

Community Priorities for City of New Orleans Investments: Results from a Community Budget Survey, 2024

Introduction

The Big Easy Budget Coalition's mission is "to advance budget equity—the just and fair allocation of government resources—to create the conditions for all New Orleanians to participate and thrive."

The Big Easy Budget Coalition (BEBC) is a diverse, growing group of more than 30 social justice organizations across New Orleans. BEBC advocates for city budget investments that address root causes of violence and support safe, thriving communities.¹ The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice, and the Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center established the coalition in 2022. They did so in response to the city's intended appropriation of much of its federally awarded \$388 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding toward policing—despite the

funding's stated purpose of "[fostering] a strong, inclusive, and equitable recovery" from the COVID-19 pandemic.² BEBC developed and proposed the Big Easy Deal, a set of requests for budget investments in public health, community safety, youth and families, housing, infrastructure, food access, labor, and economic development that would better support the community's health, safety, quality of life, and recovery. Vera, a member organization of BEBC, supported the refinement of the Big Easy Deal and the coalition's continued advocacy by conducting survey research to identify the community's priorities for how the city invests its financial resources, which include public tax dollars.

Figure 1

Survey tabling events and flyer locations, 2024

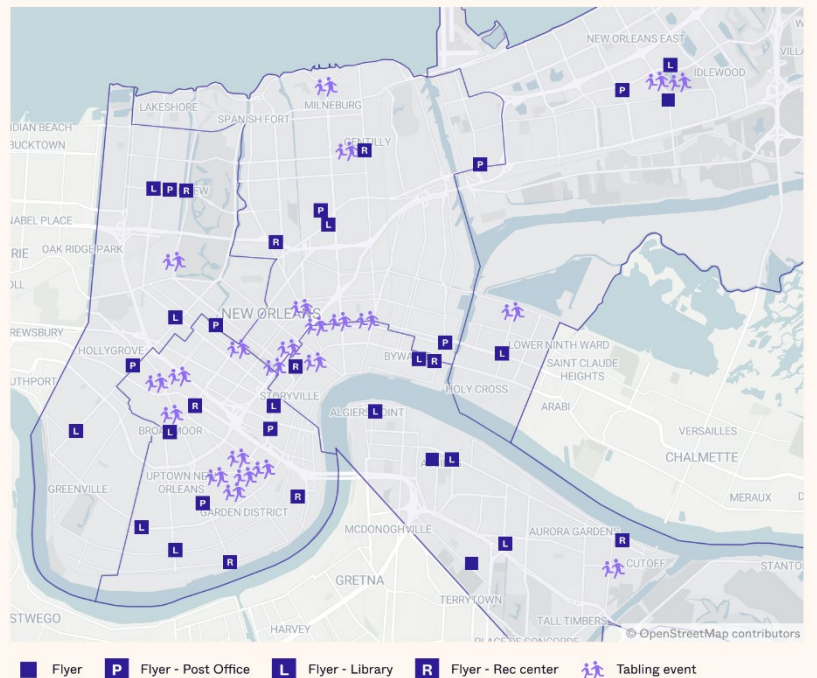


Figure 2

Survey respondents by race/ethnicity and gender, 2024

n = 364

Group	Count	Percent*
Black/African American	163	45%
Woman	107	29%
Man	48	13%
Gender nonconforming/nonbinary	7	2%
Prefer not to answer	1	<1%
White	163	45%
Woman	103	28%
Man	52	14%
Gender nonconforming/nonbinary	7	2%
Other	1	<1%
Latino/Latina/Latinx	16	4%
Woman	8	2%
Man	7	2%
Gender nonconforming/nonbinary	1	<1%
Asian	8	2%
Woman	5	1%
Man	2	1%
Gender nonconforming/nonbinary	1	<1%
Prefer not to answer	7	2%
Man	3	1%
Woman	3	1%
Prefer not to answer	1	<1%
Native American or Native Alaskan	4	1%
Man	2	1%
Prefer not to answer	1	<1%
Woman	1	<1%
Other	3	<1%
Man	3	1%

* Note: All percents use the total sample population as the denominator.

