



# 2020 Annual Report





# 2020 Annual Report

## Message from the Executive Director:

After a year like no other, the light at the end of the tunnel is starting to brighten, and as we embark on a new year, the League of California Cities looks forward to supporting California's 482 cities and towns in their efforts to recover stronger than before — just as Cal Cities has done for over a century. As we officially conclude 2020, I'd like to reflect on the progress we've made together in this truly unprecedented year.

2020 will be remembered for a global pandemic, social unrest, California's worst-ever wildfire season, massive energy blackouts, a divisive election season, and more. But, 2020 was also the year that local leaders rose to challenges of a magnitude we've never experienced, reimagined how to serve in uncharted waters, and started to recover in transformative ways that will leave our cities even stronger than they were before.

In a year like no other, the strength and resiliency of our cities and our local leaders shined through. Local leaders demonstrated, more than ever, why local government is the most trusted level of government.

As city leaders navigated this challenging environment, Cal Cities remained by their side. We reimagined how we serve our members, and how to support members with the resources they needed the most. We transformed many of our educational conferences to virtual offerings. We fought at the state and federal level for resources for cities to respond to COVID-19 and recover from its impacts. We committed to working alongside cities in their efforts to advance equity in their communities. We leveraged our existing communication channels — and created new ones — to ensure cities had access to vital information in real time.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the talented and dedicated Cal Cities staff who gave new meaning this year to the terms "nimble" and "pivot" in carrying out Cal Cities' mission of expanding and protecting local control for cities through advocacy and education while in a virtual environment the vast majority of the year. Together, with our members and partners, we proactively drove state and federal policy that reflects the needs of California cities and the residents who call our cities home.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the 2019-20 Cal Cities officers and board members for their leadership and guidance, and our League Partners for their generous support of this organization. We are stronger when we work together, and a unified voice will be incredibly important as we continue the fight to get cities the resources they need to recover and move their communities forward.

With that, I proudly present the Cal Cities 2020 Annual Report, which captures our collective achievements in support of California cities over the past year. I look forward to all we will accomplish together in 2021.

Sincerely,

**Carolyn M. Coleman**  
Executive Director and CEO  
League of California Cities

**In 2018, Cal Cities launched a three-year Strategic Growth Plan** to chart a course that would build on our success as an organization, guide our growth and take the impact and value we deliver to our members to even greater levels. The Plan outlines six actionable goals to guide Cal Cities' actions and ensure progress. This annual report is structured to highlight Cal Cities' advancement of each of these goals during the second year of the Strategic Growth Plan.

1. **Strengthen California cities through proactive advocacy on common priority issues.**
2. **Increase the capacity of city officials and staff in California to provide the highest level of service to their communities.**
3. **Maintain high relevance and facilitate meaningful member engagement.**
4. **Raise Cal Cities' visibility as the preeminent voice for cities in California.**
5. **Enhance Cal Cities' governance to achieve even higher levels of engagement and effectiveness.**
6. **Expand Cal Cities' organizational capacity to fulfill its mission and implement its strategic priorities.**

## 1. Strengthen cities through proactive advocacy

For the State Capitol, 2020 was not the year anyone expected. For the seventh time in eight years, California's government was positioned to reap a sizable cash surplus projected in Gov. Gavin Newsom's \$222 billion state budget submitted to the Legislature in January — even in the face of higher spending on K-12 education, services for low-income residents and those experiencing homelessness, and health care.

