

Parks Forward Employee Survey: Final Report

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(33-609)

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PROCEDURES

The Parks Forward Initiative conducted this survey of California State Park employees in late July 2013.

The survey questionnaire contained four rating questions, seven open-end questions requiring written responses, and four demographic questions. It was presented to employees via email link to a web site hosted by the Business Research Lab, and was available to employees for two weeks.

A total of 2,500 employees were invited to take the survey anonymously, and 951 returned completed questionnaires, a 38% response rate.

The rating questions used a five-point scale ranging from “Not at all important” to “Very important.” This scale enabled employees to rate the importance of each issue independently, rather than compelling them to rank the issues from highest to lowest in importance. The ratings were tabulated by the Business Research Lab’s statistical software.

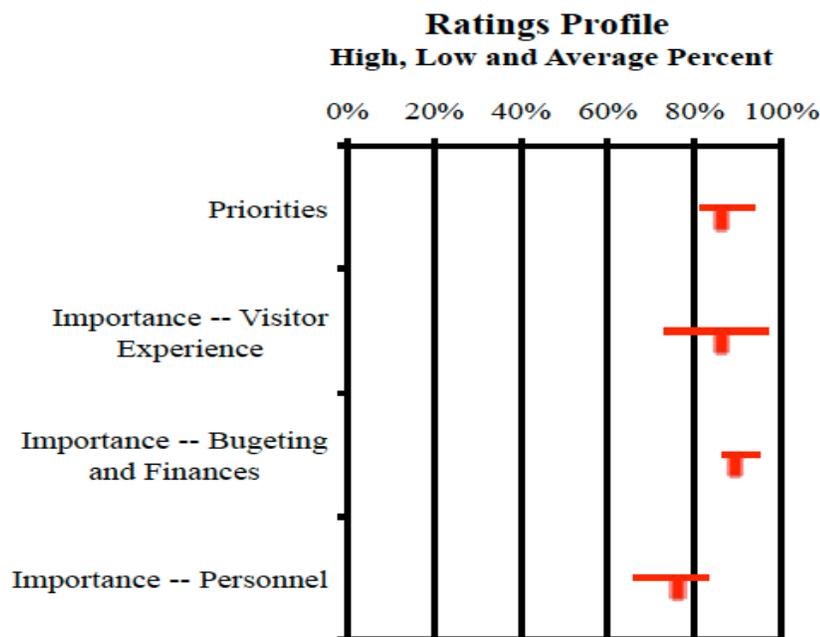
To analyze responses to the open-end questions, the Business Research Lab “coded” the answers — a process of identifying specific thoughts or suggestions and assigning them to categories. These categories, and the percentage of employee responses that fell within each category, are presented in the tables in this report.

The findings for both rating and open-end questions are presented in Section II of this report (“Findings in Detail”).

B. OVERVIEW OF RATING AND OPEN-END QUESTIONS

1. Rating Questions

State Park employees give high marks to all of the issues raised in the rating questions. For example, in the question in which they were asked to rate the priority of different parts of the mission statement, 94% rated “protecting natural resources” high or highest priority, and 81% rated “creating opportunities for high quality outdoor recreation” high or highest priority. The average of all issues rated high or highest priority was 86%¹. These high ratings signify strongly held State Park employee views.



2. Open-End Questions

On the open-end questions, many parks employees responded, often at considerable length. However, with a few exceptions there was little agreement on specific issues.

¹ The numbers for the Importance ratings were calculated in the same way.

C. RESPONSES BY SECTION

Section 1: Overall Views

Functions Performed Best

Parks employees most often mention public safety, providing recreation, and natural resource management as the functions the department performs best.

Functions That Most Need Improvement

Forty-eight percent of employees mention maintenance and/or housekeeping as the single function most in need of improvement.

Desired Changes

Although employees mentioned a variety of changes that they hope will be implemented through the Parks Forward Initiative, there was no consensus on any one. The highest level of agreement was 18% who suggested improved maintenance and repairs.

Changes That May Not Be Implemented

There is little agreement on changes that employees are concerned may *not* be implemented. Thirteen percent of employees fear that maintenance procedures may not be improved, 12% are concerned that funding procedures may not be implemented, 11% are concerned that staff will not be added.

Priorities

Sixty-two percent of employees rate protecting the state's most valued natural resources as highest priority for the department. Half assign the highest priority to protecting the state's most valued cultural resources. Fewer than half assign the highest priority to any of the other functions.

