Counties Matter

Counties are diverse in structure and how we deliver services to our residents, yet we all share the vision of achieving healthy, safe, and vibrant counties across America.
The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America’s 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to:

- Advocate with a collective voice on national policy.
- Exchange ideas and build new leadership skills.
- Pursue transformational, cost-effective solutions.
- Enrich the public’s understanding of county government.
- Exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

STRONGER COUNTIES.
STRONGER AMERICA.
America’s 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs represent the places where we live, work and play. Counties are so present in our everyday lives that we sometimes overlook the many ways they help our communities thrive. Often behind the scenes, 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees are responsible for maintaining roads and bridges, caring for our physical and mental health, administering our elections, ensuring public safety, strengthening environmental stewardship, and so much more.

County governments are also indispensable partners in our nation’s intergovernmental system, which balances and shares roles and responsibilities among all levels of government. Counties collaborate with federal, state, local and tribal governments to deliver on-the-ground services and meet our residents’ needs.
TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation and infrastructure are core public sector responsibilities that impact everything from our daily commutes to shipping goods around the globe. From building and maintaining roads and bridges to providing efficient transit options, counties are a driving force connecting communities and strengthening our economy. Counties play a major role in other essential community infrastructure like schools, hospitals, jails, courthouses, parks and water purification and sewage systems.
COUNTIES ARE INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION OF 40% OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS.

COUNTIES OWN 38% OF BRIDGES.

COUNTIES OWN AND MAINTAIN 45% OF AMERICA’S ROADS.

COUNTIES ARE INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION OF 34% OF PUBLIC AIRPORTS.

COUNTIES INVEST ANNUALLY:

- $61 billion in the construction of public facilities, such as hospitals, schools, jails and other local institutions.
- $134 billion total in building, maintaining and operating physical infrastructure and public works.
- More than $22 billion in sewage and solid waste management.

COUNTY STATISTICS:

- 134 billion total in building, maintaining and operating physical infrastructure and public works.
- $61 billion in the construction of public facilities, such as hospitals, schools, and other local institutions.
- $134 billion in sewage and solid waste management.

COUNTIES INVEST IN LOCAL BROADBAND NETWORKS that support internet access for millions of residents.
COMMUNITY HEALTH

Counties invest heavily in local residents’ health and well-being, often serving as a safety net for low-income and indigent residents. County health departments protect our residents and communities by offering a wide range of services like administering flu shots, providing health information and preventing and responding to public health emergencies. From hospitals and emergency rooms to clinical care facilities, many counties operate the systems that keep us healthy from the time we are born to the time we grow old. Counties also often have significant responsibilities for behavioral and mental health services and care.
Local governments, mostly counties, contribute to the non-federal share of Medicaid $28 BILLION annually.

**STATS**

**COUNTIES INVEST ANNUALLY**

- $62.8 BILLION in human services
- $100+ BILLION in community health and hospitals
- $163+ BILLION in community health, hospitals and human services annually

**COUNTIES SUPPORT**

900+ HOSPITALS, WITH MORE THAN 62,000 BEDS

Counties are involved in promoting public health through 1,592 local health departments.

Local governments, mostly counties, contribute $28 BILLION to the non-federal share of Medicaid.

**SERVICES INCLUDE**

- Hospitals & Health Clinics
- Public Health
- Behavioral & Mental Health
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Immunizations & Prevention
- Indigent Healthcare
- Health Code Inspections
- Nursing Homes
Counties play a major role in two distinct areas of justice and public safety: emergency response and preparedness and the criminal justice system. From patrolling the streets, to operating and maintaining county detention facilities, to employing innovative approaches to safely reduce jail populations, county sheriffs and other law enforcement departments are on the front lines of justice and public safety. Other key county players are judges, district attorneys, public defenders, court clerks, jail directors, 911 operators and coroners.
COUNTIES INVEST ANNUALLY

Counties operate 91% of all local jails.

SERVICES INCLUDE

- County Courts
- Public Defenders
- Sheriff’s Departments
- County Police Departments
- Paid & Volunteer Firefighters
- District Attorneys
- Jails & Correctional Facilities
- Juvenile Detention & Justice Services
- Coroners
- Emergency Management Personnel
- County Courts

Over $42 BILLION on 2,961 police and sheriff departments

Almost $21 BILLION on county courts and legal services

8 MILLION people were admitted to county and other local jails in 2020.
Counties are home to more than 17 million veterans, comprising seven percent of residents living in our counties. Counties fund and operate, almost exclusively through local tax revenues, County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) in 29 states and the District of Columbia, which help veterans claim more than $52 billion in federal VA benefits each year. CVSOs help our veterans access stable housing, employment and education opportunities and deliver critical mental health services that treat trauma and prevent suicide.