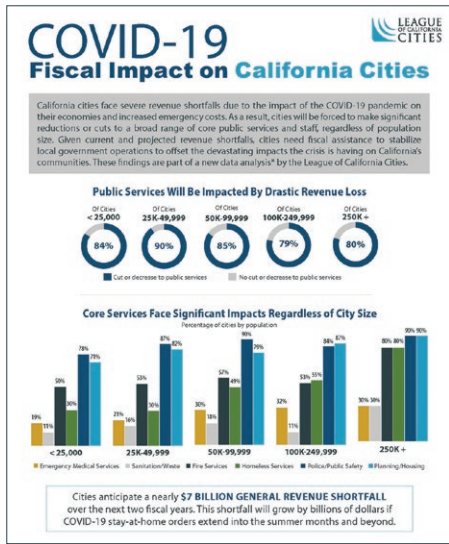
In the end, projecting a \$54 billion budget shortfall due to COVID-19, the Governor ultimately signed a \$202 billion budget. The Legislature was also disrupted by the pandemic when it was forced to take unplanned recesses in response to outbreaks among legislators and staff and implement temporary public health measures designed to control the spread. While all of this may have resulted in an abbreviated session with COVID-19-related measures

understandably taking top priority, Cal Cities, and the powerful voices of city officials it represents, made progress on the member-driven and board-approved 2020 Strategic Advocacy Priorities.



### • Improve the supply and affordability of housing.

Following up on the Governor's veto of a similar measure last year, Cal Cities once again worked collaboratively with the Legislature and key stakeholders to develop measures that equipped local governments with the tools needed to help boost affordable housing production in their communities. SB 795 (Beall, McGuire, Portantino) would have reengaged the state as a partner to local governments by providing an ongoing and accountable source of funding to build affordable housing and infrastructure. Although the bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee after a long battle, Cal Cities will continue to work with the Governor and supporters to advance these types of important tools in 2021.



With Cal Cities working with a strong coalition of city officials, multiple efforts by legislators to override local decision making in the housing development process were rejected or failed to advance. As a common sense alternative to these proposals, with the support

of the Cal Cities Housing, Community and Economic Development Policy Committee and the Cal Cities Board, Cal Cities advanced its own bold housing production proposal with legislators and the Governor. While it failed to move forward in a session cut short by COVID-19, Cal Cities will continue to work with legislators and the Governor to forge a path forward on housing production that respects local decision making.

For years, the Legislature has focused on requiring local government to streamline their housing approval processes, while failing to identify ways for the state to better align its housing program. With the strong support of Cal Cities, the Governor signed AB 434 (Daly) that combined six rental housing programs into the existing Multifamily Housing Program, which means a unified application and review process.

- **Advocate for increased funding and resources to prevent homelessness and assist individuals experiencing homelessness.**

In a legislative year that was far from “business as usual,” Cal Cities worked throughout the legislative session to lay the ground work for securing resources for cities to address homelessness in our communities. In February, the Governor met with the Cal Cities board in Yountville where he agreed with board members on the need for state and local governments to partner and forge strategies that could help achieve our goals. In the final budget, Cal Cities helped secure \$300 million to support local homelessness efforts.



- **Address fiscal sustainability.**

When the pandemic took hold in March, overnight, cities throughout the state stepped up to respond to the public health crisis, working around the clock to protect residents from COVID-19, shutting down their local economies, and continuing to maintain core city services and transparency in government, even while city offices and city halls were closed. The rapid response of city officials and staff prevented the spread of COVID-19 and saved lives.

However, these actions also took a toll on city budgets. With estimates that cities were facing a \$7 billion revenue shortfall and billions of dollars in unplanned expenses due to COVID-19, Cal Cities moved quickly to make the case that cities desperately needed state and federal assistance. Without such assistance, cities projected they would be forced to cut services, lay off workers, freeze hiring, and rollback capital projects.

Cal Cities launched the “Support Local Recovery” coalition to advocate for resources from the state and federal governments to maintain local services during and after the pandemic and to jump-start local recovery.

Nearly 400 organization and individuals, including city officials, small businesses, labor, firefighters, and community service organizations joined Cal Cities in fighting for state and federal assistance.

The coalition was successful in getting the state to set aside \$500 million from its federal CARES Act funding so that every California city had access to resources to offset unplanned and unbudgeted COVID-19 expenses. Cal Cities also successfully advocated for executive action by the Governor to help cities maintain government operations and transparency.

