

*Research
Report* on
America's Cities



Strengthening Families
in America's Cities:
A Survey on
Municipal Conditions,
Policies and Resources
for Children and Families

National League
of Cities



Institute for Youth,
Education, and Families



This report is one of a series on conditions affecting children, youth, and families in America's cities. These reports are based on a nationwide Strengthening Families Survey addressed to elected officials, made possible through the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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A Survey on Municipal Conditions, Policies and Resources for Children and Families
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Research Report

on
Strengthening
Families



Strengthening Families in America's Cities: A Survey on Municipal Conditions, Policies and Resources for Children and Families

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of Cities



Institute for Youth,
Education, and Families



*Supported by the
Annie E. Casey Foundation*

*Research
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Preface

We are pleased to present *Strengthening Families in America's Cities: A Survey on Municipal Conditions, Policies and Resources for Children and Families*. This report is a compilation of a series of research reports on children and families in America's cities published in 2003 and 2004.

The study is based on survey results obtained from over 500 of the nation's municipal elected officials. The survey was completed in 2003 with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the A. L. Mailman Family Foundation, the Packard Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, and the MetLife Foundation. This study was prepared and written by Cheryl Katz, Vice President of Baldassare Associates, and Christopher Hoene, NLC Research Manager.

This survey effort is part of NLC's commitment to issues affecting youth, education and families, and builds upon knowledge gleaned from the two previous studies, *Our Future and Our Only Hope: A Survey of City Hall Regarding Children and Families* (1989) and *Critical Needs, Critical Choices: A Survey on Children and Families in America's Cities* (1996). The findings in this most recent report will:

- ❖ inform and influence the nation's discussions about children and families;
- ❖ mobilize and guide municipal officials and community leaders across America;
- ❖ demonstrate the varied roles of America's cities and towns in addressing the needs of children and families;
- ❖ reinforce NLC's emphasis on the interconnection between the success of communities and the success of families; and strengthen the capacity of NLC.

We intend for this new report to also add encouragement to those already hard at work and to those who are just beginning to see the needs in a local context.

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Highlights

The *Strengthening Families in America's Cities* survey was conducted for the National League of Cities (NLC) on issues affecting children and families in America's communities. The mail survey of elected officials, conducted from November 2002 to March 2003, included responses from 501 cities nationwide. The margin of error is +/- 4.5 percent for the total sample.

Here are the highlights of the findings:

Conditions and Needs

- ❖ **Despite the economic downturn, most elected officials say conditions for families and children in their cities have improved (33%) or stayed the same (50%) over the past two years.** Only 16 percent say conditions have worsened. Officials are even a bit more upbeat about the future, with 38 percent saying conditions will improve over the next two years, 35 percent expecting no change and 18 percent anticipating a decline.
- ❖ **Nonetheless, communities are being constrained by tight fiscal conditions.** While 47 percent say their city is spending more on children and families today than it was five years ago, 42 percent report spending the same amount and 11 percent are spending less. This represents a drop from the 1995-96 NLC Children and Families Survey, when 57 percent of cities reported an increase over the previous five years in spending on children and families, and only 36 percent said their funding level had remained the same.
- ❖ **Many leaders say current conditions have limited their community's ability to address the needs of children and families in the past year.** Nearly half (48%) say their community has been able to do an *excellent* (7%) or *good* job (41%). However, the same number say they have been able to do only a *fair* (36%) or *poor* job (13%) of addressing the needs of children and families. Looking ahead, nearly half (51%) think their community will be able to do an *excellent* (8%) or *good* job (43%) in the next three years, while 35 percent expect to do a *fair* (35%) or *poor* job (9%). Although these ratings are nearly identical to those expressed in the 1996 survey, there is a widespread belief this year that municipal ability to provide programs and services has *decreased* due to recent trends in the allocation of state (53%) and federal funds (46%).
- ❖ **Cities' greatest strengths in meeting the needs of families and children are in recreation (34% say their community does a *more than adequate* job) and elementary through high school public education (27% *more than adequate*).** Areas rated as having the greatest deficiencies are:

youth participation and youth employment opportunities (48% saying each is *less than adequate*), drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment (43%), affordable housing (42%), elder-care (41%), and mental health care, parenting education and youth mentoring (40% each).

- ❖ **Housing affordability (28%), child care (24%), afterschool programs and substance abuse treatment (22% each) are rated as the most critical community program needs for families and children.** Since the 1995-96 survey, mentions have increased for economic issues, including housing affordability (up 7 points) and youth (up 11 points) and adult (up 6 points) employment.
- ❖ **Higher-income families are seen as the best-served resident group in America's cities, while the working poor are seen as the least-served.** Asked to rate how well their community meets the needs of specific groups of residents, 30 percent of local leaders say their cities are doing a *more than adequate* job in meeting the needs of high-income families. As for the most under-served groups, low-income working families top the list (47% saying their community is doing a *less-than-adequate* job), followed by single-parent families (45%), immigrant families (43%), teenagers (41%), and kinship-care families (40%).
- ❖ **Single-parent families are seen as having the most critical needs.** In an open-ended question on the groups in their community whose needs are currently the most critical, officials rate single-parent families highest (45%), followed by low-income working families (42%), elderly and aging residents (34%), children 13 and older (27%), immigrant families (23%), and children under three (21%).

Municipal Roles

- ❖ **Municipal governments are most likely to provide recreation (65%) and afterschool programs (41%) as direct services.** Cities are most likely to have staff or a department providing recreation (42%), youth crime and violence prevention programs (35%) and housing affordability (32%). Three in 10 respondents say municipal officials in their community lead or advocate in the areas of youth participation in civic affairs (31%), neighborhood supports, raising children to have healthy values, and housing affordability (30% each). Twenty-two percent have a commission or task force on recreation.
- ❖ **The three highest municipal program priorities in the past year were recreation (55% naming this in an open-ended question), housing affordability (40%) and before and afterschool programs (27%).**

- ❖ **Most cities budget at least *some* municipal funds for afterschool programs (57%) and neighborhood engagement efforts (52%).**
- ❖ **Cities are most likely to fund their programs for children and families from general revenues (73%) and fees-for-services (60%).** Compared to the 1995-96 survey, cities today are more likely to fund such programs with fees-for-services (60% vs. 54%), impact or developer fees (30% vs. 23%) and dedicated municipal taxes (16% vs. 11%), while they are less likely to use funds from general municipal revenues (73% vs. 80%).
- ❖ **The greatest barrier to providing programs and services for children and families is a lack of funding, which 75 percent say is a *major* barrier to their municipal government.** Other issues rated as *major* barriers are city financial problems (39%), lack of staff (29%) and citizen resistance to new spending (28%). Compared to the 1995-96 survey, cities today are considerably more likely to rate lack of funding as a *major* or *moderate* barrier (91% vs. 66%), as well as city fiscal crisis (62% vs. 34%).
- ❖ **Only 25 percent of local elected officials say that strengthening families in their community is mainly the responsibility of others.** Elected officials see their main function in strengthening families as promoting strong neighborhoods (63% say this describes their role a *great deal*), providing local leadership on the issues (60%), collaborating with other public, private and non-profit agencies (55%), and advocating for the needs of families and children (49%). Fewer see themselves as being highly involved in ensuring funding for programs and services (37%) or facilitating program and service delivery (36%). Nonetheless, only 25 percent say the issue is mainly the responsibility of others.
- ❖ **In the future, most elected officials say their role in strengthening families will primarily be providing leadership (27%), advocating (18%), collaborating with other agencies (15%), and promoting strong neighborhoods and resident engagement (15%).**

Early Childhood Development

- ❖ **Cities are making considerable efforts to meet early childhood needs.** More than six in 10 elected officials rate their communities as *adequate* or better in meeting the overall needs of children under three (66%), having preschool or early childhood education available (80%), providing child care for this age group (62%), providing health and prenatal care to children (74%), and having child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention services (67%).

- ❖ **Still, a sizeable number say young children in their communities are being *less-than-adequately* served in those areas, including child care (28%), child abuse prevention (33%) and meeting the overall needs of children under three (34%). One in five say the availability of early childhood education in their community is below the minimum acceptable level, and one in four say their community's health and prenatal care for children is inadequate.**
- ❖ **Nearly four in 10 cities earmark a *great deal* (15%) or *some* (23%) municipal funds for early childhood programs, despite the fact that this has not traditionally been a municipal function. One in five provide early childhood education (22%) as a direct municipal service, and one in six (16%) offer child care for young children.**
- ❖ **Local leaders overwhelmingly see their communities as having a stake in promoting early childhood education. The top reasons cited for allocating municipal resources to early childhood programs are that they improve later school performance (74%) and reduce a child's chances of becoming a juvenile delinquent (74%). Two in three also say supporting early child development programs is *very important* because it raises children's future employment prospects (69%) and reduces their likelihood of needing social services as an adult (66%).**
- ❖ **Elected leaders *strongly* support the following federal policy objectives concerning families with young children in their communities: providing early intervention and treatment for children with disabilities (60%); providing child-care assistance for low-income working families who do not qualify for other forms of assistance (55%); universal preschool (53%); and providing affordable, quality child care for all children (52%).**

Youth and Afterschool

In the area of resources for youth, elected officials rate their communities highly for the availability of structured, supervised afterschool activities (56% say *excellent or good*), and youth centers (55%). The biggest deficiency is in employment opportunities for youth, which 27 percent rate as *poor or not available*.

Local leaders stress youth involvement in civic life. Most cities sponsor community service programs (71%) and "youth in government" events (50%), and many (41%) have a youth council. Other opportunities cities provide for youth participation include youth summits (26%), teen courts (20%) and youth mapping (17%).

- ❖ **Youth voices are valued by local elected officials.** Three in four (76%) rate this as important to their municipal government, including 35 percent saying it is *very important*.

Family Economic Security

- ❖ **Local leaders believe the most successful strategies for improving the economic security of lower-income working families are creating homeownership incentives and improving transportation.** Each of these strategies is used and found effective by 59 percent of cities. Job training (54%) and rental housing assistance (53% each) are also rated as effective. More than half of cities report no experience with providing matching funds for family savings, access to affordable health coverage, financial literacy programs, increasing the minimum wage, or assistance with claiming tax credits or refunds.
- ❖ **Regardless of whether they are currently using the strategy, officials say the most effective approaches for increasing lower-income family economic security would be job training and education (58%), access to affordable health coverage (40%), targeted job creation (38%), and homeownership incentives (35%).**

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Introduction

Strengthening families, and creating a positive environment for the well-being of their younger residents, is one of the most important functions of municipalities today. Across the nation, communities are charged with ensuring that families have the support and resources needed to help their children grow into healthy, productive adults. Local governments are on the forefront of this vital responsibility.

The National League of Cities, through its Institute for Youth, Education and Families, has an on-going commitment to strengthen the capacity of municipal leaders to enhance the lives of young people and their families. The Institute provides support to assist municipal leaders in taking action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. As part of that effort, the NLC is conducting a series of surveys of municipal leaders on conditions, policies and resources for the nation's children and families. *Strengthening Families in America's Cities* is the third in that series.

Building on surveys reports released by the NLC in 1989 and 1996, *Strengthening Families in America's Cities* examines conditions for children and families in municipalities nationwide. The 2004 survey seeks to determine the most critical needs for families and children in America's communities. In addition, the current survey examines municipal involvement in providing programs and services for children and families, and seeks to identify the successful approaches being used by municipalities today. The survey also explores municipal financing, and the funding mechanisms used to support initiatives benefiting children and families. Within these topics, the survey examines a number of issues such as barriers to providing programs and services for families and children, elected leaders' self-perceived roles in strengthening families in their community, and the effect of recent trends in state and federal funding.

