
2019 City of Austin Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan Survey Executive Summary

Overview

ETC Institute administered a Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan Survey for the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) during the winter and spring of 2019. The survey will help PARC establish priorities for the future development of parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services.

Methodology

ETC Institute mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in the City of Austin. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. Residents who received the survey were given the option of returning the survey by mail or completing it on-line at www.AustinPARCSurvey.org.

Ten days after the surveys were mailed, ETC Institute sent emails and placed phone calls to the households that received the survey to encourage participation. The emails contained a link to the on-line version of the survey to make it easy for residents to complete the survey. To prevent people who were not residents of the City of Austin from participating, everyone who completed the survey on-line was required to enter their home address prior to submitting the survey. ETC Institute then matched the addresses that were entered on-line with the addresses that were originally selected for the random sample. If the address from a survey completed on-line did not match one of the addresses selected for the sample, the on-line survey was not counted.

A total of 925 residents completed the survey. The overall results for the sample of 925 households have a precision of at least ± 3.22 at the 95% level of confidence.

This report contains the following:

- Charts showing the overall results of the survey (Section 1)
- Priority Investment Rating (PIR) that identifies priorities for facilities and programs (Section 2)
- Benchmarking analysis comparing the City's results to national results (Section 3)
- Tabular data showing the overall results for all questions on the survey (Section 4)
- A copy of the survey instrument (Section 5)

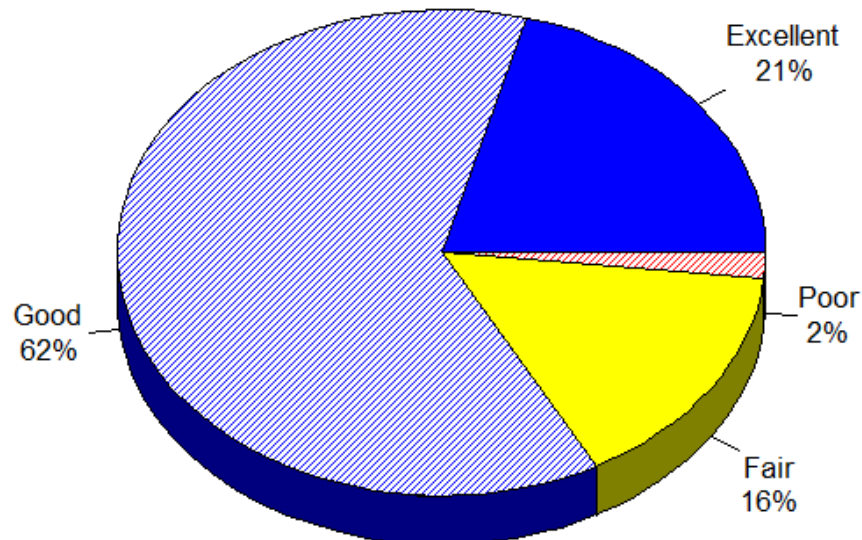
The major findings of the survey are summarized on the following pages.

Facility Use and Ratings

Ninety percent (90%) of respondents indicated someone in their household visited a park or facility offered by PARD during the past year. Eighty-three percent (83%) of respondents who visited a park or facility indicated that the condition of the parks/facilities they visited was either “excellent” (21%) or “good” (62%), 16% of respondents gave a “fair” rating and only 2% gave a “poor” rating.

Q1a. How would you rate the physical condition of the parks/facilities you and the members of your household have visited during the past year?

by percentage of respondents who indicated they have visited parks or facilities offered by PARD during the past year
(without “not provided”)



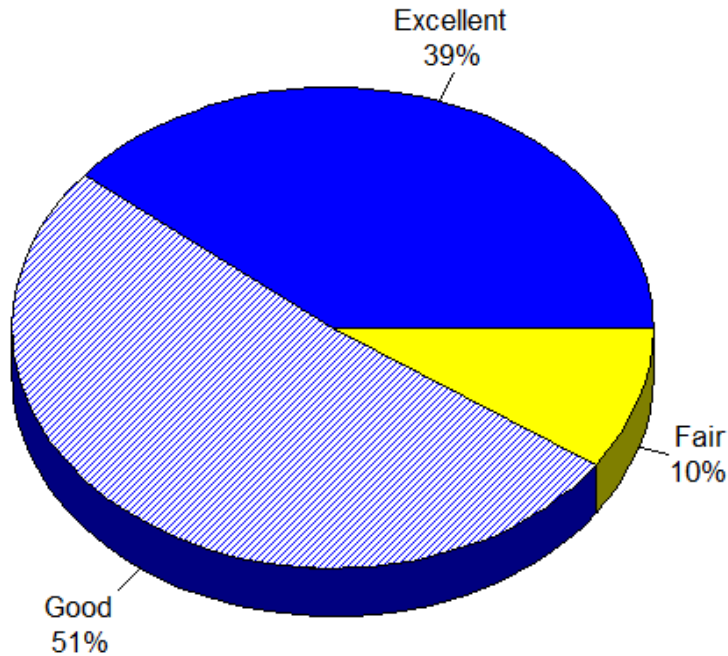
Source: ETC Institute (2019)

