

## Key Findings from the 2018 GP REDLine Survey on Homelessness in Parks

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The 2018 REDLine survey on Homelessness received 150 responses from throughout the United States. It was distributed by email to a GP RED maintained list of professionals including representatives from parks and recreation, public health, social services, planning and other related fields. The survey was designed to obtain current information on challenges posed by homeless individuals in public spaces, and to identify some of the initiatives that have been undertaken to address these conditions. Questions were intended to gather a broad understanding of some of the efforts occurring around the country, with a particular focus on parks, recreation and public health agencies. Several of the questions were also framed to allow comparison to questions that were asked previously as a part of the NRPA membership-based study, "Homelessness in Parks, 2018."

### WHAT ARE WE CALLING THIS CHALLENGING ISSUE?

- The survey included the following question:

*"What is the term that is most often used for the segment of your community/population that is without housing on a day to day basis?"*

Results show that "homeless" is, by far, the most frequently used term, followed by "transient" and "unauthorized camping. Although there have been conversations in some communities about using terms other than "homeless," results show that this term is much more likely to be used in communities throughout the country than any other term.

### WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THIS ISSUE?

Attitudes of agencies and communities vary widely on homelessness in park settings. For example, survey results show that there are deep divisions on how homeless individuals are seen by communities and agencies, with 38% saying they disagree that "Homeless individuals are a different type of park user with different needs," and 44% saying they agree with the statement. Similarly, about 33% disagree with the statement, "Homeless individuals are a nuisance to other park users -i.e. get them out," and 55% agree with this statement.

### HOW EFFECTIVE ARE WE AT DEALING WITH THE ISSUE?

- Survey respondents indicated that both their community and their department (or organization) are generally quite ineffective in dealing with homelessness/unauthorized camping in parks and public spaces. Virtually none of the respondents said their organizations are "extremely effective" and about 40% called their efforts a 1 or 2 on the 5-point scale, where 1 means "not at all effective." Clearly, results point to a need for more effective efforts at both the community and agency levels.

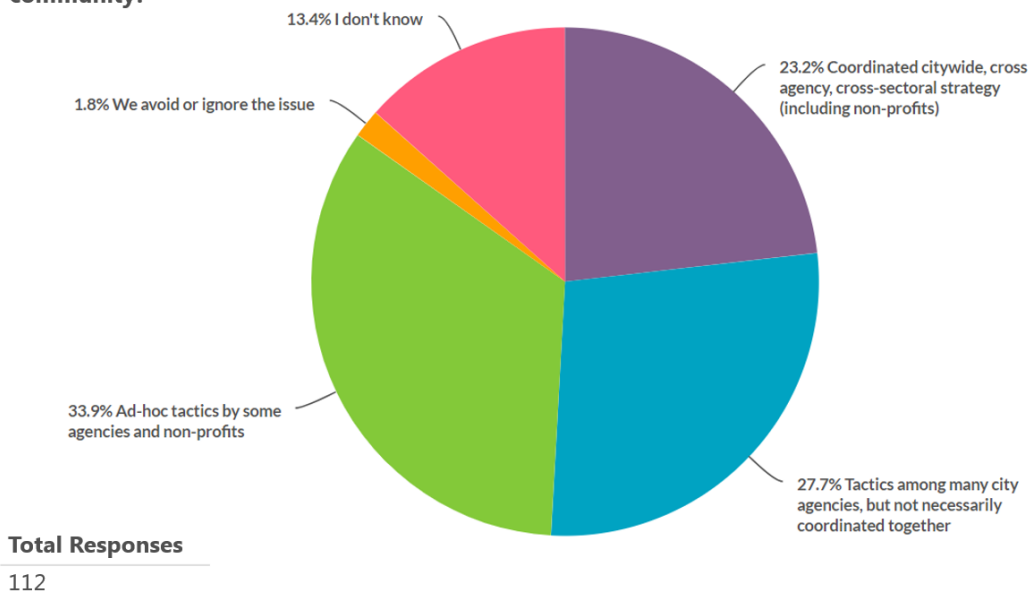
### WHAT DO EFFORTS IN OUR COMMUNITIES LOOK LIKE TODAY?

- When asked about where community efforts are focused (using a 5-point scale between "prevention policies" and "enforcement policies," and with "a balance" in the middle) more

respondents call their efforts a “balance” (44%) than any other category. Few communities are emphasizing just prevention, with more leaning toward enforcement.

- Other community entities are more likely to provide services to local homeless populations (e.g., food assistance, shelter, access to computers/telephones, social services, etc.); however, parks and recreations agencies do often provide a number of amenities. Most (70%) were providing some level of restroom facilities, followed by electricity/charging at 30% and showers at 23%.
- In a related finding, most survey respondents report that there is a general lack of coordinated effort at the community level, with either “ad-hoc tactics” or “some tactics among agencies but not coordinated” as the dominant responses (62%).

**12. Which of the following best describes the nature of the strategies and tactics in your community?**



## DESIGN STANDARDS

- An area of notable activity by local agencies is in the use of design standards and infrastructure that discourage overnight stays in parks. The GP REDLine survey showed that 32% of respondents indicated that their agencies were using these techniques. When compared to the NRPA study, between 25% and 35% respondents said their communities were not using design to mitigate homelessness. However, in both studies there was a strong indication that such standards are being considered (27% of GP REDLine respondents). Clearly, design standards is an increasing area of interest among professionals and there is likely to be more attention given to best practices in this area in the future.

## WHO IS LEADING THE CHARGE?

- Based on the survey responses, the following agencies were most likely to be playing a leadership role in dealing with homelessness:

- Schools (59%)
- Non-profits (55%)
- Parks and Recreation (53%)
- Faith-based organizations (48%)

According to the survey, libraries, health and human services agencies and police departments played relatively smaller roles in terms of leadership at the community level.

