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Special Report

Satisfaction with Local Beaches

A survey in collaboration with



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Introduction

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey about people's use of and satisfaction with beaches, conducted in collaboration with New Yorkers for Parks. New Yorkers for Parks serves as an independent advocate for the people of New York and their parks and local beaches by serving as an independent watchdog for more equity and efficiency in the parks system, and raising awareness and creating public discussion regarding various park and beach issues. The survey focused on frequency of beach use, ways beaches are used, rating of beach conditions and beach funding.

Methodological note: The survey was conducted from July 11 through August 7, 2006, and included online responses from 1,299 panelists, 163 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City. See the methodology section at the end of this report for more details.

Background

New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) is the only independent watchdog for all the city's parks, beaches and playgrounds. The city's oldest and leading independent expert on park conditions, efficiency, and funding, NY4P has worked for nearly 100 years to ensure greener, safer, cleaner parks for all New Yorkers.

Out of 578 miles of waterfront in NYC, 14 miles are dedicated to public beaches managed by NYC's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). The seven public beaches are located in all boroughs except Manhattan: Rockaway Beach, Queens; Coney Island/Brighton Beach, Brooklyn; Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn; Orchard Beach, Bronx; South Beach, Staten Island; Midland Beach, Staten Island; and Wolfe's Pond Beach, Staten Island.

Millions of people visit these seven New York City beaches every year for swimming, relaxation, and a variety of other sports and activities. Since DPR does not conduct user surveys, this survey will provide NY4P with data describing how New Yorkers versus the nation as a whole perceive the conditions of their beaches. The results of the survey will assist NY4P in shaping an advocacy strategy to improve public beaches.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from July 11 through August 7, 2006, and included online responses from 1,299 panelists, 163 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger

population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the survey respondents, both weighted and unweighted, and compares this profile to data from the US Census. As the unweighted results in Table 1 show, respondents nationally are disproportionately white, female, and in the 25 to 44 age group. Respondents nationally over-represent the Northeast and under-represent Blacks, Asians or Pacific Islanders, those 65 and older, and those in the lowest income group. The unweighted results, by design, more closely mirror the Census figures nationally. The unweighted New York City respondents are again disproportionately white and female. They also over-represent those whom are between the ages of 45 to 64 and those in the highest age group. The unweighted results from the New York City respondents under-represent Blacks, Hispanics, Asians or Pacific Islanders, those between the ages of 18 to 24 and 65 and older, and the two bottom income groups.

The weighting procedure involved two steps. First, weights were constructed to bring the sample into geographic balance based on the population of Census regions. This geographic weight was then applied to the data, and new weights were calculated to align the sample to the Census in terms of gender, race, and age. This weighting procedure was carried out separately for New York City and the nation. Income was not used as a weighting variable because of missing data and because of the difficulties comparing income across surveys.

Findings

The findings below are reported separately for the nation as a whole and for New York City and are weighted to better reflect the general population (see methodological note above). This section begins with general perceptions of local beaches. It then focuses on how often beaches are used, and what local beaches are used for. The report concludes with the conditions of local beaches and the question of who should be funding beaches.

Satisfaction of local beaches

Figure 1 compares New York City and the rest of the nation in terms of an overall index of satisfaction with local beaches. The index ranges from 0-100 and is based on three questions designed to measure overall satisfaction with local beaches.¹ The index results show that the average New York City respondent was slightly more satisfied with their local beach than the average national respondent.

Beach usage

New York City and nation wide respondents reported that they use their local beaches in the summer with about the same frequency (**Figure 2**). (“Local beach” was defined as a beach within an hour of your home.)

Although not as frequently as they visit local beaches, New York City residents and the rest of the nation also visit non-local beaches in the summer. New York City residents reported using non local beaches more frequently than nation wide respondents (**Figure 3**).

¹ The three questions asked were overall satisfaction with the local beaches, expectations of local beaches, and of their ideal beach.

