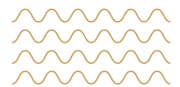# Voice of the People **Awards**

Celebrating innovative local governments that engage with their communities on Polco
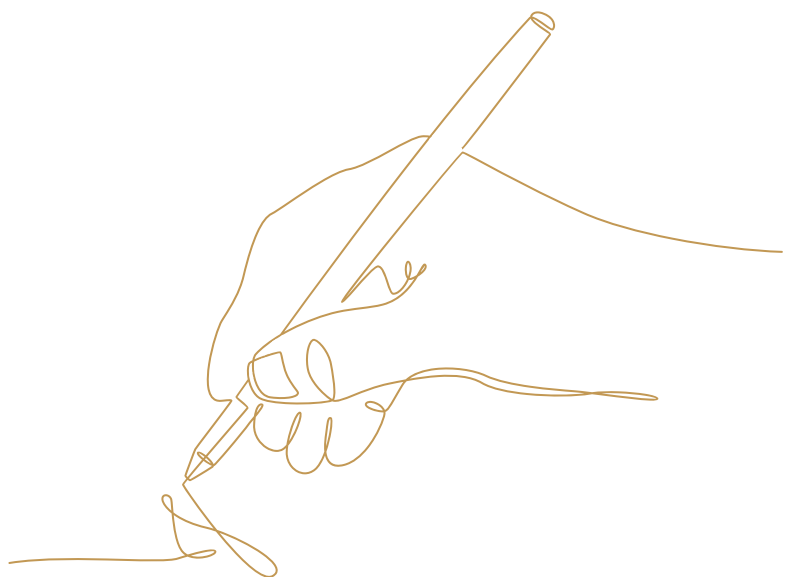
National Research Center

Polco **NRC**

Table of contents

CHAPTER 1

This collection of case studies highlights award-winning local governments that successfully engage with residents through community surveys on Polco.

Each example highlights a jurisdiction that transformed input into action. You'll see how Winter Garden, Florida, maintains its natural beauty with excellent air quality, cleanliness, and recycling services. Learn how Elk Grove, California, took a proactive approach to improving safety. Discover how Franklin, Tennessee, actively engages with residents to inform city planning, among many other examples around the nation.

Each of these jurisdictions are also recipients of the Voice of the People Awards. The VOP Awards are the only local government honor based on community engagement. The accolade is presented by Polco and the International City / County Management Association (ICMA).

These inspiring case studies demonstrate how local governments can work directly with their residents to make meaningful change. The examples serve as a blueprint for other municipalities that seek improvements in their own hometowns. They are a launching pad for new ideas, innovative solutions, and opportunities to strengthen your community.

VOP Award Explanation:

Voice of the People winners are selected based on their results on The National Community Survey (The NCS), a resident feedback assessment that focuses on the foundations that create a high quality of life. Categories include the economy, safety, utilities, design, inclusivity, natural environment, parks and recreation, and health and wellness. Winners demonstrated significant improvements or excellence on The NCS in each category. A few winners spotlight municipalities that effectively harness Polco's community engagement tools that allow organizations to gather resident insights and post questions directly to community members.

Award Types:

Excellence	Transformation
VOP Excellence awards are given to local governments that perform well beyond the national benchmark on The NCS in a certain category. Excellence winners also include municipalities that are highly-effective at online engagement	Winners of VOP Transformation awards showed dramatic improvements on The NCS from the previous year.

CHAPTER 2

Online Engagement Case Studies - Bloomington, Minnesota

How Resident Feedback Helped Bloomington Save $390,000

Like many communities nationwide, Bloomington, Minnesota, faced simultaneous challenges regarding its COVID-19 response.

Leaders needed to protect residents from the spread of COVID-19, and help the local economy recover. Plus, limited ability to engage in-person and constantly changing circumstances made it a struggle to connect with residents, which became even more of a necessity in a socially- distanced world.

Bloomington's leaders swiftly began problem solving on how best to reach their residents. They decided to leverage Polco's community engagement platform.

"We selected the Polco platform because of its ability to provide quick snapshots of how constituents were faring and gather feedback on budget and service issues," said Diann Kirby, Bloomington's Community Services Director.

Polco's suite of survey and civic engagement tools deliver insights local governments can rely on. As part of the subscription, Polco provides scientific surveys and can verify that respondents live in the community. Polco also provides real-time results displayed as helpful dashboard reports, graphs, and maps.

"The ability to select surveys off the shelf was particularly useful in our case, as was the verification of residents against voter registration files for demographic data. The product was very user-friendly, providing us with the ability to upload questions and set up polls in a matter of minutes," Kirby said.

Addressing Residents' COVID-19 Concerns

Throughout the pandemic, the City gathered feedback to learn more about how the pandemic was affecting residents. This feedback guided Bloomington's COVID-19 response.

Because of these efforts, Bloomington won a VOP Award for Online Community Engagement.

In April 2020, residents reported that the City website was the second most popular resource for critical information about COVID-19. Community members sought timely, factual information, so the City improved its website and added a COVID-19 dashboard. In June, residents reported that they did not feel safe in public around others not wearing masks. In response, the Mayor issued a proclamation requiring face coverings inside all City buildings. The City Council planned to follow up to consider an ordinance requiring face masks inside all of Bloomington's indoor spaces. They were ahead of the game. Shortly after this consideration and before the Council's public hearing, Minnesota's government implemented a statewide face mask mandate inside all public and commercial indoor spaces.

Guiding Economic Response

COVID-19 impacts resulted in a budget shortfall of up to $17 million for Bloomington in 2020. Bloomington used Polco to partner with residents to decide how to address the gap.

To reach more residents, Bloomington leaders promoted a budgeting poll through the City's social media, email, and website. Residents who did not have internet access could call Parks and Recreation. City leaders included a Frequently Asked Questions page with the poll. Over 3,000 residents responded.

After reviewing resident feedback, the City Council elected to close a community center through the end of the year. This saved the City an estimated $390,000, helping to address the City's budget shortfall.

"The use of the Polco citizen engagement platform has helped the City of Bloomington to increase engagement, improve transparency, and inform decision-making on issues that matter to the city's residents," Kirby said. "It is helping the City to stay abreast of public opinion and key trends, especially at a time when in-person engagement is significantly constricted due to a public health crisis."
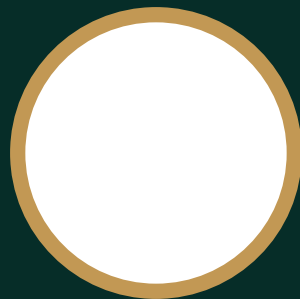
" We selected the Polco platform because of its ability to provide quick snapshots of how constituents we're faring and gather feedback on budget and service issues, "

said Diann Kirby, Bloomington's Community Services Director.
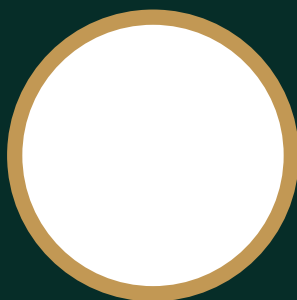
" The use of the Polco citizen engagement platform has helped the City of Bloomington to increase engagement, improve transparency and inform decision-making on issues that matter to the city's residents," said Kirby. "It is helping the City to stay abreast of public opinion and key trends, especially at a time when in-person engagement is significantly constricted due to a public health crisis, "

said Kirby.

CHAPTER 3

Online Engagement Case Studies – Boone, Iowa

Boone Goes the Extra Mile to Listen to Residents

Making Resident Voices Heard

"The elected officials of Boone have been incredibly responsive to the public. The City is indebted to their efforts to make this level of accessibility a reality," Stines said.

Many cities make the effort to hold meetings online and upload meeting videos to YouTube. But Boone takes that a step further. One councilman shares key meeting points with the public via social media and email so that residents can be informed of key topics without viewing the entire meeting.

The City also goes the extra mile to get feedback. They host community discussions and workshops on economic and residential growth. They use Polco's online community engagement platform to ask residents for feedback on topics such as recreation and wellness options, fireworks usage, and the role of art in the community.

By using Polco consistently, Boone has built a large community of respondents over time. In October 2019, Boone had 62 total subscribers on Polco. In December 2020, they had 447 and growing.

"As Boone looks to always get better at reaching residents, we will continue to fine tune polling offerings and the best modality for making remote meetings accessible," Stines said.
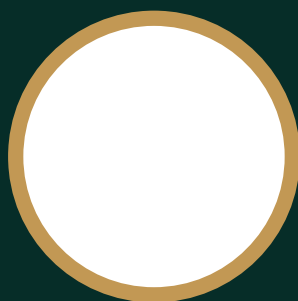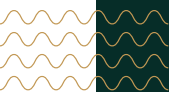
" As a City, we always look for opportunities for citizens from all backgrounds to feel their voices matter, because they do, "

said Elijah Stines, Boone, Iowa City Council Member. With this philosophy in mind, Boone uses many tools and tactics to listen to their residents. Boone was recognized as a finalist for the VOP Award for Online Community Engagement due to its engagement success.

CHAPTER 4

Transformation Case Studies – Palm Coast, Florida

Palm Coast Transforms Community Livability Through a Commitment to Community Development

"We take pride in being one of the best places to live in America," said Denise Bevan, Palm Coast's City Manager. "This is a reflection of the hard work and dedication of our residents, City staff, and public officials."

The City regularly conducts The NCS to gather feedback from residents. Data shows much improved ratings between 2017 and 2019. Specifically, the overall reputation of the community and the overall customer service of government employees improved significantly. For the improvements, Palm Coast won a VOP award for Transformation in Foundations of Livability.

"The City of Palm Coast has taken great strides to make the City not only habitable, but desirable. We commend them for their hard work," said Damema Mann, Director of National Engagement for Polco.

Palm Coast Develops the Local Economy

The City of Palm Coast completed several initiatives to improve the quality of life for residents. One of the latest initiatives was the development of the innovative University of North Florida MedNEX multi-county hub and spoke structure. Hub and spoke structures are a new organizational model in healthcare that utilizes a collection of different healthcare services, such as hospitals and specialty clinics, to provide healthcare to a population.

MedNEX is the very first university-based medical hub within the vicinity and will help bring together the entire Florida medical ecosystem. This will allow students, residents, and healthcare professionals to collaborate, learn, and grow together to create a healthy, prosperous community.

"Students who choose to participate will be trained as our next generation of healthcare professionals. This will bring together scholars and practitioners to create an epicenter in Town Center, our Innovation District, for a comprehensive nexus that will eventually change the entire medical dynamics and economy of Palm Coast," Bevan said.

Based on research, Bevan predicts MedNEX will lead to 23 percent job growth. She also predicts that Palm Coast will offer almost 400,000 regional students a more comprehensive opportunity to enter the healthcare field close to home.

Putting Tax Dollars to Work

In 2017, the City's ratings for a vibrant downtown commercial area were ranked as below the national average. As a result, city officials launched the Be Local, Buy Local initiative as a way to increase economic development and overall quality of life for residents.

"This is a shop-local campaign that was designed as a call to action to educate and prompt residents to spend their money on goods and services in their home community," Bevan said. "Money spent in local stores, restaurants, or at gas pumps comes right back to the City to build, upgrade or maintain our amenities and infrastructure."

The "Be Local, Buy Local" campaign had three sources of funding:

- **1/2 cent tax:** Money collected via shopping locally and went directly to support the General Fund.
- **Local option fuel tax:** Funds collected when residents paid for gas at their local stations. The tax supported street improvements, new sidewalks and paths, parkway beautification, signal optimization, intersection and turn lane improvements, and continuous street lighting program.
- **Small county surtax:** Taxes that went toward Capital Projects Fund to pay for costs of construction, reconstruction, or public facilities improvements.

Between 2017 and 2019, the Be Local, Buy Local initiative brought in approximately $625,296. The City has begun to spend the money to expand its entertainment and recreation options within the community.

Palm Coast Expands Entertainment and Recreation Options

While the City focused its attention on growing its local economy, it's also working hard to improve residents' overall quality of life. This is reflected in the City's efforts to support the community through the development of new residential and non-residential structures, including ample entertainment and recreation options.

One recent project included an elaborate splash pad for the James H. Holland Memorial Park. The park is already a staple in the community, especially for those with growing families. With the new splash pad, the park has become even more of an asset for the City.

"We are so excited about the new splash pad," Bevan said. "It's a great addition to our park and the city. Can you just imagine your family's delight when you bring them to the park? Water jets will shoot out at you from lifelike frogs, dolphins, and rays while you swing from hammocks or climb around treehouses."

Additional upgrades for the park include:

- Added accessibility features
- New family swings
- Upgrades to the bocce ball courts
- A new LED lighting system added to the tennis courts

Palm Coast Embodies the Foundations of Livability

Palm Coast, Florida, is a proud community that has taken great strides in improving quality of life over the last few years.

"There's a reason why people always smile and say hello as they pass each other on jogging trails or bike paths. Palm Coast residents simply love living here. This City is their happy place because their quality of life continues to surpass their expectations," Bevan said.
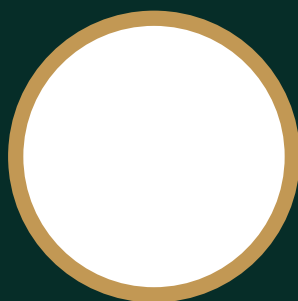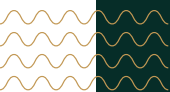
"There's a reason why people always smile and say hello as they pass each other on jogging trails or bike paths. Palm Coast residents simply love living here. This City is their happy place because their quality of life continues to surpass their expectations,"

said Denise Bevan, Palm Coast's Interim City Manager.

National Research Center ❖ Polco NRC

CHAPTER 5

Transformation Case Studies – Woodinville, Washington

How Woodinville Prioritized Resident Feedback to Improve Safety

TRANSFORMATION IN SAFETY

Woodinville, Washington

	2017	2019		vs. benchmark
Overall feeling of safety	○	● +6		**Above** ∧
Police/Sheriff services	○	● +4		
Fire prevention and education	○	● +4		
Crime prevention	○	● +6		
Animal control	○	● +4		
Stocked supplies in preparation for an emergency	○	● +8		**Above** ∧

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

✦ Polco ▌ NRC
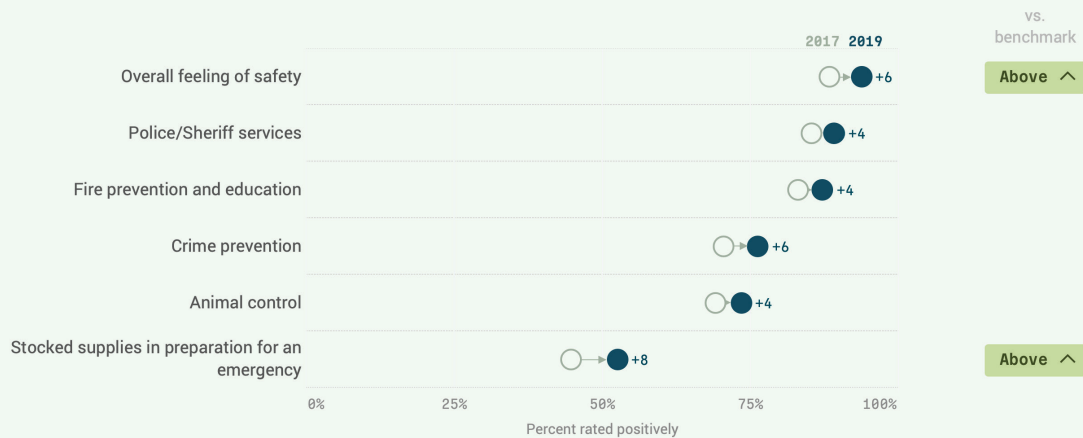
Since 2017, both violent and property crimes decreased by about 30 percent in Woodinville, Washington. How did Woodinville create a much safer community? It took lots of personal interaction and feedback from residents and businesses.

"It's not uncommon to see Woodinville officers handing out stickers and balloons at community events, or accepting an invitation to drive to a child's house to wish them a happy birthday," said Maia Knox, Management Analyst for Woodinville.

In addition to prioritizing personal relationships, Woodinville is deeply committed to resident feedback. The City regularly conducts The NCS. The survey revealed improvements on safety, policing, and crime prevention between 2017 to 2019.

"The NCS showed that Woodinville has significantly improved safety over the past few years. For that they should be very proud," Mann said.

Woodinville's endeavors led to a VOP Award for Transformation in Safety.

Increased Positive Interactions with The Community

The Woodinville Police Department continually focuses on increasing its positive interactions with the community. You can frequently see Woodinville Police in the community championing donation-based events such as "Shop with a Cop" and "Toys for Tots," which help kids in need during the holidays.

Additionally, The Woodinville Police Department increases its visibility through meetings to support neighborhood crime prevention and assigning extra police presence to the downtown corridor during the holiday shopping season.

The Woodinville Police Chief's social media presence also improved the relationship between residents and police. In a few short years, Chief Katie Larson grew the Police Department Facebook page to more than 3,000 followers.

"She accomplished this by taking time to explain tough concepts, highlighting positive community news, and, in her words, 'just being a human,'" Knox said.

Improved Emergency Preparedness

In addition to the Police Department's great work, the City's Emergency Management Division made strides to improve emergency preparedness.