These results show some differences from those obtained through the NRPA Homelessness Survey of members.

## FINDINGS

The survey finding that parks and recreation agencies are still considered to be relatively ineffective in their efforts (as discussed above), yet in a relatively high leadership role, is significant. Further, the survey provides guidance on other agencies that are viewed to be successful – schools, non-profits and faith-based entities. They represent some of the logical partners for successful cross-agency collaboration and coordination.

Clearly, the nature of homelessness problems requires efforts from a wide range of professionals and organizations. The survey findings suggest some of the logical champions for these efforts. And the results of the survey provide some metrics upon which the industry can measure progress over time.

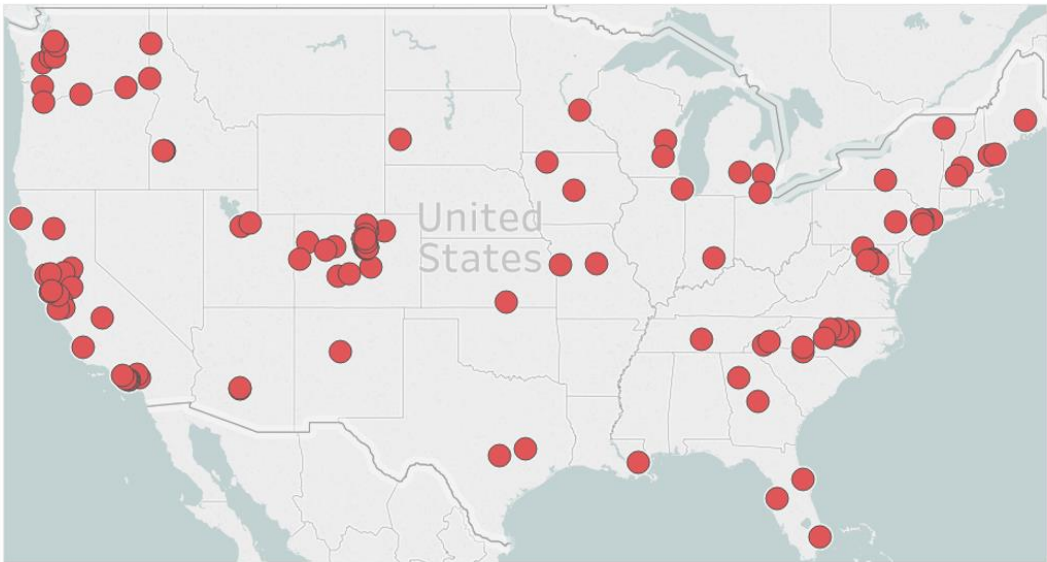
## NEXT STEPS/CALL TO ACTION

The GP RED Think Tank, held in December 2018, included a session on Homelessness. A video of that discussion is available by clicking here: <https://youtu.be/4B1JkhuXgQs>

Further, the strong interest in this topic, as expressed at the Think Tank and through the efforts of NRPA suggests that there is definite need and interest in the topic and a desire for more action. How should practitioners continue to develop skills and knowledge to promote understanding, influence strategies and obtain a seat at the table as municipal efforts increase? And how do you determine your place in collaborative efforts? These are topics that deserve continued attention. If you have comments on this topic or examples of programs that are working in your region, please share them by clicking here: <https://survey.rrcresearch.com/s3/Comment-on-GP-REDLine>.

# GP REDLine Survey Results: Unauthorized Camping ("Homelessness") in Parks and Public Spaces November - December 2018

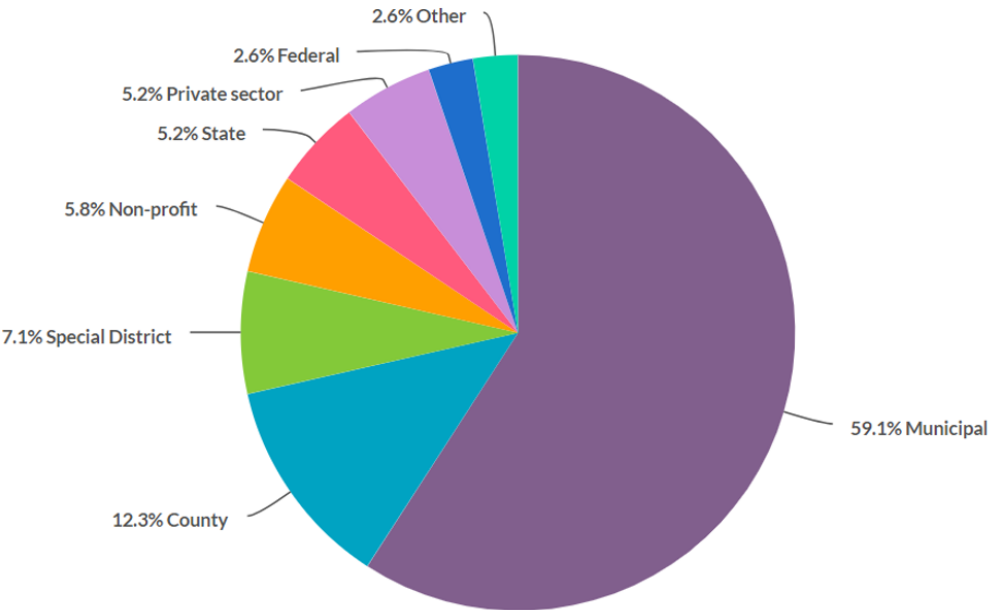
## 1. What is the ZIP Code of your agency or organization?



