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# Parks and Recreation:

## Mockumentary or Physical Activity Partner?



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# **Park and Recreation Services (PRS) have the capacity and reach to address the nation's physical inactivity crisis...**

- There are over 12,000 local park and recreation departments with more than 105,000 public park facilities and 65,000 indoor recreation facilities.
- The total area covered by urban parkland in the U.S. exceeds 1 million acres
- Over the past decade, PRS have “returned” to community health as a key rationale for their existence.

# **Parks & Recreation is an important physical activity research context because:**

- Typically free and open access
- Offer features that inspire intrinsically enjoyable activity as well as “stealth” activity
- A forum for social interaction and nature connection, which can also reduce stress and anxiety
- The park and recreation sector is eager for information that connects their facilities/services to health outcomes

# What Do We Know about Park and Recreation Approaches, Tools, and Contributions?

Provide an overview of park and recreation approaches and physical activity measures

Discuss findings from..

*Active Living Research Synthesis*

*National Survey of Health Partnerships*



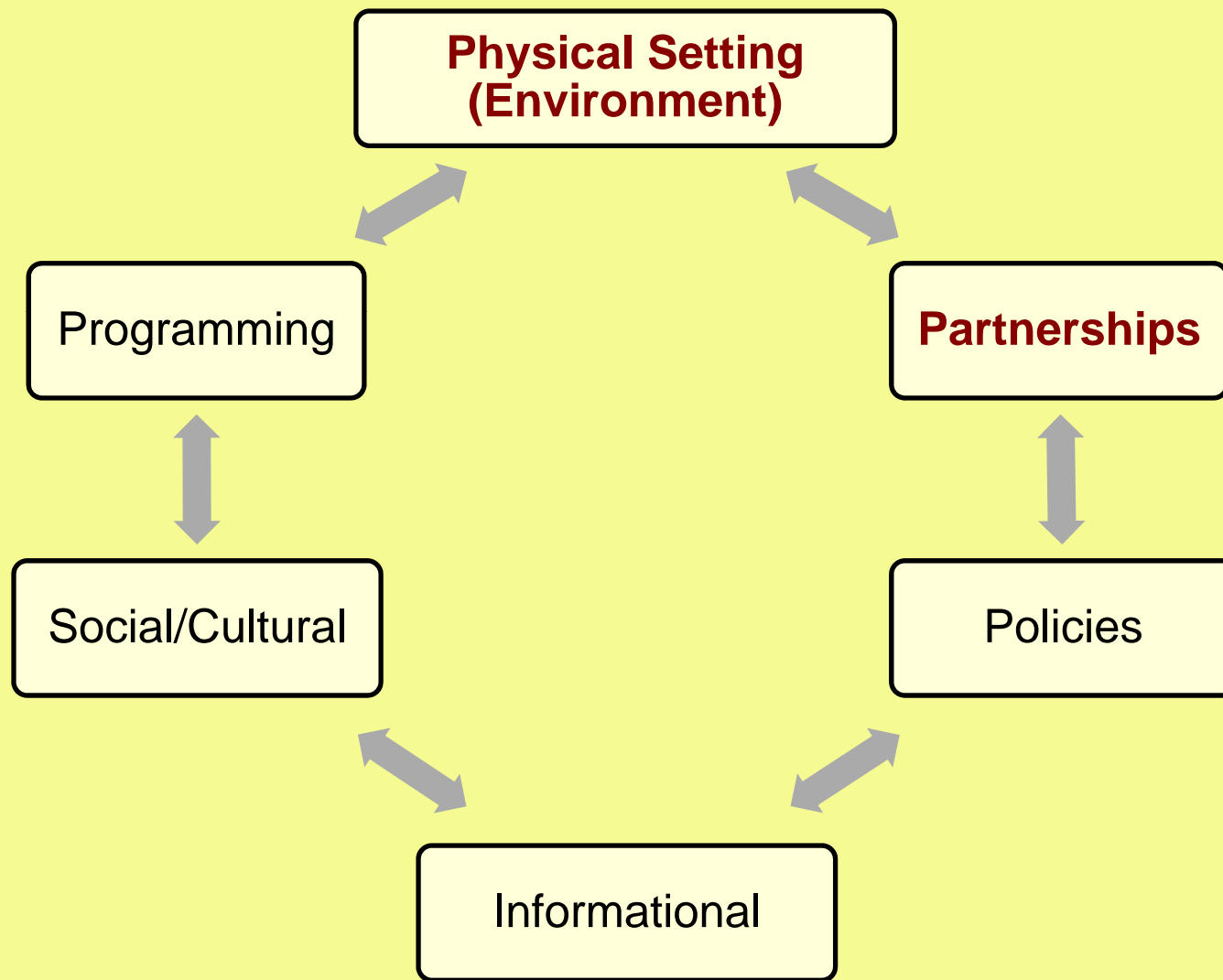
**Active Living Research**

Building the evidence to prevent childhood obesity and support active communities



