



**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Community Survey<sup>TM</sup>

## Ashland, MA

Trends over Time

2019



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# Summary

The National Community 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 2019 ratings for the Town of Ashland to its previous survey results in 2016. Additional reports and technical appendices are available under separate cover.

Trend data for Ashland 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 five percentage points between the 2016 and 2019 surveys, otherwise the comparisons between 2016 and 2019 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 Ashland for 2019 generally remained stable. Of the 132 items for which comparisons were available, 73 items were rated similarly in 2016 and 2019, 13 items showed a decrease in ratings and 46 showed an increase in ratings. Notable trends over time included the following:

- Among 52 total Community Characteristics ratings, residents assessed 20 aspects more positively than in 2016. Survey respondents felt more positively about many overall aspects of community quality, including overall quality of life in Ashland, their neighborhoods as places to live, Ashland as a place to retire, Ashland's overall image or reputation, and its overall appearance. The greatest increases since 2016 were for overall economic health, Ashland's overall image or reputation, new development in Ashland and Ashland as a place to visit (with increases of 18%, 12%, 10% and 10%, respectively). Residents' evaluations of traffic flow on major streets, public parking, and education and enrichment opportunities decreased from 2016 to 2019.
- Nearly half of Governance ratings increased since 2016. Residents awarded the highest ratings bumps to the overall direction the Town is taking, confidence in Town government and the Town being honest (with increases of 21%, 20% and 20%, respectively). However, respondents were more critical of street repair in 2019 than in 2016.
- Residents were more likely to recommend living in Ashland to someone who asked and use public transportation instead of driving, as well as less likely to report a crime and observe a code violation, in 2019 compared to 2016. Conversely, respondents reported lower levels of contacting Ashland employees, stocking supplies in preparation for an emergency, conserving water and using Ashland Recreation Department or their programs. More residents were under housing cost stress in 2019. Additionally, fewer survey respondents reported participating in religious or spiritual activities; watching a local public meeting; campaigning for an issue, cause or candidate; or reading or watching local news.

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Table 1: Community Characteristics General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
	2016	2019		2016	2019
Overall quality of life	81%	88%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Overall image	64%	76%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Place to live	85%	89%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Neighborhood	82%	90%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Place to raise children	89%	92%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Place to retire	49%	54%	Higher	Lower	Similar
Overall appearance	65%	73%	Higher	Similar	Similar

Table 2: Community Characteristics by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
		2016	2019		2016	2019
Safety	Overall feeling of safety	94%	95%	Similar	Similar	Higher
	Safe in neighborhood	96%	97%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Safe downtown/commercial areas	94%	97%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Mobility	Overall ease of travel	79%	76%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Paths and walking trails	49%	52%	Similar	Lower	Similar
	Ease of walking	47%	46%	Similar	Lower	Lower
	Travel by bicycle	34%	32%	Similar	Lower	Lower
	Travel by public transportation	43%	40%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Travel by car	74%	71%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Public parking	68%	62%	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Traffic flow	58%	44%	Lower	Similar	Similar
Natural Environment	Overall natural environment	81%	86%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Cleanliness	78%	85%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Air quality	90%	91%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Built Environment	Overall built environment	49%	50%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	New development in Ashland	36%	46%	Higher	Lower	Similar
	Affordable quality housing	52%	56%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Housing options	69%	70%	Similar	Similar	Higher
	Public places	55%	61%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Economy	Overall economic health	50%	69%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Vibrant downtown/commercial area	19%	25%	Higher	Lower	Lower
	Business and services	52%	58%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Cost of living	40%	46%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Shopping opportunities	33%	30%	Similar	Lower	Lower
	Employment opportunities	24%	32%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Place to visit	38%	48%	Higher	Lower	Lower
	Place to work	44%	50%	Higher	Lower	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Health and wellness	55%	58%	Similar	Lower	Similar
	Mental health care	38%	35%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Preventive health services	48%	47%	Similar	Similar	Lower
	Health care	50%	46%	Similar	Similar	Lower
	Food	63%	66%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Recreational opportunities	63%	63%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Fitness opportunities	62%	64%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Education and enrichment opportunities	71%	66%	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Religious or spiritual events and activities	77%	78%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Cultural/arts/music activities	47%	54%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Adult education	43%	43%	Similar	Lower	Lower
	K-12 education	87%	89%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Community	Child care/preschool	62%	65%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Social events and activities	51%	59%	Higher	Similar	Similar