### Total Responses

150

## 2. Which term below best describes your agency or organization?



### Total Responses

158

## Other

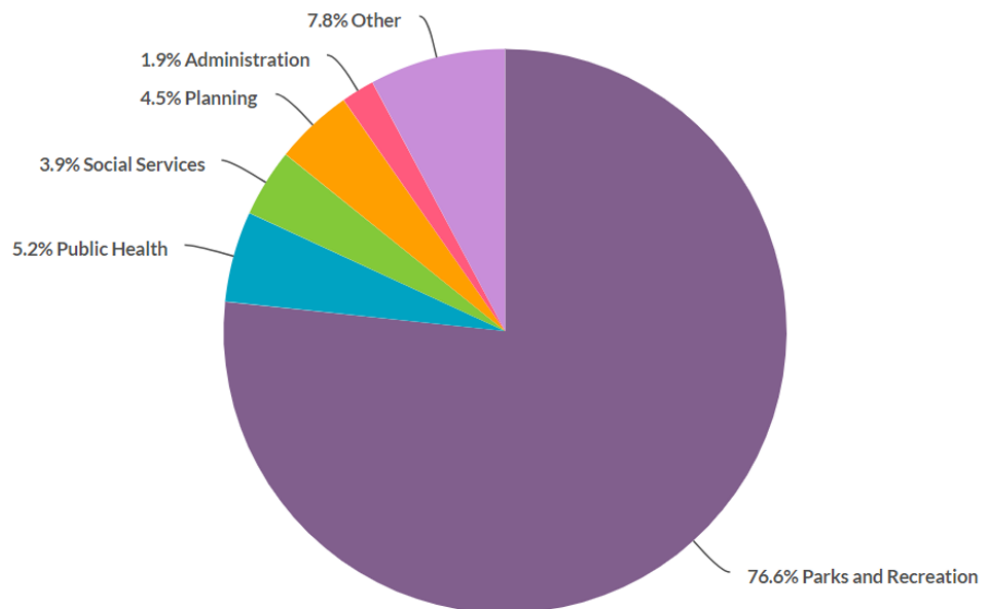
Education

Healthcare

University

University education

### 3. And which department or area of specialization best describes your agency or organization



#### Total Responses

154

## Other

Education

Consulting

Fairgrounds

Parks and Rec, Social Services, Planning, Cultural Affairs, and Administration

Public Works - Parks Maintenance

Reforestation

Research




University - research

law enforcement

public education

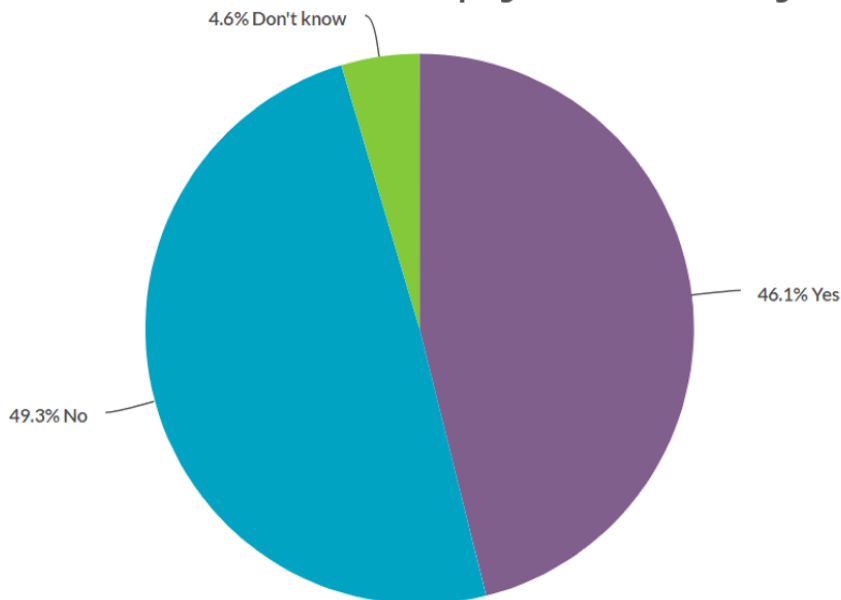
research

4. A number of the following questions ask you about “your community.” What is the name of the community that you most identify with and will be responding about in this survey?

Value		Percent
Prefer not to identify it, I want to remain fully anonymous		29.2%
Name of community:		61.8%
If associated with multiple communities, please identify primary examples:		9.0%

GPRed will provide comments under separate cover if requested.

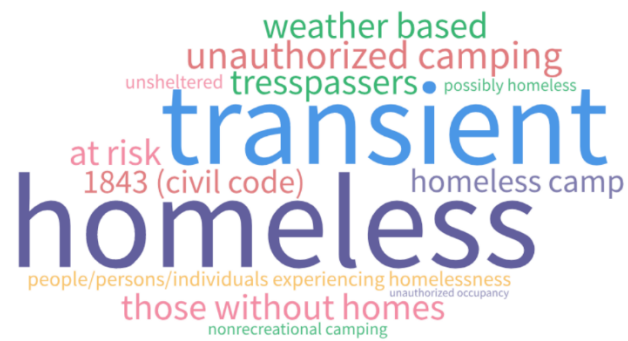
**5. Has your organization or community discussed or debated an appropriate name for problems associated with unauthorized camping, unsheltered housing, homelessness, etc?**



**Total Responses**

152

6. What is the term that is most often used for the segment of your community/population that is without housing on a day to day basis? (e.g. homeless, unauthorized camping, transient, unhoused, etc.)