Because the success of a city is directly tied to the success of its youngest residents, the survey included a special focus on early childhood development. Children who are exposed to developmentally-appropriate educational environments in their early years enter school ready to learn, and, as they mature, they are less likely to drop out of high school, engage in juvenile delinquency, or rely on social services. *Strengthening Families in America's Cities* looks at how well the needs of young children are being met, and what types of programs and services municipalities are providing for families of children under three. The survey also measures support for federal policy initiatives concerning families with young children. In addition, the survey takes an in-depth look at two other topics of current interest: youth, including opportunities for young people to become involved in

community service and governance; and ways to bolster the economic security of lower-income working families.

The 2003 survey findings are compared with results from the 1995-96 NLC survey, *Critical Needs, Critical Choices*, and the 1989 NLC survey, *Our Future and Our Only Hope*, to examine trends and progress over time. The current survey also analyzes results by city size and region, to determine similarities and differences between small (population under 50,000), medium (population 50,000 to 99,999) and large (population 100,000 or more) cities, and between communities in the Northeast/Midwest, South and Western regions of the nation.

The current environment is not an easy one for families and children in America. An economic downturn, concerns about national security, and international conflict have provided constraints on public funding and competition for public attention. The nature of the American family itself is changing in many ways. Increases in single-parent and kinship-care families, dual-career households, and immigrant families are among the key demographic trends that make the needs of families an increasingly complex picture.

Nonetheless, there has been much progress in conditions for children and families. The *2003 KIDS COUNT Data Book* found improvements in eight of 10 indicators of child well-being over the previous decade, including reductions in infant mortality, child and teen deaths, teen births, and high school drop-outs. The report found a gain in parental employment and a reduction in the child poverty rate. But the study also found a substantial rise in the number of single-parent families, and raised concerns about the economic jeopardy of low-income families.

Strengthening Families in America's Cities presents a similar picture of significant progress coupled with challenges remaining to be met. On one hand, the survey finds overall conditions for children and families to be quite favorable, and elected officials are optimistic about the future. Many cities have made considerable strides in meeting the needs of their child and family residents, with two-thirds or more rated as doing an adequate or better job in providing recreation, public elementary through high school education, early childhood education, children's health care, child care for older children, family-friendly workplaces, domestic violence prevention, youth community service opportunities, child abuse prevention, raising children to have healthy values, and youth crime prevention. A sizeable number of cities provide programs supporting children and families as direct services, including recreation, afterschool, youth crime prevention, neighborhood supports, and housing affordability. At least one in three municipalities have staff or a city department overseeing recreation, youth crime

and violence prevention programs, and housing affordability. Municipal officials also provide substantial leadership and advocacy on children and family issues.

While these results show that leaders have made numerous accomplishments in providing for the well-being of children and families in their communities, they also show areas where work still needs to be done. Housing affordability, child care, afterschool programs and substance abuse prevention and treatment are rated as the most pressing program needs for children and families. Low-income working families, single-parents, immigrants, teenagers, and non-parent family members raising children are seen as the population groups whose needs are least likely to be met in communities today. Four in 10 or more elected officials rate their municipality as doing a less-than-adequate job of meeting residents' needs for youth employment opportunities, drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment, affordable housing, care for the elderly, mental health care, parenting education, and youth mentoring programs. Mentions of economic issues as critical needs have increased significantly since the 1995-96 NLC survey.

On the fiscal front, cities appear to be making the best of limited resources. Despite a weak economy nationwide, most local elected leaders rate conditions for children and families in their communities as improved or unchanged in the past two years. Nearly half of elected officials say their cities are spending more on children and families today than they were five years ago, and a similar number rate their communities as being able to do an *excellent* or *good* job of addressing child and family needs.

Still, communities are feeling the financial pinch. The number of officials saying their city is spending more on children and families today compared to five years earlier is 10 points lower than it was in the 1995-96 NLC survey. Most cities' ability to provide programs and services has *decreased* in the wake of lower allocations of state funds, and nearly half feel the same effect from recent trends in federal funding. Municipal leaders say a lack of funding and city financial problems are the greatest barriers to providing programs and services for children and families in their community.

The findings on early childhood development show widespread awareness of the long-term benefits of high-quality care for children under three. Leaders overwhelmingly acknowledge that their communities have a stake in making sure their youngest residents have positive early learning experiences. Most also see it as a moral responsibility. Support for federal policies assisting families with young children is solid. Officials are demonstrating leadership on the issue and, despite the fact that early childhood education has not traditionally been a municipal function, nearly four in 10 communities overall, and nearly two-thirds of large cities, allocate some

civic resources to early learning programs. Most elected leaders say their communities are doing an adequate or better job in meeting the overall needs of young children and their families.

But again, there is more ground to cover. Child care is named as the second-most critical program or service need in America's communities, and early childhood education is ranked among the top 10. Children under three are seen as among the population groups with the most pressing needs. More than three in 10 leaders say their communities have *less-than-adequate* child care for young children. The lack of services for young children is especially severe in the nation's largest metropolitan areas.

Throughout this report, our findings show that while municipal governments place a high priority on providing for the well-being of children and families in their communities, and many efforts are being made, elected officials are challenged by the need to balance increased responsibilities and a growing need for services with limited fiscal resources. It is our hope that this report, and NLC's on-going commitment to helping communities support their children and families, will assist municipal leaders in meeting that challenge.

Critical Needs

Conditions for Children and Families

Despite the constraints to municipal budgets posed by the current economic downturn, and the growing complexity of family needs, elected officials from the nation's cities see conditions for children and families in their communities as remaining largely unchanged or even improved over the past two years. Half (50%) say that overall conditions for families and children in their communities are about the same today as they were several years ago, while one in three (33%) think there has been improvement. Only one in six (16%) local leaders believe that the environment for families and children in their communities has worsened during that time.

This perception is somewhat more negative in large cities (population 100,000 or more), where fewer than half (42%) say conditions for children and families have remained about the same, and fully one in five (20%) believe the environment has deteriorated. Cities in the West also appear to have been harder-hit by recent trends: about one in four (24%) say things have worsened in the past two years.

Looking to the future, city leaders are cautiously optimistic. Nearly four in 10 (38%) predict that conditions for children and families in their community will get better and 35 percent think there will be little change. One in six (18%) expect things to worsen.

Officials from large cities are less positive about the future: three in 10 expect conditions for families and children in their communities to be worse two years from now. Leaders from Western cities are also more negative, with a quarter (26%) expecting further decline in the next two years.

TABLE I

Conditions for Children and Families Over Time							
	City	Population			Region		
	Total	Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Past two years							
Improved	33%	30%	42%	37%	29%	32%	39%
Worsened	16	14	15	20	14	12	24
Stayed about the same	50	55	40	42	55	54	37
Don't know	1	1	3	1	2	2	-
Next two years							
Improved	38%	37%	42%	40%	37%	39%	40%
Worsened	18	14	18	30	17	13	26
Stayed about the same	35	39	32	23	35	39	28
Don't know	9	10	8	7	11	9	6

Needs of Children and Families

Elected leaders were asked to rate how well their community meets the needs of children and families in 24 key areas that are significant to successful outcomes and quality of life. The officials identified their cities' greatest strengths in meeting the needs of families and children as recreation (34% say their community's recreational programs are *more than adequate*) and elementary through high school public education (27% say this is *more than adequate*). Both these areas have a mean score below 2 (the lower the score, the higher the rating), which makes them the highest-rated of the areas asked about and average to moderately above adequate.

A second tier of areas was rated *adequate* or better by more than two in three local officials, including early childhood education (80% say *adequate* or better), children's health care (74% *adequate* or better), family-friendly workplaces (71% *adequate* or better), youth community service opportunities (68% *adequate* or better), child care for children three and older (72% *adequate* or better), and domestic violence prevention (69% *adequate* or better). These areas receive mean scores between 2.03 and 2.20, which averages out to *adequate* or slightly below *adequate*.

A third tier was rated *adequate* or better by about six in 10 local officials, including raising children to have healthy values (67% *adequate* or better), before and afterschool programs (65% *adequate* or better), youth crime and

violence prevention (66% *adequate* or better), child abuse prevention and intervention (67% *adequate* or better), employment opportunities for adults (63% *adequate* or better), and child care for children under three (62% *adequate* or better). Mean scores for this group range from 2.22 to 2.29, which averages out to moderately below adequate.

Areas seen as having the greatest deficiencies, with approximately four in 10 officials rating them as *less than adequate*, are: drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment, housing affordability, elder-care, youth mentoring, parenting education, mental health care, neighborhood supports, and welfare-to-work (with mean scores ranging from 2.30 to 2.34). At the bottom are youth participation in civic affairs (48% *less than adequate*, mean score 2.36) and youth employment opportunities (48% *less than adequate* and mean score 2.41, which averages to well below adequate).

There are some significant differences by city size in assessments of how well communities are meeting the needs of children and families. Ratings of the K-12 public schools are considerably higher in small (under 50,000 residents) and medium (50,000 to 99,999) communities than in cities with populations of 100,000 or more.

Residents' needs for early childhood education also appear to be better met in smaller and medium-sized cities than in large cities. Larger cities, by contrast, receive higher ratings for providing youth community service opportunities. As for raising children to have healthy values, leaders of small and medium cities are more likely to rate their communities as doing an *adequate* or better job than are cities of 100,000 or more. Reflecting their more complex needs, large cities also tend to be rated lower for meeting needs in the areas of children's health and prenatal care, family-friendly workplaces, child care for children of all ages, before and after-school programs, youth crime and violence prevention, elder care, housing affordability, and mental health care. Large cities are rated better than smaller ones for providing opportunities for youth to participate in community government.

By region, officials from cities in the South rate their communities significantly lower than do those in the Northeast/Midwest and the West in meeting the needs of children and families for recreation, youth community service opportunities, domestic violence prevention and intervention, raising children to have healthy values, neighborhood supports, drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment, opportunities for youth to participate in civic affairs, and youth employment and job training. Cities in the South also tend to be rated lower for youth crime and violence prevention, welfare-to-work programs, and parenting education. Cities in the Northeast/Midwest score higher than the other regions in several

areas, including K-12 public education, early childhood education, children’s health care, domestic violence prevention and intervention, before and afterschool programs, child abuse prevention, elder-care, and mental health care. In the West, leaders tend to rate their communities lower than the other regions for providing child care for children under three as well as for those three and older. Western cities are also seen as doing a poorer job in meeting residents’ needs for affordable housing.

TABLE 2

How Well Needs of Families and Children Are Being Met in Your Community				
	More than adequate	Adequate	Less than adequate	Mean*
Recreation	34%	44%	22%	1.88
K-12 public education	27	54	19	1.92
Early childhood education/preschool	17	63	20	2.03
Children’s health care and prenatal care	11	63	26	2.14
Family-friendly workplaces	12	59	29	2.17
Youth community service opportunities	14	54	32	2.17
Child care for children aged 3 and older	10	62	28	2.18
Domestic violence prevention and intervention	12	57	31	2.20
Raising children to have healthy values	11	56	33	2.22
Before and afterschool programs	12	53	35	2.23
Youth crime and violence prevention	10	56	34	2.24
Child abuse prevention and intervention	8	59	33	2.25
Employment opportunities for adults	12	51	37	2.26
Child care for children under 3 years old	9	53	38	2.29
Welfare to work	5	60	35	2.30
Youth mentoring	10	50	40	2.30
Neighborhood supports	8	53	39	2.31
Elder-care	9	50	41	2.31
Parenting education, promoting responsibility	8	52	40	2.33
Housing affordability	9	49	42	2.33
Mental health care	5	55	40	2.34
Substance abuse prevention and treatment	9	48	43	2.34
Youth participation in civic affairs	12	40	48	2.36
Youth employment opportunities and training	7	45	48	2.41

*Lower mean score denotes more positive rating.