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
		2016	2019		2016	2019
Engagement	Neighborliness	70%	75%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Openness and acceptance	78%	83%	Higher	Similar	Higher
	Opportunities to participate in community matters	73%	80%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Opportunities to volunteer	77%	75%	Similar	Similar	Similar

Table 3: Governance General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
	2016	2019		2016	2019
Services provided by Ashland	80%	86%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Customer service	80%	89%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Value of services for taxes paid	44%	56%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Overall direction	47%	68%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Welcoming resident involvement	58%	70%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Confidence in Town government	50%	70%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Acting in the best interest of Ashland	57%	76%	Higher	Similar	Higher
Being honest	59%	79%	Higher	Similar	Higher
Treating all residents fairly	61%	79%	Higher	Similar	Higher
Services provided by the Federal Government	50%	46%	Similar	Similar	Similar

Table 4: Governance by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
		2016	2019		2016	2019
Safety	Police	85%	89%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Fire	95%	98%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Ambulance/EMS	94%	96%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Crime prevention	87%	92%	Similar	Higher	Higher
	Fire prevention	89%	91%	Similar	Similar	Higher
	Animal control	74%	82%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Emergency preparedness	73%	81%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Mobility	Traffic enforcement	71%	71%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Street repair	49%	43%	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Street cleaning	60%	63%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Street lighting	59%	56%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Snow removal	74%	80%	Higher	Similar	Higher
	Sidewalk maintenance	51%	51%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Traffic signal timing	63%	62%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Natural Environment	Bus or transit services	46%	49%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Garbage collection	81%	87%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Recycling	84%	88%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Yard waste pick-up	68%	75%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Drinking water	70%	74%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Natural areas preservation	62%	77%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Open space	63%	74%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Built Environment	Storm drainage	77%	78%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Sewer services	78%	82%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Power utility	78%	81%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Utility billing	70%	71%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Land use, planning and zoning	38%	49%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Code enforcement	48%	58%	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Cable television	72%	73%	Similar	Higher	Higher
Economy	Economic development	36%	46%	Higher	Lower	Similar
Recreation and Wellness	Town parks	73%	82%	Higher	Similar	Similar

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
		2016	2019		2016	2019
	Recreation programs	74%	78%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Recreation centers	76%	81%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Health services	58%	61%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Special events	71%	81%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Public libraries	88%	93%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Community Engagement	Public information	75%	82%	Higher	Similar	Similar

Table 5: Participation General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
	2016	2019		2016	2019
Sense of community	70%	75%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Recommend Ashland	86%	92%	Higher	Similar	Similar
Remain in Ashland	86%	87%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Contacted Ashland employees	61%	50%	Lower	Higher	Similar

Table 6: Participation by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)		2019 rating compared to 2016	Comparison to benchmark	
		2016	2019		2016	2019
Safety	Stocked supplies for an emergency	32%	24%	Lower	Similar	Lower
	Did NOT report a crime	87%	93%	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Was NOT the victim of a crime	97%	98%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Mobility	Used public transportation instead of driving	32%	37%	Higher	Similar	Higher
	Carpooled instead of driving alone	34%	33%	Similar	Similar	Lower
	Walked or biked instead of driving	46%	46%	Similar	Lower	Lower
Natural Environment	Conserved water	91%	83%	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Made home more energy efficient	82%	81%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Recycled at home	97%	97%	Similar	Higher	Similar
Built Environment	Did NOT observe a code violation	64%	73%	Higher	Higher	Higher
	NOT under housing cost stress	95%	70%	Lower	Much higher	Similar
	Purchased goods or services in Ashland	94%	93%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Economy	Economy will have positive impact on income	33%	28%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Work in Ashland	28%	27%	Similar	Lower	Lower
Recreation and Wellness	Used Ashland Recreation Department or their programs	49%	32%	Lower	Similar	Much lower
	Visited a Town park	78%	79%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables	87%	83%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity	87%	87%	Similar	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	In very good to excellent health	75%	74%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Used Ashland public libraries	68%	66%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Participated in religious or spiritual activities	30%	22%	Lower	Lower	Much lower
Community Engagement	Attended a Town-sponsored event	62%	63%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate	24%	16%	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Contacted Ashland elected officials	21%	16%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Volunteered	32%	29%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Talked to or visited with neighbors	93%	91%	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Attended a local public meeting	33%	30%	Similar	Higher	Similar
	Watched a local public meeting	39%	27%	Lower	Higher	Similar
	Read or watched local news	85%	79%	Lower	Similar	Similar
Voted in local elections	86%	84%	Similar	Similar	Similar	