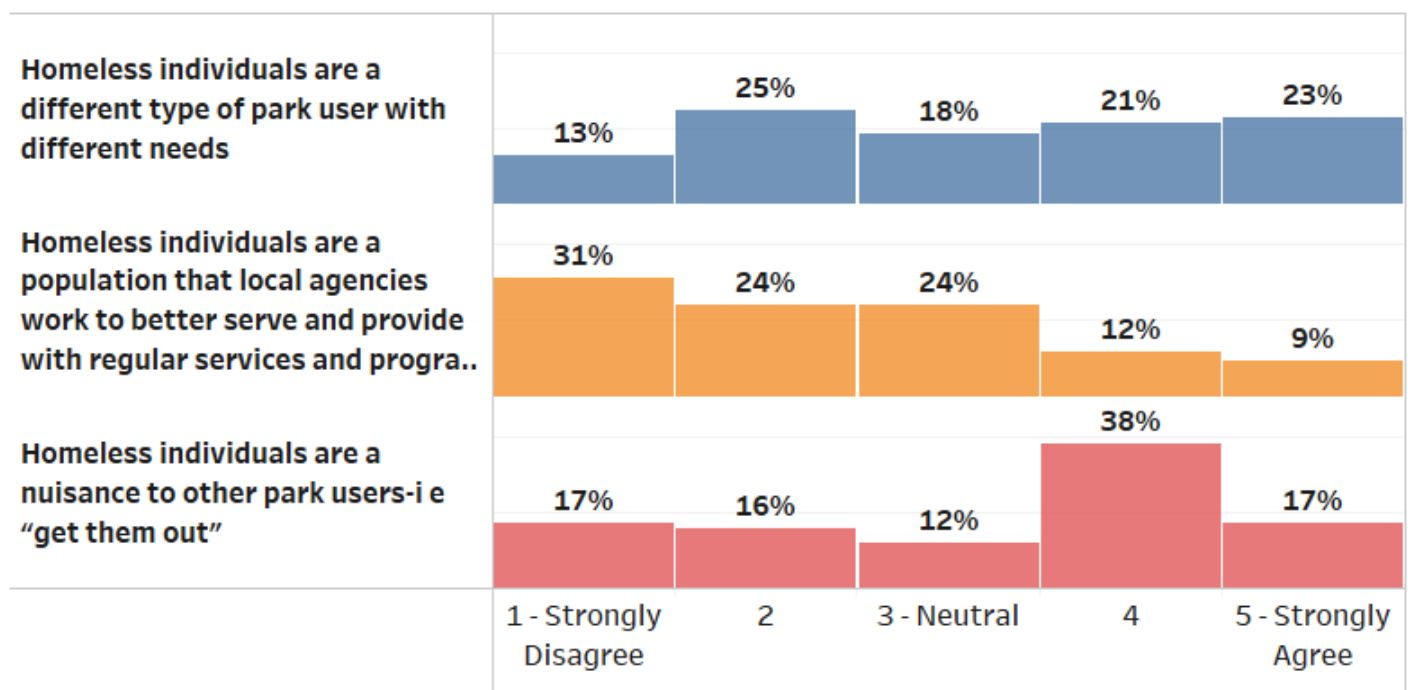
Count	Response
30	Homeless
5	transient
5	unauthorized camping
3	Transient
2	People experiencing homelessness
2	homeless and transient
2	homeless or transient
2	individuals experiencing homelessness
1	1,843
1	7
1	All of the above
1	Homeleas
1	Homeless, I think.
1	Homeless, Transient
1	Homelessness
1	I use a campervan, if I like the spot, I stay overnight regardless of signs.
1	Individuals experiencing Homelessness
1	Non-recreational camping
1	Peopl experiencing homelessness
1	People currently experiencing homelessness
1	homeless and or transient as there are different populations
1	homeless camp
1	homeless or "those without homes"
1	homeless or transient (more weather based)



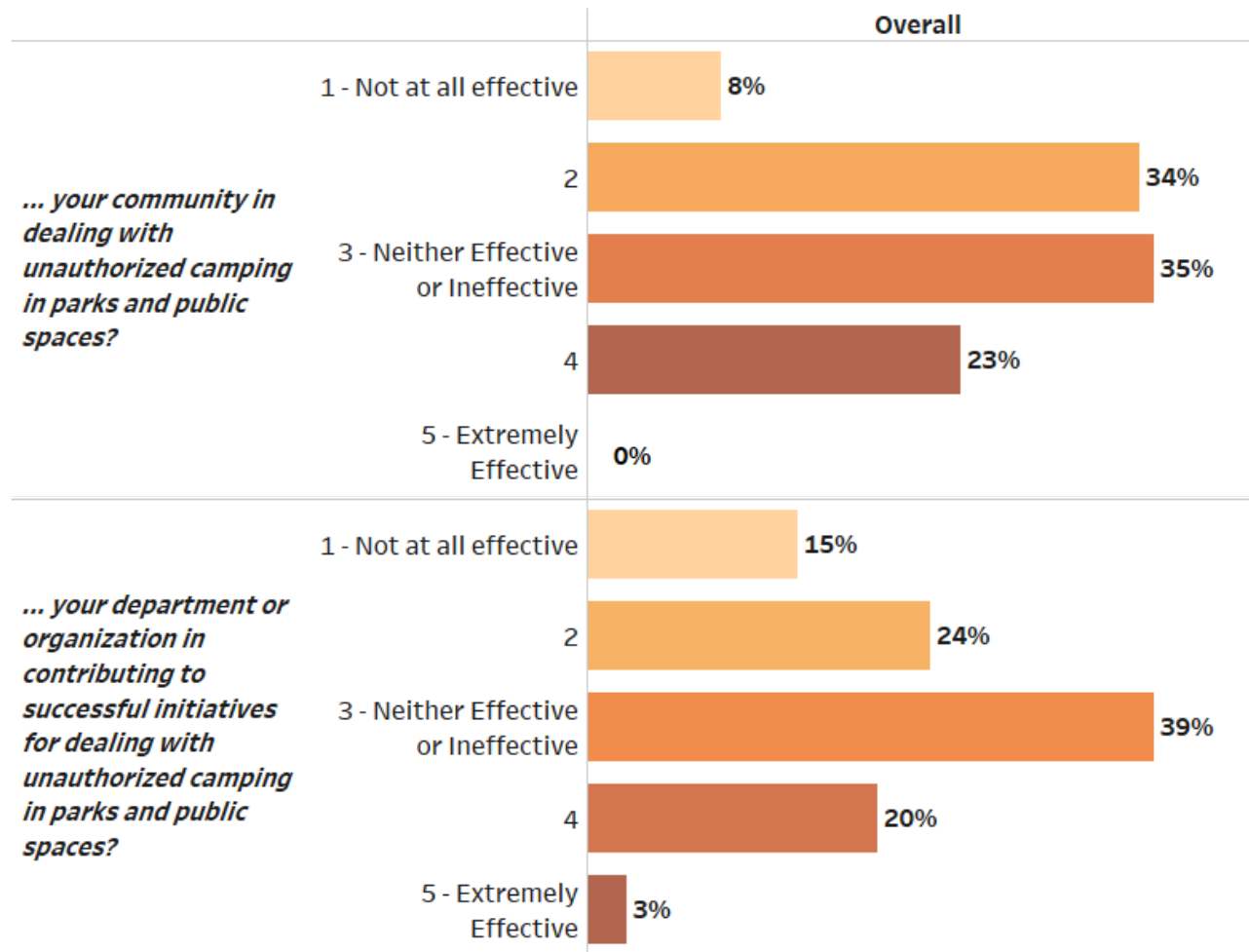
Count	Response
1	homeless, trespassers
1	homeless, unauthorized camping
1	people experiencing homelessness
1	person experiencing homelessness
1	those without homes
1	unauthorized occupancy

