



2025 California City Manager Survey

A Profile of the Profession

Commissioned by The California City
Management Foundation (CCMF)

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ROSE INSTITUTE
OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE



About the Rose Institute

The Rose Institute of State and Local Government is a leading source of objective, non-partisan information on California state and local governments. Founded at Claremont McKenna College in 1973, the Institute's mission is to enhance the education of students at CMC, produce high quality research, and promote public understanding on issues of state and local government, politics, and policy, with an emphasis on California.

Project Team

Kenneth P. Miller, JD, PhD

Bipasa Nadon, JD

Jessica Jin

Sanskriti Kumar CMC '26

David Taylor CMC '26

Olivia Frankt SC '27

Kahani Malhotra CMC '28

Rhiannon Worline CMC '28

Acknowledgments

Joseph M. Bessette, PhD

Marionette Moore



The California City Management Foundation is the premier advocacy and support organization for city managers. Its mission is to promote and encourage excellence in City Management in all of California's 480+ incorporated cities and towns. Through its extensive peer network, it offers guidance, support and advice for city managers in all stages of their careers. Working with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), CCMF helps establish ethical standards in the industry. It sponsors luncheons and conferences, provides legal advice and maintains a library of resources for its members. CCMF does a lot of things, above all, fostering a community of city managers both online and off.



Where talent meets the talented: Tripepi Smith Talent Solutions is a multifaceted recruitment consultancy service. We combine local government access with communications to advance the quest for talent.



Providing innovative risk management solutions for its public agency partners for more than 45 years, the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority (California JPPIA) is one of the largest municipal self-insurance pools in the state, with more than 125 member cities and other governmental agencies. Members actively participate in shaping the organization to provide important coverage for their operations. The California JPPIA provides innovative risk management solutions through a comprehensive portfolio of programs and services, including liability, workers' compensation, pollution, property, and earthquake coverage, as well as extensive risk management training and loss control services.

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I. Introduction

What are the characteristics of the men and women who serve as California's city managers? What are their demographic traits? Their educational backgrounds and prior work experiences? Their average length of service in their positions? What do they consider the most important issues facing their cities? And do these answers vary depending on the city's size?

As the chief executive officers of hundreds of cities across the state, city managers are collectively California's most important group of local government officials. Yet, until recently, little was known about the people who fill these critical positions.

In 2023, the California City Management Foundation (CCMF), joined by Tripepi Smith Talent Solutions and the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority, commissioned the Rose Institute of State and Local Government, an academic research institute at Claremont McKenna College, to survey the state's city managers. The survey results were released in a report, *2023 California City Manager Survey: A Profile of the Profession*, which presented the first in-depth, comprehensive look at these officials.

Building on that work, the California City Management Foundation (CCMF) commissioned the Rose Institute to conduct a second survey. Tripepi Smith and California Joint Powers Insurance Authority (California JPIA) provided additional support. The 2025 Survey expands on the 2023 report by including additional questions highlighting changes in our findings between 2023 and 2025.

Background on the City Manager System

The city manager system dates back to the Progressive Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, critics of municipal government, such as Lincoln Steffens, author of *The Shame of the Cities* (1904), decried corruption and bossism in cities across the country, and organizations such as the National Municipal League (1894) were established to promote urban reform. The reformers argued that cities could be redeemed by introducing non-partisan, professional management.

Proponents of the professionalization movement emerged in many parts of the United States, with Californians exerting early leadership. A notable example was Haven H. Mason, a prominent city official in Santa Clara and later San Francisco, founder in 1898 of the League of California Municipalities (later known as the League of California Cities), and editor of the magazine *California Municipalities*. In an 1899 editorial in that journal, Mason advocated for a "distinct profession of municipal managers" that would have "sound business judgment" and apply "strict business principles." Mason noted that city administration is a "business peculiar to itself" with "no other business concern like it in the commercial world." As a result, he advocated that universities develop programs specially designed to prepare graduates "to enter the new profession of conducting municipal business." Mason concluded that "[i]t would be an interesting experiment for a city to employ a professional manager, and it would very likely prove a successful experiment. Then ambitious young men would fit themselves for municipal employment and before long our cities would be managed by professional municipal officers instead of by professional politicians."¹

Over the next two decades, several cities pursued these experiments. In 1904, the small city of Ukiah, in Northern California, became what seems to have been the first city in the nation to hire a chief executive, selected by the city council, although the office was not called "manager."² Other experiments followed in Staunton, Virginia (1908) and Sumter, South Carolina (1912). In 1914, Inglewood and Glendale became the first California cities to adopt

¹ Haven A. Mason, "A Profession of Municipal Management," *California Municipalities*, August 1899, reprinted in Richard J. Stillman II, *The Rise of the City Manager: A Public Professional in Local Government*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974): 117-119.

² Stillman, *The Rise of the City Manager*, 14; Randy H. Hamilton, "Ukiah, 1904: A Modest Footnote to the History of the Council-Manager Form of Municipal Government in the United States," Berkeley, CA: U.C. Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies Working Paper 89-2, March 1989: 1-8.

the council-manager system, as it came to be known.³ That same year, the City Manager Association (later the International City/County Management Association, or ICMA) was established, providing an organizational structure for the new profession. In 1915, the National Municipal League adopted the manager plan in its Model City Charter, giving the concept widespread legitimacy and appeal.⁴

Unlike in “strong mayor” cities where the mayor wields executive authority, in a council-manager system, the city manager acts as the chief executive and is charged with administering the full range of municipal operations. In council-manager cities, elected representatives (council and mayor) are expected to set policies, and the city manager implements them, although managers often share responsibility for policy formation. The role of a city manager is complex and requires a broad range of skills. City managers are expected to possess a high degree of education and training and to adhere to a set of professional values, norms, ethical standards, and practices. In 1985, the California City Management Foundation (CCMF) was founded in part to strengthen these professional norms and promote city management education.

California has embraced the council-manager form of municipal government more completely than the rest of the nation. In a 2016 study published by Common Cause, researcher Nicolas Heidorn found that 468 California cities (or 97%) used this system. Only five major cities in the state—Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Fresno, and Oakland—used a “strong mayor” or mayor-council system in which the elected mayor is the chief administrative officer, assisted by an appointed administrative official.⁵ A few small cities in California have decentralized the administration of government, with department heads reporting directly to the city council or to individual council members.⁶ As of 2018, California cities used the council-manager system at more than double the national rate. According to the *ICMA 2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey*, 48.2% of American cities (n = 4,020 cities) reported they used the council-manager

form of government, compared with 38.2% that used the mayor-council system.⁷

“City manager” is the most common title used for the chief administrative officer in the vast majority of California cities. With the incorporation of the city of Mountain House in 2024, California currently has 483 incorporated cities. Of these, 435 use the title city manager (the survey includes in this category 407 current city managers, 21 interim city managers, 2 acting city managers, 2 assistant city managers, 2 city manager/finance directors, and 1 interim city manager/city planner). “City administrator” is the next most common title (21 cities, including a city clerk/administrator and city hall administrator, or 4% of the total), followed by town manager (18 cities, including 1 interim town manager, or 4% of the total). Except for the cities that have a strong mayor system of government, city managers, city administrators, and town managers perform functionally equivalent jobs. For the balance of this report, we use the term “city manager” to include all of these positions.

Although the council-manager system has become the dominant form of municipal government in California, prior to the Rose Institute’s surveys only limited research had focused on the state’s city managers as a group. A notable exception is the study of the status of women in the profession. ICMA has conducted research on the number and percentage of women chief administrative officers (including city managers and the highest-level county administrators) in California and across the nation. Those findings, presented in reports in 1976 and 2014 and in later updates, indicate that the number of women at the top level of local government management has increased over time, but that women remain under-represented in those positions—23% in the United States and 27% in California as of 2024.⁸

This report presents new information on city managers in California and provides a robust and updated profile of the profession.

3 John C. Bollens, *Appointed Executive Local Government*, Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1952, 1.

4 Stillman, *The Rise of the City Manager*, 19, 114.

5 San Diego has a Chief Operating Officer, Los Angeles a Chief Executive Officer, and Fresno a City Manager. Both San Francisco and Oakland have a City Administrator.

6 Nicolas Heidorn, *California Municipal Democracy Index 2016*, Sacramento, CA: California Common Cause, 2016, 3, <https://www.commoncause.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/states/california/research-and-reports/california-municipal-key-findings.pdf>. California state law authorizes the use of the city manager system. See *Cal. Gov. Code* § 34851 (2022), https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=GOV&division=2.&title=4.&part=1.&chapter=4.&article=1.

7 International City/County Management Association. 2018 *Municipal Form of Government Survey – Summary of Survey Results*. Washington, DC: ICMA, 2019, 1, <https://icma.org/sites/default/files/2018%20Municipal%20Form%20of%20Government%20Survey%20Report.pdf>.

8 See Pamela W. Antil, Tamara Latourneau, and Amber Cameron, *ICMA Task Force on Women in the Profession: Final Report on the Status of Women in the Profession*, Washington, DC: ICMA, August 2014, (including the 1976 Report as an appendix), <https://icma.org/documents/final-report-status-women-profession>; International City/County Management Association, “Data on ICMA Women in the Profession: As of June 2021,” <https://icma.org/page/data-icma-women-profession>.

II. Survey Methodology

The Rose Institute drafted this survey instrument in collaboration with CCMF and Tripepi Smith. See Appendix A. We collected survey data over the course of thirteen weeks beginning on Tuesday, February 18, 2025. We emailed a letter of introduction explaining the study to all city managers in California. The survey was conducted using Qualtrics software and took respondents less than five minutes to complete. We contacted city managers by email and phone over the next eight weeks to solicit responses to the online survey. We received responses from a total of 292 cities, for a response rate of 60%. See Appendix B.

The research team supplemented the survey response data with information from publicly available sources such as city websites, newspaper articles, and LinkedIn. We gathered data on education, time in current position, prior position, major field of study, city council size and mode of election (at large vs. district), and method of election of the mayor. We were able to fill in data for many, but not all, of the cities that did not participate in this survey. We did not separately gather information related to city managers' age, gender, or race; the data in those tables derive from survey responses only.

The research team then checked the data for accuracy and consistency. We also coded responses for Major Subject of Study and Most Pressing Issues. See Appendix C and Appendix D.

