



FREE GUIDE

5 (Really) Important Parks and Recreation Trends for 2024

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Here We Grow Again! Parks & Recreation Market Growth

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on various industries, and the Parks and Recreation sector was no exception.

But, guess what? We're on the upswing again!

Below we'll touch on some key factors showing that the market is on the rise and cover tips that your parks and recreation agencies can use to gear up for increased demands:

\$552.8 B

U.S. Spending on
Recreation in 2023

\$224 M

ORLP Grants to be
offered in 2024

89%

Of U.S. Adults Value
the Importance of
Parks & Rec



1. Bouncing Back from COVID-19

In 2020, spending on recreation hit their lowest point since 2005, dropping a massive 25.5% decline from record highs in 2019.

The industry is now on a path of recovery, with expenditures steadily increasing!

Forecasts from Statista indicate that, for the first time since the onset of the pandemic, total spending on rec is expected to have topped pre-pandemic levels, closing out the year at a record high of \$552.8 billion [1].

Parks & Recreation Expenditure in Billion US Dollars [1]



TREND 1: Takeaways

2. American Adults Love Parks & Rec!

A heartening revelation is that data from the NRPA shows a majority of adult Americans recognize and value the importance of parks and recreation in their communities - and this number is growing!

89%

American adults agree that parks and recreation is an important local government service. Almost as highly rated as essential services like police protection & education. [2]

84%

American adults consider access to high-quality parks and recreation opportunities as a critical factor when deciding where to live. Up 5% since 2021. [2]

88%

American adults endorse increased investments by their local governments in parks and recreation. Most notably to outdoor & indoor facilities + accessibility. [2]

3. Government is Offering More Funding 2024!

As folks continue to invest more in parks and recreation, so is the government! The government is taking notice and offering record-breaking amounts of grants to support outdoor rec initiatives.

The [ORLP \(Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership\)](#) program is committing \$224 million in grants for U.S. communities to enhance parks in 2024 – the largest grant funding offered since the ORLP's inception in 2014!

1.

Optimize Your Staffing Plans for Rising Demands

As engagement with your parks and recreation offerings continues to rise, it's important to ensure your team is adequately staffed and prepared to handle higher volumes of activity without sacrificing the quality of your service. Some questions to consider:

- Have you budgeted for additional staff members to accommodate the rising demand?
- Are job responsibilities prioritized to address seasonal peaks effectively?
- Has your staff already been showing signs of burnout or decreased engagement in 2023?



2.

Explore Funding Opportunities Through Grants

Let's face it, when it comes to parks and rec, budgets are always tight. It's thrilling to see that the government is offering record-breaking levels of funding for agencies in 2024. Be sure to explore what grants are out there to help get you the funding you need to continue enriching the lives of your community members.

Check out [NRPA's list of grant and fundraising resources](#) for parks and recreation agencies.

3.

Leverage Tech to Improve Operational Efficiencies

Recreation management software is designed to make life easier for your staff and better engage your clients – unfortunately, not all platforms are built equal, and many agencies often face daily challenges with rigid, complex, and ineffective software.

If your current platform is hindering your daily workflows, consider [scheduling a demo with Xplor Recreation](#). Explore how our flexible and user-friendly recreation management software can streamline your parks and rec operations.

Hear from Hayley K. of the City of Grand Prairie, who shares her experience partnering with Xplor Recreation:



[With our previous software] we needed 9 front desk agents between all our facilities at all times. Since, switching to Xplor Recreation we've reduced that number to four, and others have been able to support in other roles. Xplor Recreation saves our staff a lot of time and makes thing a lot less stressful for them.

Want to make life easier for your staff and better engage your community members?

[Book a 15-minute introductory call today](#) to see all the ways Xplor Recreation's frictionless, all-in-one recreation management software can support your agency.

[Book Your Demo](#)

Parks & Recreation Agencies' Increasing Commitment to DEI

In 2023 and beyond, prioritizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) remains an important priority for parks and recreation agencies across North America.

We can't carry on without addressing the fact that this isn't just a passing "trend" but a long-overdue re-evaluation of how we can authentically support everyone in our communities.

Parks and Recreation professionals, you play a pivotal role as the heartbeat of our communities, influencing DEI progress for current and future generations.