**7. How does your community or agency view unauthorized camping/homelessness?**

*Using the scale below from 1 to 5, indicate whether you think the overall local sentiment would be to agree, be "neutral" or disagree with each statement.*



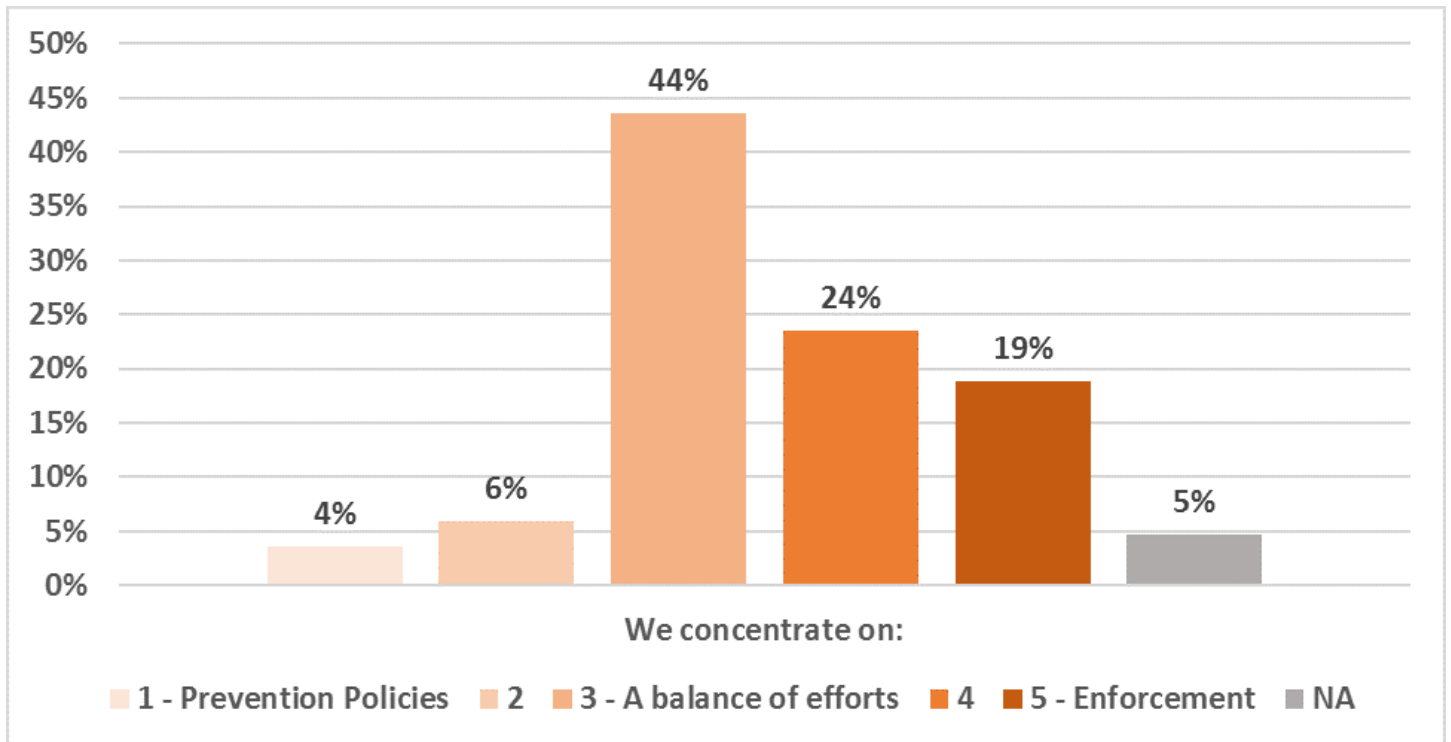
8. Using the scale below from 1 to 5, overall, how effective is:



Total Responses

85

9. On the scale below, from 1 to 5, where would you place your community in terms of dealing with unauthorized camping?



Total Responses

85

10. What role does your agency or organization typically play in contributing to policy discussions concerning unauthorized camping in your community?



Response

none

As a small community our department works closely with local law enforcement on policy discussions

Assisting with identification of persons in need of additional support services, and for clean up of unauthorized camp sites.

Community & Recreation Services (CRS) plays an important role in all internal policy discussions on unauthorized camping/mobile homeless issues and programs.