TABLE 3

How Well Needs of Families and Children Are Being Met in Your Community (By city size and region)						
% Adequate/More than Adequate	City Population			Region		
	Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Recreation	77%	86%	79%	85%	70%	82%
K-12 public education	83	85	70	87	76	80
Early childhood education/preschool	82	82	68	89	72	79
Children's health care and prenatal care	76	78	66	83	71	67
Family-friendly workplaces	73	75	63	74	69	71
Youth community service opportunities	64	77	79	70	60	79
Child care for children aged 3 and older	75	74	63	77	72	65
Domestic violence prevention and intervention	69	77	63	78	61	68
Raising children to have healthy values	67	81	59	78	55	73
Before and afterschool programs	67	67	59	70	61	64
Youth crime and violence prevention	66	74	58	71	60	67
Child abuse prevention and intervention	67	74	62	76	60	66
Employment opportunities for adults	61	62	69	66	58	65
Child care for children under 3 years old	66	62	49	70	62	52
Youth mentoring	58	70	61	66	54	61
Welfare to work	65	69	60	70	59	67
Elder-care	61	65	49	70	52	57
Neighborhood supports	59	65	65	68	53	64
Housing affordability	61	53	53	68	59	45
Parenting education, promoting responsibility	58	71	59	68	52	62
Substance abuse prevention and treatment	59	59	52	68	48	57
Mental health care	65	61	43	70	59	50
Youth participation in civic affairs	50	51	61	53	45	61
Youth employment opportunities and training	50	56	55	66	40	52

Most Critical Program Needs

Municipal officials were asked in an open-ended question to name the most critical program needs for children and families in their community. Up to three responses were allowed. Economic issues ranked high, with housing affordability at the top of the list, mentioned by 28 percent as a critical need. Child care was named a critical need by 24 percent, while afterschool programs and substance abuse prevention were mentioned by 22 percent each. Employment opportunities for adults was ranked fourth (20%) and 17 percent mentioned parenting education, putting this issue in fifth place.

Mentions of housing affordability (up 7 points) and employment opportunities for adults (up 6 points) and youth (up 11 points) have risen since this question was asked in the 1995-96 NLC Children and Families Survey, reflecting the recent economic downturn. In line with the nation's growing population of older residents, mentions of elder-care as a critical need have also climbed sharply (up 11 points) since the last survey. Municipal officials today are also more concerned with early childhood education (up 8 points) than they were in the previous survey. Fewer, however, mention K-12 education (down 8 points), indicating that many areas may have seen improvements in the public schools. And though mentions of child-care have declined 6 points, reflecting an increase in availability since 1996, the issue still ranks as a top program need for children and families.

TABLE 4

Most Critical Program Needs in Your Community – Top 10			
Open-ended, up to three mentions allowed	2003	1996	2003 Rank
Housing affordability	28%	21%	1
Child care	24	30	2
Before and afterschool programs	22	21	3
Drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment	22	19	3
Employment opportunities for adults	20	14	4
Parenting education/promoting parental responsibility	17	12	5
Raising children to have healthy, constructive values	15	—	6
Youth employment opportunities and job training	14	3	7
Youth crime and violence prevention	14	17	7
Elder care	13	2	8
Child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention	11	7	9
Early childhood education/preschool	11	3	9
Youth mentoring	9	4	10

Needs of Specific Groups and Family Types

Municipal officials were next asked to assess the job their community is doing in meeting the needs of 16 key groups of residents and types of families. The local leaders responded that higher-income families are the best-served group in America's cities, with 30 percent saying their community does a *more than adequate* job of meeting this group's needs and only 5 percent giving a *less-than-adequate* assessment. The mean score for higher-income families is a very positive 1.75 (the lower the score, the higher the rating).

The least well-served groups are seen as kinship-care families, (grandparents or other relatives raising children of absent or incapacitated parents), immigrant families, single-parent families, and low-income working families. Only about half say their communities are doing an adequate or better job in meeting the needs of these residents, while four in 10 or more rate their communities as doing a *less-than-adequate* job in serving kinship-care families (40%), immigrant families (43%), single-parent families (45%), and low-income working families (47%). Mean scores for these groups range from 2.35 to 2.43, averaging to well below adequate.

Approximately eight in 10 or more say their communities are doing at least an *adequate* job in providing programs and services for middle-income families (89%), two-parent families (88%) and children aged 6-12 (79%). Mean scores for these groups range from 2.00 to 2.06, meaning that the responses average out to a rating of *adequate*.

Local leaders are somewhat less positive about the job their communities are doing in serving elderly and aging residents, children aged three to five, and children with special needs. While more than two in three say their cities are doing at least an adequate job for elderly and aging residents, children aged three to five and children with special needs, more than a quarter give *less-than-adequate* ratings for providing programs and services for these groups. Mean scores for these groups range very narrowly from 2.15 to 2.17, averaging to a slightly below adequate rating.

A fourth tier includes families on public assistance, extended families, disabled adults, children under three, and children 13 and older, for whom approximately six in 10 public officials say their community is doing an adequate or better job. About three in 10 or more rate their community as *less-than-adequate* in meeting the needs of families on public assistance (29%), extended families (27%), disabled adults (36%), children under three (34%), and children 13 and older (41%). Mean scores for these groups range from 2.23 to 2.28, averaging to below adequate.

In general, larger cities receive lower ratings for meeting the needs of several groups, including children of all ages and children with special needs, as well as the elderly and aging, disabled adults and families on public assistance.

By region, cities in the Northeast/Midwest tend to be seen as doing a better job than other areas at providing programs and services for two-parent and single-parent families, children of all ages, children with special needs, and the elderly. Elected officials from cities in the South rate their communities lower than other regions for meeting the needs of children under three, extended families, kinship-care families, immigrant families, and disabled adults.

TABLE 5

How Well Community is Meeting Needs of the Following Groups				
	More than adequate	Adequate	Less than adequate	Mean*
Higher-income families	30%	65%	5%	1.75
Middle-income families	10	79	11	2.00
Two-parent families	10	78	12	2.01
Children aged 6-12	14	65	21	2.06
Elderly and aging	16	53	31	2.15
Children aged 3-5	10	64	26	2.16
Children with special needs	15	52	33	2.17
Families on public assistance	6	65	29	2.23
Extended families	3	70	27	2.23
Disabled adults	11	53	36	2.25
Children under 3	8	58	34	2.26
Children 13 and older	12	47	41	2.28
Kinship-care families	4	56	40	2.35
Immigrant families	6	51	43	2.38
Single-parent families	3	52	45	2.41
Low-income working families	5	48	47	2.43

*Lower mean score denotes more positive rating.

TABLE 6

How Well Community is Meeting Needs of the Following Groups (By City Size and Region)						
% Adequate/More than Adequate	City Population			Region		
	Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Higher-income families	95%	95%	98%	98%	93%	95%
Middle-income families	89	89	90	92	85	92
Two-parent families	89	89	88	95	82	89
Children aged 6-12	83	84	69	89	74	76
Elderly and aging	71	75	62	81	56	72
Children aged 3-5	77	79	62	85	68	69
Children with special needs	69	73	61	81	56	67
Families on public assistance	73	72	63	75	67	73
Extended families	74	77	70	76	65	84
Disabled adults	65	68	58	76	49	71
Children under 3	66	71	62	75	59	65
Children 13 and older	61	67	50	66	55	57
Kinship-care families	63	58	53	68	50	66
Immigrant families	61	51	47	67	45	62
Single-parent families	55	64	53	68	47	53
Low-income working families	54	53	48	58	49	51

Most Critical Group Needs

In an open-ended question on which type of family or specific population has the most critical needs in cities, single-parents top the list, with 45 percent of elected officials naming this group in one of three mentions. The “working poor,” or families where employed members make too much income to qualify for public assistance but too little to make ends meet reliably, are ranked second, with 42 percent of municipal leaders mentioning this group as having pressing needs in their community. Third on the list are elderly and aging residents, mentioned by 34 percent, followed in fourth place by teens, named by 27 percent. Immigrant families round out the top five most critical needs, with 23 percent naming this group.

Other groups municipal officials see as having among the top 10 most pressing needs in their communities are: children under three (21%); kinship-care families (18%); children with disabilities or special needs and disabled adults (17% each); families receiving public assistance (13%); and children aged three to five (11%).

TABLE 7

Group with the Most Critical Needs in Your Community – Top 10		
Open-ended, up to three mentions allowed	Total	Rank
Single-parent families	45%	1
Lower-income working families	42	2
Elderly and aging residents	34	3
Children 13 and older	27	4
Immigrant families	23	5
Children under 3	21	6
Non-parent family members raising children (kinship-care)	18	7
Children with disabilities/special needs	17	8
Disabled or dependent adults	17	8
Families receiving public assistance	13	9
Children aged 3-5	11	10

Municipal Ability to Address Needs of Children and Families

Even under the current challenging conditions, many cities are managing to provide a high level of services for children and families. Nearly half (48%) of local leaders say their community has been able to do an *excellent* (7%) or *good* job (41%) of addressing the needs of their child and family residents in the past year. A similar number (49%), however, say they have been able to do only a *fair* (36%) or *poor* job (13%).

As for the next three years, officials express cautious optimism, with 51 percent thinking their community will be able to do an *excellent* (8%) or *good* job (43%), 35 percent expecting to do a *fair* job and only 9 percent anticipating doing a *poor* job of addressing the needs of children and families in their cities.

Although these ratings are nearly identical to those expressed in the 1995-96 survey, there is a widespread belief that municipal ability to provide

programs and services has *decreased* due to recent trends in the allocation of state (53%) and federal funds (46%) (for full discussion, see section on municipal finance).

Smaller cities are much more upbeat than large ones in their assessment of their municipal government's ability to address the needs of children and families in their community: among cities with fewer than 50,000 residents, 57 percent say they have been able to do an *excellent* or *good* job this year, compared to only 22 percent of cities with 50,000 or more residents. Smaller cities also have a much more positive view of the future: 61 percent of those with populations under 50,000 think their municipality will be able to do an *excellent* or *good* job of addressing the needs of children and families during the next three years, compared to only 20 percent of cities with 50,000 or more. There are no regional differences on these questions.

Municipal Government's Ability to Address Needs				
	2003		1996	
	Past year	Next 3 yrs	Past year	Next 3 yrs
Excellent	7%	8%	5%	7%
Good	41	43	41	48
Fair	36	35	38	30
Poor	13	9	13	12
Don't know	3	5	3	3

TABLE 8

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Municipal Involvement in Child and Family Issues

Role of elected officials

Elected officials were asked to describe the extent to which seven types of activities described their main functions in strengthening families in their community. The top response was promoting strong neighborhoods and resident engagement, which 63 percent say describes their role *a great deal*. Six in 10 also say they see their role as providing local leadership on the issues, and 55 percent say that collaborating with other public, private and non-profit agencies describes their role *a great deal*. About half say that advocating for the needs of families and children (49%) is a central part of their role as an elected official.

Fewer see themselves as being highly involved in the issue through ensuring funding for programs and services (37%) or facilitating the development and delivery of programs and services (36%). Nonetheless, only one in four municipal officials say that strengthening families in their community is mainly the responsibility of others.

Smaller cities and those in the Northeast and Midwest are somewhat less inclined to say that any of the activities describes their role in strengthening families *a great deal*.

