

2026 City Employee Salary Survey Report

Technical Report

Aljets Consulting

June 2026

The League of Oregon Cities' 2026 Salary Survey provides updated information to help Oregon cities compare compensation, staffing, benefits, and position requirements. Results show that cities average one full-time equivalent employee for every 177 residents, while salaries have increased about 15% since 2022 but have not kept pace with inflation. Larger and Metro region cities generally offer higher wages, while smaller cities face greater recruitment challenges. Benefits, especially sick leave and vacation time, have increased, and position requirements have also risen, with average required experience increasing from 3.8 years in 2022 to 5.3 years in 2026. Public works, utilities, maintenance, police, finance, engineering, and department-head roles remain the most difficult to fill, largely due to certification requirements, limited qualified applicants, compensation constraints, housing shortages, and rural location challenges.

Introduction

The League of Oregon Cities' (LOC) most requested data information in previous years has been city wages, salaries, and benefits. For this reason, it was important for the LOC to meet this demand first in 2018 and again in 2022. Salary data allows cities to better compare their own salaries with other cities to offer competitive compensation. The data is also useful in planning for future budget needs. Further, this information can be used by the LOC to analyze differences in salaries based on population and region.

Results

City Staffing Levels

For cities that have employed city staff, on average, they employ one full-time equivalent (FTE) employee for every 177 city residents. This is relatively consistent with previous findings: 229 in 2018 and 234 in 2022. However, this average varies depending on the region, geography, city services, and of course, respondent cities.

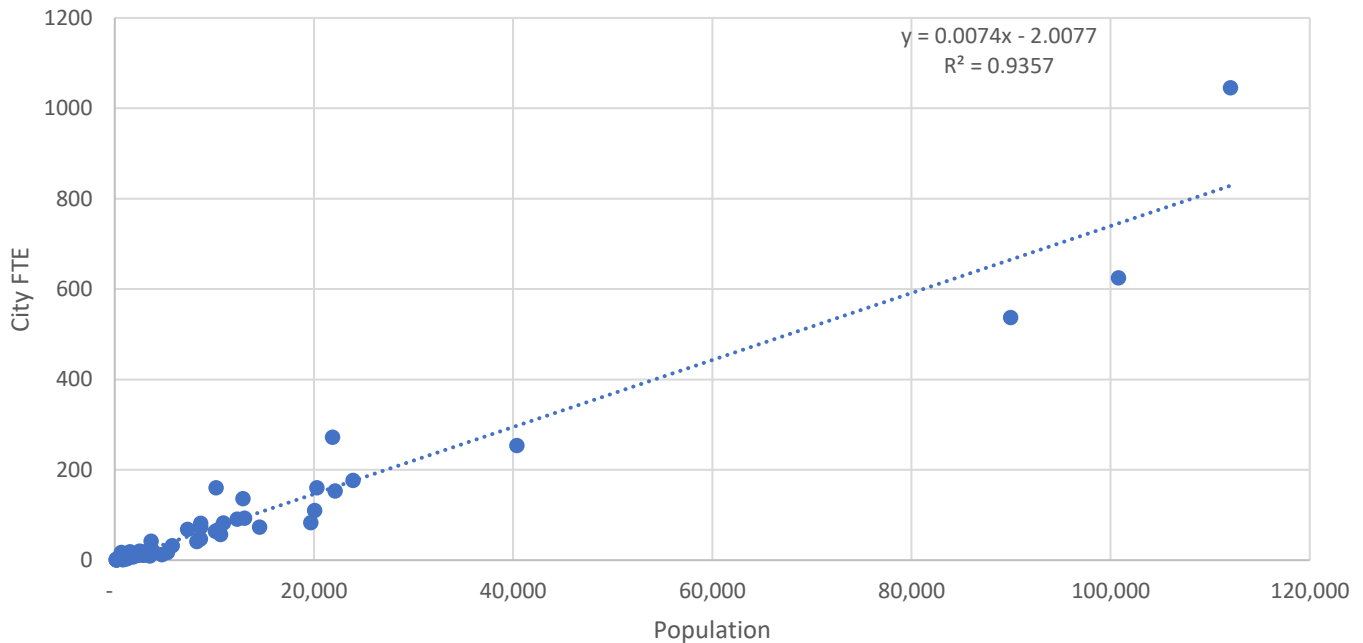


Figure 1: Regression Trend Indicating Pattern in City Staffing Compared to Population. NOTE: Portland Excluded Due to Their Size and Effect on the Regression Estimate