Survey Design, Recruitment, and Analysis

The Big Easy Budget Coalition Survey poses a series of questions across themes vetted by Fund The People, a former member organization of BEBC. Themes include perceptions of neighborhood safety, what individual people and communities need to thrive, perceptions of city investments, and priorities for city investments.³ The survey collects demographic information but does not collect names or contact information.

Vera administered the survey in English and Spanish using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Researchers recruited survey participants by engaging community members at 23 public meetings and events; circulating flyers with QR codes in public spaces such as community centers, libraries, and post offices; sending email and text blasts; and posting to social media. (Figure 1.) To summarize the data, Vera researchers conducted a descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative elements of the survey and a thematic analysis of the open-ended, qualitative elements. Results were not analyzed cumulatively with 2023 results, as respondents from prior years could retake the survey.

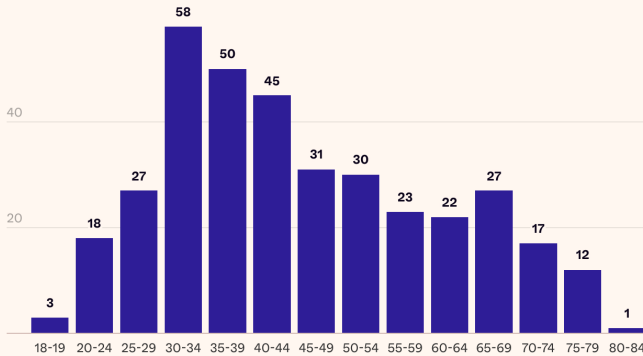
From May 15 through November 21, 2024, 498 people consented to participate in the survey. Vera analyzed 364 responses from residents from all five New Orleans City Council Districts. The analytic sample (N=364) included only the responses of people who met the eligibility criteria (people who were 18 years old or older and current residents of Orleans Parish) and completed questions beyond the initial demographic section of the survey.

The survey sample was not representative of the population characteristics of New Orleans, and the number of respondents from each district was not proportional to the share of residents therein. Black people and white people were each 45 percent of the sample.⁴ (Figure 2.) Sixty-two percent of respondents were female.⁵ Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 84 years old (median age: 42). (Figure 3.) More than one-quarter of respondents were residents of City Council District D (Seventh Ward, Gentilly, and St. Roch). (Figure 4.) Residents from Districts A (Uptown), B (Mid-City, Central City, and Central Business District), C (Algiers, Bywater, French Quarter, and Marigny) and E (Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East) were each 17 percent to 20 percent of the sample. Representation of District E residents in this sample (17 percent) was nearly double that of the 2023 sample (10 percent).

Figure 3

Age distribution of survey respondents, 2024

n = 364



NOTES:

Participants ranged in age from 18-84. Median age was 42.

Findings

Most people felt safe in their neighborhood, even at night, but perceptions of safety were lowest among District E residents

Everyone deserves to be safe, and New Orleans has more to do to ensure the safety of all residents. Nearly 90 percent of respondents reported feeling safe walking in their neighborhood during the day, and more than half felt safe walking at night. (Figure 5.) However, perceptions of safety were lowest among District E residents, as 65 percent of respondents from

this district—compared to 86 percent or more of respondents in Districts A, B, C, and D—felt safe walking in their neighborhood during the day. Perceptions of safety when walking at night were lower than perceptions of safety when walking during the day for all districts and were lowest in District E, with less than half of respondents feeling safe. District E, which is composed of communities still recovering from Hurricane Katrina’s most devastating impacts, has the city’s highest concentration of poverty and high incidence of community violence.⁶

Most people felt connected to their neighborhood

Respondents perceive safety as coming from the programs and services that support a high quality of life and social connectedness.⁷ Four out of every five respondents reported feeling connected to their neighborhood (Figure 5.) Eighty-five percent of white respondents versus 71 percent of Black respondents felt connected to their neighborhood. Respondents from District E felt least connected to their neighborhood compared to respondents from other districts—66 percent felt connected versus 86 percent of District A respondents, 79 percent of District B respondents, 87 percent of District C respondents, and 77 percent of District D respondents.