It is important to note that not every survey respondent answered every question. For example, 291 of the 292 respondents filled in the question on age, 288 of the 292 filled in the question on education, 274 of the 292 filled in the question on race or ethnicity, and 271 of the 292 filled in the question on prior government experience. Similarly, in some cases, the research team was able to gather only a portion of the supplemental data. Using publicly available sources, the research team was able to identify the highest degree earned for 153 city managers and the major subject studied for 150 city managers. The number of data points for each variable is noted under each table (N=___).

The research team also gathered population data for each city from the United States Census Bureau. We determined the population of most cities based on July 1, 2024 Census estimates. These population estimates are frequently adjusted. This survey uses the population estimates available from April 14 to April 22, 2025. For cities and towns with populations fewer than 5,000, we used figures from the 2020 Decennial Census. We then coded the cities into four size categories (small, medium, large, and very large) for the purposes of this study. Assigning a size code to each city is a useful analytic tool to see how city manager characteristics differ for cities of varying size.

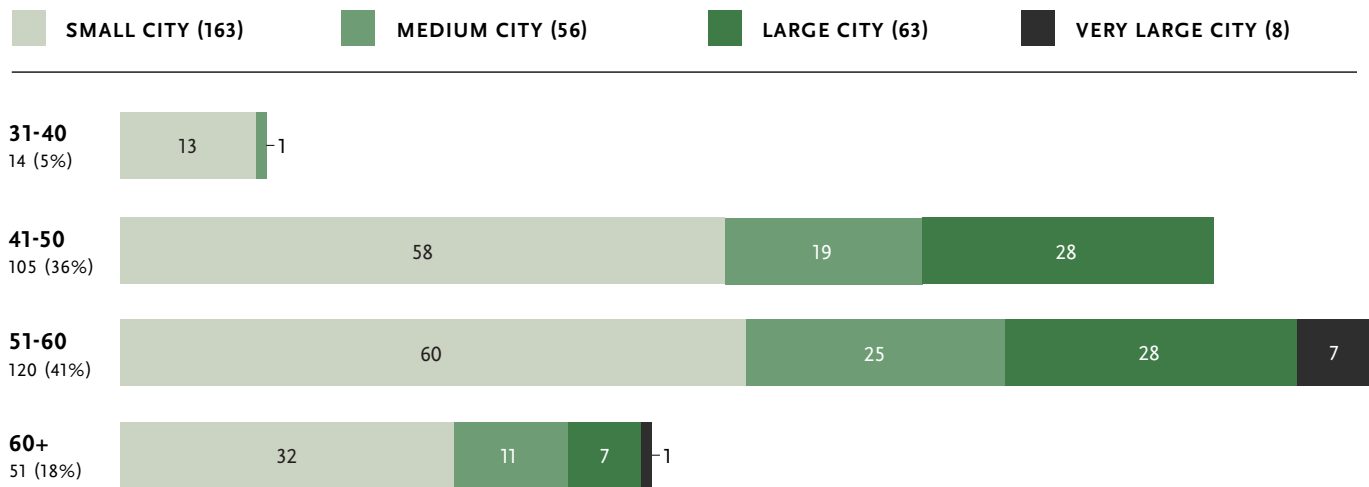
City Size Categories

SMALL CITY	MEDIUM CITY	LARGE CITY	VERY LARGE CITY
LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 35,000	35,001 - 75,000	75,001 - 200,000	GREATER THAN 200,000

Note: City size is based on July 1, 2024 population estimates from the United States Census Bureau. For cities and towns with populations fewer than 5,000, city size is based on the 2020 Decennial Census.

III. Demographic Profile

Figure 1. Age and City Size



Q: What is your age? N=290.

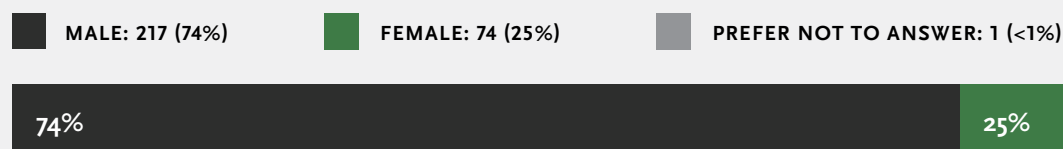
Notes: One respondent (age 51-60) did not include identifying city information and is excluded from this figure. The change from 2023 callout box refers to the percentage point change. For example, city managers age 41-50 were 36% of all city managers in 2025 but only 33% in 2023.

CHANGE FROM 2023

31-40: 0% 41-50: +3% 51-60: -4% 60+: +1%

The vast majority of California city managers for whom we have age data are in their forties or fifties. Forty-one percent of respondents are age 51-60 and another 36% are age 41-50. Those who are younger mostly serve in Small or Medium Cities (of the 14 respondents in their thirties, 13 serve in a small city). On the opposite end of the spectrum, managers in the 60+ age bracket also largely serve in Small or Medium Cities (43 of the 51 in that age group). Managers in Large Cities and Very Large Cities are primarily in the 41-50 and 51-60 groups. Of the 63 managers of Large Cities, 28 are 41-50 and 28 are 51-60 years of age. The eight managers of Very Large Cities are overwhelmingly in their fifties (the exception is one manager who is over 61).

Figure 2. Gender



Q: What is your gender?

N=292.

Note: Percentages do not total 100% or 0% due to rounding.

CHANGE FROM 2023

MALE: -2% FEMALE: +1% PREFER NOT TO ANSWER: N/A

One-quarter of city managers responding to the survey are women and three-quarters are men.

Figure 3. Race or Ethnicity and Gender

AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE

1% (3 - F: 3 | M: 0)

ASIAN

4% (13 - F: 8 | M: 5)

BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN

5% (14 - F: 3 | M: 11)

HISPANIC OR LATINO

13% (35 - F: 14 | M: 21)

NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER

0% (0)

MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN (MENA)

<1% (1 - F: 0 | M: 1)

OTHER

2% (6 - F: 0 | M: 6)

WHITE

70% (204 - F: 44 | M: 160)

PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

2% (5 - F: 0 | M: 4 | PNTA: 1)

TWO OR MORE RACES

3% (9 - F: 1 | M: 8)

MALE: 217

FEMALE: 74

PREFER NOT TO ANSWER: 1

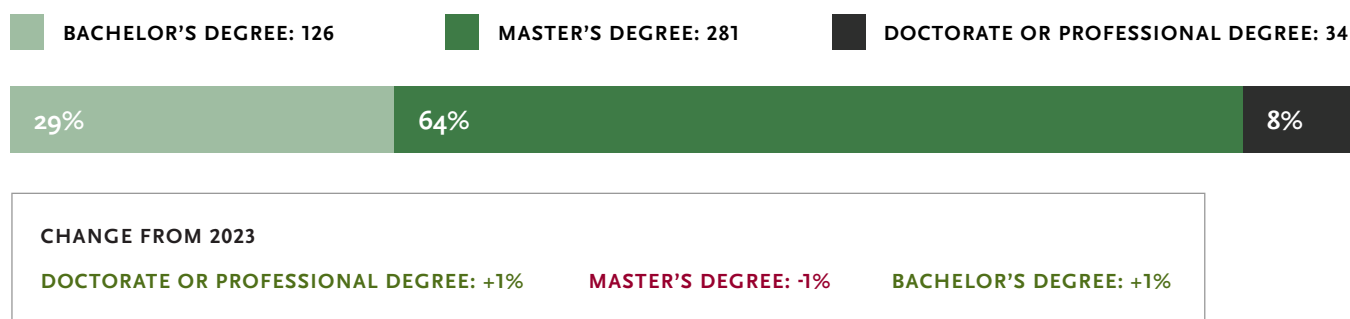
Q: What is your gender?

Q: Based on these U.S. Census Bureau categories, with what race and ethnicity do you most identify yourself? (Check all that apply.) N=290.

Note: Fields marked as "NA" were not possible responses in the 2023 survey and are excluded from comparative analysis. Percentage change from 2023 does not balance due to rounding and the addition of new categories.

The vast majority of respondents identified as one race or ethnicity: 70% as White, 13% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Asian, 5% Black or African American, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and one respondent identified as Middle Eastern or North African. Another 2% identified as Other and 2% preferred not to disclose their race or ethnicity.

Three percent of respondents identified as two or more races. Five of these respondents identified as White and Hispanic or Latino. Three identified as Asian and Other, Asian and White, and White and Other. One respondent identified as three races: White, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

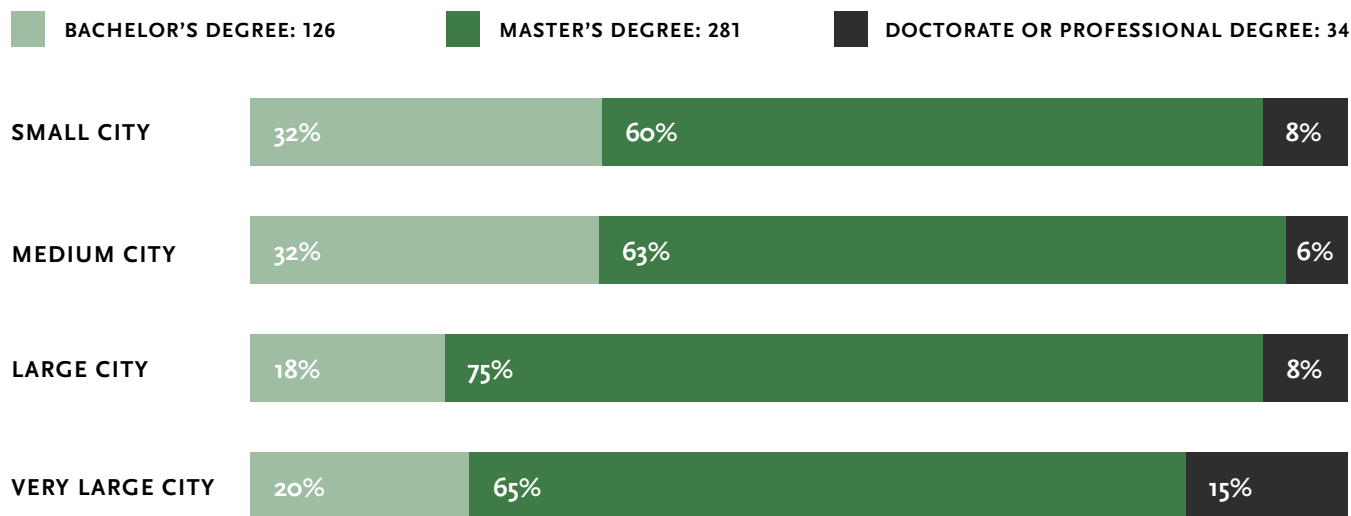
Figure 4. Education

Q: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? N=441.

