

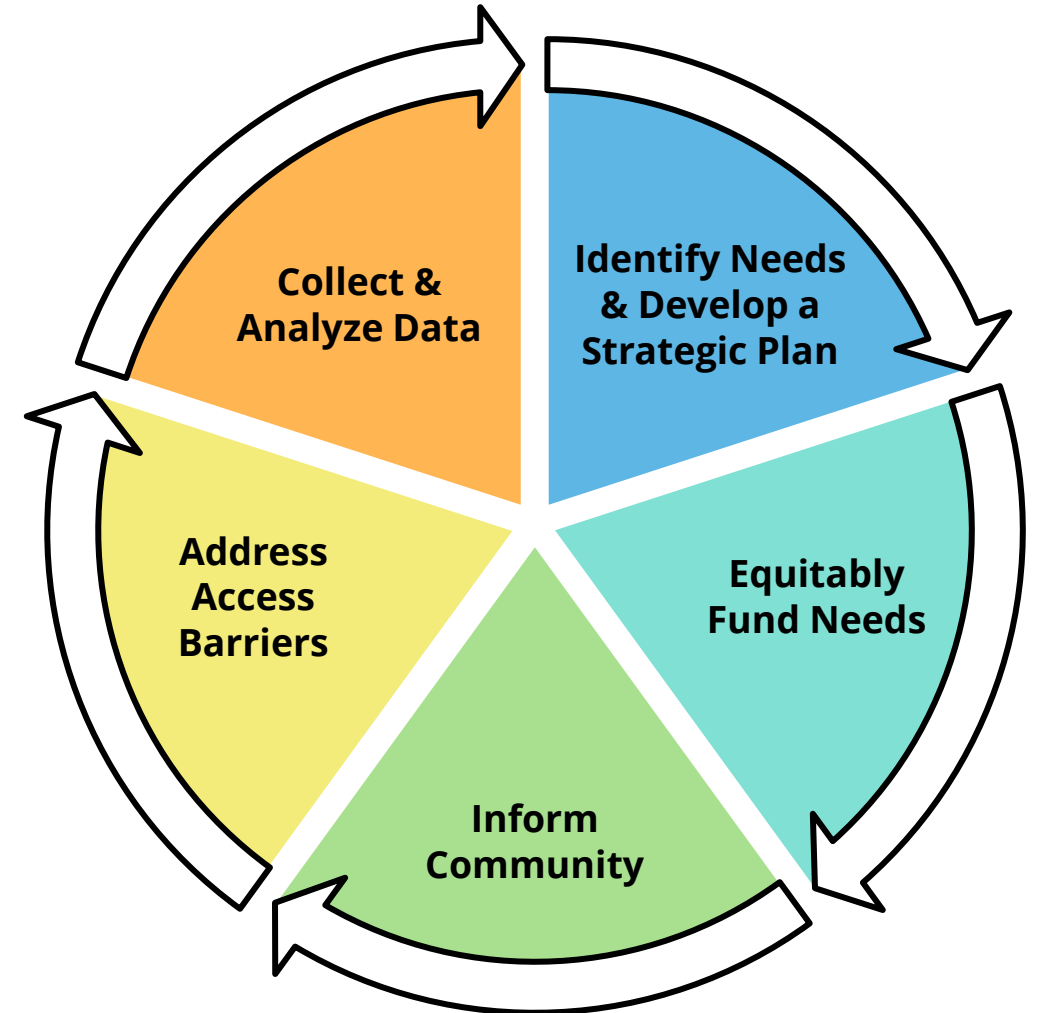
# Office of the City Auditor

## Performance Audit of Equity in Recreation Programming

Presentation to the Park and Recreation Board  
January 20, 2022

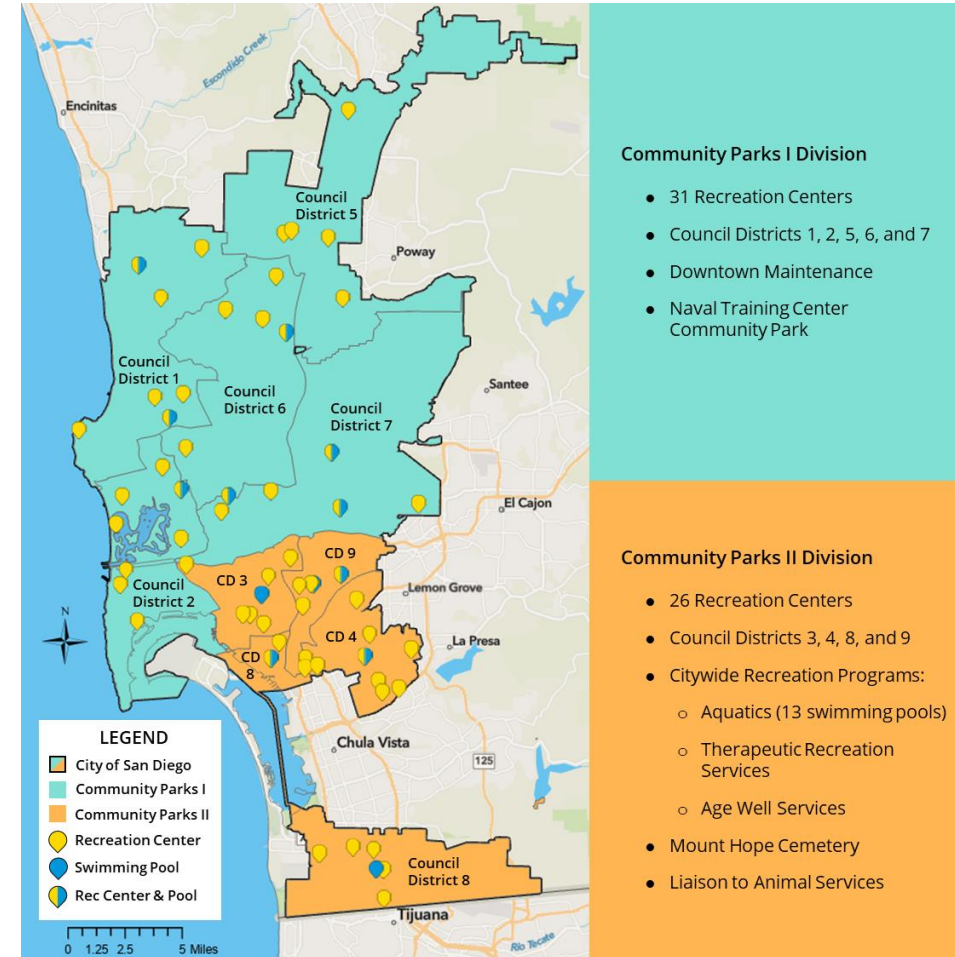
# Audit Objectives

- 1) Determine whether Parks & Rec effectively identifies recreation programming equity needs in each community;
- 2) Determine whether Parks & Rec meets identified programming needs equitably through funding and staffing allocations; and
- 3) Determine whether Parks & Rec provides residents with equitable access to recreation programs.



# Background

- Recreation provides numerous health and social benefits to individuals and communities.
- The Parks and Recreation Department manages programs across 57 recreation centers and 13 aquatic centers.
  - Community Parks I Division (CPI)
  - Community Parks II Division (CPII)
- Prior to 2018, Recreation Councils controlled funds raised through contracted programs and facility rentals.
  - Transition of funds to City control shed light on funding disparities.



Note: Two recreational facilities in Balboa Park—the Activity Center and the Municipal Gymnasium—are reflected in the map but not in the count of recreation centers above, since those are managed by the Developed Regional Parks Division.

Source: OCA generated based on data from the SanGIS Regional Data Warehouse and information from the Parks and Recreation Department's website.

