



What's in this Newsletter?

Welcome, all, to the second issue of the 2024 ORPS Newsletters! In this issue, we will highlight some information related to economic impacts of various aspects of our industry. This is a big task, so I am aiming to provide some recent information, tools and resources, as well as a look at esports – the economic impacts and who is playing videogames.

To assist me in this effort of discussing esports, I want to introduce Bubba Gaeddert, the Executive Director of [Videogames and Esports Foundation](#) (VEF), a 501(c)(3) located in Kansas. A few years ago, Neelay Bhatt of Next Practice Partners, LLC presented at ORPS about building organizational cultures and trends in the field – one of those trends was [esports](#). In 2019, at ORPS, Neelay was sounding the horn on an esports industry that was reaching more than \$1 billion dollars in returns. Neelay, discussed esports further in 2022, still believing that it was a trend that would continue [post-pandemic](#). Checking in now, Bubba shows how expansive the overall videogaming industry is across gaming platforms, how it spans generations, and skill levels. Check out VEF for some **free resources!**

While tackling the argument of economic impacts is an important one, it is as important to see the people behind those numbers. Whether practitioners are maintaining and beautifying, connecting their community to local and state parks, clubs, pool facilities, etc., programming and more these economic impacts are a way for us to make our case, **and** to be there for the most important user group – our community.

Thank you for lending an ear,
Kevin Fink, kfink1@uco.edu

The Economic Impacts Issue

February 2024, Issue 2

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[Outdoor Recreation, A Growing Industry](#)

[Outside Magazine](#) recently highlighted a Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) report showing that the Outdoor Recreation Industry (comprised of sales and services, travel and tourism, public spending, fuel, construction, and more) accounted for just over 2% of the national GDP reflecting more than \$560 billion dollars. Considering Oklahoma's GDP, the BEA data showed about 1.9% was attributed by the Outdoor Recreation Industry.

The BEA report also showed that the Outdoor Recreation Industry beat, compared to the general US economy, compensation and jobs along with GDP. The most recent [release](#) (January 2024) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics noted a slight and steady increase in Leisure and Hospitality employment including the specific areas: "Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries," "Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation," and "Leisure and Hospitality," though unemployment was also higher between December 2023 and January 2024.

[State Parks and Their Economic Impact](#)

Visit the [Tourism Industry Research & Reports](#) page for Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD) to learn more about the impacts of our State Parks on our state and local economies. In 2021, Dean Runyan and Associates estimated that State Parks generated more than \$350 million in visitor spending and created millions more "for local economies" through revenue and benefits for those involved in "accommodations & food service", "recreation," and "retail & transportation."

Economic Impacts of esports

Dear Oklahoma Recreation and Park Society Professionals,

As a seasoned gaming and esports expert with over two decades of experience, and a former parks and rec, YMCA, and Chamber of Commerce sports director, I'm thrilled to share insights on integrating esports into your parks and recreation programs.

Esports is more than playing video games; it's organized competition adhering to strict rules. With 3.3 billion gamers worldwide, the \$184 billion industry surpasses movies and music combined.

Demographics might surprise you: the average US gamer is 33, not living in basements; 47% of Baby Boomers and 48% overall are female. 97% of teens play video games. Esports offers diverse career opportunities, from game design to event organization.

Esports has reached the Olympics, showcasing games like Fortnite, Rocket League, and even Chess. Fortnite's prize pools are massive, but games like Dota 2 throw \$20M+ at once. College esports programs offer over \$25 million in scholarships, with 5,000+ high schools joining the trend, fostering STEM education through leagues like [HSEL](#).

Communities across the US embrace gaming and esports, with 100s of programs in libraries, parks, and community centers. The impact extends beyond recreation; Stanford researchers find no causal link between video games and violence. Engaging with arts and culture online improves mental health in young people, enhancing cognitive abilities and even positively affecting career paths.

Esports is a gateway for inclusivity; 82% of students in the [Gaming Concepts](#) course report never participating in other extracurricular activities. Girls, often underrepresented in STEM, benefit from gaming, improving problem-solving and digital skills.

Incorporating esports into your programs fosters community engagement, skill development, and mental well-being. Let's unlock the potential of esports together for the benefit of Oklahoma's parks and recreation landscape.

Best regards,

Bubba Gaeddert
Executive Director - [Videogames and Esports Foundation](#)
Gaming and Esports Expert
Grew up in Oklahoma City.

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| Put It On Your Calendar! | ORPS 2024 Conference November 6 th and 7 th <u>Norman, OK</u> |
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Resources: Impact Tool

NRPA maintains an economic impact tool at this [link](#), called the *Impact and Rank of Local Park and Recreation Agency Spending on State Economies (2021)*.

