

THE 10 CRITICAL IMPERATIVES FACING CITIES IN 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we approach 2014, cities large and small confront challenges that not only impact the quality of life of those who live and work there, but the success of our entire nation. The National League of Cities is highlighting the most pressing of these challenges in this report.

With more than 80 percent of Americans living in cities, and with cities producing more than 75 percent of our nation's economic output, it is imperative that we find solutions.^{1, 2} Cities across the country are innovating, but cannot and should not continue to go it alone. Partnerships among local governments, citizens, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and federal, state, and county leaders are needed. Together we can ensure that our nation's cities thrive and continue to be centers of opportunity and national economic prosperity.

HERE ARE THE 10 CRITICAL IMPERATIVES FACING CITIES IN 2014:

FRAGILE FISCAL HEALTH: After seven years of declining tax revenues, cities report their fiscal health is on the mend. But cities continue to confront the prolonged effects of the economic downturn and remain vulnerable to cuts in federal funding. Many are being forced to operate with reduced workforces and service levels. Cities need new tools in their revenue generating toolbox. For example,

the NLC supports legislation that would allow cities to collect taxes from remote online purchases.

DETERIORATING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE:

Eroding infrastructure threatens citizens' safety and quality of life. Traffic congestion continues to grow, choking the environment with pollution and costing commuters millions of dollars in wasted gas and thousands of hours of lost time. The overall transportation system must be made more efficient, including upgrading older systems and adding new modes like light rail and bus rapid transit. Cities are finding innovative ways to finance infrastructure, including public-private partnerships, but a local-federal partnership is essential.³ Federal tax-exempt municipal bonds have supported three-quarters of all infrastructure investment in the U.S. But this tool is under threat, and NLC opposes any attempt by the Administration or Congress to eliminate or limit the tax exemption on municipal bonds.

THE SHRINKING MIDDLE CLASS:

Although the economy is improving, millions of citizens are still struggling. Many jobs once held by middle-income workers have disappeared, leaving these workers unemployed or forced to take lower-paying jobs. Middle-class families saw their median income decline by nearly 30 percent over the past decade.⁴ As a result, more families are slipping into poverty and straining social service programs. City leaders can help families and neighborhoods become more economically secure by developing strategies

to connect residents with state and federal work supports and public benefits, expand opportunities to save and build financial assets, and help hard-to-employ residents overcome barriers to work.

INADEQUATE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION:

For cities to be globally competitive and attract new families and businesses, it is imperative that more residents successfully obtain postsecondary degrees and credentials. Higher education brings numerous benefits to cities: higher-paying jobs, growing tax revenues and economic activity, enhanced public safety, and a better quality of life. Cities can convene education stakeholders including K-12 postsecondary officials, community-based organizations, workforce agencies, and businesses to establish data-driven goals and support action plans to improve education across the cradle to career continuum.

THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Safe, affordable housing remains a critical component of a healthy, prosperous city. Following the collapse of the real estate market, foreclosures and empty houses have destabilized entire neighborhoods in cities across the country. The foreclosure and vacancy crisis has resulted in increased crime, blight, shrinking local tax bases, and a greater need for social services. To support their residents and rebuild neighborhoods, cities can work with national, state, local, and nonprofit partners to provide mediation between lenders and borrowers, prevent vacant property deterioration, and rehabilitate properties for resale or rental.

A LESS-THAN-WELCOMING RETURN FOR

VETERANS: Veterans coming home from deployment can have major difficulties returning to their former lives. These service members face a higher risk of unemployment, homelessness, and family problems. Communities need to be proactive in helping returning veterans successfully transition from the war front to the home front, especially when it comes to employment, affordable housing, and social service or medical issues. The federal government offers programs, but more must be done. To help veterans successfully return to their communities, local governments can work with social service, charitable, and veterans groups to best determine what help returning soldiers need, create affordable housing programs for veterans, and partner with businesses to provide jobs help.⁵

GANG VIOLENCE: Gangs recruit young members and ensnare them in a life of drugs, organized crime, and

violence that can terrorize and paralyze neighborhoods. In addition to suffering unacceptably high numbers of deaths and injuries, gang-besieged neighborhoods are plagued by physical decay and withdrawal from civic engagement. Children fear going to school, parks become unusable, and going shopping can be a dangerous outing. To prevent gang violence, cities can find new ways create opportunities for young people, support families, and build stronger social bonds in neighborhoods that help keep youth from joining gangs. A comprehensive strategy includes partnering with school, neighborhood and church leaders, offering drug-prevention programs, and supporting efforts to keep young people on track toward graduation.