Section 2: Visitor Experience

Protecting the natural beauty of the parks is rated very important to the visitor experience by 79% of park employees. Additionally, 63% rated recreational opportunities as very important, and 52% believe a quiet, peaceful environment is very important.

Section 3: Budgeting and Finances

Importance

Four out of five employees say a clearer connection between operational need and allocation of funds is a very important financial issue to explore.

However, others are not far behind — three out of five agree that more transparent reconciliation, more process clarity, and more timely systems are also very important issues to explore.

Opportunities to Reduce Costs

No suggestion for reducing costs was mentioned by more than one out of five employees. Twenty-two percent suggest fewer managers, 17% urge better money management, and 15% recommend improved processes and procedures.

Opportunities to Increase Revenues

No suggestion for increasing revenues was mentioned by more than one out of five employees. Twenty percent of employees suggest more special events, and a comparable number recommend more active marketing. Fourteen percent suggest adding new activities or programs, more concessions, or other improvement to facilities and amenities.

Section 4: Personnel

About half of the respondents believe more leadership training, and greater opportunities for promotional testing are very important issues to explore to improve opportunity and efficiency in the State Park personnel process. Fewer than half see the need for more State Civil Service exams as a “very important” issue to explore, though 55% believe this issue is “somewhat important.”

Section 5: Additional Feedback and/or Recommendations

No suggestion was mentioned by more than one out of five employees. Twelve percent agree that communications should be improved, 11% recommend additional funding, and 10% suggest hiring more staff.

D. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

There is substantial agreement among employees on the issues covered in the ratings (e.g., priorities, important visitor experiences, and the like), but little agreement on the issues covered in the open ends (e.g., functions performed well and functions needing improvement, etc.).

The responses to some of the open ends provide cues for further inquiry — drilling down on housekeeping and maintenance problems, for example.

Some findings seem either paradoxical or anomalous. For example, 11% of employees want to raise fees and 11% want to lower them. While these findings seem to be at odds with each other, they may not be. Perhaps some fees should be raised and some should be lowered. Based on these findings, it seems worth examining fee structures based on park location, type, or other attributes.

II. THE FINDINGS IN DETAIL

A. OVERALL VIEWS

1. Functions Performed Best

Fifty percent of Parks employees say that public safety is the function the department performs best, 40% say providing recreation, 29% say education, and 24% say natural resource management.

Although a wide variety of other functions are mentioned, none is mentioned by more than a handful of employees.

(Table begins on the next page)

Table 1

Functions Performed Best

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Public Service</u>	
Recreation	40%
Education	29%
Interpretation	11%
Visitor/customer service/taking care of visitors/ways to serve the public better	4%
Off-highway/OHV activities/recreation	2%
Other public service comments	1%
<u>Security</u>	
Safety/public safety	50%
Law enforcement	3%
Aquatic/water safety	2%
<u>Resource Management</u>	
Natural resource management	24%
Other resource management	7%
Cultural resource management	3%
Preservation/historic preservation	1%
Compliance with CEQA/NEPA/environmental protection laws	1%
Other resource management comments	1%

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Operations

Maintenance/housekeeping	21%
Marketing/self promotion/public relations	2%
Administration/clerical	1%
Other operations comments	1%
Operations/park operations	1%
Facilities/infrastructure/better/improved facilities/infrastructure	1%
Budgets/accounting/money management	1%
Planning/general plans/strategic planning	1%
Concessions/operation/management of concessions	0%
Revenue generation/finding funding/stable funding	0%

Employee Management

Employees who are dedicated/professional/work hard/try hard/do their best	4%
Good/sufficient training	2%
Good management/leadership	1%
Good/open/accurate communications	0%
Teamwork/sense of family/cooperation/working together	0%
All negative comments	4%
Other	1%
None	1%
Don't know	1%

Base (Random sample of 300)

2. Functions That Most Need Improvement

Forty-eight percent of employees mention maintenance and/or housekeeping as the single function most in need of improvement.

Sixteen percent urge improvements in education, 12% suggest increasing staff, 11% believe improvements are needed in management performance and safety, and 10% say natural resource management needs to be better.

Fewer than 10% agree on any other improvement.