Over half of respondents from New York City and nationwide reported that they “Never or almost never” use local beaches in the off season. (**Figure 4**)

Figure 5 illustrates that, by and large, New Yorkers and the rest of the nation use beaches for the same types of activities, with a few notable exceptions. New Yorkers use beaches for “Passive recreation” and “Attending performances or special events” much more than nationwide panelists.

National respondents gave an average score of “Good” or better for all the conditions of the local beaches. The features not receiving an average of “Good” or better from New York City residents were “Bathing water quality”, “Drinking fountains” and “Bathrooms.” New Yorkers rated all beach features except “Pathways/Boardwalks” and “Playgrounds” listed on the survey lower than their nationwide counterparts. For the complete features and their average score, please see **Figure 6**.

Conditions of local beaches

Both New York and national panelists said “Crowding” was their top complaint. In all categories, New York City panelists witnessed undesirable conditions more often than others (**Figure 7**).

When asked if their beaches were “Crowded, Noisy, Dirty, Unsafe, Closed,” none of the average scores for either “Closed” or “Unsafe” reached better than “Sometimes.” These results are found in **Figure 7**.

Financing of local beaches

New York panelists chose “General government spending” while nationwide residents chose “Private donations” as the top way to finance their local beaches. Nationwide and New York City panelists alike approve of both “Concession revenue” and “Advertising” as other top ways to finance their local beaches. Both groups were also less likely to approve of “Special beaches tax for neighboring residents and businesses” and “User fees” to finance beaches. **Figure 8** lists all the financing mechanisms on the survey and the average response scores.

The overwhelming number of respondents felt that the city or local parks department should have primary responsibility for maintaining local beaches (79 percent of New York residents and 69 percent of nationwide panelists). See **Figure 9** for more details.

Conclusions

Respondents from both New York and nationwide report that they use local and non-local beaches in the summer. The most common use of the beach was to relax.

These groups are not without complaints about their beaches. Both groups felt their beaches were often noisy and over crowded. Respondents from New York also felt their beaches were often dirty. In addition, New York respondents rated every beach feature except for “Pathways/Boardwalks” and “Playgrounds” lower than their nationwide counterparts.

New York panelists chose “General government spending” while nationwide residents chose “Private donations” as the top way to finance their local beaches and over 2/3 of

respondents from both New York and nationwide said that the city or their local parks department should maintain local beaches.

About eTownPanel: eTownPanel is a university-based, nonprofit project that aims to expand the potential of the Internet as a tool for measuring the quality of life in communities across the US and for providing citizen-driven feedback on the performance of local governments. eTownPanel also serves as a cost-effective research tool for local nonprofit organizations and government agencies that seek to understand what citizens think about important local issues. The project currently focuses on New York City but will soon include additional cities and towns from across the US.

For more information visit www.ETownPanel.com or email info@ETownPanel.com

Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents (percents)

	The Nation (n=1299)			New York City (n=163)		
	Census	Weighted	Unweighted	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.0	28.9	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	35.6	35.9	31.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Midwest	22.9	20.5	23.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
West	21.9	23.6	16.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
White, non-Hispanic	69.1	70.5	85.5	35.0	43.6	69.8
Black or African American	12.3	10.9	5.6	24.5	15.7	10.7
Asian or Pacific Islander	12.5	10.8	3.7	27.0	20.4	10.1
Hispanic or Latino	3.7	5.3	3.2	9.7	17.1	4.4
Other	2.4	2.4	1.9	3.8	3.3	5.0
Male	51.0	52.6	75.3	51.0	51.4	60.8
Female	49.0	47.4	24.7	49.0	48.6	39.2
18 to 24 years	13.4	14.5	6.3	13.3	15.8	6.9
25 to 44 years	40.7	41.3	52.1	44.4	51.3	42.1
45 to 64 years	29.6	32.8	38.9	28.5	23.8	47.2
65 years and over	16.7	11.4	2.7	13.8	9.0	3.8
Less than \$25,000	28.7	18.1	14.7	34.9	14.4	8.2
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	36.0	35.5	25.7	34.2	24.6
\$50,000-\$74,9999	19.5	23.9	26.5	16.7	24.6	23.9
\$75,000 or more	22.5	22.0	23.3	22.7	26.8	43.3