# Background

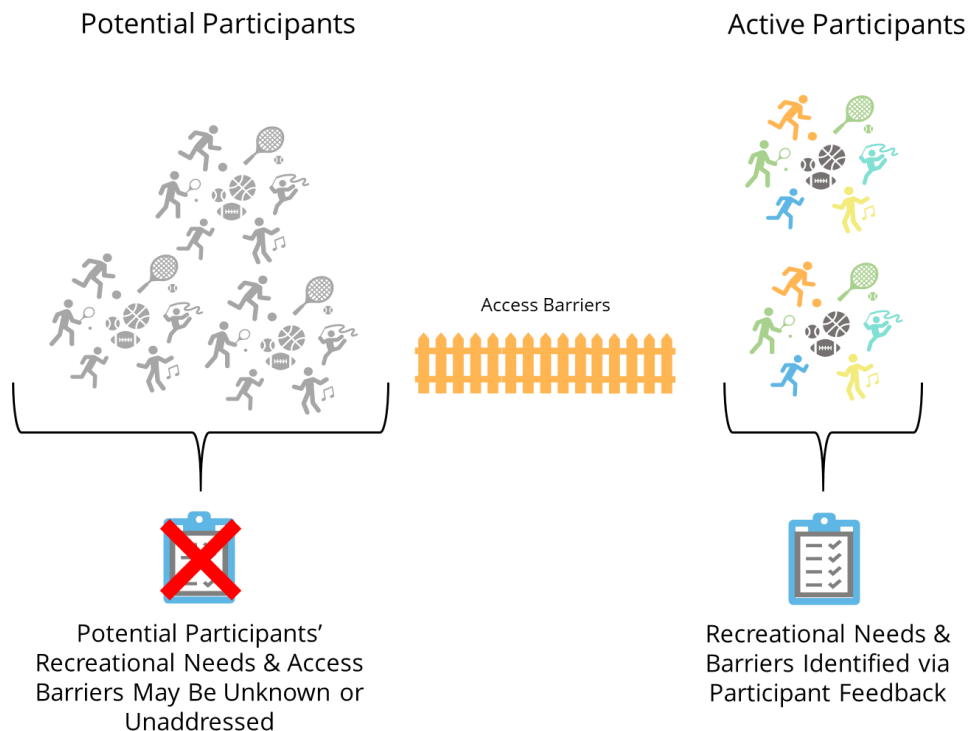
- Equality = Same amount of investment for all communities
- Equity = Appropriate investment for each community's circumstances
- Recreation programming equity is about making appropriate recreation investments in each community so that all can access and enjoy benefits of recreation.
- Parks & Rec has begun centralizing some aspects of recreation programming.

**Equity Recognizes Everyone Starts from a Different Place and Different Investments May Be Necessary So All Can Enjoy the Benefits of Recreation**



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

## Finding 1: Although Parks & Rec solicits participants feedback, it is likely not aware of broader community recreational needs and lacks a strategic plan and adequate resources to provide recreation programs more equitably.



- Parks & Rec's current feedback mechanism excludes individuals not actively engaged in programs.
  - Needs and barriers of these individuals may be unknown.
- Community needs assessments are vital for strategic planning.
  - National Recreation and Park Association lays out four-step approach for conducting the assessment which involves the entire community, not just frequent recreation users.

Source: OCA generated based on review of the City's 2015 and 2018 Resident Satisfaction surveys, the Community Interest and Opinion Survey, and the National Recreation and Park Association Community Assessment guide and benchmarked municipalities.

# Finding 1: Parks & Rec should adopt a more robust approach to assessing community needs.

**Goal 03**

**Promote lifelong recreation and learning.**

**OBJECTIVE**

**3.1**

*By 2020, increase in participation by diversifying and or marketing the numbers and types of social and recreational programs, enrichment classes and sports for adults and seniors*

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

- # of participants in recreation programs annually (by category, e.g., families, young adults, 50+ adults, people with disabilities and targeted underserved groups)
- % of participants by age and ethnic diversity in comparison to City demographics
- #s of different programs offered annually by core service area (e.g., aquatics, access leisure, cultural and fine arts, environmental education and nature interpretation, special interest, sports and fitness, and Camp Sacramento).
- % of repeat participants who have been involved in 1-3 other programs, or more than 3 programs

**STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS THAT SUPPORT THIS OBJECTIVE**

- 1.1** Expand access to programs and services that support youth development, safety and health.
- 3.1** Provide programs, services and events to support lifelong learning for all ages.
- 3.2** Plan, manage and regularly evaluate the delivery of programs, events and services.



Source: City of Sacramento's Youth, Parks, & Community Enrichment Department Strategic Plan.

