

# The National Citizen Survey™

## Needham, MA

Trends over Time

2014

# Summary

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS™) is a collaborative effort between National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The survey and its administration are standardized to assure high quality research methods and directly comparable results across The NCS communities. The NCS captures residents' opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement). This report discusses trends over time, comparing the 2014 ratings for the Town of Needham to its previous survey results in 2008, 2010 and 2012. Additional reports and technical appendices are available under separate cover.

Trend data for Needham represent important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines. Deviations from stable trends over time, especially, represent opportunities for understanding how local policies, programs or public information may have affected residents' opinions.

Meaningful differences between survey years have been noted within the following tables as being "higher" or "lower" if the differences are greater than six percentage points between the 2012 and 2014 surveys, otherwise the comparison between 2012 and 2014 are noted as being "similar." Additionally, benchmark comparisons for all survey years are presented for reference. Changes in the benchmark comparison over time can be impacted by various trends, including varying survey cycles for the individual communities that comprise the benchmarks, regional and national economic or other events, as well as emerging survey methodologies.

Overall, ratings in Needham for 2014 generally remained stable. Of the 88 items for which comparisons were available, 65 items were rated similarly in 2012 and 2014, 16 items showed a decrease in ratings and 7 showed an increase in ratings. Notable trends over time included the following:

- There were several decreases from 2012 to 2014 within the facet of Mobility. Travel by public transportation, street repair, street cleaning, street lighting, snow removal and sidewalk maintenance all showed a decrease in ratings from 2012 to 2014. However, ratings for traffic flow increased.
- Within the facet of Economy ratings for Needham as a place to work declined from 2012 to 2014 while ratings for economic development and the positive impact of the economy increased.
- Within the facet of Education and Enrichment there were no decreases in ratings and cultural activities and child care ratings increased from 2012 to 2014.
- There were increases and decreases within the pillar of Participation. Fewer residents attended a local public meeting or watched a local public meeting in 2014 when compared to 2012. However, more residents indicated recycling at home in 2014 than in 2012.

Table 1: Community Characteristics General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
	2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Overall quality of life	91%	96%	97%	93%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Overall image	89%	91%	95%	91%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Place to live	96%	98%	97%	96%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Neighborhood	89%	94%	93%	90%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Place to raise children	94%	97%	97%	95%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Place to retire	51%	57%	59%	51%	Lower	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Overall appearance	73%	83%	85%	88%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar

Table 2: Community Characteristics by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark				
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014	
Safety	Overall feeling of safety	NA	NA	NA	97%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher	
	Safe in neighborhood	99%	99%	99%	96%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar	
	Safe downtown/commercial area	98%	99%	98%	96%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar	
Mobility	Overall ease of travel	NA	NA	NA	88%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar	
	Paths and walking trails	44%	50%	57%	61%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower	Similar	
	Ease of walking	76%	81%	83%	84%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher	
	Travel by bicycle	50%	59%	60%	55%	Similar	Higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar	
	Travel by public transportation	78%	77%	72%	51%	Lower	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar	
	Travel by car	75%	78%	79%	75%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar	
	Public parking	NA	NA	NA	55%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar	
	Traffic flow	48%	48%	51%	58%	Higher	Higher	Higher	Higher	Similar	
	Natural Environment	Overall natural environment	72%	81%	84%	86%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Much higher	Similar
		Cleanliness	78%	85%	89%	89%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Air quality		NA	86%	85%	91%	Higher	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Higher	
Built Environment	Overall built environment	NA	NA	NA	70%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar	
	New development in Needham	51%	65%	60%	52%	Lower	Lower	Higher	Similar	Similar	

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
	Affordable quality housing	22%	29%	25%	25%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Much lower	Lower
	Housing options	40%	47%	45%	42%	Similar	Much lower	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
	Public places	NA	NA	NA	67%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Economy	Overall economic health	NA	NA	NA	84%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
	Vibrant downtown/commercial area	NA	NA	NA	47%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Business and services	63%	65%	66%	63%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Cost of living	NA	NA	NA	28%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Shopping opportunities	30%	36%	36%	39%	Similar	Much lower	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
	Employment opportunities	34%	36%	43%	37%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Much higher	Similar
	Place to visit	NA	NA	NA	66%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Place to work	72%	75%	79%	65%	Lower	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Health and wellness	NA	NA	NA	83%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Mental health care	NA	NA	NA	65%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
	Preventive health services	NA	77%	78%	82%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Health care	71%	76%	79%	82%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Food	NA	72%	70%	72%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Higher	Similar
	Recreational opportunities	65%	71%	67%	66%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Fitness opportunities	NA	NA	NA	66%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Religious or spiritual events and activities	87%	90%	92%	88%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Cultural/arts/music activities	42%	47%	53%	62%	Higher	Much lower	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Adult education	NA	NA	NA	74%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	K-12 education	91%	89%	93%	91%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Child care/preschool	44%	52%	51%	62%	Higher	Higher	Much higher	Higher	Similar
	Social events and activities	67%	73%	75%	69%	Lower	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Community Engagement	Neighborhoodliness	NA	NA	NA	78%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher

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	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)	2014 rating compared to 2012				Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014	2008	2010	2012	2014
Openness and acceptance	69%	71%	71%	71%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Opportunities to participate in community matters	78%	78%	83%	79%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Opportunities to volunteer	85%	86%	87%	79%	Lower	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar

Table 3: Governance General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
	2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Services provided by Needham	85%	89%	90%	85%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Customer service	86%	84%	84%	84%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Value of services for taxes paid	62%	61%	67%	65%	Similar	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Overall direction	60%	65%	70%	67%	Similar	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Welcoming citizen involvement	62%	63%	67%	63%	Similar	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Confidence in Town government	NA	NA	NA	65%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Acting in the best interest of Needham	NA	NA	NA	69%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Being honest	NA	NA	NA	72%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Treating all residents fairly	NA	NA	NA	69%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Services provided by the Federal Government	43%	50%	55%	50%	Similar	Higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar

Table 4: Governance by Facet

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)	2014 rating compared to 2012				Comparison to benchmark				
		2008	2010	2012	2014	2008	2010	2012	2014	
Safety	Police	95%	96%	94%	92%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Fire	98%	99%	98%	94%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Ambulance/EMS	98%	97%	98%	95%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Crime prevention	94%	91%	93%	91%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Fire prevention	92%	92%	92%	88%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Animal control	79%	78%	77%	79%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Emergency preparedness	83%	87%	80%	75%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Mobility	Traffic enforcement	76%	80%	77%	77%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Street repair	32%	39%	52%	43%	Lower	Much lower	Similar	Higher	Similar
	Street cleaning	55%	61%	73%	64%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Much higher	Similar
	Street lighting	56%	66%	70%	60%	Lower	Similar	Higher	Much higher	Similar
	Snow removal	63%	63%	72%	65%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Much higher	Similar
	Sidewalk maintenance	41%	46%	51%	44%	Lower	Much lower	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Traffic signal timing	56%	57%	55%	61%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Bus or transit services	NA	59%	60%	58%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Higher	Similar
Natural Environment	Recycling	84%	84%	82%	80%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Drinking water	83%	89%	89%	85%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Natural areas preservation	60%	64%	70%	64%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Much higher	Similar
	Open space	NA	NA	NA	63%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Built Environment	Storm drainage	70%	67%	77%	66%	Lower	Much higher	Higher	Much higher	Similar
	Sewer services	83%	86%	92%	88%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Land use, planning and zoning	47%	49%	51%	50%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher	Similar
	Cable television	77%	76%	78%	73%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Economy	Economic development	52%	50%	52%	60%	Higher	Higher	Higher	Much higher	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Town parks	78%	88%	89%	82%	Lower	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Recreation programs	79%	86%	86%	77%	Lower	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Recreation centers	NA	68%	65%	69%	Similar	NA	Similar	Lower	Similar
	Health services	83%	85%	89%	87%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Special events	NA	NA	NA	76%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Public libraries	94%	93%	94%	90%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Community Engagement	Public information	81%	81%	82%	80%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar

Table 5: Participation General

		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Sense of community		81%	84%	87%	85%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Recommend Needham		93%	89%	90%	94%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Remain in Needham		90%	85%	86%	89%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Contacted Needham employees		74%	60%	61%	58%	Similar	NA	Higher	Much higher	Similar

Table 6: Participation by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Safety	Stocked supplies for an emergency	NA	NA	NA	35%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Did NOT report a crime	NA	NA	NA	91%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
	Was NOT the victim of a crime	98%	96%	94%	95%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Mobility	Used public transportation instead of driving	NA	NA	NA	50%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
	Carpooled instead of driving alone	NA	NA	NA	47%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Walked or biked instead of driving	NA	NA	NA	73%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
Natural Environment	Conserved water	NA	NA	NA	88%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Made home more energy efficient	NA	NA	NA	77%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Recycled at home	94%	89%	89%	95%	Higher	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
Built Environment	Did NOT observe a code violation	NA	NA	NA	69%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
	NOT under housing cost stress	70%	74%	71%	74%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
Economy	Purchased goods or services in Needham	NA	NA	NA	97%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Economy will have positive impact on income	7%	15%	17%	34%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	Higher

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)				2014 rating compared to 2012	Comparison to benchmark			
		2008	2010	2012	2014		2008	2010	2012	2014
Recreation and Wellness	Work in Needham	NA	NA	NA	35%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Used Needham recreation centers	NA	NA	NA	55%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Visited a Town park	85%	84%	82%	80%	Similar	NA	Similar	Lower	Similar
	Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables	NA	NA	NA	88%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity	NA	NA	NA	87%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	In very good to excellent health	NA	NA	NA	77%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Used Needham Public Library	88%	86%	88%	83%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Higher
	Participated in religious or spiritual activities	59%	56%	59%	56%	Similar	NA	Higher	Much higher	Similar
	Attended a Town-sponsored event	NA	NA	NA	62%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Higher
Community Engagement	Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate	NA	NA	NA	29%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Contacted Needham elected officials	NA	NA	NA	22%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Volunteered	51%	51%	55%	50%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Participated in a club	37%	39%	38%	36%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Similar
	Talked to or visited with neighbors	NA	NA	NA	95%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Done a favor for a neighbor	NA	NA	NA	87%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Attended a local public meeting	35%	28%	30%	23%	Lower	NA	Similar	Higher	Similar
	Watched a local public meeting	51%	46%	38%	31%	Lower	NA	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Read or watched local news	NA	NA	NA	90%	NA	NA	NA	NA	Similar
	Voted in local elections	89%	90%	82%	87%	Similar	NA	Much higher	Much higher	Higher