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Public Response to Park and Recreation Funding and Cost-saving Strategies: The Role of Organizational Trust and Commitment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Historically, public park and recreation services have been funded through general funds and appropriations, with minimal amounts derived from non-tax revenue sources. The fiscal conservative movement, however, has spawned an expansion of non-tax revenues and cost saving strategies. This study examines the level of citizen support for a variety of funding and cost-saving strategies for park and recreation agencies in a metropolitan region, and the factors related to citizens' opinions about such strategies. Data were collected through a mail survey of adult residents of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania region. A total of 578 questionnaires were completed. Results showed that funding strategies involving external contributions such as donations and corporate sponsorships were most strongly supported by the local citizenry. Respondents were least supportive of park services privatization and the use of park entrance fees. Regression analysis was used to test the relationships between citizen socio-demographic characteristics, park use patterns, organizational trust and commitment, and level of support for the various strategies. Organizational trust, commitment, and citizen characteristics were significantly related to a number of funding strategies. While prior research has examined the role of trust and commitment in the implementation of enterprise funding strategies (e.g. user fees), our data indicates that trust and commitment were more salient for general tax support than for other, more transactional funding strategies, such as user fees and corporate sponsorships. Respondents who perceived that their local park agencies were socially competent and who were more committed to the agency were also more likely to support taxes and less likely to support park privatization. These results affirm that a trusting and committed citizenry is a key ingredient in preventing the erosion of tax-based support and the subsequent privatization of park and recreation services. Park and recreation administrators who wish to expand their funding beyond existing tax support should take actions to foster trust and commitment across their multiple constituent groups.

Agencies that currently enjoy a high level of constituent trust and commitment should be cautious when privatizing park services, lest they compromise existing levels of trust and commitment.

KEYWORDS: Funding strategies, trust, commitment, fees, tax support, corporate sponsorship

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Introduction

Adequate funding continues to be a top priority for local park and recreation departments across the nation. Surveys of park and recreation administrators have repeatedly identified the availability of sufficient finances as one of the profession's major challenges to growth and sustainability (Crompton, 1999). Historically, public park and recreation services had been funded directly through general funds and appropriations with only a minimum amount funded through user fees and other non-tax revenue sources. The fiscal conservative movement, however, has spawned an expansion of revenue (user fees, specialized taxes, trust funds, donations, corporate sponsorships) and cost-saving strategies (intergovernmental partnerships and service privatization). During this period (approximately 1978 to the present day) park and recreation departments were given more autonomy and encouragement to select enterprise funding strategies that would maximize their fiscal bottom line and sustain services during periods of declining tax appropriations.

In the quest to sustain adequate funding, researchers have argued that park and recreation agencies may risk losing long-term public support at the expense of short-term revenue maximization (Glover, 1999; McCarville 1995). Notably, there have been public controversies associated with park funding strategies such as park entrance/user fees (Dustin, More, & McAvoy, 2000; More, 2000; 2002) and corporate sponsorships (Mowen & Graefe, 2002; Mowen & Havitz, 2002). Lack of public acceptance of funding strategies may be accompanied by reductions in existing tax

support, reduced visitation, and non-compliance (Becker, Berrier, & Barker, 1985; Leuschner, Cook, Roggenbuck, & Olderswald, 1987; Reiling, Criner, & Oltmann, 1988). Park and recreation departments that understand how the public will respond to funding strategies will be better positioned to develop funding initiatives with a greater likelihood of public support and sustainability. Since public support for funding depends on a variety of community and organizational contexts (Responsive Management, 2003), it is also important to understand how these preferences can vary by citizen, community, and agency characteristics.

The purpose of the current study was to examine the collective relationships between citizen socio-demographic characteristics, use patterns, organizational trust, organizational commitment and the level of support for a variety of park and recreation funding and cost-saving strategies. Study findings should provide professionals with an understanding of those conditions that influence public support for funding and whether these relationships depend on the type of funding strategy under consideration.

Citizen Response to Park and Recreation Funding Strategies

A number of national, state, and local surveys have assessed public support of park and recreation funding strategies and population characteristics associated with that support. In 2002, as a response to critical budgetary shortfalls, King County, Washington conducted a telephone survey of Seattle residents and found that 71 percent of citizens supported corporate sponsorships, 70% the sale of advertising space, and 70% private contracting as ways to generate additional park and recreation revenue. They also supported proposals to expand fee revenues and create a non-profit parks foundation to support park maintenance. However, a majority (65%) opposed the outright sale of parks to private interests (McDonough, 2003).

At a state-level, a survey of Washington State residents was conducted to inquire about citizen attitudes and support for various state park funding strategies (Responsive Management, 2000). A majority of citizens that were polled agreed with the statement that their state park system was currently under-funded. Here, a substantial percentage (47%) felt that the state park system should be funded equally by citizens (e.g., through taxes) and by park visitors (e.g., through user fees). Twenty percent felt that Washington State Parks should be funded by visitors and 26% felt that it should be funded by the general citizenry. When asked about specific funding strategies, citizens were less likely to support options that placed a burden on the general population such as additional taxes, bond issues, and generalized fees/charges unrelated to parks. Strategies that received the greatest support included revenues from illegal dumping fines (95%), selling advertising space on its website (79%), and sales taxes on large recreation vehicles (74%) (Responsive Management, 2000). Strategies

that received the least support included revenues from additional sales tax (28%), fees based upon the first sale of new houses (36%), and taxes upon road construction projects (37%). This study also examined the relationships between citizen characteristics and support for funding strategies. It found that citizens who visited a park within the last two years, who visited primarily for nature enjoyment, who had higher levels of education, and who perceived that State Parks spent tax money wisely were more likely to favor funding State Parks from the general citizenry (e.g., the tax base). The study contributed to an understanding of some of the underlying causes and influences on support of the agency and its policy and operational initiatives.