The City uses digital media to proactively communicate with residents about risks such as earthquakes and snow storms.

Behind the scenes, the Emergency Management Division connects with a committee of representatives from partner agencies. They plan to locate the City's emergency operations center at Fire District headquarters. This increased coordination allows the City to better anticipate risks and respond to emergencies.

Looking Towards the Future

Woodinville's Emergency Management and Police Department leaders aim to keep improving the City's safety.

Emergency Management leaders will use mailers and digital media to increase messaging about emergency preparedness tips, tricks, and best practices. They also plan to implement a mobile app residents can use to report risks and hazards. Last, they want to form a local Citizen Emergency Response Team.

The Woodinville Police Department plans to hire a business district liaison and formalize programs related to business crime prevention. They will also hire an advocate who can assist crime victims with issues related to domestic violence, social service resources, and navigating the legal system. The Police Department is also developing new methods of gathering feedback from community members who use police services.

"City leadership and staff are proud of our recent accomplishments in the area of public safety. We look forward to making the community feel safer each year," Knox said.

" It's not uncommon to see Woodinville officers handing out stickers and balloons at community events or accepting an invitation to drive to a child's house to wish them a happy birthday, **"**

said Maia Knox, Management Analyst for Woodinville.

CHAPTER 6

Transformation Case Studies – St. Lucie, Florida

Reimagining Strategic Planning in Port St. Lucie Transformed Resident Satisfaction

TRANSFORMATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Port St. Lucie, Florida
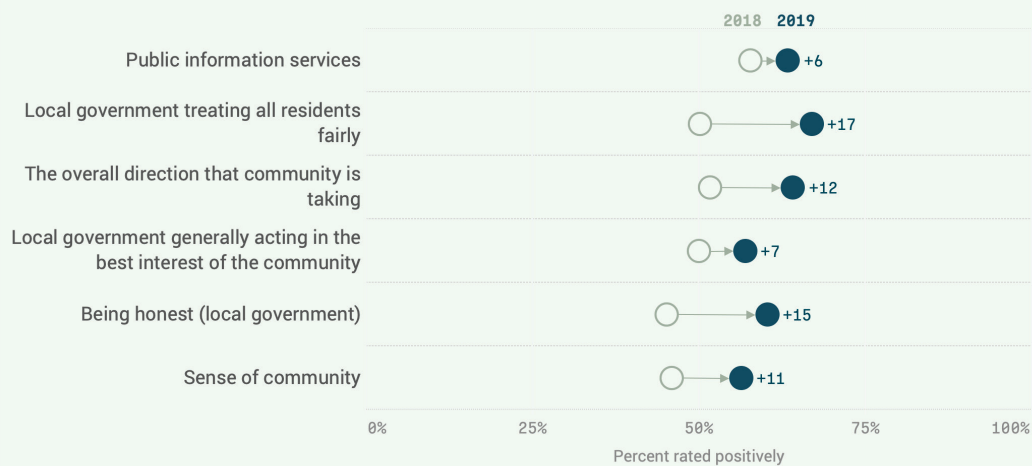
	2018	2019
Public information services	○ → ●	+6
Local government treating all residents fairly	○ → ●	+17
The overall direction that community is taking	○ → ●	+12
Local government generally acting in the best interest of the community	○ → ●	+7
Being honest (local government)	○ → ●	+15
Sense of community	○ → ●	+11

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

❖ Polco ▮ NRC

"Port St. Lucie's citizens are at the heart of every strategic goal set by City leaders, who recognize that relationships are built by listening and responding to feedback, not only when handling today's issues, but also while planning for the future," said Kate Parmelee, Strategic Initiatives Director for Port St. Lucie, Florida.

Keeping residents at the heart of every strategic goal led to skyrocketing resident participation and increased resident satisfaction. Leaders were not afraid to do things differently to better engage residents.

"This new approach to strategic planning has dramatically increased citizen engagement and provided the City Council with timely and comprehensive citizen feedback that ultimately leads to citizen informed policy and funding decisions. This approach is cultivating more informed and empowered citizens that are reacting positively to these efforts," Parmelee said.

The City regularly conducts The National Community Survey (The NCS) to gather feedback from residents. Data from the survey show that Post St. Lucie's resident attitudes toward local government honesty, treating all residents fairly, and creating a sense of community improved greatly between 2018 and 2019.

"I commend the leaders of Port St. Lucie for taking such great care for residents to be heard. Their efforts have transformed community satisfaction" Mann said.

Port St. Lucie's changes led to a Voice of the People Award for Transformation in Community Engagement.

Gathering Resident Feedback

Port St. Lucie's Annual Citizen Summit, a strategic planning event, and The NCS provide important opportunities for residents to express their opinions. "The NCS, combined with the annual Summit, has become vital to Port St. Lucie's strategic planning process," Parmelee said.

The Citizen Summit is a drop-in event for all ages featuring interactive booths representing the City's seven strategic goals. Attendees have the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns related to these strategic goals at the booths and engage with the City Council face-to-face.

City leaders hand out "PSL Bucks" to attendees. These bucks act as votes towards different policy or funding changes.

Perhaps one of the most notable achievements of the Annual Citizen Summit is the way Port St. Lucie City Council involves children in the activities. Kids participate in interactive activities about civil duties such as recycling, cleaning up litter, and designing playgrounds. This keeps kids interested and invested in becoming active in the community.

The popularity of the summit is a testament to the tremendous energy put forth by the City Council. In just three years, the summit's attendance has doubled to more than 600 attendees. This engagement quadrupled participation from prior engagement workshops.

The City also leans heavily on feedback from The NCS. "The survey allows the City to obtain the community's opinion on specifics, track our performance over time, and to meaningfully compare ourselves to other communities to identify areas where we can meaningfully improve," Parmelee said.

Within the past year, participation in The NCS has increased significantly.

Using Community Feedback

City Council has a three-step process to incorporate feedback from The NCS and The Citizen Summit into their strategic plan.

1) Design

In the design step of the process, City Council reviews the results of the community feedback. They select elements that are most important to address and create a strategic plan.

2) Implement

During this phase, City Council members choose which programs need more focus based on community response. They then implement a plan for these programs and program directors allocate budgets for each initiative.

3) Evaluate

Throughout all steps of the process, leaders encourage feedback from the residents. In fact, they make data readily available via an online user-friendly platform. This is where the program directors track the success of their efforts and evaluate the outcomes.

The City Manager publishes updates on the progress and current state of the strategic plan each quarter. This keeps the community informed and updated.

As Port St. Lucie leaders look towards the future, they plan to continue to innovate and adapt to engage residents. During COVID-19, they held a virtual public workshop and online survey related to a planned Adventure Park. This drew over 300 survey responses, which surpassed typical attendance at in-person park planning workshops.

"Through promoting meaningful participation opportunities and acting on the feedback we receive through engaging with residents, we anticipate citizen satisfaction with community engagement to continue to grow," Parmelee said.
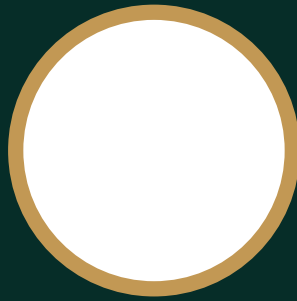
National Research Center   Polco   NRC

> **"** Port St. Lucie's citizens are at the heart of every strategic goal set by City leaders — who recognize that relationships are built by listening and responding to feedback, not only when handling today's issues, but also while planning for the future, **"**

said Kate Parmelee, Strategic Initiatives Director for Port St. Lucie, Florida.

CHAPTER 7

Transformation Case Studies – La Vista, Nebraska

How La Vista Transformed Its Downtown from Abandoned To Vibrant

TRANSFORMATION IN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

La Vista, Nebraska

	2016	2019		vs. benchmark
Power (electric and/or gas) utility		●	+3	
Utility billing		●	+3	
Variety of housing options		●	+6	Above ⌃
Overall quality of new development		●	+21	Above ⌃
Overall design or layout of residential and commercial areas		●	+10	
Land use, planning and zoning		●	+14	Above ⌃

Percent rated positively

Polco ▪ NRC
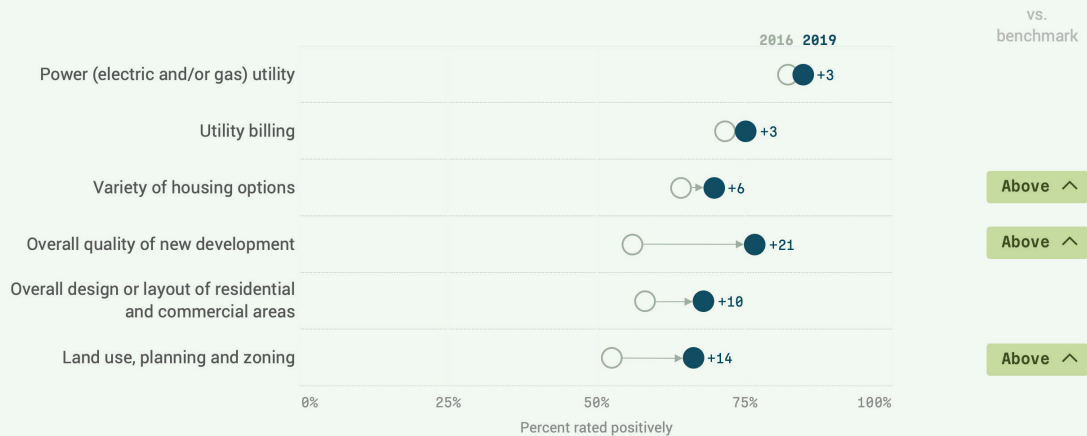
La Vista, Nebraska, improved resident satisfaction through show-stopping downtown development. For several decades, 84th Street in La Vista had been a bustling stretch of storefronts, restaurants, and grocery stores. Over time, though, changing trends in retail meant a number of national department stores on the street closed. When the Wal-Mart and last grocery store closed on 84th Street by 2008, the former economic engine of the City sat abandoned.

City leaders listened to resident feedback and resolved to transform the corridor into a vibrant destination.

"The goal of the transformation of 84th Street is that it would not only provide for economic resiliency in La Vista, but also that it would create a sense of place for the community," said Brenda Gunn, City Administrator.

The data shows residents were pleased with the development. The City of La Vista often conducts The NCS to gather feedback from community members. From 2016 to 2019, residents have become much more satisfied with overall quality of new development, land use, planning, and zoning, and overall design and layout of residential and commercial areas.

"La Vista has done a great job involving residents in transforming their downtown area," said Mann, Director of National Engagement for Polco.

La Vista's leadership has been recognized with a Voice of the People Award for Transformation in Built Environment.

Vision 84.

The City involved residents in downtown revitalization plans. In 2014, voters approved an additional half-cent sales tax to go toward development efforts. Then in 2017 and 2018, many residents provided feedback on the streetscape planning process.

The result of all the planning is Vision 84, a guide for the creation of the development. The development features apartments, office space, neighborhood retail, dining and entertainment space integrated with public gathering spaces. As part of Vision 84, developers are also in the process of transforming a former golf course into a central recreation area with a large lake and new trail system. Finally, the crown jewel of the redevelopment effort will be a state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor music venue in the City Center next to the park.

To support the new development, the City has also constructed public infrastructure improvements in the redevelopment area. These upgrades include sewer and street upgrades, as well as a public off-street parking facility.

La Vista leaders are still in the process of finalizing the project.

"This corridor runs through the heart of our community and is one of the most visible and accessed areas of our City. Residents wanted better for our community. We are proud of the results of their feedback," Gunn said.
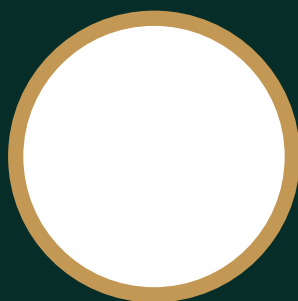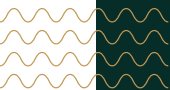
> " The goal of the transformation of 84th Street is that it would not only provide for economic resiliency in La Vista, but also that it would create a sense of place for the community, "

said Brenda Gunn, City Administrator.

CHAPTER 8

Transformation Case Studies – Flower Mound, Texas

How Flower Mound Transformed Resident Satisfaction With Wildly Successful Events

EXCELLENCE IN RECREATION & WELLNESS

Flower Mound, Texas

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

City parks	92%	Above ∧
Health services	91%	Above ∧
Recreation centers or facilities	87%	Above ∧
Availability of affordable quality food	87%	Above ∧
Overall health and wellness opportunities	87%	Above ∧
Fitness opportunities	87%	Above ∧

Polco NRC

TRANSFORMATION IN EDUCATION & ENRICHMENT
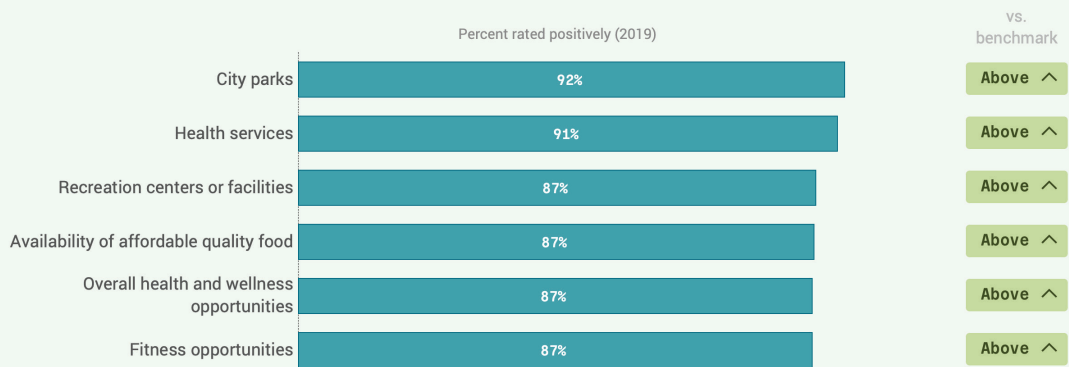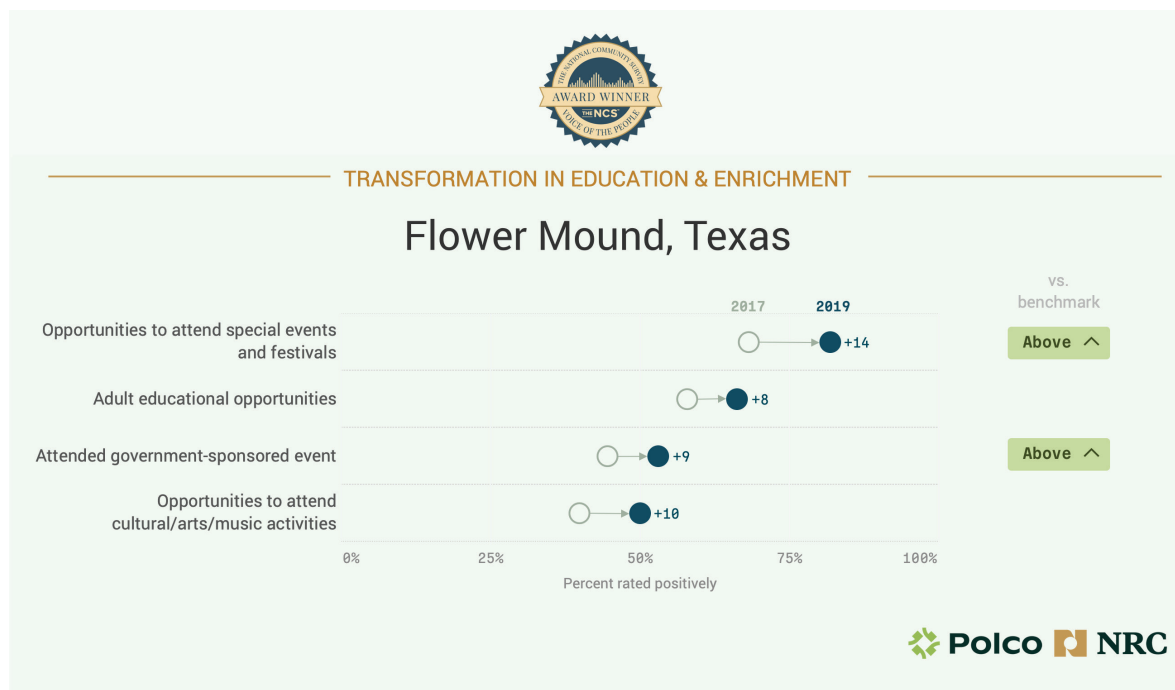
Flower Mound, Texas

Flower Mound, Texas, has long had a commitment to maintaining a high quality of life. With excellent park and recreation opportunities and an outstanding library already in place, residents expressed a desire for more cultural arts.

Flower Mound's leaders took this desire to heart. Today, Flower Mound's events are "wildly successful and well-attended," according to JP Walton, Assistant to the Town Manager.

And residents are happy.

The Town conducts The NCS on a regular basis. Data from the survey show that Flower Mound's residents have become much more pleased with the Town's Education and Enrichment between 2017 and 2019. Specifically, they have become much more satisfied with opportunities to attend special cultural, music, and art events and festivals.

"These large increases are a direct result of the Town's focus on providing cultural arts activities and events within the Town," Walton said.