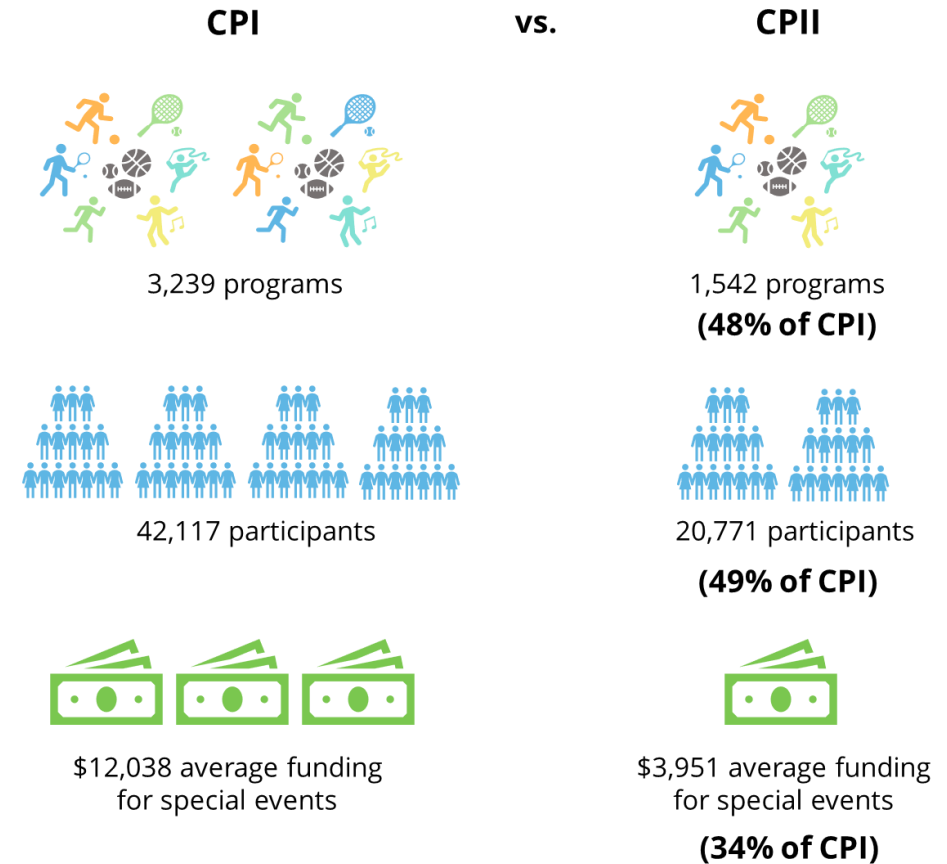
- Parks & Rec does not have a strategic plan with performance measures to assist decision-making. Strategic planning helps ensure agencies have a sense of direction and measurable goals to guide decision-making.
- Other cities coordinate equity-driven efforts through a central office.
  - The City's Office of Race and Equity was established in FY21
- Parks & Rec needs to analyze the extent of the resources needed to comprehensively improve equity so that it can support any future funding requests.

## Finding 1 Recommendations

1. Conduct a **community needs assessment** every five years that includes:
  - Identification of community priorities;
  - Satisfaction levels; and
  - Demographic information
2. Develop a **strategic plan** for addressing recreational equity that:
  - Defines a vision for equity;
  - Includes objectives, goals and performance measures;
  - **Identifies resources** needed; and
  - Is presented to City Council for approval

## Finding 2: Parks & Rec's approach to resource allocation and program quality is incomplete and limits its ability to provide equitable recreation programming.