Figure 4

Survey respondents by city council district, 2024

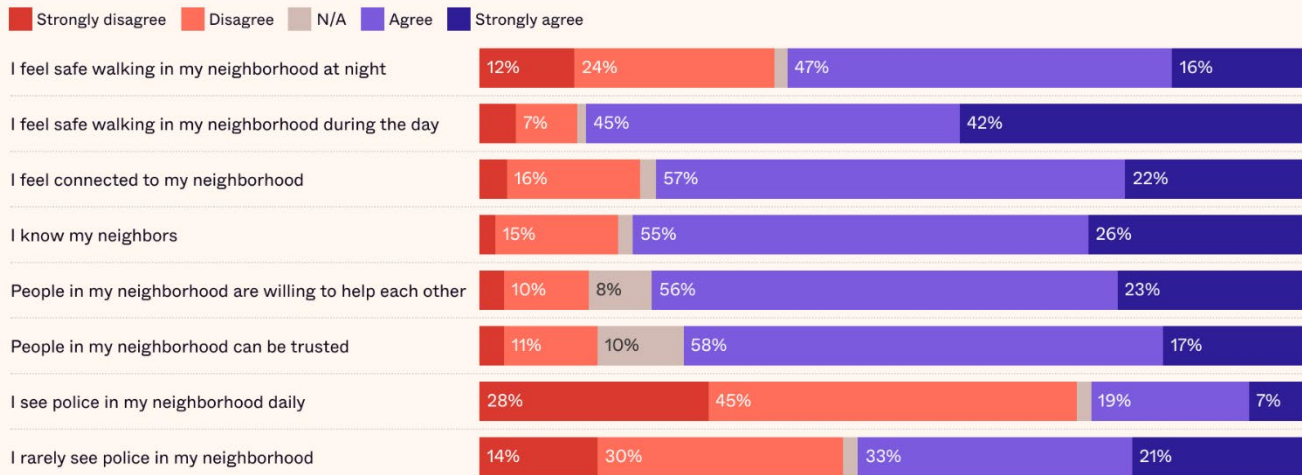
N= 364

District	Count	Percent
A	71	20%
B	75	26%
C	61	17%
D	95	26%
E	61	17%
Missing	1	<1%

Figure 5

Perceptions of neighborhood safety, 2024

n = 364



Note: Proportions <5% are not visible in the graph above.

To thrive, people in New Orleans said their communities need investments in accessible and affordable resources and services, infrastructure improvements, jobs and economic development opportunities, and housing

Ninety percent (n=327) of the analytic sample of survey respondents responded to the prompt, “To thrive, my community needs. . . .” Vera categorized their responses and found that the top five needs were the following:

- 1. Infrastructure improvements**, such as street and sidewalk repairs, more parks and green space, neighborhood revitalization and blight remediation, and drainage.
- 2. Accessibility of resources and services** that improve health and quality of life.
- 3. Job and economic development opportunities**, along with livable wages that allow people to provide for their families.
- 4. Housing** that is available and affordable, especially so that residents are not pushed or priced out of their homes and neighborhoods.
- 5. Affordability** of things such as utilities, insurance, and cost of living.

“To thrive, my community needs real investments so the quality of life in the city isn’t based on your zip code, income, or race.”

The top five community priorities for city investments were educational opportunities for youth and families; safe, affordable housing; repairs to roads and streets; opportunities for youth; and mental health services

Ninety percent (n=326) of the analytic sample responded to the open-ended prompts asking their top three priorities for where they wanted the city to spend its tax revenue. (Figure 6.) The top five investment priorities identified by respondents included the following:

1. **education** (n=161, 49 percent), including investments in schools, after-school programs, community colleges, tutoring, and out-of-school learning and enrichment opportunities for children and families;
2. **housing** (n=151, 46 percent) that is safe and affordable for all residents;
3. **road and street repairs** (n=99, 30 percent);
4. **opportunities for youth** (n=94, 29 percent), including education, workforce development, activities, and programs; and
5. **mental health services** (n=74, 23 percent).

