

# Parks and Recreation Provides Essential Workforce Development Programs

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## *A new NRPA report highlights the role park and recreation departments play in creating first-time employment opportunities for youth and young adults*

Park and recreation departments are essential providers of workforce development and career exploration programs, according to a new [National Recreation and Park Association](#) (NRPA) report. These programs — which include entry-level jobs, internships and specialized skilled-based training programs — expose youth and young adults to a wealth of career possibilities within the field of parks and recreation.

According to the [Workforce Development and Career Exploration in Park and Recreation report](#), one in three park and recreation departments currently offer a workforce development or career exploration program targeted to teenagers, young adults and other people entering the labor force for the first time. Furthermore, park and recreation professionals indicate that these programs are likely to become more common, with one in five park and recreation leaders looking to establish workforce development programs at their agencies within the next two years.

Park and recreation leaders view workforce development and career exploration programs as critical opportunities that demonstrate to youth and young adults that parks and recreation is a rewarding career path for them to pursue. Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents indicate that the key goal of their agencies' workforce development program is to **develop future professionals and leaders**. Other key goals of these workforce development and career exploration programs include:

- **Providing youth with employment opportunities**
- **Recruiting a more diverse agency workforce that better reflects the community served**
- **Expanding the programming and offerings delivered by the agency**
- **Building self-efficacy and confidence of participants**
- **Developing youth foundational soft skills**
- **Building economic opportunity for lower-income community members**

“It is vitally important for parks and recreation that we create a new generation of leaders by attracting diverse talent through workforce development and career exploration programs,” said Jack Kardys, president of J Kardys Strategies, LLC and NRPA board member. “This new generation of park and recreation professionals will be essential in helping the field understand and adapt to the evolving needs and desires of our communities.”

These programs also can help prepare youth and young adults for their future regardless of whether they continue to work in parks and recreation. For example, in addition to exposing youth and young adults to a wide range of jobs, these programs allow participants to:

- **Build self-confidence**
- **Gain valuable work experience**
- **Develop foundational skills, including communications and financial literacy**

People strongly agree that workforce development and career exploration programs are important. According to a recent NRPA Park Pulse [poll](#), nearly all U.S. adults — 92 percent — say it is important for youth and young adults to have access to employment opportunities that help individuals to gain experience and explore career possibilities.

**To read the full *Workforce Development and Career Exploration in Park and Recreation* report, [click here](#).**

**To learn more about NRPA, visit [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org).**

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### **About the National Recreation and Park Association**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, vibrant and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. With more than 60,000 members, NRPA advances this mission by investing in and championing the work of park and recreation professionals and advocates — the catalysts for positive change in service of equity, climate-readiness, and overall health and well-being. For more information, visit [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org). For digital access to NRPA’s flagship publication, *Parks & Recreation*, visit [www.parksandrecreation.org](http://www.parksandrecreation.org).