It shows, state-by-state, the estimated **economic impacts** of “Local Park and Recreation Agenc[ies]” as well as the **nationwide** impact of these agencies combined – more than 1 million jobs, more than \$100 billion in operations, and almost \$100 billion in capital purchases for 2021.

According to the interactive tool, **Oklahoma** ranks 23rd in “economic activity” (\$1.7 billion) and 27th in jobs (9,000+, part- and full-time “supported by local parks and recreation”). The interactive tool may provide talking points for us in our own communities, and it allows us to examine neighboring states or those similar to Oklahoma regarding local impacts. NRPA provides [“talking points”](#) for practitioners too.

However, the authors of the report want to stress that some benefits **are not accounted for** in this economic impact tool, such as the influence of tourism dollars, quality of life impacts, and others.

These impacts matter to our communities. From another lens, NRPA (2023) released their *Engagement with Parks* report and the researchers found that more than 80% of 1,000 surveyed (18+ years) described **visiting their local parks and recreation** “at least once” during the reporting year and 80%+ “desire to live near high-quality park and recreation opportunities.” And though they were reporting on different industries, the Heaths (2017) cited research that happier, more satisfied customers **typically spend more** compared to unsatisfied customers becoming less dissatisfied. In their words, focus on “peak” moments to move happy customers to be thrilled ones. **Stay tuned** if interested in a Newsletter Book Club in future issues!

News and Notes and Up-and-Comings

An * marks a new opportunity since the previous Newsletter.

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Community Challenge Grants

- [AARP Community Challenge Grants](#) are quick response grants that open in January with project completion by December of the same year.
- The grants “[help] communities become great places to live for residents of all ages.”
- Grant ideas, nationwide, are summarized in this [infographic](#).
- For **Oklahoma** winners in 2023 (and to see more projects that can be funded) look [here!](#)

Oklahoma Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grants

- RTP Grants are due March 31st, 2024.
- For more information about the application and/or contact information, click [here](#).

*46th Annual Southeast Environment and Recreation Research (SERR) Conference

- March 24th – March 26th, 2024 in Helen, GA.
- SERR provides presentations and workshops for various topics “for researchers and managers within the park, recreation, and environmental management fields...”
- For more information about focus areas for this conference, click [here](#). And here is a link to last year’s program, [here](#).

*2024 AAPRA / NRPA Mentorship Program

- Become a mentor or be a mentee, see the **flyer (and QR Code)** on page 4.
- Apply [here](#) by March 8th, 2024.

Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP)

- **Swim Lessons** and **Life Jacket Grants** are available through AOAP. You can apply for one or both grants with four cutoff dates to apply throughout the year (the next is April 1st, 2024).
- For more information about the application and/or contact information, [click here](#).

*2024 National Outdoor Recreation Conference (NORC)

- May 6th – 9th, 2024 in South Lake Tahoe / Stateline, NV.
- NORC provides a conference for “recreation resource planners, land managers, policy makers, tourism and destination stewardship partners, researchers, consultants, innovators, and leaders in outdoor recreation.”
- For more information about focus areas for this conference, click [here](#).

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2023 – 2027

- For those interested in **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants** (typically due in September), the [SCORP](#) was recently published and released for our viewing. LWCF grants should be, in many cases, aligned with needs found in the SCORP.

Tell Your Story in Future Newsletters

If you would like to **write a short Newsletter Story** (~100 – 400 words), have any **Announcements** or a **Kudos / recognition** (e.g., new hires, grant funding awards, staff shout-outs), reading a great field-related **book**, or want to share upcoming **Experiences / Programs / Services to Promote / Share About Your Community**, **email me at:**

- Kevin Fink (kfink1@uco.edu) with content **by the 5th of the following month** of each current Newsletter.
- And if you think about, include **ORPS Newsletter** as part of the Subject Line to ensure I don’t miss it!

2024 AAPRA/NRPA MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



Are you ready to take your career to the next level? Just think what your very own mentor could do for you: cheerlead, listen, advise, and share experiences! Join us for the 2024 Mentorship Program!

MENTEES:

- Young Professionals, Students, and those seeking FT/PT employment in the field
- Be willing to commit time (typically two hours per month)

MENTORS:

- Significant experience in the field
- Be willing to commit time (typically two hours per month)

APPLICATION DEADLINE is March 8, 2024

WEBINAR If you're unsure and want to ask questions, join us for an interactive webinar on February 15, at 11:00 PST.
<https://redbarncommunications.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYscuCgrD4vEtHhoirtcARPJoE31vpHRGz6>

INFORMATION AND APPLICATIONS

visit aapra.org/Programs/Mentorship-Program



References and Resource Links

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