Most people believed that the city spends too much on police and courts and not enough on the resources and services they need to thrive

When respondents were asked about their perceptions of the city's expenditures on an array of public resources and services, "Police and courts" was the sole category where 50 percent of respondents said the city spends "too much." (Figure 7.) Police, courts, and the criminal legal system collectively receive the highest allocation, about one-third, of the city's revenue from taxes, fines, and fees, yet more than half of respondents across districts agreed to the survey prompt, "I rarely see police in my neighborhood daily."⁸ (Figure 5.) Respondents believed the city spends "too little" on fire and emergency services (54 percent); roads, streetlights, and drainage (87 percent); opportunities for youth (88 percent); programs and services for low-income people (88 percent); education (91 percent); mental health services (92 percent); and housing (92 percent).

Figure 6

Community priorities for city investments, 2024

	Priority	Count	Percent
1	Education	161	49%
2	Housing	151	46%
3	Road & Street Repairs	99	30%
4	Opportunities for Youth	94	29%
5	Mental Health Services	74	23%
6	Programs for Low-Income People	61	19%
7	Police & Courts	50	15%
8	Drainage	46	14%
9	Public Transit	44	13%
10	Infrastructure Maintenance	42	13%
11	Jobs & Economic Development	38	12%
12	Streetlights	31	10%
13	Utilities	29	9%
14	Other	26	8%
15	Safety	22	7%
16	Governance/Regulations	17	5%
16	Health	17	5%
18	Parks & Outdoor Recreation	15	5%
19	Food Access & Security	12	4%
20	Green Infrastructure & Trees	11	3%
21	Blight	8	2%
21	Flooding & Disaster Management	8	2%
23	Clean Streets/Litter	7	2%
23	Fire & EMS	7	2%
25	Bike Lanes	6	2%
25	Sidewalks	6	2%
25	Violence Prevention	6	2%
28	Crime	5	2%
29	Childcare	4	1%
30	Community Policing	2	1%
	Total	326	

Residents believed that the criminal legal system should focus more resources on nonpunitive, rehabilitative interventions that prevent and address violence

The survey asked respondents to identify areas where they believe the criminal legal system should focus more resources. Of those who responded to this question (n=348), the majority prioritized crime prevention through early intervention (83 percent), skills and employment training (72 percent), and treatment (61 percent). (Figure 8.) Only 19 percent wanted to see more resources go toward arresting people, and only 15 percent of respondents believed the criminal legal system should focus more resources on punishment.

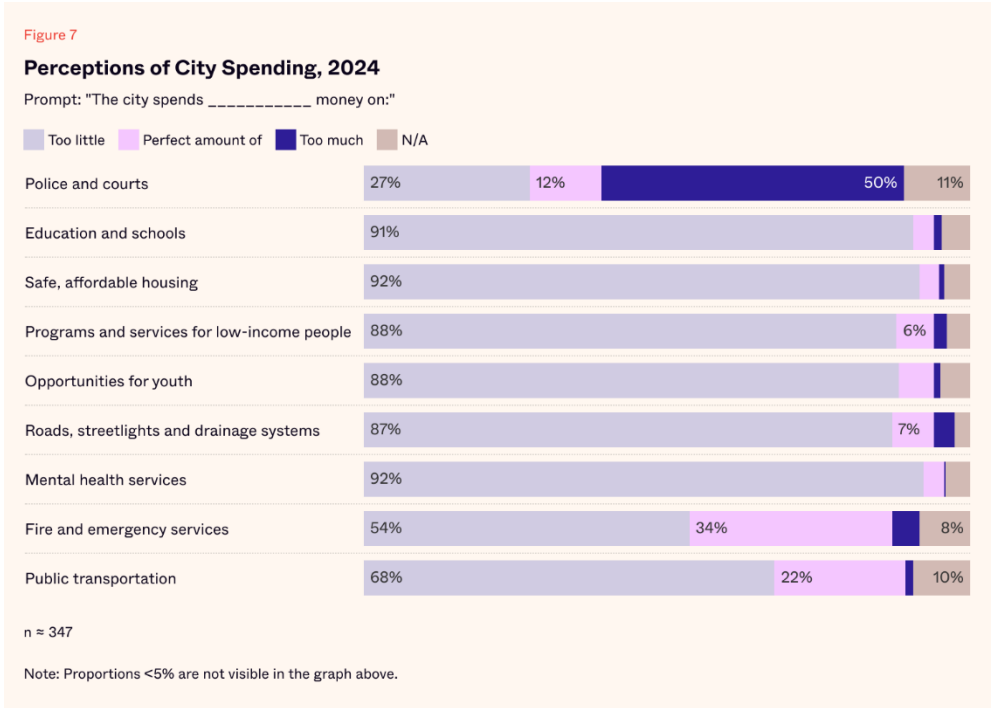
Priority: “Public safety, not police.”