In 1992, Godbey, Graefe, and James surveyed the American public to assess public use, perceived benefits, and preferences for municipal park and recreation services. When asked about their preferences for funding local parks, a majority of respondents (69%) indicated that funding should be based upon an even distribution of tax support and user fees. Twenty percent indicated that park funding should come solely from taxes and 10% felt that funding should come solely from user fees. Lower income and urban residents were more likely to support tax-only funding of park and recreation services. However, respondents who identified themselves as Republicans were more likely to support the sole use of user fees to support local park and recreation opportunities (Godbey et al., 1992). However, the reader is cautioned that changes in the political climate since the early 1990's may have changed how citizens view these issues today.

Numerous studies have investigated the public response to user fees. While acceptance of this funding strategy has been generally high, it also depends upon population contextual variables such as socio-economic status, age, and park use (Reiling, Cheng, Robinson, McCarville, & White, 1995). For example, Bowker, Cordell, and Johnson (1999) conducted a nationwide survey of user fees as applied to specific kinds of outdoor recreation amenities. A large majority (96%) felt that fees or a combination of fees and taxes should be used to fund at least one of the ten amenities profiled in their survey. Yet, for a majority of the park amenities, respondents tended to favor tax-only funding rather than the combination of fees and taxes (Bowker et al., 1999, p. 11). In terms of specific amenities, these researchers found that boat ramps, campgrounds, and special exhibits (i.e. amenities for which fees are frequently levied) were associated with favorable user fee support while restrooms, picnic facilities, and historic sites (traditionally fee-free sites) drew the least fee support. Similar to a number of other user fee studies, they found that respondents with higher incomes and education levels were more likely to support fees while older adults and racial/ethnic minorities were less likely to support fees.

Collectively, these investigations have provided insights into the public's overall support of park and recreation funding strategies. While support for non-tax revenue sources of funding is likely to vary across park and

recreation organizations and across geographical regions, certain population characteristics such as age and income have generally been associated with funding support, particularly with respect to user fees. However, recent studies have argued that support for funding strategies is contingent upon more than the socio-demographic or behavioral profile of citizens (Borrie, Christensen, Watson, Miller, & McCollum, 2002; Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003; Winter, Palucki, & Burkhardt, 1999). Such studies provide a compelling argument that citizen-agency relationships (and the trust and commitment that these relationships engender), are key ingredients in the perception and acceptance of agency actions. In particular, this body of research has noted that trust and commitment have direct implications for citizen support of park funding strategies such as user fees. What follows is an overview of the trust and commitment research in the public administration and the parks and recreation literature. Definitional and conceptual issues are highlighted as well as relationships between these constructs and support for park funding strategies.

Trust

The concept of trust has been discussed as a fundamental element in shaping relationships between citizens and government institutions. The precise meaning and existence of trust have been difficult to define, because it depends upon a number of contextual variables. According to Earle and Cvetkovich (1995), trust is the process in which an individual accepts the assignment of task responsibility to other persons, groups, organizations, or institutions. Individuals extend trust to other organizations with the expectation of mutual benefit (Hardin, 1993). Trust is more likely to develop between individuals, organizations, or communities that share similar norms and values and subordinate that shared interest to a larger group or organization (Liljeblad, Borrie, & Watson, 2005).

Yet, individuals can express varying degrees of trust in the same individual or organization depending on the tasks or responsibilities being undertaken. For example, park and recreation agencies have been historically trusted to provide a range of opportunities for the public using general taxes as the primary funding strategy. However, recent efforts by these organizations to engage in enterprise funding strategies such as expanded fee programs, support by non-profit park foundations, and corporate sponsorship have raised concerns (Dustin et al., 2000; Mowen & Graefe, 2002; Mowen & Everett, 2000). Such concerns are often a matter of political philosophy over the roles, responsibilities, and power exercised by governmental bodies. However, such concerns might also be related to mistrust in the agency, how it would implement these funding strategies, and/or how these funding strategies might change the organization and its relationship with the public.

Measuring the public's evaluation of a park and recreation organization has typically been accomplished with a transactional, customer service

model focusing on user satisfaction or other attribute performance measures. However, the level of support for an organization is also related to its performance on agency mandates such as public health, social equity, environmental stewardship, and faithful use of public dollars. These mandates, and the public's evaluation of an organization's effectiveness in meeting them, are indicative of longer-term horizons and relationships and not just an immediate transaction or customer purchase. Furthermore, this relationship between the public and the agency is perceived to be reciprocal and mutually beneficial. The public trusts a parks and recreation department to do good things in their community, to do those things in a fair manner, and to do them on the public's behalf. Conversely, park and recreation organizations should expect citizens to participate in decision-making processes and in volunteering efforts.