Note: 288 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 153 are taken from publicly available sources such as city websites, newspaper articles, and LinkedIn. Percentage totals may exceed 100% or fail to balance due to rounding.

Almost all city managers for whom we were able to get education data have a Bachelor's degree and almost three-quarters have some form of post-graduate degree. The terminal degree for just over one quarter (29%) is a Bachelor's degree. The share of city managers with a Master's-level degree is almost double that, 64%. Another 8% have some form of doctorate-level degree (PhD or JD).

Public policy, public administration, and business administration are the most common fields for Master's degree holders. A law degree (JD) is the most common degree among doctorate or professional degree holders.

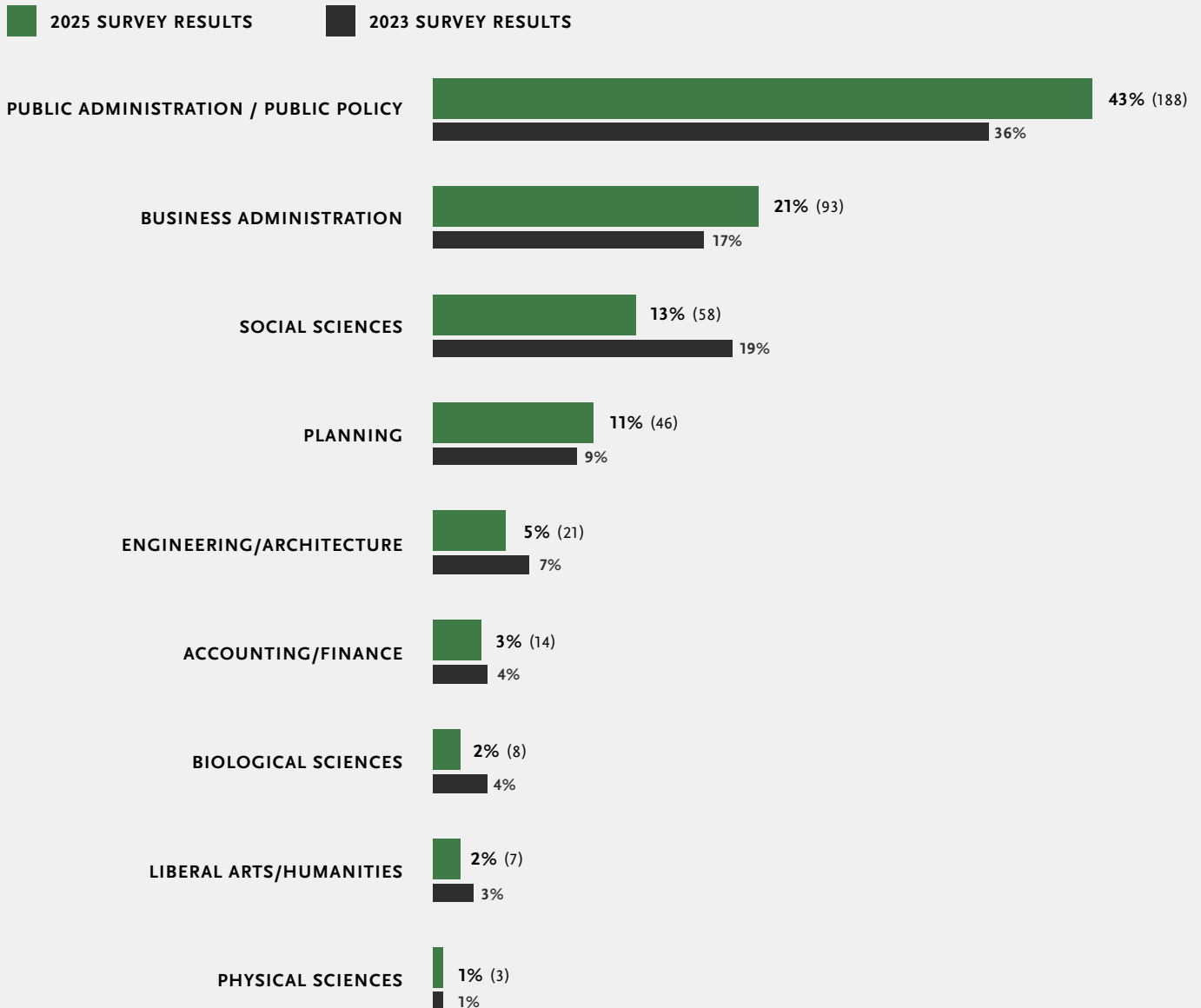
Figure 5. Education and City Size

Q: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? N=441.

Note: 288 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 153 are taken from publicly available sources such as city websites, newspaper articles, and LinkedIn. The total percentage exceeds 100% due to rounding. City size is based on July 1, 2024 population estimates from the United States Census Bureau. For cities and towns with populations fewer than 5,000, city size is based on the 2020 Decennial Census.

Larger cities tend to have more city managers with graduate degrees. For Small Cities, 68% have a graduate degree (60% Master's and 8% PhD or JD). For Medium Cities, 69% hold graduate degrees with 63% with Master's and 6% PhD or JD. For Large Cities, 83% have graduate degrees (75% Master's and 8% PhD or JD). For Very Large Cities, 80% have graduate degrees (65% Master's and 15% PhD or JD).

Figure 6. Major Subject Studied



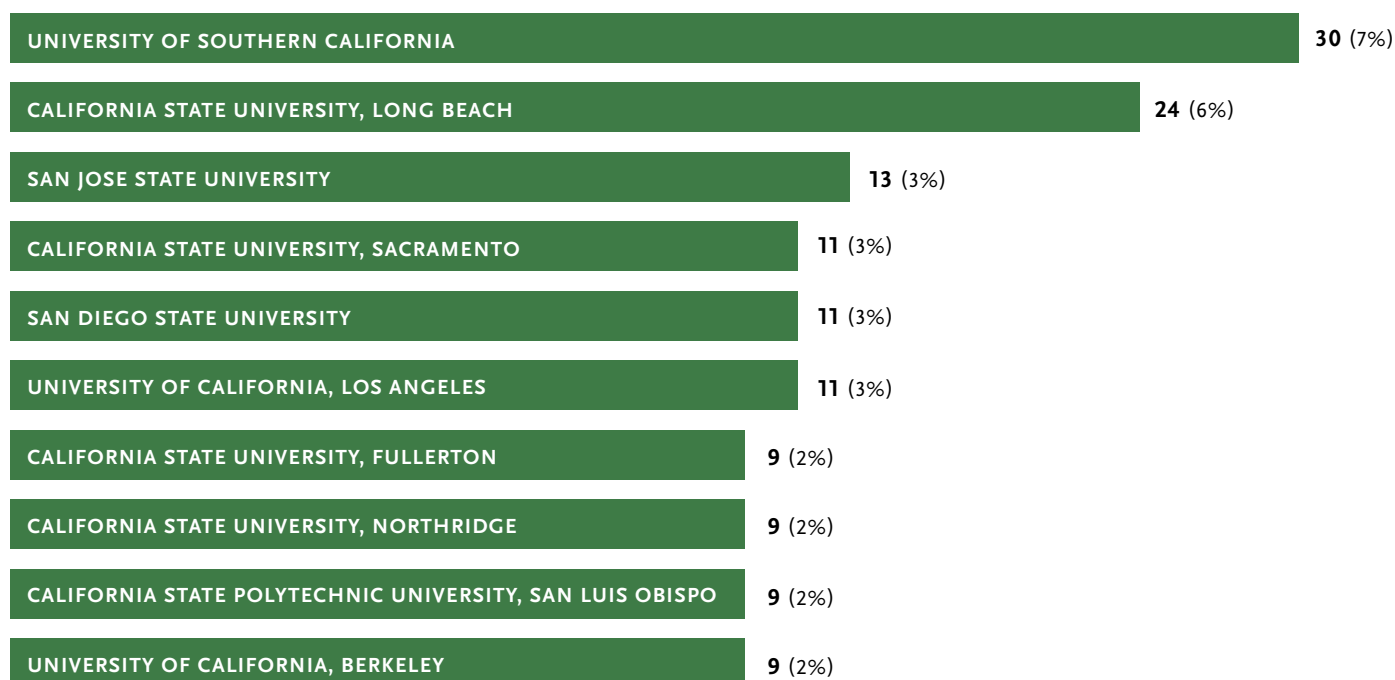
Q: Major subject studied? N=438.

Note: 288 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 150 are taken from publicly available sources such as city websites, newspaper articles, and LinkedIn. Survey results graphed as percentages. The total exceeds 100% and the 2023 change percentages do not balance due to rounding.

The areas of study among 2025 city managers demonstrate significant shifts in educational background when compared to the 2023 results. Public administration and public policy are the most common subjects of study, accounting for nearly half (43%) of all majors. This figure is the largest increase (7%) from the 2023 Survey. The number of city managers holding degrees in business administration increased by 4% to 21% (of the 93 city managers who hold degrees in business administration, 53 hold MBAs). Meanwhile, other social science subjects decreased by 6% to 13%; this category includes political science, history, and law. Planning, generally urban or regional, increased by 2% to 11%. Only 5% of city managers studied engineering and architecture, a 2% decline.

See Appendix C for a list of fields included in each category.

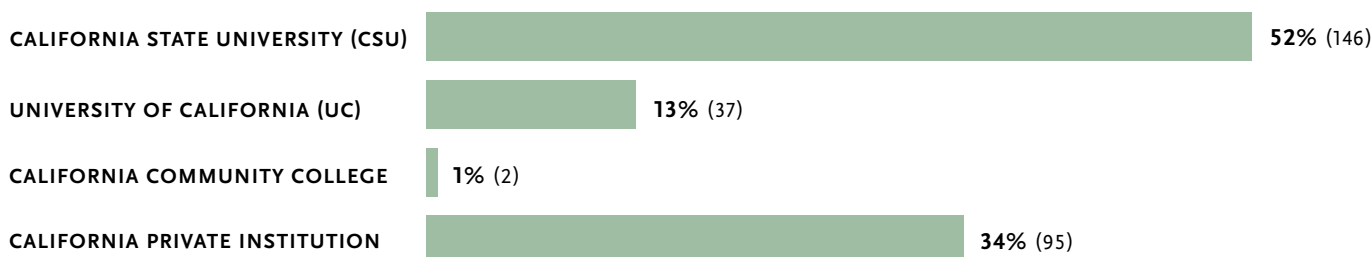
Figure 7. Top Ten Institutions for Highest Degree



Q: What is the name of the institution where you received your highest degree? N=401. Note: 292 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 109 are taken from publicly available sources such as city websites, newspaper articles, and LinkedIn.