Figure 1 above shows the trend in city staffing, and Figure 2 below denotes the averages based on population quintile and region. While the median number of employees based on respondents was 17 FTE (slightly less than the average of 20 in 2022), the number of employees increased greatly as population increased. 1st Quintile cities (with a population less than 490) averaged 2.1 FTE, while 5th Quintile cities (population more than 10,950) averaged 684 FTE. However, without the inclusion of Portland, the 5th Quintile average is 272 FTE and an overall average of 77 FTE. These larger FTE averages in larger cities appear to show the FTE in a city does not increase completely linearly. On average, 5th Quintile cities employ a new FTE for every 145 residents, whereas 1st Quintile cities employ an FTE for every 107 residents. This indicates less staff are needed per capita as population increases. Regardless of the size of city, these numbers have come down from previous surveys. This indicates additional staffing across cities regardless of city size.

What is your FTE (Full Time Equivalent) count for the entire city government?	
Quintile	Average
1st Quintile	2.1
2nd Quintile	6.3
3rd Quintile	13.5
4th Quintile	52.8
5th Quintile	684.4
TOTAL	173.3
Region	Average
N. Coast	25.4
Metro	1,644.1
N. Willamette	16.0
S. Willamette	41.3
C. Coast	101.1
S. Coast	30.7
S. Oregon	119.7
Gorge	37.3
C. Oregon	37.5
SC Oregon	78.2
NE Oregon	58.8
E. Oregon	6.0
TOTAL	173.3

Table 1: What is your FTE (Full Time Equivalent) count for the entire city government?

Salaries and Wages

The data from the survey shows that despite differences in population as well as region, salaries and wages in Oregon follow noticeable trends. Below in Figure 2, the surveyed positions are arranged by highest to lowest average annual salary. Detailed breakdowns of all positions are available on the LOC Research Hub at <https://www.orcities.org/resources/research/research>. This pattern of highest and lowest average paid positions is consistent with the findings in 2019 and 2022 with a few exceptions. City attorneys (average \$154,418) have been surpassed by city managers (average \$159,993) as the highest paid city staff. Average increase in staff wages since the 2022 survey was 15%, or roughly 3.6% per year increase. According to the CPI inflation calculations from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, this average increase does not keep up with inflation seen in the last four years.