(Table begins on the next page)

Table 2

Functions that Most Need Improvement

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Public Service</u>	
Education	16%
Interpretation	9%
Recreation	4%
Visitor/customer service/taking care of visitors/ways to serve the public better	4%
Other public service comments	2%
Gain/restore public trust in the Department	1%
Off-highway/OHV activities/recreation	0%
<u>Security</u>	
Safety/public safety	11%
Law enforcement	2%
Aquatic/water safety	1%
<u>Resource Management</u>	
Natural resource management	10%
Cultural resource management	9%
Other resource management	7%
Preservation/historic preservation	0%
<u>Operations</u>	
Maintenance/housekeeping	48%
Staffing levels brought to/maintained at a good/adequate level	12%
Good management/leadership	11%
Budgets/accounting/money management	8%
Revenue generation/finding funding/stable funding	8%

(Continued)

Operations (continued)

Good/sufficient training	7%
Other operations comments	7%
Other employee management comments	7%
Technology updates/use of more modern technology	7%
Good/open/accurate communications	6%
Administration/clerical	6%
Facilities/infrastructure/better/improved facilities/infrastructure	5%
Marketing/self promotion/public relations	4%
Purchasing/better/streamlined purchasing	3%
No bureaucracy/good/effective processes	3%
Top-heavy in management/supervision/too many people in offices	2%
Employees who are better/better-trained/educated/skilled/qualified	2%
Accountability	2%
Teamwork/sense of family/cooperation/working together	2%
Nepotism/favoritism in hiring/assignments/management practices	2%
Updated methods of accepting payment/electronic payment methods	1%
Employee retention/keep good employees/reduce turnover	1%
Employees who are dedicated/professional/work hard/try hard/do their best	1%
Good/better treatment/consideration of employees	1%
Concessions/operation/management of concessions	1%
Planning/general plans/strategic planning	1%
Improved/adequate pay	1%
Employee morale	
Other	1%
Don't know	1%

Base (Random sample of 300)

3. Desired Changes

Although employees mentioned a variety of changes that they hope will be implemented through the Parks Forward Initiative, they could not agree on any one. The highest level of agreement was only 18% who suggested improved maintenance and repairs.

Additionally, 16% hoped for increased staff, 12% suggested more adequate funding, 12% urged less emphasis on law enforcement, 11% want more promotion opportunities for those not in law enforcement, and 11% suggested more vigorous marketing.

(Table begins on the next page)

Table 3

Desired Changes

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Staffing/Personnel</u>	
Adequate/increased staffing levels	16%
More/better opportunities for promotion/advancement/for those not in law enforcement	11%
Hire more qualified people	8%
Other staffing/personnel comments	7%
Reduce the managers/upper management	5%
Park manager series/non-badged park manager series	4%
Terminate poorly-performing employees/managers	3%
More full-time/permanent employees/fewer seasonal employees/volunteers	1%
<u>Financial</u>	
Adequate funding/more money	12%
Other financial comments	8%
Budget changes/improved accounting/financial management	7%
Stable/dependable funding source	7%
Fewer high paying/non-field positions that sap funds	3%

(Continued)

Communication

Improved/more open communications	7%
Transparency/more transparency	6%
Integrity/feeling of trust/honesty	5%
Other communications comments	1%

Employee Management

A more collaborative/cooperative environment	8%
Reduced bureaucracy/more streamlined processes	7%
Better management/leadership	6%
Other employee management comments	6%
Accountability	6%
Planning/set goals/forward thinking	4%

Resource Management

Natural resource management	9%
Cultural resource management	6%
Other resource management comments	3%
Privatizing parks/functions should be curtailed	1%

Training/Education

More/better employee training/education	5%
Other training/education comments	2%

Processes/Procedures

Other processes/procedures comments	9%
Improved/updated technology	3%
Use of more "green" technology/renewable energy	1%

Facilities/Infrastructure

Improved maintenance/ability to make repairs	18%
Improved/ability to upgrade	2%
Other facilities/infrastructure comments	2%

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Atmosphere/Environment

Improved morale	5%
Other atmosphere/environment comments	3%
Changing/eliminating the "old boy" system	2%

Operations

Reduced emphasis on enforcement/law enforcement	12%
Marketing/self-promotion/increased awareness	11%
Remember/support/focus on our core mission/values/goals	7%
More/separate emphasis on safety/making parks safe	6%
Other operations comments	4%
New/modern/updated/better equipment/tools/vehicles	3%

Public/Customer Service

More/better public interpretation/visitor education	8%
Other public/customer service comments	3%
Improve customer service/focus on customer service	3%
Parks/buildings/facilities/programs are open/longer hours/more public access	1%
Other	4%
None	1%
Don't know	1%

Base (Random sample of 300)

4. Changes That May Not Be Implemented

Thirteen percent of respondents are concerned that maintenance procedures may not be improved, 12% fear that changes to funding procedures may not be implemented, and 11% are concerned that staff will not be added.