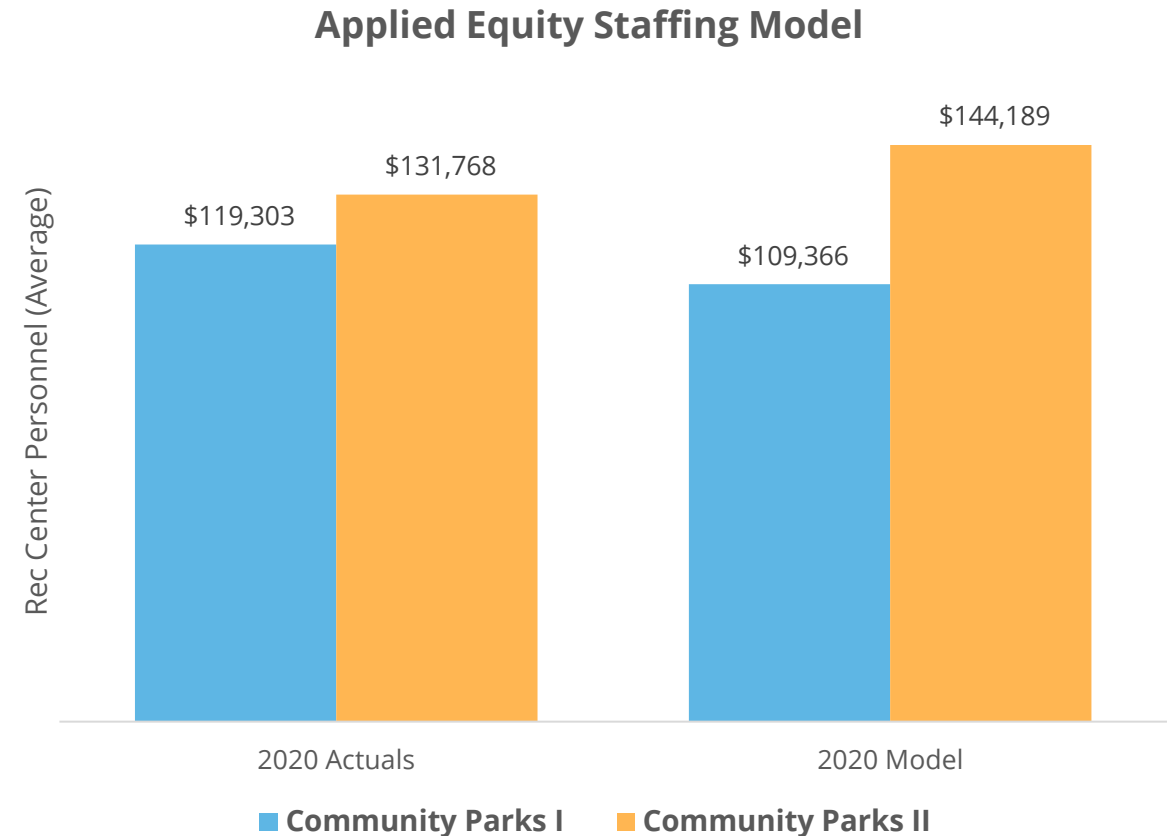
- Recreation centers in CPI had 47 percent more funding than those in CPII on average.
- Parks & Rec offers two main types of programs: Staff-run and contracted.
  - In 2019, 98 percent of expenditures on contracted programs took place in CPI.
- Recreation centers without a history of contracted programs may find it difficult to establish these programs.
- Cost to the City of administering contracted programs may not be fully recovered by program surcharges.



Source: OCA generated based on 2019 Parks & Rec Equity Report and RCF Budgets.

## Finding 2: A data-driven approach could address inequities

- Parks & Rec's budget is largely based on the prior year's allocations.
- Minneapolis model used community and site-specific data to create a data-driven resource allocation model.
- Benchmarked cities created citywide recreation specialist positions to teach specialized classes to all centers.

