

NLC NATIONAL
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OF CITIES

A CENTURY OF STRENGTHENING CITIES



State OF THE Cities





A CENTURY OF STRENGTHENING CITIES

ABOUT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

NLC's Center for Research and Data Analysis provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities; creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities; inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues; and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Foreword

America's cities are not just surviving, they are innovating and delivering every day. NLC's State of the Cities report examines mayors' and councilmembers' approaches to overcoming their challenges. Using research methods that start with analyzing mayoral speeches and are supported with surveys, data, and public opinion analysis, this study takes a deep dive into the heart of the operation of our cities, towns, and villages.

Mayors remain committed to providing top-quality services to their residents. This year, mayoral speeches overwhelmingly focused on cities' resilience in these tumultuous, uncertain times. Mayors' commitment to the overall health of their communities is a sign of the strength of local leadership in America.

Once again, the report identifies economic development as the top priority for mayors across mayoral speeches and survey responses. This demonstrates that city leaders understand the economic challenges in their communities and are dedicated to finding solutions. Closely related to economic development is infrastructure. Efforts to expand local infrastructure directly impact residents' well-being and foster economic development.

Other priorities are housing and public safety. Mayors are aware of the historically high housing costs for their residents and are committed to implementing strategies to increase affordability and attainability. They recognize public safety, in particular mental

health and substance misuse, as other major concerns in their communities. Both issues are correlated with residents' access to stable housing, and local leaders express significant concerns about them.

The State of the Cities report outlines the priorities, challenges and strategies our cities routinely face. This year's report also illustrates the creative solutions local leaders implement across the country, such as the creation of a dedicated command school for Lieutenants and Captains focused on strengthening community partnerships, enhancing problem-solving skills, and promoting procedurally sound policing practices at the Syracuse Police Department.

The road ahead is set to test our ability to come together and transform our cities into cohesive communities that leverage their strengths and address their challenges through collaborative efforts. Strong local government has never been more important for the resilience of America's cities, towns and villages than it is today.

I believe in cities, not because the challenges are small, but because the leaders steering them are creative, innovative and deeply connected to the people they serve. No one knows a community like its mayor.



Clarence E. Anthony

CEO and Executive Director
National League of Cities

Introduction

THE 13TH ANNUAL State of the Cities report comes at a time marked by recurring challenges and uncertainty for America's cities, towns and villages. Local governments are navigating historic headwinds — from economic shifts to infrastructure demands, from housing shortages to rising public safety and health concerns. Despite these pressures, local leaders demonstrate remarkable resilience, adaptability and commitment to advancing the wellbeing of their communities.

This report identifies these challenges and opportunities and offers a comprehensive analysis of community priorities in 2026.

In an analysis of 60 mayoral speeches and more than 170 survey responses from elected municipal officials, the following key themes emerged:

- ◆ **Economic Development Remains a Top Priority:** Local governments are focusing on job creation, supporting small businesses and fostering innovation to drive economic growth amid changing market conditions.
- ◆ **Infrastructure Investment is Front and Center:** Cities are prioritizing transportation infrastructure and utilities, with a focus on resilience and sustainability.

- ◆ **Affordable Housing:** Addressing housing supply and demand is a major concern, with mayors implementing creative solutions to increase affordable housing stock and support vulnerable populations.

“

“Even as we faced significant challenges, 2025 became a year marked by meaningful progress across our city. Together, we moved forward on key priorities, strengthened essential services and delivered results that reflect the values and high expectations of our community. The state of our city is strong. Through our shared commitment to collaboration and service, we are building the resilience, creativity, inclusion and sense of purpose this moment demands, and laying the foundation our future will require.”

Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle
VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON

”



“Build where you live.”

Mayor Josh Levy
HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA

The *State of the Cities 2026* report brings together insights from a comprehensive survey, mayoral speeches and public sentiment analysis to provide a holistic view of the issues

shaping municipal priorities today. Economic development, infrastructure, housing, budget management and public health and safety all emerge as top concerns. By examining strategies, analyzing trends and highlighting innovative solutions, this report serves as both a reflection on the current state of America's cities, towns and villages and a roadmap for the collaborative efforts required to build thriving, equitable and resilient communities for the future.

Top Mayoral Priorities in 2026



DATA COLLECTED FROM mayors' State of the City speeches reveal that **economic and workforce development** is the most prevalent topic, accounting for 31 percent of the overall speech duration. Mayors are focused on attracting and retaining businesses in 2026, with many also highlighting their efforts on downtown revitalization. While there are development challenges — from insufficient federal investment to unemployment — local leaders are fostering economic recovery and progress.

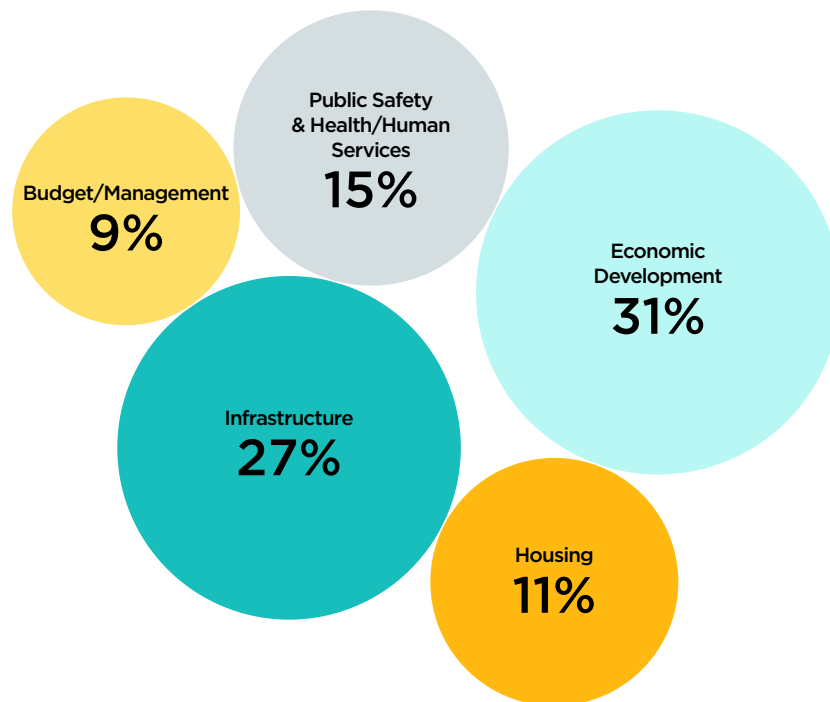
Infrastructure is another prominent topic in 2026, accounting for 27 percent of mayoral speech time. Moreover, infrastructure is the highest-ranked priority for mayors responding to NLC's mayors survey, keeping the same placement as the 2025 survey (See *Appendix C, Table 1*). Priority infrastructure categories include parking lots, bridges, the public utility system (broadband, power) and the public transit system; mayors are also concerned about resiliency against extreme weather events.



FIGURE 1

Economic Development and Infrastructure are the Top Mayoral Priorities in 2026.

PRIORITIES IN 2026 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESSES ANALYSIS.



Source: Content Analysis of Mayoral Speeches for 2026 (N=60).

Survey respondents noted that **housing, budget and management, and public health and safety** topics are also among their most important areas for 2026 (See *Appendix C, Table 1*).

- ◆ **Housing** supply and affordability are the main key priorities, with leaders identifying the high cost of housing as the primary challenge.
- ◆ Some local leaders noted significant **budgetary** challenges, with 35 percent of respondents reporting a decline in federal funds last year.
- ◆ **Public health and safety** topics are also complex and important issues, as mental health and substance abuse continue to be top concerns for local leaders. Additionally, cybersecurity and emergency preparedness rank high on leaders' concerns.

Although the rankings differ between speeches and survey responses, the following five priorities ranked highest in both sources: economic development, infrastructure, budget and management, housing, and public health and safety.*

The difference in results between the primary data sources is that respondents represent a diverse set of communities with respect to population size and geographic location (See *Appendix A, Table 1*).

While only two percent of mayoral speeches collected from NLC were from cities of less than 10,000 people, this group represented more than half of the survey respondents. Cities with a population between 10,000 and 49,999 had the most representation in the speech analysis (37%), while in the survey analysis, cities with fewer than 10,000 people had the most responses. On the geographic dimension, the most involved region was the South in both analyses. Overall, the demographic distribution of the analyses included all regions and population sizes.

* To learn more about the different priority rankings among the different data sources, see Appendix A.

“

“Real progress rarely announces itself — instead, it shows itself through hard work, late nights and weekends, hours upon hours of research and a devotion to the task that is well beyond the spotlight.”

