents don't make the time to get kids where they need to be - too much hassle for them. We are looking to offer different programming, but need to get input from the community to see what they want.” (M-M-24)

- n. “advertising could be a lot better!!!! Some programs are not offered when convenient for working people. Money is tight, especially for GOV workers.” (O-L-28)
- o. “Location of the parks/facilities in our community. And the multi-use facilities we utilize within our community.” (MC-U-32)
- p. “Sometimes the day and time of the classes we offer doesn't work for people's schedules, which is I think a bigger barrier than even proximity to our parks.” (M-L-34)
- q. “I think people are unaware of the program offerings in general. Parks and recreation agencies aren't great at getting their information to the public in a timely manner and I think it is difficult to do both portions of your job - program and market.” (M-L-35)
- r. “Marketing is lacking, needs to explore ways to reach all demographics and not the normal ways. Families and individuals are busier than ever; however, they need time to decompress and need to take time for themselves. Fees for memberships are being implemented next year for the first time.” (M-L-36)
- s. “People's schedules are so busy right now. It is hard to find time for extra.” (LC-L-41)
- t. “Youth sports today have moved to more competitive private leagues and have moved away from utilizing city parks and recreation programs. We also do not currently have a lot of programs for empty nesters or the tween age years.” (M-U-43)

- u. “Families in our community are busy and that is why I ranked lack of time in their schedule as the highest number of points. Along with being busy is if a park or facility is too far from their house, they may not have the time to travel there for a program. I do not think we have a lack of programming that interests people, but that was as close as I could get to the choice I'd include of programs that fill up SO fast people can't enroll, and they have a lack of interest in programs that are left.” (LC-L-45)
- v. “With our community so close to other successful P&R systems I think there is a lot of competition. It's hard for residents to take in all the options that are available.” (M-U-50)
- w. “There is not a lot for Adults to do, but then again when we do offer classes they don't always go over. How much is that due to busy schedules not sure. I also think we need to do a better job of getting the word out.” (MC-M-57)
- x. “If I'm not aware of programs, facilities or parks that are available to me, I won't know what I won't know, therefore can't use what facilities I don't know about. Some programs are better at marketing what they have, but some aren't.” (LC-L-58)
- y. “In our community we use a lot of social media and some of our patrons are not in tune with that, so they feel left out of the loop. Though we use several other methods to get the word out they always seem to miss out on the information.” (MC-U-59)
- z. “Lack of awareness-individuals are inundated with so much information that they miss info. Lack of programming-we are a small community with a small staff;

so being able to provide programs for everyone we don't have the staffing for.

Lack of time-for example pool hours are still set to what they have been when it was normal for one parent staying home with kids.” (M-L-60)

aa. “30- lack of time for their schedules and our facility schedule. only so much facility space and time to even program what we want to and being available for rentals, events, etc.

25- communication/marketing and outreach is forever a moving target on our end but we always still hear at some point "i didnt know anything about this" no matter our efforts.

20- proximity- even with being a small town, its rural and there are definitely transportation barriers at times for all aged residents.” (M-U-62)

bb. “All of our parks in town are close to neighborhoods and available to the public. I think with our Spanish Speakers and lack of programming interests are what lacks.” (MC-M-65)

cc. “Mostly the issues faced are a combination of being close to the activities and the awareness that the activities are actually taking place” (M-M-66)

dd. “Our city has successfully positioned parks and recreational facilities equitably throughout our community. With over 30 languages spoken in our households, communication can be challenging. This diversity highlights the various ethnicities and cultures within our community, which can result in differing interests. For instance, traditional American Midwest recreational opportunities may not appeal to individuals from countries like Somalia or Haiti.

Additionally, language barriers can hinder relationship-building, making it difficult to identify the leisure services that everyone truly desires. While program fees might impact participation, we strive to keep our fees affordable and offer scholarships for those with proven need.

It's common for many people to express that they are "too busy," but in my experience, we often manage to find time for activities that are most important to us.” (M-U-67)

4. You have 100 points to show how the parks and recreation **organization you are employed at prioritizes efforts** to overcome the following barriers. Please distribute the points based on how you perceive your agency’s actions, with higher priority barriers receiving more points.

- a. Proximity to parks and facilities $(M = 16.43, SD = 14.39)$
- b. Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks $(M = 25.75, SD = 17.53)$
- c. Language barriers $(M = 5.14, SD = 5.98)$
- d. Lack of programming that interests people $(M = 20.89, SD = 13.54)$
- e. Facility and program fees $(M = 21.96, SD = 12.64)$
- f. Lack of time in their schedule $(M = 6.79, SD = 6.41)$

5. You have 100 points to exhibit how **you would prioritize efforts** to overcome the following participation barriers. Please distribute the points based on how you would prioritize efforts to overcome each barrier to participation, with higher priority barriers receiving more points.