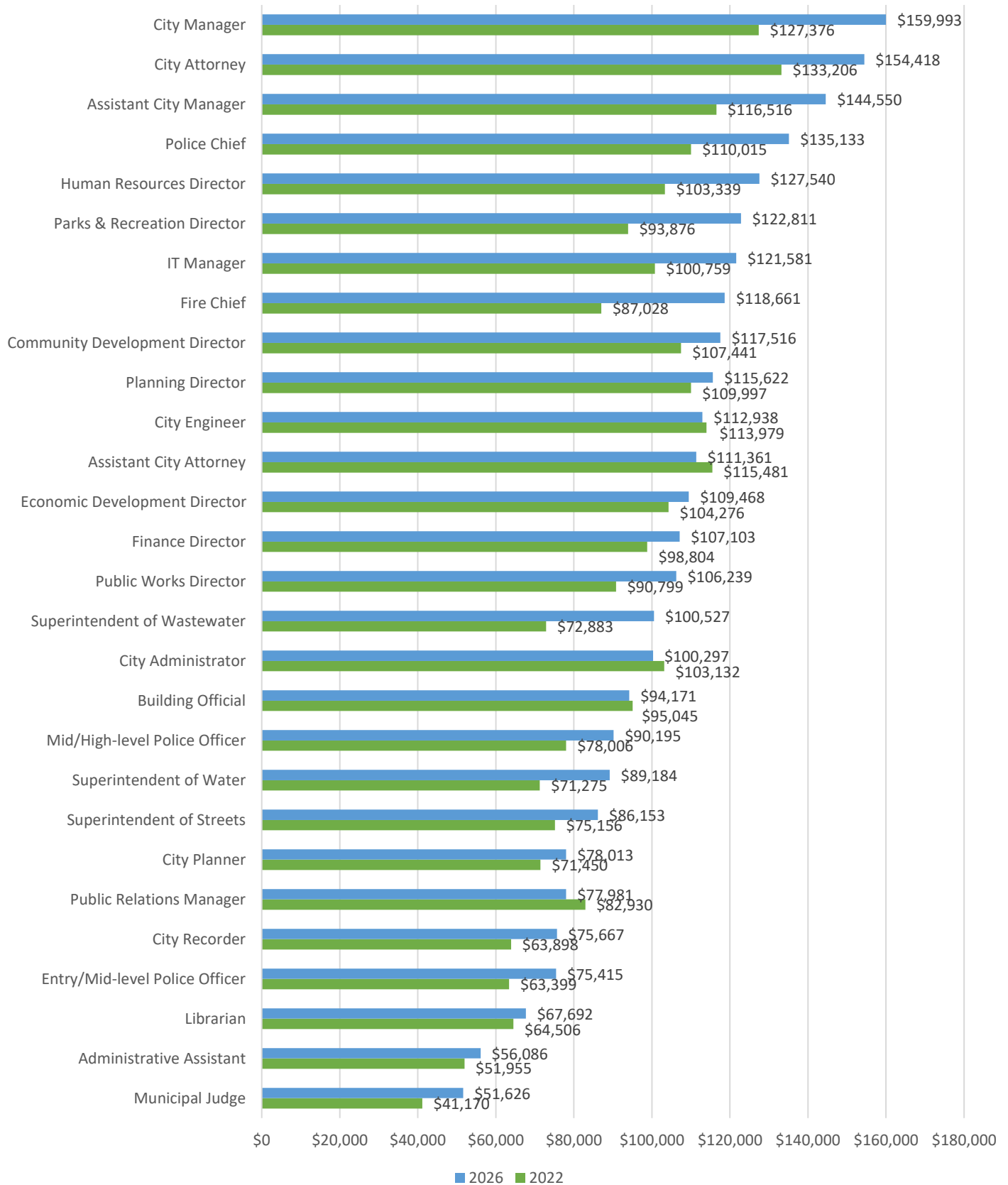


Figure 2: Average Salary/Wage by Position

The survey produced other interesting findings, starting with the average salary/wage by quintile and region. Figures 3 and 4 below show these trends, which were calculated by taking the mean of all salaries reported by each individual city. Another way to think of this calculation is to imagine if a city needed to pay the salary of one random position: How much would they have to pay? One interesting trend is that the 2018 survey found cities with a population larger than 10,000 offer 16% more in salary compared to the statewide city average. In 2026, this difference was 32%. This suggests an increased ability of the largest 20% of cities to attract talent for their staff. Further, Figure 3 shows the differences in average wages by population from 2022 compared to 2026. These numbers indicate not only the effect of inflation, but the increase of wages affecting the largest cities in particular.

While the population trends are not surprising, the regional differences reveal noteworthy patterns. The highest average paid city employee is in the Metro region. This is not a surprise, given the prosperity of that region. The lowest average salaries appear to be in North and South Coast, North Willamette and Eastern Oregon regions. The North Willamette Valley average response is unusual for that region, and is likely an artifact of lower participation than in 2022’s version of this survey.