64%

of agencies have formal DEI activities or plan to introduce them in near future

2x

more agencies have formal DEI activities or plan to implement them since 2021

91%

of parks and rec leaders believe it is important to address inequities

Americans who think parks & rec agencies are inclusive are

2x

more likely to engage with their offerings

48%

of the public think parks and recreation is accessible to people of all abilities

67%

of Americans believe equity is an important priority for parks and rec

TREND 2: Takeaways

1. DEI Commitment is On The Rise at Park & Recreation Agencies Across the Nation!

Parks and rec agencies' commitment to DEI isn't just smoke and mirrors. Numbers don't lie and the data shows that agencies are truly committed to evolving their DEI efforts.

64%

of parks and recreation agencies have committed to DEI activities and plans. 42% have established formal DEI activities + 36% plan to have them in the next 12 months. [2]

91%

of parks and rec leaders agree it is important to address park and recreation inequities. 69% of which "strongly agree". [4]

Top 3 Types of DEI activities and policies:

- Hiring practices and policies (74%)
- Staff education/skill development (56%)
- Volunteer education/skill development (49%)

Opportunities for DEI activity and policy improvement:

- Community Engagement Policies (43%)
- Recreational programming policies (39%)
- Volunteer recruitment practices and policies (34%)
- Multilingual marketing and promotion policies (29%)
- Funding and investment policies (21%)

TREND 2: Takeaways

2. Americans Care About DEI in Parks & Rec

The significance of DEI is crucial – we already know this and data shows that the majority of parks and recreation agencies are recognizing it too.

More importantly, it's a big deal to community members you serve.

67%

American adults believe think equity is an important thing for parks and recreation agencies to prioritize. 33% rated this as “important” and 34% think it’s “extremely important.” [\[4\]](#)

2x

on average, Americans who believe their local parks and recreation offerings are “inclusive” engage with their offerings nearly twice as much. [\[4\]](#)

These stats underscore not only the societal importance placed on DEI but also the direct impact it has on community engagement and participation.

As we celebrate the growing commitment to DEI, we recognize that it is more than a passing trend — it is a shared value that strengthens the bond between your community members and how you support their daily lives.



TREND 2: Takeaways

3. The Public Believes There's Still Room for DEI Improvement

Despite the rising commitment to DEI activities, it's important to acknowledge that the public still thinks there is room for improvement.

But, don't get too discouraged. This journey is a marathon, not a sprint, and each improvement represents a positive step forward.

According to research from the NRPA:

56%

of respondents think their local parks and recreation offerings are inclusive to people of all ages. [2]

52%

of respondents think their local parks and recreation offerings are inclusive to people of all incomes. [2]

48%

of respondents think their local parks and recreation offerings are inclusive to people of all abilities. [2]

46%

of respondents think their local parks and recreation offerings are inclusive to people of all gender identities. [2]

These stats highlight both progress made and the ongoing need for focused efforts to ensure that parks and recreation spaces truly serve all of their diverse and inclusive community members.

1.

Get Honest Assessments of Your DEI Initiatives

Your agency may be dedicating a lot of much-needed time and focus to DEI activities, but how are you tracking how your efforts are measuring up to the goals you've set? Are you focusing on the right initiatives?

To answer these questions, it's important that to periodically conduct anonymous surveys with both your staff and community members.

You can use a free tool like Survey Monkey to create your surveys and your recreation management platform to share them out to your community members.

With [Xplor Recreation](#), you can get your survey out to your community members through automated emails, SMS messages, and push notifications through your [custom-branded Mobile App](#).

2.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help

Navigating the ever-evolving landscape of DEI initiatives can be tricky, and it's absolutely okay not to have all the answers. Nevertheless, recognizing the significance of DEI to your community, it's crucial to proactively address any gaps or concerns by seeking guidance.

Some options to consider:

- Collaborate with a specialized consulting firm dedicated to DEI
- Recruit dedicated staff members with a proven track record in managing DEI initiatives.
- Reach out to your peers and tap into collective wisdom for valuable insights and shared experiences.

Supporting Our Growing Senior Communities with Parks & Rec

A profoundly important trend is here — the increasing focus on supporting our growing seniors' communities.

This trend is fueled by the undeniable demographic shift in the United States, where the 65+ age group stands out as one of the fastest-growing segments.