- a. Proximity to parks and facilities $(M = 10.71, SD = 12.15)$
- b. Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks $(M = 38.45, SD = 19.37)$

- c. Language barriers $(M = 7.59, SD = 10.57)$
 - d. Lack of programming that interests people $(M = 21.55, SD = 11.58)$
 - e. Facility and program fees $(M = 15.17, SD = 12.78)$
 - f. Lack of time in their schedule $(M = 6.90, SD = 5.41)$
6. Please explain your point allocation and any point discrepancies between the previous two questions.
- a. “I believe we need to work at getting the cost of our programs lowers or free.”
(LC-L-49)
 - b. “I feel that currently we are focused on trying to come up with interesting programs that will bring participation. But it has not been effective. I think we should be focused on letting people know who we are and what we do.” (L-M-64)
 - c. “I think the allocation is appropriate for our community and their needs. The lack of time in schedule is a personal choice of residents and I'm not sure how efforts of the City could overcome that barrier.” (M-U-68)
 - d. “As a communicator and past marketer, I would increase the time spent on awareness of programs, facilities, and parks through strategic messaging campaigns.” (MC-U-03)
 - e. “Since I am the Director my answers are the same. I feel our most important issue is making people aware and more importantly making them want to be aware. We also need to work on increasing our programming.” (MC-U-04)
 - f. “I think lack of awareness at some point has to be put on the individual. They need to change how they receive information. I put more time into finding different programs that interest all people in our community.” (MC-U-13)

- g. “I believe that awareness of what is offered is the biggest hurdle in a continually changing community. Once a person is aware we can better provide services and gather feedback on program needs, program offering time and day, ect. to reduce barriers. We must continually work to be relative and focusing on delivering great services to the public.” (M-U-15)
- h. “We need to seek more input from community members regarding the programs they would like to see offered & are willing to participate in.” (M-M-24)
- i. “People won't show up if they don't know about it. Plain and simple. Our org is fine with their marketing efforts... complacency” (O-L-28)
- j. “I believe the two categories between what our organization and what I personally would allocate time/resources to barriers are pretty similar, based on the situation and location they could be swung either way (meaning dependent on the exact matter at hand, the number would be interchangeable).” (MC-U-32)
- k. “I believe that our department does a great job of marketing our programs. We have people that return each session to repeat classes. I don't see language as a barrier.” (M-L-34)
- l. “I think we need more focus on advertising and marketing and I do not believe my agency agrees. I need to focus on programs people are interested in and are willing to go out of their way or fit it into their busy schedules to participate in. Again, I do not feel my agency is alignment with that thought. They want to focus on revenue generation and pricing pyramids and it gets clunky on the programming side of things having to regard the those items.” (M-L-35)

- m. “Purchasing new park land is a main point in our department. Marketing needs to be addressed to bring awareness in our community for the public to be healthy and live a happier life.” (M-L-36)
- n. “I think that making the public aware of all our programs and having programs that interest all ages plus providing scholarships to those who cannot afford the fees would help to increase participation.” (M-U-43)
- o. “As a volunteer coordinator I want to make sure we are offering opportunities at a variety of location around our county. My importance of that might be higher than marketing for example.” (LC-L-35)
- p. “You don't have control over an individuals time and we already offer a great scholarship program, so for our department, it would be focusing on awareness and assuring we have options close to the community” (M-U-50)
- q. “I don't think we as an organization do a whole lot.” (MC-M-57)
- r. “Being bilingual and an immigrant, I know how hard it is to overcome language barriers in different environments. Parks may be visited; however, facilities that may offer other programs can become an intimidating challenge for people who may not speak English very well. Likewise, fees are always a topic of contention for park and recreation facility users. Finding that balance needs to always be at the forefront of Park & Rec professionals.” (LC-L-58)
- s. “We do a lot with scholarships and aid to help people afford the programs. We also so a lot of different programs to try and fit all the needs of our community. Trying to get the word out about these programs and benefits is what the main

focus is on. We need to keep our people informed and that will keep them coming in.” (MC-U-59)

- t. “No discrepancies” (M-L-60)
- u. “I would focus more on awareness and less on proximity. both parts, stand by trying to keep our program costs low and affordable but always having options as we do for scholarships, membership discounts and opportunities to give everyone a fair shake at being a part of something.” (M-U-62)
- v. “I feel we currently are not doing anything to help get more people out in our parks. We need more communication and ideas of activities. I personally would get things printed in dual languages and survey the public for what activities they might want to participate in.” (MC-M-68)
- w. “I would focus on spreading out activities and bringing up communications with social media or other outlets” (M-M-66)
- x. “We have been successful in positioning facilities and parks equitably, so I would rate that aspect lower on our current priority list. However, due to budget cuts and ongoing efforts to streamline costs, our marketing budget has been significantly reduced, resulting in the loss of a dedicated full-time employee. To effectively promote our message and brand, we need to increase our marketing budget and efforts.

Language barriers, which often lead to cultural barriers, are significant issues in our community that should be addressed more proactively. Everyone deserves the opportunity to participate in parks and recreation, so we must find better ways to build trust and relationships to bridge these gaps and create essential programs.

