

# State of the Cities 2019



### 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.

NLC’s Center for City Solutions 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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# Introduction

From public health crises to affordable and fair housing, mayors have demonstrated their capacity to lead on critical issues that extend beyond city limits. In 2019, it’s becoming increasingly apparent that cities, towns and villages have a greater role to play in the national dialogue.

Much like the president’s State of the Union address, each year, mayors across the nation detail the state of America’s cities, towns and villages. The state of the city speech is a mayor’s most visible and direct way to communicate significant achievements, as well as goals and major policy directions for the future.

Now in its sixth year, the National League of Cities’ annual State of the Cities report provides an in-depth analysis of these speeches. This content analysis of 153 speeches delivered between January and April 2019 is based on parts of mayors’ speeches that articulate specific plans, goals and impacts related to projects, programs and city departments. Speeches are coded as having significantly covered a major topic if the word count for that topic constitutes at least 10 percent of the speech. The analysis reveals that:

**1** Economic development is the most-covered major policy issue. The issue has garnered the top spot for the past six years, with an even more substantial percent of mayors dedicating a significant portion of their speeches to the issue in 2019 (74 percent) compared with 2018 (58 percent).

**2** Health and human services climbed three spots this year, overtaking budgets, housing and public safety. This year 46 percent of mayors discussed the issue at length, compared to only 34 percent last year. Much of this movement is due to an increased focus on expanding parks and recreation-related facilities and activities.

**3** Energy and environment also rose in importance this year, with 41 percent of mayors discussing the issue compared to only 25 percent last year. Mayors introduced concrete plans for enhancing neighborhood vitality through expanded tree coverage and improved city landscapes.

**4** Although housing dropped in the rankings, a similar percent of mayors provided significant coverage of housing in their speeches in 2019 (38 percent) compared with 2018 (39 percent). In particular, mayors provided a new focus on land and housing trusts, eviction assistance and fair housing ordinances.

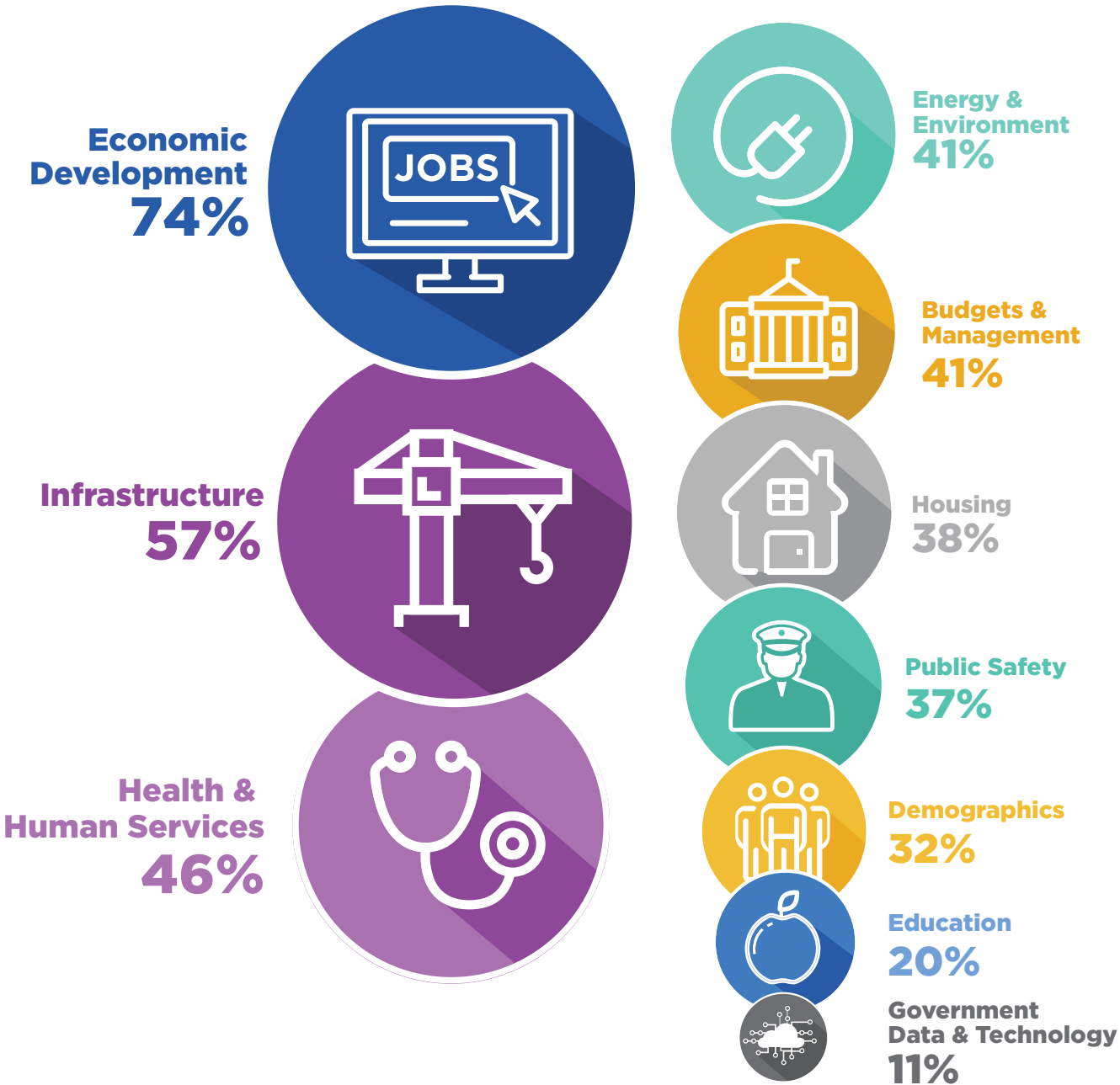
The remainder of the report details trends, emerging issues and priorities of mayors in cities across the nation. While bread and butter issues like economic development, infrastructure and budgets remain top priorities for mayors, we are also seeing major movement and emerging local leadership on larger-scale issues related to health and human services and energy and environment. In these contexts, mayors are using their local authority to make lasting impacts on national and global issues.

*The core function of City government is to provide quality of life, basic services, public safety, police and fire; Recreational opportunities for our citizens, young and old; water and sewer; streets and drainage. To be SUCCESSFUL it takes on-going, smart planning, 5-, 10-, 20- year plans that will yield development that creates jobs and be a credit to our city.*

**Mayor Andrew “FoFo” Gilich**  
Biloxi, Miss.

# Top 10 Issues

By percent of speeches that significantly covers each topic.\*



\*Significant = 10 percent of speech devoted to topic



# What Are Mayors Talking About?

The most interesting trend of 2019 is that the health and human services topic jumped three places. While this jump was primarily due to an increased focus on parks and recreation services for residents (over 63 percent in 2019 compared to only 28 percent in 2017), a few other subtopics have become more prevalent. For example, references to mental health increased significantly, with approximately 20 percent of mayors discussing the issue in 2019, compared with only four percent in 2018. More and more cities are experiencing a large call volume for mental health-related issues, and as a result, are developing crisis intervention programs across the nation.

While opioids dropped a few places in relation to other health and human services subtopics, approximately 11 percent of mayors are still focused on highlighting its devastating social impacts and uplifting harm reduction as the leading strategy to combat the problem. While this figure is the same as in 2018, it is significantly lower than in 2017, when over 18 percent of mayors discussed the issue. This drop is encouraging, as mayors are increasingly focusing on solutions to reduce drug overdose and death.

*I want a community that does more to provide holistic, integrated mental health services to address the mental health crisis in this community, particularly among our young people.*

**Mayor Steve H. Hagerty**  
Evanston, Ill.

As in prior years, economic development was the most-covered topic for mayors, and downtown development remains at the top. Downtown development even overtook police and roads, streets and signs for the number two most-covered subtopic. It also ranked as one of the top three subtopics in the Midwest, Northeast and West regions and is ranked number one among cities with a population size of 100,000-299,999. It appeared in 56 percent of mayoral speeches, up from 18 percent in 2016. In recent years, cities, towns and villages are overwhelmingly turning to strategies focused on creating public spaces that promote quality of life as core parts of their economic development plans, and this often includes downtown development.