It has been suggested that individuals extend trust to others out of self-interest, with the expectation that the relationship will be mutually beneficial (Hardin, 1993). People and organizations tend to respond to the level of trust invested in them (Carnevale, 1995); thus by trusting someone they are more likely to trust you. This suggests that level of connectedness, as well as perceptions of honesty, reliability, and fairness will influence the level of support that an agency and its programs will have. Furthermore, trust is more apt to form based within communities that share norms and values and are willing to allow another person or organization to represent those norms and values in their actions (Liljeblad et al., 2005).

While there are number of definitions for trust, several pre-conditions to trust are recognized: *perceived knowability*, *contingent consent*, and *shared norms and values* (Liljeblad et al, 2005). Earle & Cvetkovich (1995) suggest that we trust people who share our cultural values. This can be interpreted to mean both a sense that the person's or organization's objectives overlap sufficiently with our own, and that they would think and act according to a similar set of norms and ethics. Thus, trust is based both on a sense that the person or organization is well-intentioned and has worthy objectives, but also that they operate with integrity, fairness, responsiveness, and compassion.

Perceived Knowability. In order to trust an organization, the public must have confidence in the organization's ability, and confidence that the organization will follow through on their intentions. An assessment is made based on reputation, past experience with the organization, and the degree to which the public knows how the agency operates. The more the public feels they can count on the agency to do what it says it should be doing, the greater the trust granted. In addition, the greater the public's familiarity with the skills, knowledge, and, expertise of the agency, the greater their confidence in the agency and its programs.

Contingent Consent. Part of trusting is a willingness to endorse or allow others to act on your behalf. Because the individual or organization is part of a community, there is a sense of longevity and continued presence

that engenders trusts. This dimension recognizes that individuals assign trust when they feel their interests will be respected, that their views and concerns are valued, and that members of the community have some say or influences in decision and policy-making processes. This dimension explicitly acknowledges the voluntary nature of trust and the notion that trust can be easily lost or withdrawn.

Shared Norms and Values. Perceived knowability, particularly as measured through competence and effectiveness, requires a considerable degree of knowledge and involvement in the organization, its mission, and activities. An alternative view of social trust, conceptualized by Earle and Cvetkovich (1995), purports that perceived normative and value similarity can be used as a trust measure in those situations where the requisite organizational knowledge is low. They tested a trust scale based upon perceived shared values, goals, views, etc. and found that this scale explained much of the variation in a global trust judgment item (e.g., perception that the agency was trustworthy).

Trust Studies in the Parks & Recreation Literature

Despite the growing dialogue surrounding trust and its composite dimensions, few empirical studies have applied the concept to better understanding organizational initiatives. More recently, however, trust is proving to be a significant indicator of public support for organizational actions, particularly those related to funding of park and recreation services. For example, Winter et al. (1999) conducted both a qualitative and quantitative analysis of social trust and its implications for the USDA Forest Service Fee Demonstration Program. Their surveys and focus groups measured trust through a shared norms and values perspective. In addition to other population characteristics such as age and income, organizational trust had a strong influence upon respondents' support for fee-based funding strategies. More specifically, respondents who had higher values/normative similarity with the Forest Service also held more favorable opinions towards the Fee Demonstration Program and were more supportive of higher daily/annual fee amounts. These authors concluded that social trust appeared to have significant utility when studying reactions/acceptance of user fee strategies and policies.

In their discussion of public purpose marketing, Borrie et al. (2002) showed that citizens could be effectively segmented based upon their relationships to park and recreation agencies. Using a sample of the general public in the Pacific Northwest, respondents were segmented based upon three relationship dimensions: trust, commitment, and perceived social responsibility. Borrie et al. (2002) found that these constructs yielded distinct and valid marketing segments that varied by socio-demographic characteristics, use levels, and the perceived importance of benefits of the National Forests in Oregon and Washington. While this study provided

an illustration of how trust (as well as perceptions of social performance) can vary across population characteristics, it did not examine how these relationship-based segments varied in their support for specific managerial actions such as funding alternatives.

More recently, Nyaupane (2004) examined the role of information, trust and equity perceptions in relation to acceptance of the USDA Forest Service Fee Demonstration Program. Using a three-item trust scale focusing on shared values and citizen trust in spending fee money wisely, he found that while trust significantly and positively predicted fee acceptance, equity perceptions moderated this relationship. As trust in the USDA Forest Service decreased, the perception that fees would negatively impact disadvantaged populations increased (Nyaupane, 2004). This study provided evidence that trust is related to support for fee strategies, but that this relationship depends on other attitudes such as equity perceptions. Here, trusting relationships reduced concerns regarding equity and increased the likelihood of acceptance of fees.

In addition to their development of a trust model, Liljeblad et al. (2005) operationalized and examined the role of trust as it pertained to local residents' perceptions of USDA Forest Service fire management practices near the Bitterroot National Forest (BNF). They found that respondents with a high level of trust were more likely to be women, short-time residents of the area, and more satisfied with the overall management of the BNF. Low trust individuals were more likely to have experience with wildfires, have worked for the Forest Service in the past, and perceive that the federal government wastes a lot of money (Liljeblad et al., 2005). Collectively, these empirical investigations of organizational trust have identified the construct as an important component in shaping citizen response to park and recreation management strategies, particularly those related to funding. However, support for organizational management decisions might also be influenced by the level of commitment to park and recreation organizations and the settings/services that they manage.