This Survey asked for the first time the institution where city managers earned their highest academic degrees. City managers received their highest degrees from 142 different colleges and universities. The institution that granted the highest degree to the most city managers was the University of Southern California (USC) with 30. All the USC graduates earned advanced degrees and all but three received either a master's or doctorate degree in Planning or Public Administration. Similarly, of the 24 city managers who received degrees from California State University, Long Beach, all but five received MPP/MPAs. USC is the only private university among the top 15 institutions in this category.

Figure 8. California Schools Granting the Highest Degree



Q: What is the name of the institution where you received your highest degree? N=401. Note: 292 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 109 are taken from publicly available sources such as city websites, newspaper articles, and LinkedIn.

Most respondents (69%) received their highest degree from an academic institution in California. Among California graduates, the majority (66%) received their highest degrees from a public university. Overwhelmingly, city managers received these degrees from a California State University (CSU) campus rather than the University of California (UC) system. Nearly three times as many city managers received their highest degree from a private California institution than from a UC school.

Figure 9. California Native

YES: 185 (64%) **NO: 102 (36%)**



Q: Are you originally from California?
N=287.

Note: 285 responded to this question in the survey. Biographical information for two city managers was sourced from publicly available newspaper articles.

CHANGE FROM 2023

YES: 0% NO: 0%

Two-thirds (64%) of responding city managers report that they are originally from California.

Figure 10. California Transplants - Domestic vs. International

DOMESTIC (63)

INTERNATIONAL (22)



MASSACHUSETTS (6)

KANSAS (5)

IDAHO (4)

NEW YORK (4)

ILLINOIS (3)

NEW JERSEY (3)

OREGON (3)

CANADA (7)

MEXICO (2)

Q: Enter state of origin.
N=85.

Note: 84 responded to this question in the survey. Biographical information for one city manager was sourced from a publicly available newspaper article.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of responding city managers who migrated to California came from another state, while the rest (26%) came from abroad.

IV. Employment Profile

Figure 11. Local Government Career Start in California

YES: 234 (80%)

NO: 57 (20%)

CHANGE FROM 2023

YES: -3%

NO: +3%

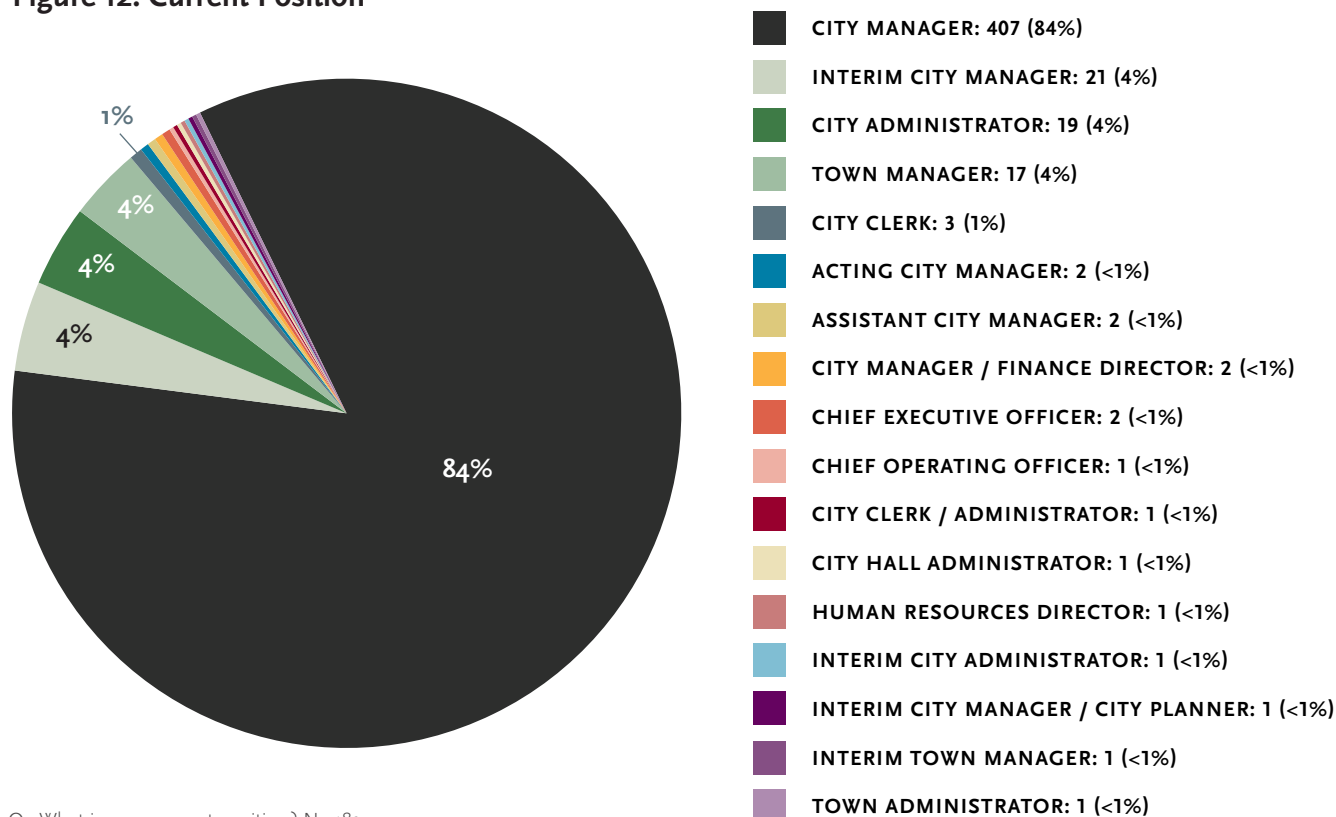
80%

20%

Q: Did you start your local government career in California? N=291.

The vast majority of California city managers launched their local government careers in California. Eighty percent got their start here and 20% began their careers outside the state.

Figure 12. Current Position



Q: What is your current position? N=483.

Note: 291 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 188 are taken from city websites.

“City manager” is the most common title used for the chief administrative officer in the vast majority of California cities. Of the 483 cities in this study, 435 use a city manager (407 current city managers, 21 interim city managers, 2 acting city managers, 2 assistant city managers, 2 city manager / finance directors, and 1 interim city manager / city planner). “City administrator” is the next most common title (21 cities, including a city clerk / administrator and city hall administrator, or 4% of the total), followed by town manager (18 cities, including 1 interim town manager, or 4% of the total).

Table 1. Current Position and City Size

	SMALL CITY	MEDIUM CITY	LARGE CITY	VERY LARGE CITY	TOTAL
ACTING CITY MANAGER	2				2
ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER	1		1		2
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER		1		1	2
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER				1	1
CITY ADMINISTRATOR	15	1	1	2	19
CITY CLERK	3				3
CITY CLERK / ADMINISTRATOR	1				1
CITY HALL ADMINISTRATOR	1				1
CITY MANAGER	210	90	92	15	407
CITY MANAGER / FINANCE DIRECTOR	2				2
HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR	1				1
INTERIM CITY ADMINISTRATOR		1			1
INTERIM CITY MANAGER	11	7	1	2	21
INTERIM CITY MANAGER / CITY PLANNER	1				1
INTERIM TOWN MANAGER	1				1
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR	1				1
TOWN MANAGER	15	1	1		17

Q: What is your current position? N=483.

Note: 291 responded to this question on the survey. The remaining 192 are taken from city websites. City size based on 2024 population estimates from the United States Census Bureau.

In some small cities, the city clerk acts as the administrative officer. For the strong mayor cities, the elected mayor is the chief executive officer, officially responsible for running all city departments. In all five of these cities, the mayor is, however, assisted by an appointed administrative officer. San Diego has a Chief Operating Officer, Los Angeles has a Chief Executive Officer, and Fresno has a City Manager. Both San Francisco and Oakland have a City Administrator.

Table 2. Time in Current Position

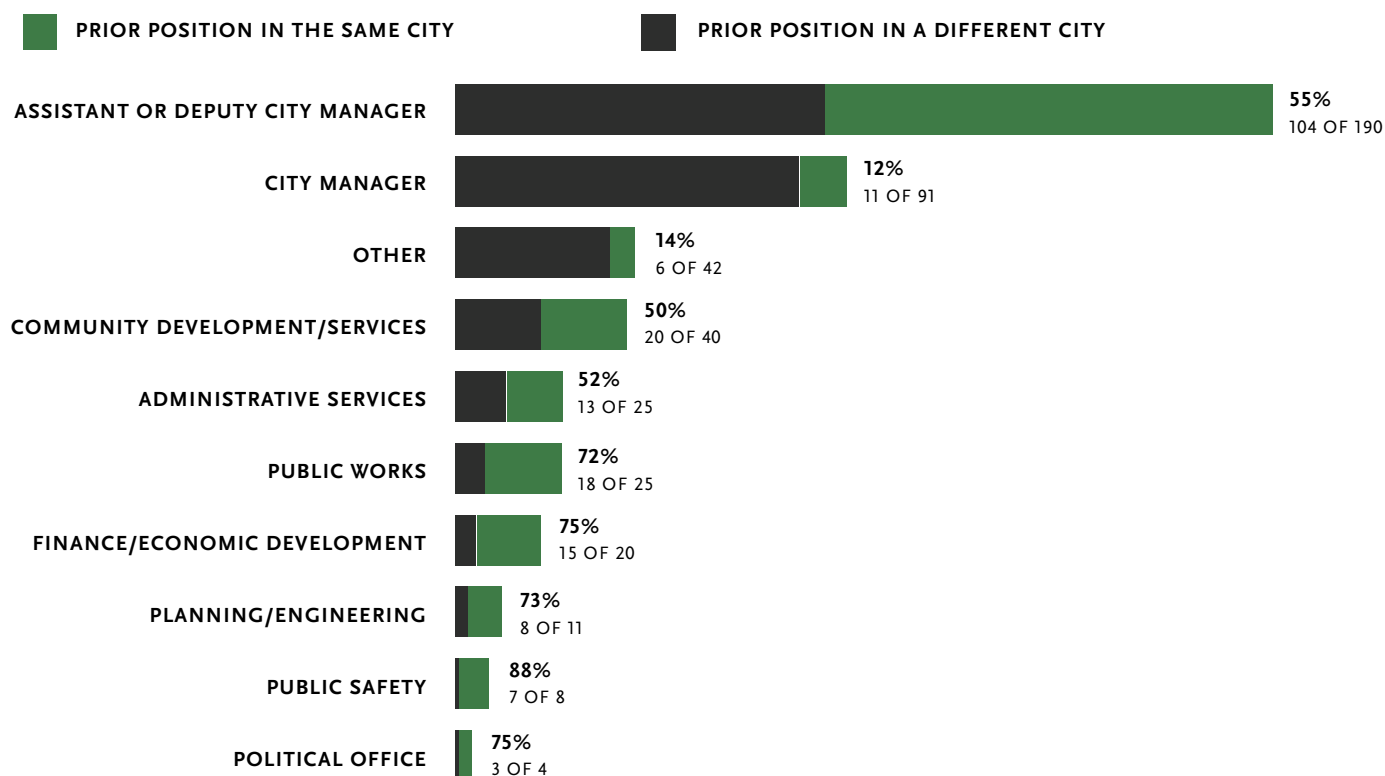
MONTHS IN CURRENT POSITION: AVERAGE	52.5 MONTHS
YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION: AVERAGE	4 YEARS, 4.5 MONTHS

Q: Start date in current position. N=461.