A BROKEN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM: America's population of recent immigrants reached a record 40.4 million in 2011. In addition to making vast social and cultural contributions, immigrants generate substantial economic growth, revitalize communities, and stabilize neighborhoods. Despite these contributions, Congress remains gridlocked over proposals to fix the nation's broken immigration system. Cities need a federal solution that secures our nation's borders and includes a path to citizenship for the millions of immigrants currently contributing to our nation's vitality.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND EXTREME WEATHER:

Catastrophic storms, droughts, heat waves, and rising sea-levels will increasingly have a profound impact on cities. These events can cost human life, destroy property, disrupt entire economies, and wipe out local infrastructure. In 2011, weather events caused more than \$60 billion in damages nationwide; in 2012, the damages from Hurricane Sandy alone hit \$65 billion. Communities must prepare for extreme weather events and a changing climate by taking a number of important steps now, including upgrading facilities and infrastructure to weather storms, and partnering with the private sector to help finance improvements.⁶

LACK OF PUBLIC TRUST:

Polls show public trust in government is abysmally low. A recent poll found 37 percent of voters trust their local government, 22 percent trust their state government, and only 12 percent trust the federal government. The timing could not be worse: cities need citizens' input and cooperation more than ever before. City leaders must connect with their citizens and involve them in important decision-making. Fortunately, new social media offer a number of ways to do just that.



INTRODUCTION

Cities are the heart of America. They are where people live, work, and play. They are where government is closest to the people and where real change is happening. This is made even clearer when compared to the ongoing political gridlock in Washington.

When cities are strong, our nation's children and families thrive, the economy flourishes, and the environment is cleaner, healthier, and better preserved for future generations. There are some big challenges ahead, however, and cities can't continue to go it alone.

This report highlights 10 imperatives that cities must grapple with as we approach 2014, suggests ways that local governments can provide solutions

and in some cases, spotlights how an effective local-federal partnership can make the difference between success or failure, stability or uncertainty.

The 10 Critical Imperatives Facing Cities in 2014 include:

1. Fragile Fiscal Health
2. Deteriorating Transportation Infrastructure
3. The Shrinking Middle Class
4. Inadequate Access to Higher Education
5. The Need for Affordable Housing
6. A Less-Than-Welcoming Welcoming
Return for Veterans
7. Gang Violence
8. A Broken Immigration System
9. Climate Change and Extreme Weather
10. Lack of Public Trust



FRAGILE FISCAL HEALTH

In 2013, cities reported that their fiscal health is on the mend after seven long years of declining revenues.⁷ However, looking to 2014, high levels of unemployment, uncertainty about federal and state actions, and long-term pension and health benefit obligations constrain the fiscal outlook for many cities.

Cities continue to confront the prolonged effects of the economic downturn, remain vulnerable to external policy shifts, including cuts in federal funding, and face challenges balancing their budgets, which they are required to do on an annual basis.

In this environment, cities are likely to continue to operate with reduced workforces and service levels, and on the whole are cautious about making significant infrastructure investments. The multiplier effect of

these cuts on families, businesses, and the overall local economy can be devastating for communities.⁸

At a time when city finances are still tenuous, providing more tools in the revenue generating toolbox is a critical way the Administration and Congress can support cities. For example, enacting the Marketplace Fairness Act, which NLC supports, would allow state and local governments the flexibility to collect the taxes already owed to them on remote online purchases.⁹ This means more money for basic services, such as roads and public safety, without increasing the overall federal deficit. This would also afford consumers more choice through fair competition. It also means leveling the playing field between online retailers and brick-and-mortar retail businesses. It does not mean raising taxes or imposing new ones.