While Congress failed to include state and local aid in the final relief package passed at the eleventh hour of the 2020 congressional session, we will continue to advocate for resources with the incoming Congress and Administration in January.

- **Strengthen community and disaster preparedness, public safety, and resiliency.**

Through wildfires, threats to the energy grid, and power shutoffs, Cal Cities partnered with the Governor’s Office and the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to ensure city leaders had the most up-to-date information on community resource centers

and that safety guidelines were reaching cities and impacted residents.

Given the widespread use of utility-initiated power shutoffs at the end of 2019, the beginning of this legislative session saw a slew of bills related to strengthening utility-infrastructure safety to reduce wildfire risk and strengthen local emergency preparedness. By the end of the session, only one moved forward. With Cal Cities' support, AB 2213 became law. This bill directs Cal OES and California Volunteers to develop guidelines to help connect volunteers and donation resources that could assist during an emergency. As communities respond to ever worsening disasters, leveraging all available resources in this way is critical.

As cities throughout the state continue to be ravaged by wildfires, legislators failed to reach agreement on proposals for more funding for wildfire preparedness and prevention. There will undoubtedly be proposals introduced in 2021, and Cal Cities stands ready to partner with the Governor, legislators, and other stakeholders to strengthen our collective ability to reduce wildfire risk and local preparedness.

#### • **Address public safety concerns of California cities.**

Following the death of George Floyd and the demonstrations throughout the state and across the country, police reform became a high priority for the Legislature in 2020. While measures to address the use of force became law in 2019, additional police reform bills were considered during the 2020 session.

Cal Cities helped defeat SB 731 (Bradford), which sought to remove immunity protections for all public employees and establish a decertification process for peace officers, and SB 776 (Skinner), which would have made personnel records for use of force incidents subject to disclosure, including records for non-sustained or exonerated cases. Despite our support, voters defeated Proposition 20, regarding criminal justice reform, in the November 2020 election.

Cal Cities supported AB 1775 (Jones-Sawyer), which increased the penalties for knowingly using the 911 emergency system for harassing another person based on perceived characteristics of a protected class. The bill, which the Governor signed into law, allows for civil action against persons who make false police reports or claims, regardless of discriminatory motive, and classifies blatantly false reports to law enforcement as a form of intimidation.



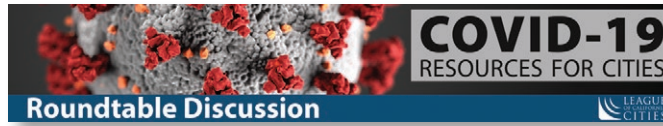
#### **Legal advocacy**

In addition to representing the interests of California cities in legislative and regulatory matters at the state and federal levels, Cal Cities also protects the interests of cities in matters before the courts. This year, through our Legal Advocacy Program, Cal Cities approved the filing of 43 amicus or “friend-of-the-court” briefs and letters in the state and federal appellate courts.

Appellate courts issued decisions favorable to cities in several cases in which Cal Cities filed an amicus brief. A few highlights include:

- The California Supreme Court rejected another challenge to the California Public Employees’ Pension Reform Act (PEPRA). In *Alameda County Deputy Sheriff’s Association v. Alameda County Employees’ Retirement Association*, the Court upheld provisions of PEPRA that were intended to curb the practice of pension “spiking” by excluding certain specified items of compensation, such as leave cash-outs and on-call and standby pay, from the amount that county retirement systems use to calculate employees’ pension benefits at retirement under the County Employee’s Retirement Law (CERL). The Court agreed with Cal Cities’ position in the case, which was that this type of abuse must be stopped in order to ensure a long-term, sustainable system that all public employees can depend on.
- In *Wilde v. City of Dunsmuir*, the California Supreme Court held that municipal water rates and other local utility charges are not subject to referendum. The Court agreed with many of the arguments advanced in Cal Cities’ friend-of-the-court brief – including the argument that allowing referenda on funding measures would impair cities’ fiscal planning. In its opinion, the