Program Participation and Ratings

Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents indicated someone in their household has participated in a program offered by PARD during the past year. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents who rated the programs their household participated in as either “excellent” (39%) or “good” (51%), only 10% of respondents gave a “fair” rating and no respondents gave a “poor” rating.

Q2a. How would you rate the programs you and the members of your household have participated in during the past year?

by percentage of respondents who indicated they have participated in a program offered by PARD during the past year (without “not provided”)



Source: ETC Institute (2019)

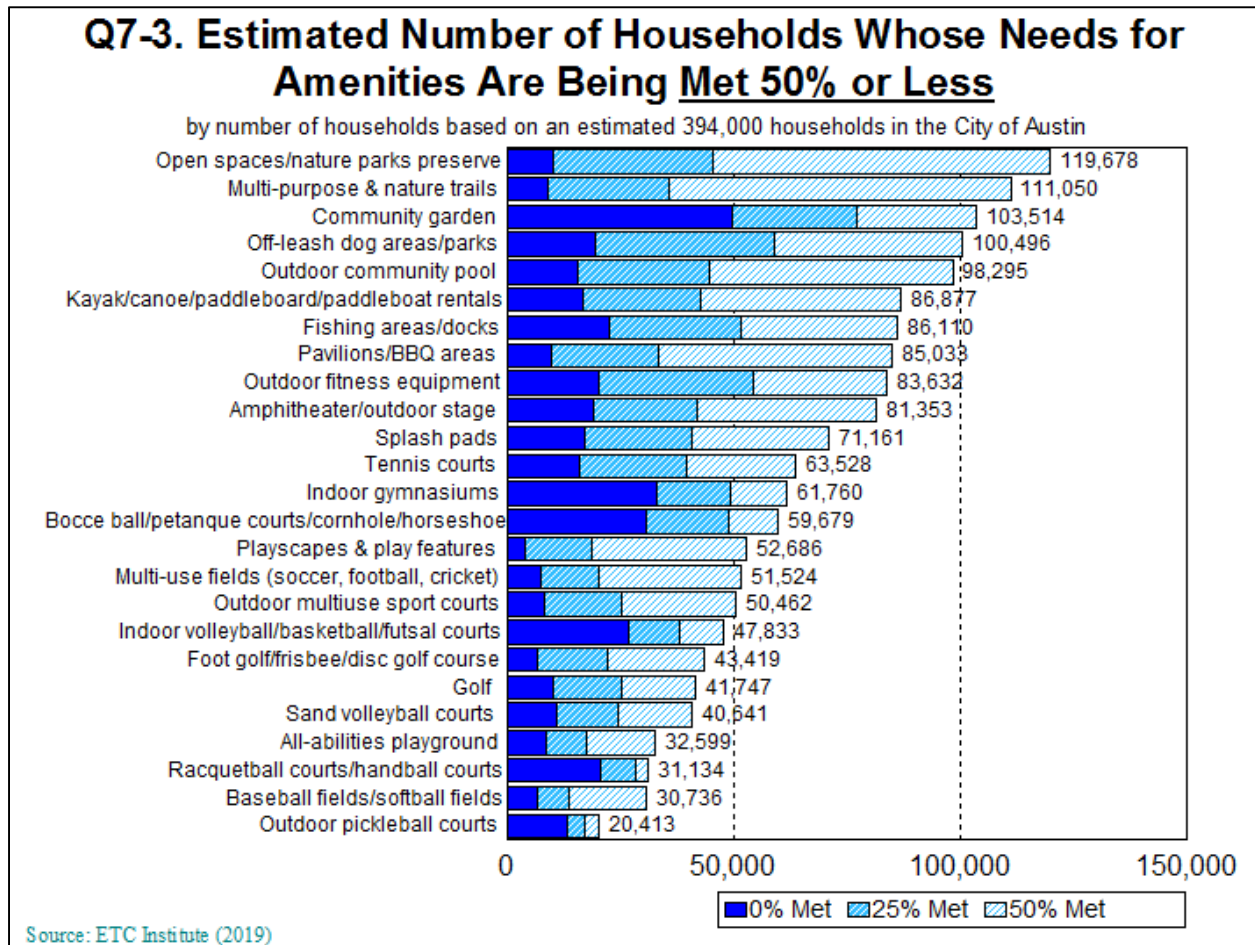