DETERIORATING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Eroding infrastructure continues to threaten our economic competitiveness, safety, and quality of life. Cities recognize the need to not only upgrade and maintain infrastructure, but also introduce new modes of transportation – be it water ferries, light rail, bus rapid transit, or more bicycle and pedestrian walkways.¹⁰

The American Society for Civil Engineers recently found:

- Failing to invest in deficient and deteriorating roads and bridges cost the U.S. \$130 billion in 2010, and by 2020 will result in \$3.1 trillion in lost GDP growth and 877,000 lost jobs.
- 40 percent of urban interstates have capacity deficiencies, costing \$27 billion a year in lost time and other inefficiencies wasted on the roads. By 2020, that number could grow tenfold, reaching \$276 billion a year.
- Companies would underperform by \$240 billion over the next ten years without additional investment. Exporters, which would have trouble moving goods to market, would send \$28 billion less in trade abroad.
- The cost to families' household budgets would be \$1,060 a year.¹¹

Traffic congestion also creates pollution and wasted fuel. According to Texas A&M's Annual Urban Mobility Report, traffic results in 380 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions for each commuter, totaling

some 56 billion pounds, and roughly three billion gallons of fuel wasted each year – enough to fill the New Orleans Superdome four times over.¹²

Deteriorating transportation infrastructure and traffic congestion are major challenges that will only continue to grow, particularly as funding dwindles. In addition to local funding mechanisms such as property or sales taxes and public-private partnerships, the federal government must be a fiscal partner in ensuring effective solutions.¹³ And that partnership is under threat today. Cities have long used tax-exempt municipal bonds to pay for schools, roads, water and sewer systems, airports, bridges and other vital infrastructure. State and local governments financed more than \$1.65 trillion of infrastructure investment over the last decade (2003–2012) through the tax-exempt bond market.¹⁴

As the Administration and Congress look for revenue to close the federal deficit, proposals are being considered that would limit or eliminate altogether the federal income tax exemption provided to interest earned on bonds issued by state and local governments. NLC opposes any attempt to eliminate or limit the traditional tax exemption for municipal bonds – whether as a part of a deficit reduction plan, a push for comprehensive tax reform or as an offset for new spending.



THE SHRINKING MIDDLE CLASS

During the recession, many jobs once held by middle-income, mid-skill workers disappeared, leaving these workers unemployed or forced to take lower-paying jobs. As the overall economy continues to emerge from the Great Recession, mid-skill and even many higher-skill jobs have shown no signs of returning, forcing many moderately educated workers to take low-wage jobs, if they can find work at all. As a result, many working families have been pushed into poverty or near poverty, and are reliant on social service programs to meet their basic needs.

Deep job losses in occupations such as construction, information technology, manufacturing, and insurance are not likely to return. Meanwhile, jobs in food service, retail, and personal health care are growing, but are not as high-paying.¹⁵

Middle class families saw their median income decline by nearly 30 percent over the past decade, while the cost of goods and services steadily climbed. A record one in five families is on food stamps, and more Americans are living paycheck to paycheck.^{16, 17}

A shrinking middle class is not just a problem for larger cities. Unemployment, foreclosed homes, and failed businesses are hurting suburban communities across the country too. According to a Brookings Institution report, in 1999, large U.S. cities and their suburbs had roughly equal numbers of poor residents, but by 2008 the number of suburban poor exceeded the poor in central cities by 1.5 million.¹⁸ Although poverty rates remain higher in central cities than in suburbs, poverty rates have increased at a quicker pace in suburban areas.

Millions of families across America are living on the financial edge, just one unexpected setback from a major financial crisis. For low-income families already struggling to meet basic needs, such common occurrences can trigger a devastating chain of events that leads to unemployment, homelessness, and family instability. City leaders can help families and neighborhoods become more economically secure by developing strategies to connect eligible residents with state and federal work supports and public benefits, expand opportunities to save and build financial assets, and help hard-to-employ residents overcome barriers to work.¹⁹



INADEQUATE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

In order for cities – large and small, urban and suburban – to be globally competitive and attractive to businesses and families alike, more of their residents must pursue and successfully obtain postsecondary degrees and credentials.