Note: Census figures from American FactFinder, 2000 Census Quick Tables, available at www.census.gov.
 Weighted results reflect post-stratification adjustments for region, race, age, and gender.

Figure 1. Overall index of neighborhood beach satisfaction (0-100 scale)

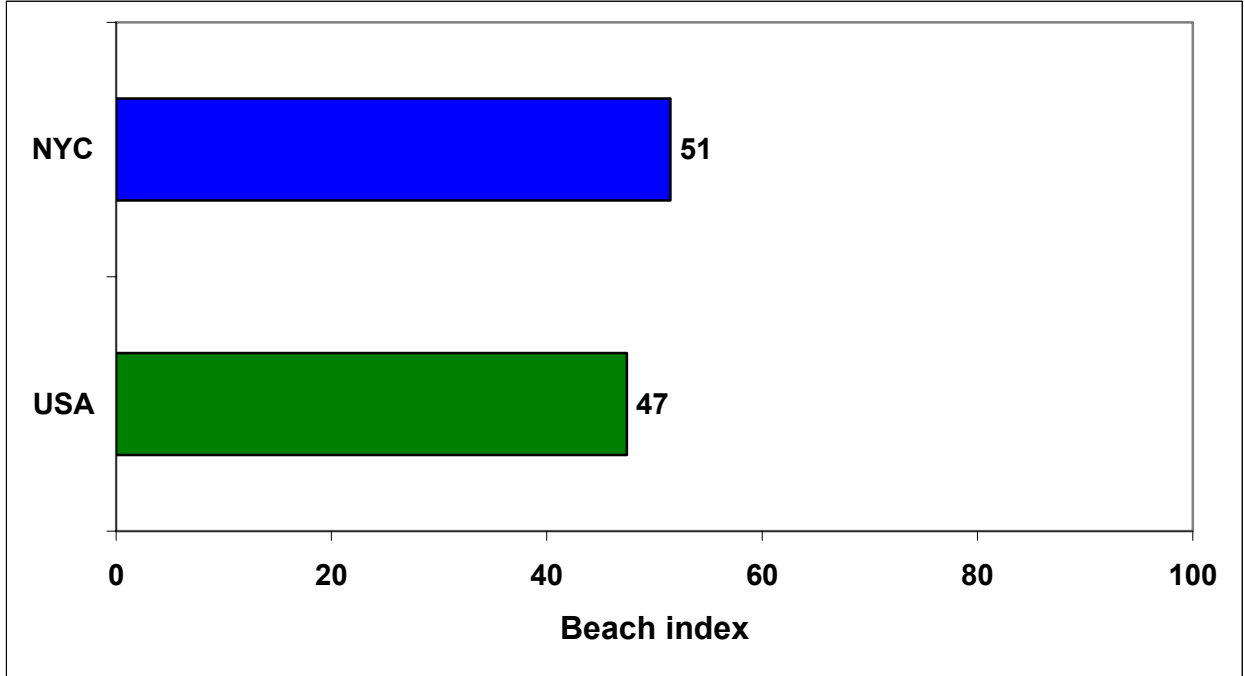


Figure 2. How often do you use local beaches in the summer?

