Collaborative governance is an arrangement between two or more organizations sharing responsibility for decision making, problem solving, and/or the provision of a good or service (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bradley, 2012). Collaborative governance, rooted in public administration, has been examined in sport governance research; however, few studies have focused on sport specific models for municipal government recreation and sport (see: Brownlow, 2006; Perkins, 2010; Pincetl, 2003). The application of collaborative governance at the municipal level is, in part, the result of federal and international economic approaches to public sector sport and recreation administration (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Ghose, 2005; Roy, 2015). Collaborative governance for public recreation alleviates some of the issues associated with the reduction of funding for recreation by combining public resources with that of NGO’s, such as voluntary and not-for-profit organizations (Holifield & Williams, 2014; Pincetl, 2003; Wolch, 1990).

The purpose of this study is to examine the application of collaborative governance in three differentially scaled cities for the administration and management of disc golf. Disc golf is a relatively new and emerging sport in the United States. The first modern disc golf course was constructed in 1975 in California. As of October 2016, the Professional Disc Golf Association recognize over 5,500 courses in the U.S. and thousands more internationally. With a majority of the courses situated in public parks, the development and expansion of disc golf has occurred despite reductions in public recreation funding.

The results indicate similar, yet varying, models of collaborative governance. Local disc golfers and public recreation administrators share responsibilities and work together to collaboratively manage disc golf in their communities, create and maintain courses, create revenue streams, and enhance the local disc golf scene. Although there are some challenges associated with collaborative governance at each site, the collaborative model has aided in the development and growth of disc golf. The results of the study suggest access to free, public courses may be limited through an alternative governance structure.

Overall, the collaborative governance model, if implemented properly and uniquely positioned in each municipality, can enhance public recreation. During the study, it was evident the model is being utilized at these sites for other
aspects of park management including local youth leagues (i.e. Little League), adventure sports (i.e. BMX tracks and skate parks), and outdoor activities (i.e. hiking and mountain biking trails). This study advances our understanding, as sport management researchers and practitioners, of collaborative governance while addressing best practices and challenges of a sport-specific form of governance that may be valuable in other facets of sport management.