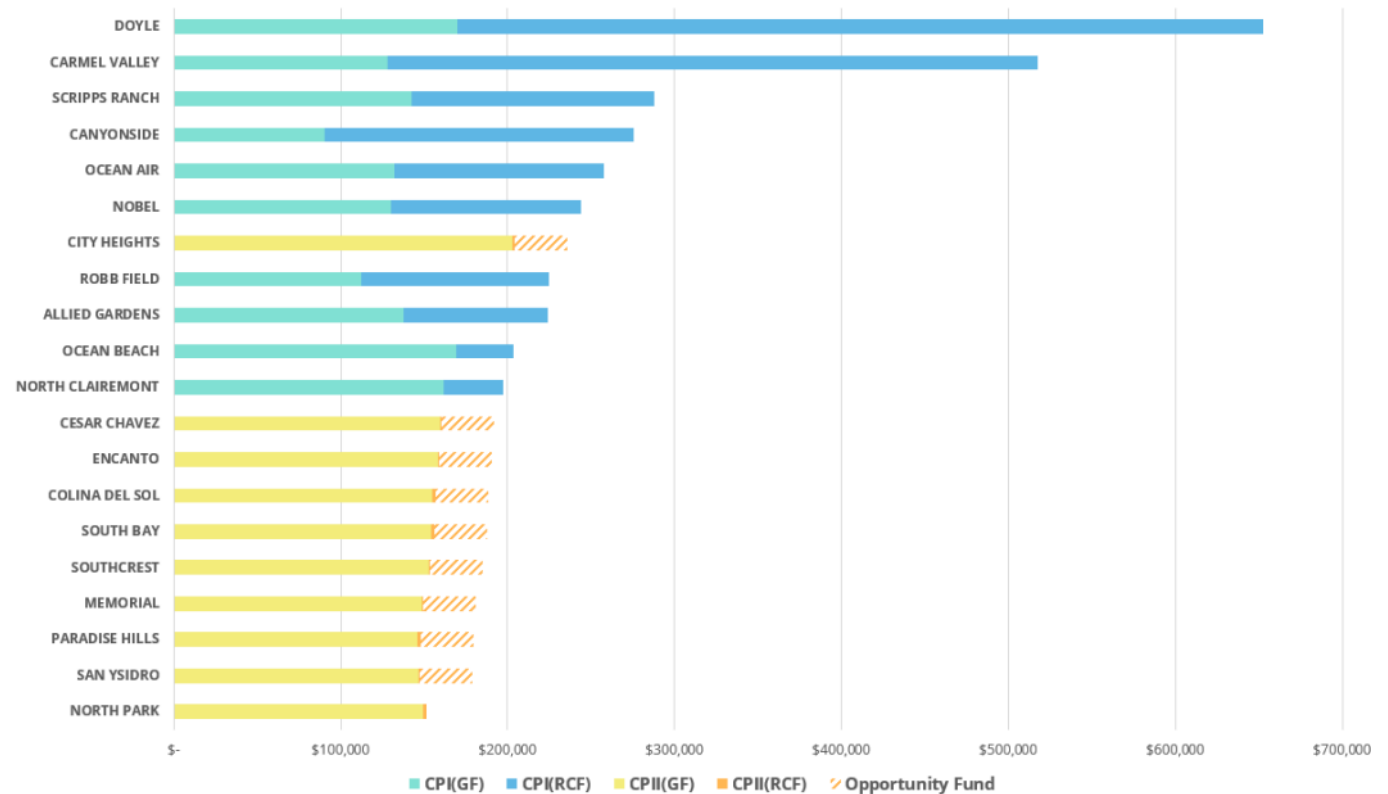


Source: OCA generated based on Census Bureau data, City of San Diego budget information, and ActiveNet.

## Finding 2: Parks and Rec has taken steps, but can implement additional measures to further improve

- General Fund expenditures have been increasingly distributed toward CPII.
- Come Play Outside provided \$750,000 in funding to recreation facilities in communities of concern.
- Parks & Rec is proposing an Opportunity Fund that will fund equity-based programs.
- Parks & Rec lacks comprehensive process to assess program quality.

Additional Funding Opportunities May Narrow the Gap between CPI and CPII



Source: OCA generated based on data from SAP.

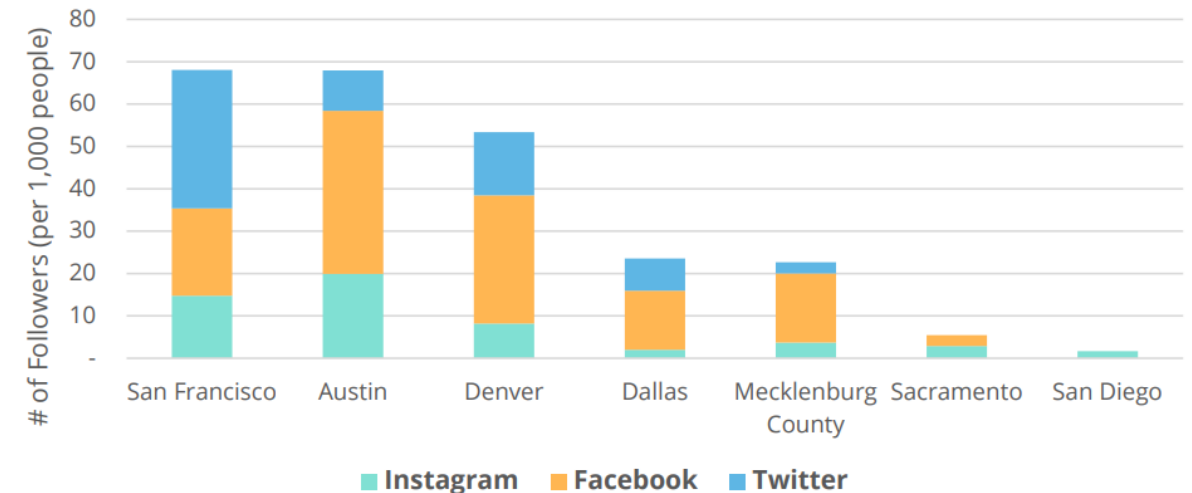
## Finding 2 Recommendations

3. Include **contracted recreation programs in its next User Fee Study** and increase the program surcharge, if necessary, in order to reach 100 percent cost recovery on these programs.
4. Implement a **resource allocation model** that will evaluate resource equity between recreation facilities. The model should be based both community-specific criteria and site-specific criteria.
5. Implement a comprehensive method for **measuring the quality** of all recreation programs. These should be conducted in a way that is standardized and incorporate notes, observations, and interview data.
6. Implement **a plan for directing resources** toward eliminating identified disparities in Recommendations 4 and 5. Steps should consider using equity-based funding for scholarships, incorporate community feedback, include measurable metrics, report on the effectiveness of the Opportunity Fund, and be included in an update to the strategic plan.