"Flower Mound has put significant recent investment into cultural arts and it has paid off," Mann said.

Flower Mound's event programming resulted in a Voice of the People Award for Transformation in Education and Enrichment.

Expanding Cultural Arts

In response to residents' request for more arts and culture, the Town created a Cultural Arts Commission in 2014. This six-member group helps promote and advise on programs related to cultural arts programs, art in public spaces, and library services. The Commission recommended that the Town hire a consultant to create a Cultural Arts Master Plan. Leaders officially adopted the plan in 2018 after months of surveys, public meetings, and planning committees.

National Research Center Polco NRC

The first step in implementation was hiring a Cultural Arts Program Coordinator. Since hiring the Coordinator, the Town has created several programs and events. These include the Independence Day Art Challenge, Chalk the Walk Art Contest, Visual Journal Challenge, Art Treasure Hunt, Alphabet Hunt, All Around Town Selfie Challenge, Town Hall Art Display, and Traffic Signal Box Art Project.

"As a result of the success of these programs, residents have requested to expand the current programming and incorporate more," Walton said.

As leaders look towards the future, they are planning to build a cultural arts center. This facility will not only provide a performing arts space, but will also include workspaces to create and experience art.

Flower Mound also plans to host its first Art in the Park Festival. The Art in the Park Festival will feature live performances, local artwork, an art treasure hunt, a recycled fashion show, hands-on activities and much more. City leaders were preparing to host the first festival in 2020, but it was canceled due to COVID-19.

"We look forward to presenting the residents with a groundbreaking celebration of art to showcase the many talented residents of the Town of Flower Mound," Walton said.

Library Improvements

Although Flower Mound's cultural arts expansion may be the main reason for the transformation in the Town over the last few years, the library also continues to improve.

In recent years, the Library added on-demand streaming service to meet the digital requests. They are also focusing on an expansion project that will add 15,000 square feet to the facility. The expansion includes a dedicated children's story time and program area, quiet reading room, teen area, additional study rooms, and more.

"The response and attendance to our events and programs have been immensely popular and we look forward to continuing to expand them in the future," Walton said.
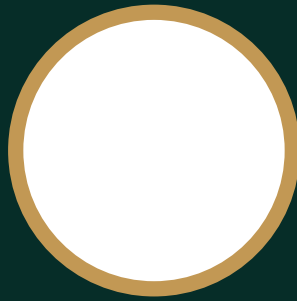
"The Town's commitment to excellence in Parks and Recreation is directly attributed to the residents of the Town of Flower Mound. Through open engagement, Town staff has implemented the requests, wants, and needs of the community,"

said JP Walton, Assistant to the Town Manager.

CHAPTER 9

Transformation Case Studies – Collinsville, Illinois

How Collinsville Transformed the Local Economy Through a Diverse Approach to Development

TRANSFORMATION IN ECONOMY

Collinsville, Illinois

	2011	2019		vs. benchmark
Economic development		●+1		**Above** ∧
Community as a place to work	○→	●+10		
Vibrancy of downtown/commercial area		●		
Cost of living		●		
Impact of the economy on family income in the next 6 months	○────→	●+22		
Employment opportunities	○→	●+8		**Above** ∧

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

Polco ■ NRC
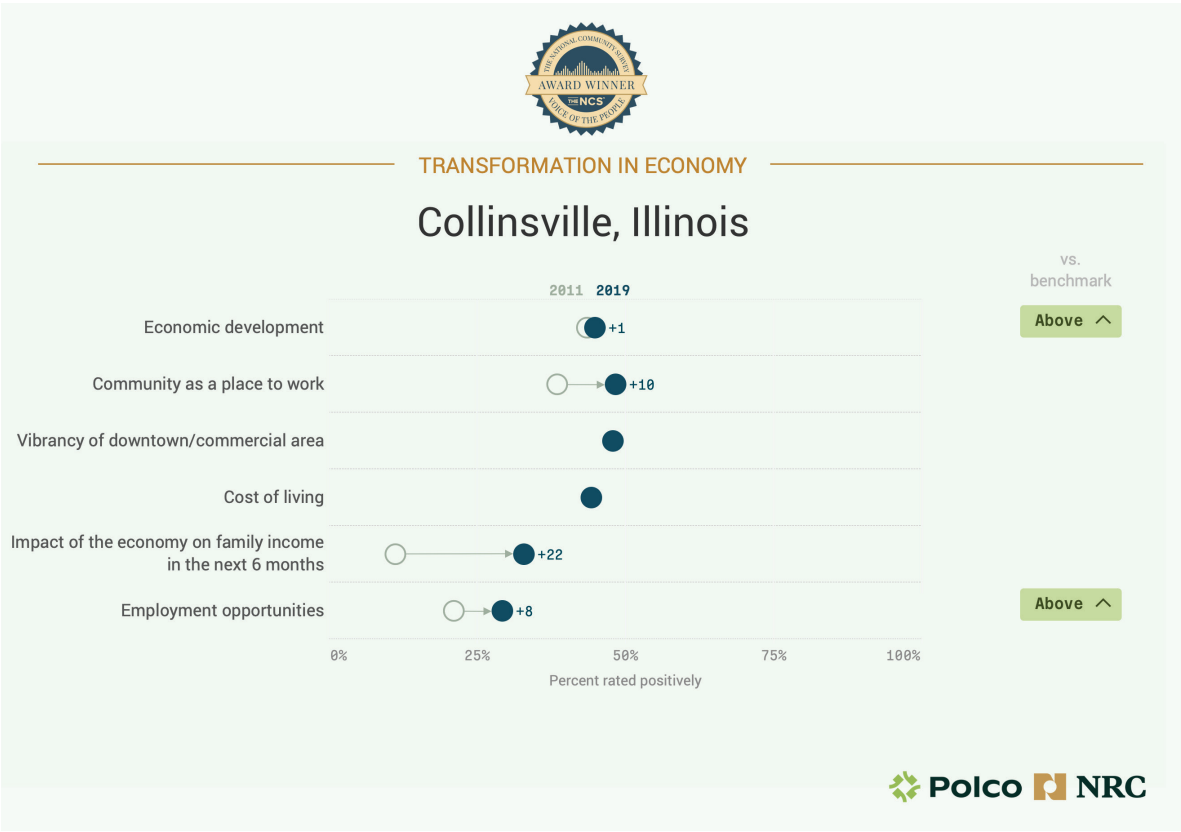
Collinsville, Illinois, leaders approach economic development from many angles—from festivals to improving its Hospitality District and Convention Center to programs that spur development and jobs.

"The City is very strategic with our economic development efforts. Our goal is to bring outside dollars into the community," said Derek Jackson, Deputy City Manager of Collinsville.

And these efforts paid off.

The City conducts The National Community Survey (The NCS) to gather feedback from residents. Data from the survey show that Collinsville's residents have become much more pleased with the City's Economy between 2011 and 2019. Results show large improvements in how the local economy will impact the family income in the next six months, as well as Collinsville as a good place to work.

"Collinsville's economic development efforts have led to dramatic improvements in their local economy, specifically related to the community being a great place to work," Mann said.

Collinsville's efforts led to a Voice of the People Award for Transformation in Economy.

Bringing Tourist Dollars to the Community

"One goal we have is to bring outside dollars into the community through our Hospitality District, convention center, and festivals in order to help fund services for our residents," Jackson said.

The Hospitality District is located at the Gateway Convention Center. The District features nine hotels and over 900 hotel rooms. The Hospitality District contains over 20 restaurants. District staff help coordinate Convention Center clients, providing services such as site visits and pricing info for various hotels, suggestions for pre- and post-convention activities, referrals for vendors, marketing, and transportation assistance.

Collinsville brings in tourist dollars through a variety of unique festivals like Italian Fest and the International Horseradish Festival.

Programs to Spur Development

Because of its diverse approach to economic development, Collinsville's leaders started a variety of programs to bring more jobs and development to the area. For example, Collinsville has a tax increment financing (TIF) program, a development agreement program, and a first-time home buyer's program.

As they look towards the future, Collinsville's seek out opportunities to support their local economy.

"The City will continue to explore economic development opportunities to bring additional planned growth to the local economy and job market," Jackson said.
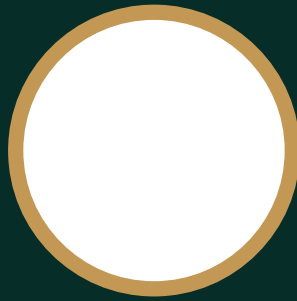
" The City is very strategic with our economic development efforts. Our goal is to bring outside dollars into the community, "

said Derek Jackson, Deputy City Manager of Collinsville, Illinois.

CHAPTER 10

Transformation Case Studies – Morristown, Tennessee

Recreation Improvements Increased Resident Satisfaction in Morristown

TRANSFORMATION IN RECREATION & WELLNESS

Morristown, Tennessee

	2018	2019
Availability of affordable quality food		+1
Fitness opportunities		+6
Availability of affordable quality health care		+1
Availability of preventive health services		+1
Recreational opportunities		+2
General health		+13

Percent rated positively
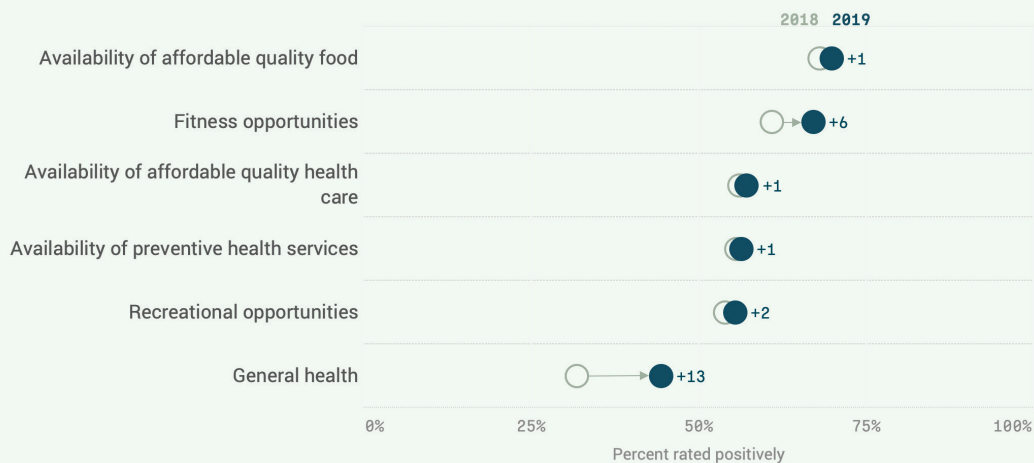
"Morristown is fortunate to be in a very beautiful part of the country that allows outdoor recreation nearly year-round. Citizens are able to utilize our parks not just during the summer, but well into the fall and winter months," said Michele Parvin, Accountant-Grants Coordinator for Morristown, Tennessee.

Morristown's leaders wanted to make sure residents of all ages and abilities could enjoy a variety of recreation and wellness opportunities. In recent years, Morristown focused on providing a diverse range of parks and programming.

"Having a variety of parks and programs allows us to appeal to a broader demographic," Parvin said.

These efforts have paid off. Data from The NCS results show that Morristown's resident's approval of the City's recreation and wellness opportunities increased between 2018 and 2019. For the improvements, Morristown won a VOP Award for Transformation in Recreation and Wellness.

"I commend Morristown for putting in a strong effort in making recreation opportunities accessible to more people," Mann said.

Recreation for All

"The Morristown Parks & Recreation Department hosts events and offers leagues that appeal to people of all athletic abilities, ages, and interests. From leisurely activities like concerts in the park to active athletics leagues and children's activities, there is something for everyone to enjoy," Parvin said.

Recently Morristown improved the variety of offerings to provide recreation for more residents.

For example, The City recently developed a downtown Heritage Park by taking the dilapidated property of former Morristown College and turning it into a 52-acre park with walking trails and greenspaces. Employees reconstructed a historical replica of the college's colonnades to pay homage to the Black educational institution.

"The development of Heritage Park as a more "passive" park helped fill a gap in our park system by offering a more relaxing, contemplative space, which nicely balances with the active sports complexes and playgrounds found at many of our other facilities," Parvin said.

The City has made other efforts to expand recreation to more people. They have made major Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements to several parks to make more areas of their parks accessible to those in need of handicapped access. Last, they have expanded adult sports leagues by introducing unique and fun athletics such as pickleball and kickball. This has led to a large increase in participation. They also recently received a grant to construct a new dog park.

In addition to expanding recreation opportunities, Morristown has recently teamed up with a local health initiative to help promote healthy and active lifestyles.

As part of this initiative, the City hosts several team walking challenges, biking events, and fitness classes at local parks throughout the year.

Looking Towards The Future

As Morristown looks to the future, they are excited to continue to expand health and wellness opportunities for their residents. As part of this expansion, they plan to break ground on the construction of a new community center. The new center will offer athletic facilities, fitness rooms, swimming pools, and more.

"Recreation is a huge element to quality of life for our citizens. It is integral that we continue to provide opportunities to improve the health and wellness of Morristown residents," Parvin said.
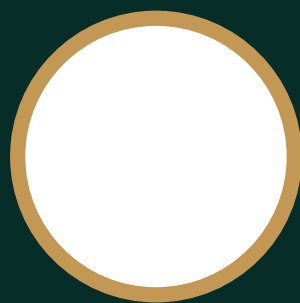
" The Morristown Parks & Recreation Department hosts events and offers leagues that appeal to people of all athletic abilities, ages, and interests. From leisurely activities like concerts in the park to active athletics leagues and children's activities, there is something for everyone to enjoy, "

said Michele Parvin, Accountant-Grants Coordinator for Morristown, Tennessee.

CHAPTER 11

Transformation Case Studies – Montgomery County, Maryland

How Montgomery County's Investment in Transit Increased Resident Satisfaction.

TRANSFORMATION IN MOBILITY

Montgomery County, Maryland

	2017	2019	vs. benchmark
Bus or transit services	○	● +18	Above ⌃
Snow removal	○	● +12	
Street lighting	○	● +9	
Availability of paths and walking trails	○	● +5	
Overall quality of the transportation system	○	● +7	
Sidewalk maintenance	○	● +8	

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

✦ Polco ❚ NRC

❚ **National Research Center**   ✦ **Polco**   ❚ **NRC**
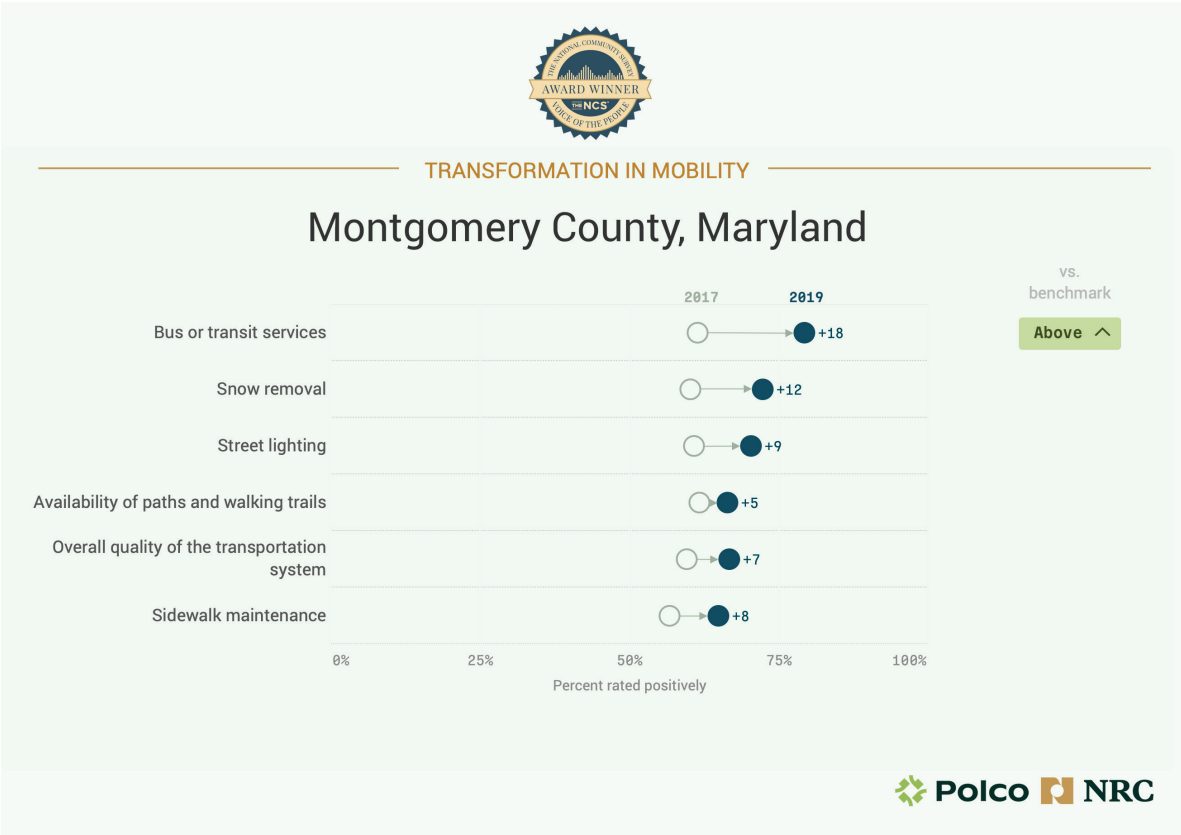
Montgomery County, Maryland's leaders know that improving mobility is about much more than cutting down on traffic.