Mayor Amy Shuler Goodwin
CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

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Economic and Workforce Development



ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE

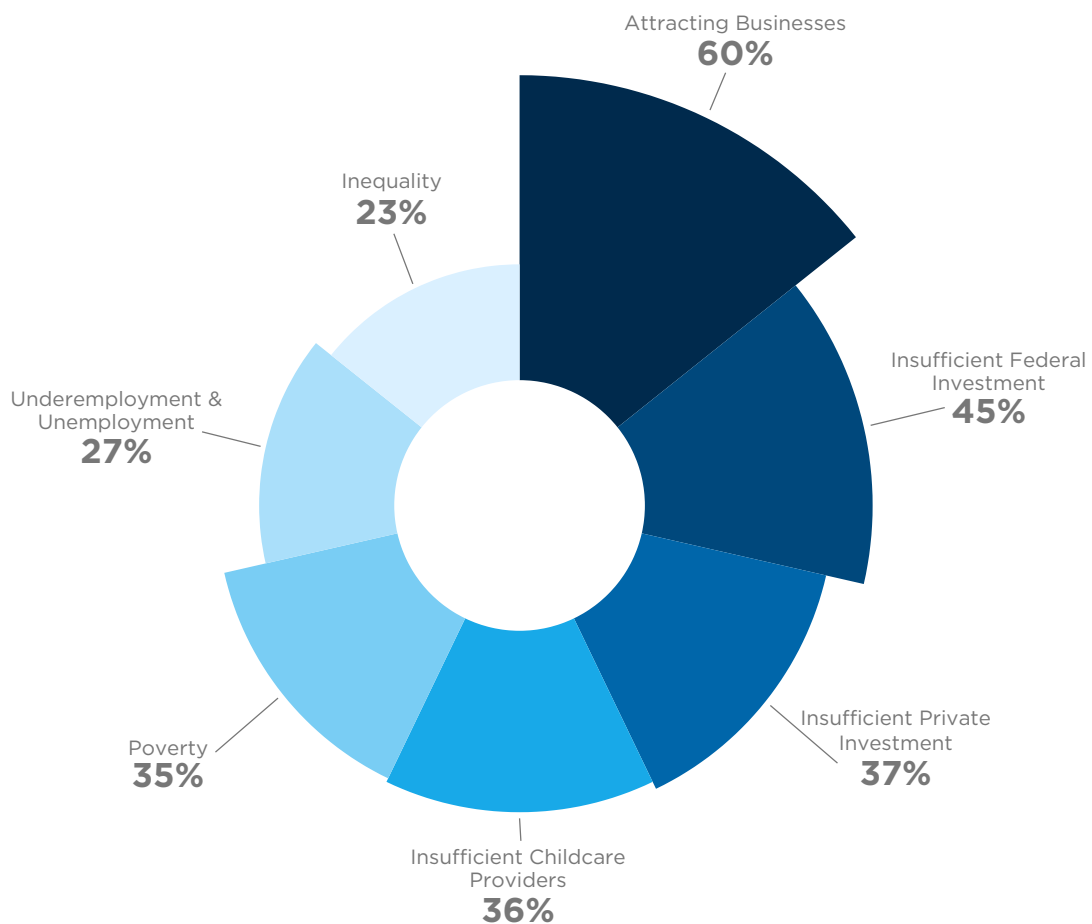
development continues to be a major issue for municipal leaders, as indicated not only in State of the City addresses but also in responses to NLC’s Mayoral Survey (see

Appendix C, Table 1). Similar to 2025, economic development ranks as the most discussed issue in mayoral speeches, representing 31 percent of speech time (see *Appendix B*).

 [FIGURE 2]

Attracting Businesses and Insufficient Federal and Private Investment among Major Economic Challenges Facing Cities.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES IDENTIFYING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACING CITIES IN 2026.



Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 132 responses.

Survey data shows mayors are tackling complex economic development challenges. In NLC's [State of the Cities 2025](#) report, about 85 percent of city leaders rated their economic situation as *acceptable, good or excellent*.¹ Comparatively, the number slightly decreased in 2026 to 82 percent, a 3.5 percent change (see *Appendix C, Table 3*). In 2026, the top economic development challenges remained the same and at similar percentage levels as in 2025: attracting businesses (60%), insufficient federal investment (45%), insufficient private investment (37%) and insufficient childcare providers (36%).^{*} In sum, mayors' top concerns are related to finding ways to activate their local economy. To do this, public officials are constantly looking for ways to raise revenue.

Compared to 2025, there was an increase in the percentage of local leaders indicating concerns around poverty, underemployment/unemployment, and inequality which increased by three, six, and six percentage points, respectively. Growing inequality is concerning because it can hinder economic growth. According to the World Bank, high economic inequality can slow progress toward broad-based growth, while reducing inequality can drive economic development by increasing human capital and reducing poverty.^{2,**}

“

“Embracing change and development is a part of being a strong and thriving city. Long-term strategic planning has been the key to our growth and achievements in Lovejoy. Sowing seeds into development will result in a mighty harvest from our investments. Our children’s quality of life depends on our actions today. It is our duty to deliver our youth access to resources and agencies ready to help them succeed...to deliver our seniors resources to help them enjoy their retirement...and to deliver a city our residents speak about with pride!”

Mayor Marci Fluellyn

LOVEJOY, GEORGIA

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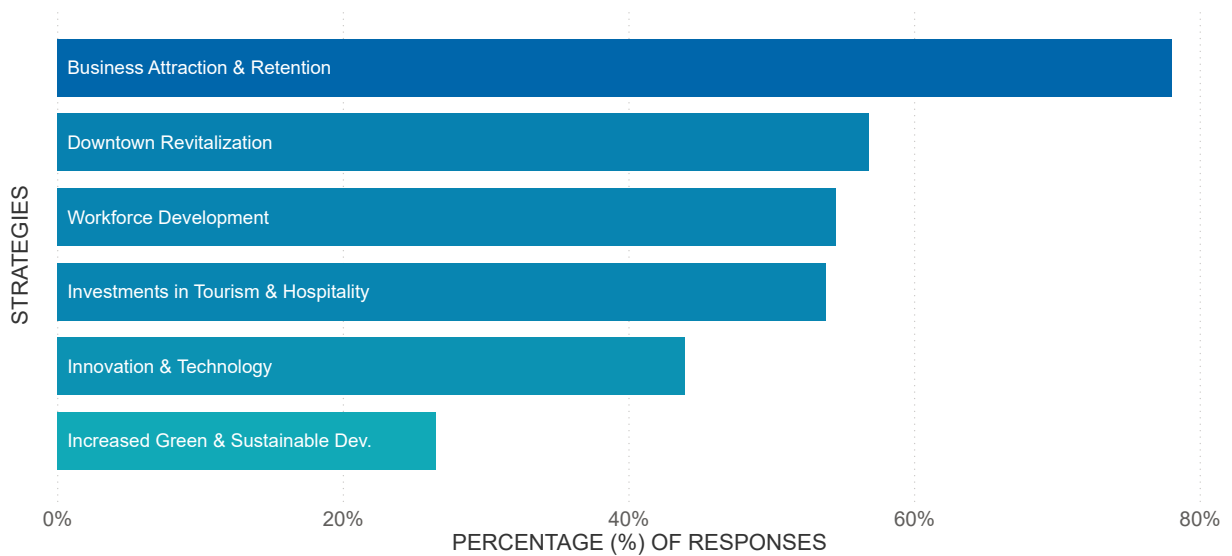
* In a 2025 survey of NLC members, municipal leaders identified childcare as one of the top challenges in ensuring workforce engagement.

** High economic inequality in a country can limit people's ability to move up the socioeconomic ladder, and thereby slow progress toward broad-based growth and poverty eradication. Decreasing high levels of inequality, on the other hand, can spur economic development, strengthen human capital and speed up poverty reduction.

 FIGURE 3

Business Attraction, Downtown Revitalization, and Workforce Development among the Most Utilized Strategies by Mayors to Address Economic Development Challenges.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES BY PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES.



Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 132 responses.

Cities are working hard on **downtown revitalization** as an economic development strategy through initiatives such as ramping up arts investments and creating business improvement districts to attract and retain businesses. When downtowns are geographically contained, they drive tax revenue and business activity in localities by efficiently concentrating resources and social infrastructure that support the long-term health of a city.³

In Chicago, to address its growing homelessness crisis, shelter services are spread throughout the city as opposed to being clustered in one location. Research has shown that city beautification also helps with addressing homelessness.⁴

“

“Revitalization starts by confronting what has been neglected. When we remove blight and replace it with new development, we send a clear message: our city believes in its future. And together, we will continue turning neglected spaces into places where families can live, businesses can grow and our community can thrive.”

Mayor Jason Ashmore

SESSER, ILLINOIS

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Cities continue to prioritize **workforce development** through skills training and wraparound support for workers to meet local business demand. Local leaders reported insufficient childcare as a challenge that impacts workers' ability to contribute to the local workforce (See Appendix C, Table 2).

Further, with the accelerated adoption of generative AI by businesses, it is not surprising that workforce development through skills training is a priority for local leaders. This situation can be an opportunity for city leaders to proactively develop policies and strategies to embed AI into local programs and services, such as licensing and permitting operations, while simultaneously investing in future-ready skills training for municipal employees. According to a survey of 225 U.S. executives conducted by KPMG, most respondents agreed that generative AI could play an important role in increasing productivity, that there would be a change in the way people work in the future, and that AI could end up encouraging innovation and help in creating more products and services.⁵ Economists Acemoglu, Autor and Johnson have highlighted AI's collaborative potential: *“While AI's capacity to automate work is substantial... its potential to serve as a collaborator, by extending human judgment, enabling new tasks, and accelerating skill acquisition, is equally transformative and currently underexploited.”*⁶

Fifty-four percent of respondents are focusing on **investments in tourism and hospitality** to spur economic development. Local leaders note that investments in tourism and hospitality require collaboration with community members to strike a balance between historical context and forward-looking strategies in downtown areas.

Additionally, many mayoral addresses highlight the efforts of the **local business community** to boost tourism. This year, some cities have been selected to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and in line with this goal, they have been preparing their cities for the growth that comes with it.

- ◆ **Kansas City, Missouri**, opened in February a new Kansas City International Airport Terminal, to welcome visitors for the NFL draft in April 2026 and the World Cup in June and July 2026.
- ◆ **Los Angeles, California**, will host more than 100 free FIFA watch parties and, through its “Clean Corridors Initiative,” the city has accelerated the beautification of its corridors, especially the ones near the watch parties.
- ◆ **Seattle, Washington**, will host celebrations and watch parties to make the city part of the event and encourage visitors to experience what neighborhoods have to offer. In addition, they will create more opportunities to play soccer by organizing a friendly match between elected officials.

While tourism and hospitality may primarily rely on private investment, there is ample room for the federal government to step in and support the local business initiatives. For example, improvements in roads and transportation that facilitate access to cities have a positive impact on the flow of tourism.

“Strong cities are built through collaboration, innovation and a shared commitment to opportunity for our residents. When we invest in people and our small businesses, we create communities that are not only resilient but thriving for generations to come.”