Fewer than 10% agree on any other concern.

(Table begins on the next page)

Table 4

Specific Changes that may not be Implemented

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Staffing/Personnel</u>	
Adequate/increased staffing levels	11%
More/better opportunities for promotion/advancement/for those not in law enforcement	9%
Reduce the managers/upper management	6%
Other staffing/personnel comments	3%
More full-time/permanent employees/fewer seasonal employees/volunteers	3%
Terminate poorly-performing employees/managers	2%
Hire more qualified people	1%
Park manager series/non-badged park manager series	1%
<u>Financial</u>	
Adequate funding/more money	12%
Budget changes/improved accounting/financial management	7%
Stable/dependable funding source	4%
Other financial comments	4%
Reduced fees	2%

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Communication

Improved/more open communications	5%
Transparency/more transparency	2%
Other communications comments	2%
Integrity/feeling of trust/honesty	1%

Employee Management

Better management/leadership	7%
A more collaborative/cooperative environment	5%
Other employee management comments	5%
Reduced bureaucracy/more streamlined processes	4%
Planning/set goals/forward thinking	4%
Accountability	3%

Resource Management

Cultural resource management	3%
Natural resource management	3%
Other resource management comments	3%
Privatizing parks/functions should be curtailed	1%

Training/Education

More/better employee training/education	3%
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Processes/Procedures

Other processes/procedures comments	
Improved/updated technology	2%
Use of more "green" technology/renewable energy	1%

Facilities/Infrastructure

Improved maintenance/ability to make repairs	13%
Other facilities/infrastructure comments	3%
Improved/ability to upgrade	2%
Clean/cleaner facilities/bathrooms/parks	1%

(Continued)

Atmosphere/Environment

Other atmosphere/environment comments	1%
Improved morale	1%
Changing/eliminating the "old boy" system	1%

Operations

Other operations comments	7%
Reduced emphasis on enforcement/law enforcement	4%
Marketing/self-promotion/increased awareness	2%
New/modern/updated/better equipment/tools/vehicles	2%
Remember/support/focus on our core mission/values/goals	1%

Public/Customer Service

Other public/customer service comments	4%
Parks/buildings/facilities/programs are open/longer hours/more public access	2%
More/better public interpretation/visitor education	2%
Same as/all of the above (exclusive)	5%
Nothing will change/things will stay status quo	9%
Other	1%
None	2%
Don't know	1%

Base (Random sample of 300)

5. Priorities.

Top box ratings (e.g., “Highest Priority”) reflect strongly held views, but second box ratings (“High Priority”) are typically lukewarm; that being the case, it makes sense to focus on top box ratings.

Sixty-two percent of respondents rate “protecting the state’s most valued natural resources” as highest priority for the department.

Half assign highest priority to protecting the state’s most valued cultural resources.

Fewer than half assign highest priority to any of the other functions.

(Chart is on the next page)