"Transportation has been a longstanding priority for Montgomery County. However, in the past five years, the focus has shifted from primarily congestion reduction to providing a balanced transportation system that serves as an asset to the entire community," said David Gottesman, Montgomery County Statistics Manager. "We want to increase mobility options available to our residents and businesses."

The County uses The NCS regularly. Data from the survey show that resident mobility approval grew between 2017 and 2019. Specifically, they became more satisfied with bus and other public transportation services.

"The public response suggests that this strategy shift is valued by our community. They appreciate the variety of options available and the improved ease of moving around the County," Gottesman said.

Montgomery County's efforts led to a Voice of the People Award for Transformation in Mobility.

Innovations in Transit

Recently, Montgomery County leaders updated the Metro transit station, invested in a modern transit fleet, and improved real-time information to make it easier to ride public transportation.

Additionally, the County invested in a cross-county light rail and a flash bus rapid transit concept. This concept maximizes the use of dedicated transit lanes and strives to make the routes as efficient as possible.

"Investment in this network is essential to moving more people without major expansion of the highway network. It also prevents the negative environmental and community impacts associated with urban and suburban highway expansion," Gottesman said.

Montgomery County also expanded a Kids Ride Free program for residents ages 18 and under.

"This program improves mobility for students and encourages an early foundation in public transportation options rather than driving single-occupancy vehicles," Gottesman said.

Walking and Biking Improvements

Public transit is only part of the equation. In the last five years, Montgomery County has also invested in options for walking and biking.

County leaders built bike paths in many key growth areas. These paths link residential communities to commercial areas. Additionally, the County expanded bikeshare and e-scooter programs. The County is currently building a new trail that connects the area's two largest downtowns.

Strong Communication, Strong Strategy

Strong communication, engagement, and a strong transportation strategy underpin Montgomery County biking and walking improvements.

The County has recently improved its websites and social media outreach to better communicate travel options to businesses and residents.

The County has strategically focused on facilitating economic development in areas with public transit access. It has also recently adopted new transportation legislation. Known as NextGen TDM, the plan will expand programs that encourage public transit, walking, and bicycling in new and existing development projects.

"All of our efforts help our residents, employers and employees understand what options are available to avoid congested roads and to have more pleasant and predictable journeys," Gottesman said.

" Transportation has been a longstanding priority for Montgomery County. However, in the past five years, the focus has shifted from primarily congestion reduction to providing a balanced transportation system that serves as an asset to the entire community and increases mobility options available to our residents and businesses, "

said David Gottesman, County Statistics Manager.

CHAPTER 12

Transformation Case Studies – Elk Grove, California

Fast-Growing Elk Grove Transformed Safety Through Prevention and Engagement

TRANSFORMATION IN SAFETY

Elk Grove, California

2017 **2019**

Feeling of safety in your neighborhood during the day	+4
Feeling of safety in downtown or commercial area during the day	+4
Police/Sheriff services	+3
Overall feeling of safety	+11
Crime prevention	+8
Emergency preparedness	+10

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

Polco NRC
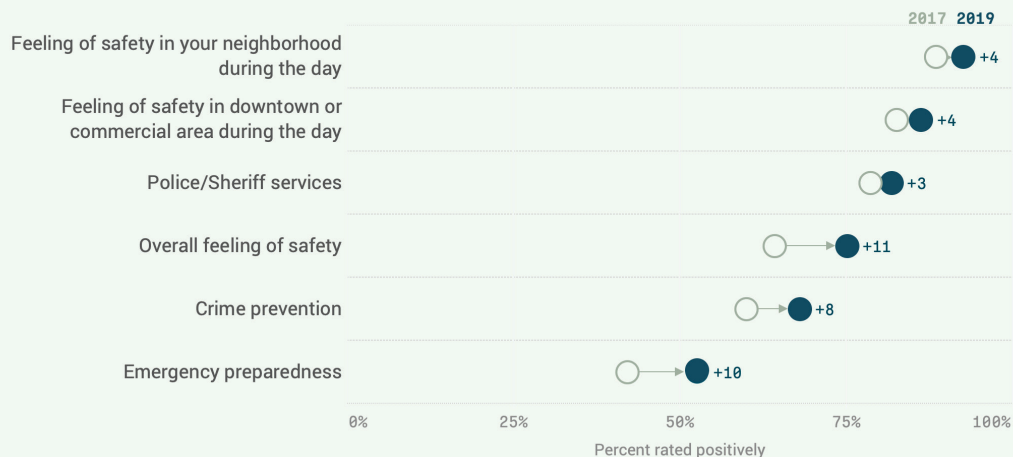
Elk Grove's overall sense of safety and security hasn't come about from mere happenstance. It comes from hard work.

"The Elk Grove City Council has adopted four priority goals, one of which specifically focuses on safety. Providing a safe community for Elk Grove is not exclusively done through enforcement, but requires a strong commitment to working with the community through engagement, outreach, and training," said Carrie Whitlock, Strategic Planning and Innovation Program Manager.

Data from The NCS show that Elk Grove's resident opinions toward safety improved between 2017 and 2019. Overall feeling of safety, crime prevention, and emergency preparedness metrics all increased, which is why Elk Grove won a VOP Award for Transformation in Safety.

"I admire how Elk Grove has numerous community programs that increase the perception of safety and offer residents a chance to participate in its enforcement," Mann said.

Why Residents Feel Safe in Elk Grove

Since Elk Grove's incorporation in 2000, the City has focused on elevating public safety. But safety became the City's top priority in 2013 when The NCS pointed out that's what residents desired.

"As with any large or small city, crime continues to persist in Elk Grove. However, Elk Grove Police Department's prevention activities and community policing, coupled with a strong commitment to community engagement, supports a strong feeling of safety felt by our community," Whitlock said.

According to the Census Bureau, Elk Grove was the fastest growing city in the nation in 2006. This rapid population growth encouraged more safety improvements.

Improving Elk Grove's Safety

Elk Grove's City Council believes residents are just as important to safety as local law enforcement agencies. The Council encourages community members to participate in creating a secure and resilient place to live.

"Through extensive outreach and engagement, residents continue to help shape the future of public safety policies and procedures," Whitlock said. "Not only will this level of participation help to ensure continued success in this area, but it will help strengthen trust and loyalty in the City of Elk Grove."

Citizens Academy

The Academy is a 10-week course where attendees meet for a maximum of three hours every week. They learn about different aspects of municipal policing, such as forensics and more. Academy students can ride along and get first-hand information from detectives. They also participate in a simulator and get to use actual guns with blanks. Since its inception, more than 240 individuals have graduated from Elk Grove's Citizens Academy.

Mobile Crisis Support Team (MCST)

Local law enforcement agencies and the Sacramento County Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) formed the Mobile Crisis Support Team. Funded by DBHS, the goal of this program is to mitigate mental health crises in the community.

Members of the team include licensed mental health professionals and specially trained officers. The team also includes a Peer Navigator. The Peer Navigator ensures that individuals with potential mental health needs have help accessing care systems and other appropriate services.

Volunteers in Police Services (VIPS)

The VIPS's aim is to protect both life and property. Volunteers who join this program help with non-enforcement services, such as teaching Elder Fraud Awareness classes and performing house checks for residents on vacation. The program gives sworn officers more time to focus on crime prevention.

UAS Program

Also known as the drone program, Elk Grove launched the UAS in 2019 to improve public safety and life preservation missions. The drone units monitor traffic incidents and uncover escape routes for serving search warrants.

"The drones provide the bird's eye view to be able to see a broader area of the City," said Elk Grove Police Officer Jason Jimenez.

Explorer Program

The Elk Grove Police Explorer Program encourages and supports the City's younger residents interested in public safety careers. Individuals must be between 14 and 21 years old, have completed the 8th grade, and be physically fit to join the program.

Animal Shelter

The Elk Grove Animal Shelter was completed in October 2019. This police department facility took in more than 900 animals in the first three months of operation.

Even with all the new programs, EGPD still has work to do.

"The EGPD continues to work on innovative ways to promote public safety, prevent crime, and connect with the community," Whitlock said.
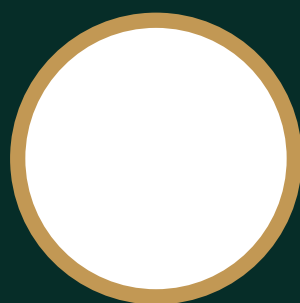
> " As with any large or small city, crime continues to persist in Elk Grove. However, the proactive approach by the Elk Grove Police Department (EGPD) in supporting prevention activities and community policing, coupled with a strong commitment to community engagement, supports a strong feeling of safety felt by our community, "

said Carrie Whitlock, Strategic Planning and Innovation Program Manager of the City of Elk Grove.

CHAPTER 13

Transformation Case Studies – Ashland, Massachusetts

Ashland Doubled Town Meeting Attendance

TRANSFORMATION IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Ashland, Massachusetts

	2016	2019
Garbage collection	○→●	+6
Overall quality of natural environment	○→●	+6
Cleanliness	○→●	+6
Yard waste pick-up	○——→●	+7
Preservation of natural areas	○————————→●	+15
Open space	○———————→●	+11

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

Polco **NRC**
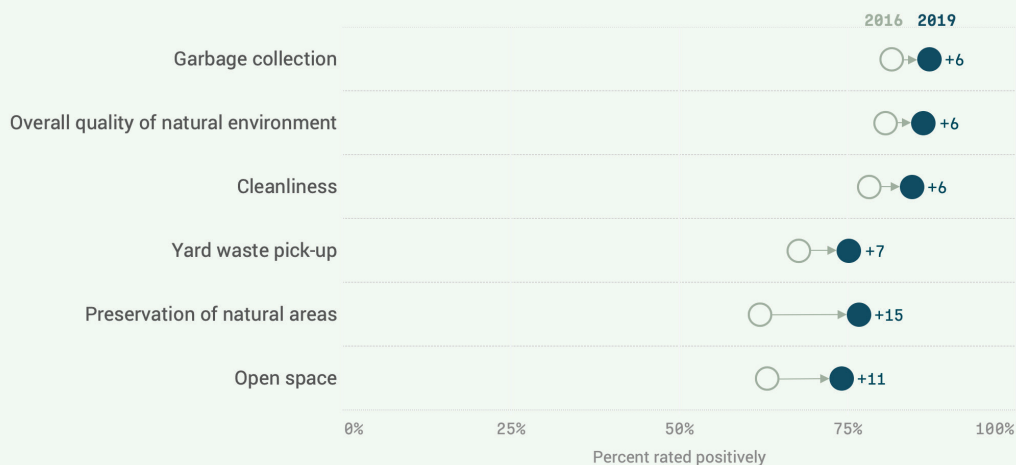
"Town Hall is intimidating. Working adults may not have the luxury of attending meetings," said Jenn Ball, Ashland, Massachusetts Assistant Town Manager.

Plus, under Ashland's "Open Town Meeting" form of government, legislative decisions can only be made by registered voters who have the ability to show up at the time and place designated for the Town meeting.

"These meetings have traditionally been dominated by older adults who do not have kids living with them, leaving out the vast majority of Ashland's families struggling to balance work, kids' activities, and family life with civic participation," Ball said. "This lack of involvement meant an unrepresentative sample made many of the town's most consequential decisions."

In 2016, The NCS showed room for improvement related to several aspects of community engagement. Ashland implemented a number of strategies to break down barriers to resident participation.

These efforts have led to significantly improved ratings. In 2019, Ashland residents rate resident involvement, confidence in town government, honesty, acting in the best interests of the Town, and treating all residents fairly at least 15 percentage points higher than they did in 2016.

These improvements are why Ashland won a VOP Award for Transformation in Community Engagement.

Break Down Barriers to Engagement

Leaders prioritized attendance at community events. They also organized informal meetings with community members in their homes.

"Our job doesn't end at 5 o'clock or when the last meeting ends," said Town Manager Michael Herbert. "We find it important to be at farmers markets and community events to develop that type of connection."

They found that informal, in-home meetings are invaluable in developing the trust necessary for good governance.

Ashland leaders also developed an online group to help identify concerns and issues facing young professionals and people with young families. Based solely on this group's feedback, the Town provided free childcare for all Town Meetings.

As a result, the average attendance of in-person Town meetings increased from about 250 people to more than 400 people. At the same time, the average age of attendees decreased from 64 to 48. (All meetings were virtual during the pandemic.)

The Town also invested in gathering online feedback.

"This has allowed for members of our community with young families to participate without having to obtain childcare to attend an evening community meeting," Ball said.

As one example, Ashland asked for online feedback for a downtown streetscape project. Three times as many residents offered input on this project than the Town's largest in-person public meeting.

"Online meetings have opened up a lot of different types of people to be able to participate," Ball said.

Evolving Communication Strategies

The Town continues to experiment with communication and engagement strategies. For example, the 2016 results from The NCS identified the Town's website and social media as key sources of information. Over the last few years, Town leaders have put considerable effort into building its social media presence. In 2016, most Facebook posts reached 100–200 people. Today, posts reach more than 2,500 people. And Ashland's weekly online newsletter currently reaches 4,000 people.

Creating Gathering Spaces

Last, the Town seeks to build community by creating more opportunities for people to come together. Ashland turned a vacant property downtown into a small park for community events. The Town hosts a newly-created annual music and art festival, an annual cultural festival, and a Diwali Event at the park.

During COVID-19, the library hosted virtual programming and the recreation department hosted socially-distanced outdoor programs, such as scavenger hunts, in the parks.

"We always try to be incredibly interactive and inclusive," Ball said. "We try to be agile. We're willing to try all sorts of strategies to make sure our residents know we still want to hear from them and that we're still trying to move important initiatives forward."

Reaching All Residents

One key component of Ashland's success is its use of data to continuously improve. Their current focus is how to reach underrepresented residents.

"In the 2016 iteration of The NCS survey, we looked at the data in the aggregate to revise and implement our initiatives. While this yielded very positive results, we will use the 2019 data to identify groups or categories of people that feel less positive about the town or perhaps excluded from opportunities to participate," Ball said.

To reach underrepresented residents, the Town recently created a people of color steering group that will help town officials understand survey data, explore additional data sets, and develop policies to promote equity.

The Town has also recently hired a new Communications and Cultural Affairs Program Coordinator. The Coordinator's role is to create community events that draw diverse community members together and enhance the Town's communication methods so they reach as many residents as possible.

"We continuously strive to increase community engagement to ensure all of our residents' voices are heard," Ball said.
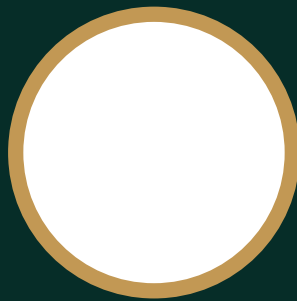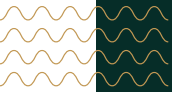
> " While people are clamoring in many ways for in-person interactions now that we have to meet virtually due to the pandemic, I believe online meetings have opened up a lot of different types of people to be able to participate, "

said Jenn Ball, Assistant City Manager.

CHAPTER 14

Transformation Case Studies – Ashland, Massachusetts

How Ashland Transformed the Natural Environment

TRANSFORMATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ashland, Massachusetts

	2016	2019	vs. benchmark
Openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds	○→●	+5	Above ∧
Public information services	○→●	+7	
Opportunities to participate in community matters	○→●	+7	
Local government treating all residents fairly	○———→●	+18	Above ∧
Being honest (local government)	○———→●	+20	Above ∧
Local government generally acting in the best interest of the community	○———→●	+19	Above ∧

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Percent rated positively

Polco NRC

Prioritizing resident voices led to increased resident satisfaction and more open spaces in Ashland, Massachusetts.

From 1990 to 2015, land preservation and the environment took a backseat to residential housing development. This growth attracted more people to Ashland, but it also left leaders with questions about what residents wanted.

By 2016, a new management team stepped in as the Town Council of Ashland. They were eager to hear more about resident opinions. So, they sent out the first National Community Survey to gather input.

The results of this survey showed that, after so much development, the people of Ashland wanted change. They wanted to preserve the environment and wanted more open spaces. Leaders responded.

"We believe that consistent community dialogue about our actions lead to our residents recognizing our efforts on the 2019 survey. It allowed us to enjoy a significant increase in positive ratings," said Jenn Ball, Assistant Town Manager.

Between 2016 and 2019, rankings for preservation of natural areas increased 15 percent and open space metrics increased 11 percent.

"Ashland should be proud of their efforts to listen to resident voices to transform the natural environment," Mann said.

The shift in direction is why Ashland won a Voice of the People Award for Transformation in the Natural Environment.

Prioritizing People

After gathering data through The NCS, the management team prioritized residents' desire for more open spaces. The strategic plan they developed became one of the most significant efforts to preserve Ashland's land since 1948 when leaders donated over 500 acres of forest to the Sudbury Valley Trustees and Ashland Town Forest Committee.

As part of the plan, the Town recently added over fifty additional acres of land to the already vast town forest. The Town also purchased 65 acres of agricultural land to protect from a local business owner.