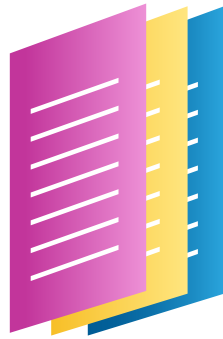
Mayor Kim A. Thomas
RICHMOND HEIGHTS, OHIO

“

“As a community, Butte-Silver Bow has lived through the full cycle of boom and bust that comes with a mining heritage, and through it all we have shown an uncommon resilience and ability to adapt. That spirit remains our greatest strength. Today, as new technologies and industries emerge that can shape our future, we are once again called to evolve. Our responsibility is to embrace innovation and the opportunities of a new economy while preserving the grit, character and sense of community that define who we are. Change is not new to Butte-Silver Bow, it is part of our story, and we will meet this next chapter with the same determination and pride that have carried us forward for generations.”

Chief Executive J.P. Gallagher
BUTTE-SILVER BOW, MONTANA

”



KEY NLC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES:

REPORTS

[Artificial Intelligence Demystified – AI Toolkit for Municipalities](#)

[The Experience and Impact of the City Inclusive Entrepreneurship Network](#)

[America250 Celebration Toolkit: Showcasing America's Cities, Towns & Villages](#)

BRIEFS

[Workforce Development 101: A Primer for Municipal Leaders](#)

[Resource Collection: Extension & Municipal Collaboration](#)

[Expanding Opportunity for All: How to Increase Employment for People with Disabilities](#)

FACT SHEET

[Apprenticeship for Cities: Getting Started](#)

ARTICLES

[How Fair Chance Hiring Practices Strengthen the Entire Workforce](#)

[Increasing Opportunity: Economic Mobility in Rural Communities](#)

[Mayors Sound Off on What Works for Workforce Development](#)

Infrastructure



“

“Infrastructure is where leadership meets responsibility.”

Mayor Andrew Connors

TITUSVILLE, FLORIDA

”

FOR MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS, funding infrastructure development presents difficult challenges. With diminishing federal funds, high interest rates and inflation, it is not surprising that local leaders place infrastructure near the top of their concerns and priorities.

Within infrastructure, **transportation** stands out as the key area that local leaders are focused on. Three of the top five infrastructure priorities for respondents are transportation-related: parking lots, bridges and public transit systems (see *Appendix, C Table 5*). Only 16 percent of respondents graded the conditions of their parking lots with an “A” (see *Appendix C, Table 6*). Bridges and public transit systems received a higher percentage of A grades, with 30 percent and 31 percent, respectively. However, 34 percent of mayors reported dissatisfaction with their cities’ public transportation systems. These results align with NLC’s [Municipal Infrastructure Conditions Report 2025](#), where 63 percent of survey respondents ranked roads and bridges as among the highest priorities stated, and only 15 percent of respondents signaled public transit as a priority.

In terms of social overhead capital, transport infrastructure plays a decisive role in industrialization and has obvious spillover effects on regional innovation, factor reallocation and manufacturing productivity, which promote the aggregation of industries, population and economy; this is often called the economic distributional effect.⁷

Along with transportation issues, local leaders pointed out **public utility systems** as priorities this year. Respondents listed broadband and power as the public utilities that complete their top five infrastructure priorities.

“

“I understand that aging infrastructure is not just about water lines and pavement. It’s about the people. The condition of our roads, water systems and public facilities directly shapes the quality of life for our citizens. Through strong partnerships, strategic planning and steadfast advocacy for funding, we are committed to securing the investments needed to move our community forward with equity, safety and resilience.”

Mayor Yamekia Robinson

LAKE CITY, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Local leaders are prioritizing transportation and public utilities, but many still report concerns about the vulnerability of their infrastructure to natural disasters and **extreme weather events**. Only 25 percent of city leaders are *Very Prepared* for natural disasters or emergencies that may impact local infrastructure in 2026. According to

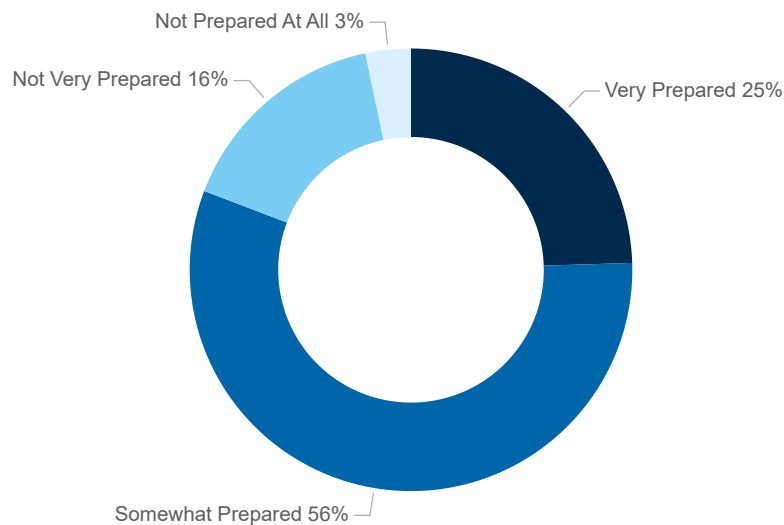
Climate Central, there were \$23 billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in the U.S., totaling \$115 billion in damages. The disaster events in 2025 continue to exceed the historical average of nine events from 1980 to 2024, indicating that the frequency of natural disasters — and the associated impact on communities — is increasing.⁸*



FIGURE 4

Majority of Respondents Feel Somewhat Prepared for Natural Disaster or Emergencies.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES IDENTIFYING AWARENESS FOR NATURAL DISASTERS OR EMERGENCIES THAT MAY AFFECT LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE.



Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Sample size (N): 151 responses.

* Climate Central is an independent group of scientists and communicators who research and report the facts about our changing climate and how it affects people's lives. See <https://www.climatecentral.org/>

In recent years, municipalities have had more access to infrastructure financing through federal funding streams. For example, the 2021 [American Rescue Plan Act](#)⁹ (ARPA), a \$1.9-trillion economic stimulus bill, provided \$350 billion to state and local governments through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF), which enabled essential water and internet upgrades, among other eligible uses. By December 2026, local government recipients must spend down all of their ARPA funding.¹⁰

Local governments also received historic access to support for rebuilding local infrastructure through the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#)¹² (IIJA)).¹³The [Local Infrastructure Hub](#) helped to train thousands of cities, towns and villages on how to access federal infrastructure grants. However, IIJA funding is set to expire in September 2026; similar to the conclusion of ARPA funds in December 2026. Considering the end of these two significant funding streams, some of the concern reported by local leaders may be related to this upcoming funding “cliff.”

The vast majority of survey respondents (81%) indicated that the end of this funding will negatively impact their infrastructure spending (*See Appendix C, Table 8, respondents answering Most Likely and Likely*). This is a potential change relative to last year. In NLC’s [Direct Funding Works: Five Years of the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Program](#) report, almost 40 percent of municipal finance officers were “*not at all concerned*” with budget shortfalls.¹⁴

Even amid funding challenges and the increased threat of disasters, local leaders continue to invest in the production and maintenance of essential infrastructure systems to support the health and connectivity of their residents.

Local Governments Leverage Federal Funding for Infrastructure¹¹

\$3.1B Amount obligated by municipalities with populations over 250,000

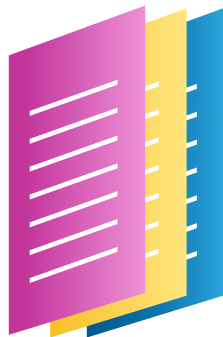
\$20.1B Amount obligated by municipalities with populations under 250,000

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“We are fortunate to have received a significant grant from our State Revolving Fund for our water and sewer; however, funding is not enough with the pace of technology today. Small towns do not have the trained workforce to maintain infrastructure effectively...There should be some state-wide regulations on water systems and takeover of small systems especially when it deprives the system of economic growth. Grants should be made available to help with training, workforce development and training in partnership development geared toward small towns and cities.”

Mayor Alberta McCrory
TOWN OF HOBSON CITY, ALABAMA

”



KEY NLC INFRASTRUCTURE RESOURCES:

REPORTS

[Rebuilding Together: Examining Federal Funding for Municipal Infrastructure](#)

[Municipal Infrastructure Conditions 2025](#)

[Municipal Infrastructure Conditions 2026](#)

TOOLKIT

[Building Community Resilience to Wildfires: A Toolkit for Local Leaders](#)

BRIEF

[Elevating Complete Streets Policies with Green Infrastructure](#)

FACT SHEET

[Infrastructure's Role in Housing Development](#)

ARTICLES

[If Your City Has a Rail Crossing, Here's What to Expect on Rail in 2026](#)

[Zoning for Solar: Basic Principles](#)

Housing



WHILE THERE ARE many issues related to housing, 75 percent of mayors identified **high housing costs** as a main challenge. In recent years, income growth has concentrated in a small number of cities, and with it, so have median household incomes, which increased by about 15 percent in cities that were already in the top 10 percent as compared to cities that were initially in the bottom half from 2000 to 2018.¹⁵ This concentration of income is one of the factors connected to a rapid rise in housing costs. The Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) house price index rose by 31 percentage points more than the overall inflation rate, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).*

In a close second, local leaders point out the **lack of housing supply** as a challenge to overcome in their communities. Seventy-one percent of respondents consider the housing supply in their communities to be insufficient. This finding suggests that high housing costs are driven by supply-side factors rather than a lack of demand for housing. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (JCHS), high home prices and elevated interest rates have reduced home buying to its lowest rates since the mid-1990s. In addition, the study suggests that builders faced higher construction costs, leading to smaller buildings with fewer amenities¹⁶.



“Affordability isn’t just a poor person’s issue, just a young person’s issue, or just a working person’s issue. The crisis reaches very high up the income scale. It hits baristas and coders and artists. Longshore workers and electricians and caregivers. It hits small business owners who are struggling to pay their own bills too.”