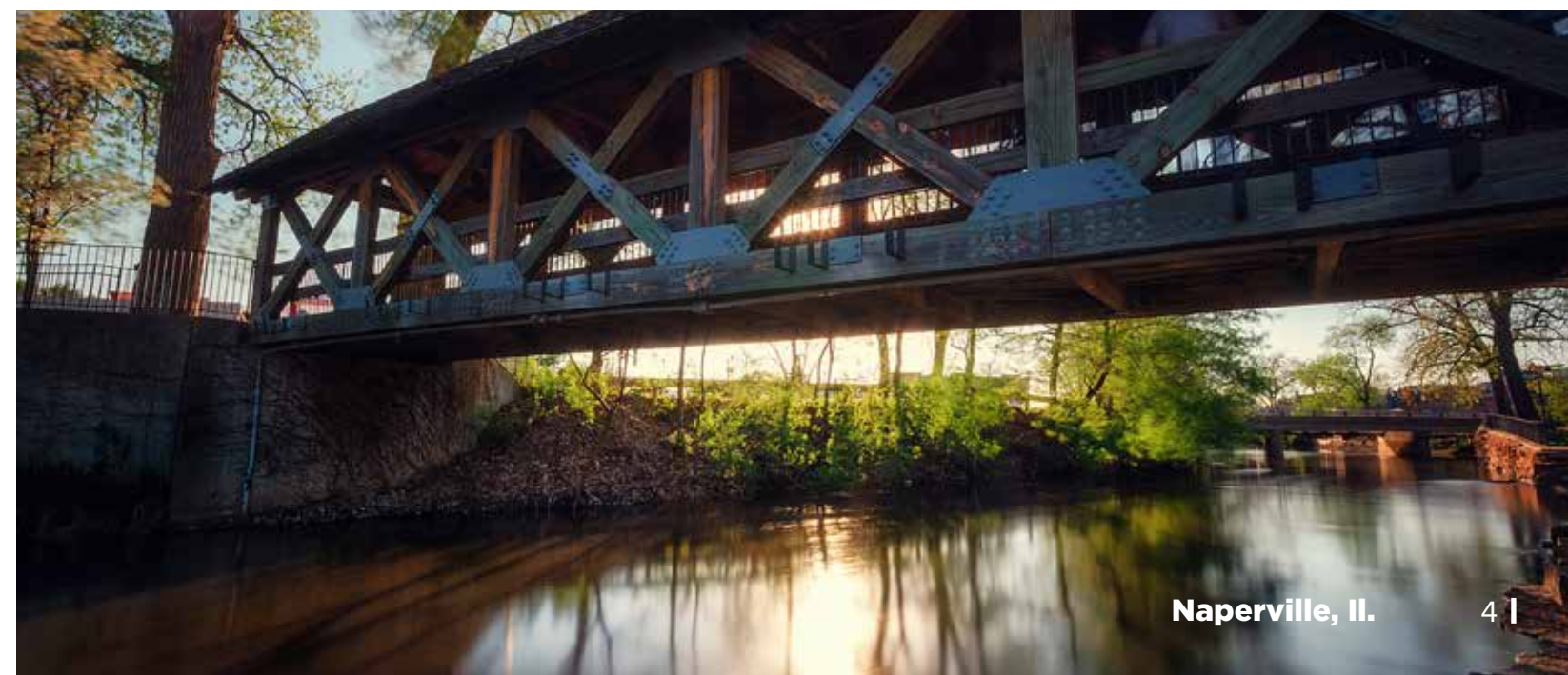
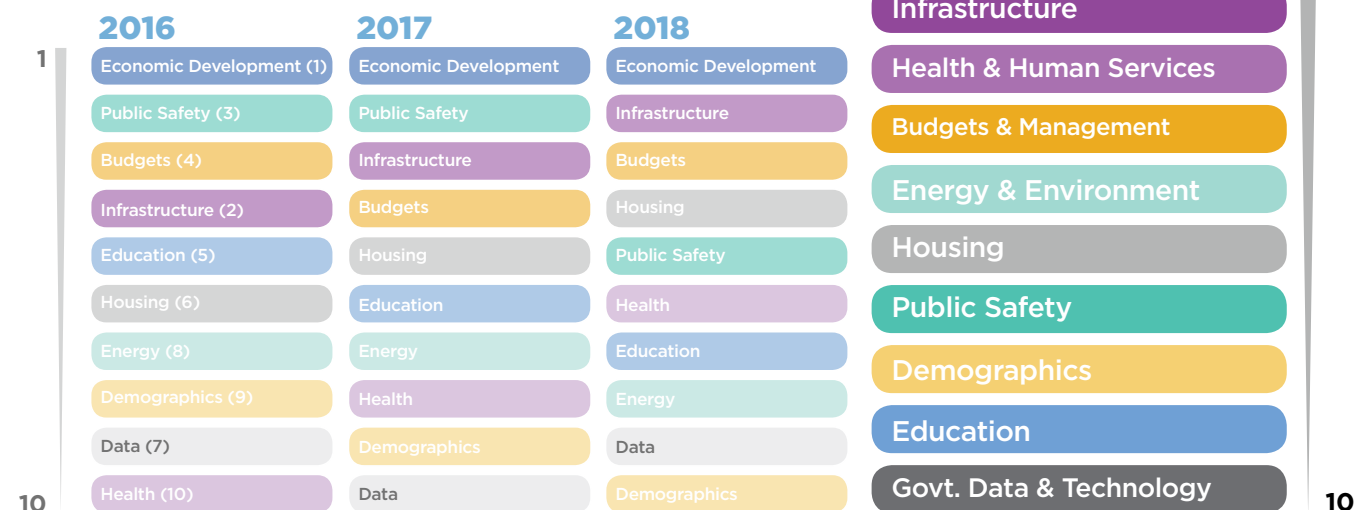
*In 2019, New Rochelle is a growing city – growing faster than almost any other in New York State – with the most ambitious downtown development plan in the entire Hudson Valley, a plan that is attracting unprecedented investment, bringing life and energy to our city’s center, from the street-front to the skyline.*

**Mayor Noah Bramson**  
New Rochelle, N.Y.

This year, arts and culture also continued to be a popular theme within economic development, with three in 10 mayors discussing it. While this figure is the same as in 2018, we have noticed a growing trend over time. In fact, in 2016, only 21 percent of mayors mentioned arts and culture in their speeches.

## Top 10 issues over the last four years

Number in parentheses indicates topic ranking in 2015, not pictured here.



Infrastructure was the second most-covered topic again this year. Like last year, nearly 60 percent of mayors discussed infrastructure issues at length, up from 48 percent in 2017 and 31 percent in 2016. Like last year, roads, streets and signs, as well as water, sewer and waste were the most talked about infrastructure sub-topics. Similar to last year, across regions and population categories, roads, streets and signs held steady as a top five subtopic.

These fundamental programs come with a price, and mayors are keenly aware of their fiscal limitations. Concerns about infrastructure funding rose in importance this year, with approximately 33 percent of mayors discussing the need to work with federal partners to rebuild and reimagine our nation's streets, bridges and tunnels (about a 10 percent increase from both 2018 and 2017). Mayors in the Midwest and South, as well as those in cities with fewer than 50,000 residents prioritized infrastructure funding, in particular. We are increasingly seeing more cities looking to state and federal partners for aid, and while mayors are hopeful, they admit it has been a long and difficult road.



*Having a complete streets plan recognizes that our streets belong to everyone—pedestrians and cyclists as well as motorists—and so [it] enhances safety and improves the aesthetic appeal and quality of life in our neighborhoods.*

**Mayor Paul Dyster**  
Niagara Falls, N.Y.

While budgets and management fell one place this year (41 percent of mayors discussed the issue in 2019 compared to 49 percent in 2018), it was still a popular topic. As global issues ranging from environmental regulation to firearm use and minimum wage continue to be of vital concern to residents at the local level, intergovernmental relations has cemented its place as the top subtopic among budget and management issues.

Additionally, property tax, budget transparency, and leadership and governance all held their places in 2019. Interestingly, mayors have focused less and less on pensions over the last four years. In fact, 2017 was the most popular year for the subtopic, as approximately 18 percent of mayors discussed it. In 2019, only six percent of mayors discussed it, very similar to 2016. While this appears to be a drop-off, we are seeing the emergence of more state-specific trends. For example, mayors in Illinois and California continue to shed light on the challenges their cities face with the pension funding gap, rising long-term pension costs and growing tensions between the states and the municipalities. These fiscal challenges are perhaps why only one percent of mayors discussed a budget surplus in 2019, whereas 11 percent discussed it in 2016.

However, within budgets, mentions for local government workforces gained in popularity. This year, over 10 percent of mayors discussed how their communities will take more proactive roles in hiring talented workers, as well as retaining current government employees by improving onboarding processes for new hires and offering professional development opportunities such as workforce agreements, leadership development programs and on-the-job trainings.

Like budgets and management, energy and environment issues also appeared in 41 percent of mayoral speeches. Once in the bottom five, the topic jumped three places this year. Much of that movement is due to more mayors providing concrete plans and goals to expand tree coverage and improve city landscapes in their neighborhoods. Environmental sustainability is a major concern, and mayors have been increasingly focusing their speeches on clean and solar energy. In 2019, approximately 12 percent of speeches discussed solar power, compared to only five percent in 2016. More mayors are promoting environmental health by reducing air pollution in their cities, with 10 percent of mayors discussing the issue in 2019 compared with only three percent in 2016.