Amenity Needs and Priorities

Amenity Needs: Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 25 recreation amenities and rate how well their needs for each were currently being met. Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had the greatest “unmet” need for various amenities.

The four recreation amenities with the highest percentage of households that have an unmet need were:

1. Open spaces/nature parks preserve – 119,678 households,
2. Multi-purpose and nature trails – 111,050 households,
3. Community garden – 103,514 households, and
4. Off-leash dog areas/parks – 100,496 households.

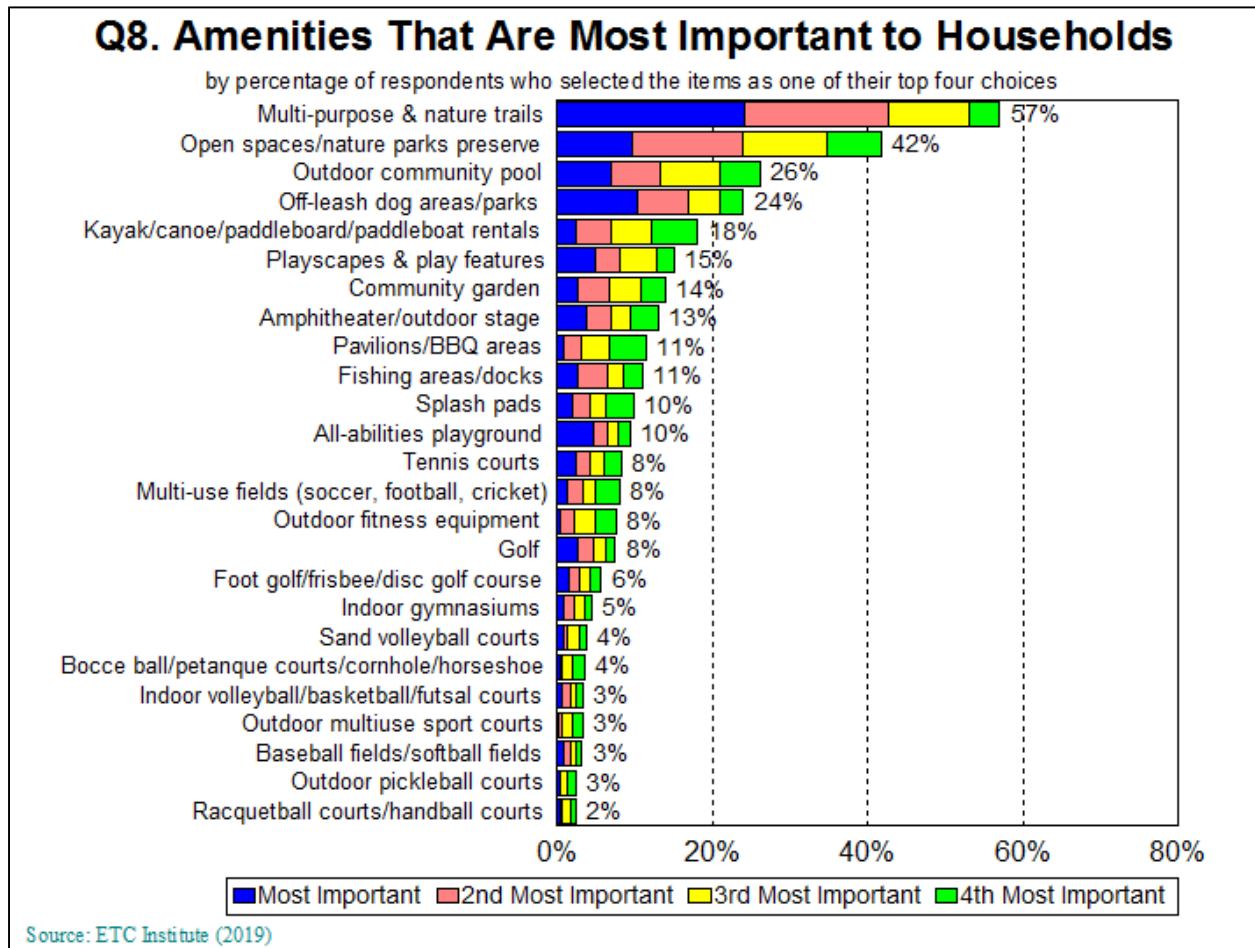
The estimated number of households that have unmet needs for each of the 25 amenities that were assessed is shown in the chart below.