Mayor Katie B. Wilson
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



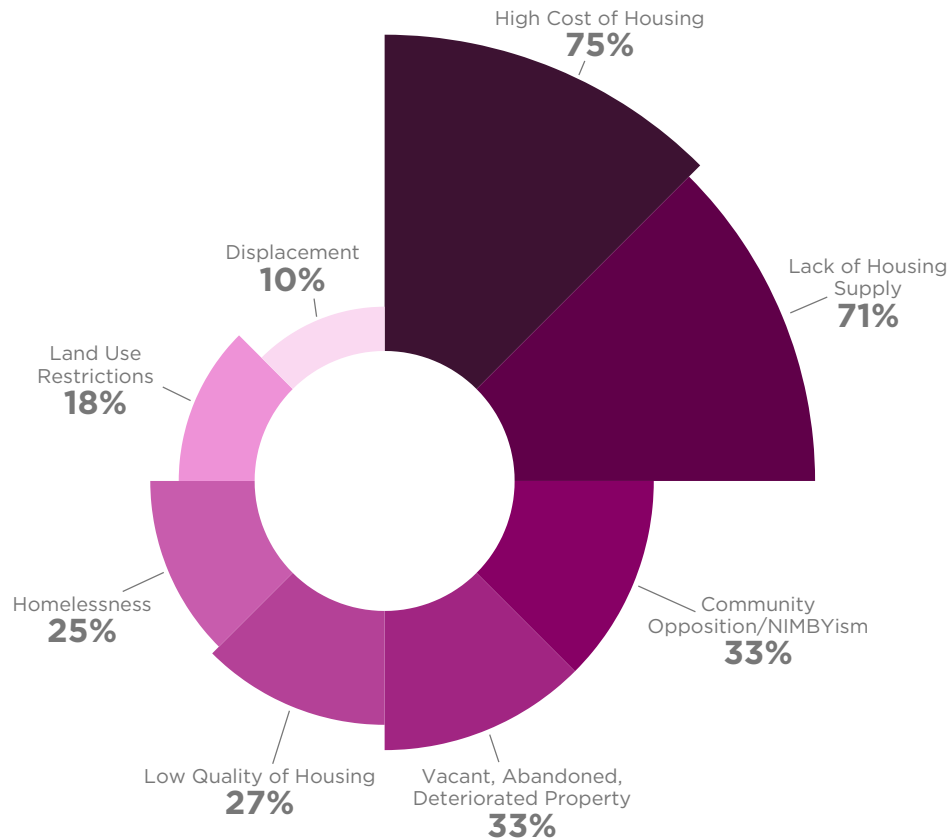
* Federal Housing Finance Agency, <https://www.fhfa.gov/data/hpi>



FIGURE 5

High Costs and Lack of Supply among the Main Housing Challenges for Cities.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES IDENTIFYING A MAIN HOUSING CHALLENGE FACING CITIES.



Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 134 responses.

High housing costs and a lack of housing supply explain why 55 percent of respondents considered that **housing attainability** is “*poor or very poor*” in their city (See Appendix C, Table 10). Local infrastructure needs — and prohibitive infrastructure costs — also prevent cities from expanding local housing supply, as explained in NLC’s [Infrastructure’s Role in Housing Supply Production](#).¹⁷

According to the JCOHS report, [The State of the Nation’s Housing 2025](#), a record-high 8.5 million very low-income renters had worst-case housing needs, such as severe cost burdens or severely inadequate housing, according to the last count in 2021. As stated in the same study, in 2024, more than 770,000 people were homeless¹⁸.

“

“Assisting our friends experiencing homelessness has become a larger part of their roles. We need to seek ways to address the drivers of homelessness, which are mental health, chemical dependency, and affordable housing availability so that we can assure safety for all of our residents.”

Mayor Kim Norton

ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

”

Mayors recognize that housing challenges require innovative solutions. In their 2026 speeches, mayors mentioned a diverse range of initiatives to tackle the housing challenges.

As federal funding programs, like SLFRF, end in 2026, it is important that local leaders seek additional funding options and new program flexibilities to continue developing housing initiatives. One hope for this is the [21st Century ROAD to Housing Act](#). If passed, it will help local officials boost housing supply by improving existing programs, unlocking private capital and reducing federal regulatory barriers. Importantly, this act does not impose limits or preemptions on local land-use or zoning authority and avoids unfunded mandates.¹⁹

Municipalities can use NLC’s [Housing Supply Accelerator](#)²⁰ to tackle their housing challenges. This tool provides multilayered approaches to improve local housing conditions. Some resources are the [Housing Supply Accelerator Playbook](#)²¹ and the [Filling the Gap Tool](#).²²

Cary, North Carolina, has developed the *Healthy Homes Cary Program*, which promotes safe and sanitary housing by addressing hazardous structural conditions, improving energy efficiency, enhancing accessibility for residents with disabilities and supporting aging in place.

New Haven, Connecticut, has plans to build 10,000 new units of housing over the next 10 years, with at least 30 percent of those units being affordable.

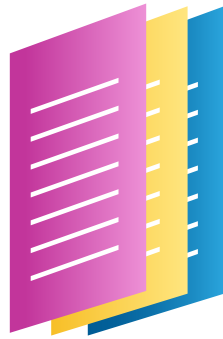
Columbus, Ohio, is planning to invest \$125 million in housing stability, with the goal of transforming its shelter system to better respond to individuals’ and families’ needs. In addition, the city will build transitional and permanent supportive housing to help people leave shelters and move into a safe, stable home.

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“We aren’t just building roofs over our heads. We are building communities where neighbors know each other.”

Mayor Reginald L. Burgess
NORTH CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

”



KEY NLC HOUSING RESOURCES:

ARTICLES

[Lessons from San Juan: Preventing Displacement in Informal Housing](#)

[How Cities are Building a Better Homelessness Response System](#)

[Understanding the Current Housing Residential and Economic Outlook](#)

[The State of Eviction Prevention Policies & Programs in the U.S.](#)

TOOLKIT

[Housing Supply Accelerator Playbook](#)

Budget and Management



AS COMMUNITY LEADERS, mayors understand their responsibility to navigate these challenging times through effective management of the city’s budget and recognize this as one of their top priorities in 2026.

ARPA and IIJA funds have increased cities’ economic power to promote their development. As expressed in the NLC report [Rebuilding Together: Examining Federal Funding for Municipal Infrastructure](#),²³ federal infrastructure programs — through a combination of direct federal grants, formula funding to states, and federal loans — play a critical role in helping cities, towns and villages nationwide build and maintain assets that serve residents and businesses while supporting local and national economic growth.

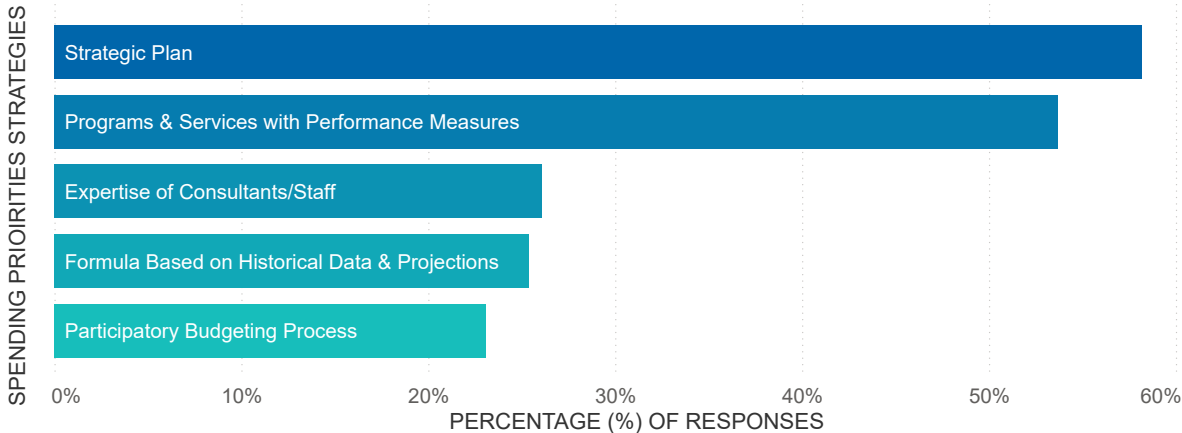
As 2026 marks the last year to spend SLFRF funds, it is a pivotal year for local government finances. City leaders have already started to feel this change. Almost 70 percent of respondents said that federal funding has decreased or stayed the same this year. (See *Appendix C, Table 11*)

Mayors and budget managers utilize a diverse range of approaches to prioritize spending on an increasingly limited budget. Fifty-eight percent of respondents use a strategic plan to primarily prioritize spending, and 54 percent allocate spending according to a breakdown of priority programs and services with performance measures. These approaches show that community leaders are judicious and strategic in maximizing the impact of their budget.

 **FIGURE 6**

Almost 60% of the Respondents Implement a Strategic Plan to Prioritize Spending.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES REGARDING DIFFERENT STRATEGIES TO PRIORITIZE PUBLIC SPENDING.



Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 134 responses.

City leaders also have the ability to diversify their funding streams. A wide range of **funding streams** are available for cities to explore.

- ◆ **Restricted Funding:** These funds are designated for specific purposes, often by the funder, with strict conditions on their use. Examples include federal grants (e.g., Community Development Block Grants) that must be applied to housing or urban development, or philanthropic contributions tied to specific projects.
- ◆ **Unrestricted Funding:** These funds can be used flexibly by the city to address its priorities as they emerge. Examples include general fund revenues generated from local taxes or philanthropic contributions without condition.

NLC has paid special attention to publishing resources about different types of funding for municipalities. An example of this type of informational resource is NLC's [Diversified Funding for Health & Wellbeing](#)²⁴ and [Tax Authority & Tax and Expenditure Limits brief](#)²⁵.

As mentioned previously, with SLFRF spending coming to an end and IJA expiring, municipalities face unprecedented budgetary uncertainty. Another source of financial risk and uncertainty comes from the recent increase in frequency and duration of government shutdowns. The impacts of government shutdowns in recent years have cascaded across state, local and county governments reliant on federal funding, pushing them into crisis management as they juggle budgets, postpone services and maintenance and absorb costs usually covered

by the federal government. This creates significant economic strain and service.²⁶ According to NLC's [Local Official Checklist: Navigating a Federal Government Shutdown](#),²⁷ partial or total federal shutdowns have immediate consequences for local budgets and vulnerable residents, impacts that are further intensified by the broader economic uncertainty that shutdowns create.