Priorities

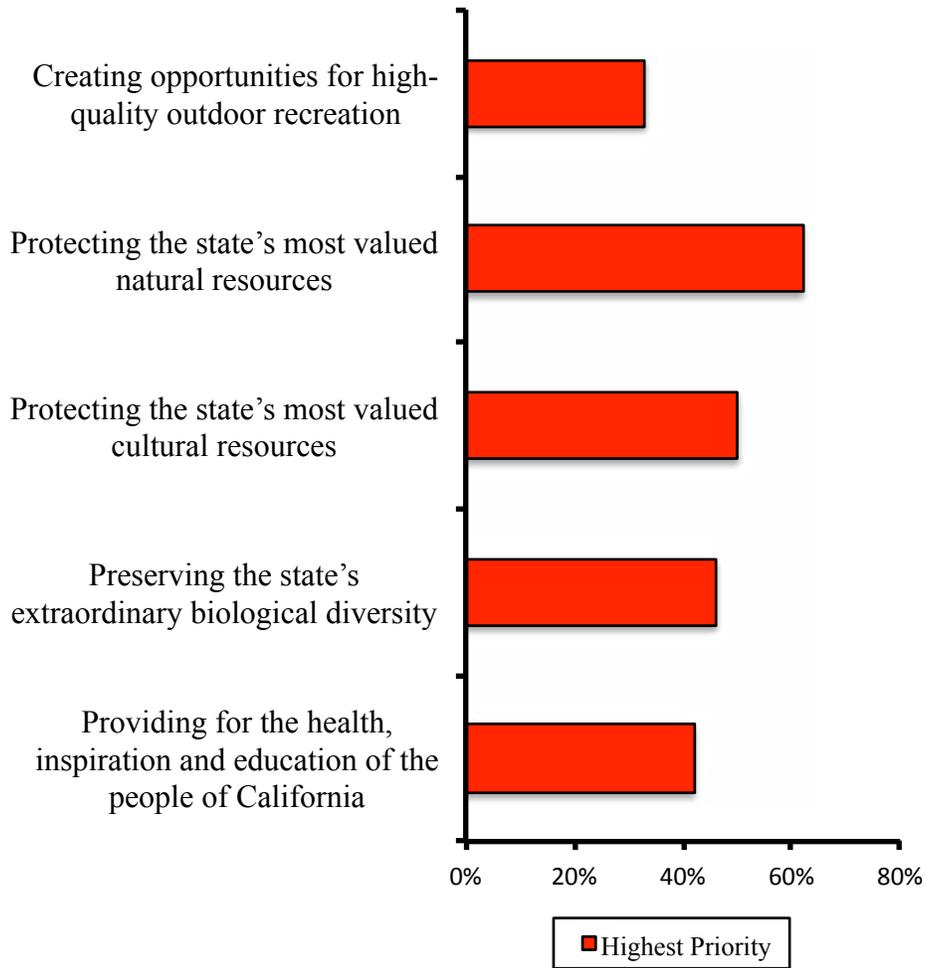


Table 5

Priorities

	Lowest Priority	Low Priority	Neutral	High Priority	Highest Priority
Creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation	2%	3%	14%	48%	33%
Protecting the state's most valued natural resources	0%	1%	5%	32%	62%
Protecting the state's most valued cultural resources	1%	2%	10%	37%	50%
Preserving the state's extraordinary biological diversity	1%	2%	12%	39%	46%
Providing for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California	2%	3%	13%	40%	42%

Base: 942-945

B. VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Seventy-nine percent of park employees rate natural beauty very important to the visitor experience.

Secondarily, 63% rate recreational opportunities very important, and 52% believe a quiet, peaceful environment is very important.

Fewer than half rate educational services and biological diversity very important to the visitor experience.

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Importance: Visitor Experience