As I mentioned earlier, if something is important to you, you will find the time for it. I believe the same principle applies to funding as well.” (M-U-65)

- y. “I think we spend a lot of time on programming but not enough on reaching a wide audience to attract them to our programming.” (M-M-69)

The next question focuses on the most common **organizational barriers** as identified in Survey 1 responses from parks and recreation professionals.

7. You have 100 points to show how much **you perceive the presence** of the following **barriers to your organization's capacity** to address the participation barrier issues discussed earlier in the survey.

Please distribute the points based on your personal experience and observations. Barriers that you believe are more present in your organization should receive more points.

- a. Offering program that interests people ($M = 19.11, SD = 16.73$)
- b. Not enough marketing support ($M = 15.17, SD = 16.77$)
- c. Lack of volunteer involvement ($M = 10.07, SD = 9.66$)
- d. Staffing shortages ($M = 11.24, SD = 11.82$)
- e. Staff turnover and loss of expertise ($M = 8.66, SD = 7.97$)
- f. Lack of funding ($M = 10.59, SD = 11.77$)
- g. Lack of community investment ($M = 6.28, SD = 11.44$)
- h. The local recreation market is flooded ($M = 8.59, SD = 10.63$)
- i. Finding quality staff and contractors ($M = 10.97, SD = 11.69$)

8. Briefly explain why you chose to allocate your points this way.
- a. “We need to offer more programs, but staff do not have the capacity to do this.”
(LC-L-49)
 - b. “We cannot find quality staff that are able to program a community center. They don't have any idea or the concept. We have warm bodies, to open and close centers. We don't have parents that will step up and coach their child's sport teams. We can not be everyone's coach.” (L-M-64)
 - c. “Limited funding for additional staff to meet the needs/requests of the community. Keeping up with rapidly changing trends.” (M-U-68)
 - d. “Our recreation commission is separate from city parks and facilities. Meaning: We provide the programs and manage the facilities/park areas, but the city maintains and decides whether or not to invest in them. This is the largest barrier, as we provide the spaces and programs and listen to the community as we're bringing the people to these places, but it's lost on the city staff and council members, who are disconnected and do not value parks and recreation systems like we do and have additional competing interests, political capital, and budgetary requests.” (MC-U-03)
 - e. “Lack of community investment is one we continue to deal with. This leads to the funding issue as people are not willing to allocate taxes to us. Lack of interest also means we don't have as many people participating.” (MC-U-04)
 - f. “In a small community, sometimes we want to offer new ideas that we think interest people but we can't find a quality instructor.” (MC-U-13)

- g. “I believe we must keep up with recreation and outdoor trends, stay relevant and continue to be innovative in our program offerings. We need to continue to find creative ways to reach existing and new customers. Retention of quality staff over time will stabilize the foundation of our programming and allow for consistency over time.” (M-U-15)
- h. “Marketing is key in getting programming information out to residents. With no local news paper, and social media as the primary source of information gathering, much of what is promoted is either missed or buried among other social media posts.” (M-L-23)
- i. “The current P & R Director does not have much interest in offering new programming because that takes time & effort. Wants to continue to do what we always have done. We rely on volunteers to coach. Because of a lack of volunteers, staff often end up coaching teams which takes time away from creating or implementing new programs or seeking input from the community on what they would like offered.” (M-M-24)
- j. “Not enough \$ to do what we want. Marketing can always be better/more. Funding to keep staff, hire staff, reward staff is at all-time low. Morale is poor here.” (O-L-28)
- k. “We are a fairly small recreation department in a metro area setting; we keep a good percentage of our community involved in our programs/activities but there is always another option just down the road.” (MC-U-32)

- l. “It's hard to find dedicated staff at the payrates we offer. Once we do find them, they stay around because they like the relationships they build with the participants.” (M-L-34)
- m. “I could have split the points up because several of these items are barriers, but I feel as though the ones I listed are the biggest issues. In the KC metro area, we are saturated with other agencies and private companies who are all trying to get the same people to participate. I think it leads to public fatigue - who do I go to, who do I trust, what have I heard about these programs/agencies. Ultimately, the marketing is the biggest hurdle for PR professionals.” (M-L-35)
- n. “Turnover in staff is extremely high with full and part time staff. Lack of training, communication and unappreciated. We are facing a deficit for 2026 and have been tasked with discontinuing programs and raising prices.” (M-L-36)
- o. “I don't think that we have enough programs to catch all of the age groups in our service area. Also lack of funding plays a part in not being able to offer the added programs” (M-U-43)
- p. “Our community is invested in what we do and it shows through their use of parks and facilities. It can be hard to tell our stories because we have a small marketing team for the size of our organization and we are not empowered to be involved in the creation of collaterals, social posts, etc.” (LC-L-45)
- q. “Hiring variable staff is challenging because they only need to be scheduled when a program is taking place and that schedule varies. If we have more space and staff, we could do more. We also lack the volunteers needed for big festivals.” (M-U-50)

