



PHOTO©GETTYIMAGES

**TRENDS**

# State of the Cities

Florida’s municipalities: Diverse in makeup, but with common goals

**W**hat does a city in Florida look like?

Is it a beachfront metropolis? A community of rolling fields and farms? A weathered and cozy fishing village? Is it a high-tech hub of research and innovation? A forested gem of nature trails and wildlife? A buzzing center of world travelers and students? Is it a downtown of brick streets lined with local shops and restaurants?

Cities in Florida are all these things and more. But as diverse in atmosphere, size and geography as they are, Florida’s municipalities share commonalities, particularly the desire of their municipal officials to provide residents with the services most important to them and to be the best possible stewards of city resources while providing those services.

**by Liane M. Schrader  
Florida League of Cities**

Since 1990, 26 new cities have been incorporated in Florida, which increases the state’s municipal population to 50.6 percent of the statewide total. In the past five years, the municipal population has increased 6 percent, which outpaced statewide population growth of 4 percent. Florida is, however, a state of smaller cities. The median municipal population is 5,755, and 67 percent of Florida cities have populations of less than 15,000.

The number of municipal employees needed to deliver services in each city is based not only on the city’s population but also on the number and level of services provided. Staffing levels in Florida cities vary greatly and range from less than

10 employees up to more than 1,000 employees. In 2017, the statewide average was one municipal employee for every 106 residents.

Municipal service levels are far-reaching and vary depending on the needs and desires of residents. Municipalities typically provide services directly by city employees or by contracting with another government entity such as a county.

Many cities place a high priority on quality-of-life services such as parks and recreation. More than 90 percent of Florida municipalities provide city parks. Basic services such as garbage collection and some level of water service are commonly provided by cities as well. While two-thirds of cities provide water service, 42 percent additionally provide wastewater and storm-water services.

Police, fire and emergency medical services are consistently among the top city services provided. Well over four-fifths of Florida municipalities provide police and fire services for their citizens.

Municipalities are making strides to improve communication outreach to citizens through new technologies to keep their residents informed of general governance issues and during emergencies. In addition to a website, more than 70 percent utilize at least one social media platform, with the most frequently used being Facebook and Twitter.

Improving economic conditions for their cities and citizens is a multifaceted effort for municipal officials and staff. Economic development incentives to spur business growth can include expedited permitting procedures, favorable development regulations and tax breaks. In Florida cities with populations greater than 60,000, the most widely used incentives are community redevelopment agencies, expedited permitting and job incentives. Additionally, a vast majority of cities seek additional funding for local projects and initiatives through grants from federal, state and nonprofit sources.

The largest portion of municipal revenue comes from service taxes, permitting fees, franchise and impact fees, interest earnings, and state and federal grant funding. While property taxes are another key revenue stream for most cities, in FY 2016-17, 85 percent of cities maintained or reduced their millage rates. The average percentage increase in municipal millage rates statewide from FY 2012-13 to FY 2016-17 was an extremely modest 0.59 percent. The average statewide millage rate during the same period was 4.6207.

Florida's cities continue to meet the needs of their residents by tailoring their services and revenue sources to fit their municipalities, while still striving for the same goal: to do the best and most efficient job of providing for their communities.

To read the *2017 State of the Cities* report, visit [floridaleagueofcities.com](http://floridaleagueofcities.com).

Liane M. Schrader, CAE, is research analyst for the Florida League of Cities. 



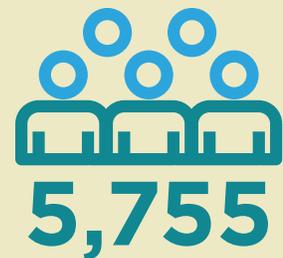
PHOTO © GETTY IMAGES

Need to know how many cities in your population range have the same form of government as your city?

Wonder how many cities in your region contract out their fire services and to what entity?

Searching for the average surcharge imposed by cities that provide water service to neighboring jurisdictions?

Trying to draft an ethics ordinance and wondering which other cities have already done so?



median population of cities in Florida

#### The Center for Municipal Research & Innovation can help.

Through the CMRI's annual **CityStats** survey, answers to these questions and more can be provided to our member cities' elected officials and staff. But only if you participate! The 2018 survey will launch in April via email to all Florida cities.

It's important that the CMRI receives the largest possible percentage of responses from the League's members. The data is most relevant with a 100 percent response rate because it then is a true reflection of municipal activities for the year, and it helps determine trends over multiple years.

#### How is the data used?

- » To produce the annual *State of the Cities* report
- » To support the League's legislative advocacy efforts
- » To guide FLC University's training and education opportunities
- » To provide answers for dozens of member city data inquiries per year

Much of the data collected through the survey is not available anywhere else. League members can use the results for a better understanding of issues occurring in their communities and for determining how national, statewide and regional trends and events are impacting Florida cities.

The CityStats survey is the cornerstone of the center's research and data analysis. In 2017, surveys were collected from 314 of Florida's 412 cities, for a 76 percent response rate. Watch your city's email for this year's survey.

Contact Liane Schrader at [lschrader@flcities.com](mailto:lschrader@flcities.com) for more information.