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

# Park and Recreation Approaches to Promote Activity: An Ecological Perspective



# Park Environment & Physical Activity Measures

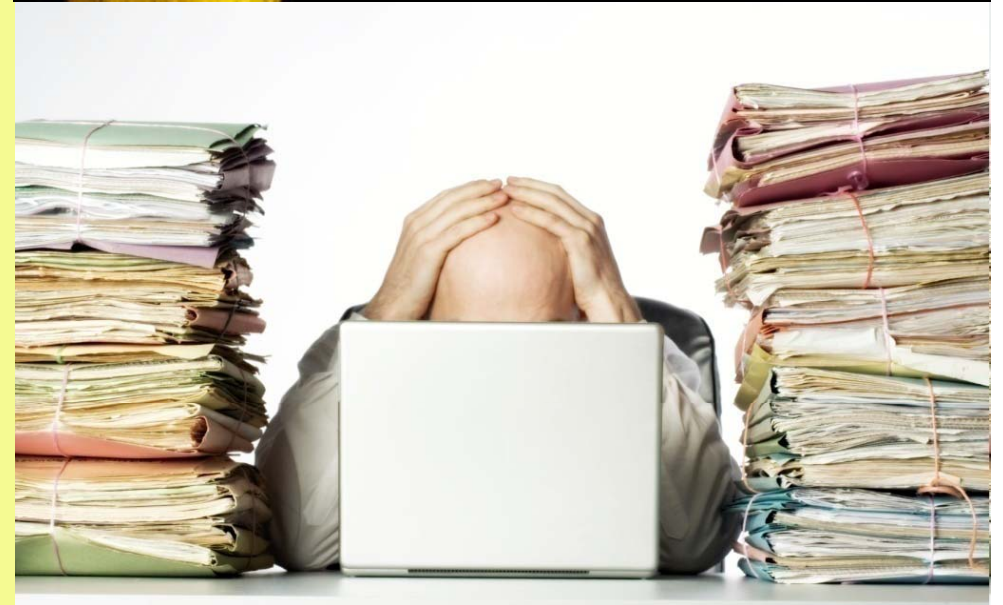
- **Perceived**
  - Self-Report from Subjects
  - Example: PA-PS
- **Observed**
  - Researcher Observations
  - SOPARC
- **Objective**
  - Direct Monitoring Technology



# Information Overload!

The growth of studies linking park settings to physical activity has been remarkable

Still a long way to go to fully understand the impact of environmental and policy changes on physical activity outcomes.



# Public Parks and Active Living: A Brief Review of the Evidence



- Excerpts from a Research Synthesis conducted for Active Living Research...

– [http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Synthesis\\_Mowen\\_Feb2010.pdf](http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Synthesis_Mowen_Feb2010.pdf)



# The Proximal Principle...

**Park proximity is associated with higher levels of park use and physical activity particularly for youth**

- A systematic review found that a majority of studies demonstrated positive associations between recreational facility access and physical activity.
- Perceived & objective measures of park access were related to recommended physical activity levels
- Youth who had close-to-home parks were 2-3 times more likely to walk regularly than youth with no parks.

# Activity-Friendly Park Features

**Within parks, people tend to be more physically active on trails, at playgrounds, at sport facilities, and near park support features**

- Park spaces with soccer fields, tennis, basketball, volleyball courts, and playgrounds associated with higher MVPA overall park energy expenditures (EE).
- Park activity areas with restrooms and drinking fountains had higher number of park users and greater total EE.
- Parks with paved trails were 26 times more likely to be used for physical activity than parks without paved trails.

# Park Renovations and Investments

**Park renovations can increase use of certain types of facilities (playgrounds, skate parks) and increase vigorous activity among children.**

- Renovated playgrounds associated with higher use among adults and children; and higher levels of recess MVPA, particularly for youth
- An evaluation of sport field renovations found that renovated fields experienced significant physical activity increases for both boys & girls
- Another study found that, with the exception of skateparks, visits decreased after improvements, but policy and programming factors may have explained these results.