In addition, Ashland built a community park and recreation area on a 3-acre plot of land that was previously home to run-down buildings and unusable land. Last, leaders acquired a Rail Transit District and transformed it into a community park and outdoor recreational retreat.

Rail Transit District Transformation

The Rail Transit District is an 180-acre plot of land surrounding the commuter train station that goes to Boston. The area was originally reserved for housing and a technological park, but The NCS results encouraged Ashland's leaders to decrease the environmental impact of the plans.

National Research Center   Polco   NRC
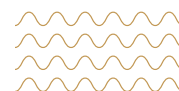
As a result of these negotiations, the Town managed to:

- Buy the seven most crucial acres of the district to use as open space.

- Convert a portion of the land to become a retirement community.

- Secure funding to build a community YMCA.

- Purchase and preserve nine additional acres in the Rail Transit District that cannot be replaced or industrialized.

- Secure and preserve a critical piece of land in the historic district. The deed protects a historical home from demolition, as well as 26 additional acres surrounding the home.

Resident Satisfaction Revealed

Changes by the new management team did not go unnoticed. Their project proposals passed unanimously in Town Hall, a rare occurrence in Ashland. In addition, The NCS rating for natural resource preservation, land use, and overall satisfaction and confidence in local government increased significantly.

Ashland's leaders aren't done yet. The Town Council is devoted to becoming a net-zero community by 2040 by working with the Open Space and Recreation Committee.

Leaders also plan to invest in the Town Forest Committee's projects and plans as they look toward the future. This involves creating and maintaining new hiking and biking trails. It also involves introducing a tree bylaw to protect the large tree canopy that covers the town. This new bylaw discourages developers from cutting down more trees. It also encourages them to create smaller, more compact housing, like apartments.

The stormwater management utility is another important tool used to decrease pollution in the waterways and streams flowing through Ashland. This program pairs nicely with the Health Department's recent restrictions on herbicides and certain chemicals in fertilizers.

"We will continue to work to promote the proper use of our open spaces and natural recreational areas," Ball said.

National Research Center · Polco · NRC
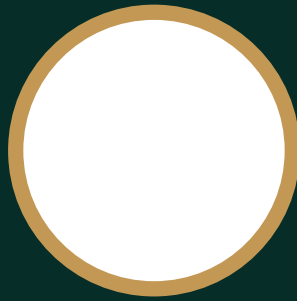
" We believe that consistent community dialogue about our actions helped lead to our residents recognizing our efforts on the 2019 survey and allowing us to enjoy a significant increase in positive ratings, "

said Jenn Ball, Assistant Town Manager.

CHAPTER 15

Excellence Case Studies – Winter Garden, Florida

How Winter Garden Increased Resident Satisfaction With a Health and Wellness Park

EXCELLENCE IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Winter Garden, Florida

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

Garbage collection	96%	Above ∧
Yard waste pick-up	95%	Above ∧
Recycling	90%	Above ∧
Cleanliness	89%	Above ∧
Overall quality of natural environment	89%	
Air quality	89%	

Polco NRC
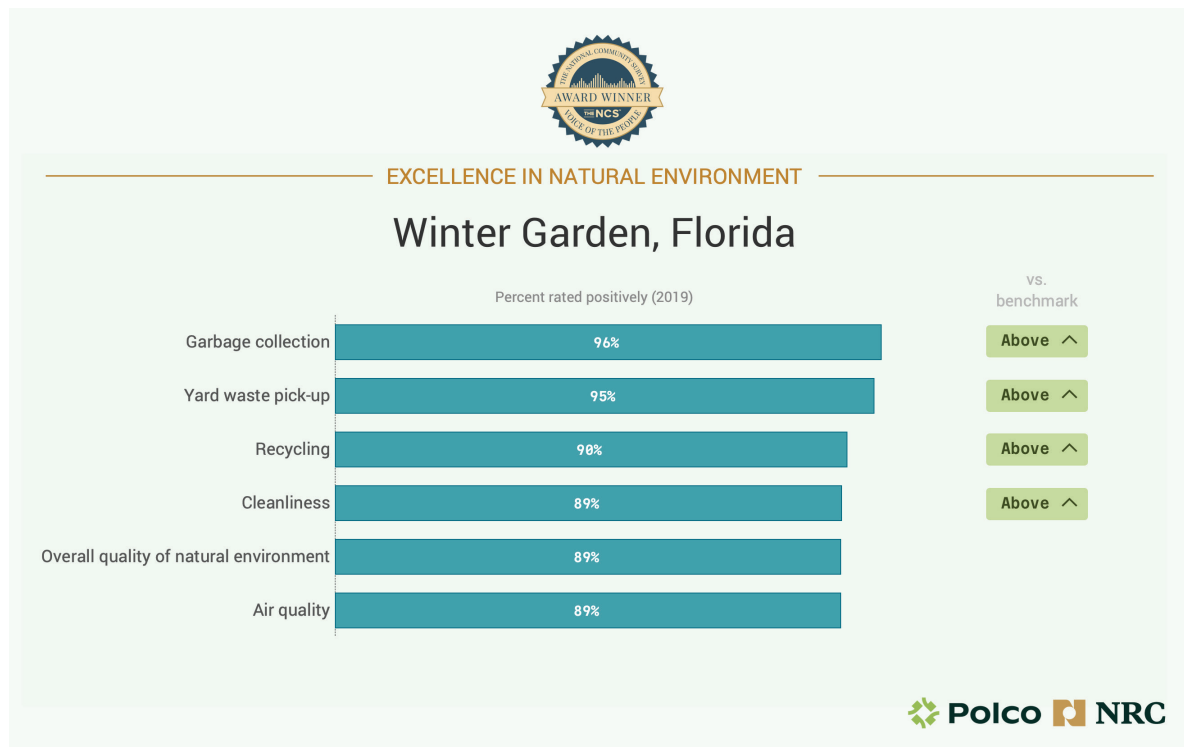
Winter Garden's mission is to be the best small city in Florida. As part of this goal, the City aims to simultaneously support wellness, the natural environment, and quality of life for their residents.

One shining example of this commitment is Tucker Ranch, a health and wellness park that Winter Garden's leaders opened in 2018.

"We are so excited since the Tucker Ranch is the first and one of a kind in Central Florida," said Marc Hutchinson, Senior Business Analyst.

Leaders' dedication to improve waste management and green space also contribute to resident satisfaction.

Data from The NCS show that most aspects of the natural environment score above the national benchmark, which is why they won a VOP Award for Excellence in Natural Environment.

"I commend Winter Garden's focus on the Natural Environment. The NCS shows that residents appreciate all the hard work,"Mann said.

Holistic Health and Wellness Park

The Tucker Ranch features a teaching farm, farm store, a greenhouse, a teaching kitchen, a health and wellness center, exercise trails, pre- and post-surgery therapy, a meditation garden, an aquaponics facility, and much more. The mission of the park is to holistically benefit the mind, body, and spirit.

"Residents are excited about this project as nothing like it exists in Central Florida," Hutchinson said .

A Focus on Green Space

The City is expanding green space even beyond The Tucker Ranch. As part of the City's design and construction standards, all new development projects are required to dedicate 25 percent of their site location to green and open spaces. This includes natural conservation easements. Since these changes, the amount of green space in Winter Garden increased 7 percent between 2009 and 2019.

Improvements to Waste Management

Hutchinson believes the Waste Management team earned a lot of goodwill from residents during the cleanup of Hurricane Irma in Fall 2017. The City completed the cleanup effort within 36 days of the disaster. They removed over 3o thousand cubic yards of vegetative debris while maintaining the normal garbage pick-up schedule

"This was unique for the region and really stood out to our residents as other jurisdictions took as long as five to six months to complete their clean-up effort," Hutchinson said.

Last, Waste Management has worked hard to reduce sending non-recyclables to the landfill. Despite a 40 percent increase in population since 2009, Winter Garden has reduced non-recyclable waste to the landfill from 93 percent to 90 percent, and increased recycling from 6 percent to 9 percent.

The NCS showed that the garbage collection satisfaction rating jumped 8 percent between 2009 and 2019. The yard waste satisfaction rating jumped 11 percent between 2009 and 2019.

"We challenge staff to be more proactive in anticipating service needs based on field observations," Hutchinson said. "We continuously evaluate pick-up routes. We actively push communication to keep residents informed on changes in the pick-up schedule as well as to promote recycling and sustainability behavior."

The City continues to improve sustainability and livability each year.

"Keeping staff motivated, energized and empowered with a sense of ownership will be key in sustaining the momentum of high performance. Finding creative ways to stay ahead of the service needs through relevant, timely, and value-add communications will also be crucial," Hutchinson said.

" Keeping staff motivated, energized and empowered with a sense of ownership will be key in sustaining the momentum of high performance. Finding creative ways to stay ahead of the service needs through relevant, timely and value-add communications will also be crucial, "

Said Marc Hutchinson,
Senior Business Analyst.

CHAPTER 16

Excellence Case Studies – Plymouth, Minnesota

How Plymouth Police Transparency Promotes Confidence

EXCELLENCE IN SAFETY

Plymouth, Minnesota

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

	Percent	vs. benchmark
Feeling of safety in downtown or commercial area during the day	98%	Above ^
Feeling of safety in neighborhood during the day	97%	
Fire services	96%	
Police/Sheriff services	93%	Above ^
Overall feeling of safety	93%	Above ^
Fire prevention and education	93%	

Polco   NRC
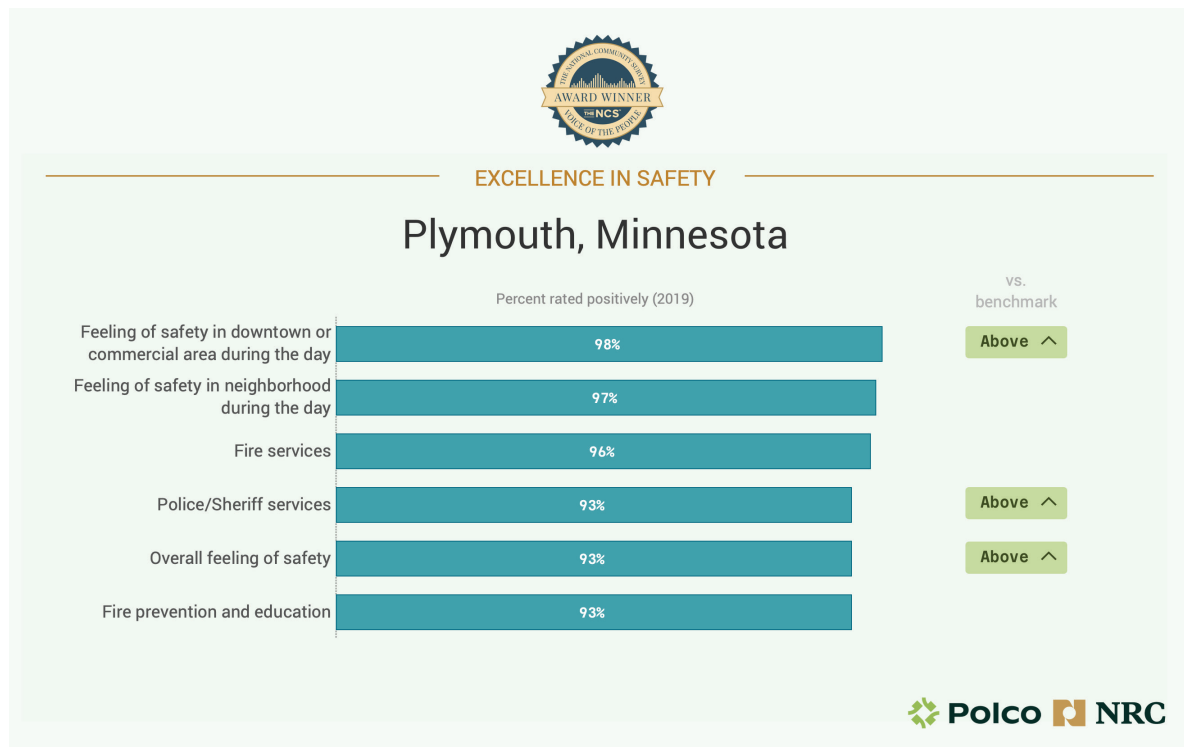
The City of Plymouth, Minnesota, makes residents feel safe by committing to police transparency and community action. The Plymouth Public Safety Department has come to understand that taking the time to connect with the public is vital to keeping everyone safe.

According to The National Community Survey, an impressive 99 percent of Plymouth community members are happy with the City as a place to live. And overall, the community stated that safety was their top-ranking priority.

Thanks to the hard work of the Plymouth Police Department, the vast majority of residents stated that they felt safe in their community— earning the department a VOP Award for Excellence in Safety.

According to Damema Mann, Senior Research Analyst for Polco and their National Research Center team, "the community received positive ratings from at least nine in 10 respondents and were more favorable in Plymouth than in other communities in the U.S."

Leadership is Worth Emulating

The Plymouth Police Department has a single priority: to provide superior protection and service by reducing crime and enhancing the quality of life.

To accomplish this, the department expects all sworn and civilian members of the team to live by and uphold the department's core values:

- Buy the seven most crucial acres of the district to use as open space.
- Convert a portion of the land to become a retirement community.
- Secure funding to build a community YMCA.
- Purchase and preserve nine additional acres in the Rail Transit District that cannot be replaced or industrialized.
- Secure and preserve a critical piece of land in the historic district. The deed protects a historical home from demolition, as well as 26 additional acres surrounding the home.

Plymouth residents ranked their community significantly higher than the national average for overall feeling of safety. They also reported that community engagement overall was satisfactory, thanks to the City's multiple communication channels and in-person events.

The NCS revealed that Plymouth residents receive most of their information from the City's newsletter. However, the City also found that visiting the official website is another preferred method of information.

"We are continually seeking to improve, engage and strengthen public trust," said Public Safety Director and Police Chief Mike Goldstein. And they are doing just that.

At least three-quarters of Plymouth residents felt favorable about:

- The value of services for taxes paid
- The overall direction of the City
- The job the City government does at welcoming citizens' involvement
- Overall confidence in the City government
- Treating all residents fairly
- The customer service provided by City employees

To uphold the Plymouth Police Department's values and foster trusting relationships with the community, the department adopted the 21st Century Policing model. This model prioritizes community engagement and police transparency to ensure the safety of everyone in the community, both residents and key governing officials.

The 6 Pillars of the 21st Century Policing Model

The 21st Century Policing Model is the first of its kind to recognize that trust between law enforcement and the people they protect and serve is vital in creating a safe and thriving community.

The model outlines six key pillars designed to encourage police transparency, accountability, and community engagement.

Pillar 1: Building Trust and Legitimacy

To feel safe, Plymouth PD believes they must build trusting relationships. Trust and legitimacy go hand-in-hand. Both are required for the public to believe that authority figures work in the community's best interest. This requires law enforcement to adopt a guardian mindset.

Pillar 2: Policy and Oversight

As part of building trust, police must create policies that reflect the community's standards and values–not just the department's objectives. It also means paying careful attention to any oversights that could negatively affect the community.

To ensure these oversights don't happen, police and safety departments should collaborate with the community to develop strategies and policies that help reduce crime by improving relationships through engagement and cooperation.

Pillar 3: Communication Technology and Social Media

Communication is crucial between the safety department and the community, so it's important to incorporate technology and social media into the mix. This allows for open communication between both parties, and complete police transparency regarding all matters.

"The Plymouth Police Department understands the power of an informed citizenry. Consequently, it provides numerous tools so residents can obtain information and provide feedback to help solve crimes," said Laurie Hokkanen, Administrative Services Director of the City of Plymouth.

The City utilizes several platforms, including:

- Newsletters
- eNotify Emails
- Cable Television
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Nextdoor
- The National Community Survey (The NCS)

These channels are used to keep the community informed of what's going on and alert residents in emergency cases. They are also used to encourage the community to reach out and communicate with the department to get all comments, questions, and concerns addressed.

Pillar 4: Community Policing and Crime Reduction

Community policing focuses on intervention and prevention with the collaborative efforts between the Public Safety Department and local schools, social services, and other stakeholders.

These partnerships open up essential lines of communication that ensure residents feel safe turning to the police in times of need.

Pillar 5: Officer Training and Education

It is also essential that today's officers receive the best training possible. Plymouth requires extensive, ongoing training for in-the-moment reactions, as well as proper socialization to help with de-escalation in high-intensity scenarios. It is a requirement for all sworn officers to take part in an average of 130 hours of training each year. That is approximately 10 times what the state of Minnesota mandates.

Pillar 6: Officer Wellness and Safety

Finally, while most of the pillars of the 21st Century Policing model focus on community wellbeing, the last pillar focuses on officer wellness and safety. To perform their duties, officers need to take care of their mental, emotional, and physical health. If they don't, they cannot keep themselves, their colleagues, and residents safe.

The City's "Check Up from the Neck Up" program requires staff to undergo health and wellness checks each year to make sure they are physically and mentally capable of upholding their duties responsibly. This program caught the attention of other departments and started spreading nationwide.

Reaping the Benefits of the 21st Century Policing Model

The 21st Century policing model has proven quite successful in the Plymouth community — reflected by the 93 percent overall feeling of safety reported by residents. The community's crime rate is over one-third lower than the national average.