Commitment

The psychological bonds that exist between recreationists and leisure service providers may influence perceptions toward managerial activities. Numerous studies have examined the structure and implications of psychological bonds to recreation activities, places, and organizations, labeled as enduring involvement, place attachment, and psychological commitment, respectively (Havitz, Dimanche, & Howard, 1993; McIntyre, 1989; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). While there is considerable debate over the conceptual distinctions between these concepts, scholars generally agree that psychological commitment is an attitudinal construct that refers to attachment that recreationists express toward leisure service providers and the settings/facilities they manage

(Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999; Kyle, Mowen, Havitz, & Absher, 2006). According to Pritchard et al. (1999, p. 334), psychological commitment represents people's attitudes toward a brand or service provider that create a resistance to change their preference for that brand. Given that recreationists do not always distinguish between leisure service providers and the park settings they manage, Kyle et al. (2006) have suggested that organizational commitment may often include a strong place bonding component.

Several researchers have suggested that these attitudes are salient in the management of park and recreation settings (Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). In a study of whitewater boaters, Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) found that place dependence was positively related to support for management activities, while place identity was negatively related to managerial support. With respect to funding strategies, Williams and Watson (1998) found that wildland recreationists who scored high on place dependence were more supportive of user fees while those who scored high on place identity were less supportive of user fees. Furthermore, respondents with higher levels of experience and site familiarity were less supportive of new user fees as a funding strategy. It appears that, rather than supporting fees for the benefits they would provide, attached recreationists were suspicious about the fees' ability to solve managerial issues (Williams & Watson, 1998). Kyle et al. (2003) examined the contextual role of place attachment in the relationship between user fee attitudes and support for spending the revenue generated by those fees. They found that place identity was a significant moderator of these relationships. Specifically, when visitor attitudes toward the fee program grew more favorable, and their emotional attachment to the recreation setting grew more intense, their support for spending the fee revenue also increased.

Thus, similar to the concept of social trust, commitment to park and recreation service providers (and the settings they manage) has been linked to public support for fee-based funding decisions. Yet the relative and collective influence of these attitudinal constructs upon support for a wider range of park and recreation funding strategies, beyond transactional user fees, remains untested. Moreover, much of the research that has linked trust, commitment, and attachment to user fee acceptance has occurred in the context of federal recreation areas, rather than local park and recreation settings.

The present study seeks to extend our understanding of the role of user characteristics, organizational trust, and organizational commitment in shaping support for the diverse range of park and recreation funding and cost saving strategies. The purpose of this exploratory investigation is to examine the collective relationships between citizen socio-demographic characteristics, use patterns, organizational trust, organizational

commitment, and the level of support for a variety of local park and recreation funding and cost-saving strategies. Specifically, the following broad research questions (both descriptive and explanatory) are posed:

Research Question #1:

What is the level of citizen support or opposition for a number of funding and cost saving strategies for park and recreation agencies in a metropolitan region, including:

- fee-based funding strategies (e.g., park entrance fees, program fees),
- tax-based funding strategies (e.g., general tax support, sin taxes),
- donation-based funding strategies (e.g., donations/philanthropy, corporate sponsorships), and
- cost-saving strategies (e.g., intergovernmental cost sharing, privatizing services)?

Research Question #2:

Are there significant relationships between citizen socio-demographic characteristics (age, income), park use patterns (number of visits), organizational trust (shared values, operational performance), and psychological commitment and the public's level of support for these park funding and cost saving strategies?

Methods

Study Sample and Data Collection

The data for this study came from a mail questionnaire sent to adult residents of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) in July 2003. A randomized sample of 2,250 Harrisburg CMSA household addresses was obtained from Survey Sampling, Incorporated. The Harrisburg, Pennsylvania CMSA was chosen because of the variety of urban, sub-urban, and rural park and recreation opportunities offered in the region, and because of a growing interest among local officials in understanding how this population would respond to a number of park and recreation financing/funding strategies.

The mail questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and a business reply envelope. About seven to ten days later, a reminder postcard was sent to all of the addresses. Approximately seven to ten days following the postcard mailing, a final follow-up cover letter, survey, and return envelope were mailed to non-respondents with an appeal to participate in this survey. This modified Dillman (2000) survey reminder procedure resulted initially in 561 returned and completed questionnaires; an initial response rate of 24.9%. However, of the 2,250 households in the original sample, 208 were returned due to invalid addresses (9.2%). Follow-up contacts of non-respondents (N = 171) were then made via telephone in order to obtain basic demographic and park behavior data and to ask if these individuals

would be willing to participate in the full study. If the respondent was willing to participate, but did not have the survey, another survey was mailed. This process resulted in 17 additional completed surveys for a final survey sample size of $N = 578$ (25.7% response rate). While lower than many on-site or personal interviews, this response rate is consistent with industry norms for mail surveys of a general population. Non-respondent checks conducted in this study revealed that survey respondents and non-respondents shared very similar demographic and park use characteristics.

Measurement and Analysis

The questionnaire included a number of items pertaining to respondents' use and evaluation of local park and recreation services in the Greater Harrisburg Region. For the purpose of the current investigation, several variables and scales were either developed or adopted to measure the independent variables of citizen characteristics, organizational trust, and commitment, and the dependent variables of support for park and recreation funding strategies.