## Finding 3: Parks & Rec's approach to community engagement and marketing is decentralized and inconsistent, which results in diminished access to programming.

- The lack of department-wide standards and requirements results in different levels and quality of marketing and outreach.
- 55 percent of City residents indicated they did not attend more programs because they were not aware of program offerings.
  - National average is 24 percent.
- Parks & Rec has less staff dedicated to marketing compared to benchmarked cities.
- Segmenting by demographic data and tailoring messaging can increase awareness.

**The City's Parks and Recreation Department Has Less Social Media Engagement than Benchmarked Agencies**



Source: OCA generated based on web searches (data is current as of September 21, 2021).

## Finding 3 Recommendations

7. Hire a **marketing professional** to manage online and physical content, coordinate **marketing efforts**, and **lead strategic marketing initiatives**.
8. Direct individual recreation centers to collect demographic information on participants and community and use collected information to create a **strategic marketing plan** that includes goals and objectives, steps for a Citywide approach, and has policies for individual recreation centers.

## Finding 4: Parks & Rec has made efforts to ensure certain communities can participate in recreation programs, but significant barriers remain that may preclude other groups from participating.

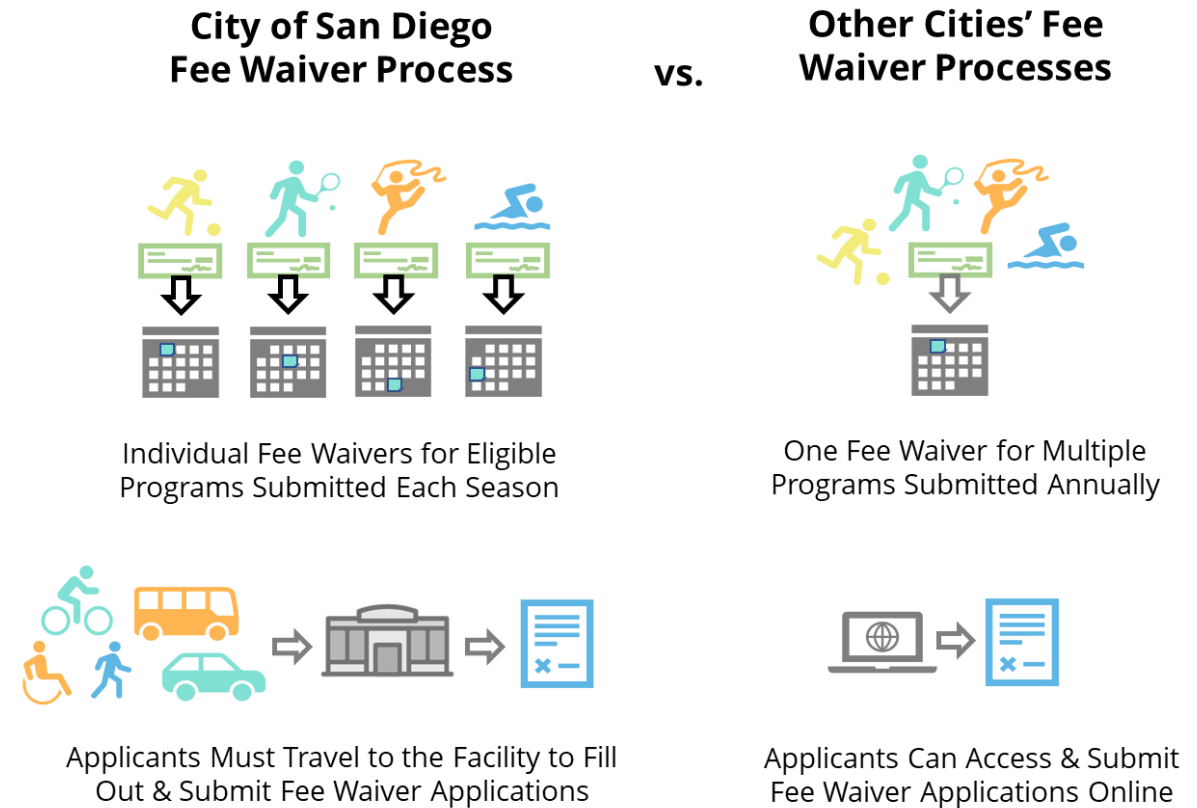
- Recreation programming equity is dependent on accessibility of programs.
- Parks & Rec's Therapeutic Recreation Services has been crucial in ensuring people with physical, emotional, or mental disability have access to social and recreation programs.
- We found that access to low-income and people who do not speak English can benefit from improvement.