Amenity Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each amenity, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents placed on each amenity. Based on the sum of respondents’ top four choices, the two most important amenities to residents were:

1. Multi-purpose and nature trails (57%) and
2. Open spaces/nature parks preserve (42%).

The percentage of residents who selected each amenity as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.

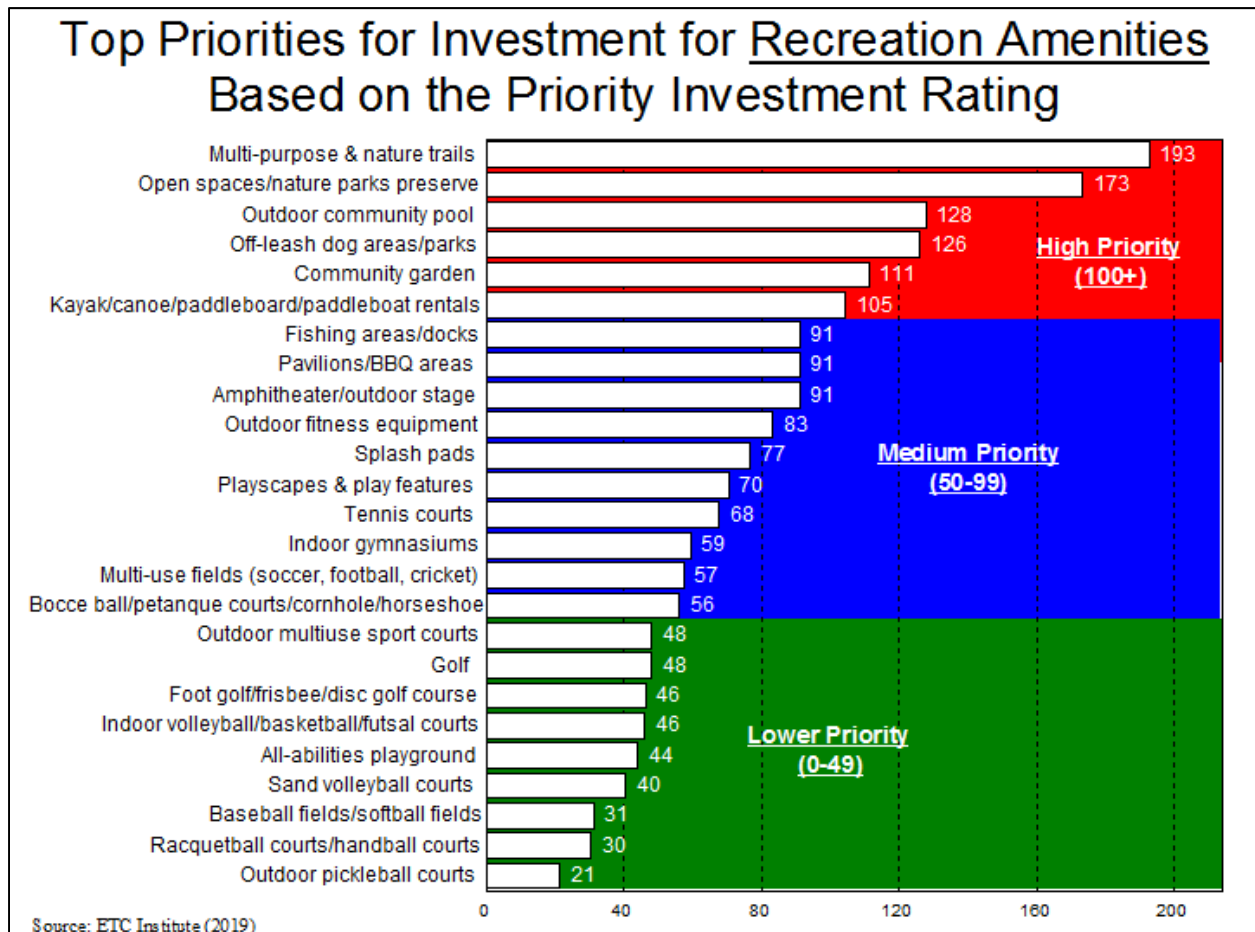


Priorities for Facility Investments: The **Priority Investment Rating (PIR)** was developed by ETC Institute to provide organizations with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on recreation and parks investments. The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) equally weights (1) the importance that residents place on amenities and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the amenity. [Details regarding the methodology for this analysis are provided in Section 2 of this report.]

Based the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), the following six amenities were rated as high priorities for investment:

- Multi-purpose and nature trails (PIR=193)
- Open spaces/nature parks preserve (PIR=173)
- Outdoor community pools (PIR=128)
- Off-leash dog areas/parks (PIR=126)
- Community garden (PIR=111)
- Kayak/canoe/paddleboard/paddleboat rentals (PIR=105)

The chart below shows the Priority Investment Rating for each of the 25 facilities/amenities that were assessed on the survey.