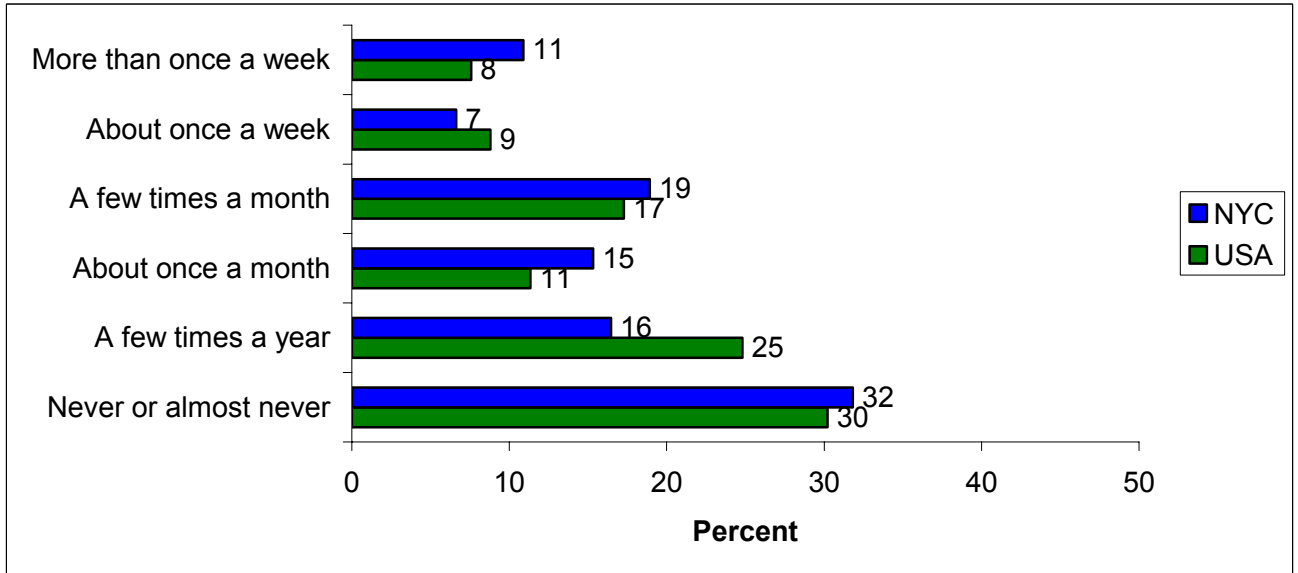


Figure 3. Other than your local beaches, how often do you visit other beaches in the summer?