Discussion about posting park hours so police can enforce people in the park after it is closed

Help identify where the camping is occurring and the impact it is having on our delivery of service and on our resources.

I stop in a campervan in locations I deem good for 24 hours usually very private

Incorporating safe design features in early phases of park and trail design.

Information based

Involved in Community Outreach bi-monthly meetings.

It's more of an issue for our Public Library Downtown (which is part of the Parks and Recreation Department.) We do have some homeless issues in our parks and we have a great partnership with the police to work with these individuals

Location of homeless sites

Make recommendations to policy makers.

Mostly we describe the impacts on our parks and staff.

None

## Response

Our agency works with law enforcement and the P&R Advisory Board to write rules and ordinances.

Our community is not active regarding homelessness matters.

Our organization works with non-profits that work with homeless populations. However, those organizations deal with folks that cannot use alcohol or drugs so there are a lot of individuals that do not utilize the various organizations that provide shelter, food, education, etc... because they choose not to comply with the rules or prefer not to be engaged with others.

Parks and recreation plays a large role in policy decisions in our community as many times, outside of the need for law enforcement, our front and mid line staff are the ones who are enforcing the policy.

Referrals as needed to local community assistance organizations.

Report unauthorized camping to law enforcement.

Sit at the table for discussions and local law is cited within parks code

Streamlining procedures & protocols; Code review and refinement;

We play both a leadership role in holding conversations regarding the issue and brainstorming solutions; a coordinators role in helping managers plan actions; and facilitators role in helping managers implement actions.

The Community Services Department works in partnership with the Police Department in discussing and interacting with the homeless or transient population in our city parks.

This comes up from in project discussions with local government agencies or communities.

Trying to design things to prevent transients from camping in parks

We are supporting after school programs in three communities where the homeless and gangs are affecting the middle and high school populations.

We deal with unauthorized camping frequently but not as much as some agencies. We have a policy in which we handle common situations and have attended a variety of conferences detailing how we handle these situations. These conferences often spur discussions about common threads each organization deals with around this issue.

We have a Park Police Division and actively participate with other law enforcement agencies in enforcing park rules and regulations. We provide resource literature to the homeless.

We have a lot of parks and public facilities. Our organization meets with law enforcement and similar to find constructive solutions.

We make enforcement decisions locally as a law enforcement agency. We only have minor input on overall departmental policy change

## Response

We provide public access to public land, including visitors without homes. Public lands often provide "affordable accommodations" for individuals that cannot afford housing in adjacent communities.

We take a lead role through the City's Health & Human Services Department.

<https://www.scpr.org/news/2017/04/27/71212/long-beach-cut-21-percent-of-its-homeless-populati/>

We work with our Police Department to address our transient small population through monitoring and park and trail rule enforcement.

We work with the Community Services Division, Police Department and Department of Public Works, a true collaborative effort.

Will respond to complaints, otherwise we work to make them aware of local resources and ensure they are safe.