Note: Time in current position is calculated from the start date to May 20, 2025 (the end of the data collection period for this study).

We were able to identify start dates for 461 city managers. They have been in their current positions an average of 52.5 months, or 4 years and 4.5 months.

Figure 13. Prior Position - Same or Different City

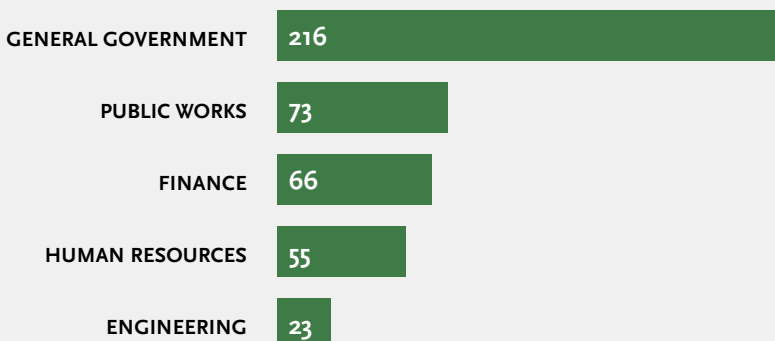


Q: What was your position prior to becoming a city manager? N=456.

Just under half (45%) of city managers worked for the same city before serving as city manager. Over half (55%) of city managers who previously held the title of assistant or deputy city manager were promoted within their same city to city manager.

We coded all interim and acting city manager titles as “city managers.” Accordingly, all 11 city managers who previously served as city managers within the same city actually previously held an interim or acting city manager role.

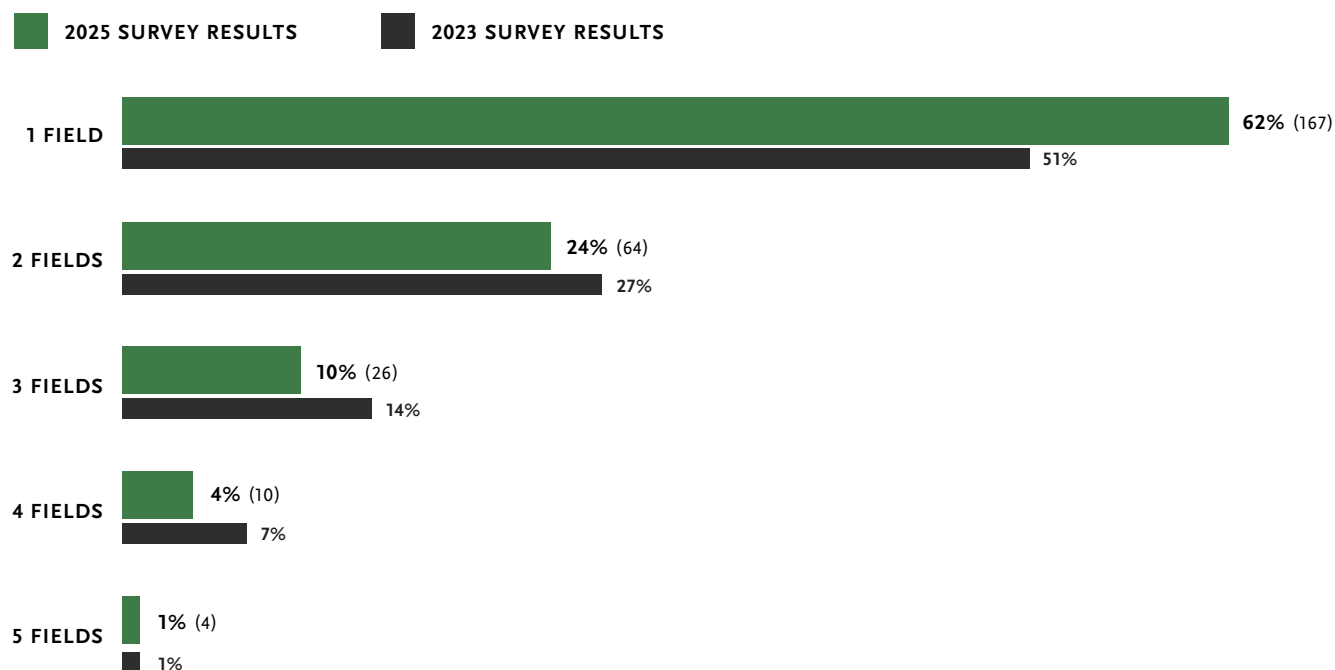
Figure 14. Prior Local Government Experience



Q: Before becoming a city manager, did you work in local government in any of the following areas? (Check all that apply.) N=271.

City managers bring a broad range of experience to the position. Over one-quarter of respondents (73 of the 271) reported having prior experience in public works, 66 of the 271 in finance, and 55 of the 271 in human resources. Approximately 8% (23 of the 271) have prior experience in engineering.

Figure 15. Prior Local Government Experience - Number of Fields



Q: Before becoming a city manager, did you work in local government in any of the following areas? (Check all that apply.) N=271.

Note: Total percentage does not equal 100 due to rounding.

Nearly 40% of respondents reported experience in two or more fields (24% in 2 fields, 10% in three fields, 4% in four fields, and 1% in five fields). The remaining 62% have prior experience in one field. Compared to 2023, far more city managers (11% more) have prior experience in only one field.

Table 3. Total Years as a City Manager in Any City

AVERAGE

8.6

Q: How long have you worked as a city manager in any city agency (total number of years)?

City managers responding to this question have worked an average of 8.6 years as a city manager in one or more cities.

Table 4. Total Years in Public Sector and Private Sector

AVERAGE

26.2

5.9

Q: How long have you worked as a city manager in any city agency (total number of years)?

Q: In total, how many years of experience do you have in the private sector?

Survey respondents reported an average of 26.2 years of experience in the public sector and an average of 5.9 years of experience in the private sector.

V. City Profile

Table 5. City Population

LOW	200
HIGH	3,820,914
AVERAGE	67,361
MEDIAN	29,910

Source: United States Census Bureau Quick Facts, City Population Estimates for 2024.

California's 483 cities range in population from 200 (Amador) to 3,820,914 (Los Angeles) and have an average population of 67,361. The median population is 29,910, meaning that half of the state's cities are smaller and half are larger.

Table 6. City Size by Category

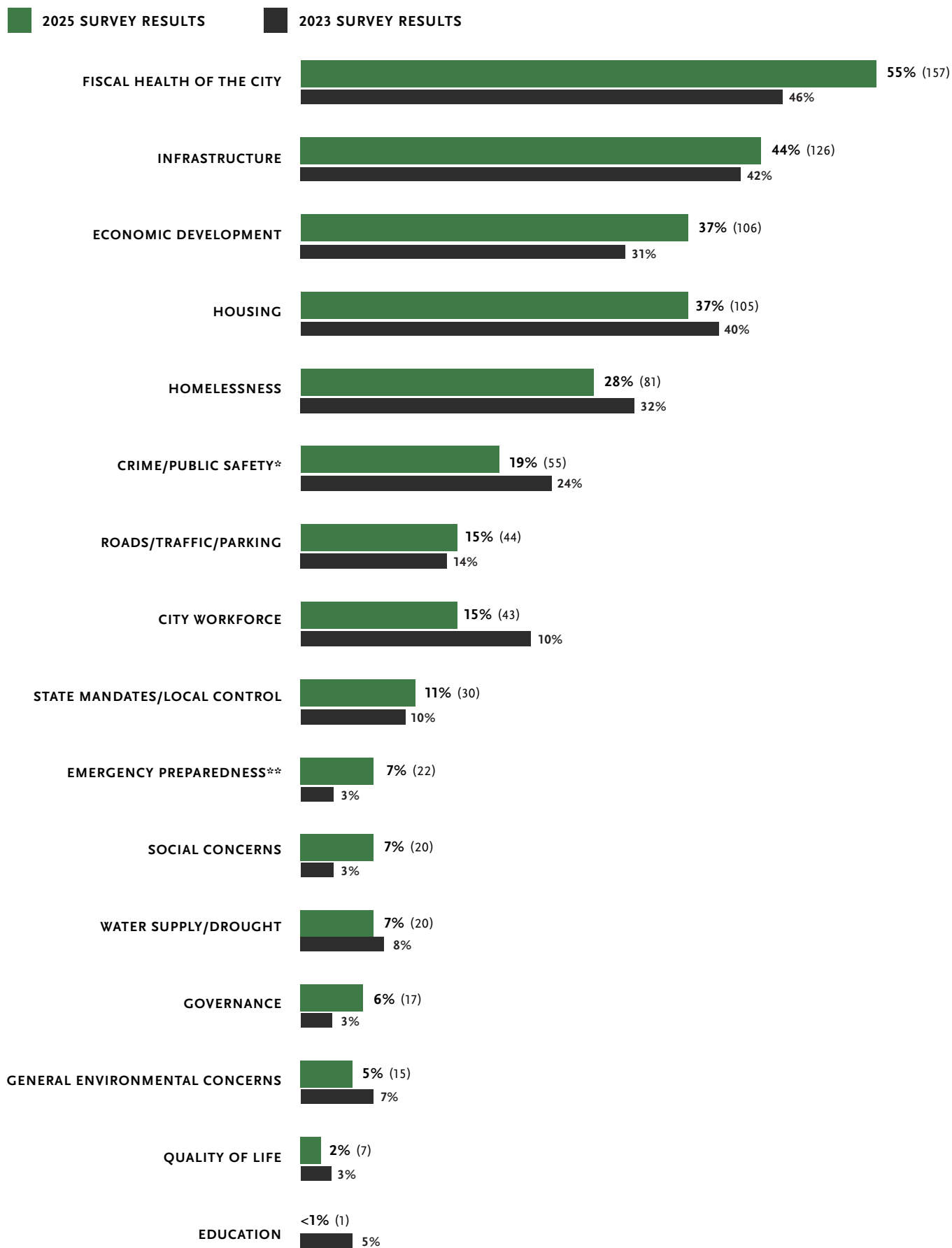
	NUMBER OF CITIES	PERCENT OF CITIES	TOTAL POPULATION
SMALL CITIES (<= 35,000)	261	54%	3,739,881
MEDIUM CITIES (35,001-75,000)	101	21%	5,877,670
LARGE CITIES (75,001-200,000)	99	21%	11,001,801
VERY LARGE CITIES (200,000+)	21	4%	12,250,473
TOTAL	482	100%	

Source: United States Census Bureau Quick Facts, City Population Estimates for 2024.