*Reaching these goals is critical, not only to our region's air quality, but to help stave off the effects of climate change which put at risk our water, forests, outdoor tourism, and the brave members of the Salt Lake City Fire Department.*

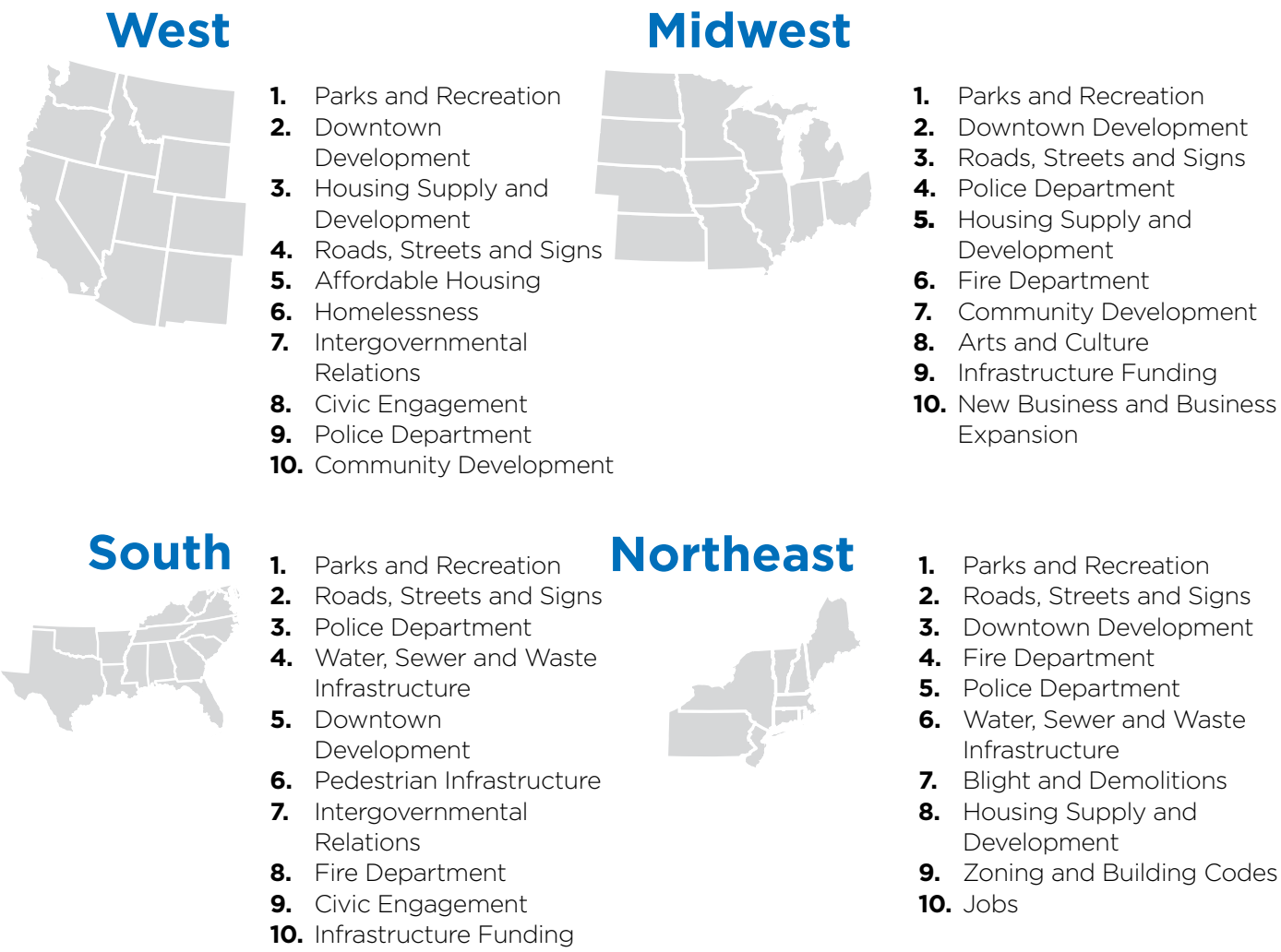
**Mayor Jackie Biskupski**  
Salt Lake City, Utah



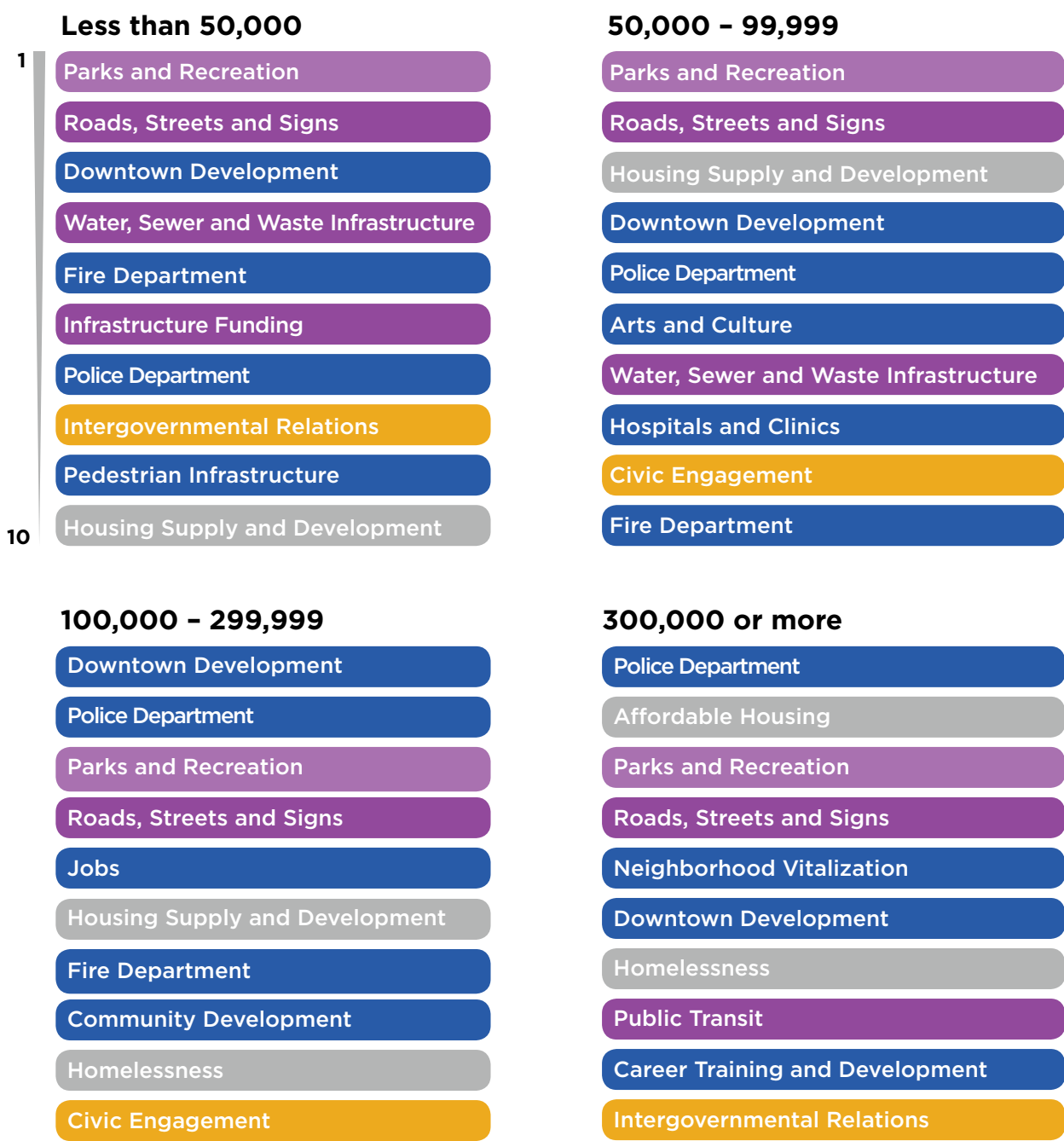
Niagara Falls, N.Y.



Top subtopics by region



Top subtopics by population









Cities are investing in the creation of jobs and vibrant downtowns not only to encourage economic development and growth, but also to address community needs.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

This year, cities focused on downtown development with specific plans to revitalize vacant properties, utilize development initiatives through private investments and implement mixed-use developments to promote tourism and local business growth. In Poughkeepsie, New York, Mayor Rob Rolison highlighted the successful transformation of the city’s long-vacant “40 Cannon Street” in the heart of downtown to an “anchor on the block, with apartments, a brewery and wine-bar, a coffee shop and an art gallery.” The city of Kingston, New York, plans to continue investing in the Kingstonian, a significant mixed-use project that will provide retail stores, restaurants, living space, a hotel and public parking spaces. Larger cities such as Anaheim, California; Columbus, Ohio; and Scottsdale, Arizona have plans to expand or build stadiums and arenas for their sports teams, while Memphis, Tennessee has utilized its funds to invest in the city’s neighborhoods.