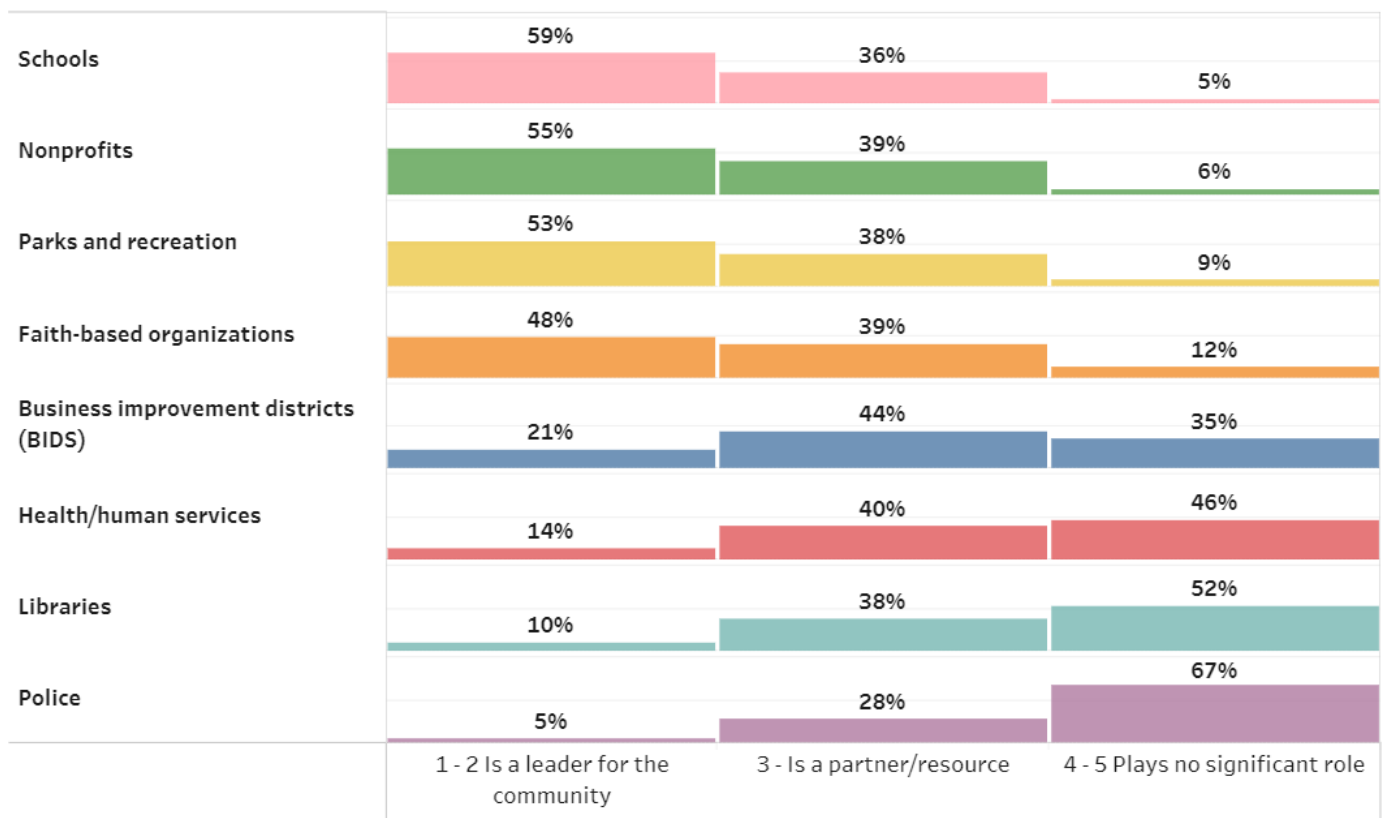
limited

minimal

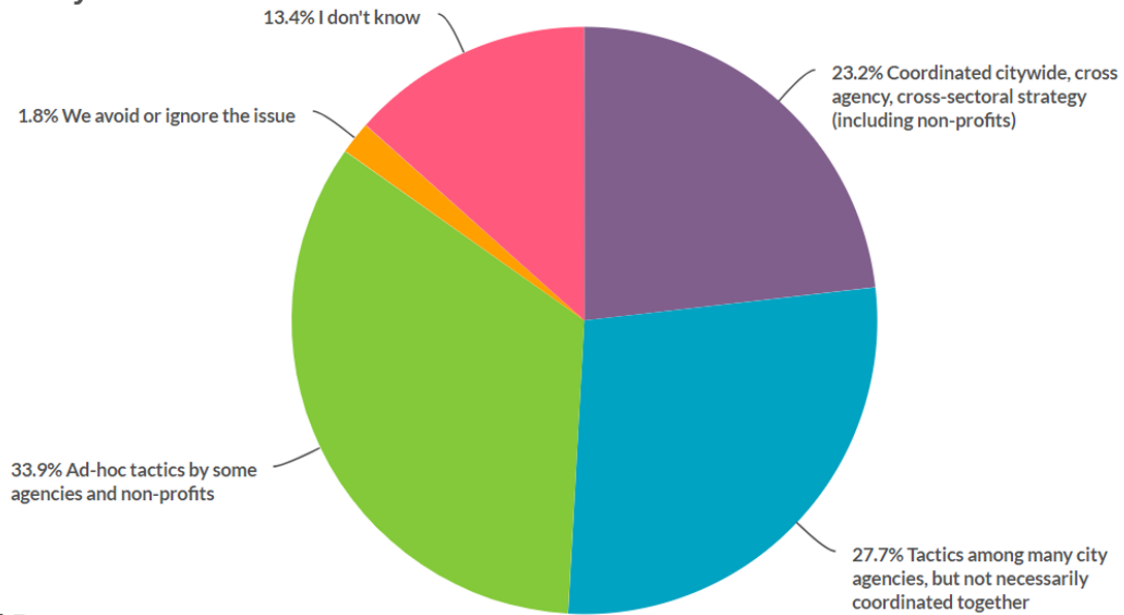
planning

We mostly lead downstream efforts (mitigation impacts of illegal encampments) while supporting some upstream interventions (e.g. work integration) and other departments in our organization focus on upstream efforts (Housing First models, etc).

### 11. Thinking about responsibilities for homelessness initiatives in your community, how would you rate the roles of different entities using the following scale:



**12. Which of the following best describes the nature of the strategies and tactics in your community?**



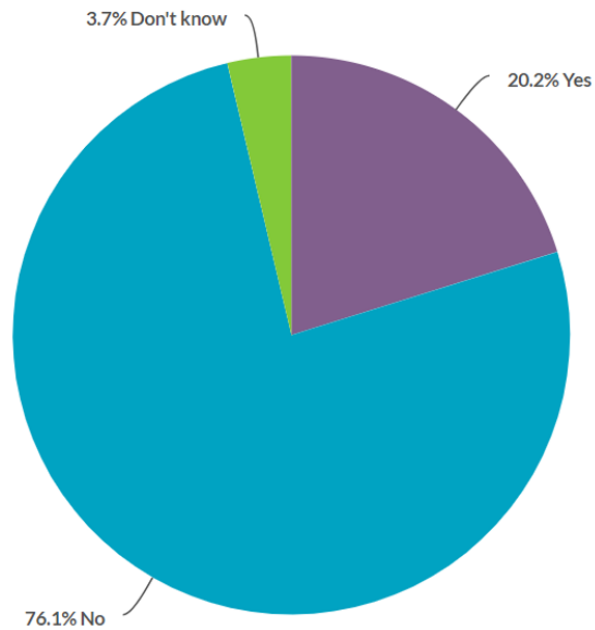
**Total Responses**

112

**13. Are the following services offered to the homeless population by parks and recreation agencies in your community?**

	Yes	No	Provided by another entity (not parks and recreation)	Uncertain
Restroom facilities	70%	7%	12%	11%
Electricity/Charging	30%	30%	16%	25%
Showers	23%	31%	26%	20%
Fitness/health and wellness	23%	42%	17%	19%
Food assistance	15%	22%	56%	7%
Shelter provided during periods of inclement weather	14%	24%	46%	16%
Access to computers/telephones	12%	33%	39%	15%
Drop-in social services	10%	31%	44%	14%
Job training	8%	29%	45%	19%
Secure storage for personal effects	6%	52%	18%	23%