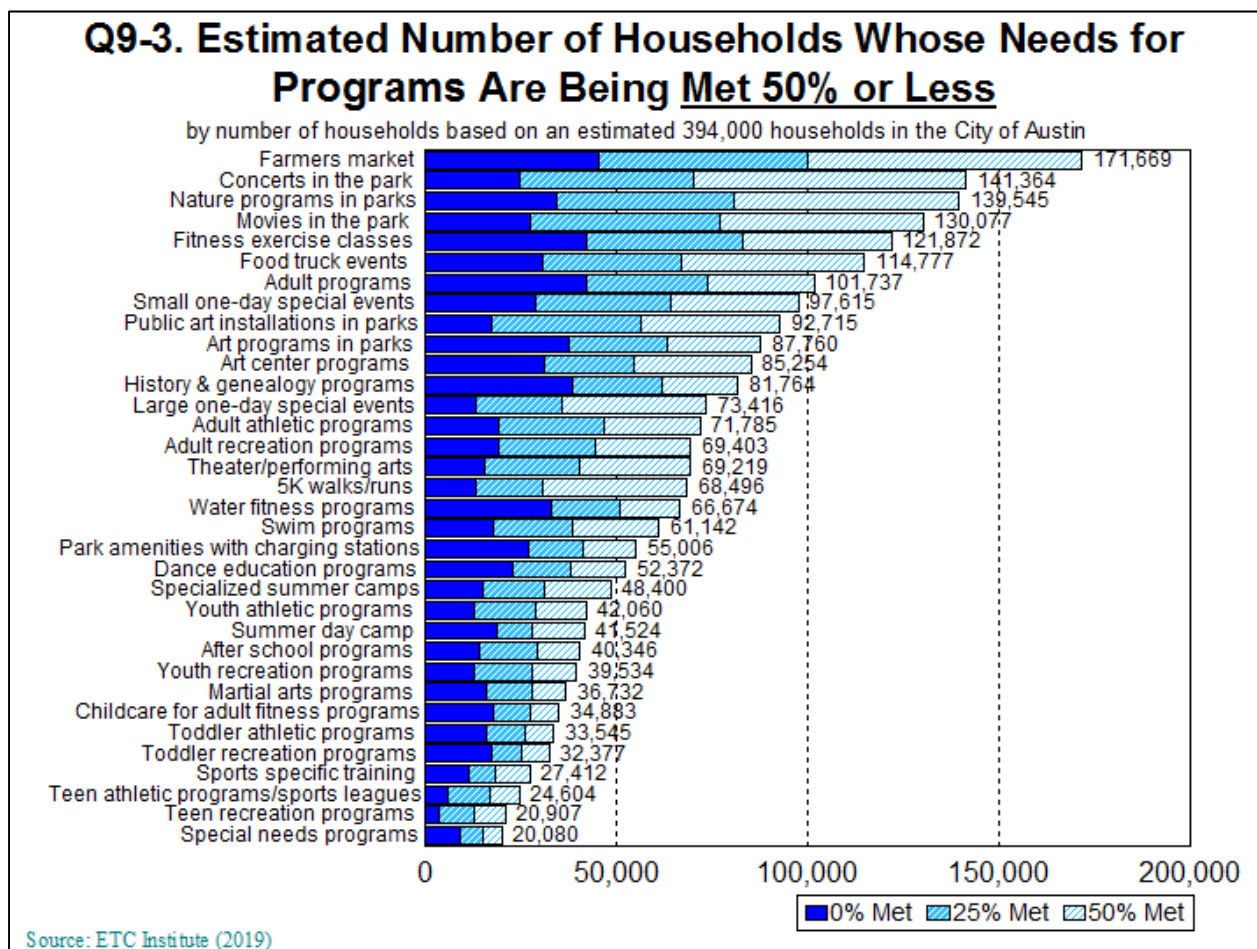
Programming Needs and Priorities

Programming Needs. Respondents were also asked to identify if their household had a need for 34 recreational programs and rate how well their needs for each program were currently being met. Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had “unmet” needs for each program.

The seven recreation programs with the highest percentage of households that have an unmet need were:

1. Farmers market – 171,669 households,