To continue fostering trusting relationships with the community, the department has introduced new technology to help improve the collection of information, including:

- A partnership with Ring doorbell
- Online crime mapping
- A crime tip line

The department also contributes much of its success to its involvement within the community. In 2019 alone, department staff took part in a record-breaking 533 events. This allows them to spend time with residents, getting to know everyone on a more personal level. It also lets residents see police as approachable neighbors, rather than outside, unknown enforcers.

Plymouth's Public Safety Department Will Continue To Lead By Example

Plymouth public safety leaders believe it's vital to foster trust within the community. Plymouth Police will continue to lead by example. They will continue to prioritize transparency, accountability, and conversations that discuss best practices in police services—not only in their own community but regionally and nationally.

> " The Plymouth Police Department understands the power of an informed citizenry. Consequently, it provides numerous tools so residents can obtain information and provide feedback to help solve crimes, "
>
> said Laurie Hokkanen, Administrative Services Director of the City of Plymouth.

CHAPTER 17

Excellence Case Studies – Niles, Illinois

How Niles Improves Quality of Life With Excellent Transportation

EXCELLENCE IN MOBILITY

Niles, Illinois

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

	Percent rated positively (2019)	vs. benchmark
Bus or transit services	93%	Above ∧
Ease of getting to the places you usually have to visit	91%	Above ∧
Ease of travel by car	88%	Above ∧
Ease of public parking	86%	Above ∧
Ease of travel by public transportation	82%	Above ∧
Snow removal	81%	Above ∧

Polco ▮ NRC

National Research Center ❖ Polco ▮ NRC

The Village of Niles, Illinois, knows improving transportation drastically improves quality of life for residents and protects the environment.

"The Village of Niles prioritizes efficient, safe, and sustainable transportation and other mobility-related services for residents and visitors alike," said Hadley Skeffington-Vos, former Deputy Village Manager. "Niles has incorporated feedback from residents and trusted experts into mobility plans in order to best serve the wants and needs of all who live, work or play in Niles."

Data shows that residents are happy with mobility improvements. The Village regularly conducts The NCS to gather feedback from community members. And residents rate almost all aspects of Niles' mobility higher than the national benchmark.

"Niles is a leader in mobility, whether that means improving roadways and bike paths to offering free transportation options to making sure snow and ice is removed promptly," Mann said .

Their high rankings on transportation questions on The NCS is why Niles received a Voice of the People award for Excellence in Mobility.

Improvements to Accessibility

Improving accessibility was a key mobility goal. Niles adopted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan to make facilities easier to navigate. One important aspect of the plan is the implementation of accessibility management software. This software helps the Village update its strategy, document progress, estimate costs, and create an ADA compliance grievance procedure, among other services.

Improvements to Bike Paths, Walkways, and Roads

In addition to making facilities more accessible, Niles' leaders continue to work hard to maintain and improve bike paths, walkways, roads, and trails, including its 36.7-mile regional trail that travels throughout the Chicago suburbs. Not only does the path wind through beautiful forests, but it connects to the highway, bus stops, and major public parking lots.

In terms of pathway improvements, Niles implemented an ongoing bicycle and pedestrian plan, which prioritizes sidewalks closest to schools, parks, and civic institutions. The Village recently improved a number of streets as well, including updating street lighting and sidewalks.

Snow and Ice Removal

Niles receives an average of 36 inches of snow per year, so leaders prioritize keeping road conditions safe. The Village uses a routing software that determines the most efficient routes and helps commuters get to where they're going before a storm hits. And the Village's proactive snow removal services clear out bus routes and high traffic streets to help maintain ease of travel.

Bus Services

The Village provides a number of free or cheap bus options.

For example, Niles offers a free, seven-day-a-week courtesy bus service. They stop at all major shopping centers and public facilities. And bus stops are a short distance from every residence.

"The Free Bus is not only beneficial to residents, but also to the environment, as it encourages people to use public transportation rather than personal vehicles," Skeffington-Vos said.

The Village also added the Pulse Milwaukee Bus Line in 2019. The Pulse Line is designed to provide a fast, frequent, and reliable bus service in suburban Chicago's heavily traveled corridors.

The Pulse buses are equipped with Wi-Fi and bike racks. The raised boarding platform facilitates easier boarding. Also, the ADA-accessible heated buses provide comfortable weather protection.

"Continuing to improve mobility within Niles will impact the sustainability of the Village, the economic health of our commercial corridors, and the physical health of our residents," Skeffington-Vos said.
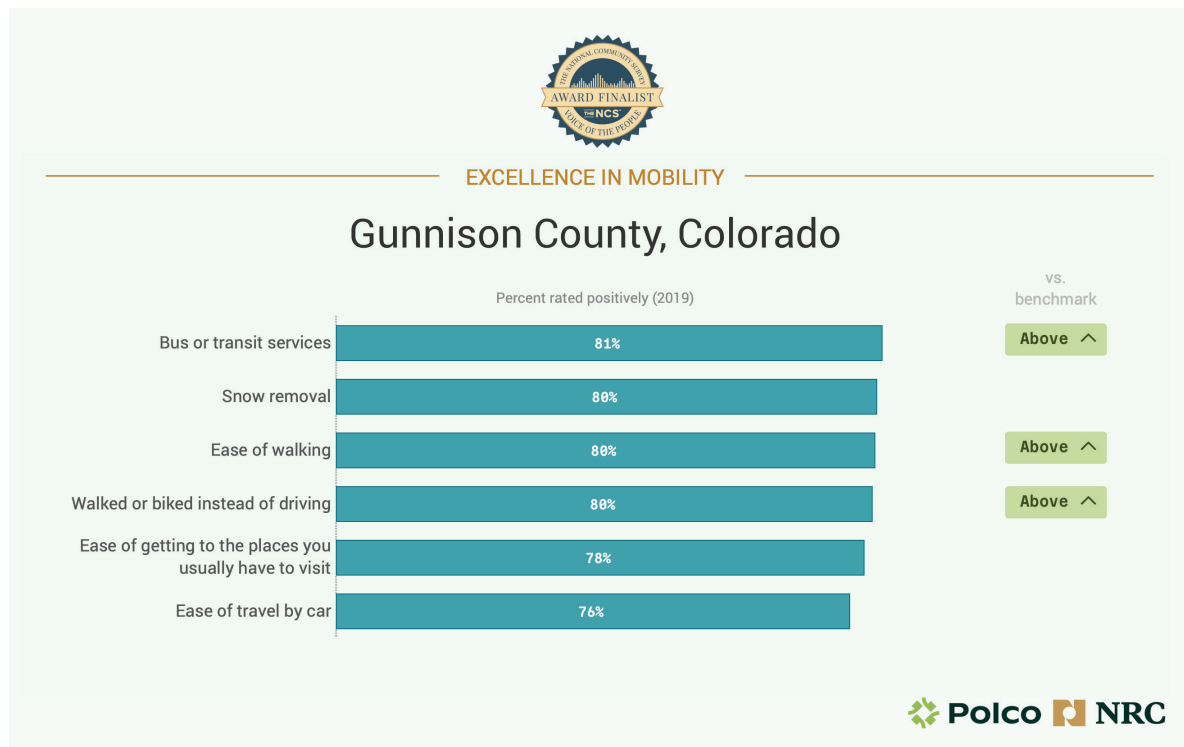
> "Continuing to improve mobility within the Village will impact the sustainability of the Village, the economic health of our commercial corridors, and the physical health of our residents. It will increase the attractiveness of Niles as a place for young families to raise children,"
>
> said Hadley Skeffington-Vos, Deputy Village Manager.

CHAPTER 18

Excellence Case Studies – Gunnison County, Colorado

How Gunnison County Work With Residents to Improve Mobility

EXCELLENCE IN MOBILITY

Gunnison County, Colorado

Percent rated positively (2019)

		vs. benchmark
Bus or transit services	81%	Above ∧
Snow removal	80%	
Ease of walking	80%	Above ∧
Walked or biked instead of driving	80%	Above ∧
Ease of getting to the places you usually have to visit	78%	
Ease of travel by car	76%	

Polco NRC

"Gunnison County has a reputation for working in the best interest of our communities. We strive to maintain transparency so that we can continue to deserve our constituents' trust and pride in our government," said Matthew Birnie, County Manager of Gunnison County, Colorado.

Indeed, data show that Gunnison County's residents value the government's work to make it easy to get around. Residents rate the County higher than the national benchmark on several aspects of mobility, according to The NCS.

The County has participated in The NCS for several years, helping guide the County's strategic planning, budgeting, and evaluation process.

"Gunnison County is very data-focused. And that focus helps them to build trust with residents and to continue to improve mobility," Mann said.

Their data-driven decisions resulted in a VOP award for Excellence in Mobility.

Strategic Planning

The Village provides a number of free or cheap bus options.

For example, Niles offers a free, seven-day-a-week courtesy bus service. They stop at all major shopping centers and public facilities. And bus stops are a short distance from every residence.

"The Free Bus is not only beneficial to residents, but also to the environment, as it encourages people to use public transportation rather than personal vehicles," Skeffington-Vos said.

The Village also added the Pulse Milwaukee Bus Line in 2019. The Pulse Line is designed to provide a fast, frequent, and reliable bus service in suburban Chicago's heavily traveled corridors.

The Pulse buses are equipped with Wi-Fi and bike racks. The raised boarding platform facilitates easier boarding. Also, the ADA-accessible heated buses provide comfortable weather protection.

"Continuing to improve mobility within Niles will impact the sustainability of the Village, the economic health of our commercial corridors, and the physical health of our residents," Skeffington-Vos said.

No Cost Bus Transportation

Gunnison's bus transportation is a shining example of its commitment to quality mobility.

The Gunnison Valley Rural Transportation Authority (RTA) provides ADA-accessible bus transportation at no cost to as many as 87,000 travelers each year to and from Gunnison, Crested Butte, and Mt. Crested Butte.

The RTA also coordinates with the Colorado Department of Transportation and other municipalities along the route to create affordable bus services between Gunnison and Denver.

Looking Towards The Future

As leaders look towards the future, Gunnison County will continually include resident voices to improve mobility in the region.

"Gunnison County will continue to honor the balance between our community's needs and our fiduciary responsibilities so that our residents and visitors can benefit from a safe and efficient local transportation network," Birnie said.

" Gunnison County will continue to honor the balance between our community's needs and our fiduciary responsibilities so that our residents and visitors can benefit from a safe and efficient local transportation network, "
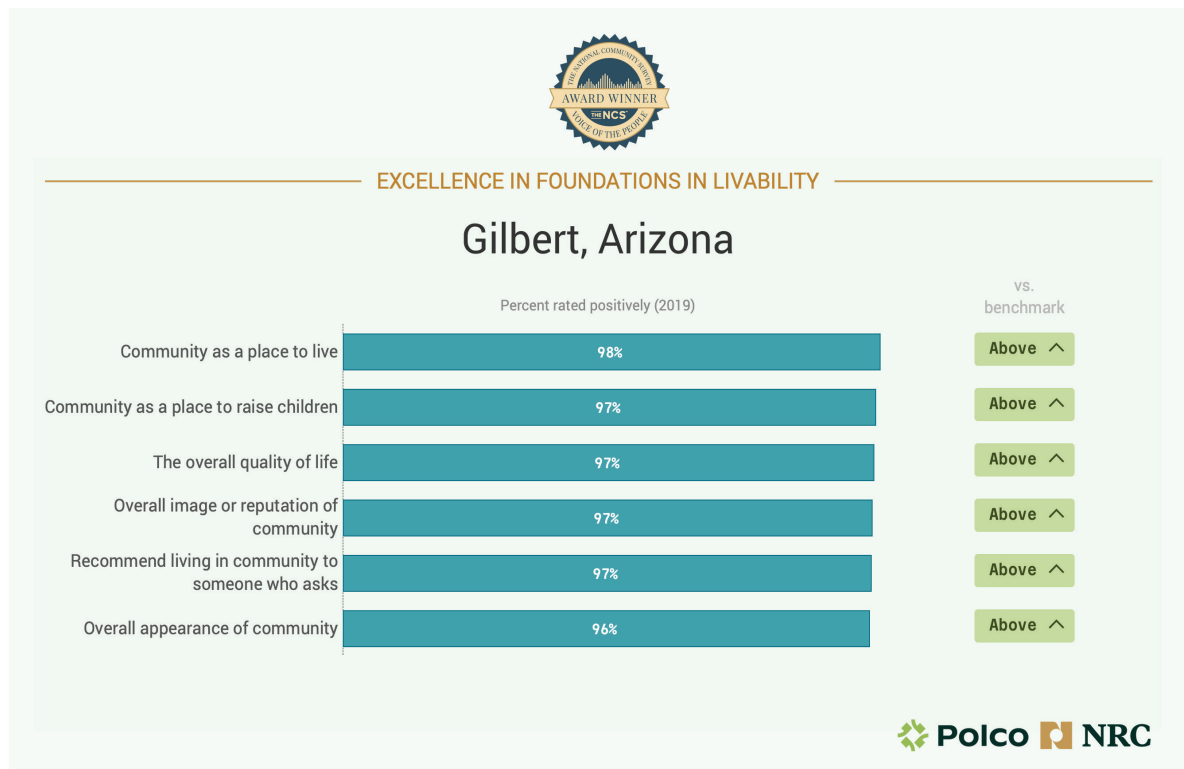
said Matthew Birnie,
County Manager of Gunnison County,
Colorado.

CHAPTER 19

Excellence Case Studies – Gilbert, Arizona

Gilbert's Transparency Leads To Award–Winning Resident Satisfaction

EXCELLENCE IN FOUNDATIONS IN LIVABILITY

Gilbert, Arizona

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

	Percent rated positively (2019)	vs. benchmark
Community as a place to live	98%	Above ∧
Community as a place to raise children	97%	Above ∧
The overall quality of life	97%	Above ∧
Overall image or reputation of community	97%	Above ∧
Recommend living in community to someone who asks	97%	Above ∧
Overall appearance of community	96%	Above ∧

Polco NRC

It's rare that a community looks far into the future to make sure they are prepared for what comes next. And it is even rarer when a community asks residents to join them along for the ride.

The Town of Gilbert, Arizona, is that forward-looking place.

Data shows that Gilbert's residents experience a strong quality of life and think highly of their government. The Town regularly conducts The NCS to gather feedback from community members. In fact, 98 percent of residents say Gilbert is a great place to live. This level of resident satisfaction is so high that only four out of 395 other municipalities nationwide ranked higher. These high marks are why Gilbert received a Voice of the People award for Excellence in Foundations of Livability.

"Gilbert is an amazing place for its commitment to open government, resident feedback, and planning for today and the future," Mann said.

Transparency and Engagement

"Our transparency and commitment to communication and resident engagement builds trust," said Melanie Dykstra, Community Resources Supervisor.

The Town's Office of Digital Government manages over three dozen social media accounts and publishes a regular podcast. The Town also works with leaders to craft and implement a digital roadmap strategy to be a leader in online government. Gilbert has won a number of awards as a result of this work.

In addition, the Town has an open data portal that helps tell Gilbert's story with numbers. The portal shows relevant local trends, statistics, and community survey results.

Gilbert residents regularly participate in The NCS. Results inform funding priorities, new programs, and organizational goals. For example, Gilbert has recently invested significant infrastructure in parks and recreation opportunities as a result of feedback on The NCS. The Town built a regional park that includes a large playground and a splash pad. Future phases of the project include a 7-acre lake, performance pavilion and amphitheater, an event lawn, and sport courts.

Town of the Future

Gilbert leaders know that planning thoughtfully for the future is essential to the Town's success.

"The people are here and the businesses are coming. We are going to be just fine tomorrow. It's the five-year and the 10-year and the 20-year marks that I want to make sure this community is prepared for," said Gilbert Mayor Jenn Daniels.

During Gilbert's 100th birthday, officials announced its mission to be a Town of the Future. As part of the birthday celebration, leaders developed three new focus areas in their planning: building a prosperous community, strong economy, and an exceptional built environment.

One component of the plan is to strategically maintain existing infrastructure over the next few decades. Another focus will be innovative growth and economic development. The Town has developed a long-range financial plan and established an Opportunity Zone to spur smart development in Gilbert's historic downtown.