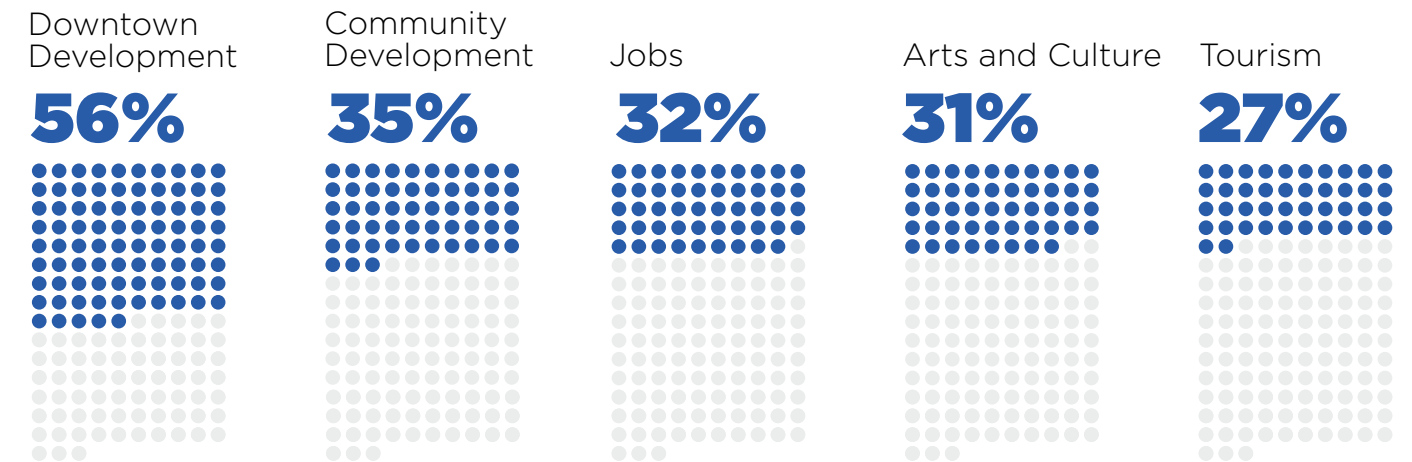
JOBS

Several cities also highlighted their investment in creating permanent jobs for local residents not only as a way to improve the economic outlook, but also to increase opportunities for youth and communities of color. In Chesapeake, Virginia, Mayor Richard “Rick” West helped secure investment from ForKids, a service provider for families experiencing homelessness. A leader in helping families in crisis, ForKids is expected to bring jobs to support homeless and unemployed families and provide over \$12 million in capital investment to the city. “This project, more than any other in recent memory, shows the power of partnership as the community, the city, and the organization came together to make it happen,” said Mayor West. And in Salt Lake City, Utah, Mayor Jackie Biskupski showcased one woman’s objective to turn an obstacle-ridden women’s resource center into an opportunity to create a job training program for “the women who will rebuild their lives at the center.”

74%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of economic development issues.

TOP 5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBTOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.



We know that one of the immediate ways to address poverty, our economy, to stabilize families and even reduce crime is to make sure people have access to good paying jobs.

Mayor Ras Baraka  
Newark, N.J.





Mayors shared technology-driven solutions for calming traffic and bolstering pedestrian infrastructure so that residents will have better access to amenities and enjoy improved safety among drivers and walkers.

ROADS, STREETS AND SIGNS

This year, mayors shared new strategies to keep residents moving safely and efficiently in their cities. Strategies like traffic calming, or the slowing of traffic by building speed bumps or other obstructions, as well as flow improvements stood out. In Kettering, Ohio, Mayor Don Patterson supported a project to analyze traffic patterns in preparation for significant improvements to a county road. “The project will add a lane of traffic in each direction in order to ease daily vehicle flow,” said the mayor. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Mayor Sharon Weston Broome is supporting upgraded and better synchronized traffic signals across the parish to improve traffic movement, save time and money and improve safety. And in Clarksville, Tennessee, new Mayor Joe Pitts has been working with the street department to design a major intersection improvement that will tackle severe traffic backups by widening roads and improving traffic signals and sidewalks.

PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

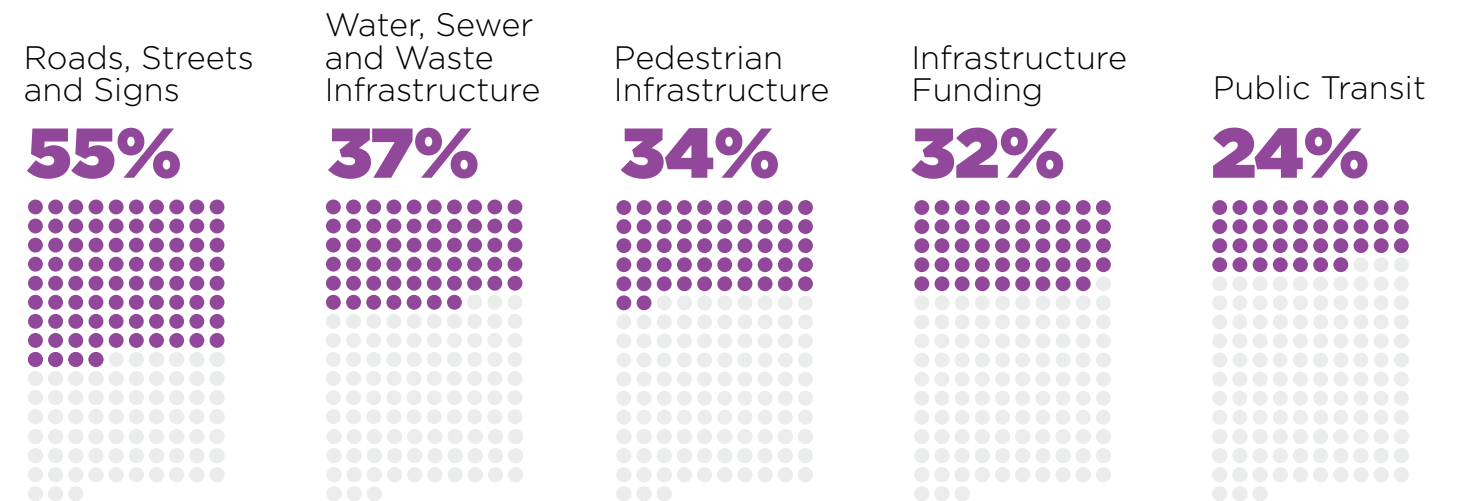
Cities are improving their pedestrian bridges, walkways and boardwalks for accessibility and safety. In Everett, Washington, Mayor Cassie Franklin is beginning a project to transform the city’s downtown into a pedestrian-friendly corridor with shelters and benches. Additionally, the city is expected to open a new pedestrian bridge that will not only carry stormwater off the bluff, but “will give us a new way to access our incredible waterfront,” said the mayor.

Many cities are focused on using technology to create safer streets for all users. Mayor Lily Mei from Fremont, California will be installing more traffic safety devices and enhancing crosswalks to help pedestrians cross busy streets. Similarly, the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan has focused on safety as it sets new pedestrian crosswalk standards as part of an effort to lower the city’s higher-than-state-average rate of pedestrian-involved crashes with motor vehicles.

57%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of infrastructure issues.

TOP 5 INFRASTRUCTURE SUBTOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.



Infrastructure improvements are often not all that visible to the general public. They don’t typically garner a great deal of attention – though their failure certainly does. Nonetheless, they are essential to preserve our assets and ensure the continued reliability of services and quality of life to our residents.

Mayor Patrick Madden  
Troy, N.Y.

# Health & Human Services

A growing number of calls to emergency service providers involve a mental health component, and cities are meeting the need by developing crisis intervention and diversion programs to prevent vulnerable individuals from falling into the criminal justice system.

## MENTAL HEALTH

With the untimely deaths of several high-profile television personalities, as well as military veterans, cities are focused on improving mental health outcomes for at-risk citizens. In Glendale, Arizona, Mayor Jerry Weiers highlighted an opportunity for the local rose garden to serve as a healing place for veterans, allowing them to learn a new skill while providing a therapeutic outlet for those with post-traumatic stress disorder, in particular. In Henderson, Nevada, Mayor Debra March is working with the media to allow the city to have billboards, radio and TV spots to “present words that rescue people from themselves.” The city is also developing crisis intervention training to better prepare officers for dealing with citizens who might be suffering from mental illness.

Cities are focused not only on improving mental health but also on diverting individuals experiencing mental health conditions from the criminal justice system toward community mental health treatment. In Iowa City, Iowa, Mayor Jim Throgmorton is facilitating the development of a new behavioral health access center for “people in crisis rather than have them treated roughly and then taken to a hospital emergency ward or the county jail.”