# What do we know about Physical Activity Partnerships?

A National Survey of Park and Recreation Health Partnerships (2007)\*

– Funded by the *National Recreation Foundation*

Surveyed 1,217 park and recreation agencies (directors, senior managers)

Examined physical activity partnership approaches, key partners, and outcomes

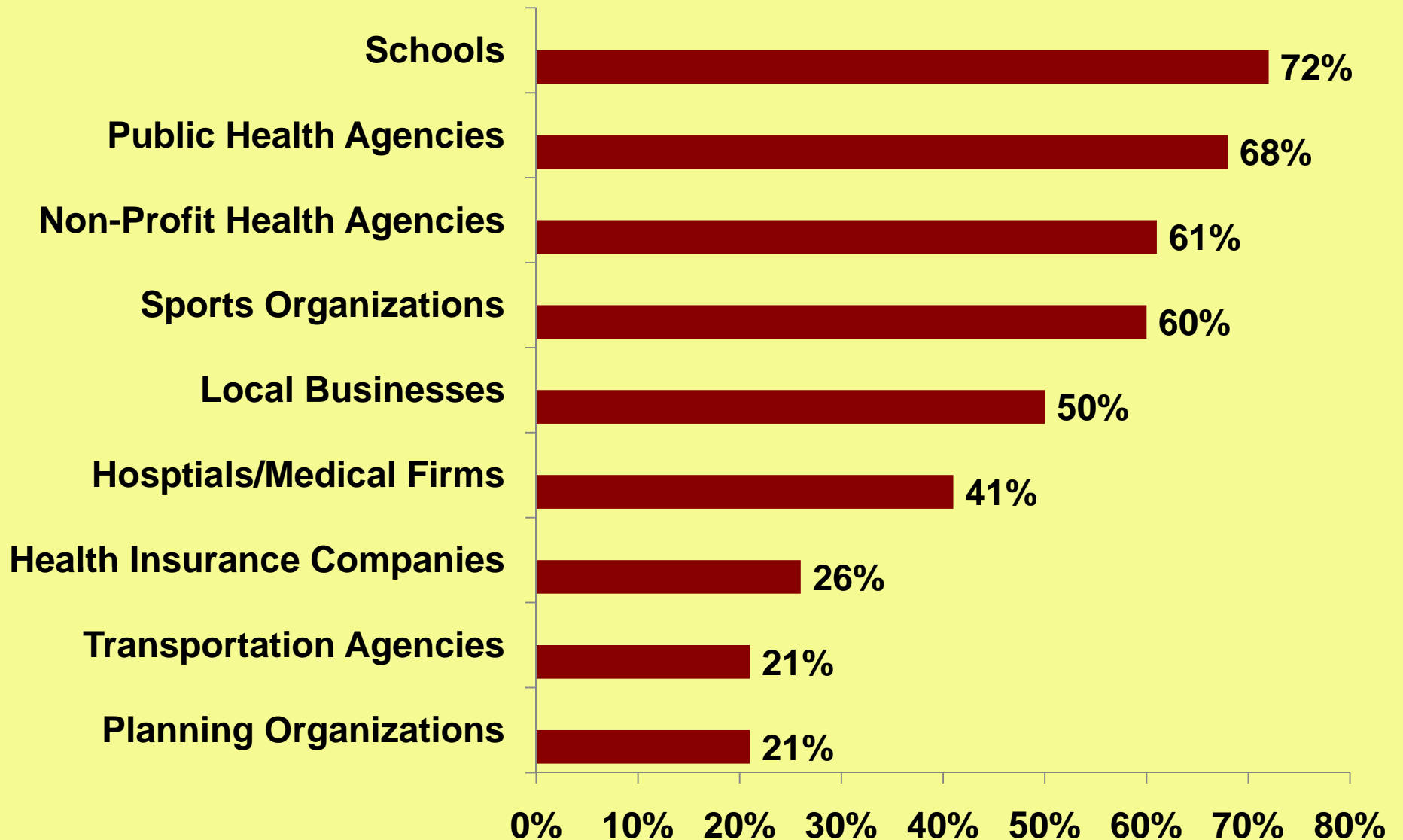


\* Mowen, A. J., Payne, L. L., Orsega-Smith, E., & Godbey, G. C. (2009). Assessing the health partnership practices of park and recreation organizations: Findings and implications from a national survey. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 27(3), 116-131.