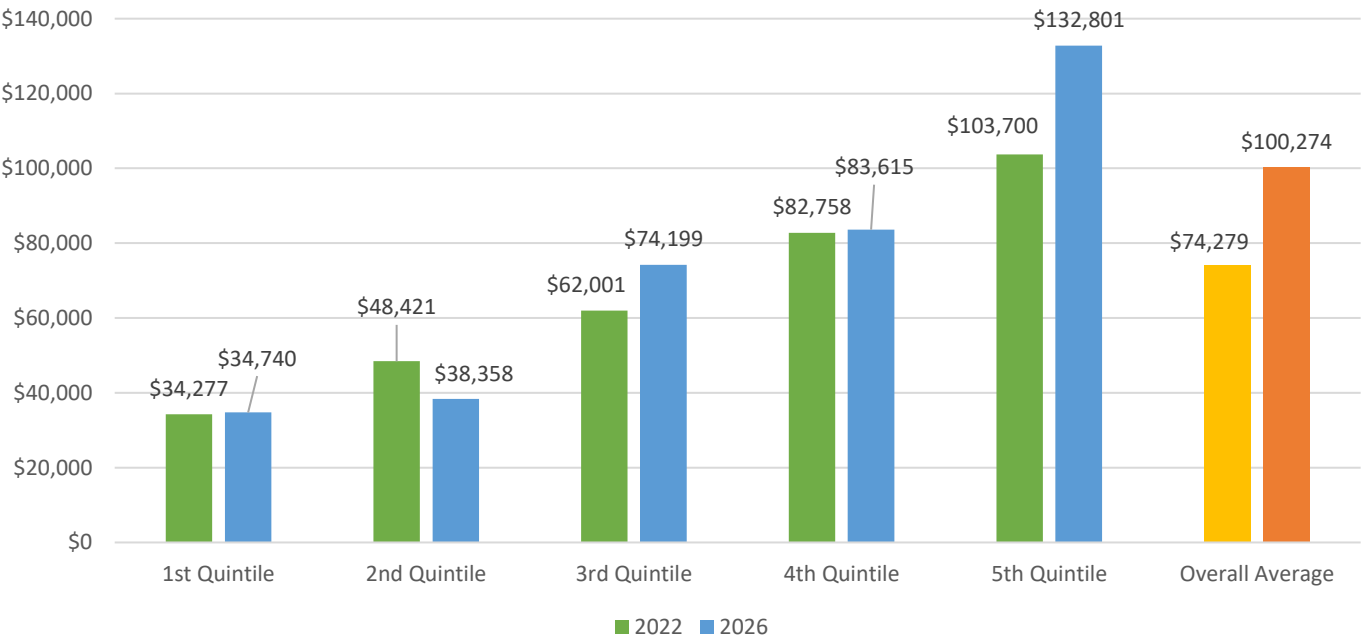


Figure 3: Average City Salary by Population 2022 vs. 2026



Figure 4: Average City Salary by Region

Vacation, Sick Time, etc.

As with salaries and wages, the amount of vacation and sick time also varies from city to city. Overall, the average amount of sick time for all positions is 29.9 days. Excluding paid time off (PTO) days, as well as executive leave, assistant city engineers receive the most time off (71.9 days). This is likely an artifact of the data. Larger cities can afford more generous packages, and as a result, the roles that are more likely to be found in larger cities will have more robust sick and vacation benefits, on average. Mean vacation time across all positions is 40.5 days. The trend of providing more vacation versus sick time is consistent across all quintiles and regions. Further, compared to 2022, sick and vacation days have increased overall significantly. For example, vacation days in 2022 across all positions averaged 15.7 days. Sick days in that same survey averaged 11.2 days. This may suggest cities offering extended days off as benefits in lieu of increasing salaries. Detailed tables by position for sick time, vacation and PTO can be found on the LOC Research Hub at <https://www.orcities.org/resources/research/research>.