Your Role as an Elected Official in Strengthening Families			
	Great Deal	Somewhat	Little or None
Promote strong neighborhoods and resident engagement	63%	27%	10%
Provide local leadership on the issues	60	29	11
Collaborate with other public, private and nonprofit agencies	55	32	13
Advocate for the needs of children and families	49	34	17
Ensure funding for programs and services	37	40	23
Facilitate development and delivery of programs and services	36	38	26
Limited role; others have primary responsibility for this	25	37	38

TABLE 9

TABLE IO

Your Role as an Elected Official in Strengthening Families						
% Saying "A great deal"	City Population			Region		
	Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Promote strong neighborhoods	54%	75%	84%	58%	66%	66%
Provide local leadership	55	75	67	54	63	65
Collaborate with other agencies	50	71	59	48	58	58
Advocate for the needs of children and families	43	62	58	44	51	53
Ensure funding for programs and services	34	44	41	33	42	36
Facilitate program development and delivery	32	38	45	30	39	38
Limited role; others have primary responsibility	25	24	27	26	26	22

Elected officials were also asked in an open-ended question to describe what they think will be their primary role in strengthening families in their communities in the future. Providing leadership (27%) was the top response, followed by advocating for the needs of children and families (18%), collaborating with other agencies (15%), and promoting strong neighborhoods and resident engagement (15%). Fewer see their primary role in the future as facilitating the development of programs and services (12%) or ensuring funding (9%).

TABLE II

Your Primary Role in Strengthening Families in the Future		
Open-ended, up to three mentions allowed	Total	Rank
Provide local leadership on the issues	27%	1
Advocate for the needs of children and families	18	2
Collaborate with other public, private and nonprofit agencies	15	3
Promote strong neighborhoods and resident engagement	15	3
Facilitate development and delivery of programs and services	12	4
Ensure funding for programs and services	9	5

Types of Involvement

Respondents were asked about the ways their municipal government is involved in the 24 key areas of need for families and children. Types of municipal involvement asked about include: providing and/or funding as a direct service; having city staff or a department in place; having a city commission or task force; and having municipal officials lead, advocate and/or convene events.

Direct Service: Areas where municipal governments are most likely to provide a direct service are recreation (65%) and before and afterschool programs (41%). Other areas provided as a direct service by nearly a third of cities include: youth crime and violence prevention (37%), neighborhood supports (33%) and housing affordability (33%). Other areas provided as a direct service by more than one in five cities include domestic violence prevention and intervention (30%), drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment (29%), youth employment opportunities and job training (28%), youth community service (27%), youth participation in civic affairs (26%), youth mentoring (23%), early childhood education (22%), elder-care (21%), child care for children three and older (21%), child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention (20%), and adult employment opportunities (20%). No other programs were provided as a direct service by more than 20 percent.

City Department or Staff: Municipal governments are most likely to have a city department or staff in place to provide for recreation (42%). Approximately a third of cities have a city department or staff for youth crime prevention (35%), housing affordability (32%) and neighborhood supports (29%), while about a quarter do so for before and afterschool programs (26%), domestic violence prevention (25%), youth community service (24%), and youth participation in local government (22%). One in five have a department or staff that provides youth mentoring, youth employment opportunities, and substance abuse programs (20% each). Fewer than one in five cities have staff or a department for any of the other areas asked about in the survey.

Commission or Task Force: The only area in which more than one in five municipalities report having a commission or task force is recreation (22%).

Officials Advocate: The top areas in which municipal officials are involved by advocating or providing leadership are: youth participation (31%); housing affordability, neighborhood supports and promoting healthy values (30% each); and youth community service opportunities (29%). In about one in four cities, officials advocate for youth mentoring (26%) and youth crime prevention (22%), while one in five give leadership on domestic violence

prevention (21%), substance abuse prevention, public education, mental health care, parenting education, and youth employment (20% each.)

No Involvement: A majority of municipal officials responded that their local government has no direct involvement in 10 of the 24 areas asked about in the survey: child care for children under three, children’s health care and welfare-to-work programs (60% each); family-friendly workplaces (57%); child care for children three and older, early childhood education and mental health care (55% each); public education (54%); and elder-care and parenting education (52% each). It is likely that in many cities these issues are handled by other agencies, or the federal, state or county government.

TABLE 12

Municipal Involvement – Top Areas	
Direct service:	
Recreation	65%
Before and afterschool programs	41
Youth crime prevention	37
Neighborhood supports	33
Housing affordability	33
Domestic violence prevention	30
Substance abuse prevention	29
Youth employment opportunities	28
Youth community service	27
Youth participation	26
Youth mentoring	23
Early childhood education	22
Elder-care	21
Child care for 3 and older	21
Child abuse prevention	20
Adult employment opportunities	20

TABLE 12 (CONTINUED)

City department or staff:	
Recreation	42%
Youth crime prevention	35
Housing affordability	32
Neighborhood supports	29
Before and afterschool programs	26
Domestic violence prevention	25
Youth community service	24
Youth participation	22
Youth mentoring	20
Youth employment opportunities	20
Substance abuse prevention	20
Commission or task force:	
Recreation	22%
Officials advocate:	
Youth participation	31%
Housing affordability	30
Neighborhood supports	30
Promoting healthy values	30
Youth community service	29
Youth mentoring	26
Youth crime prevention	22
Domestic violence prevention	21
Substance abuse prevention	20
Public education (K-12)	20
Mental health care	20
Parenting education	20
Youth employment opportunities	20

Highest Municipal Priorities

In an open-ended question on the highest priorities for their municipal government in the past year, local officials responded that recreation (55%), housing affordability (40%) and before and afterschool programs (27%) were at the top of their lists. Other issues mentioned as relatively high priorities are youth crime and violence prevention (25%) and neighborhood supports (20%). About one in six say drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment is a high priority for their municipal government (15%), while about one in 10 emphasize adult employment (12%), domestic violence prevention programs (11%) and youth participation efforts (11%). No other issues were mentioned by more than one in 10 municipal officials.

As for the year ahead, the list of municipal government priorities looks pretty much the same. Recreation is ranked as the top priority by 42 percent of local officials, followed by housing affordability (39%). About one in four mention before and afterschool, and youth crime prevention (24% each) and neighborhood supports (22%). Adult employment (16%) and substance abuse (15%) are high priorities to about one in six municipal governments, while about one in 10 mention youth participation (12%), public education (12%) and domestic violence prevention (10%). Again, no other issues were mentioned by more than one in 10 municipal officials.

Municipal officials were asked in an open-ended question to specify the programs in which they were most interested in gaining more information about ways their local governments could help strengthen families in their community. The top three issues named were housing affordability (28%), youth crime and violence prevention (22%) and ways to increase neighborhood supports (19%).

TABLE B3

Highest Municipal Priorities		
Open-ended, up to three mentions allowed	Past Year	Next Year
Recreation	55%	42%
Housing affordability	40	39
Before and afterschool	27	24
Youth crime prevention	25	24
Neighborhood supports	20	22
Substance abuse prevention	15	15
Adult employment	12	16
Domestic violence prevention	11	10
Youth participation	11	12

Formal Policy

More than a quarter of municipalities (28%) have a written policy such as a law, ordinance or section of a master plan that focuses on children and families, and another 5 percent say they have such a policy under consideration. Half (55%) of municipalities do not have any formal policies concerning families and children. Twelve percent of the officials responding to the survey were uncertain about whether or not their municipality had such a policy.

The number of municipalities responding that they have an official policy on children and families is similar to the 32 percent saying they had such a policy in the 1995-96 survey.

Large cities (50%) are much more likely to have a formal policy on children and families than are medium-sized (39%) or small cities (18%). Similarly, written language describing a municipality's focus on children and families is much more prevalent in the West (47%) than in the Northeast/Midwest (19%) or the South (22%).

Barriers to Municipal Involvement

Lack of funding presents the greatest barrier to providing programs and services for children and families in America's cities. Nine in 10 cite this as a barrier in their municipality, including 75 percent calling it a *major barrier*. City financial problems are also considered a *major barrier* by a sizeable number of municipalities (39%), as well as lack of staff (29%) and citizen resistance to new spending (28%). More than six in 10 cities say each of these issues poses at least a *moderate barrier* in their communities.

A majority of cities also say a lack of facilities poses a *major* or *moderate barrier* (58%), and nearly half say that their municipality lacks information on how best to provide the services (48%), that programs are sufficiently provided by other agencies (47%), that they lack information on where the needs are greatest, and that they lack neighborhood support structures (42% each). Three in 10 or more also say their cities are hindered to a *major* or *moderate degree* by fragmented efforts between their city and outside groups (39%), ineffective communication among the agencies providing services (37%), lack of political support (33%), and fragmented efforts within their municipality (30%).

Since the 1995-96 survey, the number of cities saying their ability to provide programs and services for children and families has been hampered by issues relating to funding has taken a significant leap. There has been a 28-point increase in the number saying that a fiscal crisis in their city is

posing a *major* or *moderate* barrier to serving families and children, and a 25-point increase in the number saying that lack of funding is a *major* or *moderate* barrier today. Part of this increase most likely reflects the lingering effects of the economic recession of 2001 that many cities were continuing to cope with into 2004.

Other barriers that have increased in significance involve a lack of physical resources or expertise, including a 27-point rise in the number saying their city lacks facilities or infrastructure to provide programs and services, a 15-point increase in the number saying their city lacks information on what to do, and an 11-point increase in the number saying they lack information on where the needs are greatest. In addition, the number saying that programs for children and families in their community are sufficiently provided by others has risen by 17 points. Interestingly, cities do not see citizen resistance to new spending as an increasing obstacle.

For large cities, barriers to providing services for children and families tend to center more on conflicts or poor communication between the various departments and agencies involved in the issue, such as fragmented efforts between city and outside groups (47%), ineffective communication among providers (46%) and fragmented efforts within city government (36%). Large cities are also more likely to say they are hampered by a city fiscal crisis (76%).

Small cities are more likely to note obstacles involving insufficient resources, including lack of information on what to do (52%), lack of information on where needs are greatest (45%) and lack of neighborhood capacity (44%). Small cities are also more likely to mention citizen resistance to new spending (67%).

Cities in the South are more likely than the other regions to say they are constrained by a lack of resources, such as infrastructure (63%), information on how best to provide services (54%), information on needs (50%), and neighborhood capacity (47%).

TABLE 14

Barriers to Providing Programs and Services								
% Saying <i>major or moderate</i> barrier	Total 2003	Total 1996	2003					
			City Population			Region		
			Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Lack of funding	91%	66%	91%	82%	96%	87%	93%	91%
Citizen resistance to new spending	64	57	67	57	58	70	64	55
Lack of staff	62	NA	63	58	62	63	62	60
City fiscal crisis	62	34	57	60	76	60	60	66
Lack of facilities or infrastructure	58	31	59	49	55	49	63	58
Lack on information on what to do	48	33	52	35	37	53	54	28
Programs sufficiently provided by others	47	30	49	44	43	44	51	45
Lack of information on needs	42	31	45	39	29	38	50	30
Lack of neighborhood capacity	42	NA	44	33	37	38	47	37
Fragmented efforts between city and outside groups	39	32	38	30	47	35	44	36
Ineffective communication among providers	37	31	36	25	46	33	43	32
Lack of political support	33	34	33	29	33	33	38	24
Fragmented efforts within city government	30	27	30	21	36	28	36	23

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Municipal Finance for Child and Family Services

Current municipal spending

Cities are just about evenly divided between increasing spending for child and family services (47%) and having the same size budget for these services today as they did five years ago (42%). One in 10 cities say they have cut their spending on services for children and families (11%).

Compared to the 1995-96 NLC survey, municipalities are significantly less likely today to have made spending increases for children and families, and are more inclined to say they are spending the same amount as they were five years ago. This is despite the fact that in many cities, demand for services has increased and program needs have become more complex in that time.

The nation's small cities, which are currently undergoing substantial population growth, may be especially impacted by rising demands for child and family services – yet they are the least likely to have increased their spending in this area (44%). A majority of medium (59%) and large cities (54%) have expanded their budget in the past five years. Spending on services for children and families has also increased considerably in the West (63%), while the other regions are more inclined toward the *status quo*.