Court also cited as authority the Cal Cities California Municipal Law Handbook, which is a treatise published annually with the work of over 300 municipal attorneys from the Cal Cities City Attorneys' Department.



state's history, Cal Cities developed a wildfire response and recovery webinar series to explore lessons learned from previous experiences, how to access funding and resources, and the new challenges that COVID-19 added to responding to wildfires.

- In *City of Redondo Beach v. State of California, et al.*, a California Court of Appeal held that the California Voter Participation Rights Act does not apply to charter cities, because charter cities were not specifically mentioned in the Act and there was no clear legislative intent to apply the Act to charter cities. This holding was consistent with arguments made by Cal Cities, both in a friend-of-the-court brief and in comments filed previously with the California Attorney General.

## 2. Increase the capacity of city officials

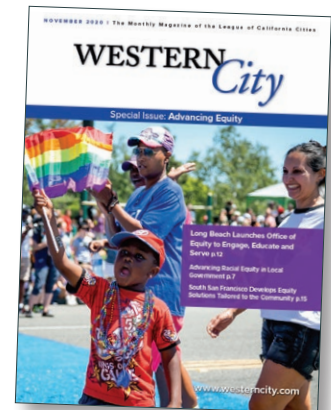
As cities reimaged ways to deliver essential services, maintain transparency in government, and support their communities, Cal Cities pivoted alongside its members, reimagining what kinds of programs and services cities needed, and designing new ways to deliver those services.

Many of Cal Cities' flagship educational conferences, such as Mayors and Council Members Executive Forum, City Clerks New Law and Elections Seminar, and the Cal Cities Annual Conference & Expo, were transformed into virtual offerings. This online format ensured the safety of Cal Cities' members and staff and resulted in participation by members who may have had difficulty traveling to in-person offerings in the past.

Cal Cities also developed a COVID-19 webinar series to assist city officials with their response to the pandemic. Topics ranged from how to issue an emergency declaration, reporting requirements for CARES Act funding, tools for stimulating economic development, and best practices for supporting unsheltered residents during a pandemic. Nearly 10,000 city leaders participated in this webinar series, which continues to provide valuable information to Cal Cities members.

During the summer, as California cities prepared for what would become the largest wildfire season in the

Building on the board's commitment, Cal Cities offered webinars and programming to city officials to help support their efforts to advance equity in their communities. This included keynote programming and sessions during the Cal Cities Annual Conference & Expo, offering city leaders the latest research, panel discussions, and a roundtable conversation on best practices to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities. Cal Cities created an "Advancing Equity Resources for Cities" webpage to serve as a one-stop shop for city officials to browse the collection of learning opportunities that Cal Cities develops and provide links to other foundational resources from trusted partners. Cal Cities also developed a special "Advancing Equity" issue of *Western City* magazine, highlighting local government efforts to disrupt systemic inequities in city policies and replace them with systems that are inclusive and fair. Cal Cities' focus on supporting cities in their efforts to build more equitable communities will continue in 2021.



## 3. Maintain high relevance and facilitate meaningful member engagement

The pandemic was uncharted territory for many city officials, and Cal Cities recognized the need to create a clearinghouse for members to access up-to-date information that would help them respond and recover from the pandemic. Cal Cities launched a COVID-19 Resources for Cities webpage, curating city-centric news, guidance, key information on funding

opportunities, the Governor’s executive orders, and best practices for rethinking economic development during the pandemic. Cal Cities also disseminated daily electronic communications to ensure cities received critical information when they needed it.

In response to member feedback, Cal Cities developed department roundtables to allow for virtual collaboration on member-chosen topics. Local leaders from throughout the state shared best practices and challenges to adapting city services and maintaining operations during the pandemic. The member participation in these offerings was tremendous, as more than 5,000 local officials participated.