“I have been mayor for 37 years and we have ‘NEVER’ had a tax ‘INCREASE’ (in fact we reduced it by 40%) and we have ‘ALWAYS’ had a balanced budget. We have a ‘CAPITAL DEVELOPERS’ account that we use for emergencies and shortfalls that were unforeseen. This fund has over 35 million dollars in it. We made a commitment when I was elected to not use taxpayer dollars to fund our budget.”

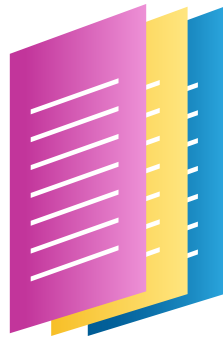
Mayor Kenneth L. Branner Jr.

MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE



However, city leaders employ different strategies to address these risks. Almost 70 percent of respondents said they maintain a contingency fund for emergencies or unforeseen events. Also, 58 percent said they

implement flexible and adaptive policies that can be adjusted or modified according to changing circumstances (See *Appendix C, Table 13*).



KEY NLC BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT RESOURCES:

REPORTS

[City Fiscal Conditions 2025](#)

[Strengthening Municipal Workforces Through Skills-Based Practices](#)

TOOLKIT

[Diversified Funding for Health & Wellbeing](#)

BRIEF

[Local Official Checklist: Navigating a Federal Government Shutdown](#)

ARTICLES

[Understanding the Challenges Facing the Municipal Workforce](#)

[How to Train Municipal Staff for AI](#)

Public Health and Safety



“

“A successful city is measured by more than growth or budgets. It is measured by how people are treated and whether they feel safe, respected and valued.”

Mayor Mark Shepherd
CLEARFIELD CITY, UTAH

”

AMONG THE TOP priorities of local leaders in 2026 is **public health and safety**. This policy area appeared in 15 percent of mayoral speeches and was selected as a high priority by 14 percent of respondents in the mayoral

survey. Among all public health and safety topics, local leaders’ number one concern by far is **mental health**, with more than 50 percent of respondents expressing that they are “*very concerned or extremely concerned*” about this issue. Related to the concern of mental health, **substance abuse** is an area of focus for city leaders, as 38 percent of respondents said that they are “*concerned or extremely concerned*” about this problem. According to the National Association of Counties (NACo) and NLC report [Opioids: How Settlement Dollars Advance City and County Opioid Abatement](#), some cities are pooling opioid settlements with other funds to finance projects like the construction of substance use service facilities. Cities are also creating joint planning bodies to ensure expenditures within each locality help close service gaps that persist across geographies²⁸.

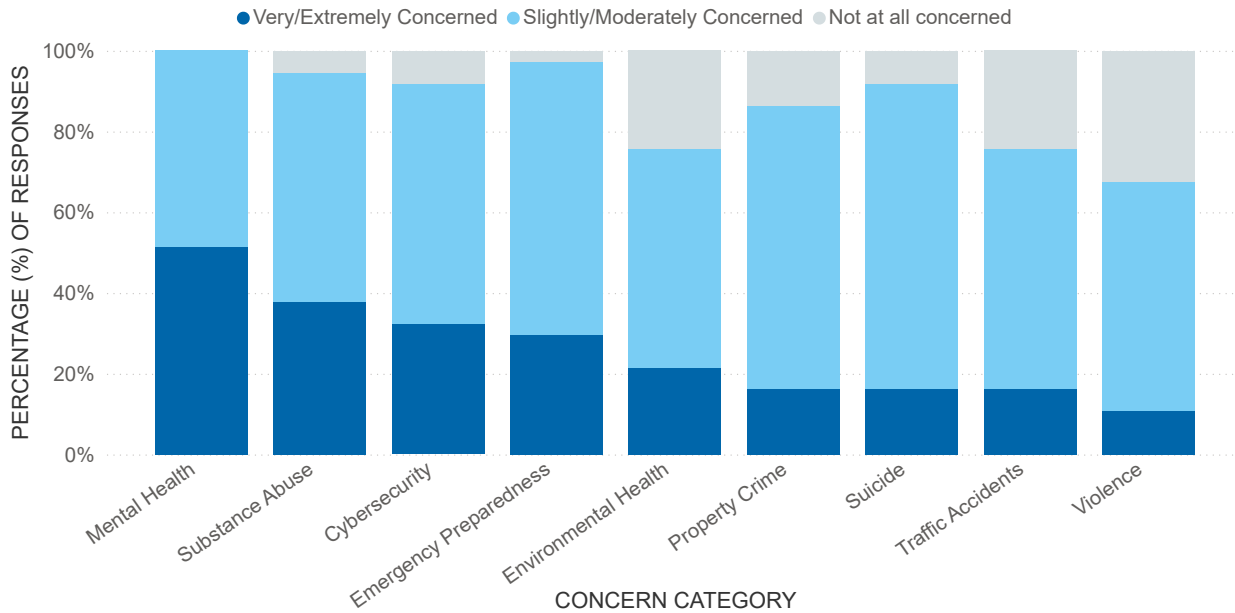




FIGURE 7

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Are the Highest Public Health and Safety Concerns for American Mayors.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES BY LEVEL OF CONCERN FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY.



Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question; therefore, they might not add to 100. Sample size (N) varies depending on the category, ranging from N=37 for all the categories except for "Other" with N=20.

Public health and public safety are deeply interconnected. Just as health is more than the absence of disease, public safety is more than the absence of crime; it embodies: "a sense of physical, emotional, social, and material security that fosters stability and is accompanied by support from community and society when needed."²⁹ This is particularly relevant in the

United States, which, as with health care, stands out among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)) nations for its exceptionally high per capita spending on policing and law enforcement, as well as its higher incarceration rate than any other country.³⁰

Improving public safety means focusing on the root causes of the problem; public health is one of them. For example, a working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research finds a negative and statistically significant relation between access to mental healthcare and crime. Researchers found that 10 additional healthcare offices in a county reduce crime by 1.7 crimes per 10,000 residents.³¹ A different article published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* found that states that expanded Medicaid have seen a 5.3 percent drop in yearly reported violent crime rates compared to states that did not expand Medicaid.³² In summary, improving public health is crucial to enhancing public safety. Evidence shows that better access to mental health care and broader health coverage are linked to lower crime rates, highlighting the importance of addressing root causes to build safer communities.

Also, mental health and housing are deeply related, and research suggests there is a two-way relationship between homelessness and mental health.³³ According to NLC's article [Exploring the Link Between Housing Stability and Mental Health](#),³⁴ people who live with mental health challenges face difficulties in securing stable living conditions, and the reverse may be true as well.

As much as the benefits of stable housing can help uplift mental health, the repercussions of a lack of stable and affordable housing can exacerbate mental health challenges. This is a trend identified among both renters

and homeowners, with similar mental health repercussions reported on those experiencing mortgage strain.

These facts show that housing is not a stand-alone policy area; rather, housing policy is closely connected to public safety and mental health. A safe city, with people who are attentive to their wellbeing, will result in a more developed city, with more infrastructure and better living conditions — and vice versa.

“

“Safety is a physical reality — response times, lighting and patrols. Safety is also a feeling. It extends into our parks, our streets and the public places where city life unfolds”.

Mayor Erin Mendenhall

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

”

Given the significance of substance abuse and mental health in local leaders' priorities, it is not surprising that two of their top policy areas of focus are directly related to them. **Creation or expansion of alternative crisis response teams** was identified as a policy area requiring the most attention in public safety, with the highest response rate (13%). This is consistent with recent trends in policing, examining how public safety responds to non-criminal and non-violent incidents and the re-imagining of public safety programs (as shown in NLC blog [“How Local Governments Are Building Alternative Public Safety Models”](#)³⁵). The second policy area of focus was the **retention and recruitment** of a diverse public health and safety workforce (12 percent). Recruitment for these positions can be challenging due to their rigor and the impact on both physical and mental health.



“The simple freedom for a child to run to a friend’s house, grab a ball, and meet at Memorial Field. The confidence for teens to walk downtown for ice cream. The peace of mind that comes from knowing your community is looking out for you. That only happens when safety is real.”

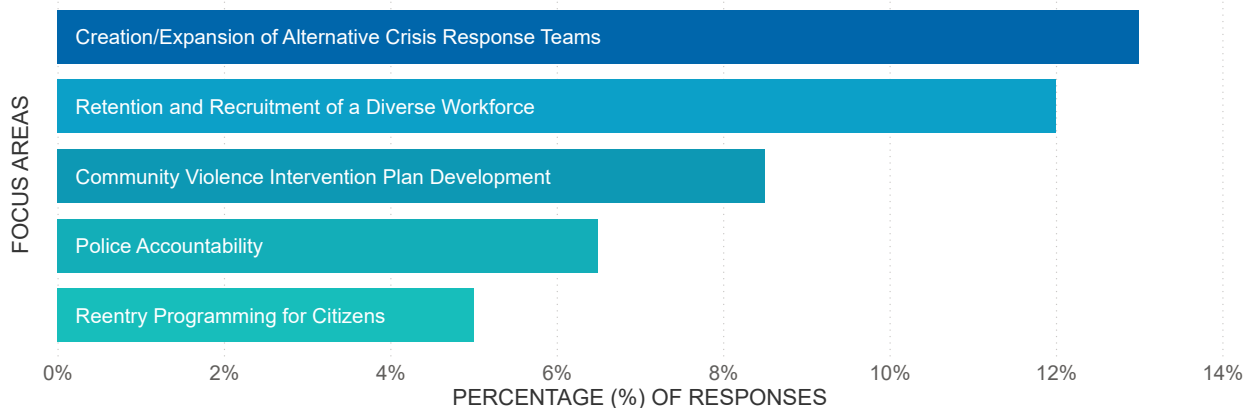
Mayor Elizabeth Fagan
SUMMIT, NEW JERSEY



FIGURE 8

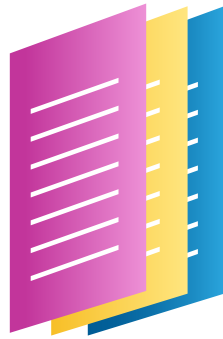
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Are the Highest Public Health and Safety Concerns for American Mayors.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES BY LEVEL OF CONCERN FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY.



Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 200 responses.



KEY NLC PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY RESOURCES:

REPORT

[Municipal Action Guide: Adopting Community Metrics for Public Safety](#)

BRIEF

[Public Safety Workforce Development in the Post COVID-19 Era](#)

TOOLKITS

[Reimagining Public Safety](#)

[Local Policy Hub: Advancing Health through Improving Housing Policy](#)

[National Opioid Settlement Dashboard](#)

ARTICLES

[Why Is It So Hard to Fill Public Safety Workforce Jobs?](#)

[Local Strategies for Law Enforcement Recruitment and Retention](#)

[Behavioral Crisis Response in Minneapolis: Embracing Inclusive Design in Community Safety](#)

[Enhancing Public Safety: Why Community Responder Models are the Smart Solution to Addressing Homelessness](#)

[7 Tips and Strategies for Cities to Increase Youth Engagement for Violence Reduction](#)

Alignment with Public Priorities



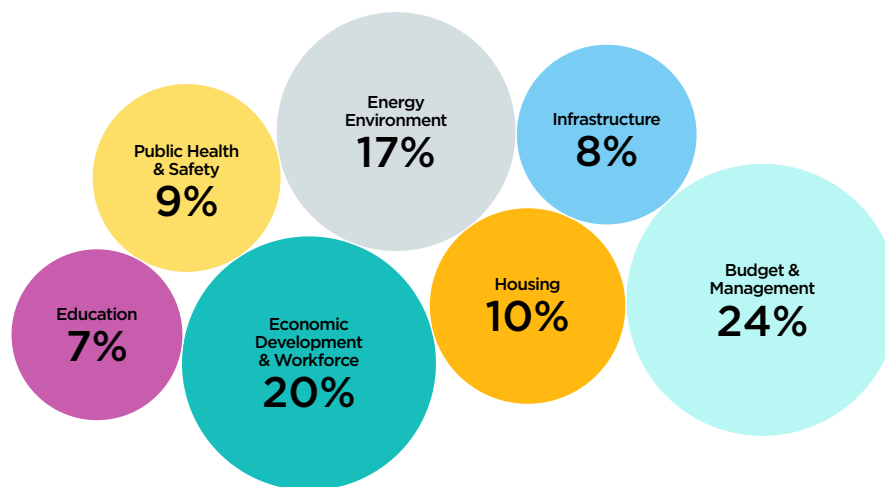
TO UNDERSTAND HOW residents' interest in municipal issues coincide or diverge from those of public officials, NLC conducted analysis of public sentiment on the categories analyzed in this report. The analysis consisted of calculating the frequency with which posts by public officials were shared by users on X (formerly known as Twitter). This metric serves as a proxy for public engagement on different issues raised by public officials.*

The results show that constituents' interests and the mayors' priorities differ on certain topics. For example, although infrastructure ranks high in mayoral interests as captured by the survey and the analysis of speeches, constituents have shown a lower regard for infrastructure investment (8%). By comparison, the public showed greater interest in energy and the environment (17%) and public health (9%). However, there is significant overlap between constituents and mayors on two key priorities for 2026: budget management and economic development, for which residents showed strong interest at 24 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

 **FIGURE 9**

Budget/Management and Economic Development Had the Most Attention from Citizens in 2025-2026.

PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN 2025-2026 BY RESIDENTS.



Source: Data gathered from the Quorum Local Platform from March 30, 2025, to March 31, 2026.

Figure Notes: Public Engagement on X (i.e., the platform formerly known as Twitter) measures the ratio of posts issued by local authorities to the number of times these posts were shared by residents within each category. The sample for tweets and retweets differs from one another, ranging from the highest ratio found for Budget and Management with a total share of 24% (129 tweets and 31 retweets), to the smallest share for Education with 7% (125 tweets and 9 retweets).

* For more information on the methodology used to assess public opinion, see Appendix A.

This represents a shift in constituent priorities relative to 2025 analysis, where energy, environment and education ranked as the most frequently reshared topics. Education has been the topic with the highest levels of erosion, with frequent reposts falling to seven percent in the 2026 survey.* Mayoral priorities such as housing and public health have appeared with steady frequency in the analysis.

“

“Going forward, we are looking at even more ways to engage the public, so that more residents can participate, understand what’s happening and share ideas”.

Mayor Elizabeth Fagan

SUMMIT, NEW JERSEY

”

Social media provides public officials with a more controlled environment in which to interact with their constituents, relative to physical spaces. This is important because, increasingly, local leaders are exposed to threats, harassment and violence during public meetings. According to NLC’s [Promoting Healthy Community Dialogue: Civic Discourse 101](#),³⁶ this type of violence can be damaging to democracy in the US, as it deters individuals from public office.

This could explain why more than 90 percent of the respondents in our mayoral survey chose social media as one of their preferred outlets for communicating with their residents, followed by town hall meetings, which were chosen by 77 percent of respondents.

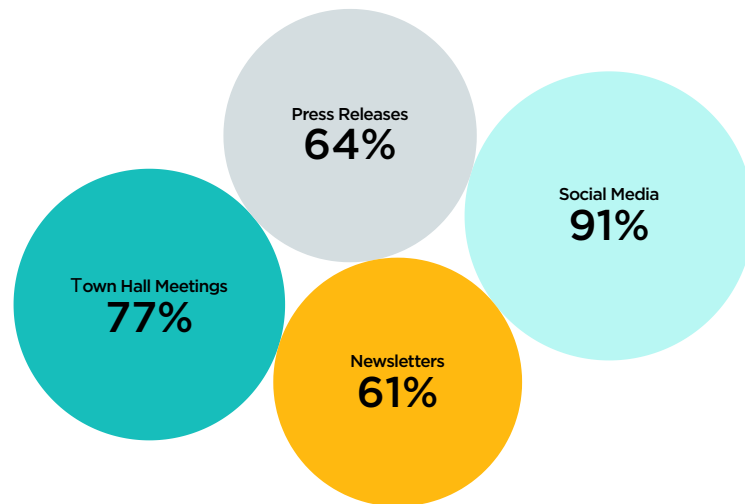
Civic engagement is high and important for cities. According to the NLC brief [Resident Opinions on Key Quality of Life Issues](#), the majority of respondents trust their local government leaders to ensure they have access to three out of the four local services about which NLC inquired. This is important because this trust sustains communities’ long-term support and commitment to their local government³⁷.

* Importantly, the majority of K-12 education systems fall outside of the municipal purview as they are managed by school districts.

 [FIGURE 10]

Social Media and Town Hall Meeting among the Top Outlets Mayors Use to Engage with Their Residents.

PERCENTAGE OF OUTLETS USED BY MAYORS TO ENGAGE WITH THEIR RESIDENTS.



Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 140 responses.

As a complementary component of this report, NLC conducted a more in-depth analysis of [Resident Opinions of Local Government](#)³⁸, analyzing topics on infrastructure, public safety, and housing management.

One of the most notable findings is that fewer than half of respondents (47%) identified *attending or participating in public meetings* as a means of engaging in public decision-making. This result stands in contrast to findings from NLC's mayoral survey, which found that *town hall meetings* are among the preferred mechanisms for maintaining direct engagement with residents.

In addition, respondents indicated that the automobile is their primary mode of transportation, a finding that aligns with mayors' emphasis on the need to expand parking infrastructure.

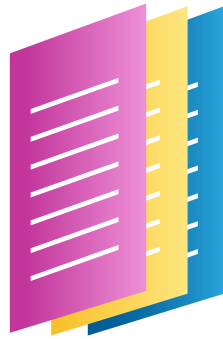
The priorities of mayors and residents are inherently interconnected. Accordingly, a comprehensive assessment of municipal priorities requires examining both viewpoints to identify gaps and areas of misalignment. Ultimately, local officials' responsibility is to foster communities that enable residents to thrive and achieve a high quality of life.

“

“I am pleased to report that a group of city staff attended a Harvard course on community engagement...that learning should become evident in the years ahead.”

Mayor Kim Norton
ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

”



KEY NLC ALIGNMENT WITH PUBLIC PRIORITIES RESOURCES:

NLC INITIATIVE

[We The Cities: Bridging Our Divides](#)

REPORT

[Resident Opinions of Local Government Brief](#)

ARTICLES

[Promoting Healthy Community Dialogue: Civic Discourse 101](#)

[Local Leaders Call for National Civility Pledge at National League of Cities Congressional City Conference](#)

[Addressing the Decline of Civility in Public Discourse](#)

Conclusion



“

“Strength is not the absence of problems. It is the willingness to face them directly and do the hard work of change to become stronger, more accountable and more prepared for the future we are building together.”

Mayor Robert G. Cantelmo

ITHACA, NEW YORK

”

THE 2026 State of the Cities report offers a holistic view of the complex challenges that America’s local governments are tackling: economic development, infrastructure, housing, budget management and public health and safety. Yet, as this report illustrates, these priorities are deeply interconnected. For example, investments in infrastructure not only modernize communities and stimulate economic growth but also require thoughtful budget management to ensure fiscal health. Similarly, efforts to address affordable housing and public health are often linked, as access to stable housing directly impacts community wellbeing and mental health, and vice versa.

As federal funding diminishes, there is a strong imperative for local governments to diversify funding streams, such as improving their capacity to leverage federal tax credit and incentive programs, like Opportunity Zones, to attract additional private investment.

Public-private partnerships are becoming essential tools for cities, towns and villages to fund critical projects, spark innovation and build resilient, future-ready communities. By fostering collaboration across sectors, local leaders can leverage limited resources, expand opportunities and drive progress even in challenging fiscal environments.

Ultimately, the path forward demands not only a clear-eyed understanding of the challenges at hand but also a willingness to seek synergies among priorities and to embrace creative partnerships. By doing so, America’s cities, towns and villages can continue to serve as engines of opportunity and resilience for all residents.

“

“Strong cities are built through collaboration, innovation and a shared commitment to opportunity for our residents. When we invest in people and our small businesses, we create communities that are not only resilient but thriving for generations to come.”