"We will continue to solicit feedback, engage with our residents, and use data. We will not just sit back and let growth happen, but proactively drive growth in ways that will have long-term benefits," Dyskstra said.
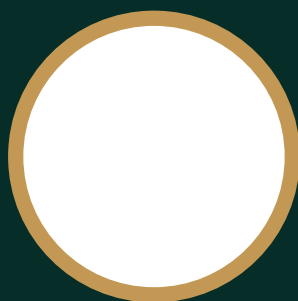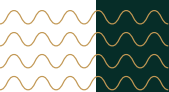
" The people are here and the businesses are coming. We are going to be just fine tomorrow. It's the 5-year and the 10-year and the 20-year marks that I want to make sure this community is prepared for, "
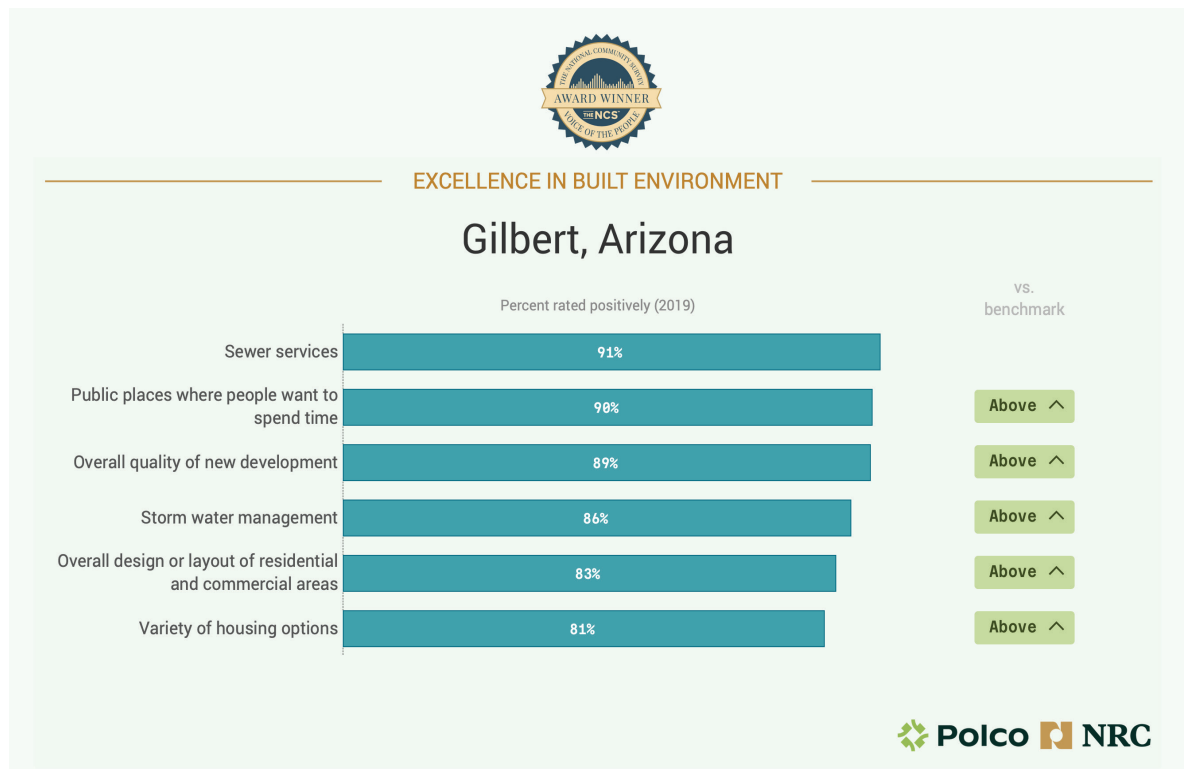
Said Gilbert Mayor Jenn Daniels.

CHAPTER 20

Excellence Case Studies – Gilbert, Arizona

How Surveys Help Gilbert's Built Environment Keep Pace With a Booming Population

EXCELLENCE IN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Gilbert, Arizona

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

	Percent	vs. benchmark
Sewer services	91%	
Public places where people want to spend time	90%	Above ∧
Overall quality of new development	89%	Above ∧
Storm water management	86%	Above ∧
Overall design or layout of residential and commercial areas	83%	Above ∧
Variety of housing options	81%	Above ∧

Polco NRC

National Research Center Polco NRC

Gilbert, Arizona is growing rapidly. In fact, its population has doubled every five years since 1980. As the Town prepares for a boom in housing and development, Gilbert's leaders continually reach out to residents to make sure they thoughtfully grow.

"While Gilbert is currently in a cycle of growth that could eventually change once the community is fully built-out in a decade or two. Our goal is to try and work with residents to understand, at a much more specific level, what we need to do to make sure that Gilbert continues to thrive 20 years from now," said Patrick Banger, Town Manager.

Gilbert's built environment, or urban planning, exemplifies how continuous feedback and long-term development strategy leads to resident satisfaction.

Gilbert's residents rate almost all aspects of the Town's built environment higher than the national average, according to The NCS results, which is why Gilbert received a VOP award for Excellence in Built Environment.

"Gilbert includes residents in their planning to make sure the Town's built environment meets the needs of the growing population," Mann said.

Resident Voice In Planning For The Built Environment

Town leaders use The NCS results to inform their development vision. For example, leaders used The NCS results to develop The General Plan. This plan identifies goals for land use, development, new roads, and energy and resource conservation.

As they grow, Gilbert's leaders know that listening to residents will help them create the best strategy.

"Gilbert will continue to solicit feedback and listen to and engage with our residents, use data, and not just sit back and let growth happen, but proactively drive growth in ways that will have long-term benefits," said Melanie Dykstra, Volunteer and Community Resources Supervisor.
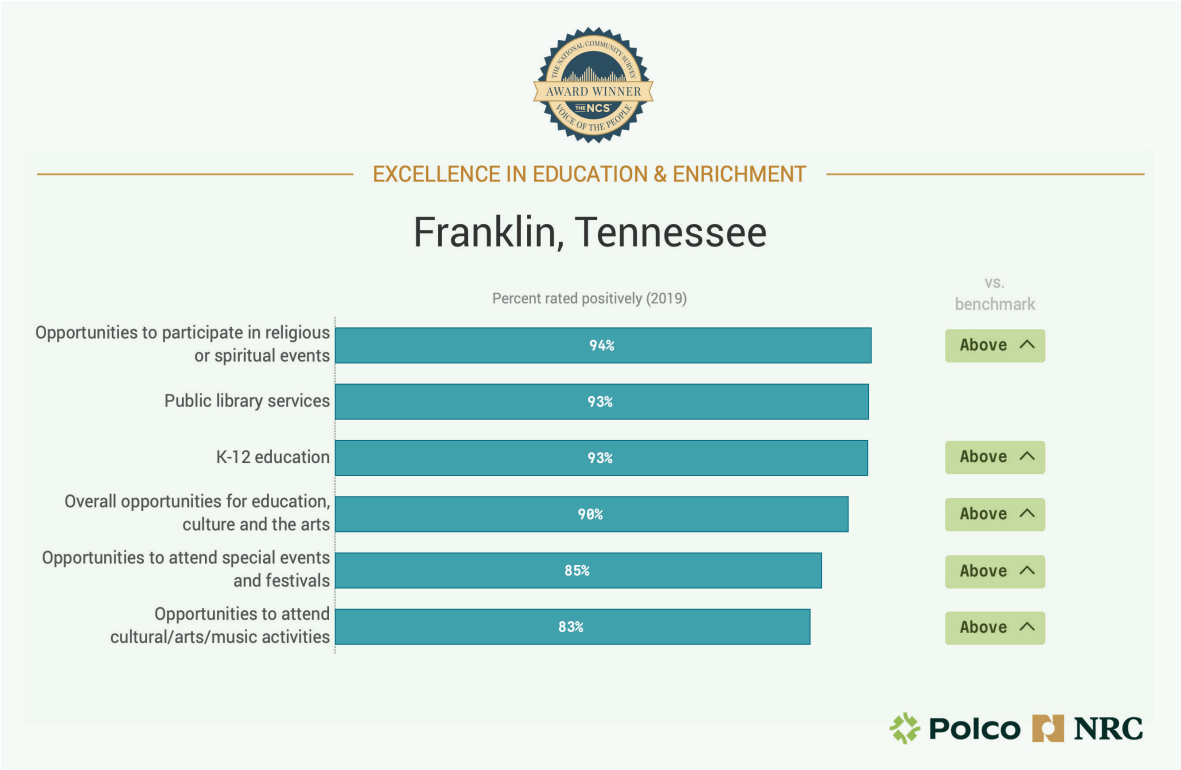
> " While Gilbert is currently in a cycle of growth that could eventually change once the community is fully built-out in a decade or two. Our goal is to try and work with residents to understand, at a much more specific level, what we need to do to make sure that Gilbert still continues to thrive 20 years from now, "
>
> said Patrick Banger,
> Town Manager.

National Research Center ❖ Polco NRC

CHAPTER 21

Excellence Case Studies – Franklin, Tennessee

Franklin Builds Community Through Festivals

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION & ENRICHMENT

Franklin, Tennessee

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

Opportunities to participate in religious or spiritual events	94%	
Public library services	93%	
K-12 education	93%	Above ^
Overall opportunities for education, culture and the arts	90%	Above ^
Opportunities to attend special events and festivals	85%	Above ^
Opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities	83%	Above ^

Polco | NRC

"The City of Franklin has placed a special emphasis on developing wonderful places where community can happen. As evidenced by our festivals and programming, and the interest we draw from people around the nation and the world, Franklin is a special place where people want to be," said Eric Stuckey, Franklin, Tennessee City Administrator.

Data show that Franklin's residents value arts and culture opportunities. The NCS respondents rate the City higher than the national benchmark on community participation in special events, social events, arts, and music activities. Their extensive calendar of community activities is why Franklin won a VOP award for Excellence in Education and Enrichment.

"Franklin builds a special sense of community through many festivals and enrichment opportunities. Leaders pay close attention to data to increase resident satisfaction," Mann said.

An Authentic Visitor Experience in a Dynamic Downtown

Many of Franklin's festivals take place in the City's Historic Downtown. Events include Arbor Day, Main Street Festival, Kids Arts Festival, Celebration of the Nations, Wine Down Main Street, The Pilgrimage Festival, and Dickens of a Christmas, among others.

"These festivals provide an authentic visitor experience by combining the dynamic downtown, cultural diversity, attractive architecture and a strong commitment to historic preservation," Stuckey said.

Cultural Opportunities Vitally Important To Franklin

Franklin offers numerous arts and enrichment opportunities as well.

A performing arts center is located next to the main local library. The local community college offers dozens of enrichment programs for all ages. Plus, all can enjoy the beautiful 15-block historic district that offers true southern hospitality.

"Cultural opportunities are vitally important to the vitality of Franklin," Stuckey said.

Continuous Improvement Loop

These festivals and enrichment programs are a part of Franklin's intentional approach to meeting resident needs—needs that they measure consistently with The NCS. Ten percent of the City's Strategic Plan is tied directly to The NCS questions. The City uses a communication plan to proactively engage residents in its continuous improvement loop.

Reimagining Favorite Community Events During The Pandemic

The NCS results and informal resident feedback gave city leaders the evidence they needed to plan safer holiday celebrations during the pandemic.

"These new events will help our community remain safe and socially distanced but still enjoy the spirit of Christmas and the holiday season," said Mayor Dr. Ken Moore in the City of Franklin website.

During Halloween 2020, the City reimagined their annual fall Pumpkin Fest as a safer event.

Paint the Town Orange was a month-long celebration on Franklin's Historic Main Street. During October, Franklin was aglow with shades of orange. Visitors could purchase an event t-shirt and facemask. Anyone who wore the commemorative clothing could participate in a variety of promotions. In addition, attendees could participate in an online costume contest and outdoor historical tours.
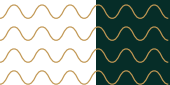
Franklin's leaders also reimagined their winter festivals. Neighborhoods could request Santa Claus to visit on a sleigh escorted by the Fire Department. The Parks Department hosted a Christmas drive-thru at a park featuring lights, characters and more. Last, the City hosted a virtual tree lighting program to air on the City's social channels and TV.

"This has been a very stressful time during 2020 and we're looking for ways we can continue to unite our community and also ways that we can help our businesses," Moore said in a City of Franklin video.

> " We don't just provide lip service to the act of building community. We take the time to actually and continuously build our city, "
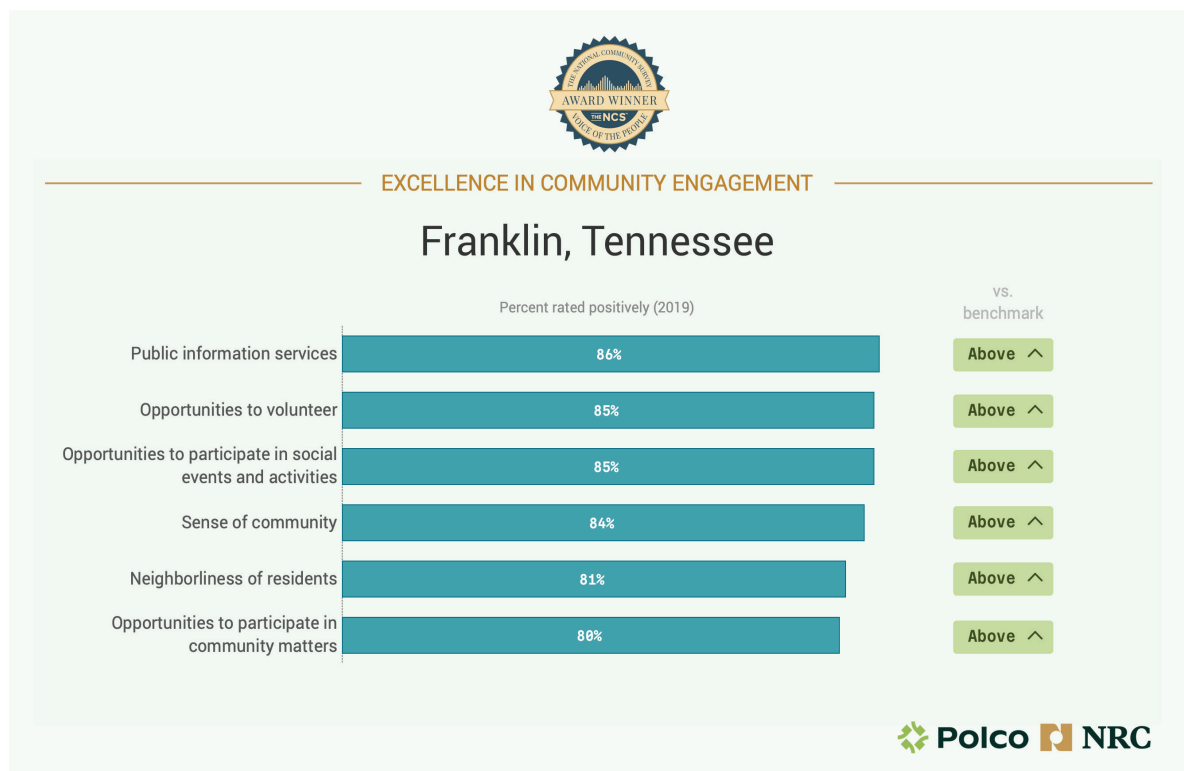>
> said Eric Stuckey,
> City Administrator for Franklin,
> Tennessee.

CHAPTER 22

Excellence Case Studies – Franklin

How Franklin Engages Community Through Outreach

EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Franklin, Tennessee

Percent rated positively (2019)

		vs. benchmark
Public information services	86%	Above ∧
Opportunities to volunteer	85%	Above ∧
Opportunities to participate in social events and activities	85%	Above ∧
Sense of community	84%	Above ∧
Neighborliness of residents	81%	Above ∧
Opportunities to participate in community matters	80%	Above ∧

Polco NRC

"We don't just provide lip service to the act of building community. We take the time to actually and continuously build our city," Stuckey said .

And Franklin's residents have noticed this commitment.

The Town regularly conducts The NCS to gather feedback from residents. Residents rate most aspects of engagement above the national average, including a sense of community and opportunities to participate in community matters.

"Franklin is a leader in community engagement. They score much higher on the national benchmark for community engagement,"Mann said .

Along with its Education and Enrichment award, Franklin also won a VOP for Excellence in Community Engagement.

"We are especially humbled in knowing that these awards come directly from the responses of our citizens and taxpayers who share our belief that Franklin is one of the best places to live, work, play, and grow anywhere in Tennessee and the United States," Stuckey said.

Many Ways To Engage

Franklin leaders connect to residents in many different ways. The City is very active on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Nextdoor. And the team always responds quickly to messages. The City tends to take a lighter, informative approach to draw more people in.

In addition to using social media, the City hosts public meetings and encourages active civic groups. For over two decades, the independent non-profit Franklin Tomorrow helped the City work towards a shared vision for the future.

Franklin Tomorrow provides a variety of opportunities for engagement, including a quarterly Breakfast With the Mayors meal and a monthly FrankTalks lecture series that highlight issues facing the community.

Franklin Tomorrow also began a community initiative called On The Table. This initiative provides an opportunity for people to gather in small groups to share a meal and have a real conversation about what's important to them.

Last, officials have multiple planning processes in place to help the City set goals and track how well they are meeting them.
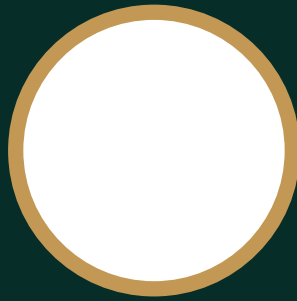
" The City of Franklin has placed a special emphasis on developing wonderful places where community can happen. As evidenced by our festivals and programming, and the interest we draw from people around the nation and the world, Franklin is a special place where people want to be, "

said Eric Stuckey, Franklin, Tennessee City Administrator.