A postsecondary credential – whether it is a bachelor's degree, associate degree, apprenticeship or certificate – is critical for success in today's economy. The Center on Education and Workforce (CEW) at Georgetown University estimates that more than six in 10 jobs will require at least some postsecondary education by 2018, and that the higher the level of educational attainment, the higher a person's earnings over a lifetime will be.²⁰

Despite the substantial returns to higher education, only 40 percent of American adults currently have postsecondary credentials, and this rate is significantly lower for low-income minorities.

Helping residents obtain a higher education must be a priority because of the numerous benefits that it would bring. These include higher pay for residents, growing tax revenues for cities, a stronger local economy, enhanced public safety, and a better quality of life.

City leaders can employ a number of strategies to inspire and support local actions that have the potential to improve postsecondary completion rates, including:

- Coordinating wraparound services to help young people complete college.
- Aligning postsecondary success strategies with local workforce and economic development initiatives and the city's overall strategic plan.
- Galvanizing the business community to identify high-demand skills and credentials, provide internships, and raise funds for college scholarships.²¹

MEMPHIS, TN

In 2009, when A C Wharton, Jr., was first elected as mayor of the City of Memphis, the city faced a dire economic situation. Only four percent of Memphis City Schools' students were rated as "college-ready" based on standardized test scores, and only 23 percent of Memphis residents over the age of 25 had attained a college degree. In response to

the large disparity that exists between the area's workforce needs and workforce preparation, Mayor Wharton established the Office of Talent and Human Capital as one of his first official actions. The office's goal is to attract, develop, and retain an educated and talented workforce that can propel the city to an improved economic status.²²



THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Safe, affordable, and accessible housing remains the essential core of healthy, prosperous cities. Following the collapse of the real estate market and the Great Recession, foreclosures and high vacancies served to destabilize entire neighborhoods in cities across the country. According to RealtyTrac and Core Logic, more than 4 million homeowners were foreclosed on between 2007 and 2012.²³ The foreclosure and vacancy crisis has resulted in increased crime, blight, shrinking local tax bases, and a greater need for social services.

Despite recent improvements in housing demand that are indicative of a recovery, the real estate market remains vulnerable. To support their residents and rebuild neighborhoods, cities have been working with national, state, local and nonprofit partners to prevent vacancy and vacant property deterioration, rehabilitate and convert properties for rental and resale, clean up large stocks of vacant property, and develop playgrounds, community gardens, and other public uses for these abandoned spaces.

City leaders play a key role in working with national, state, local, and nonprofit partners to help residents keep their homes and help communities cope with the ongoing effects of the foreclosure crisis.²⁴ Strategies include:

- Preventing vacancy: cities can mandate or provide mediation between lenders and borrowers and provide foreclosure counseling to borrowers.
- Prevent vacant property deterioration: cities can use approaches such as vacant property registration, vacant inventory identification, and community vacant property management to prevent blight, deter vandals, and decrease the cost of rehabilitation and re-integration into the market.
- Rehabilitation and conversion to rentals and resale: resources for rehabilitating properties for reuse include land banks and bank donations of real estate owned (REO) properties to city governments.



A LESS-THAN-WELCOMING RETURN FOR VETERANS

Veterans coming home from deployment, particularly from conflict zones, can have major difficulties returning to their families and former lives. These women and men who made tremendous sacrifices to serve are now at higher risk for unemployment, homelessness, and family problems. For example:

- Returning veterans can have higher unemployment rates than other groups.²⁵ In Arizona, for example, the non-veteran unemployment rate was 7.7 percent in 2012, while the unemployment rate for post 9-11 veterans was more than twice that, at 15.9 percent.
- Veterans often make up a disproportionate share of the homeless population in many cities nationwide.²⁶ Some 60,000 veterans are now homeless, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Their needs are often different from other homeless individuals and families.
- Oftentimes, veterans need more than just a home or a job. One study found nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans screen positive for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression.²⁷