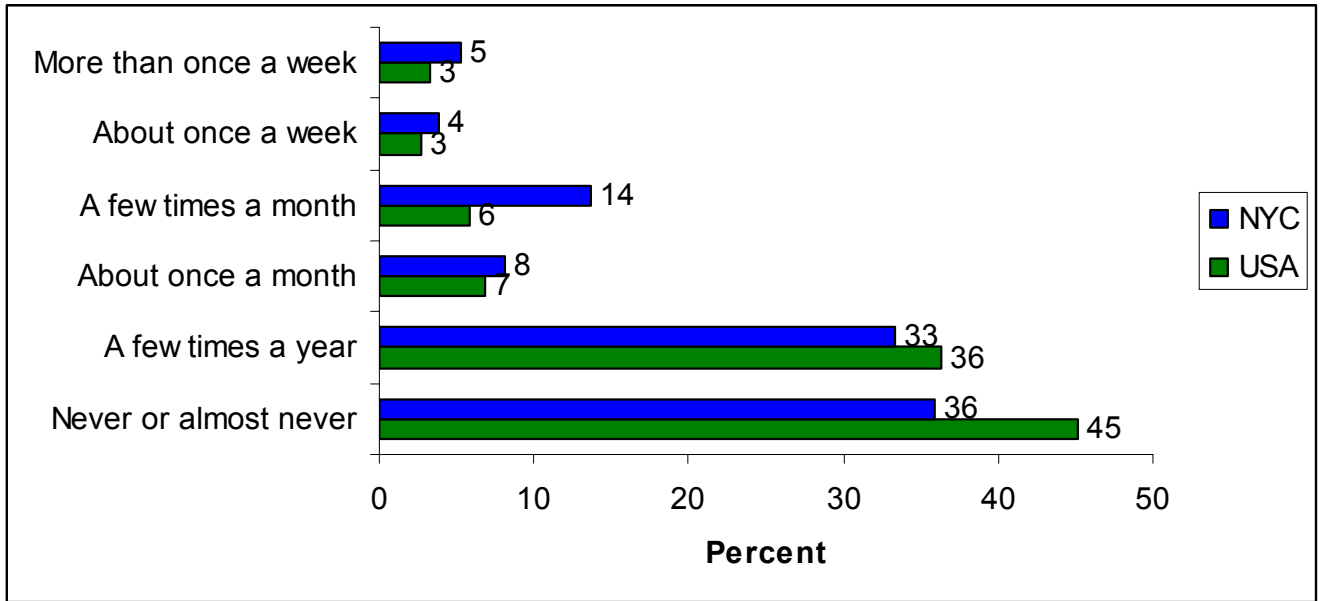


Figure 4. About how often do you use local beaches in the off-season?

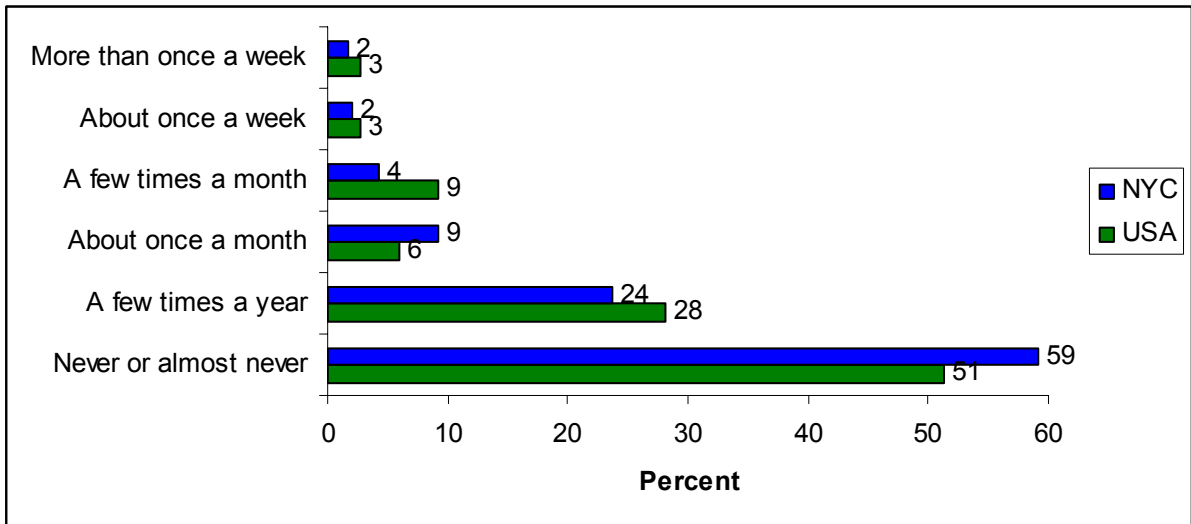


Figure 5. What do you use local beaches for?