Conclusion

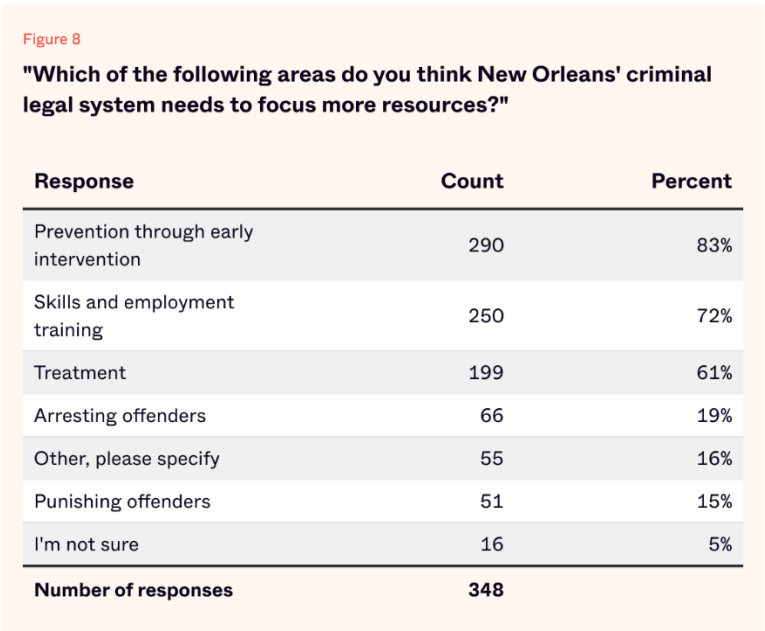
Although most respondents reported feeling safe and connected to their neighborhood, community members prioritized resources and services that make for a safer, more thriving city. There is very close alignment between what respondents say they need to thrive and the resources and services they believe the city should invest in more: accessible and affordable resources and services, education, housing, infrastructure and road improvements, jobs and economic development opportunities, opportunities for youth, and mental health services.

Kim Mosby and Sarah Omojola of Vera Louisiana and Monique Blossom of the Louisiana Fair Housing Action

Center presented the investment requests of the 2024 Big Easy Deal, as well as the findings of the BEBC Community Survey, to the Community Development Committee of the New Orleans City Council on September 30, 2024. BEBC drew on the deal and survey findings to create talking points for coalition members and supporters to use when providing public comment in support of allocations toward community resources and services during the October budget hearings.



The final budget adopted for the 2025 fiscal year included more than \$37 million in investments in affordable housing construction, community violence prevention and intervention, restorative justice, trauma recovery services, programs combating food insecurity, and education.⁹ Although the city budget does not typically include allocations for education—because funding for school-based education comes from the state budget—the New Orleans City Council honored the fact that education was the primary community priority from the 2024 survey results and allocated \$20 million to in- and out-of-school educational opportunities for youth and families. The funding was later reappropriated, but the allocation was promising.



The city budget and local budget advocacy face headwinds as Louisiana’s Republican governor, Jeff Landry, advances in his term with the backing of the state legislature’s conservative supermajority. Shortly after his first month in office, Landry made his first budget proposal in February 2024, which would funnel hundreds of millions of dollars in increased allocations to the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, state police, and the prison system, as well as make cuts to education and health care services.¹⁰ By December, he had signed income and corporate tax cuts into law and proposed four constitutional amendments, one of which related to state taxes and budgeting, that would go before Louisiana voters in March of 2025.¹¹ All amendments were ultimately defeated, but

the governor has remained steadfast in proposing sweeping changes to the state budget, which has implications for New Orleans as one of the state’s most prominent municipalities.