As we dive into this trend, we'll look at key insights that shed light on the crucial role parks and rec agencies play in enhancing the lives of older adults in our communities.

38%

increase in 65+ population in the U.S. since 2010

9/10

older adults want their local parks and rec to provide activities for seniors

77%

of parks and rec agencies provide programs specific to older adults

25%

increase in senior participation in outdoor activities from 2018 to 2022

70%

of adults over 65 reported having disabilities

95%

of adults over 60 are reported to have at least one chronic health condition

3. How Parks & Rec Can Help Support Challenges in Aging Populations

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2021, around 46% of Americans aged 75 and older, and 24% of those aged 65 to 74, reported having a disability. [7]

Additionally, the National Council of Aging, reports that almost 9.5 in 10 adults over 60 have at least one chronic health condition, and 80% have two or more. [8]

The 3 most common chronic diseases in older adults are:

- Hypertension (74%)
- High Cholesterol (51%)
- Arthritis (35%)

Understanding the diverse needs and abilities within your senior community is a must for developing inclusive and accessible parks and recreation programs for older adults.

Additionally, we can't ignore the profound impact your programming can have on improving the life expectancy and overall quality of life for the older adults in your community.



1.

Prioritizing Initiatives to Support Older Adults

As the 65+ population continues to grow and actively engage with your parks and rec offerings, it goes without saying that agencies need to continue prioritizing and evolving the ways they serve these members of their communities.

The good news is that 77% of parks and rec agencies offer programming specific to older adults. A great achievement, but there are still many ways agencies can continue to improve how they cater to this group.

Consider evaluating the following:

- Do you have enough programming to meet the demands of your 65+ community members?
- Are you offering inclusive and adaptive programming that is suitable for the significant number of older adults with disabilities.
- Are your facilities and amenities accessible to seniors with disabilities?

2.

Facilitate Seamless Engagement for Older Adults

When it come to purchasing behaviors, adults over 65 still favor shopping in-person, but, many are now turning to online shopping.

Here are some ways you can ensure a smooth experience for older adults:

- Provide multiple, user-friendly registration methods—whether in-person, over-the-phone, or online—to cater to diverse preferences.
- Ensure your website is easy to navigate and designed with an intuitive user-interface and accessibility functionality.
- Align your online registration system with the same user-friendly principles recommended for your website.
- Distribute communications through channels favored by the 65+ population, recognizing and adapting to their preferences.

If your current recreation management software makes online registration challenging for your community members, consider [booking a demo](#) with Xplor Recreation to learn more about our effortless online registration process, designed to be user-friendly for people from all walks of life and compliant with accessibility standards. John Dunn III can attest to this:

TREND 3: Actions



I recently pulled a report in Xplor Recreation and saw that we've actually seen a big lift in online registrations for our seniors programs. Even less tech-savvy folks seem to be able to easily register for classes online! ([View Case Study](#))

Check Out Our Latest Case Study to See All The Ways the City of Tukwila Benefited from Switching to Xplor Recreation

In this comprehensive Case Study, you'll get detailed insights into:

- The challenges the City of Tukwila were facing with their previous recreation management platform
- What they were looking for from their next rec management technology partner and why they chose Xplor Recreation
- Some of the many benefits and results the City of Tukwila team has experienced since partnering with Xplor Recreation

[You can check out the full case study here.](#)



The Rising Importance of Millennials



Another demographic group that parks and recreation agencies need to keep a close eye on is millennials.

As of 2022, millennials (currently people 28-43 years old), have overtaken baby boomers as the largest population group in the U.S. [10] Unsurprisingly, we're also seeing more millennial parents - 80% of new moms are millennials! [9]

You've probably heard this before, but millennials are a different breed. Understanding their distinct needs and behaviors should not be overlooked.

Let's look at some key insights about millennials:

21.8%

of the U.S. population are millennials - largest population group

80%

of new moms in 2023 belong to the millennial demographic

8 in 10

millennial moms use their phones for online shopping

millennial moms spend an average of

17 hrs

a week on social media

69%

of parents and millennials agree that access to recreation is important

82%

of millennials want agencies to engage with them about programming

TREND 4: Takeaways



1. Parks and Recreation Matter to Millennials and Parents

69% of parents and millennials strongly agree that access to recreation is important. [\[11\]](#)

This reinforces the role that parks and rec play in the lives of millennial parents, who value accessible and diverse recreational opportunities for their families.