Based upon prior research, two socio-demographic variables (age, income) and one level of visitation variable (number of local park visits) were examined as independent predictors of funding support. First, respondents' age was ascertained in an open response format. Second, respondents' total pre-tax household annual income was measured in an ordinal format of eight categories (\$0 - \$19,999, \$20,000 - \$39,999, \$40,000 - \$59,999, \$60,000 - \$79,999, \$80,000 - \$99,999, \$100,000 - \$119,000, \$120,000 - \$139,000, and \$140,000 or more). To measure park use history and experience, respondents were asked, in an open response format (interval scale), how many times they had visited local parks (e.g. city park, state park, trail, etc.) over the last 12 months.

Social trust was measured using two of the three dimensions conceptualized by Liljeblad et al. (2005): shared norms and values, and perceived knowability. A six-item, five-point semantic differential scale was used to measure the degree to which the respondent felt that their local park and recreation agency shared their own values. This scale was adopted from Winter et al. (1999). Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as, "My local park agencies do (or do not) share my values," "My local park agencies oppose (or support) my views," and "My local park agencies have different (or similar) goals as mine." These six items were combined into a single index with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.935. A complete listing of the shared values items and their response alternatives is presented in Figure 1.

The second dimension of social trust was measured using a four-item, five-point scale to measure perceived organizational performance and competence. While earlier studies of social responsibility used specific management actions as surrogates for responsible behavior (Borrie et al., 2002), we drew from the literature on corporate social responsibility and

assessed public reaction to more general organizational behaviors. Given the social purposes of public-sector park and recreation departments and the extent of public financing for these services, we were particularly interested in measuring respondent perceptions of fiscal management and service equity. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree) with the following statements: "My local park and recreation agency is a good steward of public dollars," "My local park and recreation agency provides recreation opportunities for all of its citizens," "My local park and recreation agency ensures that services are distributed equitably in the community," and "My local park and recreation agency wastes tax dollars." Collectively, these four items were combined into a single index, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.865.

Commitment to local park and recreation service providers was assessed using a condensed eight-item index adopted from Kyle and Mowen (2005) and Kyle et al. (2006). Their research emphasized the importance of place as the attitude object for organizational commitment. While space limitations precluded the use of their full commitment scale, efforts were made to include items that represented affective attachment, place dependence, place identify, and social bonding. At the beginning of these commitment items, respondents were asked to share their feelings about local parks in their area (including both facilities and services). Specifically, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as, "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my local parks," "Finding alternative activities to those provided by my local parks would be inconvenient," "I feel as if my local park's problems are my own," and "Many of my friends/family would be disappointed if I were to start using other kinds of parks and leisure services." Cronbach's Alpha for this index was acceptable at 0.809. A full listing of the eight individual commitment items is presented in Figure 1.

The dependent variables for our analyses included respondent support for eight different funding and cost-savings strategies that are commonly used by today's park and recreation agencies (Crompton, 1999). At the beginning of this section, respondents were asked about their preferences for funding local park and recreation services and were informed that funding strategies can be quite diverse ranging from real estate and sales taxes, to user fees, donations and gifts, and sponsorships. Respondents were then asked to evaluate funding strategies (including tax support, sin taxes (e.g. cigarette tax), user fees for parks, user fees for programs, corporate sponsorships, donations/philanthropy, cost-sharing between townships, cities, and counties, and privatizing services) by indicating whether they supported or opposed each strategy (1 = Extremely Opposed, 2 = Opposed, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Supportive, and 5 = Extremely Supportive).

A series of multiple linear regression analyses using the simultaneous entry procedure tested the effects of age, income, frequency of local park

Figure 1
Individual Items Used to Measure Commitment
and Social Trust

Commitment Items
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my local parks
I feel as if my local park's problems are my own
I have little, if any, emotional attachment to my local parks *
Finding alternate activities to those provided by my local parks would be inconvenient
Many of my friends/family prefer local parks over other sites for leisure and recreation
Most of my friends/family would agree that local parks are the best place for what we like to do
My friends/family would be disappointed if I were to start using other kinds of leisure services
Social Trust: Shared Norms & Values Items
My local park agencies...
Do not share my values – Share my values
Are not like me – Are like me
Have different goals than mine – Have similar goals as mine
Oppose my views – Support my views
Think differently than me – Think like me
Are not trustworthy – Are trustworthy
Social Trust: Perceived Knowability Items
My local park and recreation agency is a good steward of public dollars
My local park and recreation agency provides recreation opportunities to all of its citizens
My local park and recreation agency ensures that services are distributed equitably in the community
My local park and recreation agency wastes tax dollars*

* items reverse coded for subsequent scale development

visits, trust (through shared values and perceived social responsibility), and commitment on support for the various park and recreation funding strategies. Probability levels for inclusion into the final model were set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Males represented 61% of the sample and a majority of the respondents (68%) were over 45 years of age. The mean age of respondents was 52

years. Over two-thirds (67%) had at least some education past high school, with over two-fifths (41%) completing college. A majority identified their race as White (89%) while only 4% identified themselves as Black and 7% as “Other.” Twenty-eight percent reported household incomes under \$40,000, 25% cited incomes ranging from \$40,000 - \$59,999, 31% reported incomes ranging from \$60,000 to \$99,999, and 16% cited incomes \$100,000 or greater. The reader is cautioned that, while survey respondents were not different from non-respondents, the overall study sample differed somewhat from the demographic composition of the greater Harrisburg region based on Census Bureau data. Specifically, survey respondents had higher education levels (41% completing college vs. 31% for this CMSA), household income levels (16% earned more than \$100,000 vs. 12% for this CMSA) and were more likely to be males (61% vs. 48% for this CMSA) than the general Harrisburg population (United States Census Bureau, 2003). Attitudes toward local park and recreation service providers (as measured through social trust and commitment) were low to moderate. While respondents generally felt that their local park agencies shared their own norms and values ($M = 3.68$) and were competent in performing their organizational mandates ($M = 3.47$), they were less likely to indicate that they were committed to their local park and recreation agencies ($M = 2.99$) (Table 1).