# Partnership Participation & Strategies

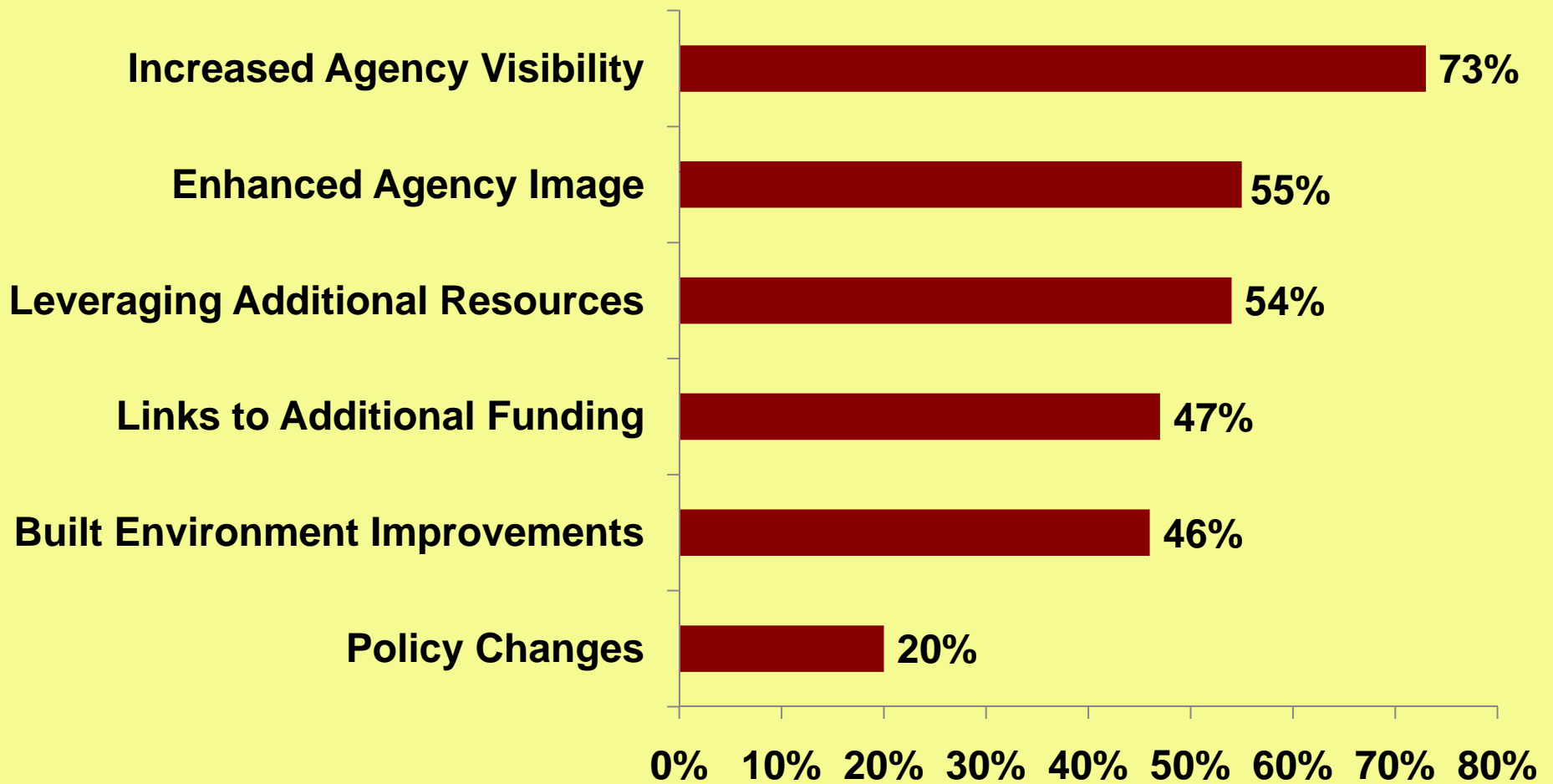
- **A majority (74%) said that their organization had engaged in a partnership to promote physical activity over the last 5 years.**
- **Partnership Strategies to Promote Physical Activity**
  - Programs (39%) and Special Events/Health Fairs (29%),
  - Creation of Active Park Features (29%)
  - Marketing/Promotional Campaigns (15%)
  - Physician Referrals to Parks & Recreation Services (4%)
- **Single Most Important Agency Contribution to the Partnership**
  - Facilities (38%)
  - Access to the Public/Target Markets (22%)
  - Enhanced Image/Visibility to the Partnership (17%)

# Type of Organizations Partnered With...



# Perceived PA Partnership Outcomes for the Park and Recreation Agency

**% Agreement**



# Partnership Functioning

- **Partnerships were characterized by high levels of...**
  - Support from top management (70%)\*
  - Willingness to collaborate (69%)
  - Partnership goal agreement (61%)
  - Empowerment to make decisions (60%)
  - Trust (59%)
- **However these partnerships were less likely to...**
  - Involve all organizations that should be involved (23%)
  - Have structured rules/guidelines (27%)
  - Break down stereotypes (30%)
  - Equitably distribute partnership resources (33%)

\* % that agreed or strongly agreed that their partnerships shared these characteristics



# Perceived Partnership Effectiveness

- Overall satisfaction (76%) and perceived effectiveness (68%) were moderately high.
- However, only 1 in 4 agencies formally evaluated the impact of their collaborations.
- Those that did evaluate were more likely to perceive favorable partnership outcomes





# “To Conclude...”



# Seizing the Possibilities...

- The early evidence indicates that parks and recreation contributes favorably to physical activity and this sector is a viable intervention and research partner
- However, the potential of this sector in addressing physical inactivity is not fully realized...
  - Many park visitors are sedentary
  - Parks are not visited frequently (based on PA guidelines)
  - We are losing “market share” to sedentary, virtual leisure

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# Questions?





# Contact Information

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**Thank You!**