2. Concerts in the park– 141,364 households,
3. Nature programs in parks – 139,545 households,
4. Movies in the park –130,077 households,
5. Fitness exercise classes– 121,872 households,
6. Food truck events – 114,777 households, and
7. Adult programs – 101,737 households (or 29%).

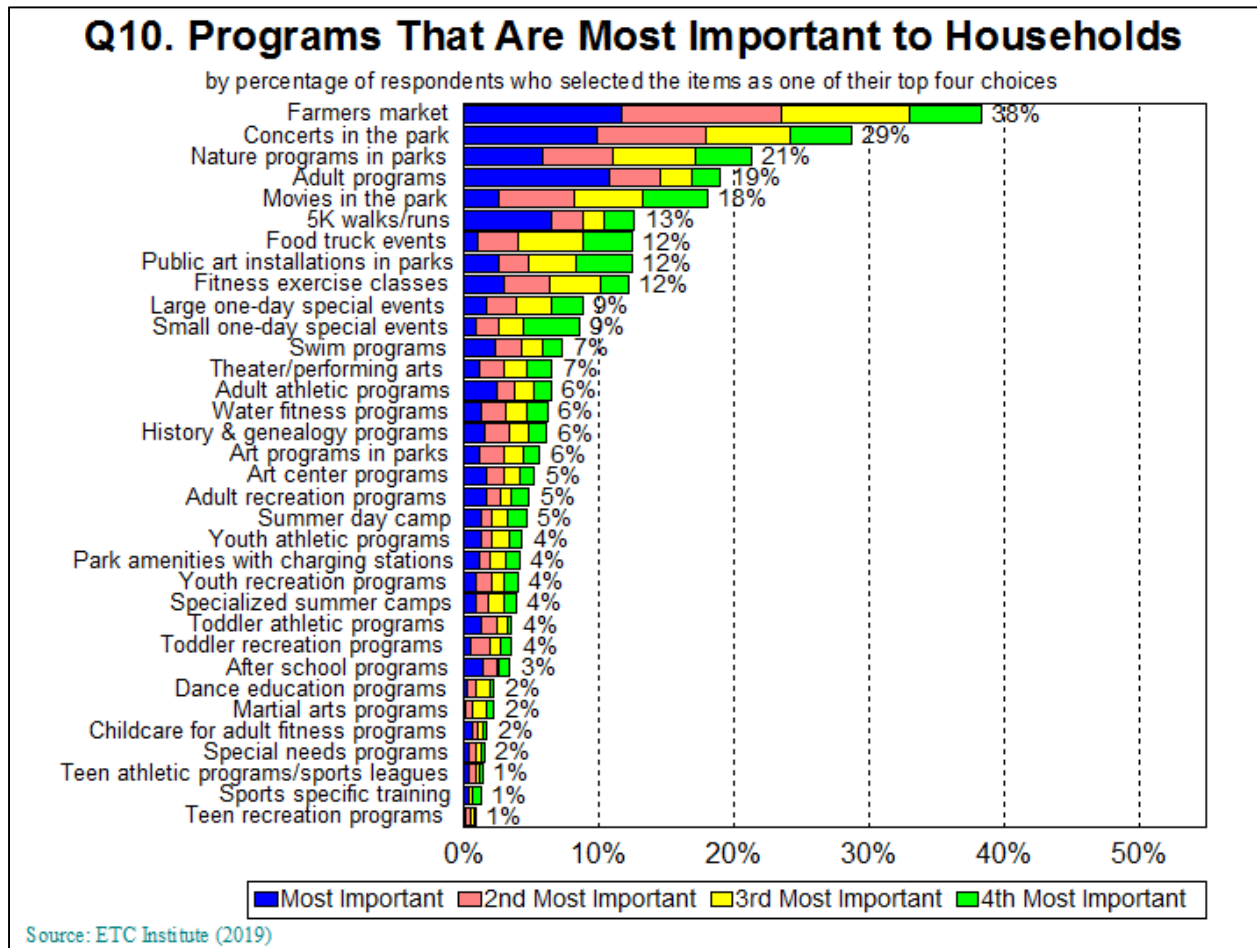
The estimated number of households that have unmet needs for each of the 34 programs that were assessed is shown in the chart below.