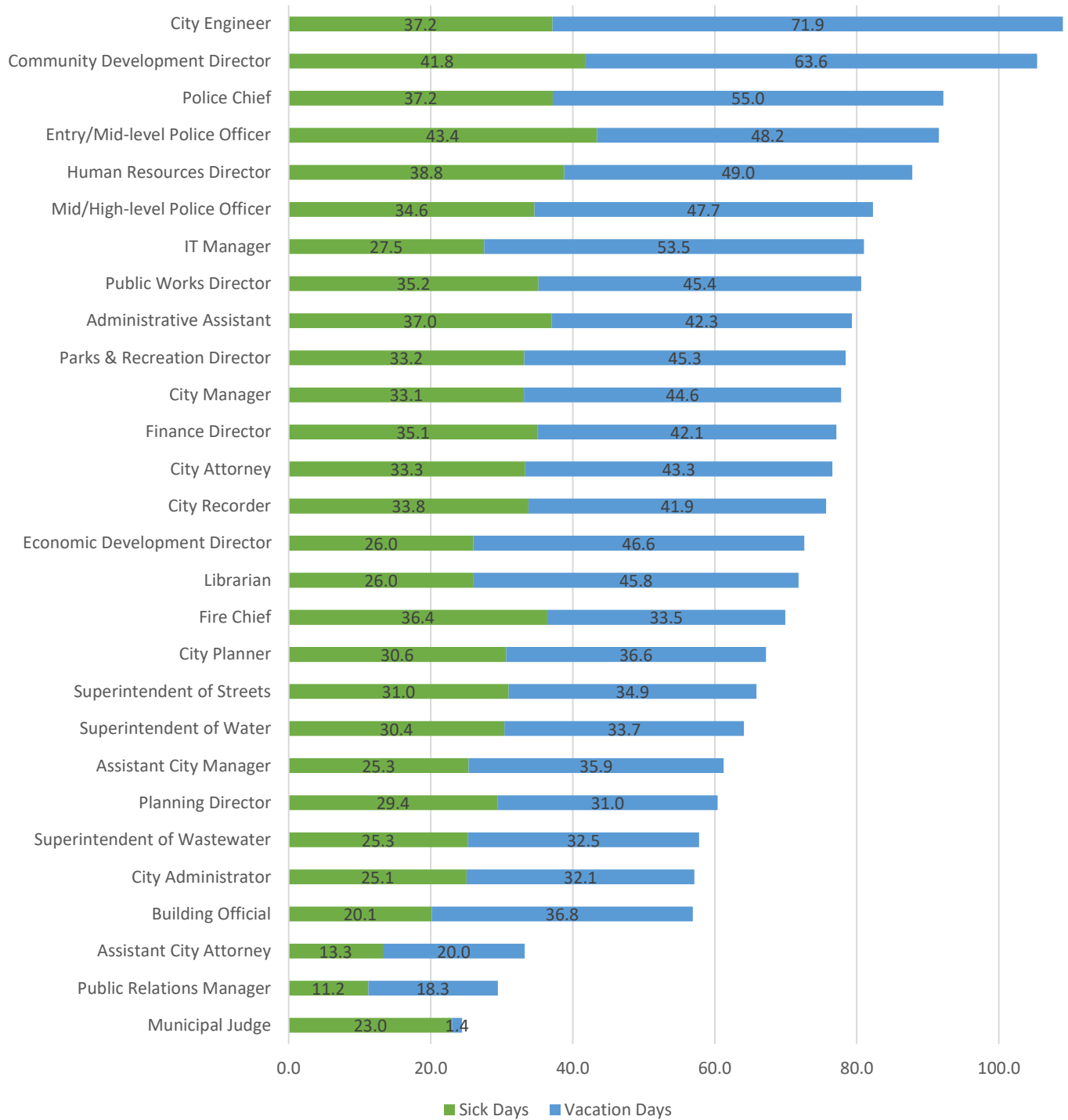


Figure 5: Average Sick and Vacation Days by Position

It should be noted that several responding cities identified that days off vary depending often on seniority and/or performance. For this reason, days-off estimates should be examined cautiously. Some positions have higher turnover (an example is city managers, with relatively high turnover) and therefore seniority benefits would affect their averages far less. A position such as “Superintendent of Streets” may have less turnover and be more likely to accrue days off

from longevity in the city. This could explain higher than average days off for some positions that have lower average salaries.

Average Time Off (Days)			
Average	Sick Days	Vacation Days	PTO
Quintile			
1st Quintile	12.3	7.9	0.6
2nd Quintile	18.2	15.8	67.6
3rd Quintile	21.3	23.1	15.8
4th Quintile	30.0	31.6	0.5
5th Quintile	33.9	59.9	11.1
TOTAL	29.9	40.5	11.1
Region			
N. Coast	15.8	26.9	4.2
Metro	14.1	18.0	31.9
N. Willamette	43.6	27.1	5.3
S. Willamette	51.9	81.2	2.2
C. Coast	12.0	18.6	
S. Coast	10.7	14.9	10.0
S. Oregon	23.9	20.7	12.8
Gorge	87.4	127.4	0.0
C. Oregon	11.5	10.3	7.9
SC Oregon	96.0	134.2	7.6
NE Oregon	34.5	49.1	5.1
E. Oregon	9.5	32.2	1.8
TOTAL	29.9	40.5	11.1

Table 2: Average Sick, Vacation and PTO Time Offered (Days)

Cities appear to offer paid time off (PTO) on a more regular basis today compared to four years ago, as far more cities responded to these questions for positions in 2026. The average for PTO across all roles was 11.1, similar to the 13.1 found in 2022. The survey asked about additional benefits not discussed in the survey. The most common responses were the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System (PERS), healthcare, tiered vacation and sick time accrual based on seniority, education reimbursement, and smaller incentives such as cellphone, clothing, and gym allowances.

Position Requirements (Education and Experience)

Across all positions, levels of educational requirements increase as the city size increases. This is likely due to the increased competition for these positions, which also have higher average salaries. The most common required education is the bachelor's degree (see Figure 6 below) which was a requirement in roughly half of all positions. Further, high school degrees or associate degrees were more common in technical positions that required additional state certification (entered in the "other" category).