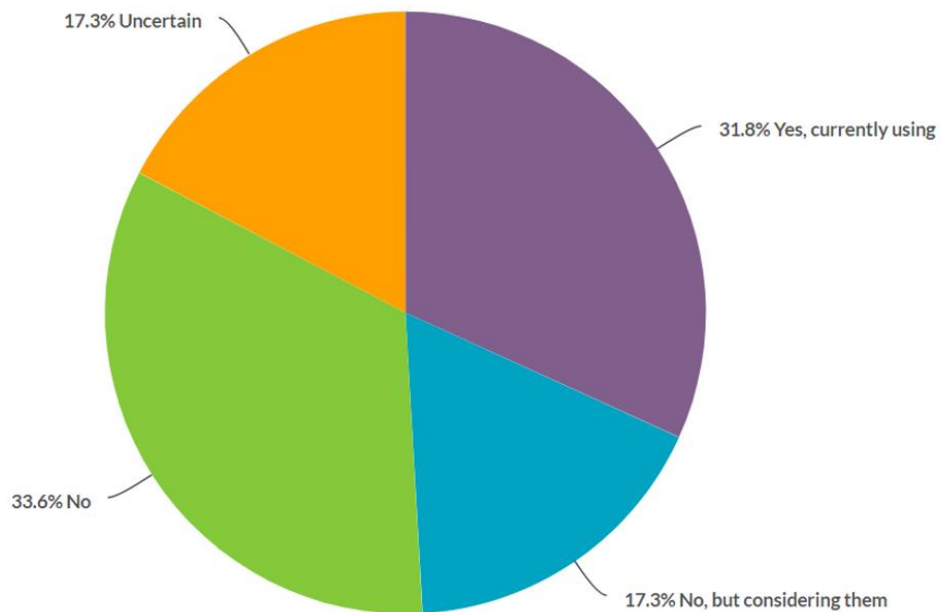
**14. Has your department or agency received training or any specialized activities to improve your skills and understanding of issues related to unauthorized camping in your community?**



**Total Responses**

109

**15. Does your agency or community use design standards and infrastructure to discourage overnight stays in parks?**



**Total Responses**

110



17. Do you have any additional comments on what is working for your community, or success stories related to unauthorized camping, that you would like to share with other practitioners?



## Response

99% of the time I am left alone in camping where I should not.

A non profit homeless shelter takes most of those that cannot go to a traditional shelter due to substance abuse or other issues.

Bringing social services providers to concentrated areas of unauthorized camping and those living in vehicles helps. Ultimately, though, housing is needed.

Cold weather drives the homeless out this time of year

Developed stay limits that require occupants to move every 14 days.

I wish we had some success stories to tell but don't. The City Homeless Action Coordinator has recently instituted a program to discourage people from giving to panhandlers and donate to service providers instead. No data yet on impact. He has also reached out to faith based organizations that feed in the parks but many will not listen or heed any of his input. The City has also contributed to the construction of 500 new low barrier beds in the hopes that it will get people off of the streets.

I work with the Continuum of Care (CoC), which is a HUD-designated entity responsible for coordinating homeless services. All 100 counties in NC (and almost every County in the USA) are part of a CoC and I urge Parks & Rec Departments to partner with these organizations in addressing unsheltered homelessness. There is a lot of research about what works to end homelessness, and unsheltered homelessness, and people working in CoCs are familiar with this and can help to educate and partner with Parks & Rec staff.

It is an ever-changing challenge. What works one day, won't work the next day. It has to be dealt with on a case-by-case situation.

## Response

It's a very challenging problem. Will be interested to hear what others are saying.

It's important to consider transient users of public land as part of the public, and to focus on impacts rather than use.

N/A

No

Not Working - closing parks at 10PM, no sitting on sidewalks, clearing allies at night.

Not at this time

Nothing is working in our community, the problem is getting worse.

Our Park Police enforce park hours of operation, not camping violations. This has been upheld in our courts so far.

Sleep Center houses up to 40+ individuals and is often full which hypothetically reduces campers. Many different opportunities for assistance from non-profits and the City alike. Seeing a large influx of homeless from out of town.

This issue is one which clearly connects to the efforts we are undertaking to create safe spaces for active recreation and leisure pursuits in our "Alpha" test site schools. Please note that we have discovered the "homeless" population also includes children and youth who should be in school!

The homeless population locally are normally transients passing through. We provide a tent periodically to allow the person to stay one night and then move on if we have room in our campground.

We have been very fortunate, although present, that unauthorized camping has not taken root in the Burlington community. Local ordinances do prohibit it from taking place within any City facility. What we have begun to see is transient and homeless individuals utilizing complimentary Wifi access points within park areas and City Hall quite frequently and remaining within locations past stated hours.

We have had a few instances over many years and are not faced with the daily problem some other agencies might be facing.

We have instituted a no camping ban for our parks and most recently our riparian areas. If consistent enforcement was available this could be better managed however, I do believe it will just push them to other areas within the community.

We have just begun to work with the County's Social Services agencies and other partners/resources in addressing a portion of the issue - specifically young adults 18-24

We have passed an ordinance which allows enforcement.

We mainly have homeless individuals along the roads, under highway overpasses. We don't see them in the parks very often.

## Response

We no longer issue citations for camping in our parks. We do however cite for being in the parks after closing time. So far the citations have been upheld where our parks have clear open and closing times posted.

We started a new program 2 years ago called CAREavan that provides safe parking areas and support services and facilities (restrooms, laundry, showers, internet, charging stations, and food and toiletries) to families and individuals living in their cars/vans (not RVs).

18. If you have codes or policies that you feel would be of interest to other professionals, feel free share that information here. Alternatively, you may provide a link or scan and upload documentation below.



## Response

Think Carefully where you stop, if a good location, you will be left alone move on after 24 hours

We have codes that make camping in parks illegal. When the sleep center is fully occupied then individuals are allowed to camp on public property( right-of-ways, etc), but not parks. Enforcement is typically a last resort because the individuals that are being moved will pop up at another location.

We have overnight camping ordinances for our parks, open space areas and trail system

<http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2018/09/04/15-35845.pdf>

NOTE: Salt Lake City is one of very few large municipalities that does not have a bona fide public parks and recreation department!