2. Millennials' Modern Buying Habits

As millennials continue to redefine the consumer landscape, it's important that parks and rec agencies understand their distinctive purchasing patterns and how to cater to the preferences of this influential demographic group. Check out these enlightening stats:

91%

of millennials prefer to shop online - more than any other generation. [\[12\]](#) Additionally, 42% of millennials use their smartphones for most of their online purchases! [\[13\]](#)

77%

of millennials' favorite brands demonstrate a commitment to unity and inclusivity. Alignment with personal values matters to millennials when making purchasing decisions. [\[14\]](#)

75%

of expecting and new parents in the U.S. are part of online community groups. millennial parents are in 3x as many Facebook groups as millennials without children. [\[15\]](#)

TREND 4: Takeaways

3. Recognizing the Manners of Millennial Moms



We've already seen that a staggering 80% of new moms belong to the millennial generation. Additionally, 50% of millennial moms are parents to school-aged kids. [\[16\]](#)

Check out some more insights to better understand how to serve millennial moms in your community:

80%

of millennial moms use their smartphone to make purchases online and love brands that seamlessly integrate technology to help save them time. [\[9\]](#)

81%

of millennial moms say Social Media is the most effective way to advertise to them. This comes as no surprise, with millennial moms spending 17 hours a week on social media! [\[9\]](#)

53%

of millennial moms are working full-time jobs. In fact, millennial women are the most financially independent and most educated generation in history! [\[9\]](#)

1.

Proudly Showcase Your DEI Efforts

You already have enough reasons to prioritize DEI initiatives in your parks and rec org, but here's another.

More than any generation, millennials purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by organizations' commitment to unity and inclusivity.

While your commitment to DEI and the actions you take matter most, be sure to communicate your plans and efforts to build stronger relationships with millennial community members.

2.

Don't Sleep on Social Media

Millennials, especially millennial moms, spend a significant amount of time on social networks. It shouldn't come as a surprise that 81% of them say social media is the most engaging method of advertising to them.

Try to allocate a portion of your marketing budget to advertise on social media platforms. Especially Facebook, which is most commonly used by millennial moms to seek information.

Also, considering 3 in 4 expecting and new millennial parents are part of online groups, it's recommended that you keep a close eye on Facebook groups in your local community, and try to get involved. Most communities today have at least one highly engaged Local Community Group or Parenting Group on Facebook. These groups can be a great source of information, a targeted place to showcase your programs and events, and an effective platform to gain insights about your community members through Group Polls.

3.

Optimize Your Online Experience

Millennials have been at the forefront of tech innovation and are generally early adopters of new technology.

Combine this with the facts that millennials do 91% of their shopping online and value convenient online buying experiences, it comes as no surprise that millennials want or better yet, expect to engage with your parks and rec services online.

Adding to that, with 80% of millennial moms choosing to shop online from their phones and 42% of millennials doing most of their shopping from their phones - it becomes increasingly evident that your parks and rec agency needs to offer a seamless and intuitive mobile registration experience to your community members.

With [Xplor Recreation](#), your community members can engage with your parks and rec offerings from their mobile browsers through your mobile-responsive online experience, or directly through your agency's [custom-branded, fully-native mobile app](#).

4.

Involve Millennials in Program and Amenity Planning

Millennials highly value the importance of parks and rec, and want to more than any generation group, they want agencies to give them a say in programming and amenity plans.

We've covered in length all the different use cases for surveying your audiences, this is another factor to consider when it comes to community engagement through surveys.

Additionally, as we saw earlier, Facebook groups are frequently visited by millennial parents and can be a great way to let folks know you want their feedback.

2024 Programming Trends in Parks & Rec

In this guide, we've looked at lots of shifting demographic and economic trends that will influence the strategies your parks and rec agency can prioritize to better serve your community members and their evolving needs.

Let's take a look at some important programming trends for 2024 and examine how the other trends we covered can influence the programs you offer.