Program Importance. In addition to assessing the needs for each program, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents place on each program. Based on the sum of respondents’ top four choices, the two most important programs to residents were:

1. Farmers market (38%) and
2. Concerts in the park (29%).

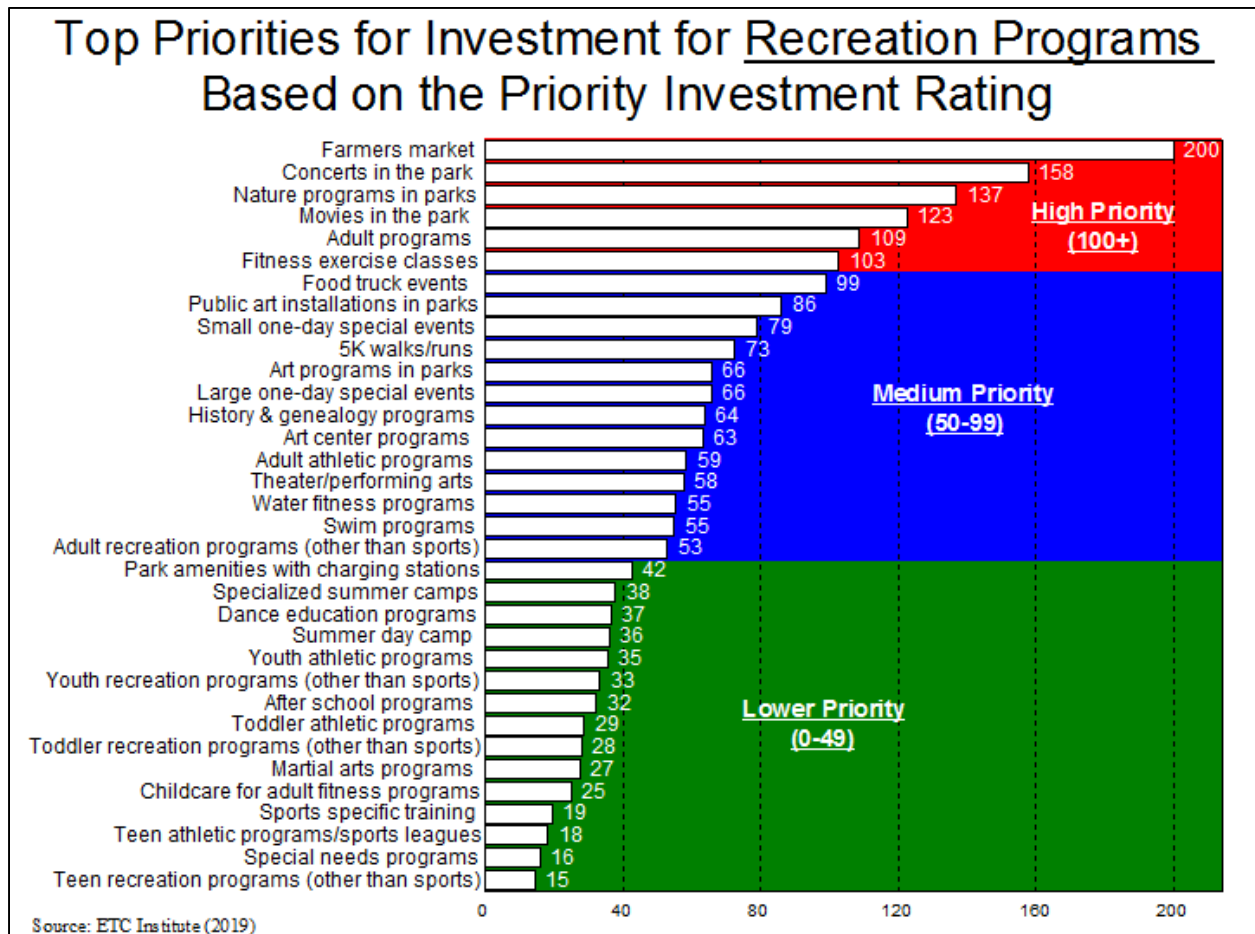
The percentage of residents who selected each program as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.