- r. “Finding what interests people is hard, but just offering something different on a consistent basis till we find it is something we should be doing; not having a good marketing plan hurts everyone.” (MC-M-57)
- s. “Funding is the most common barrier to any program/project/upgrade/development that our organization is facing when thinking of how to move forward. While our organization is doing the best we can given the dollars we are allocated annually, an increase in the mill levy will help not only support current projects, it will also invest in all the things our district would like to accomplish in the next 10-15 year.” (LC-L-58)
- t. “It is pretty even across the board on those barriers. We do lack more in volunteers especially when it comes to coaches.” (MC-U-59)
- u. “We don't necessarily have a staffing shortage but our department only has three full time employees. So being to offer a large variety of program is difficult. The local recreation market is flooded, people want recreation opportunities that are down the street from their house. Close to walk to” (M-L-60)
- v. “Programming for a community is always going to be a challenge of what people actually want vs. what people actually sign up for. its a lot of trial and error and will always be trending in a direction and could change at any moment.

Volunteer coaches and volunteers for anything whether a board, event, group etc. everyone wears a lot of hats and usually the same few people on every volunteer group.

flooded market- youth rec sports will always be vital to me, but i'm fully aware the competitive sports market is flooded too so we will always lose some participants to that and that's ok.

then hiring young teen staff for refs, officials etc. always a challenge but sometimes we get some incredible ones that stick around just part of it.” (M-U-62)

- w. “We need to find what will bring the people to the parks, especially busy parents.” (MC-M-65)
 - x. “Its a small combination of most of these factors that leads to the issues” (M-M-66)
 - y. “My previous comments explain program interests and marketing support, as well as funding. Staff is challenging in western Kansas - it is difficult to find quality, trained staff members and difficult to keep them. If employees are not from this area, they typically use Garden City as a rung to move up the ladder. Finally, a new facility will open soon in GC. We have a YMCA, Parks and Rec, and now a large private facility. We will soon see if our market will be flooded.” (M-U-67)
 - z. “One of the hardest challenges from my perspective is finding quality staff and retaining them. We have marketing support but it is a small team. Finding quality contractors you don't have to constantly watch seem to be few and far between.” (M-M-69)
9. While parks and recreation agencies cannot fully address participation barriers caused by external factors, your actions may still influence some areas more than others. Please

allocate 100 points across the categories, giving more **points to barriers that you feel your agency has the most control over.**

- a. Proximity to parks and facilities $(M = 10.88, SD = 13.80)$
- b. Lack of awareness of programs, facilities, and parks $(M = 31.35, SD = 19.68)$
- c. Language barriers $(M = 5.19, SD = 7.41)$
- d. Lack of programming that interests people $(M = 18.85, SD = 16.14)$
- e. Facility and program fees $(M = 29.04, SD = 18.60)$
- f. Lack of time in their schedule $(M = 3.15, SD = 5.16)$

10. Briefly explain why you allocated your points this way.

- a. “We have strong communications, marketing, and strategic efforts in our messaging as far as telling our story and getting the community buy-in. We also value the community's voice and believe that we listen and hear them when it comes to offering the programming they need, desire, and are interested in. And with that comes the data behind what people are willing/not willing to pay for recreational programming, events, and activities.” (MC-U-03)
- b. “My top three are the things that we have complete control over.” (MC-U-04)
- c. “We can create more programming even with minimal initial involvement.” (M-M-07)
- d. “We continually look for new programs and try to keep our fees reasonable for all.” (MC-U-13)
- e. “We can affect all of the barriers by connecting the participants to our programs and facilities. Once, connected we can assist with scholarships, potential adjust

offering time and day, ascertain feedback on needed or missing programs of interest, and access.” (M-U-15)

- f. “We know what programming would benefit our residents, it's just the funding and fees that create the barriers keeping our patrons from joining.” (M-L-23)
- g. “We have control over program fees & can offer programs at a good rate due to a city mill levy tax that supports our programs. We have a City Marketing Dept. which could help promote programs & facilities in a better way.” (M-M-24)
- h. “people don't go to things they don't know about” (O-L-28)
- i. “We set our price points and details for our programs. We should know if there are programs that are wanted, and if people are interested in participation. We have some control over facilities but a lot of that is set (via city or USD facilities). But we as a recreation agency should be in tune to what our community wants/needs and what that cost would look like.” (MC-U-32)
- j. “We have most control over fees and marketing efforts.” (M-L-34)
- k. “We are aware of our issues, but do not have the staff or financial means to fix it. I think my agency tries many ways to get the word out regarding our programs and activities, but we have a problem recruiting new participants. Instead we see the same faces over and over again. Program fees will always be an issue as well. We frequently hear from participants and members that fees are too high and they have to eliminate something from their budget. We end up being the cut spending in households.” (M-L-35)