Although stay-at-home orders prevented in-person gatherings, member engagement in Cal Cities division events remained strong. Over the course of the year, Cal Cities’ regional public affairs managers hosted numerous virtual meetings in Cal Cities’ 16 regional divisions, which featured educational and networking sessions. Many of the meetings also featured state and federal legislators as guests, and were a great opportunity for division members to speak directly with lawmakers about the resources cities needed to address the impacts of COVID-19 in their communities.

## 4. Raise Cal Cities’ visibility

The visibility of the organization, as well as our accomplishments and activities, are critical to achieving our mission and vision. In 2020, Cal Cities continued to implement its strategic communications plan, aligning communications functions with the organization’s 2018-21 Strategic Growth Plan.

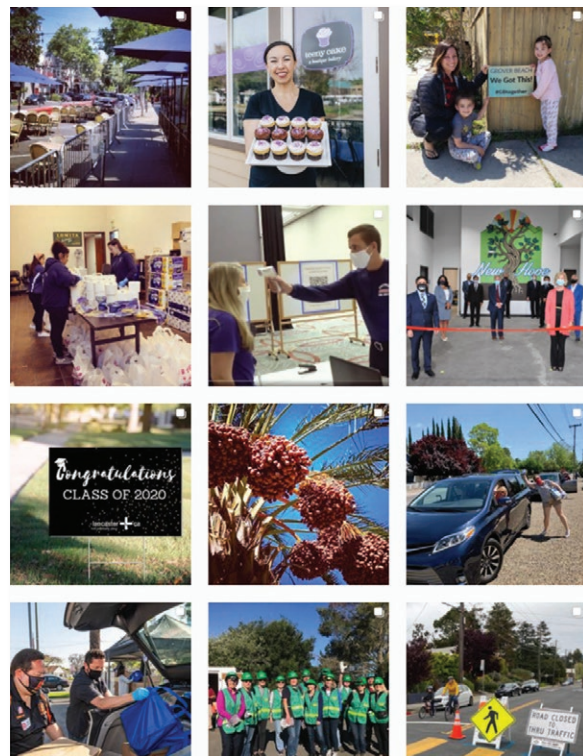
The results of these efforts included the launch of Local Works, an initiative to shine a spotlight on examples of local programs and activities that make a difference and improve the quality of life for those in our communities. When COVID-19 hit California communities, and cities sprang into action protecting residents and responding

to the crisis, Local Works became an even bigger — and more vital — initiative than expected. Cal Cities highlighted city stories weekly in newsletter articles, videos, social media posts, and created a webpage filled with these tremendous examples of how "Local Works" every day for our residents in our cities. Local Works also became a new monthly feature in *Western City* magazine.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic’s devastating impacts on city budgets and services statewide and to support the Support Local Recovery campaign’s efforts, Cal Cities developed an earned, owned, and paid media strategy to increase awareness of cities’ revenue shortfalls due to COVID-19 and amplify cities’ demands for state and federal support.

Part of the media strategy included five virtual press conferences calling on the state and federal governments to support direct and flexible funding to cities of all sizes. Cal Cities was joined by a number of local government, labor, business, and community services leaders at these press conferences, which were covered by national and statewide media outlets, including the *Associated Press*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Politico*, *Sacramento Bee*, *San Diego-Union Tribune*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*. A number of local media also published stories.

## #LocalWorks



# 2020 Annual Report

Cal Cities invested in paid social media advertising in targeted legislative districts, where more than 22,000 people saw our calls for funding. Cal Cities developed a social media toolkit for members to share the Support Local Recovery message on their own channels, and penned a Support Local Recovery op-ed with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) California, which ran statewide in *CalMatters*.