Priorities for Programming Investments. Based the priority investment rating (PIR), which was described briefly on page v of this Executive Summary and is described in more detail in Section 2 of this report, the following six programs were rated as “high priorities” for investment:

- Farmers market (PIR=200)
- Concerts in the park (PIR=158)
- Nature programs in parks (PIR=137)
- Movies in the park (PIR=123)
- Adult programs (PIR=109)
- Fitness exercise classes (PIR=103)

The chart below shows the Priority Investment Rating (PIR) for each of the 34 programs that were rated.



Barriers to Usage and Participation

Respondents were given a list of 21 potential barriers to their household's usage of or participation in PARD facilities and programs. For each potential barrier respondents were asked to indicate if it is a "major barrier," "minor barrier," or "not a barrier" to their usage of or participation in PARD facilities and programs. The biggest barriers to usage and participation, based upon the combined percentage of "minor barrier" and "major barrier" responses, were:

1. a lack of awareness of what programs are offered (69%),
2. inadequate parking at parks and facilities (61%), and
3. the presence of people experiencing homelessness (54%).

Information Sources

Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents indicated that word of mouth is the way they learn about City of Austin programs, activities, and events. Only 29% of respondents indicated they used the City of Austin website and another 29% indicated they use newspapers. However, respondents indicated that Email (28%) or the PARD website (18%) are the most preferred information sources for programs, activities, and events.

The Future of Austin's Parks and Recreation System

Respondents were asked a series of questions related to the future of the City's parks and recreation system.

First, respondents were asked to indicate what three facilities, from a list of 14, they would like to see added to or increased over the next 10 years.

- 45% of respondents selected nature centers,
- 27% selected a multi-generational community recreation center,
- 25% selected a community center for recreation, arts, and culture, and
- 24% selected indoor pools.

Second, respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for five potential actions that the PARD could take to improve the types of parks and recreation amenities offered to residents. Based on the sum of "very supportive" and "supportive" responses, four of the actions received significant levels of support:

- improving the maintenance at existing parks and facilities (90%),
- improving existing parks and facilities through new buildings, paving, trees, and playgrounds (86%),
- acquiring land for parks and facilities in areas that lack parkland (84%), and
- improving access to parks and facilities through trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, and safe crossings (82%).

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate which two potential actions they would be most willing to support with their tax dollars. The two actions that received the most support based upon the sum of respondents' top two choices were:

- acquiring land for parks and facilities in areas that lack parkland (44%) and
- improving existing parks and facilities through new buildings, paving, trees, and playgrounds (42%).

Conclusions

Although usage of facilities and amenities is high participation in PARD programs is relatively low when compared to the national average (17% vs. 32%). A contributing factor to this discrepancy in the participation rates of respondents is likely a result of the number of respondents who indicated they are unaware of the programs that are currently offered. Furthermore, most respondents (73%) indicated they learn about programs, activities, and events via word of mouth but would prefer to receive this information via email. Aligning the preferred methods of communication with the most used methods of communication can help bridge the gap between the national average of recreation program participation (32%) and the percentage of respondents who indicated they participate in programs in the City of Austin.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents indicated they are either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the overall value their household receives from the PARD. To ensure the PARD continues to meet the needs and expectations of the community, ETC Institute recommends that they sustain and/or improve the performance in areas that were identified as “high priorities” by the Priority Investment Rating (PIR). The facilities and programs with the highest PIR ratings are listed below.

Programming Investments

- Farmers market (PIR=200)
- Concerts in the park (PIR=158)
- Nature programs in parks (PIR=137)
- Movies in the park (PIR=123)
- Adult programs (PIR=109)
- Fitness exercise classes (PIR=103)

Amenity Investments

- Multi-purpose and nature trails (PIR=193)
- Open spaces/nature parks preserve (PIR=173)
- Outdoor community pools (PIR=128)
- Off-leash dog areas/parks (PIR=126)
- Community garden (PIR=111)
- Kayak/canoe/paddleboard/paddleboat rentals (PIR=105)