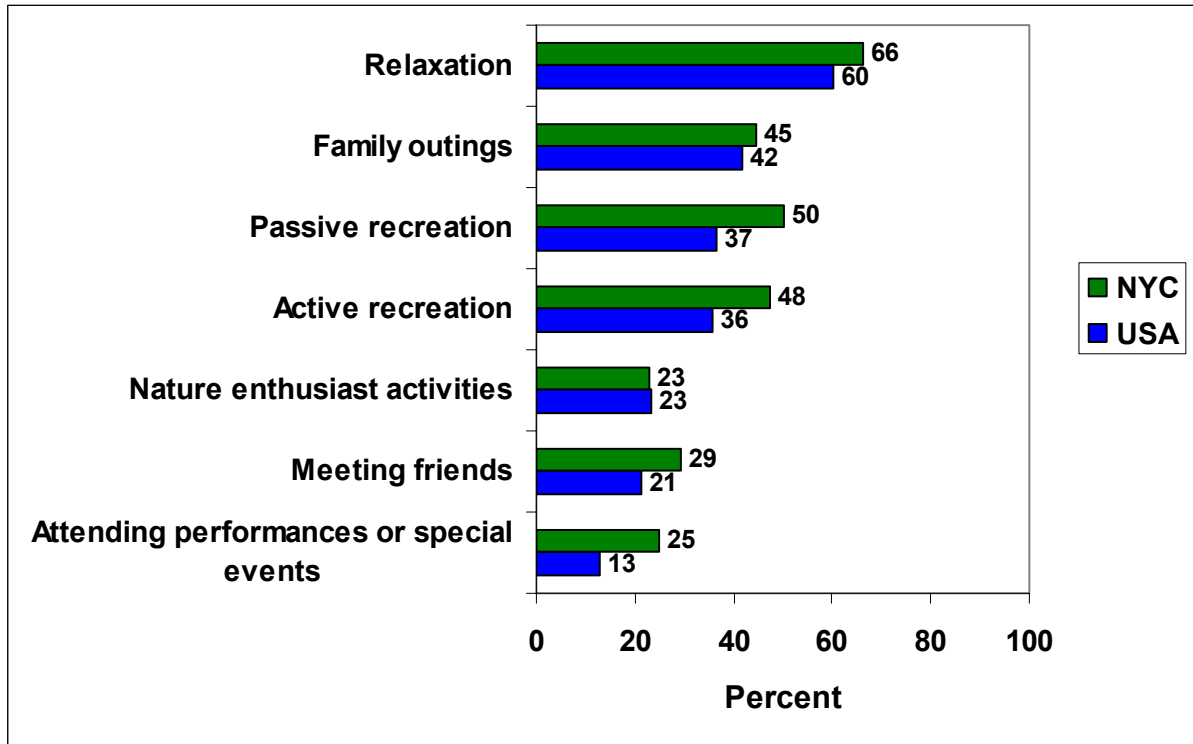


Figure 6. Please rate the following features of your local beaches.