Table 1
Mean Social Trust, Commitment, and
Funding Strategy Support Scores

Construct	Mean	Std. Dev.
Trust		
Shared Norms & Values ^a	3.68	0.84
Perceived Knowability ^b	3.47	0.75
Commitment ^a	2.99	0.60
Support for Funding and Cost-Saving Strategies ^c		
General Tax Support	3.46	0.99
Sin Taxes	3.33	1.25
Intergovernmental Cost Sharing	3.69	0.85
Privatizing Park Services	2.57	1.00
Park Entrance Fees	2.73	1.11
Park Programming Fees	3.40	0.94
Corporate Sponsorship	3.78	0.96
Donations Philanthropy	4.10	0.77

^a Measured on a five point semantic differential scale

^b Measured on a five point scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree

^c Measured on a five point scale where 1 = extremely opposed, 2 = opposed, 3 = neutral, 4 = supportive, and 5 = very supportive

Research Question #1: Citizen Support for Park Funding Strategies

Support for the different funding strategies also varied to some degree. The most favored park funding strategies involved external contributions such as donations ($M = 4.10$) and corporate sponsorships ($M = 3.78$) (Table 1). Intergovernmental cost sharing was also perceived favorably as a cost saving strategy ($M = 3.69$). Respondents were least supportive of park services privatization ($M = 2.57$) and the use of park entrance fees ($M = 2.73$) (Table 1). Finally, responses to sin taxes, park programming fees, and general taxes were somewhat mixed with scores slightly higher than neutral ($M = 3.33, 3.40, \text{ and } 3.46$, respectively) (Table 1).

Research Question #2: Relationships between User Characteristics, Trust, Commitment and Support for Funding Strategies

A series of eight simultaneous regression analyses were performed to test the relationships between the independent variables of shared values, perceived knowability, commitment, park visitation frequency, age, and income and the dependent variables. Results are grouped in pairs according to the following categories: tax supported strategies, cost saving strategies, fee-based strategies, and external contribution strategies

Tax supported strategies. Support for general taxes and sin taxes were regressed against the independent variables. Results indicated that the model regressing general tax support against the independent variables was statistically significant ($F = 17.39; p = .000$) and explained 22% of the variance (Table 2). Perceived knowability, park use frequency, income, and commitment were significant predictors in the model. Of these variables, perceived knowability and park use frequency were the strongest predictors ($\beta = .366, p = .000; \beta = .135, p = .005$, respectively) (Table 2). The more competent an agency was perceived in performing its social mandate, the more frequently respondents used parks, the higher the respondents' income, and the more committed the respondents were to the agency, the more likely they were to support general taxes as a funding strategy. Regression analyses indicated that the model regressing support for sin taxes against the independent variables was also significant ($F = 4.71, p = .000$). However, these relationships were not as strong and explained only 7% of the variance (Table 2). Age and income were negatively related to sin tax support ($\beta = -.141$ and $-.203$ respectively), while commitment was positively related to sin tax support ($\beta = .120$) (Table 2). In other words, respondents who were older and who had higher household incomes were less likely to support the use of sin taxes as a park funding strategy. Conversely, respondents who were more committed to their local park and recreation agencies were more likely to support sin taxes.

Cost saving strategies. Support for two cost saving strategies, intergovernmental cost sharing and privatizing park services, were regressed against the independent variables. Results indicated that the model regressing intergovernmental cost sharing against the independent variables

Table 2: Tax Supported Funding Strategies

Independent Predictors	General Taxes			Sin Taxes		
	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Frequency of Local Park Visits	.135	2.84	.005	-.051	-0.98	.330
Age	.009	0.19	.846	-.141	-2.70	.007
Income	.114	2.37	.019	-.203	-3.88	.000
Commitment	.111	2.09	.037	.120	2.06	.040
Shared Norms/Values	.007	0.12	.906	.010	0.15	.878
Perceived Knowability	.366	6.51	.000	.022	0.36	.718
Model Summary	F = 17.39		d.f. = 371	F = 4.71	p = .000	d.f. = 371
	R = .47	R ² = .22		R = .27	R ² = .07	

Table 3: Cost-Saving Strategies

Independent Predictors	Intergovernmental Cost Sharing			Privatizing Park Services		
	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Frequency of Local Park Visits	.017	0.33	.742	-.080	-1.53	.128
Age	-.008	-0.15	.884	-.058	-1.10	.271
Income	.098	1.85	.065	-.040	-0.76	.449
Commitment	.166	2.84	.005	-.126	-2.15	.032
Shared Norms/Values	-.037	-0.59	.553	.101	1.62	.105
Perceived Knowability	.120	1.94	.053	-.167	-2.69	.007
Model Summary	F = 3.75	p = .001	d.f. = 371	F = 3.56	p = .002	d.f. = 371
	R = .24	R ² = .06		R = .24	R ² = .06	