Spending on Services for Children and Families Today Compared to Five Years Ago								
	Total 2003	Total 1996	2003					
			City Population			Region		
			Under 50,000	50,000- 99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/ Midwest	South	West
Somewhat/much more	47%	57%	44%	59%	54%	42%	42%	63%
Same amount	42	36	45	32	38	46	47	29
Somewhat/much less	11	7	11	9	8	12	11	8

TABLE 15

Spending on Specific Services

Municipal spending in four specific areas of services for children and families was examined. The categories in which the largest amount is spent are afterschool programs, for which 26 percent of local officials said their municipal budget included a *great deal* or *good amount* of funding, and programs aimed at encouraging neighborhood and resident engagement, which receive a *great deal* or *good amount* of funding in 21 percent of municipalities. A majority of communities spend at least some of their municipal budget on each of these two areas. About one in six officials, meanwhile, say their city budget includes a *great deal* or *good amount* for early childhood development (15%) or vulnerable and out-of-school youth (14%). More than two in three say their municipal budget includes little or no funding for either of these issues.

Cities with populations of 100,000 or more are considerably more likely than smaller cities to include funding for all these programs in their municipal budget. A majority of cities with populations under 50,000 have little or no dedicated municipal funding for any of these areas. By region, cities in the West are more likely than those in the rest of the nation to have at least some of their municipal budget allocated to all of these programs.

TABLE 16

Municipal Budget includes Spending On:							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Afterschool Programs							
A great deal or good amount	26%	18%	34%	45%	20%	22%	37%
Some	31	29	35	37	29	30	35
Very little or none	41	51	29	16	47	46	26
Don't know	2	2	2	2	4	2	2
Neighborhood and Resident Engagement							
A great deal or good amount	21%	13%	27%	40%	14%	22%	26%
Some	31	26	45	39	35	26	33
Very little or none	42	54	24	17	45	47	32
Don't know	6	7	4	4	6	5	9

TABLE 16
(CONTINUED)

	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Early Childhood Development							
A great deal or good amount	15%	10%	21%	29%	14%	15%	18%
Some	23	18	32	34	23	17	32
Very little or none	57	67	44	29	56	63	47
Don't know	5	5	3	8	7	5	3
Vulnerable and Out-of-School Youth							
A great deal or good amount	14%	9%	25%	22%	10%	14%	17%
Some	29	23	38	42	26	24	42
Very little or none	53	63	36	31	60	57	37
Don't know	4	5	1	5	4	5	4

Funding Sources

General municipal revenues remain the primary source for funding programs for children and families, with 73 percent of local officials saying their municipality uses this funding source. The second-most frequently used funding source is fees-for-services, which 60 percent of municipalities use. Impact or developer fees provide funding for 30 percent of cities, while 21 percent have a bond issue to finance programs for children and families in their municipality. Leaders of one in six cities (16%) report having a dedicated municipal tax for child and family initiatives.

Since 1996, cities have become less likely to use general revenues to fund municipal programs and services for children and families (down 7 points). Instead, cities today are relying more on user fees, including fees-for-services (up 6 points) and impact or developer fees (up 7 points). Use of dedicated taxes has also risen (up 5 points).

Although general municipal revenues are the primary funding source in all size cities and every region, this source is used more extensively in large cities (87%) and those in the West (80%). Relative to larger and smaller cities, those with populations between 50,000 and 99,999 are more likely to use fees-for-services (74%), impact or developer fees (45%) and bond issues (31%). Cities in the West are more likely than other regions to use

non-tax funding sources: fees-for-service (74%) and impact or developer fees (48%). Cities that are most likely to have a dedicated municipal tax for child and family services are in the Northeast and Midwest (19%).

TABLE 17

Funding Sources								
% using source	2003	1996	2003					
			City Population			Region		
			Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
General municipal revenues	73%	80%	69%	74%	87%	72%	68%	80%
Fees-for-services	60	54	56	74	64	61	49	74
Impact or developer fees	30	23	25	45	35	21	25	48
Bond issue	21	22	18	31	21	22	21	19
Dedicated municipal tax	16	11	17	15	11	19	16	10

Impact of State and Federal Funding

Changes in the allocation of state and federal funds over the past two years have hurt cities' ability to provide services for children and families. The effect is greatest for state funds, of which a majority of municipal leaders (53%) say the allocation over the past two years has decreased their city's ability to deliver services to their child and family residents. Only 11 percent say recent trends in state funding have been beneficial, while a quarter (26%) say this has had no impact on their community's ability to provide services to children and families.

Similarly, 46 percent say the allocation of federal funding over the past two years has decreased their city's ability to provide services for children and families. Only 14 percent say their ability to provide services has increased, while three in 10 (29%) say it has made no difference.

Large cities have been especially hard-hit by state funding allocations over the past two years, with 61 percent of elected officials from cities with populations of 100,000 or more saying their ability to provide services has decreased. Cities in the Northeast/Midwest have also been somewhat more negatively affected. On the other hand, large cities are more likely than small ones to have benefited from the allocation of federal funds (21%), although most (52%) nonetheless have been hurt by recent trends. Again, the impact has been somewhat more negative in the Northeast/Midwest.

Of those who say state funding allocations over the past two years have hurt their city's ability to provide for children and families, 54 percent rate their municipality's performance in addressing needs as *fair* or *poor*. The same is true for federal funding, with 54 percent of those who say recent trends have had a negative impact rating their municipality as doing only a *fair* or *poor* job of meeting child and family needs. Similarly, for both federal and state funding allocations, of those who say recent trends have been negative, 45 percent expect their municipal government will have only *fair* or *poor* ability to address the needs of children and families in the future.

Impact of Funding Allocation on Ability to Provide Services for Children and Families							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
State:							
Increased	11%	11%	9%	13%	8%	14%	9%
Decreased	53	50	55	61	59	48	52
No difference	26	28	29	18	23	25	32
Don't know	10	11	7	8	10	13	7
Federal:							
Increased	14%	11%	18%	21%	12%	15%	14%
Decreased	46	46	42	52	53	42	42
No difference	29	30	32	21	25	28	38
Don't know	11	13	8	6	10	15	6

TABLE 18

*Research
Report*

Early Childhood Development

The survey included a special focus on early childhood development. Promoting early childhood success is one of the most important tasks facing communities today, and cities are making considerable efforts to create a positive environment for their youngest residents.

One in five (21%) local leaders rate the needs of children under three as the group with the most critical needs in their community. Large cities are somewhat more likely to mention young children as among their community's most critical needs groups (27%) than are cities with populations under 50,000 (22%) or between 50,000 and 100,000 (20%). There are no significant differences by region.

Child care for young children stands out as a major need in America's cities. When asked to name the *most* critical program or service need for children and families in their community, one in four (24%) city elected officials mention child care, putting this issue in second place, just behind housing affordability, as the most frequently-mentioned concern. In this open-ended question, most of those citing child care as a top need in their community specifically name care for children under three (17%), while 7 percent say care for children three and older. Care for children under three is seen as most critical in the Northeast and Midwest (21%) and West (19%), while it is mentioned by 11 percent in the South. It is considered equally important by large, medium and small cities.

Preschool or early childhood education is also seen as a pressing program need. One in 10 city officials rank this as the most critical need for children and families in their community, putting it among the top 10 program issues named. The need for preschool is most acute in large (24%) and medium-sized (14%) cities. Only 6 percent of cities with populations under 50,000 rank preschool among their community's most pressing needs. Cities in the Northeast/Midwest (9%), South (12%) and West (13%) rate preschool or early childhood education as an equally critical need in their communities.

Most American communities see the needs of their youngest residents as being adequately met. More than six in 10 elected officials rate their communities as *adequate* or better in meeting the overall needs of children under three (66%), having preschool or early childhood education available (80%), providing child care for this age group (62%), providing health and prenatal care to children (74%), and having child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention services (67%). Still, a sizeable number say young children in their communities are being *less-than-adequately* served

in these areas: child care (38%), child abuse prevention (33%) and meeting the overall needs of children under three (34%).

The lack of services for young children is most severe in the nation's large metropolitan areas: most leaders of cities with a population of 100,000 or more say the child care needs for children under three are being *less-than-adequately* met (51%). Similarly, in nearly four in 10 large cities, the overall needs of young children (38%), and child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention (38%) are being inadequately provided for. One in three have *less-than-adequate* availability of preschool or early education programs (32%) and children's health and prenatal care (34%).

The gaps between needs and services are also greater in the West and South. Nearly half of cities in the West (49%) and 39 percent in the South do not have adequate child care for children under three. Thirty-six percent of municipal officials in the West and 41 percent in the South say the overall needs of young children in their communities are not being adequately met. More than one in five cities in the West (21%) and a quarter of cities in the South (27%) are rated as *less-than-adequate* in the availability of preschool. One in three in the West and 29 percent in the South have an insufficient amount of children's health and prenatal care. And 33 percent of local elected leaders in the West and 40 percent in the South say their city's child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention programs are inadequate for the needs of children in their community.

TABLE 19

How Well Needs of Young Children Are Being Met in Your Community							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Overall needs of children under 3							
More than adequate	8%	7%	9%	9%	10%	6%	6%
Adequate	58	59	61	53	65	53	58
Less than adequate	34	34	30	38	25	41	36
Early childhood education/preschool							
More than adequate	17%	18%	22%	9%	28%	13%	9%
Adequate	63	64	60	59	61	60	70
Less than adequate	20	18	18	32	11	27	21
Child care for children under 3							
More than adequate	9%	9%	12%	6%	11%	9%	6%
Adequate	53	57	50	43	59	52	45
Less than adequate	38	34	38	51	30	39	49
Children's health and prenatal care							
More than adequate	11%	10%	16%	13%	15%	11%	8%
Adequate	63	66	62	53	68	60	59
Less than adequate	26	24	22	34	17	29	33
Child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention							
More than adequate	8%	7%	14%	6%	12%	7%	5%
Adequate	59	60	60	56	64	53	62
Less than adequate	33	33	26	38	24	40	33

Although providing programs for early childhood development has not traditionally been a municipal function, nearly four in 10 cities today earmark some resources to programs for children under three. Leaders of one in six cities report allocating either a *great deal* (4%) or a *good amount* (11%) of their municipal budget to programs and services promoting early childhood development, while another 23 percent say they spend some.

Large cities are much more likely to have city funds dedicated to programs and services supporting early childhood development (63% of large-city leaders say their budget contains at least some early childhood resources). Officials from two in three small communities (67%) say their municipal budget contains little or no funds for this purpose. More than half of cities in the South (63%), and Northeast/Midwest (56%) have little or nothing in their budget for early childhood development, while 50 percent of cities in the West have at least some funds dedicated to services benefiting the learning and development of children under three.

Reasons to Allocate Resources

Local elected officials show great awareness of the long-term benefits of providing high-quality care for young children in their community. Strong majorities say that the following reasons to allocate resources for early childhood development are *very important* to their municipal government:

- ❖ Children who enter school healthy and ready to learn tend to get better grades and have fewer behavioral problems (74%);
- ❖ Children who have positive early childhood experiences are less likely to become juvenile delinquents (74%);
- ❖ Children who have positive early childhood experiences are more likely to have higher rates of workforce participation and earnings (69%);
- ❖ Children who have positive early childhood experiences are less likely to need social services as an adult (66%);
- ❖ The availability of high-quality, affordable child care can improve job performance and economic stability for working parents (64%); and
- ❖ It's the right thing to do. We have a moral responsibility to take care of young children (60%).

Asked in an open-ended question to name the *most* persuasive reason for their community to fiscally support programs and services for early childhood development, officials cite the beneficial effect on school performance as the top reason (30%), followed by one in five saying simply that *it's the right thing to do* (22%). Interestingly, there are no significant differences by city size or region in views of the most compelling reason to support early childhood development.