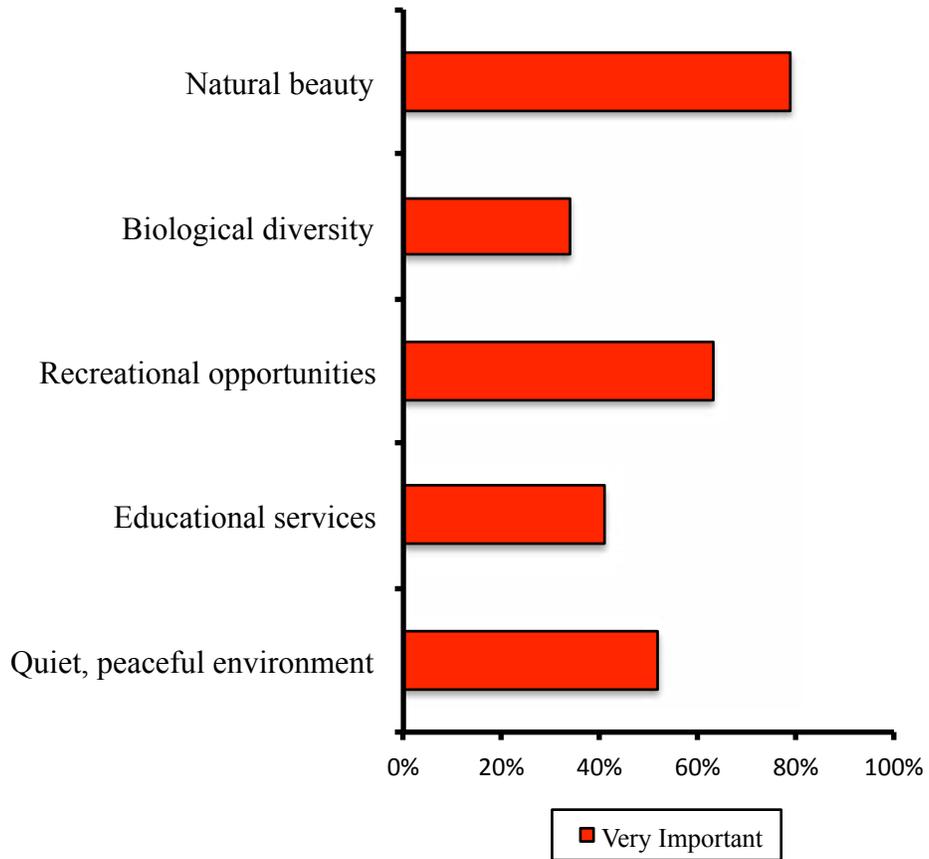


Table 6

Importance: Visitor Experience

	Not at all Important	Not very Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Natural beauty	0%	0%	3%	18%	79%
Biological diversity	1%	7%	19%	39%	34%
Recreational opportunities	0%	1%	7%	29%	63%
Educational services	1%	4%	13%	41%	41%
Quiet, peaceful environment	0%	1%	13%	34%	52%

Base: 942-946

C. BUDGETING AND FINANCES

1. Importance

Eighty percent of employees say a clearer connection between operational need and allocation of funds is a very important issue to explore.

However, others are not far behind — three out of five agree that more transparent reconciliation, more process clarity, and more timely systems are very important issues to explore.

Importance: Budgeting and Finances

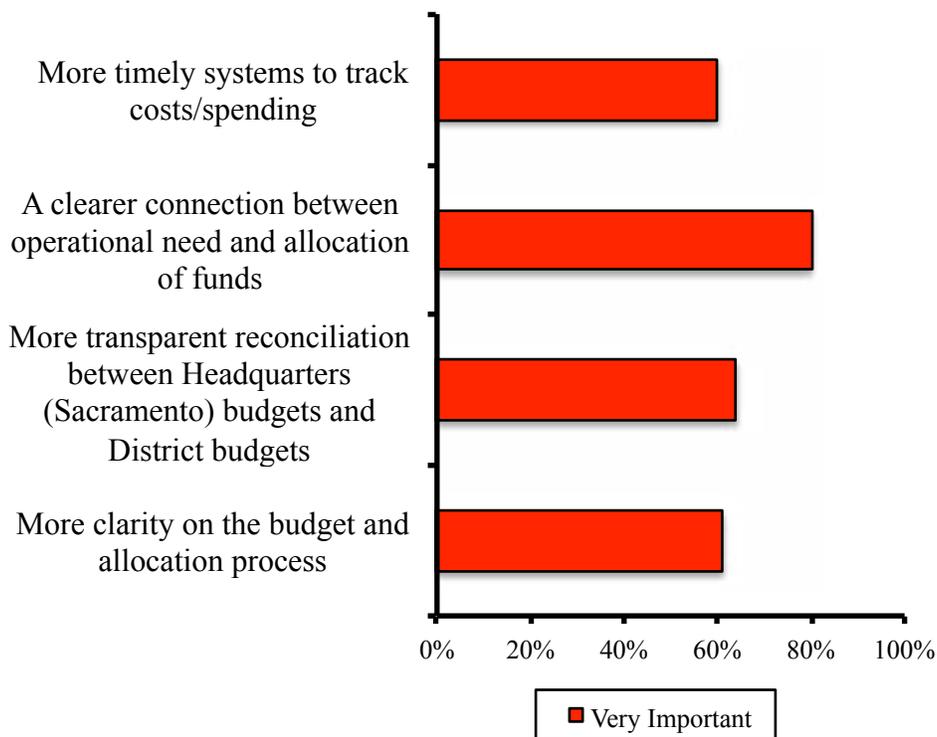


Table 7

Importance: Budgeting and Finances

	Not at all Important	Not very Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important
More timely systems to track costs/spending	0%	3%	11%	26%	60%
A clearer connection between operational need and allocation of funds	0%	1%	4%	15%	80%
More transparent reconciliation between Headquarters (Sacramento) budgets and District budgets	0%	1%	11%	24%	64%
More clarity on the budget and allocation process	0%	1%	11%	27%	61%

Base: 928-935

2. Opportunities to Reduce Costs

No suggestion for reducing costs was mentioned by more than one out of five employees.

Twenty-two percent suggest fewer managers, 17% urge better money management, and 15% recommend improving processes and procedures.