Table 4: Fee-based Funding Strategies

Independent Predictors	Park Entrance Fees			Park Program Fees		
	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Frequency of Local Park Visits	-.031	-0.59	.557	.055	1.05	.295
Age	.242	4.61	.000	.042	0.80	.425
Income	.095	1.80	.073	.165	3.10	.002
Commitment	-.021	-0.36	.716	-.053	-0.90	.371
Shared Norms/Values	-.042	-0.67	.503	.035	0.56	.578
Perceived Knowability	.005	0.08	.934	.050	0.81	.421
Model Summary	F = 3.94 p = .001 d.f. = 371			F = 2.35 p = .031 d.f. = 371		
	R ² = .25			R ² = .04		

Table 5: External Giving and Sponsorships

Independent Predictors	Corporate Sponsorship			Donations/Philanthropy		
	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Frequency of Local Park Visits	-.093	-1.76	.079	.036	0.68	.496
Age	-.127	-2.37	.018	-.116	-2.21	.028
Income	-.059	-1.09	.275	.124	2.34	.020
Commitment	.000	0.00	.997	.010	0.18	.860
Shared Norms/Values	.077	1.21	.226	.142	2.28	.023
Perceived Knowability	-.007	-0.11	.909	.014	0.23	.819
Model Summary	F = 1.69 p = .123 d.f. = 371			F = 3.84 p = .001 d.f. = 371		
	R ² = .16			R ² = .24		
	R ² = .027			R ² = .059		

was significant ($F = 3.75$; $p = .001$), but explained only 6% of the variance (Table 3). Here, only commitment was a significant predictor of support for intergovernmental cost sharing ($\beta = .166$, $p = .005$) (Table 3). The more committed respondents were more likely to support intergovernmental cost sharing as a cost saving strategy. A second, more controversial, cost saving strategy, park services privatization, was also regressed against the independent variables. Results indicated a significant regression model ($F = 3.56$; $p = .002$), explaining 6% of the variance (Table 3). The independent variables perceived knowability and commitment were the two significant predictors and were negatively related to support for privatizing park services ($\beta = -.167$, $p = .007$; $\beta = -.126$, $p = .032$, respectively) (Table 3). The more competent an agency was perceived in performing its social mandate and the more committed the respondents were to the agency, the less likely they were to support privatizing park services.

Fee-based strategies. Support for two fee-based strategies, park entrance fees and park program fees, were regressed against the independent variables. Results indicated that the model regressing park entrance fees against the independent variables was significant ($F = 3.94$; $p = .001$), but explained only 6% of the variance (Table 4). Only age was a significant predictor of support for park entrance fees ($\beta = .242$, $p = .000$) (Table 4). These results were contrary to previous fee-based research (Bowker, Cordell, & Johnson, 1999). Here, older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to support park entrance fees as a funding strategy. The model regressing support for park program fees against the independent predictors was also significant ($F = 2.35$, $p = .031$), but weaker than the park entrance fee model ($R^2 = .04$) (Table 4). Income was the sole significant predictor of support for park program fees. The lower the respondents' income, the less they supported park programming fees as a funding strategy ($\beta = .165$, $p = .002$) (Table 4).

External contributions. External contributions included the use of corporate sponsorships and donations/philanthropy as park funding strategies. The model regressing support for corporate sponsorship against the independent variables was not significant ($F = 1.69$; $p = .123$) (Table 5). However, the model regressing support for donations/philanthropy was significant but, like several other models in our analyses, explained only 6% of the variance ($F = 3.84$; $p = .001$) (Table 5). Age was a significant negative predictor of support for donations/philanthropy ($\beta = -.116$, $p = .028$). Conversely, income and shared norms/values were significant positive predictors of support for donations/philanthropy ($\beta = .124$, $p = .020$; $\beta = .142$, $p = .023$, respectively) (Table 5). The older the respondents, the less likely they were to support donations/philanthropy as a park funding strategy. The higher respondents' income and the more they shared similar values to park agencies, the more likely they were to support donations/philanthropy.

Discussion & Implications

This study was designed to ascertain public attitudes toward a number of revenue and cost saving strategies and to explore how citizen characteristics, organizational trust, and commitment influenced these attitudes. Consistent with previous park and recreation funding research, we found that citizen support for park revenue generation and cost-saving measures varied depending on the strategy in question. Similar to the findings of More and Stevens (2000) and McDonough (2002), we found that respondents were less likely to support user fees and outright privatization. Consistent with the Responsive Management (2003) study, sin taxes were less favored as a source of park and recreation funding. It appeared as though respondents were most likely to support external contributions that were more voluntary in nature such as donations/philanthropy and corporate sponsorship. Nevertheless, general tax support for parks was perceived more favorably by this sample than in prior park funding studies (e.g., McDonough, 2002). This discrepancy may be due to prior studies' focus upon public attitudes for *increased* tax support rather than overall perceptions of tax support that was utilized in the present study. Indeed, while park funding is a priority for local park and recreation departments in the study area, this issue had not reached critical mass, receiving extensive press coverage as was the case in King County, Washington during 2002 (McDonough, 2002). Public recreation administrators are cautioned that, while our findings were generally consistent with prior research, the funding traditions and citizen values in their own service regions might yield different results. Regardless, it appears that there is a place for alternate funding strategies in addition to the traditional tax support.