More than half (54%) of California cities are Small, with populations equal to or less than 35,000. Medium Cities, population 35,001 to 75,000, make up 21%, and the average population for California cities (67,361) falls within this category. Large Cities, population 75,001 to 200,000, account for another 21%. Finally, California has 21 Very Large Cities, with populations greater than 200,000. Although Very Large Cities comprise only 4% of all cities in the state, they are home to 32% of California's 39.5 million residents.⁹

⁹ 39,431,263, U.S. Census Bureau. "Population Estimates, July 1, 2024 (V2024)." *Quick Facts*. Accessed May 27, 2025. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CA,US/PST045222>.

Figure 16. Most Pressing Issues



Most Pressing Issues

Q: What are the three most pressing issues for your city?

Note: 285 officials responded to this question. Each respondent could enter three issues. The percentages are calculated using 285 as the denominator. Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

*This survey includes “police hiring and retention” under the “crime/public safety” issue category, unlike in 2023 where police hiring and retention were reported as their own category. The crime/public safety percentage change combines both 2023 categories in the calculation.

** This survey uses “emergency preparedness” to encompass all fire/wildfire-related responses as well as broader hazard mitigation concerns. The majority of responses are related to wildfire risk, and the percentage change compares this category to the 2023 “fires/wildfire” issue category.

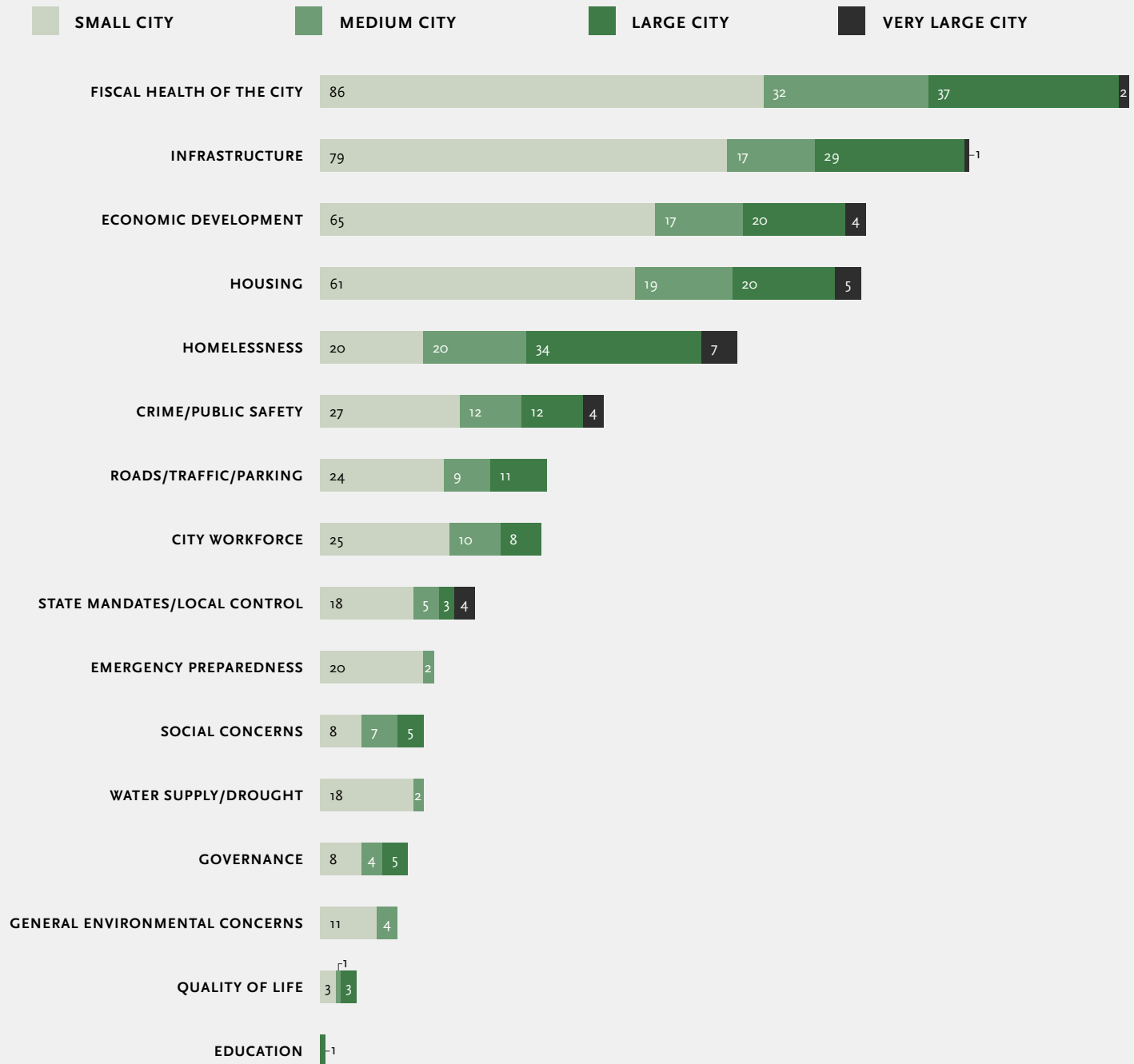
We asked city managers to identify the three most pressing issues facing their cities. Of the 285 responding to this question, more than half (55%) identified the Fiscal Health of the City as a concern. The next four highest concerns are Infrastructure (44%), Economic Development (37%), Housing (37%), and Homelessness (28%). These are followed by Crime and Public Safety (19%), Roads/Traffic/Parking (15%), and City Workforce issues (15%).

Compared to 2023, city managers share the same top two concerns – fiscal and infrastructure issues – and these concerns have only grown more pronounced. Significantly, concerns regarding the fiscal health of cities and economic development grew sharply (9% and 6% respectively).

City managers for several cities affected by or in close proximity to recent wildfires listed wildfire preparedness and mitigation as a top priority, and emergency preparedness concerns grew by 4%. Similarly, social concerns increased by 4%, with several city managers listing the state of civil discourse and a lack of public trust in government as top issues.

Concerns regarding City Workforce (-7%), Crime/Public Safety (-5%), and Education (-5%) issues decreased the most. Notably, only one respondent listed education as a pressing issue in 2025. The rare mention of education as a pressing issue probably reflects the fact that in general city managers have little control over local public education, which is directed by popularly elected local school boards.

Figure 17. Most Pressing Issues and City Size



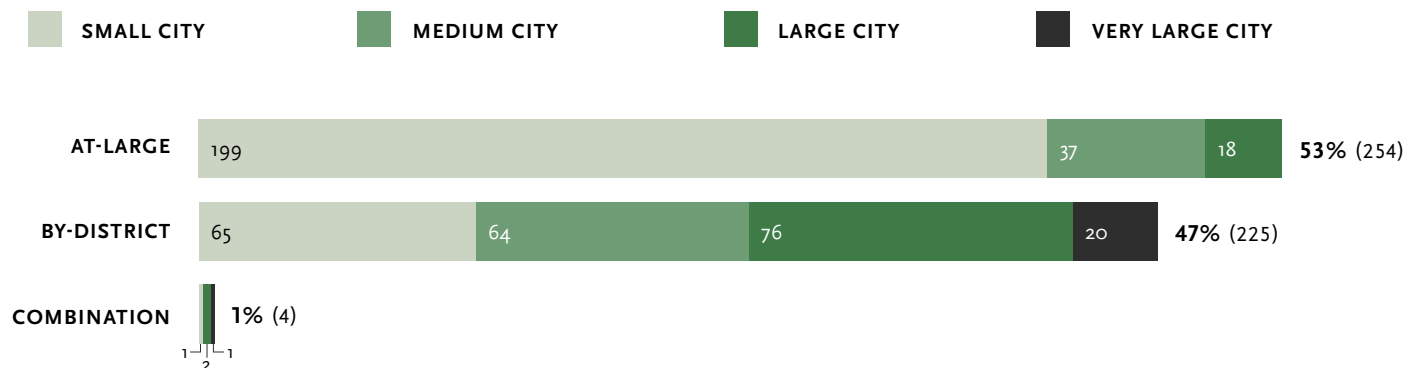
Q: What are the three most pressing issues for your city?

Note: 285 cities responded to this question. Each respondent could enter three issues.

Note: City size is based on 2024 population estimate from the United States Census Bureau.

It is interesting to note that there is some variation on the three most pressing issues based on city size. The 157 cities reporting pressing concerns about the Fiscal Health of the City are dominated by 86 Small Cities, then 32 Medium Cities, and 37 Large Cities. Only two Very Large Cities list Fiscal Health as one of their three most pressing concerns. Relative to Large and Very Large, Small Cities are far more concerned about Emergency Preparedness (20 of 22) and Water Supply/Drought (18 of 22).