- l. “Keeping our facilities clean and up to date for the public. Charging membership fees and spectators for tournaments in 2026. Increase marketing to expose the community to what we offer.” (M-L-36)
- m. “We can translate material where needed-we just don't seek our translations on a regular basis due to a low demand. Without the supports in place it can be slow if we need last minute translation.” (LC-L-45)
- n. “You really have to spread out the attention amongst all areas the best you can.” (M-U-50)
- o. “I allocated the points based on what I felt our organization has the most control over. Some things like location are something we cannot help with, unless there are more funding or donations of land happen, but other things such as fees and language barriers can be tackled.” (LC-L-58)
- p. “We have absolute control of all of these. We have less when it comes to fees as we have to make sure, we are at least breaking even. We do the programming and advertising so that is all on us.” (MC-U-59)
- q. “We can control, change, edit and enhance our marketing or lack of awareness and always try to do better and change with the times or what reaches more people. And we control our own budget year to year as part of the City of Eudora, so we have control and want to with not gauging prices, competitive cost recovery type programs, and we have the luxury of not needing to make a certain revenue to keep a program we think is essential.” (M-U-62)
- r. “We are close to several parks; we take our day campers walking to them. I also think that the fees and scheduling could be controlled. We have access to

community event calendars that would help us to not double book events.” (MC-M-65)

- s. “We can spread our activities out across the city and make them more affordable” (M-M-66)
- t. “Ultimately, our community decides on the development of new parks and facilities. The only control we have is in how we promote a bond or vote for these new initiatives. Additionally, we can raise awareness about available programs and facilities. I can create social media posts, commercials, flyers, guides, and run advertisements, but unless people are inclined to engage with this information, I cannot influence them.

I can utilize language tools available on the internet or specialized translation programs to help address language barriers. However, it’s important that the other person is also willing to use these devices or programs.

I can develop programming that interests others, but that requires them to share their opinions and ideas with me. While I can influence fees to a large extent, our governing body ultimately makes the final decisions. Finally, I have no control over the lack of time in patrons' schedules”. (M-U-67)

- u. “Facility and program fees received less because they are influenced by our budget and the market in the metro.” (M-M-69)

Appendix C.4 Survey 3

Understanding Barriers to Participation in Kansas Parks and Recreation Settings, Part 3

Thank you for participating in this study! This is the **final survey** of the study. The Survey will consist of two free-response questions, followed by a section of multiple-choice questions. Please plan to spend **up to 15 minutes** completing it to allow time for thoughtful responses.

Participation is voluntary, and you are free to end the survey at any time without consequence. Any personally identifiable information will be kept confidential in all reports. Responses will be viewed by Kansas State University graduate researcher, Evelyn Peat, and supervising professor, Dr. Sarah Jackson. Your identity will not be revealed outside of the KSU research team. All related documentation will be securely stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. Your personal contact information will not be sold to a third-party company. The study's raw data will be deleted five years after the final date of this project. It is possible that your responses, without your personal information, could be stored and used for future research studies without asking for further consent. Please direct any questions you have to Dr. Sarah Jackson from the Park Management and Conservation program at Kansas State University at sjackso@ksu.edu, or to graduate student, Evelyn Peat at peateve@ksu.edu. If you have questions concerning institutional review, please contact the Research Compliance Office at comply@k-state.edu and reference Study Number [IRB-12982].

1. **What is your name?**

Your name will not appear in any reports. This question is only used to link your survey responses with your previous answers (e.g., your level of management and community size).

The first two survey rounds showed that “Lack of Awareness” is the most prevalent and statistically significant practitioner-perceived barrier to participation. This survey focuses on this issue.

"Lack of Awareness"- An absence of knowledge and/or understanding that something is happening or exists.

2. Please reflect briefly on causes for “Lack of Awareness” of your agency's offerings among community members and **list 3 - 5 causes in the order they occur to you.**

- a. “Not enough promotion. Other activities in the community going on.” (MC-U-10)
- b. “Older community doesn't use social media. We don't print anymore.” (MC-U-44)

- c. “Lack of social media outreach (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) Lack of traditional media outreach (radio, newspaper, tv) Small city, small budget - lack of funding to get the word out about programming” (M-L-23)
- d. “Marketing opportunities (few outlets) Marketing strategy (what we could do better?) Pre-conceived ideas of what "rec centers" offer” (MC-M-40)
- e. “Not following social media outlets, Not subscribing to constant contact emails, Not aware of our location” (M-L-60)
- f. “Not subscribed to social media, Text message services not enabled, Fliers do not get home from School” (MC-U-22)
- g. “No Marketing & promotional plan, Budget regarding advertising, Competitive Market” (M-U-51)
- h. “-Market is over saturated: so many specialty groups in the area promoting program offerings and there are so many programs being offered, folks tend to avoid all marketing things altogether. -E-newsletters are going to junk mail boxes. Not everyone has transitioned to the digital world as successfully. Paper fliers are out and costly for agencies. -Not enough information is advertised and Websites can get clunky.” (LC-M-01)
- i. “Too many ways to receive information, too much to keep up with, time constraints, lack of knowing when more time should be spent reading the information” (LC-M-21)
- j. “A lack of or desire to understand why something is organized the way it is. Usually it deals with specific logistics of why we have certain programs or why we have buildings or structures in a certain place.” (LC-M-54)
- k. “Don't know where to look - Didn't know it was offered. Not something they can afford. (access to robust scholarship program). Mis information - Not going to the source or provider for the best upto date information. No central community information page highlighting all the community has to offer.” (M-U-15)
- l. “lack of awareness of where money comes from to maintain” (MC-M-65)
- m. “not enough advertising, not enough word of mouth, lack of social media presence, people just moved into town, so they don't know what is offered within

the County, those that live within the county only wants to do things near to them therefore excluding other locations' programs” (LC-L-58)

