WHY COUNTIES MATTER
TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation and infrastructure are critical components that support the economies of our counties and improve the standard of living for all Americans. By providing efficient transportation and transit options such as buses, trains, light rail and subway systems, counties are the driving force connecting communities. Counties invest in building the schools where students learn, the hospitals that treat and provide care to the community and the jails that house and rehabilitate wrongdoers. From cleaning up storm debris and restoring safety to the community to cleaning the water we drink by maintaining reservoirs, purification plants and pumping stations, counties provide the basic services that are often taken for granted.

Services include:

- Transit
- Roads
- Bridges
- Airports
- Construction of public facilities
- Water and sewage systems
- Solid waste management
- Utilities like gas and electricity

COUNTIES OWN
230,690 bridges

COUNTIES OWN AND MAINTAIN
45% of America’s roads

COUNTIES ARE INVOLVED
IN THE OPERATION OF
30% of public airports

COUNTIES INVEST
$52.3 BILLION
in construction of public facilities annually

COUNTIES INVEST
$106.3 BILLION
in building infrastructure and maintaining and operating public works annually

COUNTIES INVEST
$18.6 BILLION
in sewage and solid waste management annually
HEALTHCARE

Counties create support systems to keep you healthy from the time you are born until the time you grow old. Many counties operate hospitals and health facilities that provide clinical services, cancer and cardiac care, and emergency and trauma care. County nursing homes offer restorative care and rehabilitation, and promote quality of life and wellness to the elderly. From preventative measures like administering flu shots to educating the public with health information, county health departments ensure the everyday health of their residents.

Services include:
- Hospitals
- Nursing homes
- Behavioral and mental healthcare
- Immunizations
- Testing services
- Indigent healthcare
- Health code inspections
- Health clinics
- Public health

COUNTIES SUPPORT
976 HOSPITALS WITH A TOTAL OF 100,378 BEDS THAT SERVE MORE THAN 15 MILLION PATIENT DAYS

COUNTIES ARE INVOLVED
in promoting public health through more than 1,550 local health departments

COUNTIES INVEST
$69.7 BILLION for community health and hospitals annually

COUNTIES OWN
692 nursing homes, which represent 75% of the publicly owned nursing homes
JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY
 Counties keep communities safe, by providing law enforcement and promoting crime prevention. From patrolling and policing the streets, to operating and maintaining county detention facilities, to serving as the arm of the county courts, county sheriffs and police departments are the linchpin of the criminal justice system. The other key players in the system are judges, district attorneys, public defenders, court clerks, jail directors and coroners.

Criminal justice components include:
- Sheriffs departments
- County police departments
- County court systems
- Jails and correctional facilities
- Juvenile detention and justice services
- District attorneys
- Public defenders
- Coroners

COUNTIES INVEST $70.2 BILLION TOTAL in justice and public safety services annually, of which ...

THERE ARE 3,105 county police and sheriffs departments

$30.2 BILLION IS SPENT ON POLICE AND SHERIFFS DEPARTMENTS

$23.3 BILLION IS SPENT ON CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

11.6 MILLION people were admitted to county and other local jails in 2012

$16.7 BILLION IS SPENT ON COUNTY COURTS AND LEGAL SERVICES ANNUALLY
COUNTY MANAGEMENT

Counties provide vital services to all Americans, from issuing birth certificates and marriage licenses to operating 911 call centers. Counties often build and maintain the parks, swimming pools, community centers and cultural centers where you spend time with family and friends. Counties are responsible for running elections, from presidential to local. While balancing numerous administrative responsibilities, counties deliver essential services to ensure safe, healthy and resilient communities for their residents.

Services include:
- Record keeping
- Tax assessments
- 911 call centers
- Elections and polling places
- Recreation and parks
- Arts programs
- Housing, community and economic development

EVERY TWO YEARS, COUNTIES FUND AND OVERSEE MORE THAN 167,000 polling places

THERE ARE ALMOST 39,000 total county elected officials. 711 are elected county executives

AND COORDINATE MORE THAN 704,000 poll workers

ANNUALLY, COUNTIES INVEST $25.5 BILLION into economic development

COUNTIES INVEST $9.3 BILLION to build and maintain parks and recreational facilities annually
The nation’s 3,069 county governments provide the essential services to create healthy, vibrant, and safe communities. Counties support and maintain public infrastructure, transportation and economic development assets; keep residents healthy; ensure public safety to protect our citizens; maintain public information and coordinate elections; and implement a broad array of federal, state and local programs in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

People depend on counties to provide services that build, maintain, and protect their homes, schools and neighborhoods. Counties are also an instrumental player in America’s intergovernmental system of federal, state, and local governments.

NACo members support state and federal policies and programs that provide the tools, resources, and solutions needed to spur job growth, improve the quality of life for all Americans, and increase the economic competitiveness of America’s counties and communities. To accomplish this, NACo adheres to a set of core principles through its core functions.

**NACo’s CORE PRINCIPLES**

- Empower county leaders with new skills, resources and ideas
- Assist counties with first-class, cost-effective services
- Provide timely, informative and value-added data, knowledge and programs
- Promote sound public policies that advance the interests of counties
- Exercise sound stewardship and management of NACo’s financial, intellectual, and human resources
- Enhance the public’s understanding of county government

**NACo’s CORE FUNCTIONS**

- Legislative, regulatory, and judicial representation in the nation’s capital
- Research
- Education & technical assistance
- Cost-saving programs
- Solutions for critical problems
- Innovative programs that meet future county needs
THE DIVERSITY OF COUNTIES

No two counties are exactly the same. Counties are one of America’s oldest forms of government, dating back to 1634 when the first county governments were established in Virginia. Ever since, county governments continue to evolve and adapt to changing environments and populations, with Petersburg Borough, Alaska, incorporating as recently as 2013. Counties are diverse in the way they are structured and how they deliver services to their communities. States decide counties’ roles and responsibilities. States can allow counties to govern themselves by granting them home rule authority, which gives counties varying degrees of power to decide their own structural, functional and fiscal organization. Counties’ demographic, geographic and economic characteristics dictate how they deliver services to their communities. The organization and structure of counties are tailored to fit their communities’ needs and characteristics.

★ Los Angeles County invests $18.9 billion annually — or more than 23 of our state governments each year.
★ If Cook County, Ill., were a state, it would be bigger than 30 states in population.
★ Almost 70 percent of counties have less than 50,000 residents.
★ One in four acres of county land is federally owned. In the West, one in two acres of county land is federally owned.

WWW.NACO.ORG/COUNTIESMATTER
NACo’s Vision: Healthy, Vibrant, Safe, and Resilient Counties Across the United States

NACo’s Mission

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo assists America’s 3,069 counties in pursuing excellence in public service to produce healthy, vibrant, safe and resilient counties. NACo promotes sound public policies, fosters county solutions and innovation, promotes intergovernmental and public-private collaboration and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money.

Sources