TABLE 20

Reasons to Allocate Municipal Resources to Early Childhood Development			
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Children who enter school healthy and ready to learn tend to get better grades and have fewer behavioral problems	74%	19%	7%
Children who have positive early experiences are less likely to become juvenile delinquents	74	20	6
Children who have positive early experiences are more likely to have higher rates of workforce participation and earnings	69	24	7
Children who have positive early experiences are less likely to need social services as an adult	66	26	8
The availability of high-quality, affordable child care can improve job performance and economic stability for working parents	64	29	7
It's the right thing to do. We have a moral responsibility to take care of young children	60	32	8
Communities that make a commitment to supporting working families attract better workers	56	36	8

Federal Policy Objectives

City officials express strong support for federal policies benefiting families with young children. Asked about four federal policy objectives concerning families with young children in their communities, local leaders *strongly* support all four:

- ❖ Providing early intervention and treatment for children with disabilities (60%);
- ❖ Providing child-care assistance for low-income working families who do not qualify for other forms of assistance (55%);
- ❖ Providing a preschool education for all children (53%); and
- ❖ Providing affordable, quality child care for all children (52%).

Support for all four policies is solid in all sizes of communities, but is especially strong in the largest cities, where more than six in 10 *strongly favor* each of the proposals. Similarly, all regions show high levels of support for all four policies, but favor is especially high in the South where, again, more than six in 10 municipal officials say they *strongly favor* each of the policy objectives.

TABLE 21

Support for Federal Policy Objectives for Young Children							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Early intervention for children with disabilities							
Strongly favor	60%	59%	59%	63%	57%	70%	48%
Somewhat favor	33	33	33	34	33	26	44
Oppose	5	6	5	2	7	2	6
Don't know	2	2	3	1	3	2	2
Child care assistance for low-income working families							
Strongly favor	55%	52%	55%	63%	48%	63%	52%
Somewhat favor	34	36	31	30	41	31	31
Oppose	8	9	10	5	8	5	13
Don't know	3	3	4	2	3	1	4
Preschool education for all children							
Strongly favor	53%	48%	55%	61%	48%	63%	43%
Somewhat favor	33	37	26	27	36	27	38
Oppose	12	13	15	10	13	9	16
Don't know	2	2	4	2	3	1	3
Affordable, quality child care for all children							
Strongly favor	52%	49%	51%	66%	45%	63%	46%
Somewhat favor	32	34	33	26	39	26	33
Oppose	14	15	13	7	14	10	19
Don't know	2	2	3	1	2	1	2

Youth

Availability of Resources

A special focus on youth finds that teens and young adults are one of the most under-served groups in America's cities today. When asked in an open-ended question to name the groups with the *most critical* needs in their communities, 27 percent of local leaders mention children 13 and older, putting youth fourth among the top groups named.

Most municipal elected officials (59%) rate their communities as doing an adequate (47%) or *more-than-adequate* (12%) job of meeting the needs of their teen-aged residents. Still, a substantial four in 10 (41%) say the availability of programs and services for youth in their community is *less-than-adequate*.

Officials from large cities are especially likely to say youth in their communities are being inadequately served (50%), compared to 33 percent in medium-sized cities and 39 percent in the nation's smaller communities. There are no significant differences by region.

The survey finds that cities are making strong efforts to provide programs and services for youth. Most say their communities do provide *excellent* or *good* access to youth and recreation centers (55%) and structured, supervised afterschool activities for youth (56%). Nearly half of elected officials rate their communities as having *excellent* or *good* availability of safe places for youth to go outside of school hours (45%) and tutoring or mentoring programs (45%).

However, resources for teens and young adults in America's cities show some significant areas of need. One in five communities (22%) have *poor* or no availability of safe places young people can go on weekends, evenings and other times when they're not in school. Communities under 50,000 (26%) and those in the South (27%) are most likely to have *poor* or non-existent facilities.

Tutoring or mentoring programs are *poor* or not available at all in 14 percent of cities. Again, smaller communities (19%) are most likely to have few or no tutoring or mentoring programs for youth. There are no significant regional differences.

The availability of youth and recreation centers is rated *poor* or non-existent in 21 percent of cities. In communities under 50,000, 26 percent have *poor* or no youth centers. Communities in the South (23%) and Northeast and Midwest (21%) are more likely to have *poor* or no facilities than are those in the West (15%).

Structured, supervised afterschool activities for youth are rated *poor* or *not available* in 15 percent of cities, with leaders of smaller communities (18%) most likely to rate this as insufficient or unavailable to their teen residents. There are no regional differences.

Job training and employment opportunities for youth are an especially significant area of need. Only four in 10 local officials (41%) rate the availability of work opportunities for young people in their community as *excellent* or *good*, while fully one in four say the prospects are *poor* or *not available*. In an open-ended question on the most critical program needs in their community, 14 percent name youth employment and job training, putting this issue in 7th place.

Medium-sized communities appear to have a better availability of job training and employment opportunities for youth (51%) than do larger (43%) or smaller (38%) communities. Youth employment opportunities are especially lacking in the South, where only 32 percent of local leaders rate them as *excellent* or *good*, compared to 47 percent in the Northeast/Midwest and 45 percent in the West.

TABLE 22

Availability of Resources for Youth							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Structured, supervised afterschool activities							
Excellent/good	56%	54%	61%	63%	59%	50%	62%
Fair	29	28	34	29	28	33	24
Poor	11	14	4	6	11	11	12
Not available	4	4	1	2	2	6	2
Youth and recreation centers							
Excellent/good	55%	52%	65%	61%	53%	54%	60%
Fair	24	22	24	31	26	23	25
Poor	14	16	11	8	16	14	12
Not available	7	10	—	—	5	9	3
Tutoring and mentoring programs							
Excellent/good	45%	42%	55%	48%	52%	38%	43%
Fair	41	39	40	47	37	45	41
Poor	11	15	4	4	10	11	14
Not available	3	4	1	1	1	6	2
Safe places to go outside of school hours							
Excellent/good	45%	45%	52%	44%	45%	45%	46%
Fair	33	29	31	43	36	28	35
Poor	17	19	16	12	14	21	17
Not available	5	7	1	1	5	6	2
Employment opportunities							
Excellent/good	41%	38%	51%	43%	47%	32%	45%
Fair	34	35	30	37	35	37	29
Poor	21	22	15	20	15	24	24
Not available	4	5	4	—	3	7	2

Youth Participation and Civic Engagement

Local elected leaders value youth voices on civic issues, and provide many opportunities for youth to become involved in community service and municipal affairs. Half (51%) say their communities have *excellent* or *good* availability of places where young people can get involved in community service or volunteer work, and 44 percent provide ample chances for their young residents to participate in a youth council or other form of civic engagement.

The largest cities have the greatest availability of youth participation opportunities (62%), and, along with medium-sized cities, rate themselves more highly for the availability of community service opportunities (59%). Cities in the West are more likely than other regions to have *excellent* or *good* availability of youth community service opportunities (60%) and civic participation opportunities (51%).

Most city leaders consider youth engagement important. More than three in four say it is *very* (35%) or *somewhat important* (41%) to their municipal government to have young people involved in developing policies and programs aimed at youth. Only 21 percent say youth involvement is *not too important* to their municipal government, while 3 percent have no opinion.

Officials from communities of all sizes and in all regions are equally likely to say youth engagement is important to them.

TABLE 23

Availability of Civic Engagement Opportunities for Youth							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Community service opportunities							
Excellent/good	51%	46%	59%	59%	49%	46%	60%
Fair	31	31	30	34	35	29	28
Poor	15	19	8	7	15	19	10
Not available	3	4	3	—	1	6	2
Youth participation opportunities							
Excellent/good	44%	36%	53%	62%	42%	40%	51%
Fair	27	28	29	26	31	24	28
Poor	17	22	12	8	18	19	15
Not available	12	14	6	4	9	17	6

Community service and “youth in government” activities are the most common types of civic engagement efforts to be sponsored by municipal governments. Asked about specific opportunities their local government provides, 71 percent say their municipality has a program for youth to perform community service or volunteer their time for community causes; 50 percent have “youth in government” activities such as a dedicated day or week where young people can attend municipal meetings and work directly with civic leaders; 41 percent have a youth council that represents the views of young people to city government; 26 percent have a youth summit or community forum for young people to discuss local issues that affect them; 20 percent have a teen court where teens hear testimony and set penalties for cases involving their peers; and 17 percent have youth mapping where teams of young people survey local resources and mobilize community efforts on issues concerning youth.

Again, large cities are most likely to offer all these types of opportunities for youth participation, with more than half of cities with 100,000 residents or more providing a chance for young people to be involved in community service (89%), “youth in government” activities (63%), a youth council (76%), or a youth summit (56%). One in three large cities have teen courts (33%) and youth mapping (35%).

Municipally-sponsored “youth in government” events are equally prevalent in all regions of the country. Community service (84%), youth council (56%) and youth summit (36%) opportunities are more available in the West. Relatively few local governments in any region offer teen courts or youth mapping.

More than eight in 10 cities (83%) have some type of youth participation program, and 63 percent have two or more programs, including 20 percent with two, 21 percent with three, 14 percent with four, and 8 percent with five or more. Seventeen percent of municipalities do not provide any of the six youth participation programs that were asked about. Among cities with populations under 50,000, 22 percent have none of the programs, compared to 10 percent of medium-sized cities and 3 percent of large cities. One in four large cities (24%) provide five or more municipally-sponsored civic engagement opportunities for youth, compared to 3 percent of small cities and 11 percent of medium cities.

In the South, 25 percent of municipalities do not provide any of the youth participation opportunities, compared to 15 percent in the Northeast/Midwest and 8 percent in the West.

Of communities rating the availability of their youth engagement opportunities as *excellent* or *good*, more than two in three have municipally-sponsored “youth in government” activities (68%), 65 percent have a youth council, 40 percent have a youth summit, 25 percent have youth mapping and 23 percent have teen courts.

TABLE 24

Opportunities for Youth Civic Engagement							
% saying municipality provides	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000–99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Community service	71%	65%	78%	89%	69%	63%	84%
Youth in government	50	44	59	63	48	49	52
Youth council	41	29	55	76	38	35	56
Youth summit	26	13	45	56	20	25	36
Teen courts	20	16	21	33	14	24	22
Youth mapping	17	12	14	35	19	13	18

Youth Safety

Two in three elected officials rate their community as either *adequate* (56%) or *more-than-adequate* (10%) in offering programs to prevent youth crime and violence. Yet a significant need remains, with 34 percent saying their community is doing a *less-than-adequate* job in this crucial area. This issue is also mentioned by 14 percent in the open-ended question on most critical program needs, putting it in a tie with youth employment at 7th place.

Youth crime and violence prevention programs are falling especially short of the mark in the nation’s large cities, where 42 percent say they are *less-than-adequate*.

Leaders from cities in the South are also more likely to rate their community’s youth crime and violence prevention efforts as inadequate (40%).

Nearly four in 10 cities provide youth crime and violence prevention as a direct service (37%), making this one of the programs cities are most likely to provide directly. Another 35 percent have a city department or staff in place, while 19 percent have a commission or task force on this issue. Only one in five communities have no involvement.

Youth crime and violence prevention programs are provided as a direct service in more than two in three large cities (68%), dropping to 27 percent in small communities. Cities in the West are also considerably more likely to provide this as a direct service (47%) than are those in the Northeast/Midwest (35%) or the South (32%).

Even though 80 percent of municipalities are involved in youth crime and violence prevention to some degree, the fact that only 66 percent of municipal leaders rate their community as doing an *adequate* or better job of meeting needs in this area indicates that more efforts need to be made. This gap is greatest for the nation's large cities, where 95 percent have at least some municipal involvement but only 58 percent say their community's needs are being adequately met.

TABLE 25

Youth Crime and Violence Prevention							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
How well needs being met:							
More than adequate	10%	11%	11%	7%	11%	8%	12%
Adequate	56	55	63	51	60	52	55
Less than adequate	34	34	26	42	29	40	33

Vulnerable and out-of-school youth are another significant area of need. Fewer than half of the nation's cities (43%) budget municipal funds to programs aimed at helping young people who are not in school, are unemployed, and struggling with problems such as substance abuse, poverty or illiteracy. The majority of cities (53%) have little or no municipal funding for this group.