- n. “people not knowing where to look for information, multiple weakly run sources for information, overly-centralized communication that doesn't cover all departments” (M-M-66)
- o. “No direct marketing for our programs/amenities. Staff spread too thin to get the word out on programming as we are consistently catching up rather than being ahead. Expected to offer too many services that are diluted by sheer numbers.” (M-L-35)
- p. “Lack of transportation, lack of financial resources, and lack of diversity in programming.” (LC-L-49)
- q. “People don't listen to local radio or subscribe to local newspapers like they used to.” (MC-U-13)
- r. “With how many outlets of "getting the word out" it's difficult to hit them all. We recently started making tik tok videos to advertise our programs but we are still failing to get out hard copies in the mail.” (M-L-33)
- s. “Apathy, inconsistent marketing, brand identity” (MC-U-04)
- t. “Even with all the social medias, newsletters, emails etc theres always people not being reached, not for lack of effort on our end. people dont always read even if they see it” (M-U-62).
- u. “Lack of proper marketing, like not reaching the right people, lack in us knowing how to reach people” (MC-M-57)
- v. “Community members connect to information in different ways, and our agency is good at print work, but lacks in the ways it engages younger audiences with social media. Families are busy and sometimes receive so much information they miss a program or class they'd like to be involved with. Information is shared too late.” (LC-L-45)
- w. “Programs not promoted, Lack of interest” (M-U-43)
- x. “I just think it is an excuse. We send a registration form home with every kid in our district. The lack of going through a child's bag is part of the problem also.

They also don't read emails that are sent to them for whatever reason.” (MC-U-31)

- y. “City Counsel makes decisions that impact our department without asking for information, instead of putting the community first they only think of the homeless and budget.” (M-L-36)
 - z. “The lack of one central information source - in past, newspapers served this function; Multiple languages; Information overload; Too many options; Lack of funds for dedicated communications or marketing staff” (M-U-67)
 - aa. “Lack of Awareness is directly tied to: Lack of a marketing strategy, Lack of funds to support marketing, Lack of education on how social media works” (O-L-16)
 - bb. “1. They might see it, but not in a way that they actually process/interpret the information. (ex. on FB, but they didn't see it because they aren't on often/checking it regularly). Or don't stop to read it. 2. Not getting the information to the individuals (they don't read their emails, look on social media, read flyer/enter building with our advertisements). - this is what people claim often, but its because they don't open the email/notification. 3. people aren't looking out for our programs and thus don't see them. Many people think we are just youth sports and don't connect us to a variety of events we host. 4. lack of followers/people following the Rec to see what we post on social media.” (MC-U-14)
3. On a typical week in your role, how often do you think about "Lack of Awareness" in your community?
- a. Multiple times a day (11.8%)
 - b. Once a day (11.8%)
 - c. Once every other day (17.6%)
 - d. Once or twice a week (32.4%)
 - e. Every few weeks (20.6%)
 - f. Never (5.9%)

During the first two stages of this study, multiple themes surrounding "Lack of Awareness" emerged in the free response sections. **Please rate how much you agree/disagree with each theme statement.**

4.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
L1. People are oversaturated with advertising and information about community offerings.	6.1%	27.3%	9.1%	39.4%	18.1%
L2. Using a diverse set of marketing methods (e.g., Instagram, fliers, email, etc.) helps reach the community's diverse demographics.	12.1%	0%	3.0%	39.4%	45.5%
L3. "Lack of Awareness" will always be an issue parks and recreation agencies will have to deal with. Outreach is forever a moving target.	0%	12.1%	6.1%	36.4%	45.5%
L4. Having a social media presence is important for building awareness in your community.	6.1%	0%	0%	18.2%	75.8%
L5. Community partnerships and in-person networking are valuable tools for building awareness of your agency's offerings.	0%	0%	0%	24.2%	75.8%
L6. Email newsletters are an important tool for building awareness of your agency's offerings.	0%	12.1%	15.2%	42.4%	30.3%
L7. Word of mouth is an effective way to spread awareness throughout the community.	0%	3.0%	3.0%	39.4%	54.5%
L8. Your parks and recreation agency should allocate more resources to marketing and outreach.	0%	3.0%	21.2%	54.5%	21.2%

5. Please elaborate on your answers above. Are there any **additional methods** your organization uses to build awareness in your community? **What outreach methods have worked well, and which ones have not?**