Endnotes

- ¹ The Big Easy Deal, “About Us,” <https://perma.cc/NW85-PMV5>.
- ² The Big Easy Deal, “About Us.”
- ³ Regarding perceptions of neighborhood safety, relying on crime statistics as the primary metric of safety fails to account for the ways community members experience safety and the limitations of police data in fully capturing harm. Community members have expansive definitions and perceptions of safety that include more than policing and an absence of crime. For more, see Kim Mosby, Jakevia Wheeler, and Connor Burruss, “Community Priorities for City of New Orleans Investments: Big Easy Budget Coalition Survey Methods” (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2025).
- ⁴ For demographic breakdowns of neighborhood statistical areas, Orleans Parish, and the country, see the Data Center, “Neighborhood Statistical Area Data Profiles,” <https://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/neighborhood-data>. The Data Center analyzed data from United States Census 2000, 2010, and 2020; American Community Survey 2019–2023; and 2022 Local Employment Dynamics. The Data Center reports a population of 376,035 for Orleans Parish from the American Community Survey 2019–2023—broken down as 54.7 percent Black, 30.1 percent white, and 53.1 percent female.
- ⁵ The Data Center, “Neighborhood Statistical Area Data Profiles.”
- ⁶ See Greg Allen and Marisa Peñaloza, “20 Years After Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans Still Lags Behind,” National Public Radio, August 26, 2025, <https://perma.cc/T7JL-7HVK>. See also the Data Center, “Neighborhood Statistical Area Data Profiles.” Several characteristics of neighborhood statistical areas (NSAs), including housing and housing costs, income and poverty, and race/ethnicity, are provided from United States Census 2000, 2010, and 2020; American Community Survey 2019–2023; and 2022 Local Employment Dynamics. According to the American Community Survey 2019–2023, most NSAs in District A (Planning Districts 3 and 5) have an average household income well above \$100,000, and one NSA’s average household income is above \$230,000. Conversely, all NSAs in District E (Planning Districts 8, 9, 10, and 11) have average

household income levels between \$30,000 and \$92,000. See also Mike Perlstein, “New Orleans East Has the Most Crime, Longest Response Times by Police—Residents Frustrated,” WWL, May 23, 2023, <https://perma.cc/VN4D-S8DB>.

- ⁷ Emily Rhodes, “In New Orleans from the Barbershop to the Bakery: What Makes You Feel Safe?,” Safety and Justice Challenge, February 17, 2021, <https://perma.cc/6JHL-PFRZ>. In the New Orleans Safety and Justice Challenge Community Advisory Group’s findings from residents’ responses to “What makes me feel safe?,” answers included “learning [from] others and doing for others,” “music,” “hope,” “family,” and reflections on religion and spirituality.
- ⁸ See Committee for a Better New Orleans, “Residents’ Guide to the City Budget,” <https://perma.cc/HJ7X-VBAN>. About half of the New Orleans city budget (the general fund) comes from money raised by the city from taxes, fines, and fees. The other half (“other funds”) comes from state and federal government, millages, and grants and is earmarked for specific uses. The interactive graphic of the fiscal year 2025 budget shows that expenditures on the police, courts, and criminal legal system make up about one-third of the general fund and one-fifth of the overall city budget.
- ⁹ This figure includes money allocated by the city to a wide range of programs and services including food security, community crisis intervention, housing, and restorative approaches to school conflict—among many others. A more detailed accounting of this number is on file with the authors and is available upon request from Cameryn Okeke, program manager, at cokeke@vera.org. For more on the Big Easy Budget Coalition, see <https://perma.cc/EZ8U-V2CV>.
- ¹⁰ Julie O’Donoghue, “6 Things to Know About Gov. Jeff Landry’s First Budget Proposal,” Louisiana Illuminator, February 8, 2024, <https://lailluminator.com/2024/02/08/6-things-to-know-about-gov-jeff-landrys-first-budget-proposal>.
- ¹¹ Jack Brook, “Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry Signs Income and Corporate Tax Cuts Passed by GOP-Dominated Legislature,” Associated Press News, December 5, 2024, <https://perma.cc/3TNS-ZPLY>.

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