## OPIOIDS

Although the epidemic has been a key issue in cities and towns for several decades, 2018 mayoral addresses revealed a more explicit focus on the responses cities are implementing to address this public health crisis, and 2019 was no different. For example, the city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania added the overdose-reversing drug, naloxone, to its fire department's engines, resulting in "15 lives saved by our firefighters while waiting for the arrival of EMS to a scene," said Mayor Robert Donchez. And in Burlington, Vermont, Mayor Miro Weinberger is hiring social workers for the city's police department to screen arrestees for addictions and offer immediate access to treatment to those who screen positive before they are released.

46%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of health and human services issues.

## TOP 5

## HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES SUBTOPICS



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.*



*I want to start with the battle against opioid addiction. It is literally a matter of life and death, and it affects everyone...all demographics. It touches our businesses, schools, churches, families...everyone. It's detrimental to our labor force, diverts funding from much needed initiatives, and has stolen the future from many talented Lexingtonians.*

**Mayor Linda Gorton**  
Lexington, Ky.



# Budgets & Management

Cities are engaging with the public on budgetary practices, continuing to manage their relationships with state and local governments and rebuilding their reserves to become more fiscally responsible.

## INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

When it comes to budgeting for expenses, infrastructure improvements were at the fore of mayoral addresses this year, and some cities are hopeful they can push state and federal governments to action. “We are working together closely because we believe OKC and Tulsa face many of the same challenges and we will be more successful if we work together and support one another, rather than compete as rivals,” said Mayor David Holt, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In Ithaca, New York, Mayor Svante Myrick is working with associations such as the New York Conference of Mayors to increase state aid for municipalities, increase highway funding to fill potholes so that “cities like ours that are disproportionately impacted by tax-exempt non-profits would get a [fairer] deal,” said the mayor.

## RESERVES AND RAINY DAY FUNDS

Cities are not only balancing their budgets but also setting monies aside to fund future capital investments and rebuild their reserves. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, Mayor Dan Rivera boasted reserves of \$15.3 million, the largest in the city's history. And in Long Beach, California, Mayor Robert Garcia is calling on his city council to increase reserves to \$75 million, acknowledging that it "will take a few years, but is an important new goal for us...to ensure we are prepared to meet the challenges of the future."

## PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Cities want the community involved in their budgetary decision-making to ensure equitable outcomes for all. In Durham, North Carolina, Mayor Steve Schewel is working with the city council, staff and volunteer budget delegates to vet projects — including bus shelters, crosswalks, tiny homes and park improvements — chosen directly by the residents and put them before the voters. In Irvine, California, Mayor Don Wagner wants to inform his citizens about a new budget cycle and get input on that process through a series of public meetings. Finally, in Lansing, Michigan, Mayor Andy Schor is holding a series of participatory budget nights focused on economic development, neighborhoods, infrastructure and public safety.

## TOP 5

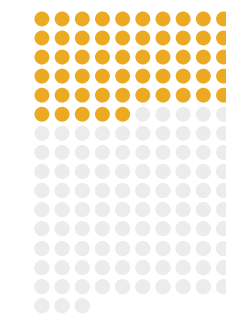
### BUDGETS & MANAGEMENT SUBTOPICS

41%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of budgets and management issues.

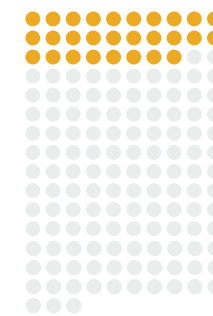
## Intergovernmental Relations

# 36%



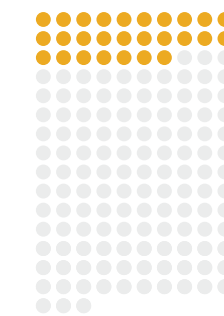
## Property Tax

**18%**



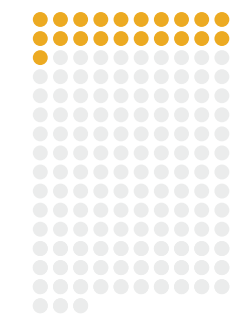
## Budget Transparency and Planning

18%



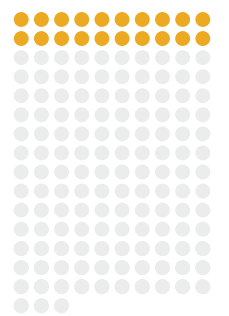
## Leadership and Governance

**14%**



## Intergovernmental Aid

13%



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.*



*In my first year as Mayor, one of my top priorities was the completion and passage of the City of Tacoma's 2019-2020 biennial budget – A budget that guides the way the City aligns its resources to support Council priorities and best meets our community's needs.*

**Mayor Victoria Woodards**  
Tacoma, Wash.



Cities are continuing to promote sustainability by planting trees to improve air quality and upgrading waste management systems to reduce waste and decrease contamination among recyclables.

INCREASING TREE CANOPY

Cities are supporting urban forest programs focused on equity, environmental justice and public safety, and making the entire community more livable. In Milwaukie, Oregon, Mayor Mark Gamba is working with the tree board to amend the city’s tree code to help protect trees from being clear cut for development. In Florida, the cities of West Palm Beach and Winter Park are focusing their efforts on increasing tree canopy coverage, which can provide shade for residents and help mitigate increased urban temperatures. In West Palm Beach, the city is balancing two sustainable practices that are sometimes in conflict with one another - solar energy and trees. The city was awarded “SolSmart Gold” by the Department of Energy’s SolSmart program for advancing solar energy growth, particularly for residential rooftop solar, and it is now making a considerable investment on shade trees to make the city more walkable.

TRASH SERVICE AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

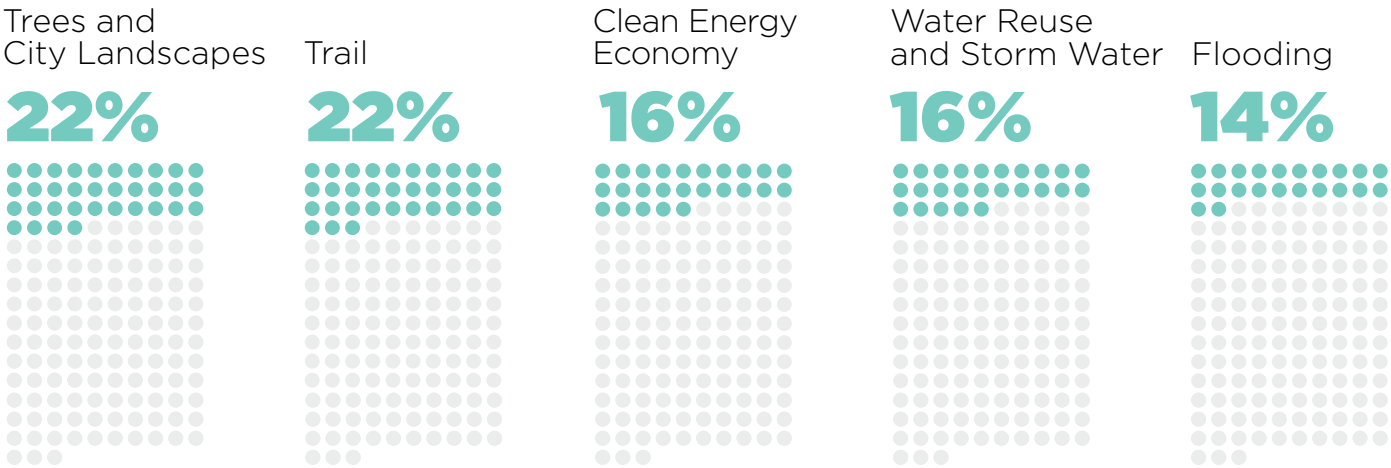
While recycling has blossomed into a global industry, residents continue to be confused by inconsistent recycling standards, and as a result, continue to generate more and more waste. Carson City, Nevada aims to reduce costs to both commercial and residential customers with curbside single-stream recycling and green waste pickup. Similarly, the city of Opelika, Alabama is updating its recycling convenience centers in order to decrease contamination caused by either incorrect items being put into the system or correct items being prepared the wrong way. In Mukilteo, Washington, Mayor Jennifer Gregerson is implementing one-bin recycling and easier composting, as well as a drop site for garbage in case service is canceled due to bad weather. “This most basic service keeps our community clean and protects public health,” said the mayor.

Some cities are taking waste management one step further by converting compost to energy. In Bloomington, Indiana, Mayor John Hamilton is helping turn local compostable organic material into compressed natural gas, with the intention of saving landfills, reducing methane release and creating a local fuel source to power public vehicles.

41%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of energy and environment issues.

TOP 5  
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT SUBTOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.



“  
We are laying the foundation to transform the way we power municipal operations through renewable energy. Our Division of Power has committed to purchase at least 50% renewable energy to power city facilities by 2020.  
Mayor Andrew Ginther  
Columbus, Ohio



22 |



Local leaders are moving toward using pre-arrest diversion as an effective public safety strategy, while also continuing to bolster their law enforcement workforces and strengthen police and community relations.