Cities under 50,000 are especially likely to have little or no municipal funds dedicated to vulnerable or out-of-school youth (63%), while nearly two in three medium (63%) and large cities (64%) spend at least some of their municipal funds on this issue. More than half of cities in the West (59%) also budget at least some funds for vulnerable or out-of-school-youth, compared to fewer than four in 10 elsewhere.

TABLE 26

Municipal Budget includes Spending on Vulnerable and Out-of-School Youth							
	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
A great deal/ good amount	14%	9%	25%	22%	10%	14%	17%
Some	29	23	38	42	26	24	42
Very little or none	53	63	36	31	60	57	37
Don't know	4	5	1	5	4	5	4

Family Economic Security

Economic Security of Low-Income Working Families

The survey included a special focus on family economic security and ways to bolster the financial stability of the low-income working families, which are seen as the least well-served of any population group in America's cities. Local officials were asked about which strategies they use in their own municipalities to promote the economic success of households where at least one member works, but does not earn enough to provide family financial security. Officials were also asked to rate the effectiveness of the approaches.

The most widely-used strategies for improving the economic security of low-income working families are homeownership incentives and transportation improvements, each of which 59 percent of cities use and find *very* or *somewhat effective*. Job training and education (54%) and rental housing assistance (53%) are also used and found *very* or *somewhat effective* by a majority of municipalities.

Just under half of local leaders (47%) say their communities have increased child care availability and found this to be *very* or *somewhat effective* in improving the economic security of low-income working families, while 43 percent say the same of targeted job creation.

Most cities have not tried providing access to affordable health care coverage, financial literacy programs, raising the minimum wage or instituting a living-wage ordinance, providing assistance with claiming tax credits, or providing matching funds for family savings.

All the strategies are believed to be quite effective in communities that have tried them. Of those municipalities using job training and education, 87 percent find this strategy to be *very* or *somewhat effective* in helping low-income working families. Eighty-five percent of officials from cities that provide homeownership incentives and rental housing assistance say these strategies are *very* or *somewhat effective*. In cities that have improved transportation, 80 percent found this worked to improve the economic security of low-income families, and of those providing assistance with claiming tax credits, 79 percent said this strategy was *very* or *somewhat effective*.

Similarly, three in four cities that are using the following strategies find them very or somewhat effective: increasing the supply of child care (77%); financial literacy programs (75%); targeted job creation (74%); and access

to affordable health coverage (74%). Two in three cities that provide matching funds for family savings find this to be an effective strategy (65%).

Cities with populations over 100,000 are much more likely than smaller cities to use many of the strategies, including homeownership incentives (95%), job training and education (86%), rental housing assistance (79%), targeted job creation (72%), assistance with claiming tax credits (57%), financial literacy programs (58%), and access to affordable health coverage (60%). Medium-sized cities are somewhat more likely to use most of these strategies. There are no significant differences by region.

TABLE 27

Strategies for Improving the Economic Security of Low-Income Working Families				
	Use Strategy			Not Using
	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective	
Homeownership incentives	15%	44%	10%	31%
Improved transportation	13	46	14	27
Job training and education	8	46	8	38
Rental housing assistance	11	42	9	38
Targeted job creation	6	37	15	42
Increased supply of child care	8	39	14	39
Access to affordable health coverage	5	25	10	60
Financial literacy programs	4	26	10	60
Higher minimum/living wage	5	24	12	59
Assistance with claiming tax credits	5	31	10	54
Matching funds for family savings	1	10	6	83

TABLE 28

Strategies for Improving the Economic Security of Low-Income Working Families (By city size and region)							
% Using strategy	Total	City Population			Region		
		Under 50,000	50,000-99,999	100,000 or more	Northeast/Midwest	South	West
Improved transportation	73%	65%	87%	88%	69%	72%	79%
Homeownership incentives	69	57	86	95	69	65	73
Job training and education	62	52	70	86	60	64	61
Rental housing assistance	62	54	76	79	63	58	67
Increased supply of child care	61	57	66	73	59	60	66
Targeted job creation	58	51	69	72	61	60	50
Assistance with claiming tax credits	46	42	51	57	46	45	49
Higher minimum/living wage	41	39	44	43	38	44	40
Access to affordable health coverage	40	32	54	60	37	42	43
Financial literacy programs	40	32	50	58	38	45	34
Matching funds for family savings	17	13	19	27	17	19	13

Most Effective Strategies

Asked which strategies they thought would be the most effective, whether or not their cities are using them, municipal officials pick approaches involving jobs, health care and homeownership as the most effective ways to improve the economic security of low-income working families in their community. At the top of the list is job training and education, named by 58 percent in an open-ended question. Access to affordable health coverage is chosen by 40 percent, in up to three mentions, while 38 percent say targeted job creation is one of the most effective strategies and 35 percent mention homeownership incentives. Somewhat fewer mention an increased supply of child care (28%), higher minimum wage (27%), improved transportation or financial literacy programs (20% each), or rental housing assistance (18%) as one of the most effective strategies. Other strategies are named by fewer than 10 percent.

TABLE 29

Most Effective Strategies		
Open-ended, up to three mentions allowed	Total	Rank
Open-ended, up to three mentions allowed	Total	Rank
Job training and education	58%	1
Access to affordable health coverage	40	2
Targeted job creation	38	3
Homeownership incentives	35	4
Increased supply of child care	28	5
Higher minimum/living wage	27	6
Improved transportation	20	7
Financial literacy programs	20	7
Rental housing assistance	18	8
Assistance with claiming tax credits	5	9
Matching funds for family savings	3	10

About the Authors

Cheryl Katz is vice-president of Baldassare Associates, a Kensington, California-based public-opinion research firm specializing in child and family issues.

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*Research
Report*

Survey Methodology

The NLC' Strengthening Families in America's Cities Survey, examining issues affecting children and families in American communities, is based on a mail survey of municipal elected officials. The survey, conducted from November 2002 to March 2003, included responses from 501 cities nationwide.

The survey followed the methods used in previous NLC surveys on children and families conducted in 1995-96 and 1988-89. For the current survey, questionnaires were mailed to 1,981 elected officials from cities nationwide. Surveys were sent to all cities with populations of 50,000 or more; a total of 640 cities. Surveys were also sent to a random, representative sample of cities with populations of less than 50,000; a total of 1,341 cities. The surveys were addressed to the mayor or highest elected officer of each city, and a cover letter asked that the survey be completed by an elected official.

An initial mailing was sent in November, 2002. Mail, fax and telephone follow-ups were made with cities that did not respond to the initial mailing. The survey was closed out in March, 2003. The 25 percent response rate is in line with response rates expected for mail surveys of this type.

The profile of cities responding to the survey is as follows:

Cities with populations under 50,000	65%
Cities with populations between 50,000 and 99,999	16%
Cities with populations between 100,000 and 299,999	15%
Cities with populations of 300,000 or more	4%

This respondent profile is representative of the total sample, and is similar to the profile of cities responding to the 1995 survey.

For purposes of analysis, the sample was divided into the following regions: Northeast/Midwest – includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin;

South – includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia;

West – includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

The respondent profile is as follows:

Northeast/Midwest	34%
South	39%
West	27%

which is representative of the total sample.

Appendix: Questionnaire and Results

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES – A Survey of Elected Officials

Please note: Throughout this survey, “community” refers to your entire town, city, or metropolitan area, and “municipality” or “municipal government” specifically refers to your city/town hall or municipal government.

1. How well are the needs of children and families in your community being met in the following areas:
(Circle one in each row)

	<i>More than Adequately</i>	<i>Adequately</i>	<i>Less than Adequately</i>
a. Before and afterschool programs	12%	53%	35%
b. Child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention	8	59	33
c. Child care for children under 3 years old	9	53	38
d. Child care for children aged 3 and older	10	62	28
e. Domestic violence prevention and intervention	12	57	31
f. Drug and alcohol abuse prevention and treatment	9	48	43
g. Early childhood education/preschool	17	63	20
h. Elder-care/families caring for older members	9	50	41
i. Elementary through high school public education	27	54	19
j. Employment opportunities for adults	12	51	37
k. Family-friendly workplaces	12	59	29
l. Children's health care and prenatal care	11	63	26
m. Housing affordability	9	49	42
n. Mental health care	5	55	40
o. Neighborhood supports (e.g. family resource centers)	8	53	39
p. Parenting education, promoting parental responsibility	8	52	40
q. Raising children to have healthy, constructive values	11	56	33
r. Recreation	34	44	22
s. Welfare to work	5	60	35
t. Youth crime and violence prevention	10	56	34
u. Youth mentoring	10	50	40
v. Youth employment opportunities and job training	7	45	48
w. Youth participation in civic affairs	12	40	48
x. Youth community service opportunities	14	54	32

2. Please list any critical needs for children and families in your community that are not mentioned above.

y. _____ z. _____

3. What are the **three most critical** needs for children and families in your community?
(Insert the letters of the items from question #1 or question #2)

1. m (28%) 2. c+d (24%) 3. a (22%), f (22%)

4. Over the past two years, would you say that overall conditions for children and families in your community have **improved**, **worsened**, or **stayed about the same**? (Circle one)

[33%] **Improved** [16%] **Worsened** [50%] **Stayed about the same** [1%] **Don't know**

5. Why is that? _____

6. Over the next two years, would you say that overall conditions for children and families in your community will **improve**, **worsen**, or **stay about the same**? (Circle one)

[38%] **Improve** [18%] **Worsen** [35%] **Stay about the same** [9%] **Don't know**

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7. Why is that? _____

8. Would you say your community is doing a **more than adequate** job, an **adequate** job, or a **less than adequate** job of meeting the needs of the following groups of residents? (Circle one in each row)

	<i>More than Adequately</i>	<i>Adequately</i>	<i>Less than Adequately</i>
a. Children under 3	8%	58%	34%
b. Children aged 3-5	10	64	26
c. Children aged 6-12	14	65	21
d. Children 13 and older	12	47	41
e. Children with disabilities/special needs	15	52	33
f. Single-parent families	3	52	45
g. Two-parent families	10	78	12
h. Grandparents or other non-parent family members raising children (kinship care)	4	56	40
i. Extended families	3	70	27
j. Immigrant families	6	51	43
k. Elderly and aging residents	16	53	31
l. Disabled or dependent adults	11	53	36
m. Families receiving public assistance	6	65	29
n. Lower-income working families	5	48	47
o. Middle-income families	10	79	11
p. Higher-income families	30	65	5

9. In which **three** groups listed in question #8 are the needs currently the **most critical** in your community? (Insert the letters of the items from question #8 or write in if not mentioned above)

1. f (45%) 2. n (42%) 3. k (34%)

10. Does your municipality have any written policy (e.g., ordinance, law, executive order, language in a general or master plan) that focuses broadly on children and families? (Circle one)

[28%] **Yes** [55%] **No** [5%] **Under Consideration** [12%] **Don't know**

11. Rate your municipal government's **overall ability during the past year** to address the needs of children and families in your community. (Circle one)

[7%] **Excellent** [41%] **Good** [36%] **Fair** [13%] **Poor** [3%] **Don't know**

12. Rate your municipal government's **overall ability during the next 3 years** to address the needs of children and families in your community. (Circle one)

[8%] **Excellent** [43%] **Good** [35%] **Fair** [9%] **Poor** [5%] **Don't know**

13. Does your municipality currently use one or more of the following strategies for improving the economic security of lower-income working families in your community? If so, how would you rate the effectiveness of those strategies? (Circle one in each row)