Mayor Kim A. Thomas

RICHMOND HEIGHTS, OHIO

”

Appendices

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

For this report, the NLC employed three different methodologies: a content analysis of mayors' State of the City addresses, a survey of mayors, and a quantitative analysis of public engagement with the mayors' priorities. We gathered and analyzed data from three distinct sources for these various methods.

A) MAYORAL SPEECHES

We conducted a content analysis of 60 State of the City (SOTC) addresses delivered by U.S. mayors between January 1 and March 31, 2026. Mayoral speeches were collected from municipal governments' official websites or YouTube channels. Each week during the analysis window, a Google search was conducted for the most recent speeches. The cities were identified, and the speeches were located on their official websites or on streaming channels that made them public. At the time of this analysis, these 60 SOTC speeches were the only ones the researchers had the capacity to locate online and code.

To analyze each SOTC address delivered, we focused only on the forward-looking and actionable plans expressed by mayors in their speeches. We then categorized these plans into one of the following priority categories: Budget and Management, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Housing, Public Safety and Health and Human Services, Education, Data and Technology, and Energy

and Environment. For each topic, the number of words used by the mayor in the speech was calculated as a proportion of the total words in the speech. This method provides a proxy for the importance the mayor gives to each topic within their speech.

B) MAYORAL SURVEY

NLC conducted a survey targeting a diverse sample of mayors from communities of various sizes across the country (all members of the NLC) to identify their top priorities for 2026. The survey was distributed to 2,307 mayors and was open for responses from February 18, 2026, to March 31, 2026. After closing the survey, the total number of responses was 225. After deleting responses with no answers (49) and preview responses (3), we ended up with a total of 173 mayors' complete survey responses included in our analysis.

Survey respondents were asked to assess topics across the following categories: Budget and Management; Economic and Workforce Development; Infrastructure; Housing; Public Health and Safety; Early Childhood, K-12, and Postsecondary Education; and Energy and Environment (contact the report authors for the instrument).

New to this year's survey, we asked mayors to provide quotes about a specific topic of their choice. Some of those quotes are found in the body of this report. We appreciate our

respondents for their willingness to participate in this new exercise to express their thoughts, which we began this year. All city spotlights in the Economic Development and Housing section have been drawn from the State of the Cities Speeches Analysis.

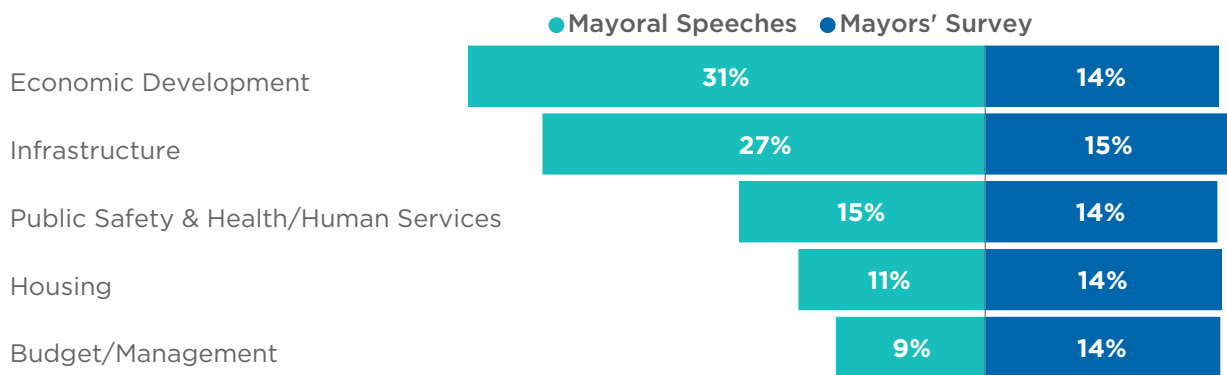
The distribution of populations among the responding cities is mostly balanced across the different population size categories. A higher percentage of respondents come from cities with fewer than 10,000 residents and those with populations ranging from 10,000 to

49,999, while cities with more than 300,000 residents represent a smaller percentage of survey respondents. This matches the distribution of cities nationwide by population size. Regarding regional distribution, the majority of survey respondents were submitted from cities in the South, while Puerto Rico was the city outside the mainland with the lowest response rate. The remaining regions present relatively balanced responses.

 APPENDIX A

Economic Development and Infrastructure are the Top Mayoral Priorities in 2026

TOP 5 MAYORAL PRIORITIES IN 2026 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESSES, BY DATA SOURCE AND PERCENTAGE (%) OF SPEECHES AND RESPONSES



Source: Content Analysis of Mayoral Speeches for 2026 (N=60), and State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey (N=173).

Figure Notes: Other categories (beyond the top 5) are not included here.

PERCENTAGE OF SPEECHES AND SURVEY RESPONSES BY REGION AND POPULATION CATEGORY													
REGION/ POPULATION CATEGORY	<10,000 (%)		10,000-49,999 (%)		50,000-99,999 (%)		100,000-299,999 (%)		300,000+ (%)		TOTAL		
	SPEECH	SURVEY	SPEECH	SURVEY	SPEECH	SURVEY	SPEECH	SURVEY	SPEECH	SURVEY	SPEECH	SURVEY	
SOUTH (%)	1.7%	26.6%	16.7%	11.6%	3.3%	3.5%	15.0%	4.1%	3.3%	1.2%	40.0%	46.8%	
WEST (%)	0.0%	15.6%	8.3%	4.1%	1.7%	1.2%	5.0%	2.9%	0.0%	1.2%	15.0%	24.9%	
MIDWEST (%)	0.0%	3.5%	5.0%	4.6%	10.0%	2.9%	8.3%	2.3%	6.7%	0.6%	30.0%	13.9%	
NORTHEAST/ MID-ATLANTIC (%)	0.0%	8.7%	6.7%	3.5%	3.3%	0.6%	1.7%	0.6%	3.3%	0.0%	15.0%	13.3%	
PUERTO RICO (%)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	
TOTAL	1.7%	54.3%	36.7%	24.9%	18.3%	8.1%	30.0%	9.8%	13.3%	2.9%	100.0%	100.0%	

C) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

We analyzed social media engagement to understand residents' sentiments regarding government priorities. To conduct this analysis, we gathered data from the Quorum Local Platform. Our study focused on the most frequently used hashtags on X (i.e., the platform formerly known as Twitter) from April 1, 2025, to April 1, 2026, for the same main categories as those used in the survey: Budget and Management; Economic and Workforce Development; Infrastructure; Housing; Public Health and Safety; Early Childhood, K-12, and Postsecondary Education; and Energy and Environment.³⁹

Public engagement is defined as the ratio of posts issued by local authorities to the number of times residents share these posts within each category. If you require further information, please feel free to contact the authors.⁴⁰

When analyzing public opinion, literature highlights two primary reasons for choosing X over other social platforms like Facebook. First, its reach is significant; while Facebook focuses on private groups, X enables users to view third-party posts. Second, and more importantly for this project, the primary purpose of X users is to stay informed about global events and developments, contrasting with Facebook, which emphasizes maintaining connections with close friends and family.⁴¹

D) DATA LIMITATIONS

As the three main data sources used for this report (mayoral speeches, the mayor's survey, and social media) are inherently different, there

are discrepancies in findings. The differences in priority rankings between the survey findings and mayoral speeches may be attributed to the following reasons: While mayoral speeches provide public opportunities to discuss municipal plans and initiatives, survey responses consist of private, written replies to an anonymous survey. The survey may also allow mayors to convey more nuance and detail regarding specific topics.

Two reasons may explain the gap between mayoral and public priorities:

- ◆ The source used to measure public engagement: While the report analyzes public engagement on social media, literature reveals that politicians believe direct contact with citizens is the most effective way to learn about public preferences, with mayors engaging residents in conversation to understand their needs.^{42,43} In other words, social media data serves as a proxy for assessing public engagement because face-to-face interactions between mayors and residents cannot be measured.
- ◆ The public may engage more critically with the issues they perceive; the more salient issues tend to attract greater attention.^{44,45} This could explain why Budget and Management was the top public priority, as residents may be worried about the municipal finance situation following decreases in several federal and state funding, as well as persistent government shutdowns.

APPENDIX B: MAYORAL PRIORITIES OVER THE LAST DECADE



APPENDIX B

Mayoral Top Priorities Remain Largely the Same Across Time

MAYORAL PRIORITY RANKINGS, YEARS 2014-2026

CATEGORY	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	AVERAGE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	2	4	1	1	1	1.5
INFRASTRUCTURE	4	2	4	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	3	2.2
HOUSING	6	6	6	5	4	6	3	5	6	6	3	2		3.8
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT		8	7	7	8	4	4	8	7	7	6	8	6	4.2
PUBLIC SAFETY	3	3	2	2	5	7	5	3	4	3	5	4	4	4.8
DEMOGRAPHICS		9	8	9	10	8	6	10	9					6.4
BUDGETS & MANAGEMENT		4	3	4	3	5	7	2	3	2	7	5	5	6.7
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES	8	10	10	8	6	3	8	7	5	5	4	6	4	7.1
EDUCATION	5	5	5	6	7	9	9	6	10	8	8	7	7	8.6
GOVERNMENT DATA & TECHNOLOGY		7	9	10	9	10	10	9	8	9	9	9	8	8.9

Source: NLC State of the Cities reports 2014-2026

Figure Notes: The results reflect solely the analysis of the Mayoral Speeches. The numbers indicate the ranking for each topic. Number one signifies the most important topic for the mayors, while number ten denotes the topic that the mayors address the least in their speeches. Budget/Management, Education, Demographics, and Government Data/ Tech were not analyzed in 2014. The demographics category has not been included in the speech analysis since 2023.