Soldiers should have access to assistance in coping with problems from the physical, mental, and emotional toll they have endured. They served their country well. They deserve our complete

support. To help veterans successfully return to their communities, local governments can:

- Work with social service, charitable, and veterans groups to best determine what help returning soldiers need, what assistance they're receiving and what more needs to be done.²⁸
- Create affordable housing programs for veterans.
- Coordinate efforts among agencies and set up databases to cut red tape and provide services more quickly.²⁹
- Identify chronically homeless veterans with the help of first responders (police, firefighters, EMTs) and parks and recreation workers.³⁰
- Partner with local businesses to hold job fairs for veterans.³¹
- Help provide critical services, from job training to mental and behavioral health services
- Build partnerships with local military, civic and business groups to help pay for and provide services and support.³²
- Work with nonprofits to make veterans more aware of the services available to them.
- Create staff positions for one-on-one help in getting federal vouchers and other services for qualifying veterans.³³



GANG VIOLENCE

Organized gangs, which recruit vulnerable and high-risk youth and expand criminal enterprises such as drug sales, human trafficking, prostitution, and racketeering, are having a devastating effect on cities across America.

Gang activities can bring fear and violence to every block of an afflicted neighborhood. In addition to suffering unacceptably high numbers of deaths and injuries, gang-besieged neighborhoods are plagued by intimidation, economic and physical decay, and withdrawal from civic engagement. As these neighborhoods decline, the bonds that hold communities together weaken. Oftentimes children fear going to school, parks become unusable, and shopping and taking a bus to work become dangerous ventures.

The facts are disturbing:

- There are approximately 1.4 million active street, prison, and outlaw motorcycle gang members comprising more than 33,000 gangs in the United States.³⁴ A majority of the gang members join between the ages of 12 and 14.
- Gangs are increasingly becoming involved in human trafficking and prostitution due to the higher profitability and lower risks of detection and punishment for these activities.
- The illegal trafficking and sale of military-style weapons is resulting in lethal encounters with law enforcement officers, rival gang members, and innocent bystanders.
- Gang violence leads to neighborhood decay, causing properties to lose value and reducing property tax revenues over time. Emergency service providers — from police and fire to emergency health providers — disproportionately bear the high costs of this violence.
- Each young person who drops out of school at age 16 and becomes involved in violence and drug use can cost the community between \$5.2 million and \$7

million in direct costs (law enforcement, health care, welfare, etc.) and opportunity costs (e.g., lost income and multipliers, lost payroll, property and sales taxes).

Fortunately, cities are implementing a wide range of approaches that not only seek to suppress gang violence, but also build communities that do not produce gangs in the first place. These approaches include:

- Establishing comprehensive local gang prevention plans based on evidence-based, public health approaches that bring together teams of municipal leaders, law enforcement officials, school district and community partners, and a host of other stakeholders representing the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
- Collaborating cross-system with county agencies, including those that oversee probation, health and human services, and child welfare systems.
- Partnering with schools to provide gang awareness and education, ensuring a safe school environment, keeping young people on track toward graduation, and intervening early with youth who display risk factors.
- Involving the faith community in mentoring and intervening with troubled youth, strengthening families, reestablishing social norms and mobilizing neighborhoods.
- Engaging neighborhood leaders and residents in supporting enforcement activities, advocating for prevention programs, developing relationships with young people, and strengthening the civic fabric of a community.
- Hiring street outreach workers to divert gang-involved youth toward positive alternatives, prevent retaliation, and promote nonviolent conflict resolution.
- Focusing on reentry strategies to ensure that young people and adults returning from detention facilities receive the services, supports, and job opportunities needed to get their lives back on track and make positive contributions to their communities.