Source: Therapeutic Recreation Services Fall 2019 Calendar.

## Sub-finding 1: Parks & Rec's approach to low-income fee waivers is inconsistent and does not maximize their impact.

- Parks & Rec's policy limits the scope of fee waivers to certain recreation programs and fees, mostly Aquatics and Civic Dance.
  - This results in assisting relatively few participants.
- The application process for the fee waivers is burdensome for the customer, which limits low-income households' access to recreational programming.



Source: OCA generated based on interviews with staff and other parks and recreation agencies.

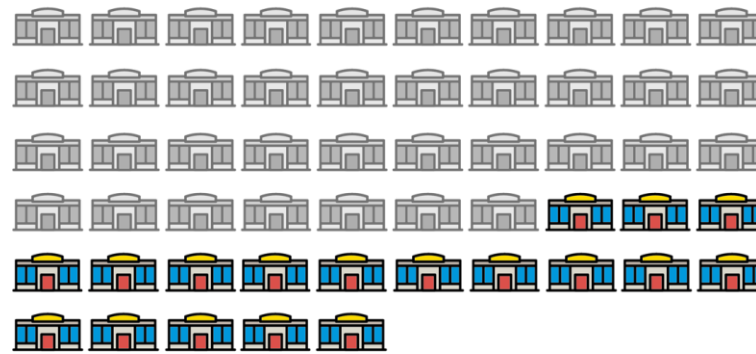
## Finding 4 Recommendations (Sub-Finding 1)

9. Create procedures that allow residents to apply **fee waivers on an annual basis** and **register for classes online while using the waiver.**
10. Reevaluate current practice of only allowing the fee waivers for Aquatics and Civic Dance programs and **expand eligibility to other programs.**  
As part of this, Parks & Rec should:
  - Analyze alternative agency fee waiver models;
  - Implement guidelines that specify which programs and costs fee waivers can be applied to; and
  - Provide the rationale for leaving other programs and costs ineligible.

## Sub-finding 2: Recreation program information is not equally accessible to people who do not speak English

- Parks & Rec lacks a language access strategy and a centralized interpretation and translation service.
  - Extent and usage of interpretation and translation resources varies by recreation center.
- When a local government agency serves a 'substantial' number of non-English speakers, State law requires qualified bilingual employees or interpreters to provide information and services.

### People Who Speak Limited English Have Limited Access to Programming Information



18 of 55 (33%) Rec Centers have service areas where at least 10% of the population indicated having limited English proficiency



Of these 18 Rec Centers, only 3 (17%) have program guides accessible in an additional language

Source: OCA generated based on Climate Equity Index data, Census Bureau data, and website observations.

## Finding 4 Recommendations (Sub-finding 2)

11. Implement a plan to **identify recreation center service areas** and the **languages spoken in those areas**. Parks & Rec should update this plan biannually.
12. Develop a **language access plan** that establishes a threshold at which languages spoken are considered substantial, policies that specify which written materials need to be translated, and procedures for getting documents translated.
13. Work with the Communications Department to obtain access to a contract **for over-the-phone interpretation services** and written materials translation.

## Finding 5: Although Parks & Rec tracks certain program information, current practices diminish its ability to implement a data-driven approach for resource allocation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

- Data-driven decision-making allows park and recreation agencies to use facts, metrics, and data to guide strategic decisions that align with their goals and objectives.
- Although Parks & Rec tracks program data, due to accuracy and consistency issues, certain key data fields cannot easily be used in systematic efforts towards improving equity. Examples of inaccurate or inconsistent data include:
  - Naming conventions (some instances lacked information);
  - Program start dates;
  - Primary instructor field; and
  - Activity status

## Finding 5 Recommendations

14. Implement **naming conventions** for the same or similar recreation programs and train staff on these conventions.
15. Develop **automated controls** to ensure program information is entered consistently and accurately. In addition, they should develop policies and procedures for supervisory review of entered information.
16. Provide an updated **training** on its recreation program management software to all users, and annually provide a refresher training.

# Conclusion

- We issued a total of 16 recommendations to help improve equity in recreation programming.
- The Parks and Recreation Department agreed to implement all 16 recommendations.