(Table begins on the next page)

Table 8

Opportunities to Reduce Costs

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Personnel/Staffing</u>	
Reduce the managers/upper management	22%
Reduce peace officers/law enforcement	10%
Adequate/increased staffing levels	8%
Other personnel/staffing comments	7%
Reduce unnecessary/redundant positions (unspecified)	5%
Reduce administration	4%
Enhance volunteer program	4%
Perform tasks in-house/do not out-source work	4%
More/improved training for employees	4%
Increase number of field employees	4%
Do not hire/hire fewer annuitants/separate current annuitants	3%
Contract work out/Fewer specialists	2%
Allow Field/Park Managers/Non-badge staff to become Supervisors	2%
Fire poor performing employees/managers/hire more qualified people	2%
Reduce RA's	1%

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Pay and Benefits

Other pay and benefits comments	4%
Reduce/eliminate overtime pay	2%
Reduce salaries for management/higher management/hire more employees that are cheaper to employ	2%
Reduce/eliminate state/employee housing	1%

Processes/Procedures

Other processes/procedures comments	15%
Reduce bureaucracy/improve efficiency/streamline processes	12%
Improve technology	8%
Improve Vehicle/Equipment Regulations	6%
Use more "green" technology/renewable energy	5%
Reduce paperwork/go paperless	5%
Improved/easier/streamlined protocol for granting contracts	5%

Administration/Management

Better budgeting/accounting/money management	17%
Improved/easier/streamlined protocol for making purchases	9%
Better oversight/supervision/accountability	5%
Other administration/management comments	5%
Reduce the number of divisions/combine divisions	2%

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Facilities

Other facilities comments	7%
Improve/renovate/repair facilities/infrastructure	5%
Maintenance of facilities	5%
Reduce the number of parks	3%
Reduce utility costs (any)	1%
Other	2%
None	4%
Don't know	1%

Base (Random sample of 300)

3. Opportunities to Increase Revenues

One out of five employees suggests more special events, and a comparable number recommend more active marketing as key opportunities to increase revenue.

Fourteen percent suggest adding new activities or programs, more concessions, or other improvements to facilities and amenities.

(Table begins on the next page)

Table 9

Opportunities to Increase Revenues

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Fees/Charges</u>	
Better/lower/more affordable rates/fees/to attract more visitors	11%
Raise fees/charge a fee for things that are currently free	11%
Other fees/charges comments	8%
Parking fees	5%
Streamline annual/seasonal/individual/regional park pass for purchase by the public	5%
Special events fees	5%
Vehicle/license plate fees	4%
Variable fee structure for different seasons/holidays/days of the week	4%
Implement concession agreements/vendor license fee	3%
Charge for film making/photographers	3%
Implement a variable pricing scale for a range of park lodgings	3%
Charging/raising fees discourages use by lower income/minority/underserved groups	2%
Increase revenue from cell towers/other easements on park property	2%
Dedicated tax/fee charged to all state residents	1%

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Operations

Other operations comments	10%
Improve methods for charging/collecting fees	6%
Ability to accept electronic/credit and debit card payments	6%
Install automated pay stations	5%
Employ staff to collect fees at entrance/answer phones/man concessions	5%
Ensure fees are collected	4%

Sponsorships/Partners

Sponsorship/corporate sponsors	8%
Other sponsorship/partners comments	5%
Partner with schools	3%

Visibility

	43%
More events/special events	20%
Marketing/self promotion/public relations	18%
Other visibility comments	5%

Facilities/Amenities

Add new attractions/activities/programs/services	14%
Concessions/stores/rentals	14%
Other facilities/amenities comments	14%
Camping/more campsites/RV hook-ups	6%
More cabin availability	6%
Invest in infrastructure/renovate/repair buildings	5%
Offer unoccupied state housing/residences as vacation rental properties	3%

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Apply for more state funding	4%
Solicit donations	4%
Current funds are being wasted	3%
Generating revenue/more revenue is not part of our mission	3%
Other	10%
None	0%
Don't know	1%

Base (Random sample of 300)

D. PERSONNEL

About half of the respondents believe more leadership training and greater opportunities for promotional testing are very important issues to explore.

Thirty-nine percent rate the need for more State Civil Service exams as a very important issue to explore.