DIVERSION

A recent trend among cities is to divert people from the criminal system toward community-based services to increase public safety more effectively than through older approaches focused on punishment. “A skilled professional with a background that can partner with law enforcement to provide the type of diversion and support that many need, more than a trip to the jail, is a huge benefit to those individuals impacted and to those communities,” said Mayor Jennifer Gregerson, Mukilteo, Washington. Several medium and large cities that we studied this year discussed diversion. For example, in St. Paul, Minnesota, the city attorney’s office launched the Neighborhood Justice Program “as an alternative to criminal prosecution for non-violent, first-time offenders.” And in Everett, Washington, Mayor Cassie Franklin highlighted a new diversion center that provides support for individuals struggling with homelessness, addiction and mental illness.

POLICE STAFFING

In more traditional “tough on crime” approaches, cities have been bolstering their police departments since the 1990s. However, there has been an increased focus on diversity among new law enforcement officers. In Elk Grove, California, Mayor Steve Ly is supporting the hiring of not just new officers but also those who reflect the community. “The Elk Grove Police Department is hiring more officers to preserve and protect our community and we are doing more than ever before to recruit new and lateral officers who reflect the diversity of Elk Grove,” said the mayor. Similarly, the city of Hartford, Connecticut hired over 100 police officers, half of whom are black or Hispanic.

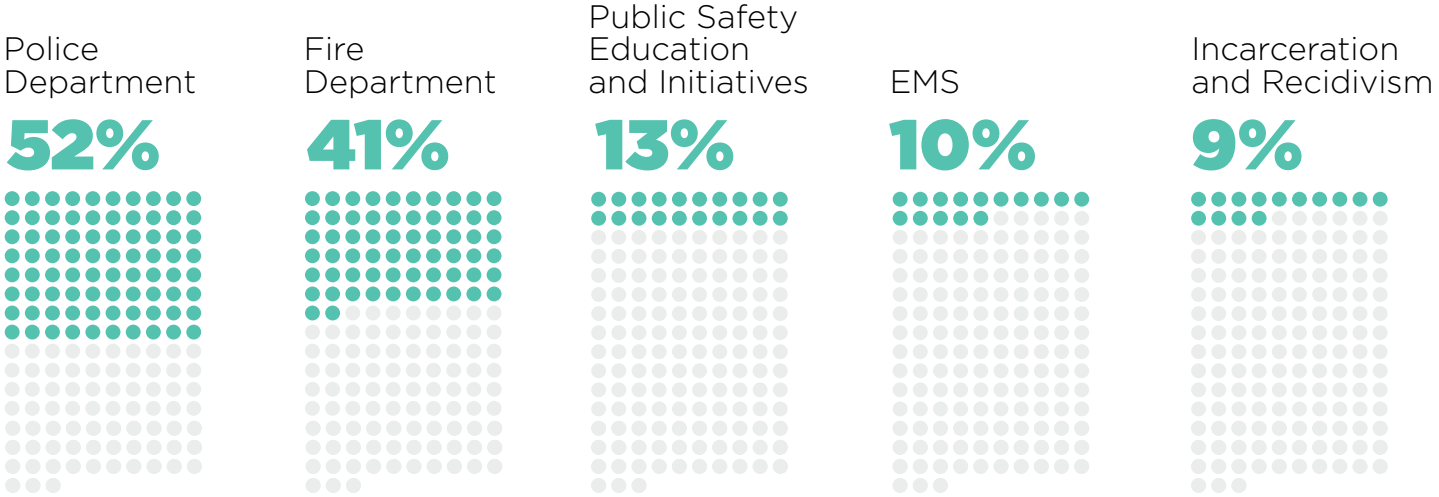
POLICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Just as residents rely on police and fire departments to protect and serve their communities, law enforcement officials equally rely on the community for support and cooperation. Cities across the nation are continuing their efforts to make this a harmonious relationship. In Buffalo, New York, residents will have the opportunity to graduate from a program called “Police and Community Together,” which is intended to build lasting relationships between the two groups. And in Columbus, Ohio, residents of the community are charged with reviewing and recommending best practices to ensure law enforcement officials have “the best training, policies and procedures to protect and serve our entire community,” said Mayor Andrew Ginther.

37%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of public safety issues.

TOP 5 PUBLIC SAFETY SUBTOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.

**Note:**  
**Police Department** includes Officer Training, Conduct, Station, Transparency and Efficiency, Technology and Equipment, Community Relations, Data, and Staffing; and  
**Fire Department** includes Station, Technology and Equipment, Training, and Staffing



“Providing for public safety is perhaps the most important function of any city government. Looking forward, we need to focus on retaining our current police department staff and we have a clear need to put more police officers on the streets.”

**Mayor Bruce Fraley**  
Berea, Ky.



# Demographics

Cities are advancing racial and economic equity by making concerted efforts to include the stories of, and create accessible amenities for, all their people. In addition, cities are preparing for Census 2020 to ensure every resident is counted for.

## RACIAL EQUITY

In an effort to reduce racial inequities, Iowa City, Iowa, has created a \$75,000 Social Justice and Racial Equity Grants Program and has developed “Racial Equity Toolkits to assess the racial equity of various City programs.” In St. Paul, the city has created new programs to promote a safer and more welcoming city for all. “Our traditional public safety toolbox isn’t designed to make us ALL feel safe, but to draw a circle and protect those inside from the others, at all costs. That explains why some of us want fewer police while others demand more — where you live in relation to that circle defines your reality and shapes your perspective.” In an effort to encourage equity, Tacoma, Washington has been developing new relationships with the leaders of the Puyallup Nation “in honor of the fact that [the] city is on their ancestral lands,” including displaying the Puyallup Nation’s flag in council chambers, hosting the first-ever joint meeting between the two governments and building joint long-range planning efforts for the Tacoma Tideflats.

**CENSUS 2020**

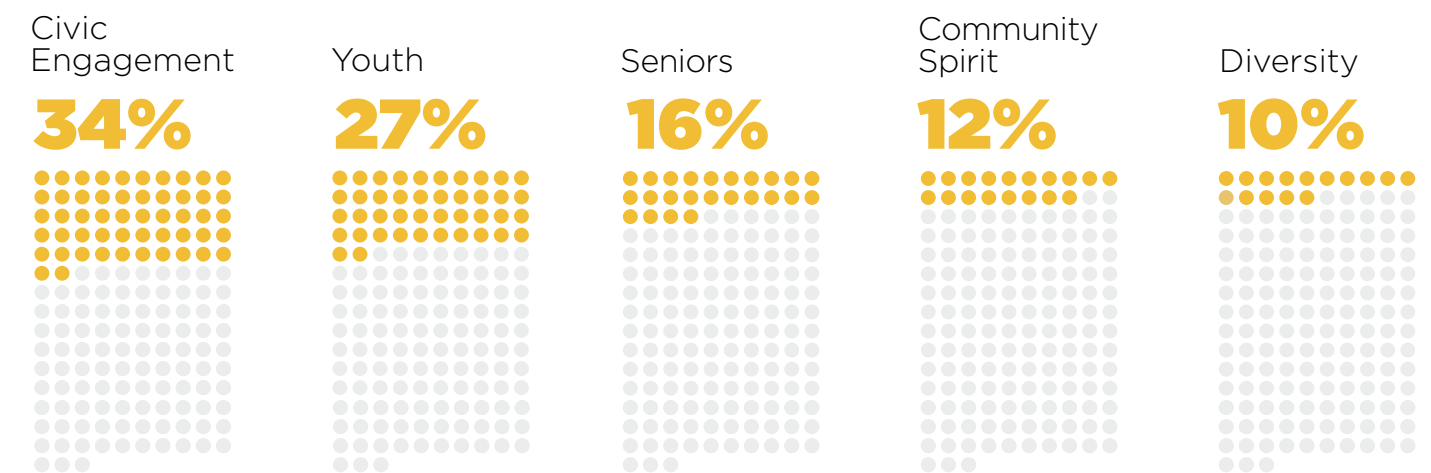
Cities are preparing for the 2020 Census by engaging with the public about its importance and utilizing resources to ensure every resident in the community will be counted. Of the cities that addressed the 2020 Census, many, such as Buffalo, New York; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Jamestown, New York; and Springdale, Arkansas have plans to establish a Complete Count Committee to provide further outreach and to increase accurate representation of the city. In Boston, Massachusetts, Mayor Marty Walsh has appointed a Census Liaison to not only “make sure every resident of Boston is counted,” but to also work with different levels of government to guarantee the city’s representation and federal funding. Both Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Seattle, Washington are collaborating with grassroots-level community-based organizations in an effort to count every resident.

## TOP 5

### DEMOGRAPHICS SUBTOPICS



of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of demographics issues.