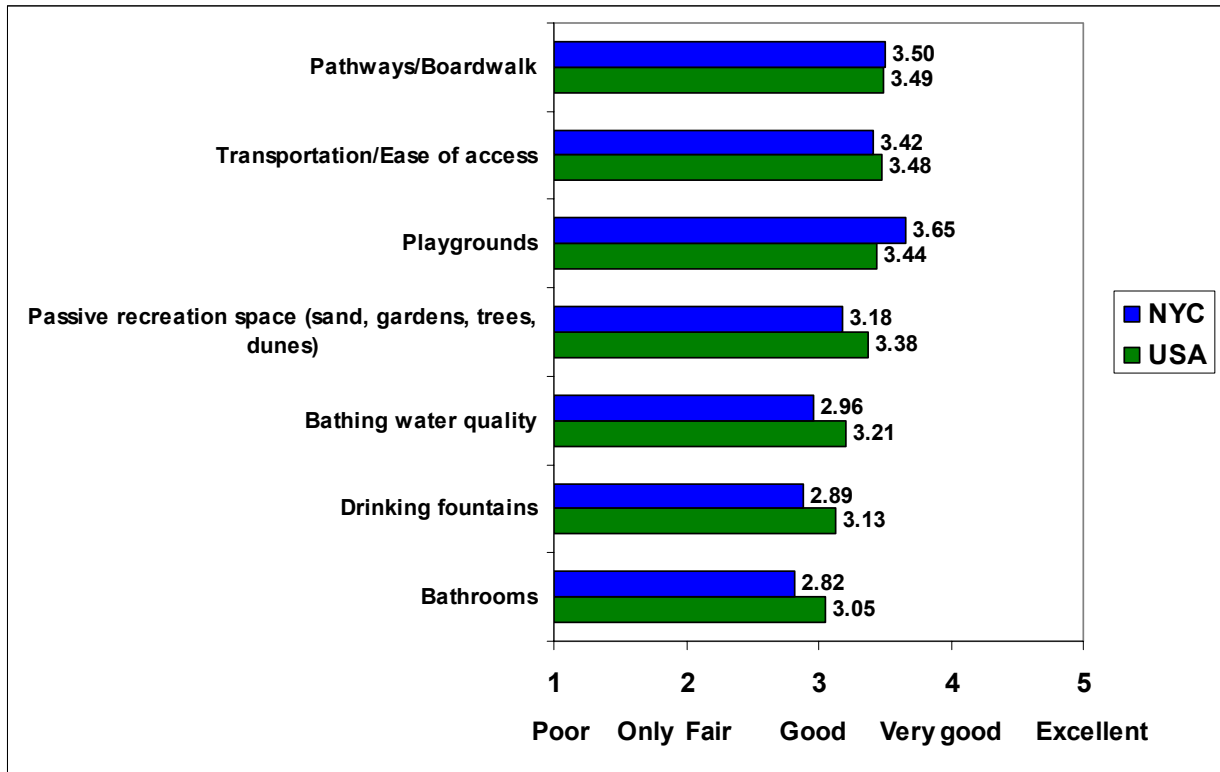


Figure 7. From your experience, how often is your local beach . . .