CHAPTER 23

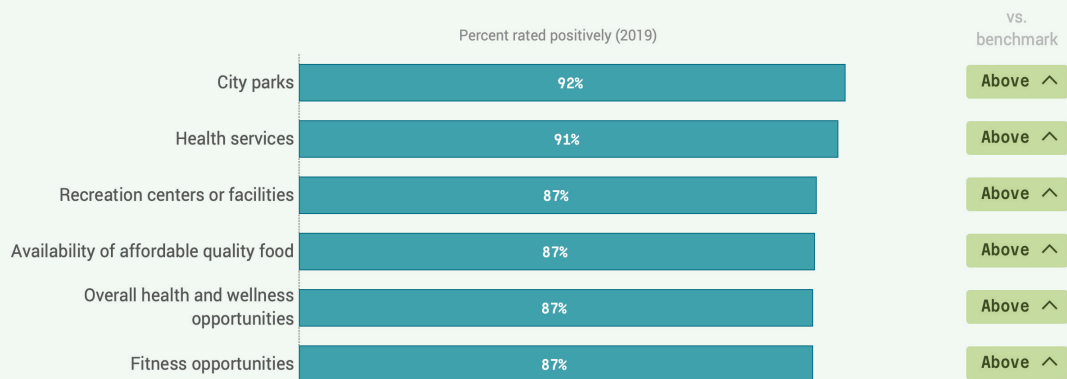## Excellence Case Studies – Flower Mound, Texas

Flower Mound Acts on Resident Feedback and Expands Parkland
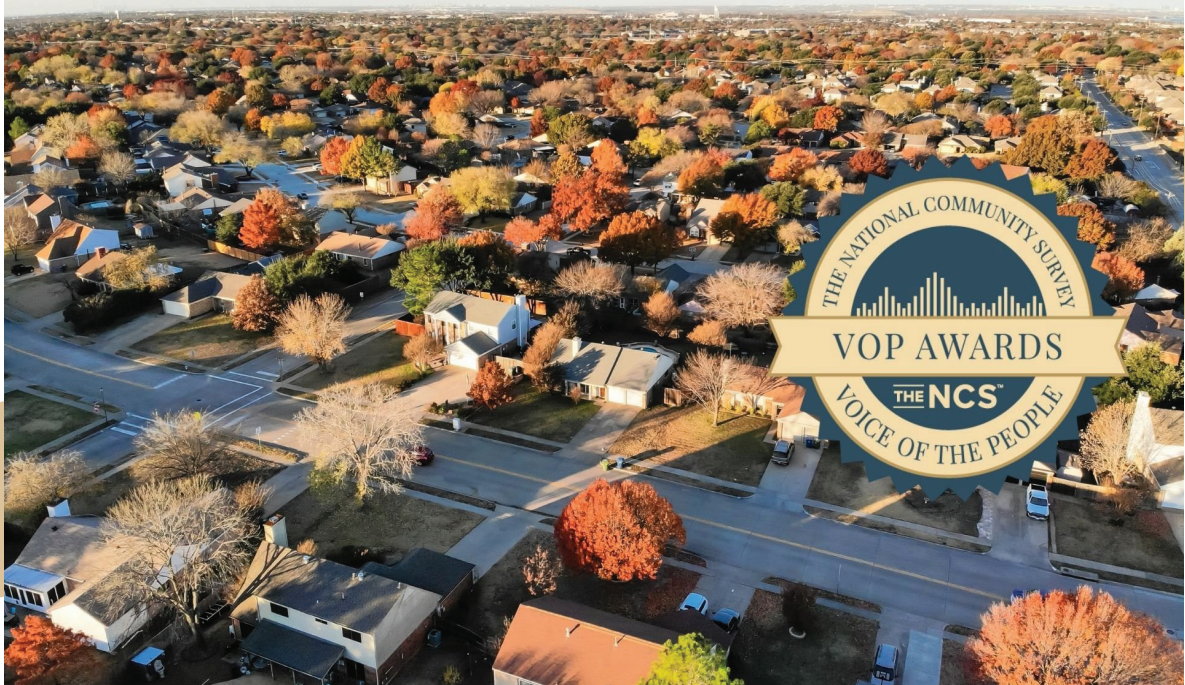
EXCELLENCE IN RECREATION & WELLNESS

Flower Mound, Texas

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

	Percent rated positively (2019)	vs. benchmark
City parks	92%	Above ^
Health services	91%	Above ^
Recreation centers or facilities	87%	Above ^
Availability of affordable quality food	87%	Above ^
Overall health and wellness opportunities	87%	Above ^
Fitness opportunities	87%	Above ^

Polco ▮ NRC

Since 2014, Flower Mound, Texas, has almost doubled the amount of land set aside for parks, opened a new Senior Center, and launched many new programs at their Community Activity Center (CAC).

What has made all of these ambitious upgrades possible? Resident feedback.

"The Town's commitment to excellence in Parks and Recreation is directly attributed to the residents of the Town of Flower Mound. Through open engagement, Town staff has implemented the requests, wants, and needs of the community," said JP Walton, Assistant to the Town Manager.

Data from The NCS show that Flower Mound's residents are happy with its recreation and wellness opportunities. Respondents rate all aspects of recreation and wellness higher than the national benchmark. These ratings are why Flower Mound won a VOP award for Excellence in Recreation and Wellness.

"Flower Mound's leaders work tirelessly to involve residents in planning for the future of recreation and wellness opportunities in their town," Mann said .

The Best Parks, Trails, and Recreation Opportunities Around

"During multiple public input sessions and through The NCS, the residents of the Town of Flower Mound have consistently expressed their desire to have the best parks, trails, and recreation opportunities available," Walton said.

So, it became the mission of the Town leaders to meet their residents' wishes.

The Town incorporated a 4B sales tax that directly funds park improvements and the expansion of recreation opportunities. For instance, additional programming at the CAC led to a 40 percent increase in new members.

"It is this direct public engagement and communication that has allowed the Town to provide the services that the residents desire," Walton said .

Flower Mound leaders also developed a Parks and Trails Master Plan. Leaders incorporated significant resident feedback into the strategy session. Every time Flower Mound plans for a park, they hold multiple public hearing and public input opportunities.

"This process allows residents to directly steer innovative park designers to create an end-product that is not only responsive to the needs of the community but also incorporates new and exciting elements," Walton said.

As a result of the Parks and Trails Master Plan, Flower Mound intends to build an additional 214 acres of parkland, tennis courts, multi-use trails, small neighborhood parks, nature trails, outdoor swimming pools, outdoor amphitheaters, and an off-leash dog park.

Bringing Medical Business To Town

In addition to improving recreation, Flower Mound's leaders also focus on bringing health and wellness-related businesses opportunities.

The Economic Development Department provided economic incentives that brought Flower Mound's first hospital to town. After the hospital opened, the Town recruited additional medical and wellness-oriented businesses to build out the surrounding property.

"The Town remains committed to implementing resident direction, will continue to promote resident engagement and communication, and will adapt our future recreation and wellness opportunities to the feedback we receive," Walton said.
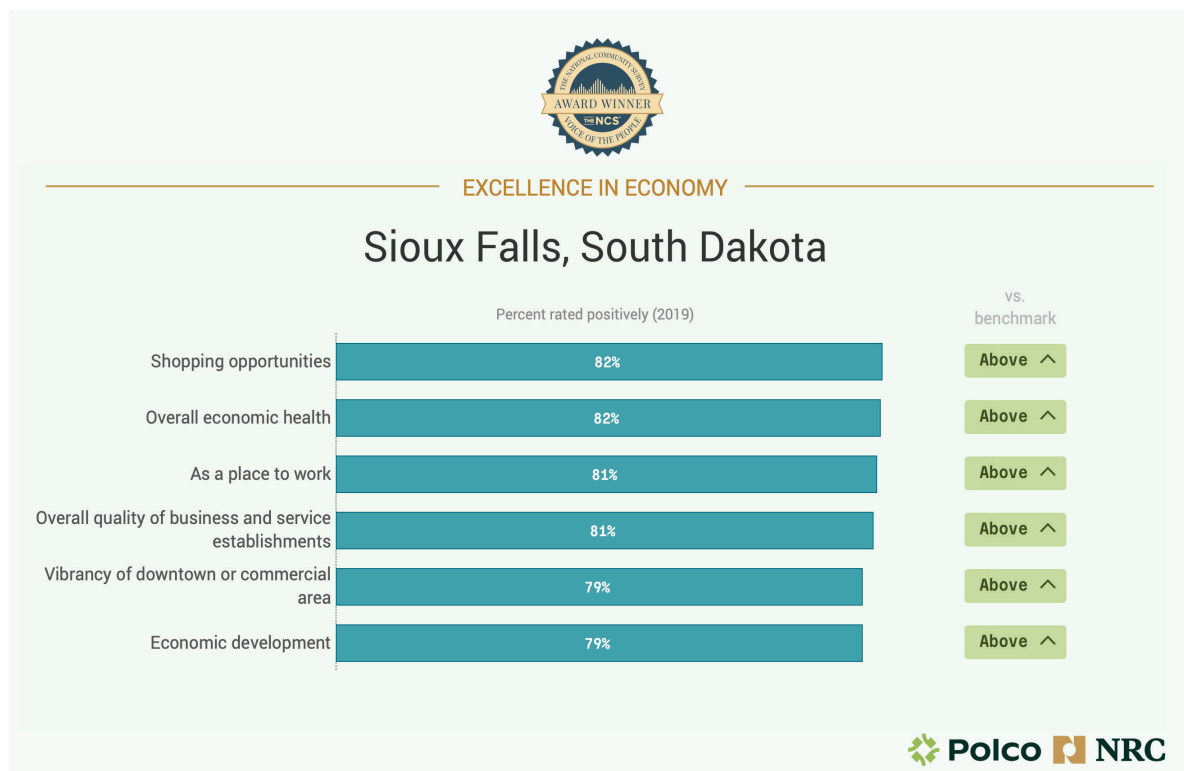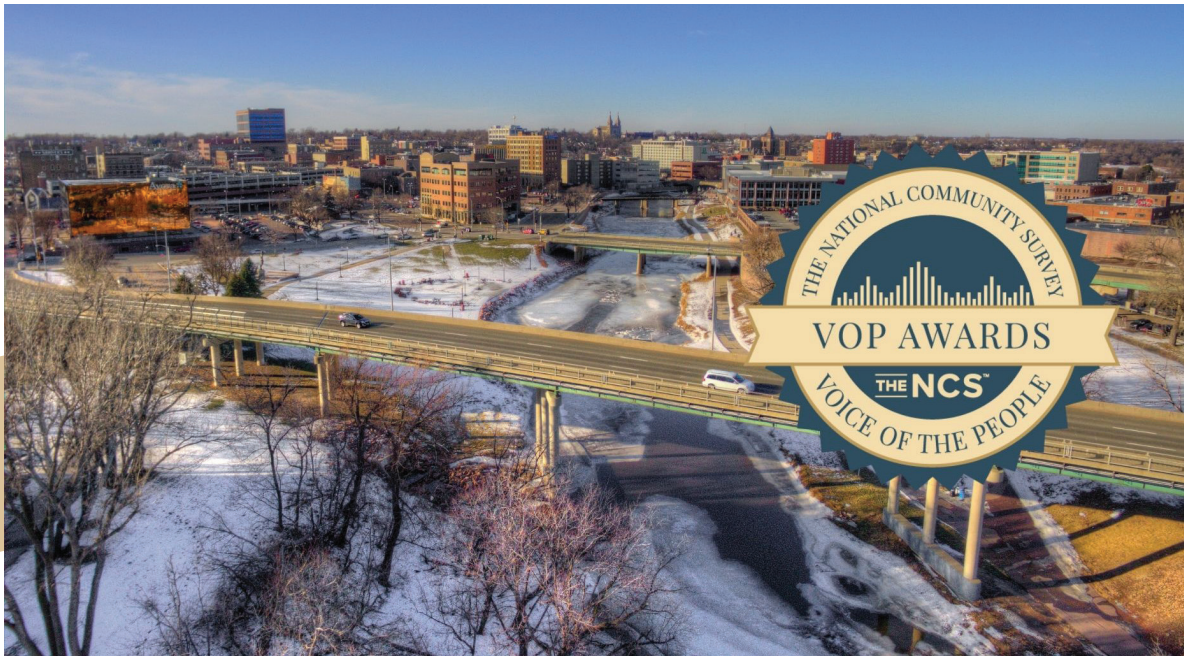
" The Town's commitment to excellence in Parks and Recreation is directly attributed to the residents of the Town of Flower Mound. Through open engagement, Town staff has implemented the requests, wants, and needs of the community, "

said JP Walton,
Assistant to the Town Manager.

CHAPTER 24

Excellence Case Studies – Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Resident Feedback Guides Sioux Falls to Record-Breaking Economic Growth

EXCELLENCE IN ECONOMY

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Percent rated positively (2019)

vs. benchmark

Shopping opportunities	82%	Above ∧
Overall economic health	82%	Above ∧
As a place to work	81%	Above ∧
Overall quality of business and service establishments	81%	Above ∧
Vibrancy of downtown or commercial area	79%	Above ∧
Economic development	79%	Above ∧

Polco NRC

Over the past few years, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, has seen immense economic growth.

"Strong Midwestern values and fiscal discipline allow our City to prosper," said Jim David, Chief of Legislation and Policy for Sioux Falls.

A focus on resident feedback and a commitment to making Sioux Falls comfortable, fun, and beautiful has led to the City's award-winning local economy.

The NCS results show that Sioux Falls residents are happy with local business and job opportunities. Respondents rate almost all aspects of the City's economy higher than the national benchmark. It's why they won a VOP award Excellence in Economy

"Sioux Falls are leaders in listening to resident priorities to develop their local economy," Mann said . "It has been impressive to see them working hard to help their City succeed."

Biggest Bang for the Buck

Sioux Falls relies on resident input to make sure they are spending their limited resources effectively and responsibly. The NCS is one important tool that helps leaders set priorities for their annual operating budget and five-year Capital Improvement Plan updates.

"By utilizing this kind of community input, the City is able to target the investment of limited taxpayer dollars where the biggest bang for the buck can be achieved. When the City listens to and responds to the public, the community is empowered in a way that makes nothing unachievable," David said.

A Comfortable Place to Live

Sioux Falls built its local economy through a significant investment in infrastructure to make the City a quality place to live.

Sioux Falls recently invested more than $135 million to improve public utilities, transportation networks, wastewater facilities, neighborhoods, and streets.

The City also began construction on a twelfth fire station to meet the needs of the growing region. Leaders are planning to construct a state-of-the-art public safety training facility soon as well.

In addition, the City is working with the State of South Dakota to improve various highways and interchanges.

"These highway improvements will significantly reduce commute times for drivers and open up hundreds of acres to commercial development," David said.

The City also became one of only 22 communities across the United States to begin implementing a 5G network.

"A fast network will help advance the capacity for technological innovation for businesses large and small," David said.

Investing in Culture

Sioux Falls focuses on development and culture to make the city a fun and beautiful place to live. For example, Sioux Falls recently partnered with a local foundation and non-profit to construct a $4.6 million outdoor concert venue.

"The venue has been a catalyst for significant reinvestment in the City's downtown core," David said.

The City Council also approved a large tax increment financing for a $185 million redevelopment in downtown Sioux Falls. Over the past few years, the City saw a record-breaking amount of construction each year. While commercial, office, institutional, and education construction slowed a bit during Covid, residential construction recently increased dramatically.

"Between apartments and single-family homes, we set an all-time record for the number of dwelling units built in our city and building permits pulled this past year," said Jeff Eckhoff, Director for Planning and Development Services.

Economic Growth in a COVID World

Because of its commitment to infrastructure, development, and culture, Sioux Falls is growing more with the pandemic. The City has recently seen a lot of people moving from larger cities.

"We have been a state that has kept businesses more open and people are coming to work and start businesses because of it," Eckhoff said.

During the pandemic, Amazon decided to build a fulfillment center in Sioux Falls, adding more than a thousand jobs.

"One interesting thing during the pandemic has been watching small businesses adapt. As a City we worked with many small businesses to help them set up safely and follow ordinances. We also worked with the Chamber to begin a marketing campaign to promote a safe return to local businesses," Eckhoff said.

" By utilizing this kind of community input, the City is able to target the investment of limited taxpayer dollars where the biggest bang for the buck can be achieved. When the city listens to and responds to the public, the community is empowered in a way that makes nothing unachievable, "

said Jim David, Chief of Legislation and Policy for Sioux Falls.

National Research Center · Polco · NRC

Conclusion

Award-Winning Communities Push Boundaries of Community Engagement

We find ourselves in an era of big changes and big challenges. We are living through a pandemic, tensions in police-community relations, labor shortages, inflation, natural disasters, and drastic shifts in the way we work and communicate. Life hasn't been smooth sailing, that's for sure.

But the award-winning communities featured in this e-book know how to weather challenges their communities face. They know that when times get hard, it's even more important to engage residents in decision-making.

"The power of using resident feedback to help inform decisions is the best way to crowdsource solutions," said Polco's Vice President of Innovation, Michelle Kobayashi.

Not only do these cities and towns embrace resident outreach, but they have found ways to push the boundaries of community engagement.

"We are very impressed with the VOP winners' efforts to move their communities forward. We can't wait to keep learning from them and watching the way they serve their residents," said Nick Mastronardi, CEO of Polco.

CONTACT INFORMATION

🌐 website

✉ email

📞 phone

National Research Center · Polco · NRC

Thank you