More than

$209 BILLION

in VA funding distributed to support veterans and their families.
7% of county residents are veterans.

COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS (CVSOs) OPERATE IN 29 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AND ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING VETERANS ACCESS FEDERAL BENEFITS.

48% of veteran expenditures went to veteran compensation and pensions.

40% of veteran expenditures went to veteran medical care.

Over 7% of county residents are veterans.
Counties offer a local, detailed level of expertise on resource management issues to federal land agencies. Whether participating in forest health projects to reduce wildfire, providing emergency services on federal lands, maintaining roads and other access points or implementing wildlife conservation measures, counties are a key partner in ensuring federal lands and resources are enjoyed and used wisely.

62% of America's counties have federal public lands.
Counties received more than $514 MILLION in Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funding in FY2021.

More than 1700 COUNTIES received a funding in 2021.

Nationally, the median PILT amount per entitlement acre was $2.87.

Average payment to counties receiving PILT was $272,526.

Counties received more than $249 MILLION in SRS funding in FY2019.

655 counties and schools received Secure Rural Schools payments.
COUNTY MANAGEMENT

Counties provide vital services to all Americans, from issuing birth certificates and marriage licenses to administering elections. Counties often build and maintain parks, libraries and cultural centers. Counties are sources of innovation, exploring new opportunities to address challenges and piloting programs and initiatives that make residents’ lives better. While balancing numerous administrative responsibilities, counties deliver essential services to ensure healthy, vibrant and safe communities across the United States.

COUNTIES INVEST ANNUALLY

Almost $12 BILLION to build and maintain parks and recreational facilities

Close to $12.8 BILLION in housing and community development
SERVICES INCLUDE

- Community and Economic Development
- Record Keeping
- Tax Assessments & Collection
- Recreation and Parks
- 911 Call Centers
- Elections and Polling Places
- Arts Programs
- Housing

EVERY TWO YEARS COUNTIES FUND AND OVERSEE NEARLY 100,000 POLLING PLACES and coordinate more than 630,000 poll workers.

STATS

THERE ARE 38,873 TOTAL COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS (INCLUDING COUNTY BOARD, EXECUTIVES AND ROW OFFICERS)

19,579 ELECTED COUNTY BOARD MEMBERS AND ELECTED EXECUTIVES

18,629 ARE INDEPENDENTLY ELECTED CONSTITUTIONAL OR ROW OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE FOR SPECIFIC COUNTY FUNCTIONS
Counties are one of America’s oldest forms of government, dating back to 1634 when the first county governments (shire) were established in Virginia. The organization and structure of today’s 3,069 county governments are chartered under state constitutions or laws and are tailored to fit the needs and characteristics of states and local areas.

No two counties are exactly the same. Counties are diverse in structure and how we deliver services to our communities. In general, states decide the roles and responsibilities of county governments. Counties are governed by locally elected officials and, in some instances, operate under home rule authority, which allows for more local flexibility and control with structural, functional and fiscal powers. Though organizational structures vary, all county governments are on the front lines of delivering vital services to residents and building stronger communities.
WHY IS LOCAL FLEXIBILITY IMPORTANT?

COUNTIES ARE INCREASINGLY DIVERSE. In 2020, in one out of four counties, there was at least a 50 percent chance that two people chosen at random would be from different racial or ethnic backgrounds – up from one in five counties in 2010. Because all counties are organized to meet local needs, county leaders are well positioned to embrace the diversity of our communities, ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities and practice inclusive decision-making.

COUNTIES INVEST RESOURCES DIFFERENTLY. For example, the American Rescue Plan’s Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund allocated $65.1 billion in direct, flexible aid to every county, parish and borough. In accordance with the legislation and guidance from the U.S. Treasury, counties are investing these critical resources in a broad array of areas based on unique county needs, opportunities and circumstances. To learn more, visit https://www.naco.org/covid-19-recovery-clearinghouse

*The Diversity Index (DI) measures the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different racial and ethnic groups
NACo’s MISSION
Strengthen America’s counties.

NACo’s VISION
Healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America.