- a. "Senior Center Newsletter has been a great tool to target the 55+ age audience" (M-L-23)
- b. "Collaborating with community partners has worked really well for us, both in creating bigger events and advertising through to multiple client lists. Digitally, we only advertise on FB, but have considered Instagram and a podcast." (MC-M-40)
- c. "Text Message Service. We pay for the service but it is the most effective way to communicate with our patrons. Fliers to schools have mixed results, we have had teachers refuse to send them home, very frustrating." (MC-U-22)
- d. "Flyers, Mailers, Activity Guides tied to City Magazine, Special Camp guides, Brochures" (M-U-51)
- e. "outreach methods include having the appropriate staff attend community events and have a vendor space to promote all things Parks & Rec. Having a 50+ coordinator at a Senior Health fair is better than having just someone from marketing. Having our corporate challenge staff attend a healthy [city redacted] chamber luncheon is more beneficial and specific for the audience. Having the wrong people at community events has failed us more often than not." (LC-M-01)
- f. "I think we do a good job of marketing to the different demographics, I'm not sure I do a good job of keeping track or up with it." (LC-M-21)
- g. "Use of school contacts, and distribution chains." (MC-U-32)
- h. "Be present where people are. Meet missing demographics at gathering places. Perform a gap analysis on missing groups and develop programs, events and partnerships to fill the gap and expand reach." (M-U-15)
- i. "I think our Marketing Manager does a great job of using several platforms. We have also been doing a "Did You Know" campaign sharing all the ways ERC is out in the community and what we do or our members." (MC-M-65)
- j. "Partnering, not only with huge businesses around the county, but also with the local mom and pop shops, can help spread the word better about different programs we offer. Especially nowadays, there is strong motivation for people to find local shops to support and give back to the community. Making sure that we include everyone, not just the big corporations around town, both parties can benefit from

spreading the word on what events we have coming up and by consumers supporting local businesses.” (LC-L-58)

- k. “Not aware of in my current role” (M-M-12)
- l. “Specific parks/ city asset driven posting. Show beautiful parks and where they are, show useful city assets in motion” (M-M-66)
- m. “I think it's smart to partner in your community to reach a new audience. Word of mouth is by far the most effective way to market as well. We need to get people to be our ambassadors and spread the word of our amazing offerings.” (M-L-35)
- n. “My department, 50 Plus, uses a magazine called [name redacted]. It is created by the county and reaches close to 600,000 people bi-monthly.” (LC-L-49)
- o. “We have a great partnership with our school district so we send fliers home with students. This method is very effective and doesn't cost as much as other forms of advertising.” (MC-U-13)
- p. “We are just trying to use all aspects of social media. Personally, I'd like to get fliers in our school newsletters but it's a challenging task.” (M-L-33)
- q. “email blasts to members and past and current participants, actual paper copies to hand people if they stop by wanting information, we always try to tag our official City socials on our post, so they'll share it for continuity of things. vocalize the updates at city commission meetings, other meetings and partners, surveys, in person public engagement, face to face conversations with vendors, participants, coaches etc” (M-U-62)
- r. “We find our email newsletter is not opened that much, but the social media version of the information is looked at more. Word of mouth, good or bad, will always be a major factor; the things you do speak volumes! I think we need to be more involved in community events, just by seeing us at community events, chamber functions, etc. helps spread the word! not getting staff on board and doing it.” (MC-M-57)
- s. “Our camp catalog is a community staple. Our website is a great resource for community members to find information. Personally, I connect with schools-finding teachers and programs that fit the opportunities I am recruiting for.” (LC-L-45)

- t. “We just installed a digital sign at the entrance of the park. It seems to help remind parents when deadlines are. I just to go on the radio twice a month but due to new ownership we don't do that anymore. We also do a summer packet that we send home with students before the school year is up. I would say the radio was on the lower end, people just don't listen to the radio that much anymore.” (MC-U-31)
- u. “Our marketing division is ever-changing. We no longer print our activity guide, limit the amount of fliers that be produced, marketing picks and chooses what they feel needs to be marketed instead of talking to the people who are running the program.” (M-L-36)
- v. “Word of mouth is the most impactful form of communication. Relationships are key to each P&R's success. If you do not have good relationships with your community members, both private and businesses, you will fail. Often, younger employees rely heavily on social media marketing, but there is much more available.

As we, as a society, continue to be bombarded with more and more information from more and more sources, the lack of awareness will persist. Gone are the days when the local newspaper was the sole source of community information. Parks and Recreation face many challenges in the future - this is just one of them.” (M-U-67)

- w. “The assumption that all awareness ties back to marketing is a blame game. Marketing is the first budget to get cut and the first department to get blamed for an unsuccessful program. Marketing is often not consulted at all on programming in terms of audience, pricing, voice, even dates and timing can result in a program not working. It is often dumped on the marketer as is to wrap in a bow regardless of the hurdles to overcome. Internal collaboration from the get-go is essential for awareness to increase and participation to increase. We have a big radio presence still in our area so we do create radio spots regularly as well as regularly participate in our local talk radio shows. Podcasts are up and coming as well. This could be a good avenue for the right community. I still am a firm believer that flyers are a waste of money and trees. QR codes have made these a little more relevant but if they can't take it on the go, it should be a no go.” (MC-L-63)