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.*



*Eliminating economic and racial inequities leads to positive outcomes including better educational achievement, improved public health, and reduced violence.*

**Mayor Tom Barrett**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



Cities are not only committed to providing youth with access to a high-quality education, but also to supporting other residents by utilizing their educational institutions to develop community initiatives.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND UNIVERSITY

Many large cities are focused on promoting opportunities for the nation’s youngest student. For example, Columbus, Ohio is collaborating with Columbus City Schools and the Boys and Girls Club to build a new facility that “will provide a high-quality early learning education to more than 200 children and crucial programs and services for their families,” said Mayor Andrew Ginther. And Long Beach, California, recently opened the new Educare Center, which is now the largest pre-K and early childhood center in the city. Plainfield, New Jersey has partnered with regional colleges to offer local classes that “can teach our youth programming and app-building skills that can be used as a vehicle to create self-employment opportunities. Ultimately, this will open up more options for our youth and all residents,” said Mayor Adrian Mapp.

Cities are also continuing to develop their universities as economic engines of the future through private investment opportunities, new jobs and career training programs. In Jamestown, New York, Mayor Sam Teresi is specifically interested in expanding the city’s business and community colleges. “We, as a city government, must help advance efforts ... to provide on-site, higher educational degree opportunities ... not only for residents of our immediate area, but also for the hundreds or even thousands of bright minds that are willing to journey here and become new, contributing members of our great community.”

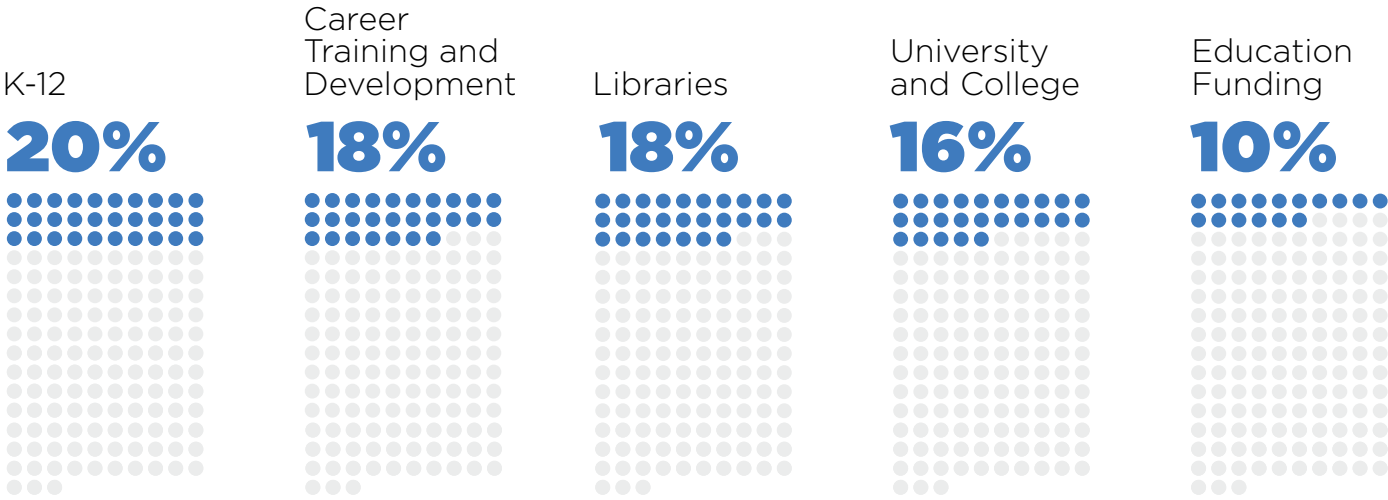
LIBRARIES

As the world becomes more digital, libraries remain essential, and cities are continuing their efforts to renovate and rebuild in order to serve the public. “Knowing that libraries cultivate the genius in young minds, we are going to equip every Virginia Beach City Public Schools student with a Virginia Beach Public Library account, via their school I.D. cards,” said Mayor Bobby Dyer, Virginia Beach, Virginia. The city of Wylie, Texas is utilizing libraries to serve as community hubs and to provide equitable economic opportunities for its residents. The city’s mayor, Eric Hogue, is especially focused on families, with a new initiative to transform the city’s public library into a “developmentally appropriate early learning environment for very young children, their parents and caregivers.”

20%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of education issues.

TOP 5 EDUCATION SUBTOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.

**Note:** K-12 includes K-12, New Schools and Facilities, and Teacher Training and Professional Development



“  
And as an educator, I know the best economic development and anti-poverty tool is access to a quality education.

Mayor Robert Garcia  
Long Beach, Calif.





Cities are streamlining processes and communications in city hall and making data-driven solutions a priority for residents.

GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Cities are improving communications between departments, with the ultimate goal of residents getting information more quickly. For Elizabeth, New Jersey, that starts with the city website. “Our new website is under development and will streamline operations and expand services [such as] increased communication tools, supporting electronic access to public services and enhancing e-government transactions,” said Mayor J. Christian Bollwage. For Greenwood, Indiana, that means digitizing employee time reporting to improve efficiency for the city’s finance department and using new technologies to minimize project expenses for its stormwater department.

Cities are also using technology to fix the ever-problematic pothole. Memphis, Tennessee is partnering with a technology company to pilot machine learning that would allow the city to scan streets for potholes and fill them more quickly. “This would involve a camera on a city vehicle, probably a garbage truck, that would detect potholes and future potholes, then automatically generate a report for us to fill it,” said Mayor Jim Strickland. Additionally, cities are using new applications to improve their mobility systems.

SMART CITIES

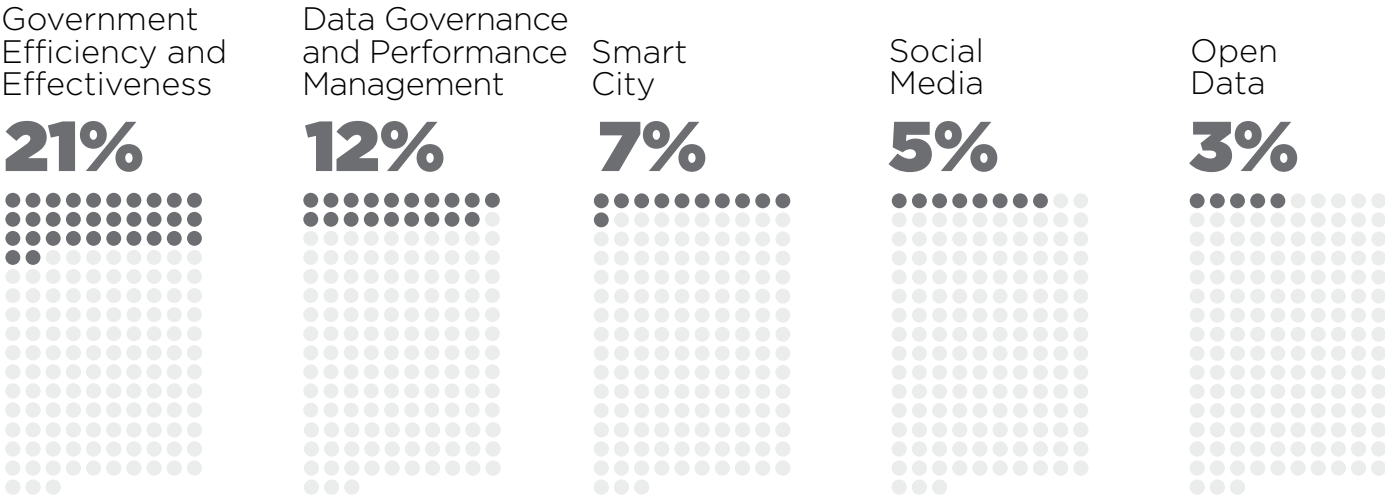
Cities are using technology not just to improve interdepartmental communications but also their community at large — in other words, cities are becoming “smarter” by using electronic sensors to collect data. In Palm Coast, Florida, Mayor Milissa Holland is using technology to “improve people’s lives and to attract more high-tech businesses to our city.” And in Plainfield, New Jersey, Mayor Adrian Mapp is working to make the city a smart city that promotes a greener lifestyle, “doing things more efficiently to reduce our carbon footprint and working with developers to offer incentives to residents to reduce the number of vehicles in a household.”

11%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of government data and technology issues.

## TOP 5

### GOVT. DATA & TECHNOLOGY SUBTOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 153 speeches in the sample. For a ranking of all 185 subtopics, see the Appendix.



“I want the city — council and staff — to make effective use of online survey tools to inform the choices before council. More agile, timely, and accessible digital outreach will help the community be directly engaged in our decisions.

Mayor Lucy Vinis  
Eugene, Ore.





# Methodology

The 2019 report is based on a content analysis of 153 mayoral speeches delivered between January and April 2019 and includes cities across population sizes and geographic regions. In particular, the speeches were obtained from cities in four population categories (less than 50,000; 50-99,999; 100-299,999; 300,000 or more) and four geographic regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). The report presents both major topics and more nuanced subtopics. This year we coded 185 detailed subtopics, such as Census 2020 or fair housing (see the Appendix for the full list of subtopics), which provide additional detail and nuance. In comparison, last year we coded 182 detailed subtopics.