This study was designed to examine the extent that citizen characteristics, organizational trust, and commitment might influence attitudes toward park funding and cost saving strategies. Results indicated that the combination of organizational trust, commitment, and citizen characteristics were significantly related to a number of funding strategies. However, with the exception of support for tax funding, our models (testing the influence of trust, commitment, age, income, and use history) were not as robust as in prior studies. The strength of these relationships may be due in part to the specification of park agencies utilized in the present study. Prior researchers (e.g., Liljeblad et al., 2005; Pritchard et al., 1999) have noted that issues of trust and commitment can be very context or brand sensitive, thus it is preferable to use as specific an attitude object as possible. However, in our regional survey, we asked respondents to indicate their trust and commitment to "their local park and recreation agencies." This broad specification was chosen because of the diversity of different park agencies present throughout the MSA and the fact that no single agency dominated the region.

Even when using a broad concept such as “local park and recreation agencies” our analyses uncovered significant relationships between trust, commitment, and support for park funding strategies. To date, the focus of park-based trust and commitment research has been directed toward the implementation of new funding strategies, but our data indicates that trust and commitment may be even more salient for general tax support compared to transactional funding strategies such as user fees and sponsorships. For example, the perceived organizational competence trust dimension (measured through perceived knowability) and organizational commitment were both significant predictors of tax support and privatization. Respondents who perceived that their local park agencies were socially competent and who were more committed to the agency were also more likely to support taxes and less likely to support park privatization. Furthermore, we found that the shared norms/values dimension of trust was positively related to citizen support for donations/philanthropy as a funding source. The more organizations were perceived to reflect the values of their constituents, the more likely these constituents were to support donations.

These findings are noteworthy in that prior studies conducted by Winter et al. (1999) and Borrie et al. (2001) had stressed the importance of trust and commitment in shaping attitudes toward fee-based funding support. Our results, however, indicated that trust and commitment (either collectively or separately) were not related to transactional funding mechanisms such as user fees, but rather were associated with dedicated and on-going tax support for parks (e.g., sin taxes, cost-sharing, and donations). These results affirm the notion that a trusting and committed citizenry may be a key ingredient in preventing the erosion of tax-based support and in preventing the subsequent privatization of park and recreation services. Park and recreation administrators who wish to expand their funding beyond existing tax support should take actions to foster trust and commitment across their multiple constituent groups. Furthermore, park agencies who currently enjoy a high level of constituent trust and commitment should be cautious when privatizing park services, lest they compromise existing levels of trust and commitment.

A variety of sin taxes have been considered to augment park funding with another dedicated source. In our analyses, we found that the more committed recreationists were more likely to support this funding strategy. This could be due in part to their beliefs in the park agencies’ mission over and above the individual rights and privileges associated with targeted taxes. Indeed, older adults and those with higher incomes were less likely to support sin taxes. In this study, socio-demographic characteristics related to a number of funding strategies in ways consistent and inconsistent with prior research. For example, consistent with Godbey et al. (1992) and Bowker et al. (1999), lower income respondents were less likely to support park program fees and contradictory to Bowker et

al. (1999), older adults were more likely than younger adults to support park entrance fees as a funding strategy. Perhaps, there are changes in age cohorts where paying entrance fees is becoming a norm or maybe older adults receive fee discounts anyway and would not be as impacted by the implementation of an entrance fee.

Of all funding support models tested, only sponsorship strategies proved to be statistically insignificant. Perhaps, corporate sponsorship are too new or they are too multi-faceted (e.g., different sponsorship activities/conditions) from which to distinguish evaluations of commitment and trust. Park administrators are encouraged to consider that, as sponsorship grows as a park funding source, differential attitudes between various constituent groups may form. As additional revenue strategies like sponsorship are devised and integrated into practice, researchers should continue to examine how constituent attitudes and characteristics shape their support.

Prior user fee research (e.g., Borrie et al., 2001; Nyaupane, 2004; Winter et al., 1999) has measured trust using a perceived shared norms/values perspective. Much of this research hypothesizes that shared norms/values are needed to establish trust judgments when citizen knowledge of an organization is minimal. A shared norms/values trust sub-domain was used in our analyses, yet we found no significant relationship between this sub-domain and any type of funding strategy. Given the developmental nature of this study we did not have the items to measure the contingent consent trust domain in our survey instrument. Future studies should continue to utilize a multi-dimensional approach to measuring trust and should test the validity of all three of these trust domains. Such analyses should make efforts to confirm/disconfirm whether more informed dimensions (perceived knowability, contingent consent) or a trust heuristic (shared norms/values) are more robust in explaining variations in public support for park agency management actions. Future studies should also verify findings by conducting similar analyses across different organizational, geographic, and population levels. As park administrators continue to seek out new revenue/funding streams, they must also carefully balance how such strategies might influence use of their facilities and public support of their mission. The results of this study coupled with previous user fee research suggests that organizational trust and commitment are key elements that shape public support for a number of funding strategies, particularly tax support. Public sector park organizations should strive to maintain or improve constituent trust and commitment in order to create a successful balance of existing and new funding strategies.

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