A BROKEN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

America's immigrant population reached a record 40.4 million in 2011, and since 2007, the number of immigrants has increased by 2.4 million, according to an analysis of Census Bureau data by the Pew Hispanic Center.³⁵ In addition to vast social and cultural contributions, immigrants generate substantial economic growth, including jobs for both foreign and native-born workers, revitalize communities and commercial corridors, stabilize neighborhoods and retain local investment in communities.

Just a few of the facts:

- Despite accounting for just 12.9 percent of the U.S. population, immigrants started 28 percent of all new U.S. businesses in 2011, and were more than twice as likely as native-born residents to start a business in 2012.^{36 37}
- Immigrant business owners contribute more than \$775 billion dollars in revenue to our annual Gross Domestic Product and employ one out of every ten American workers at privately-owned companies across the country.³⁸
- In the 25 largest metropolitan areas combined, foreign-born workers are responsible for 20 percent of economic output and make up 20 percent of the population.³⁹
- For every 1,000 immigrants living in a county, 46 manufacturing jobs are created or preserved that would otherwise not exist or would have been moved elsewhere.⁴⁰
- Immigrants can provide an economic boost in once declining areas.⁴¹ For every 1,000 immigrants that arrive to a county, 270 U.S.-born residents move there in response, and the average immigrant who moves to a community raises the total value of housing wealth by \$92,800.

Despite these contributions, Congress remains gridlocked over proposals to fix the nation's broken immigration system. Cities need a common sense

system that secures the borders and includes a path to citizenship for the millions of immigrants currently contributing to our nation's vitality.⁴² Comprehensive reform will provide cities and towns with the support needed to integrate immigrants into their communities and allow immigrants to participate fully in local economies.

In the absence of a national immigrant integration policy, U.S. cities are responding to immigration challenges by working together with civil society organizations to address critical issues.⁴³ Local governments have critical roles to play for developing and implementing immigrant integration programs, including:

- Establishing partnerships with state governments to work together to clarify the relationship between state and local law enforcement agencies and federal immigration agencies.
- Developing a comprehensive cross-sectional immigrant integration strategy among local government and municipal agencies to ensure that the city's strategy is compatible with its broader social inclusion plan.
- Engaging immigrant organizations, faith-based organizations, and the business sector in establishing integration programs and initiatives.
- Identifying the local demographics, issues, and challenges most important to the city's immigrants, and organizing regular outreach events to address these issues, which may include public safety and access to city services.
- Establishing mayoral immigrant advisory commissions and immigrant affairs offices and designating a senior city official to lead and coordinate city and community efforts to improve communication between the local government and the immigrant community.
- Eliminating language barriers and promoting adult literacy.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND EXTREME WEATHER

Whether it's a catastrophic storm, drought, heat wave, or rising sea-levels, climate change and more extreme and variable weather conditions are having a profound effect on cities. These events can cost human life, health, disrupt entire economies, and destroy property and local infrastructure. For example:

- In 2011, a year that saw record-breaking storms, droughts, and heat waves across the country, extreme weather events caused more than \$60 billion in damages nationwide.⁴⁴ In 2012, the damages from Hurricane Sandy alone hit \$65 billion.
- Almost 40 percent of small businesses do not reopen their doors following a flooding disaster, according to Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Between 2006 and 2010, the average commercial flood claim amounted to more than \$85,000.⁴⁵
- Increasingly, heavy rainfall events are putting additional strain on aging and deteriorating sewer and stormwater infrastructure systems.⁴⁶

Scientists predict even worse problems in the coming years as the earth's climate changes. One recent study, for example, predicted the U.S. Southeast will see more incidences of contaminated seafood, flooded homes, and crumbling bridges – among

numerous other problems – in the coming decades.⁴⁷

Communities are better preparing for and making themselves more resilient to the effects of extreme weather events and a changing climate by:

- Developing vulnerability assessments to gain a better understanding of potential extreme weather and climate change scenarios based on their location.
- Addressing comprehensive, systemic issues - from securing communications for emergency personnel to preparing infrastructure - to withstand severe storms and weather events.
- Drafting preparedness plans to help vulnerable residents in the event of more frequent severe weather events or longer-term problems, such as temperature increases.
- Implementing energy efficiency programs to help residents and businesses reduce energy demands during a heat wave or blizzard.
- Upgrading facilities and infrastructure to weather storms, and partnering with the private sector to help finance improvements.
- Partnering with other municipalities in the same geography to come up with innovative and cost-cutting long-term solutions.