APPENDIX C: FIGURE TABLES



TABLE 1

Economic Development and Infrastructure as the Top Mayoral Priorities in 2026 [FIGURE 1]

Priority Category	% Responses		
	Speeches	Surveys	Quorum
Economic Development	31%	14%	20%
Infrastructure	27%	15%	8%
Public Safety and Health/Human Services	15%	14%	9%
Housing	11%	14%	10%
Budget/Management	9%	14%	24%
Energy/Environment	3%	12%	17%
Education	3%	10%	7%
Data/Technology	1%	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Content Analysis of 60 Mayoral Speeches Given between January-March 2026, NLC Mayoral Survey 2026, and Quorum analysis of public engagement.

Figure notes: For Speeches: Percentages denote the average portion of State of the City addresses dedicated to each topic. Sample size (N=60). For Survey analysis: Sample size (N=173). For Quorum analysis: Public Engagement on X (i.e., the platform formerly known as Twitter) measures the ratio of posts issued by local authorities to the number of times these posts were shared by residents within each category. The sample for tweets and retweets differs from one another, ranging from the highest ratio found for Budget and Management with a total share of 24% (129 tweets and 31 retweets), to the smallest share for the Education category with 7% (125 tweets and 9 retweets).

 TABLE 2

Attracting Businesses and Insufficient Federal and Private Investment among Major Economic Challenges Facing Cities. [FIGURE 2]

Economic challenges	% Responses
Attracting businesses	60%
Insufficient federal investment	45%
Insufficient private investment	37%
Insufficient childcare providers	36%
Poverty	35%
Other (please specify)	28%
Underemployment/Unemployment	27%
Inequality	23%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 132 responses.

 TABLE 3

Responses Rating the City's Economic Situation as Acceptable or Good Increased by 3% Compared to Last Year.

	2025	2026
	% Responses	% Responses
Very poor	4%	5%
Poor	11%	14%
Acceptable	29%	30%
Good	39%	40%
Excellent	17%	11%
Total	100%	100%

Source: State of the Cities 2025 and 2026 Mayoral Survey. (N_2025=195; N_2026=132).

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question.



TABLE 4

Business Attraction, Downtown Revitalization and Workforce Development among the Most Utilized Strategies by Mayors to Address Economic Development Challenges. [FIGURE 3]

Strategies	% Responses
Business attraction and retention (providing financial assistance to encourage businesses, assistance with permits, licensing, connecting businesses with relevant networks and resources)	78%
Downtown revitalization (arts investments, business improvement districts, etc.)	57%
Workforce development (skills training / wrap-around supports for workers, etc.)	55%
Investments in tourism and hospitality	54%
Innovation and technology (entrepreneurship services and/or incubator programs)	44%
Increased green and sustainable development	27%
Other	14%

Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 132 responses.



TABLE 5

Parking Lots Was Ranked as the Top Infrastructure Priority.

Infrastructure Category	Ranking
Parking lots	8
Bridges	7
Public utility system (Broadband)*	7
Public transit system	7
Public utility system (Power)	6
Parks and recreation areas	5
Public buildings	5
Water treatment and reclamation	4
Sewer system/stormwater drainage	4
Water systems	3

Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure notes: *The number indicates the importance that mayors assign to the listed infrastructure priorities, with 10 being the most important and 1 the least important. Sample size (N): 126 responses.*

* Unique broadband publicly owned.



TABLE 6

Broadband as the Infrastructure Asset with the Best Condition.

Infrastructure Priorities	A	B	C	D	F
Streets and roads	7%	29%	42%	15%	8%
Bridges	30%	12%	18%	11%	5%
Public buildings	12%	34%	34%	14%	5%
Water systems	24%	39%	18%	9%	4%
Sewer system/stormwater drainage	12%	36%	22%	17%	9%
Parks and recreation areas	28%	40%	20%	6%	2%
Public transit system	31%	10%	12%	13%	7%
Parking lots	16%	27%	28%	12%	6%
Water treatment and reclamation	26%	32%	18%	8%	6%
Public utility system (Broadband)	33%	20%	17%	4%	4%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Sample size (N): Responses vary depending on the category, ranging from 143 responses for the "streets and roads" item to 189 responses for "bridges."



TABLE 7

Majority Of Respondents Feel Somewhat Prepared toward Natural Disasters or Emergencies. [FIGURE 4]

Preparedness	% Responses
Somewhat prepared	56%
Very prepared	25%
Not very prepared	16%
Not prepared at all	3%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Sample size (N): 151 responses.



TABLE 8

49% of Mayors Indicated That the End of ARPA in 2026 Is Likely to Negatively Impact Their Budgets.

Category	Most Likely	Likely	Not at all
Infrastructure	49%	31%	20%
Budget & Management	34%	38%	29%
Economic & Workforce Development	24%	41%	35%
Early Childhood, K-12 & Postsecondary Education	22%	41%	38%
Housing	34%	33%	34%
Public Health & Safety	32%	38%	30%
Energy and environment	29%	33%	38%
Other	23%	13%	63%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Sample size (N): 152.



TABLE 9

High Costs and Lack of Supply among the Main Housing Challenges for Cities. [FIGURE 5]

Housing challenges	% Responses
High cost of housing	75%
Lack of housing supply	71%
Vacant, abandoned, and/or deteriorated properties	33%
Community opposition and/or NIMBYism (NIMBY = Not In My Back Yard)	33%
Low quality of housing	27%
Homelessness	25%
Land use restrictions (e.g., zoning)	18%
Displacement	10%
Other	8%
Evictions	7%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 134 responses.



TABLE 10

57% of Survey Respondents Rated the Attainability of Housing in Their Community as Poor or Very Poor.

Attainability Rating	Percentage
Very poor	13%
Poor	40%
Acceptable	39%
Good	6%
Excellent	2%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Sample size (N): 134 responses.



TABLE 11

35% of Cities Have Seen Decreases in Federal Funding.

Change	% Responses
Decrease	35%
Stayed the same	34%
Increase	16%
My city doesn't receive federal funding	15%

Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 200 responses.



TABLE 12

Almost 60% of the Respondents Implement a Strategic Plan to Prioritize Spending. [FIGURE 6]

Spending Priorities Strategies	% Responses
We use a strategic plan to primarily prioritize spending	58%
We allocate spending according to a breakdown of priority programs and services with performance measures	54%
We rely on the expertise of consultants and/or staff to determine the optimal allocation	26%
We follow a formula based on historical data and projections	25%
We use a participatory budgeting process that involves our community in the decision-making	23%
Other	2%

Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 134 responses.



TABLE 13

Almost 70% of the Respondents Maintain a Contingency Fund for Financial Emergencies or Unforeseen Events.

Strategies	% Responses
We maintain a contingency fund that can be used in case of emergencies or unforeseen events.	69%
We implement flexible and adaptive policies that can be adjusted or modified according to changing circumstances	58%
We diversify our revenue sources	41%
We seek external support or assistance from other levels of government or organizations.	39%
We reduce dependence on volatile or unreliable sources	27%
Other	2%

Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 134 responses.

 TABLE 14

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Are the Highest Public Health and Safety Concerns for American Mayors. [FIGURE 7]

Concern Category	% Responses		
	Not at all concerned	Slightly/Moderately Concerned	Very/Extremely Concerned
Violence	32%	57%	11%
Property crime	14%	70%	16%
Traffic accidents	24%	59%	16%
Emergency preparedness (inclusive of natural disasters)	3%	68%	30%
Substance Abuse	5%	57%	38%
Mental health	0%	49%	51%
Suicide	8%	76%	16%
Cybersecurity	8%	59%	32%
Environmental health (ozone, PFAS, etc.)	24%	54%	22%
Other	65%	10%	25%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Sample size (N) varies depending on the category, ranging from N=37 for all the categories except for "Other" with N=20.



TABLE 15

Retention, Recruitment and Creation or Expansion of Alternative Crisis Response Teams among the Areas That Require the Most Attention.

[FIGURE 8]

Focus areas	% Responses
Creation or expansion of alternative crisis response teams	13%
Retention and recruitment of a diverse public health and safety workforce	12%
Development of a community violence intervention plan	9%
Police accountability	7%
Reentry programming for returning citizens	5%

Source: *State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.*

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options. Hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 200 responses.



TABLE 16

Budget/Management and Economic Development Had the Most Attention from Citizens in 2025-2026. [FIGURE 9]

Priority Category	% Responses
Budget and Management	24%
Economic Development and Workforce	20%
Energy and Environment	17%
Housing	10%
Public Health and Safety	9%
Infrastructure	8%
Education	7%

Source: Data gathered from the Quorum Local Platform from March 30, 2025, to March 31, 2026.

Figure Notes: Public Engagement on X (i.e., the platform formerly known as Twitter) measures the ratio of posts issued by local authorities to the number of times these posts were shared by residents within each category. The sample for tweets and retweets differs from one another, ranging from the highest ratio found for Budget and Management with a total share of 24% (129 tweets and 31 retweets), to the smallest share for Education category with 7% (125 tweets and 9 retweets).



TABLE 17

Social Media and Town Hall Meeting among the Top Outlets Used by Mayors to Engage with Their Residents. [FIGURE 10]

Outlet Category	% Responses
Social media	90.7%
Town hall meetings	77.1%
Press releases	64.3%
Newsletters	60.7%
Other	17.9%

Source: State of the Cities 2026 Mayoral Survey.

Figure Notes: Percentages are calculated as the proportion of all total responses to the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options; hence, the total of the count column is greater than the total number of respondents. Sample size (N): 140 responses.

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- For each category, we focus only on specific hashtags to be more accurate in the topic. For each category, the hashtags utilized were the following:
- Economic and Workforce Development: #economicdevelopment, #workforce, #workforcedevelopment, #hiring, #jobs, #jobsearch, #jobalert, #smallbusiness, #shoplocal
 - Infrastructure: #infrastructure
 - Budget and Management: #budget, #localgovernment
 - Housing: #housing, #affordablehousing, #homelessness
 - Public Health and Safety: #publichealth, #publicsafety, #firstresponders, #mentalhealth, #wellness, #mentalhealthawarenessmonth, #lawenforcement, #police
 - Early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary education: #education, #school, #childcare
 - Energy and Environment: #energy, #cleanenergy, #renewables, #climate, #sustainability, #environment, #climateaction, #climateaction, #earthday
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