16%

increase in agencies planning to add more programming options next 3 years

100%

increase in parents using rec programs for childcare - from 5% to 10%

Pickleball industry forecasted to grow

82%

by 2027 - from \$1.2B to \$2.1B

7%

lift in recreation class participation from 2021 to 2023

88%

of adults want agencies to engage with them about programming

1. Navigating Strategic Growth in Parks and Recreation Programming

Recent research from RecManagement shows a significant 16% increase in the number of agencies planning to expand their recreation programming options over the next three years. [17]

However, the overarching growth in plans to expand programming is accompanied by an interesting twist — there's a noticeable dip in the intentions to add most programming types. Rather than a blanket expansion of increased programming, agencies are taking a targeted approach, aligning offerings more precisely with the present needs and desires of their communities.

Top Increases in Planned Programming Types Year over Year:

- Special needs programs (8% increase)
- Teen programs (7% increase)
- Environmental programs (6% increase)

Top Decreases in Planned Programming Types Year over Year:

- Fitness programs (27% decrease)
- Mindbody programs (22% decrease)
- Group programs (21% decrease)
- Arts and crafts programs (12% decrease)

It's worth noting that the decrease in planned programming across most program category types might stem from expansion efforts in previous years, successfully meeting the past demands of community members.

2. More Parents Choosing Parks & Rec for Childcare

According to research from the NRPA, there's been a big lift in the number of parents using parks and recreation programs as a childcare solution while they are at work.

The number of parents using rec for childcare has doubled, from 5% in 2021 to 10% in 2023. [\[18\]](#)



This emerging trend seems to align with earlier findings in our guide, where we explored the fact that 53% of millennial moms are actively engaged in full-time jobs.

With so many millennial moms actively in the workforce and making up 80% of new mothers, and 50% of them being parents to school-aged kids, we may see the number of parents using recreation programs as childcare steadily increase in the years to come.



3. Programming Participation Trends



We've examined key indicators that the parks and rec industry is on a rapid growth trajectory since its significant downturn because of the pandemic.

Let's take a closer look at some of the programming participation trends over the last few years:

28%

of survey respondents have visited a swimming pool in the last year, representing a massive 47% growth in participation since 2021. [\[18\]](#)

28%

of survey respondents have visited a recreation or senior center. A staggering 55% lift in engagement since 2021. [\[18\]](#)

Notably, community member participation has gone up in the following categories since 2021:

- Recreation class participation (7%)
- Out-of-school-time program participation (8%)
- Adult Sports League participation (6%)



4. Pickleball - It's Here to Stay

If you thought pickleball was a passing fad, it's time to reassess. The extraordinary surge of pickleball is here to stay and its unstoppable growth isn't showing any signs of slowing down. In fact, the global market, currently valued at 1.2 billion dollars, is expected to nearly double by 2027. [19]

With 2023 in the rearview, pickleball has held its impressive position as the #1 growing sport in America for the third consecutive year! [20]

Here are some informative pickleball stats to consider for your parks and recreation organization:

36.5M

Americans have played pickleball at least once in 2023. That's roughly 14% of the total American population. [20]

29%

of pickleball players are 18-34 years old. Contrary to common assumptions, people aged 55+ account for the least amount of participation in any age group. [20]

11k

locations are currently available for pickleball usage in the United States and approximately 130 new locations are being added every month! [20]

1.

Explore and Analyze Program Data

To better understand your programming gaps and opportunities, start by pulling reports on your current and past activities to see what you can infer from historical program engagement.

More importantly, you should actively seek feedback from your community members on the types of programs they want to see you offer. And yes, this point has been recommended already in the guide, but that goes to show how important it is!

Most recreation management platforms allow you to access some level of program reporting, but can be challenging to produce or provide limited information. With [Xplor Recreation](#), you can easily create powerful reports with extensive segmentation options. Here's what John Dunn III, of the City of Tukwila, has to say about Xplor Recreation's reporting capabilities:



Xplor Recreation's reporting has been a stand-out feature for us. [With our previous software], we need to get our IT involved to produce simple reports. Now we can easily create and share important data as needed. ([View Case Study](#))

2.

Double Down on Pickleball!

It's clearer than ever that pickleball is going nowhere but up.

If your agency has held out on accommodating this phenomena, it's time to reconsider.

If you're struggling to accommodate the demand of America's fastest growing sport, consider seeing what existing spaces you can be used for pickleball. You may want to even consider converting spin cycle rooms or gym space for pickleball use if they are currently being underutilized.

3.