CITIES IN SOUTH FLORIDA⁴⁸

In South Florida, perhaps because the effects are so visible and in some cases immediate, initiatives are taking place to not only protect and restore the environment, but city governments are strategically thinking about the multiple effects of climate change programs and policies:

- In 2009, following the Southeast Florida Climate Leadership Summit, elected officials formalized the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, which has been getting a lot of publicity for its unprecedented levels of cooperation and action on climate change issues from cities

and counties.⁴⁹ Most recently, the Compact released a regional climate action plan, outlining mitigation and adaptation strategies to adopt.

- Following a bipartisan decision by Congress in 2000 to direct efforts at restoring the Everglades (Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project), the Everglades Foundation is taking the lead on a number of restoration projects to restore the area's natural habitat.⁵⁰ Projections show that restoration of the Everglades will actually have a 4-to -1 return on investment for South Florida.
- The South Florida Regional Planning Council, funded by the U.S. EPA, is currently doing research on the impacts of sea level rise over a 200-year period on seven counties in South Florida.⁵¹



LACK OF PUBLIC TRUST

Public trust in government has steadily declined over the years. According to a 2013 Mason-Dixon poll conducted for the National League of Cities, 37 percent of voters trust their local government, 22 percent trust their state government, and only 12 percent trust the federal government.⁵² These numbers have edged even lower amidst recent federal budget acrimony, according to the Pew Research Center.⁵³

While public trust in government has declined, the need for public support and engagement of residents is increasingly critical for cities. City leaders need the input of citizens to make the best decisions for their communities. That's why cities are developing more proactive, intensive forms of public engagement that involve a more diverse group of residents, mix online and face-to-face communication, and involve young people as engagement leaders.⁵⁴

PHILADELPHIA, PA⁵⁵

At least two strains of compelling work around community engagement are present in Philadelphia, one of which played a role in transforming the city's planning and land-use policy and another that is emerging out of Philadelphia's entrepreneurial technology community. Both have been developed through partnership between the city government, university and foundation resources, and civil society.

The more established of the two is the civic campaign for the Delaware River, which spanned two mayoral administrations and transformed an essentially corrupt and transactional municipal planning system into a broadly participatory process that resulted in an action plan for reclaiming Philadelphia's primary waterfront. This process reinvigorated land-use debates and

fueled the reform of two city commissions, led to the creation of a new comprehensive plan and sparked ongoing progress toward a more rational and effective approach to redevelopment.

More recently, as Philadelphia's "brain drain" has begun to reverse, a civically-minded tech community has coalesced around a structure provided by the city, area universities, and several foundations. This movement has volunteers both in and out of government; shared workspaces in Center City Philadelphia; an online press outlet, TechnicallyPhilly.com; and several annual events and competitions, including Philly Tech Week. The growing strength of these public-private relationships was a factor in the award of \$20 million of broadband stimulus to bring high-tech resources to low-income communities in Philadelphia.

CONCLUSION

The imperatives facing cities are daunting. City leaders understand this and are heeding the call to action. Despite a tenuous economic recovery and continued federal partisan gridlock, cities across the country are experiencing renewed optimism and a sense that today's challenges can be met through creative local leadership. Regardless of the issue, mayors, councilmembers, and city staff are working with community partners to address our country's most significant problems. With leadership, innovation, engagement, and partnership, cities can thrive and become centers of opportunity and national economic prosperity. Together, we will make 2014 the Year of the City.

ABOUT NLC

The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans.

The list of 10 imperatives is derived from recent NLC membership surveys, analysis of mayoral State of the City addresses, and staff engagement with city leaders. The report content was developed by NLC staff.

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NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Suite 550

Washington, DC 20004

1-877-827-2385 | www.nlc.org