- x. “As the only full-time employee and only seasonal/contract staff besides me, it is difficult to distribute my time and complete all of the tasks - including marketing and outreach effectively. I use FB/Instagram via the Business Suite to assist, email past participants, and have a flyer for larger events. In addition, I use school principles to send out my information, use school TVs for upcoming events/registrations, and create handouts for elementary and middle school students for relevant events periodically.” (MC-U-14)
6. How does your parks and recreation organization market programs and facilities? Select all that apply.
- a. Email newsletters *(n = 29)*
 - b. The organization’s website *(n = 32)*
 - c. Local radio *(n = 12)*
 - d. Fliers *(n = 28)*
 - e. Billboards and other signage *(n = 8)*
 - f. Instagram *(n = 23)*
 - g. Facebook *(n = 33)*
 - h. X *(n = 5)*
 - i. Other (please specify) *(n = 17)*
 - i. “Text message service”
 - ii. “Activity Guide in City Magazine”
 - iii. “Partnerships, Sponsors”
 - iv. “Mailers”
 - v. “county magazine”
 - vi. “Newspaper”
 - vii. “TV in the centers”
 - viii. “Advertisements; program guide; and communication/partnerships with other organizations; tv media monitors; posters”
 - ix. “Local Talk Radio”
 - x. “In schools via TVs, emails from principles, & handouts”
7. Who is responsible for marketing programs for your organization? Select all that apply.
- j. The staff member who leads/coordinates the program *(n = 19)*

- k. The facility manager (n = 7)
 - l. The marketing department or the designated marketing specialist (n = 25)
 - m. Other (please specify) (n = 5)
 - i. "Every single employee plays a role."
 - ii. "Administrative Assistant"
 - iii. "Office Manager"
 - iv. "anyone really"
8. Does your parks and recreation organization have a yearly or multi-year marketing plan?
- n. Yes, and we are able to follow the plan. (n = 5)
 - o. Yes, but a variety of factors has led us away from strict adherence (n = 7)
 - p. No (n = 17)
 - q. Let me explain: (n = 4)
 - i. "I have a loose one but need to firm up the details and make it better."
 - ii. "Not really but we have standards"
 - iii. "I'm not sure this exists within our organization."
 - iv. "yes, but it is not shared for us to be in the know to support the plan."
9. *This question is shown under the condition "No" is not selected in question 15* Do you have any critiques of your agency's marketing plan? If so, please explain.
- a. "From time to time, we do not push as frequently as we should about our facility offerings." (MC-U-22)
 - b. "Would love to see the plan and have the transparency so everyone is aware and can support the plan and follow suit." (LC-M-01)
 - c. "No, our agency's marketing department have a hard task and are excellent at marketing our events. While there are some community demands that more posts need to be made in different social media platforms, I understand that it is a balancing act. You want to make people aware of your programs, but you don't want to oversaturate one's forum to where it leads the person to mute or even not follow your organization." (LC-L-58)
 - d. "Does not showcase our parks system enough" (M-M-66)
 - e. "More printed materials for the 50 Plus population. More "hip" online presence." (LC-L-49)

- f. “When we hired our marketing director, that was one of his jobs was to make one; if he did, it is not known to the staff, nothing is consistent, in looks, timing, etc.” (MC-M-57)
 - g. “I am not closely enough connected to the plan to be able to elaborate on this question. We do not have a clear social media plan so sometimes it is hard to know when/how to provide helpful information.” (LC-L-45)
 - h. “Having one would be nice” (M-U-67)
 - i. “It needs formalized and improved” (MC-U-14)
10. Do you have any further comments or observations about "Lack of Awareness" that you would like to share?
- a. “It is a tricky topic as it is a good excuse for many, but if they are looking for it, then they could find the information. Out of sight, out of mind, unfortunately.” (MC-U-14)
 - b. “It not a plug and play situation. Every community has its own personality and niche as does each program and park. There is no cookie-cutter way to increase awareness. Trying is the common denominator. Try something and see if it works. And you have to have a budget to do it.” (MC-L-63)
 - c. “Yes but it doesn't pertain to the study. Parents are just lazy when it comes to having their child participate in other activities. I think social media becomes a burden that parents would rather watch than spend some quality time with their kids. Just my two cents.” (MC-U-31)
 - d. “Having a plan that ebbs and flows with the changing trends is important to reach all your different demographics.” (LC-L-45)
 - e. “It still floors me when we mail 13,000 copies of our guidebook out to every household in our county, that people will come in and say i have lived here for years and did not know you were here. How??” (MC-M-57)
 - f. “I agree with an earlier comment that it is something we will always have to deal with. There is only so many hours in a day/week/month and people have to really choose how they want to spend their time and money. We have to make ourselves relevant in a fast paced, over stimulated world.” (M-L-35)