	<i>Yes, Very Effective</i>	<i>Yes, Somewhat Effective</i>	<i>Yes, Not Effective</i>	<i>No, Not Using</i>
a. Job training and education	8%	46%	8%	38%
b. Homeownership incentives	15	44	10	31
c. Targeted job creation	6	37	15	42
d. Improved transportation	13	46	14	27
e. Increased supply of child care	8	39	14	39
f. Higher minimum wage/living wage	5	24	12	59
g. Assistance with claiming tax credits/refunds	5	31	10	54
h. Financial literacy programs	4	26	10	60
i. Matching funds for family savings	1	10	6	83
j. Access to affordable health coverage	5	25	10	60
k. Rental housing assistance	11	42	9	38
l. Other (please list) _____				

14. Regardless of whether they are currently being used, which **three** of the above strategies do you think would be **most effective** for improving the economic security of lower-income working families in your community **in the future**?
(Insert the letters of the three most effective strategies from question #13)

1. a (58%) 2. j (40%) 3. c (38%)

15. Compared to five years ago, **what is your municipality spending** on programs and services affecting children and families this year? (Circle one)

[12%] **Much More** [35%] **Somewhat more** [42%] **Same amount** [8%] **Somewhat less** [3%] **Much less**

16. Does your municipality's budget for children and families include spending on services in any of the following areas?
(Circle one in each row)

	<i>Yes, great deal</i>	<i>Yes, a good amount</i>	<i>Yes, some</i>	<i>Yes, very little</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
a. Early childhood development	4%	11%	23%	9%	48%	5%
b. Afterschool programs	8	18	31	9	32	2
c. Vulnerable and out-of-school youth	2	12	29	13	40	4
d. Neighborhood and resident engagement	7	14	31	13	29	6

17. How **important** to your municipal government are the following reasons to allocate resources to early childhood development?
(Circle one in each row)

	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Not Very Important</i>
a. Children who enter school healthy and ready to learn tend to get better grades and have fewer behavioral problems	74%	19%	7%
b. Children who have positive early childhood experiences are more likely to have higher rates of workforce participation and earnings	69	24	7
c. Children who have positive early experiences are less likely to need social services as an adult	66	26	8
d. Children who have positive early experiences are less likely to become juvenile delinquents	74	20	6
e. The availability of high-quality, affordable child care can improve job performance and economic stability for working parents	64	29	7
f. Communities that make a commitment to supporting working families attract better workers	56	36	8
g. It's the right thing to do. We have a moral responsibility to take care of young children.	60	32	8

18. Which **one** of the reasons in question #17 is the **most persuasive** in your municipality?
(Insert letter from question #17)

a (30%), g (22%), d (13%)

19. Do you **strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose** the following as **federal** policy objectives for families and young children in your community? (Circle one in each row)

	<i>Strongly Favor</i>	<i>Somewhat Favor</i>	<i>Somewhat Oppose</i>	<i>Strongly Oppose</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
a. Providing affordable, quality child care for all children	52%	32%	8%	6%	2%
b. Providing a preschool education for all children	53	33	8	4	2
c. Providing early intervention and treatment for children with disabilities	60	33	4	1	2
d. Providing child care assistance for low-income working families who do not qualify for welfare or other forms of assistance	55	34	6	2	3

Research Report

20. How would you rate the availability of the following resources for **youth** in your community?
(Circle one in each row)

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Not Available</i>
a. Structured, supervised afterschool activities	18%	38%	29%	11%	4%
b. Tutoring and mentoring programs	10	35	41	11	3
c. Youth and recreation centers	27	28	24	14	7
d. Safe places to go outside of school hours	16	29	33	17	5
e. Employment opportunities (summer jobs, training)	9	32	34	21	4
f. Opportunities for youth community service	16	35	31	15	3
g. Opportunities to participate in a youth council or other form of civic engagement	17	27	27	17	12

21. How important to your municipal government is youth participation, i.e. the involvement of young people in developing policies and programs aimed at youth and families? (Circle one)

[35%] **Very important** [41%] **Somewhat important** [21%] **Not too important** [3%] **Don't know**

22. Does your municipality provide any of the following opportunities for youth participation?
(Circle one in each row)

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
a. Youth council	41%	55%	4%
b. Youth summit	26	69	5
c. Youth community service	71	25	4
d. Youth mapping, or having young people canvas the community to identify resources for youth	17	73	10
e. Teen courts, where teens hear cases and determine sentences for youth offenders	20	73	7
f. "Youth in government" (e.g. day or week) activities	50	44	6
g. Other (please list) _____			

23. To what extent do the following activities describe your role as an elected official in strengthening families in your community.
(Circle one in each row)

	<i>A great deal</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
a. Facilitate development and delivery of programs and services	36%	38%	18%	8%
b. Advocate for the needs of families and children	49	34	12	5
c. Provide local leadership on the issues	60	29	8	3
d. Ensure funding for programs and services	37	40	16	7
e. Collaborate with other public, private and non-profit agencies	55	32	10	3
f. Promote strong neighborhoods and resident engagement	63	27	8	2
g. Limited role; others have primary responsibility for this	25	37	21	17
h. Other (please list) _____				

24. **In the future**, which of the above activities do you think will be your **primary role as an elected official** in strengthening families in your community? (Insert letter from question #23)

c (27%) b (18%) e (15%) f (15%) a (12%)

25. Indicate **all the ways** your municipal government is involved with each topic below. (Circle all that apply.)

	<i>City provides and/or funds direct service</i>	<i>City staff or department is in place</i>	<i>Commission or task force exists</i>	<i>Municipal officials lead, advocate and/or convene</i>	<i>No Involvement</i>
a. Before and afterschool programs	41%	26%	13%	18%	35%
b. Child abuse, neglect prevention/intervention	20	19	14	15	42
c. Child care for children under 3 years old	16	7	10	17	60
d. Child care for children aged 3 and older	21	12	12	18	55

	<i>City provides and/or funds direct service</i>	<i>City staff or department is in place</i>	<i>Commission or task force exists</i>	<i>Municipal officials lead, advocate and/or convene</i>	<i>No Involvement</i>
e. Domestic violence prevention/intervention	30	25	19	21	27
f. Drug or alcohol abuse prevention/treatment	29	20	17	20	31
g. Early childhood education/preschool	22	12	11	17	55
h. Elder-care/families caring for older members	21	13	12	17	52
i. Elementary-high school public education.	19	10	10	20	54
j. Employment opportunities for adults	20	19	12	24	41
k. Family-friendly workplaces	9	7	8	21	57
l. Children's health care and prenatal care	15	10	11	17	60
m. Housing affordability	33	32	19	30	23
n. Mental health care	16	8	12	20	55
o. Neighborhood supports	33	29	16	30	25
p. Parenting education, promoting responsibility	17	12	13	20	52
q. Raising children to have healthy values	17	11	12	30	46
r. Recreation	65	42	22	23	7
s. Welfare to work	12	10	9	17	60
t. Youth crime and violence prevention	37	35	19	22	20
u. Youth mentoring	23	20	13	26	35
v. Youth employment opportunities	28	20	10	20	39
w. Youth participation in civic affairs	26	22	14	31	30
x. Youth community service opportunities	27	24	15	29	28

26. Which **three** programs were the **highest priorities** for your municipal government in the past year?

(Insert the letters of the items from question #25 or write in if not mentioned above)

1. r (55%) 2. m (40%) 3. a (27%)

27. Which **three** programs are the **highest priorities** for your municipal government to be involved in over the next year?

(Insert the letters of the items from question #25 or write in if not mentioned above)

1. r (42%) 2. m (39%) 3. a and t (24% each)

28. For which **three** programs are you **most interested in gaining more information about** ways your municipal government can help strengthen families in your community?

(Insert the letters of the items from question #25 or write in if not mentioned above)

1. m (28%) 2. t (22%) 3. o (19%)

29. How **significant a barrier** is each of the following to your municipal government's ability to provide programs and services for children and families in your community? *(Circle one in each row)*

	<i>Major</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
a. Lack of information on where the needs are greatest	11%	29%	39%	17%	4%
b. Lack of information on how to best provide services	12	34	35	16	3
c. Lack of funding	75	16	4	4	1
d. Citizen resistance to involvement/new spending	28	36	25	8	3
e. City fiscal crisis	39	23	21	16	1
f. Fragmented efforts within city government	10	20	34	32	4
g. Fragmented efforts between city government and outside groups	13	26	34	24	3
h. Ineffective communication among providers	10	27	38	21	4
i. Lack of facilities or infrastructure	26	32	30	10	2
j. Lack of staff	29	33	26	10	2
k. Lack of political leadership or support	11	22	35	29	3
l. Lack of neighborhood capacity or support structures	13	29	41	14	3
m. Programs/services sufficiently provided by others	16	31	35	13	5

Research Report

30. Does your municipality use any of the following **financing** or **funding sources** or **techniques** to support programs and initiatives for children and families? (Circle one in each row)

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. A dedicated municipal tax	16%	80%	4%
b. A bond issue	21	75	4
c. General municipal revenues	73	24	3
d. Fees for services	60	37	3
e. Impact or developer fees	30	62	8
f. Other (please list) _____			

31. Over the past two years, would you say the allocation of federal and state funds has **increased** or **decreased** your municipality's ability to provide services for children and families, or has it made **no difference**? (Circle one in each row)

a. Federal:	[14%] Increased	[46%] Decreased	[29%] No difference	[11%] Don't know
b. State:	[11%] Increased	[53%] Decreased	[26%] No difference	[10%] Don't know

32. We would like to hear from you about specific approaches your municipal government is taking that are successful in helping to strengthen families in your city or community. Please use the space below or enclose any relevant materials.

33. **Authorization to release individual city information:** Reports produced from this survey will summarize data on the basis of region, city size, etc. When released, NLC may be asked by the media and/or researchers to provide individual city data. If left blank, we assume that NLC is authorized to provide copies of this questionnaire upon request.

I authorize such release. [1] **Yes** [2] **No**

34. Please list the names and titles of the persons in your municipal government whom NLC can contact regarding further information about policies, programs, and services for children and families. This may include positions such as city manager, mayor's aide, child care coordinator, youth services director, human services director, youth council advisor, and recreation or community center director.

In Spring 2003, NLC will conduct a second survey designed to gain municipal program detail. **Please circle the name of the individual to whom we should send this second survey.** If someone is not designated, the second survey will be sent to the mayor's office.

A. NAME _____ TITLE _____
 DEPARTMENT/AGENCY _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 PHONE NUMBER (____) _____ FAX (____) _____ E-MAIL _____

B. NAME _____ TITLE _____
 DEPARTMENT/AGENCY _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 PHONE NUMBER (____) _____ FAX (____) _____ E-MAIL _____

C. NAME _____ TITLE _____
 DEPARTMENT/AGENCY _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 PHONE NUMBER (____) _____ FAX (____) _____ E-MAIL _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

About The National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal governments throughout the United States. NLC serves as a national resource and advocate on behalf of over 1,700 member cities and for 49 municipal leagues whose membership totals more than 18,000 cities and towns across the country. The mission of NLC is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance.

Through its Center for Research and Municipal Programs, NLC provides an applied think tank capacity by developing, conducting, and reporting research on programs and issues affecting cities and towns.

About The Institute for Youth, Education and Families

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of children, youth, and families within their communities. NLC launched the Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city council members, and other local leaders can play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for youth and children.

As a national resource to cities and towns across America, the Institute provides guidance and assistance to municipal officials, compiles and disseminates information on promising strategies and best practices, builds networks of local officials working on similar issues and concerns, and conducts research on the key challenges facing municipalities. NLC's council on Youth, Education and Families guides and oversees the Institute's work.

The Institute provides a variety of resources specifically related to strengthening families in America's cities, including: a national network of city officials and staff interested in promoting family and childhood success; action kits for local officials; periodic workshops and audio-conferences; and guidance and referrals to national resources and experts. For more information on NLC's early childhood work, contact: the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families at www.nlc.org/iyef.



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