During the summer, Cal Cities developed a public service announcement (PSA) to thank residents and essential workers for their role in battling the pandemic, demonstrate empathy, and show the work cities were doing to support their communities. Cal Cities partnered with Comcast and 15 California mayors on the PSA “Dear California, We Will Emerge Even Stronger, Together,” which aired in more than 290 cities throughout the state. The PSA also demonstrated the commitment cities and



city employees have to their residents to keep them safe and help lead in the recovery of their communities, both during and following the pandemic.

For the Annual Conference & Expo, Cal Cities implemented a multitude of new digital elements for the virtual conference, including five promotional videos to market the conference, and videos that played throughout the three days. These videos featured the 12 Helen Putnam Award for Excellence winning cities, four Local Works videos highlighting the 83 stories shared this year and the reach those stories achieved online, the “2020 Cal Cities by the Numbers” video, and the national anthem video featuring dozens of our cities’ flags.

Throughout the year, Cal Cities’ officers and executive director represented our members in high-profile events and speaking opportunities before key stakeholders and audiences, including the California News Publishers Association, Public Policy Institute of California, USC



Price’s Lusk Center for Real Estate, California Association of Realtors, Urban Institute, and the UN Habitat in Towns World Summit.

## 5. Enhance Cal Cities’ governance

As called for in the Cal Cities 2018-2021 Strategic Growth Plan, following a comprehensive review, the board approved changes to the League Partner program designed to enhance the value the program brings to Cal Cities members and partners. The League Partner program fosters collaboration between businesses, organizations, and cities to further the priorities of cities in California. The restructured program will provide unparalleled opportunities for organizations to support the work of cities while engaging in educational activities, policymaking, conferences, regional meetings, and networking events throughout the year. The new program goes into effect Jan. 1, 2021.

## 6. Expand Cal Cities’ organizational capacity

In order to expand Cal Cities’ organizational capacity to fulfill our mission and implement our strategic priorities during a global pandemic, Cal Cities continued its investments in the infrastructure of the organization.





Like many California cities, Cal Cities pivoted to a remote working environment but remained focused on our mission: expanding local control through education and advocacy, and providing timely and relevant resources to help city officials make informed decisions for their communities. Cal Cities made notable investments in enhancing our technology infrastructure and network capacity. Cal Cities also expanded videoconferencing capability, which continues to serve a prominent role in protecting the health of staff and city officials and maintaining the connection and engagement needed to advance the organization’s mission and priorities.

## Looking ahead to 2021

City leaders displayed remarkable resilience in their commitment to serving their communities in 2020, taking action to protect their residents from a global pandemic, leading in the recovery of their local economies, responding to calls for equity and justice, and combating one of the worst wildfire seasons in history. While the pandemic may have disrupted the advancement of a number of priority issues in the state Legislature and Congress in 2020, it also shined a floodlight on why cities need strong state and federal partners to address the most pressing needs of their residents.

To focus the organization’s advocacy on cities’ highest priorities in 2021, in December 2020, more than 100 city leaders representing Cal Cities board, divisions, departments, policy committees, and caucuses, met virtually at the annual “League Leaders” workshop to review the progress on our 2020 Strategic Advocacy Priorities and help develop our 2021 priorities. Based on the input and feedback of these leaders, the Cal Cities Board of Directors adopted the following strategic advocacy priorities to guide our state and federal policy efforts in 2021:

- 1. Secure state and federal funding for local COVID-19 public health response and economic recovery for all.** Secure direct and flexible funding and resources for cities of all sizes, so they can continue to protect residents from the pandemic, deliver essential services, support small businesses, and lead the recovery in our communities. Improve communication and coordination with regional, state, and federal governments on public health orders and programs to stimulate equitable economic recovery.
- 2. Secure funding to increase the supply and affordability of housing and resources to assist individuals at risk of — or already experiencing**



— **homelessness while preserving local decision making.**

Secure additional resources to increase construction of housing, particularly affordable housing, workforce housing, and permanent supportive housing, and ensure cities retain flexibility based on the land use needs of each community. Increase flexibility and resources to provide navigation assistance and emergency shelters, and strengthen partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders to ensure mental health, substance abuse treatment, and wraparound services are available for adults and youth at risk of — or already experiencing — homelessness in our communities.