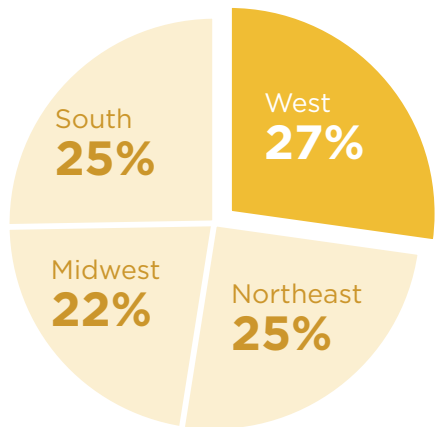
Each subtopic is assigned to one of 10 major topics – economic development, infrastructure, budgets and management, housing, public safety, health and human services, education, energy and environment, government data and technology, and demographics. Speeches are coded as having covered a major topic if the word count for subtopics within that major topic constitutes at least 10 percent of the speech (this minimum threshold measures the extent to which a mayor gave significant coverage of a topic and is calculated based on the average portion of the speech dedicated to a given topic).

We code words in a speech only if a mayor indicated a specific plan, goal or impact for 2019 and/or the future (where a plan is indicated by a reference to money spent on, roadmap to, or timeline of, a project; a goal is indicated by reference to what a mayor hopes for the future; and an impact is indicated by a reference to a direction, suggestion or action for the future). Past accomplishments alone are no longer coded as either topics or subtopics.

Mayors this year discussed between one and 55 subtopics within their speeches, with an average of 21 subtopics per speech. In comparison, mayors last year discussed between two and 43 subtopics within their speeches, with an average of 17 subtopics per speech.

## Sample breakdown by region

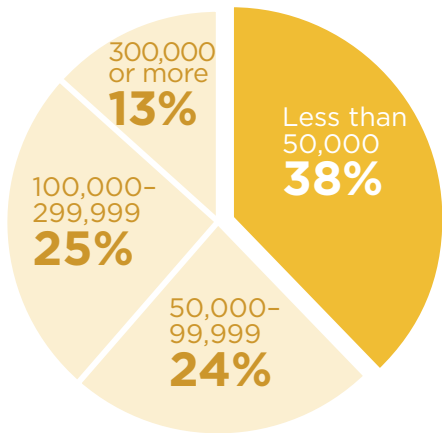
153 Total Speeches



May not add to 100% due to rounding

## Sample breakdown by population

153 Total Speeches







Coverage by Subtopics

Subtopic	Number of Speeches	Percentage	Major Topic
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	97	63%	Health & Human Services
<b>Downtown Development</b>	85	56%	Economic Development
<b>Roads, Streets and Signs</b>	84	55%	Infrastructure
<b>Police Department</b>	80	52%	Public Safety
<b>Housing Supply and Development</b>	69	45%	Housing
<b>Fire Department</b>	62	41%	Public Safety
<b>Water, Sewer and Waste Infrastructure</b>	57	37%	Infrastructure
<b>Intergovernmental Relations</b>	55	36%	Budgets & Management
<b>Community Development</b>	53	35%	Economic Development
<b>Civic Engagement</b>	52	34%	Demographics
<b>Pedestrian Infrastructure</b>	52	34%	Infrastructure
<b>Affordable Housing</b>	49	32%	Housing
<b>Infrastructure Funding</b>	49	32%	Infrastructure
<b>Jobs</b>	49	32%	Economic Development
<b>Arts and Culture</b>	48	31%	Economic Development
<b>Youth</b>	42	27%	Demographics
<b>Tourism</b>	42	27%	Economic Development
<b>Brick and Mortar and Physical Retail</b>	38	25%	Economic Development
<b>Public Transit</b>	37	24%	Infrastructure
<b>Arena and Convention Center</b>	37	24%	Economic Development
<b>Neighborhood Vitalization</b>	36	24%	Economic Development
<b>Homelessness</b>	36	24%	Housing
<b>Blight and Demolitions</b>	36	24%	Housing
<b>Trees and City Landscapes</b>	34	22%	Energy & Environment
<b>Trail</b>	33	22%	Energy & Environment
Government Efficiency and Effectiveness	32	21%	Government Data & Technology
Zoning and Building Codes	32	21%	Housing
Hospitals and Clinics	31	20%	Health & Human Services
K-12	30	20%	Education
Mental Health	30	20%	Health & Human Services
New Business and Business Expansion	30	20%	Economic Development
Property Tax	28	18%	Budgets & Management
Parking	28	18%	Infrastructure

Note: Top 25 subtopics overall are bolded.





Subtopic	Number of Speeches	Percentage	Major Topic
Credit Rating	11	7%	Budgets & Management
Manufacturing	11	7%	Economic Development
LED Lighting	11	7%	Energy & Environment
Disaster Preparedness	11	7%	Energy & Environment
Electric Utilities	11	7%	Energy & Environment
Business Support	10	7%	Economic Development
Sustainability	10	7%	Energy & Environment
School Safety	10	7%	Public Safety
Conservation	10	7%	Energy & Environment
Entrepreneurship and Startups	10	7%	Economic Development
Pensions and Pension Reform	9	6%	Budgets & Management
Healthy Homes	9	6%	Health & Human Services
Minority and Women Owned Business	9	6%	Economic Development
Reserve and Rainy Day Funds	9	6%	Budgets & Management
Legal System	8	5%	Public Safety
Animal Care Center	8	5%	Energy & Environment
Social Media	8	5%	Government Data & Technology
Tech Company Attraction and Tech Entrepreneurship	8	5%	Economic Development
Renovations and Home Improvement	8	5%	Housing
Recycling	8	5%	Energy & Environment
Pre-K	7	5%	Education
Recreational Marijuana	7	5%	Health & Human Services
Participatory Budgeting	7	5%	Budgets & Management
Innovation Districts	7	5%	Economic Development
Tax Expenditure and TIF	7	5%	Budgets & Management
Talent Attraction and Retention	7	5%	Economic Development
Substance Abuse and Drug Addiction	7	5%	Health & Human Services
Drug Offences	7	5%	Public Safety
Access to Education and Inequality	6	4%	Education
School Outcomes	6	4%	Education
Land and Housing Trust	6	4%	Housing

Subtopic	Number of Speeches	Percentage	Major Topic
Energy Efficiency	6	4%	Energy & Environment
Guns	6	4%	Public Safety
Children's Health	6	4%	Health & Human Services
Commercial Tax	6	4%	Budgets & Management
Population Growth	6	4%	Demographics
LGBTQIA+	6	4%	Demographics
Sick and Family Leave	5	3%	Health & Human Services
Accessory Dwelling Units	5	3%	Housing
Access to Healthcare	5	3%	Health & Human Services
Agriculture	5	3%	Energy & Environment
Open Data	5	3%	Government Data & Technology
Economic Inequity and Poverty	5	3%	Demographics
Environmental Education	5	3%	Energy & Environment
Resiliency	5	3%	Energy & Environment
STEAM	5	3%	Education
311	5	3%	Government Data & Technology
Deficit	4	3%	Budgets & Management
GIS and Mapping	4	3%	Government Data & Technology
Wages and Minimum Wage	4	3%	Economic Development
Financial Literacy and Empowerment	4	3%	Education
Appraisals	4	3%	Housing
Noise	4	3%	Energy & Environment
HIV, AIDS and STIs	4	3%	Health & Human Services
Violent Crime	4	3%	Public Safety
Drones	4	3%	Government Data & Technology
Childcare and Prenatal care	3	2%	Health & Human Services
Economic Transformation	3	2%	Economic Development
Gangs	3	2%	Public Safety
Gentrification and Displacement	3	2%	Housing
Special Need	3	2%	Demographics
Income Tax	3	2%	Budgets & Management



Subtopic	Number of Speeches	Percentage	Major Topic
Student Housing	3	2%	Housing
Short-term Rentals	3	2%	Housing
Medical Marijuana	2	1%	Health & Human Services
Community Schools	2	1%	Education
Cybersecurity	2	1%	Government Data & Technology
Gas Infrastructure	2	1%	Infrastructure
Education and Classroom Technologies	2	1%	Education
Veterans Homelessness	2	1%	Housing
Ports	2	1%	Infrastructure
Sexual Harassment	1	1%	Demographics
Foreclosures	1	1%	Housing
Children's Saving Account	1	1%	Education
Gas Utilities	1	1%	Energy & Environment
College Readiness	1	1%	Education
Achievement Gap	1	1%	Education
Driverless Vehicle	1	1%	Government Data & Technology
Tuition and Free College Program	1	1%	Education
Refugees	1	1%	Demographics
Surplus	1	1%	Budgets & Management
Gerrymandering	1	1%	Demographics
Charter Schools	0	0%	Education
Delinquencies	0	0%	Housing
Deregulation	0	0%	Economic Development
Health Insurance	0	0%	Health & Human Services
Public Work Funding	0	0%	Infrastructure
Trade and FDI	0	0%	Economic Development







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