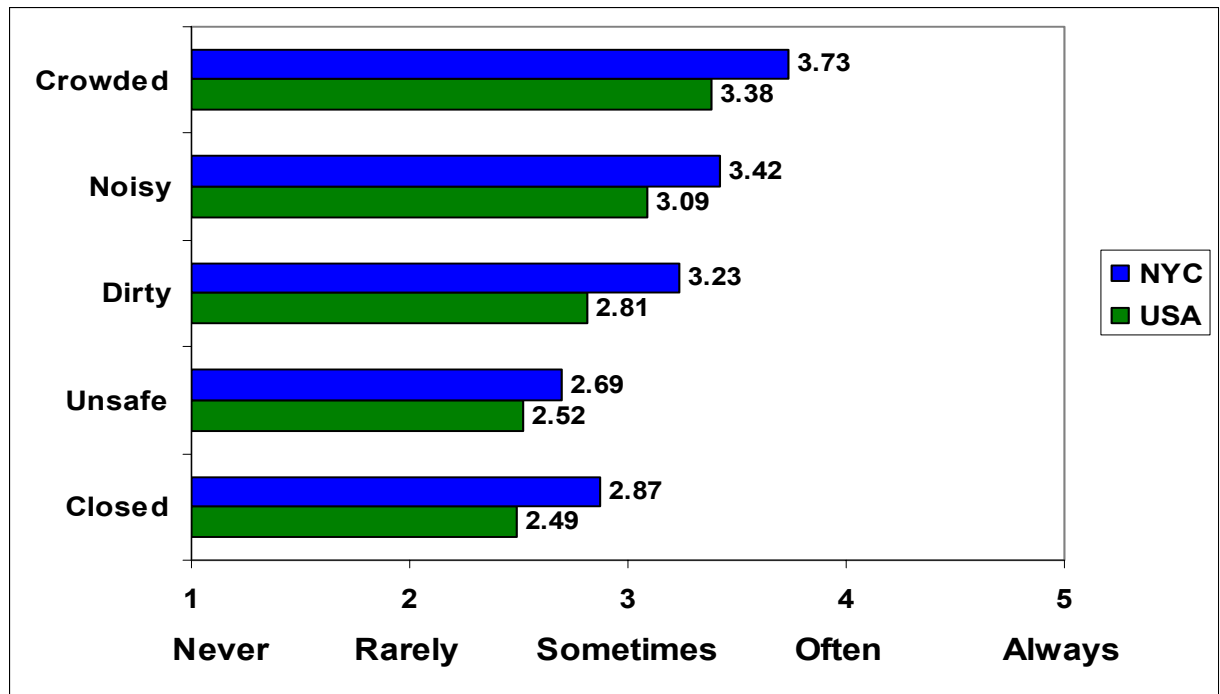


Figure 8. Do you approve, or disapprove, of local government relying on the following sources of financial support for beaches?

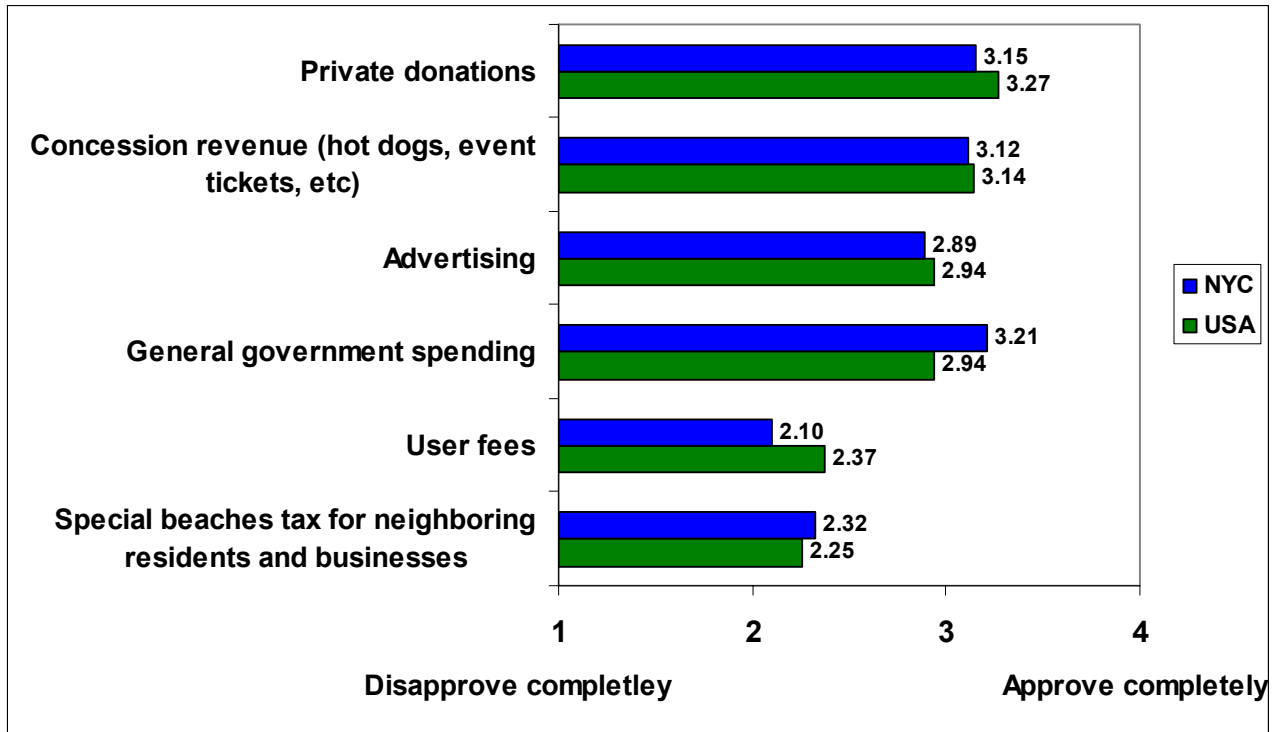


Figure 9. Who do you think should have primary responsibility for maintenance of your local beach?