Consider Expanding Your After-School Programming

While the number of parents reported to be using parks and rec programs for childcare is still low - only about 1 in 10 - this number has doubled, and we expect it to continue growing with the increasing number of millennials becoming parents and millennial moms playing such a substantial role in the workforce.

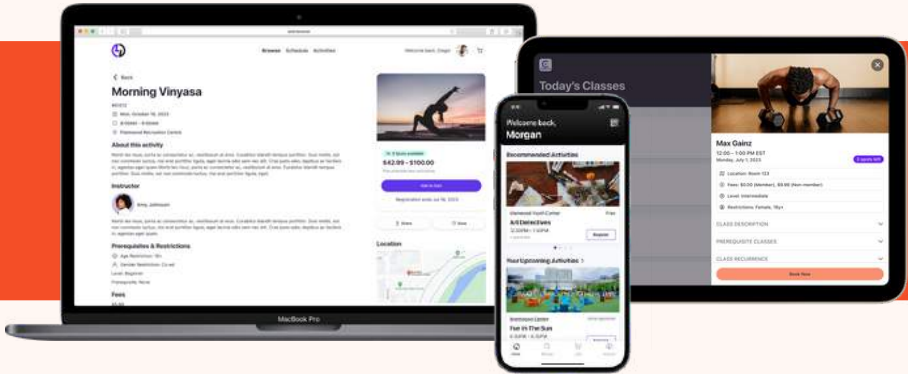
Expanding your after-school programming can be a great way to support millennial parents in your community and their children, and an untapped opportunity to drive more revenue and participation at your parks and rec agency.

To validate the demand for additional after-school programming in your community, consider distributing surveys to local parents.

You can leverage tools like your recreation management software to get the word out about your survey, or even use the poll feature in your local Facebook Community Groups and Parents groups.



About



Xplor Recreation is a trusted provider of frictionless, all-in-one recreation management software - purpose-built for Parks and Recreation Agencies.

Our reliable, easy-to-use software empowers agencies to **better engage their community members** and **make life easier for their staff** by working with a technology partner they can trust.

Manage all aspects of your organization from community member management, to online booking, registrations, payments, marketing, reporting, and more.

[Book Your Demo](#)



[Switching to Xplor Recreation] is like going from an old Nokia Brick Phone to a Smart Phone. The Nokia still does the basic things you need it to do, but the quality and user experience isn't there.

We were stuck in the past when it came to serving our staff and patrons. So, we decided it was time to ditch the 90s Nokia Phone and get ourselves onto something more modern, fluid, and innovative.

John N. Spencer - City of Ocala ([View Case Study](#))

APPENDIX

1. Total expenditure on recreation in the United States from 1980 to 2022, with a forecast for 2023, [Statista](#)
2. 2023 Engagement with Parks Report, [NRPA](#)
3. Interior Department Announces Largest Round of ORLP Grant Funding for Park & Trail Creation, Renovation, [RecreationManagement](#)
4. 2023 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, in Parks and Recreation Report, [NRPA](#)
5. Get the Facts on Older Americans, [National Council on Aging](#)
6. Activities and Opportunities For Older Adults, [NRPA](#)
7. 8 Facts About Americans with Disabilities, [Pew Research Center](#)
8. The 10 Most Common Chronic Conditions in Older Adults, [National Council on Aging](#)
9. 22 Facts You Should Know About Millennial Moms, [Snipp](#)
10. Resident Population in the United States in 2022, by generation, [Statista](#)
11. Healthier Lives Thanks to Recreation, [NRPA](#)
12. Consumer Trends Report: Shopping Habits by Generation, [Jungle Scout](#)
13. Millennial Spending Habits & Income Statistics for 2024, [Millennial Money](#)
14. Millennials Value Unity More Than Diversity, Study Finds, [CampaignUS](#)
15. Why New Parents Turn to a Virtual Village, [Meta](#)
16. What Makes Them Buy: Millennial Parents in 2023, [The Shelf](#)
17. Education, Yoga, Teens, are Top Planned Programs in 2023, [RecreationManagement](#)
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19. Pickleball Market Size in 2024: Growth Opportunities and Future Outlook 2031, [Business Future Analysis](#)
20. Pickleball Statistics: America's Faster Growing Sport in 2023, [The Pickleball Dinks](#)