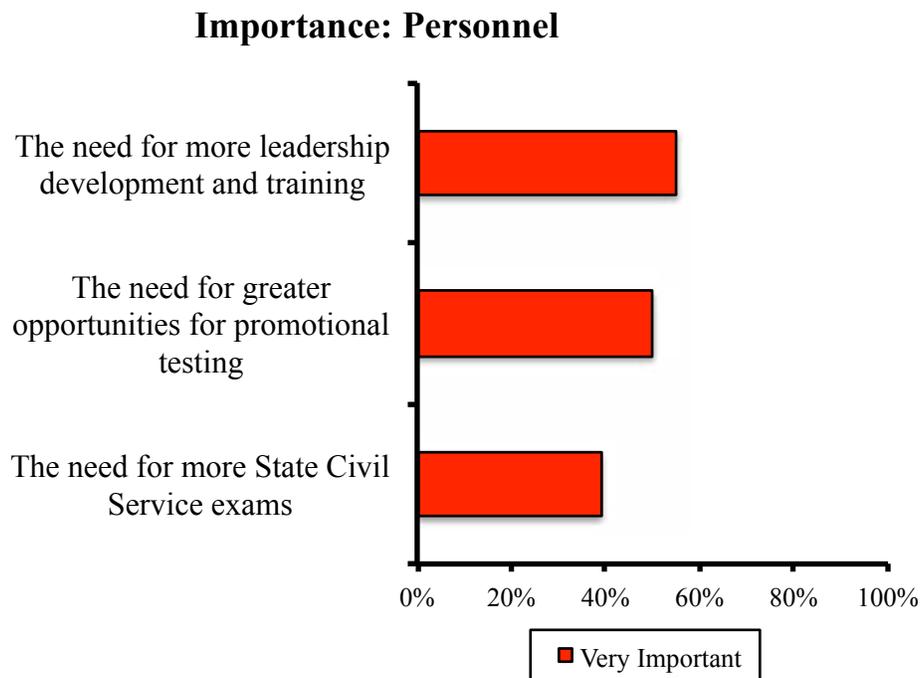


Table 10

Importance: Personnel

	Not at all Important	Not very Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important
The need for more leadership development asnd training	1%	4%	12%	28%	55%
The need for greater oppotunities for promotional testing	2%	4%	16%	28%	50%
The need for more State Civil Service exams	3%	5%	26%	27%	39%

Base: 921-937

E. ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS

Twelve percent of responding employees agree that communications should be improved, 11% recommend additional funding, and 10% suggest hiring more staff.

Table 11

Additional Feedback and/or Recommendations

	Percentage of Those Responding
<u>Staffing</u>	
Hire more qualified people	10%
Improved/more frequent training	9%
Increase/improve morale/trust of staff	8%
Opportunity for advancement	7%
Adequate staffing/quicker filling of vacancies	6%
Law enforcement bias/ability to advance with being a cop	5%
Hire more field staff/less supervisors	4%
Improve classifications/Hiring rules/Housing rules	4%
Other staffing comments	4%
Cost of living raises/wages/benefits	3%
Improve/Promote Mentoring of staff	3%
Eliminate poor performing staff	3%
Improved staff retention	3%
Exam process too long/improve exams/more exams	2%
Office/Admin for Field to free up the staff be in parks	2%
Upper management experience the Field	2%

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Funding

Need adequate funding/under-funded	11%
Other funding comments	1%

Processes/Procedures

Better communication/staff's opinions/ideas utilized	12%
Better public relations	9%
Better/more efficient strategy/True to Mission	9%
Need better oversight/supervision/accountability	8%
Other processes/procedures comments	6%
Need reduced bureaucracy/more streamlined processes	5%
Modernize parks/Computer admission program/Interactive tours	3%
Hostile work environment/afraid of retaliation	2%
Refrain from purchasing more property/creating expensive projects	2%
Follow Federal/State regulations/laws	1%
Department/functions more centralized/consolidated	1%
Change fees/costs to visitors	1%
Improve Uniform	1%

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Positive Comments

Am hopeful for the future/look forward to being part of the changes	3%
Survey is taken seriously/suggestions should be followed up on	3%
Good luck/wish you well with this task	2%
Positive survey/thanks for opportunity to comment	2%
Other positive comments	3%
More recognition/positive feedback/need to feel valuable	6%
Short of vehicles/vehicle misuse	1%
Other	4%
None	4%

Base (Random sample of 300)

F. PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

1. Tenure

Tenure	
	Percentage
Fewer than five years	16%
Five to ten years	26%
Eleven to fifteen years	25%
Sixteen to twenty years	11%
More than twenty years	21%
Base	937

2. Work Location

Work Location

	Percentage
Park Unit/Sector	55%
District Office	21%
Headquarters	24%
Base	912

3. Position

Position

	Percentage
Seasonal	11%
Rank and File	57%
Supervisory	18%
Managerial	14%
Base	914

4. Work Function

Work Function

	Percentage
Administration	24%
Facility Maintenance	16%
Visitor Services	12%
Resource Management	13%
Public Safety	18%
Interpretation	11%
Planning and Development	6%
Base	897