- 3. Improve state-local coordination and planning to strengthen community disaster preparedness, resiliency, and recovery.** Pursue additional resources and support to mitigate the effects of climate change, sea-level rise, catastrophic wildfires, and flooding in our communities. Promote community disaster preparedness, resiliency, and recovery in collaboration with the state and federal governments. Increase availability and access to the National Flood Insurance Program to include other natural disasters.
- 4. Protect and modernize critical infrastructure.** Seek increased state and federal resources for critical and sustainable local infrastructure projects including roads, public transit, active transportation, water availability, and broadband deployment that enhance workforce and economic development and improve quality of life.

In 2021, Cal Cities will be laser focused on advancing these strategic advocacy priorities and will continue progress on achieving our strategic plan goals. We stand ready to work collaboratively with stakeholders and will communicate cities’ needs to state and federal governments to protect local decision making, and ensure our communities remain vibrant and local economies remain strong.

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**Robert Newman** ..... Director of Public Works, Santa Clarita  
**Eric Nickel** ..... Fire Chief, Santa Barbara  
**Daniel Parra**..... Council Member, Fowler  
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**Ed Spriggs**..... Council Member, Imperial Beach  
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**Roberto Uranga** ..... Council Member, Long Beach  
**Alan Wapner**..... Council Member, Ontario  
**Jeremy Young** ..... Mayor, Hughson



# 2020 By the Numbers



**Member  
Cities**



**Cal Cities  
Board Members**



**Regional  
Divisions**



**Professional  
Departments**



**Diversity  
Caucuses**

Residents represented  
by **Member Cities: 33 Million**

## ADVOCACY

Monitored, tracked, and engaged on

**1,671 Bills**  
70% of the  
2,390 total bills



**434** members  
serving on **policy  
committees**



**43** Friend-of-the-  
court briefs/letters filed

**10** **action alerts**  
sent on high-priority legislation

## EDUCATION

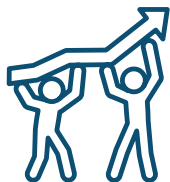
**5,500** Conference and training  
**attendees**



**115** **Webinars**  
with 15,118 webinar  
attendees

**124** Conference and  
exhibitor **sponsors**

## FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS



**CSCDA**  
**\$1.5 billion**  
in issuance in tax-exempt  
bonds and tax credits for cities,  
communities, and nonprofits  
[www.cscda.org](http://www.cscda.org)

**CalTRUST**  
**\$2.6 billion**  
in pooled investment of public  
funds at attractive rates  
[www.caltrust.org](http://www.caltrust.org)

## RECOGNITIONS



**3** Cities honored  
with **Local Streets  
and Roads Awards**



**11** **Helen Putnam**  
award-winning cities  
from **110** submissions

### The Institute for Local Government

**6** full **Beacon Vanguard Awards**

**36** cities received  
**Beacon Spotlight Awards**

# 2020 By the Numbers

Continued

## CONNECTIONS



## COVID-19

### How We Kept Cities Informed During COVID-19

**100+** COVID-19 **email updates** to city officials

**29,757** COVID-19 webpage views [www.cacities.org](http://www.cacities.org)



**32** COVID-19-related **webinars** with **8,311** attendees

### How We Kept State and Federal Leaders Informed About What Cities Needed

**5** news conferences



**150** news outlets ran stories



**30** million reach

### Launched the "Support Local Recovery Coalition"



**375+** members



**400+** advocacy letters sent to state and federal legislators



**120,000+** **#SupportLocalRecovery Tweets and Facebook posts** viewed