Figure 18. Mode of Council Election



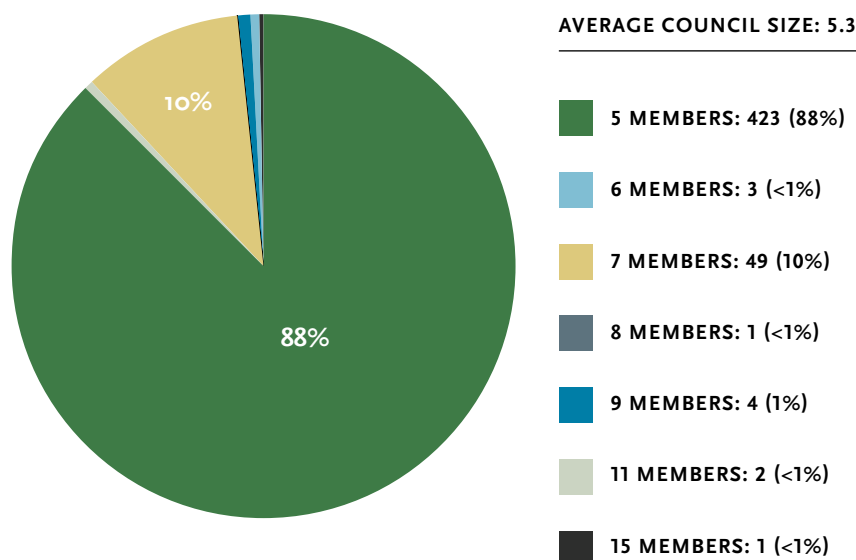
Q: How are your city council members elected?

Note: While this survey question was posed to respondents, the reported data on city council election systems are sourced from a separate Rose Institute data set. This data set is accurate as of January 1, 2025.¹⁰

Fifty-three percent of California cities elect councils using at-large election systems, where council members are elected to represent the entire city. After the California Voting Rights Act of 2001 (CVRA), an increasing number of California cities have transitioned to by-district elections, where council members represent geographic districts within a city. As of April 30, 2025, 47% of California cities use by-district elections. Another 1% use a mixed system with some members elected by-districts and some at-large.

By-district or combination councils are increasingly common in larger cities. All Very Large Cities use district-based elections. One very large city (Oakland) uses a hybrid by-district and at-large system.

Figure 19. Size of City Council

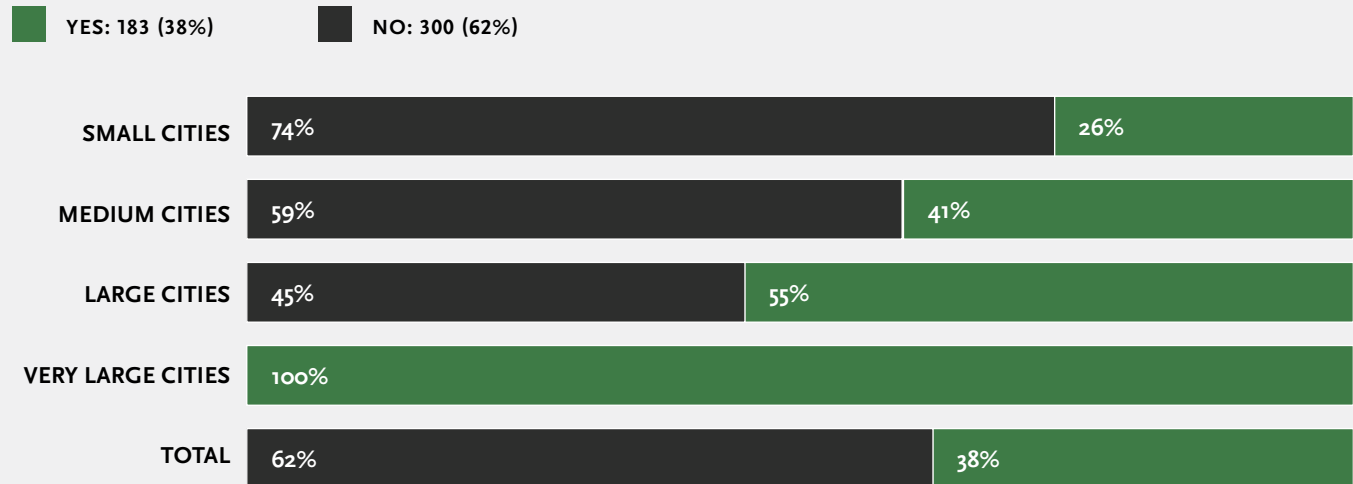


The 5-member city council is the default under California law¹¹ and the vast majority (88%) of city councils in California are that size. Charter cities have the authority to deviate from the default as part of their charter. Los Angeles has the largest city council with 15 members.

Q: How many members are elected to your city council? N=483 Note: 290 responded to this question on the survey. Additional data was collected from city websites. Many California cities include the mayor as a part of city council.

¹⁰ See Pieter K. van Wingerden and Aria Fafat, *Mapping the Revolution in California City Council Election Systems*. Rose Institute of State and Local Government, April 30, 2025.

¹¹ CA Govt Code § 36501 (2022). https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=36501.&lawCode=GOV.

Figure 20. Direct Election of Mayor

Q: Is the mayor elected directly? N=483. Note: 290 responded to this question on the survey. Additional data was collected from city websites. City sizes based on 2024 population estimate from United States Census Bureau.

Almost two-fifths (38%) of the cities in California elect a mayor directly; 62% do not. Direct election is more common in larger cities. Among Small Cities, only 26% directly elect their mayor. This rises to 41% for Medium Cities and 55% for Large Cities. All Very Large Cities in California directly elect mayors.

VI. Conclusion

This second Survey of California's city managers further advances our understanding of this important group of local officials. The 2025 Survey confirms several findings from the 2023 Survey while also highlighting some changes. Notably, as envisioned by the Progressive Era reformers of the early twentieth century, California's city managers are highly professionalized. Nearly three quarters have earned advanced academic degrees, many in the fields of public policy, public administration, or business administration. For the first time, this Survey identifies the educational institutions where California's city managers received their highest degrees, led by the University of Southern California, Cal State Long Beach, several other campuses of the Cal State University system, UCLA, and UC Berkeley. The Survey also shows that city managers possess other attributes of professionalization, including extensive prior experience in local government before attaining their positions and relatively long tenures in office, having currently served, on average, nearly nine years as a city manager in one or more cities.

The demographic profile of the profession is largely unchanged since the prior Survey in 2023, an understandable finding given the relatively short time span between the two Surveys.

A large majority (70%) of California's city managers responding to the 2025 Survey identified as white and three-fourths as male. With respect to age, most city managers (77%) are in their forties or fifties, with a slight uptick in the percentage in their forties (now 36%) and a corresponding decrease in the percentage in their fifties (41%).

Finally, city managers face a long list of challenges, but ranked the same five issues as "most pressing" in 2025 as two years before: the fiscal health of the city, infrastructure, economic development, housing, and homelessness, with economic development rising from fifth to third in the ranking in 2025.

VII. References

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VIII. Appendices

Appendix A - Survey Instrument

Rose Institute of State and Local Government California City Management Foundation City Managers Profiles

Thank you for participating in this study of California city managers. It is the goal of this survey to create a “profile of the profession.”

City Name _____

What is your name? _____

What is your age?

- ☐ ≤30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ 60+

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer

Based on these U.S. Census Bureau categories, with what race and ethnicity do you most identify yourself?
(Check all the apply)

- ☐ White
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African (MENA)
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- ☐ Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)
- ☐ Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEd)
- ☐ Doctorate or professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, PhD, JD)

What is the name of the institution where you received your highest degree? _____

Major subject studied _____

Are you originally from California?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Enter State of Origin)

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Did you start your local government career in California?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Current Position (Title) _____

Current Position start date (Month/Year) _____

What was your position prior to becoming a city manager?

- Title _____
- Employer _____
- Length of time in service (years, months) _____

How long have you worked as a city manager in any city agency? (total number of years) _____

Before becoming a city manager, did you work in local government in any of the following areas? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Public Works
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Human Resources
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ General Government

In total, how many years of experience do you have:

- in the public sector? _____
- in the private sector? _____

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CITY

What are the three most pressing issues for your city?

- _____
- _____
- _____

How many members are elected to your city council? _____

How are your city council members elected?

- ☐ By district
- ☐ At-large
- ☐ Combination (some by district and some at-large)

Is the mayor elected directly?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not applicable

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey. Your response has been recorded.

Appendix B - City Responses

CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?	CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?	CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?	CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?
Adelanto	Yes	Brawley		Concord	Yes	Exeter	
Agoura Hills	Yes	Brea		Corcoran		Fairfax	Yes
Alameda		Brentwood	Yes	Corning	Yes	Fairfield	Yes
Albany		Brisbane	Yes	Corona	Yes	Farmersville	
Alhambra	Yes	Buellton		Coronado	Yes	Ferndale	Yes
Aliso Viejo	Yes	Buena Park	Yes	Corte Madera		Fillmore	Yes
Alturas		Burbank		Costa Mesa	Yes	Firebaugh	
Amador City	Yes	Burlingame	Yes	Cotati	Yes	Folsom	
American Canyon	Yes	Calabasas	Yes	Covina	Yes	Fontana	Yes
Anaheim	Yes	Calexico	Yes	Crescent City	Yes	Fort Bragg	
Anderson	Yes	California City	Yes	Cudahy		Fort Jones	Yes
Angels Camp		Calimesa	Yes	Culver City	Yes	Fortuna	
Antioch		Calipatria		Cupertino	Yes	Foster City	
Apple Valley		Calistoga	Yes	Cypress	Yes	Fountain Valley	Yes
Arcadia	Yes	Camarillo	Yes	Daly City		Fowler	Yes
Arcata		Campbell		Dana Point	Yes	Fremont	
Arroyo Grande	Yes	Canyon Lake		Danville	Yes	Fresno	Yes
Artesia	Yes	Capitola	Yes	Davis	Yes	Fullerton	Yes
Arvin	Yes	Carlsbad		Del Mar	Yes	Galt	Yes
Atascadero	Yes	Carmel-by-the-Sea	Yes	Del Rey Oaks	Yes	Garden Grove	Yes
Atherton	Yes	Carpinteria		Delano		Gardena	
Atwater	Yes	Carson		Desert Hot Springs		Gilroy	Yes
Auburn	Yes	Cathedral City	Yes	Diamond Bar	Yes	Glendale	Yes
Avalon		Ceres	Yes	Dinuba	Yes	Glendora	Yes
Avenal		Cerritos	Yes	Dixon	Yes	Goleta	
Azusa		Chico	Yes	Dorris	Yes	Gonzales	
Bakersfield		Chino	Yes	Dos Palos		Grand Terrace	Yes
Baldwin Park		Chino Hills	Yes	Downey	Yes	Grass Valley	
Banning		Chowchilla		Duarte	Yes	Greenfield	Yes
Barstow		Chula Vista		Dublin	Yes	Gridley	
Beaumont	Yes	Citrus Heights	Yes	Dunsmuir	Yes	Grover Beach	Yes
Bell	Yes	City of Industry	Yes	East Palo Alto	Yes	Guadalupe	
Bell Gardens		Claremont	Yes	Eastvale	Yes	Gustine	Yes
Bellflower		Clayton		El Cajon	Yes	Half Moon Bay	Yes
Belmont		Clearlake	Yes	El Centro		Hanford	Yes
Belvedere	Yes	Cloverdale		El Cerrito	Yes	Hawaiian Gardens	Yes
Benicia		Clovis	Yes	El Monte	Yes	Hawthorne	Yes
Berkeley		Coachella		El Segundo	Yes	Hayward	Yes
Beverly Hills		Coalinga	Yes	Elk Grove	Yes	Healdsburg	
Big Bear Lake	Yes	Colfax		Emeryville		Hemet	Yes
Biggs		Colma		Encinitas		Hercules	Yes
Bishop	Yes	Colton		Escalon		Hermosa Beach	Yes
Blue Lake	Yes	Colusa		Escondido		Hesperia	
Blythe	Yes	Commerce		Etna		Hidden Hills	Yes
Bradbury	Yes	Compton	Yes	Eureka	Yes	Highland	

CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?	CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?	CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?	CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?
Hillsborough		Lincoln	Yes	Monterey Park		Perris	
Hollister		Lindsay		Moorpark	Yes	Petaluma	
Holtville		Live Oak	Yes	Moraga	Yes	Pico Rivera	
Hughson	Yes	Livermore		Moreno Valley	Yes	Piedmont	Yes
Huntington Beach	Yes	Livingston		Morgan Hill	Yes	Pinole	
Huntington Park		Lodi		Morro Bay	Yes	Pismo Beach	Yes
Huron		Loma Linda		Mount Shasta	Yes	Pittsburg	Yes
Imperial	Yes	Lomita		Mountain House	Yes	Placentia	
Imperial Beach		Lompoc		Mountain View	Yes	Placerville	Yes
Indian Wells	Yes	Long Beach		Murrieta	Yes	Pleasant Hill	Yes
Indio	Yes	Loomis		Napa		Pleasanton	Yes
Inglewood		Los Alamitos	Yes	National City		Plymouth	Yes
Ione		Los Altos		Needles	Yes	Point Arena	
Irvine		Los Altos Hills	Yes	Nevada City		Pomona	Yes
Irwindale		Los Angeles		Newark		Port Hueneme	
Isleton		Los Banos		Newman		Porterville	
Jackson	Yes	Los Gatos	Yes	Newport Beach	Yes	Portola	
Jurupa Valley	Yes	Loyalton		Norco		Portola Valley	
Kerman	Yes	Lynwood	Yes	Norwalk		Poway	
King City	Yes	Madera	Yes	Novato		Rancho Cordova	Yes
Kingsburg	Yes	Malibu	Yes	Oakdale		Rancho Cucamonga	Yes
La Cañada Flintridge		Mammoth Lakes		Oakland		Rancho Mirage	Yes
La Habra	Yes	Manhattan Beach		Oakley		Rancho Palos Verdes	Yes
La Habra Heights	Yes	Manteca	Yes	Oceanside		Rancho Santa Mar- garita	Yes
La Mesa	Yes	Maricopa		Ojai	Yes	Red Bluff	Yes
La Mirada		Marina	Yes	Ontario	Yes	Redding	Yes
La Palma	Yes	Martinez		Orange		Redlands	Yes
La Puente		Marysville		Orange Cove		Redondo Beach	
La Quinta		Maywood		Orinda	Yes	Redwood City	Yes
La Verne	Yes	McFarland	Yes	Orland	Yes	Reedley	Yes
Lafayette		Mendota		Oroville	Yes	Rialto	
Laguna Beach	Yes	Menifee	Yes	Oxnard	Yes	Richmond	
Laguna Hills	Yes	Menlo Park	Yes	Pacific Grove	Yes	Ridgecrest	Yes
Laguna Niguel		Merced		Pacifica	Yes	Rio Dell	Yes
Laguna Woods		Mill Valley		Palm Desert	Yes	Rio Vista	Yes
Lake Elsinore	Yes	Millbrae		Palm Springs	Yes	Ripon	
Lake Forest	Yes	Milpitas	Yes	Palmdale	Yes	Riverbank	Yes
Lakeport	Yes	Mission Viejo		Palo Alto	Yes	Riverside	Yes
Lakewood	Yes	Modesto		Palos Verdes Estates	Yes	Rocklin	Yes
Lancaster	Yes	Monrovia	Yes	Paradise	Yes	Rohnert Park	Yes
Larkspur	Yes	Montague		Paramount	Yes	Rolling Hills	Yes
Lathrop		Montclair		Parlier		Rolling Hills Estates	Yes
Lawndale		Monte Sereno		Pasadena	Yes	Rosemead	
Lemon Grove	Yes	Montebello		Paso Robles	Yes	Roseville	Yes
Lemoore		Monterey	Yes	Patterson		Ross	Yes

CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?
Sacramento	Yes
Salinas	
San Anselmo	Yes
San Bernardino	
San Bruno	Yes
San Carlos	
San Clemente	Yes
San Diego	Yes
San Dimas	Yes
San Fernando	Yes
San Francisco	
San Gabriel	
San Jacinto	
San Joaquin	
San Jose	Yes
San Juan Bautista	Yes
San Juan Capistrano	Yes
San Leandro	
San Luis Obispo	Yes
San Marcos	Yes
San Marino	Yes
San Mateo	Yes
San Pablo	Yes
San Rafael	Yes
San Ramon	
Sand City	Yes
Sanger	
Santa Ana	
Santa Barbara	Yes
Santa Clara	Yes
Santa Clarita	Yes
Santa Cruz	Yes
Santa Fe Springs	Yes
Santa Maria	
Santa Monica	
Santa Paula	Yes
Santa Rosa	Yes
Santee	
Saratoga	Yes
Sausalito	
Scotts Valley	Yes
Seal Beach	Yes
Seaside	
Sebastopol	Yes
Selma	
Shafter	
Shasta Lake	Yes
Sierra Madre	Yes

CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?
Signal Hill	Yes
Simi Valley	Yes
Solana Beach	Yes
Soledad	
Solvang	Yes
Sonoma	Yes
Sonora	Yes
South El Monte	
South Gate	
South Lake Tahoe	Yes
South Pasadena	
South San Francisco	Yes
St. Helena	Yes
Stanton	Yes
Stockton	
Suisun City	Yes
Sunnyvale	
Susanville	
Sutter Creek	Yes
Taft	
Tehachapi	
Tehama	Yes
Temecula	Yes
Temple City	Yes
Thousand Oaks	
Tiburon	Yes
Torrance	Yes
Tracy	Yes
Trinidad	Yes
Truckee	
Tulare	Yes
Tulelake	
Turlock	Yes
Tustin	Yes
Twentynine Palms	Yes
Ukiah	Yes
Union City	Yes
Upland	
Vacaville	Yes
Vallejo	Yes
Ventura	
Vernon	
Victorville	Yes
Villa Park	
Visalia	
Vista	Yes
Walnut	Yes
Walnut Creek	

CITY/TOWN	RESPONSE?
Wasco	Yes
Waterford	Yes
Watsonville	
Weed	
West Covina	
West Hollywood	Yes
West Sacramento	
Westlake Village	
Westminster	Yes
Westmorland	
Wheatland	Yes
Whittier	Yes
Wildomar	
Williams	Yes
Willits	Yes
Willows	Yes
Windsor	Yes
Winters	Yes
Woodlake	
Woodland	
Woodside	Yes
Yorba Linda	Yes
Yountville	Yes
Yreka	
Yuba City	
Yucaipa	
Yucca Valley	Yes

Appendix C - Major Subject Studied

SUBJECT CATEOGRY	INCLUDES
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION / PUBLIC POLICY	Public administration Public affairs Public policy
SOCIAL SCIENCES	Communications Criminal justice Economics Government History International relations Journalism Law Geography Political science Psychology Native American studies Social sciences Social work Social ecology
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION	Business Business administration Human resources Marketing Management Organizational management Recreation administration

SUBJECT CATEOGRY	INCLUDES
PLANNING	City and regional planning Community planning Natural resource planning Planning Regional planning Urban planning
ENGINEERING/ ARCHITECTURE	Architecture Civil engineering Electrical engineering Environmental engineering Landscape architecture
BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES	Biology Agriculture Environmental Management Environmental science Environmental studies
ACCOUNTING/FINANCE	Accounting Finance Public finance
LIBERAL ARTS/ HUMANITIES	English Literature Film studies Liberal studies
PHYSICAL SCIENCES	Aerospace Biochemistry Bioresource and agriculture Physics Math

Appendix D - Pressing Issues Categories

ISSUE CATEGORY	INCLUDES
CITY WORKFORCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiring Retaining talent Maintaining workforce Insufficient staffing levels
CRIME / PUBLIC SAFETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crime Public Safety Funding for public safety Increasing public safety costs Public safety/crime reduction Recruiting police officers Retaining police officers
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic development Jobs Businesses Economic recovery Economic diversification Development of downtown Downtown revitalization Loss of employers
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fire services Fire department staffing / labor issues Hazard mitigation Wildfires Wildfire and emergency safety Wildfire prevention

ISSUE CATEGORY	INCLUDES
FISCAL HEALTH OF THE CITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing budget Tax revenues Debt management Unfunded pension obligations Public Employees Retirement System Budget management Financial/fiscal stability
GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Climate change Climate adaption
GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult council Council dysfunction Political gridlock
HOMELESSNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homelessness Homelessness and affordable housing Homelessness/community image Homelessness/vagrancy Homelessness/wealth disparity Increasing homelessness

ISSUE CATEGORY	INCLUDES
HOUSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Lack of housing Price of housing Housing availability Housing development Affordable housing Housing Element Rent stabilization Just cause eviction
INFRASTRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure Utilities Connectivity Public works Sewage, wastewater Parks Funding for Infrastructure
QUALITY OF LIFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare Cost of living Public Amenities
ROADS/TRAFFIC/ PARKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roads Traffic Parking Funding for street maintenance Roadway maintenance and repair Traffic mitigation

ISSUE CATEGORY	INCLUDES
SOCIAL CONCERNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement Civility Public discourse Low public trust Misinformation
STATE MANDATES / LOCAL CONTROL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State mandates Loss of local control Compliance with state mandates Housing mandates State over-regulation Unfunded state mandates
WATER SUPPLY / DROUGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flooding Water Water quality Water security Drought