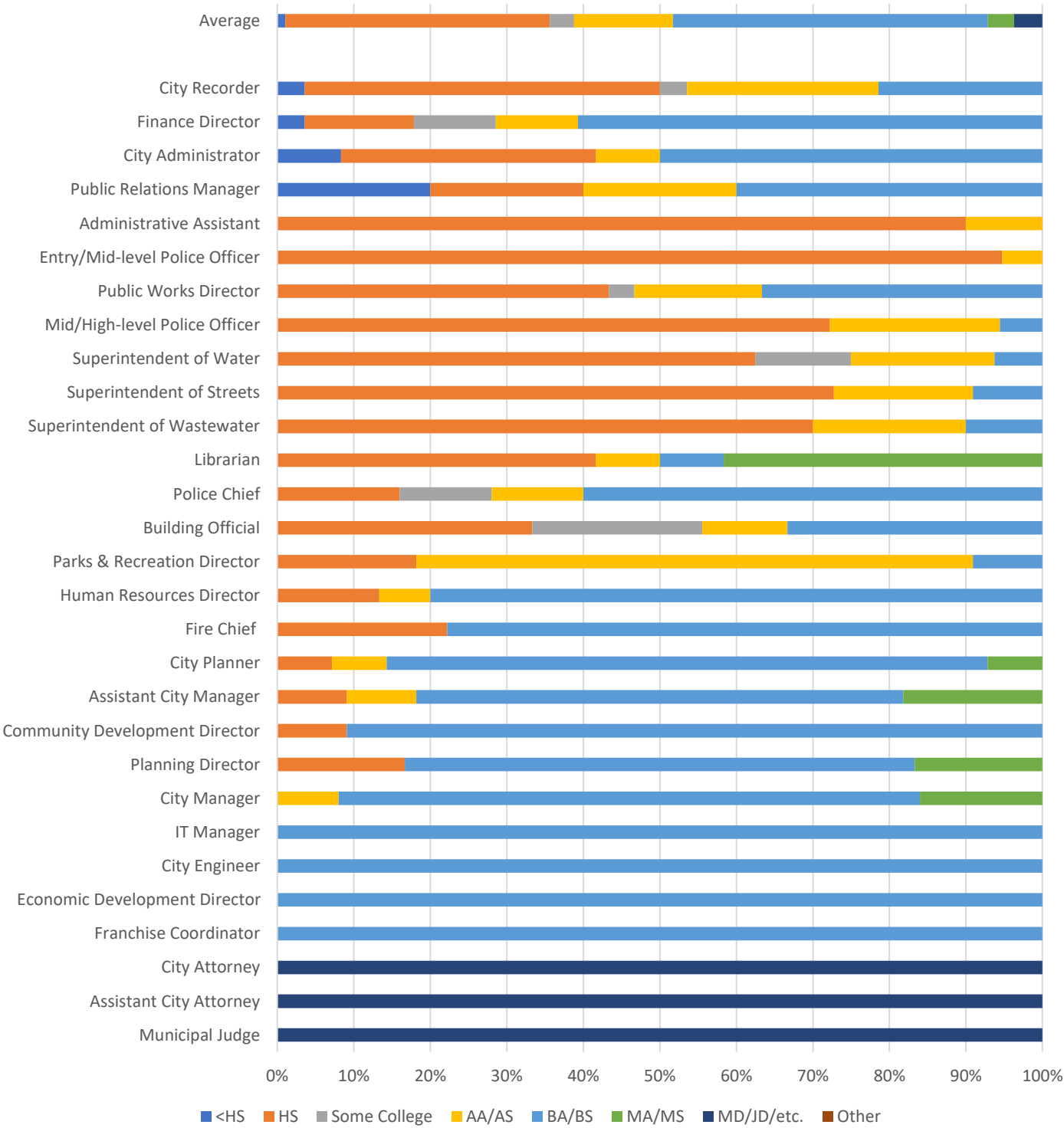


Figure 6: Education Requirements by Position

Advanced degrees such as a master’s degree and a juris doctorate were required more often in legal positions as well as for librarians, community development, city planning, and city management. Police chiefs, librarians, and building officials have some of the most variable educational requirements; some cities require advanced degrees, while others asked for a high school degree or other education. While our methodology focused on minimum education, many cities

education requirements depended on the individual’s experience; more experience meant lower educational requirements.

With regard to years of experience, the average requirement across all positions was 5.3 years compared to 3.8 years in 2022. As is the case in other variables, the amount of experience required for positions increased with population. A city with a population less than 490 required an average of 1.3 years of experience, whereas a city with a population greater than 10,950 required average 5.8 years. Figures 7 and 8 below show these experience requirements by population and region. Notice that in most regions, 3-5 years of experience is the average. The exceptions being in Metro (seven years) as well as South Coast (1.0) and Eastern Oregon (0.4). With regards to averages by position, the highest and lowest averages are found in law enforcement. The minimum required for police chiefs was 8.2 years. For entry level police, the average was 0.7 years.

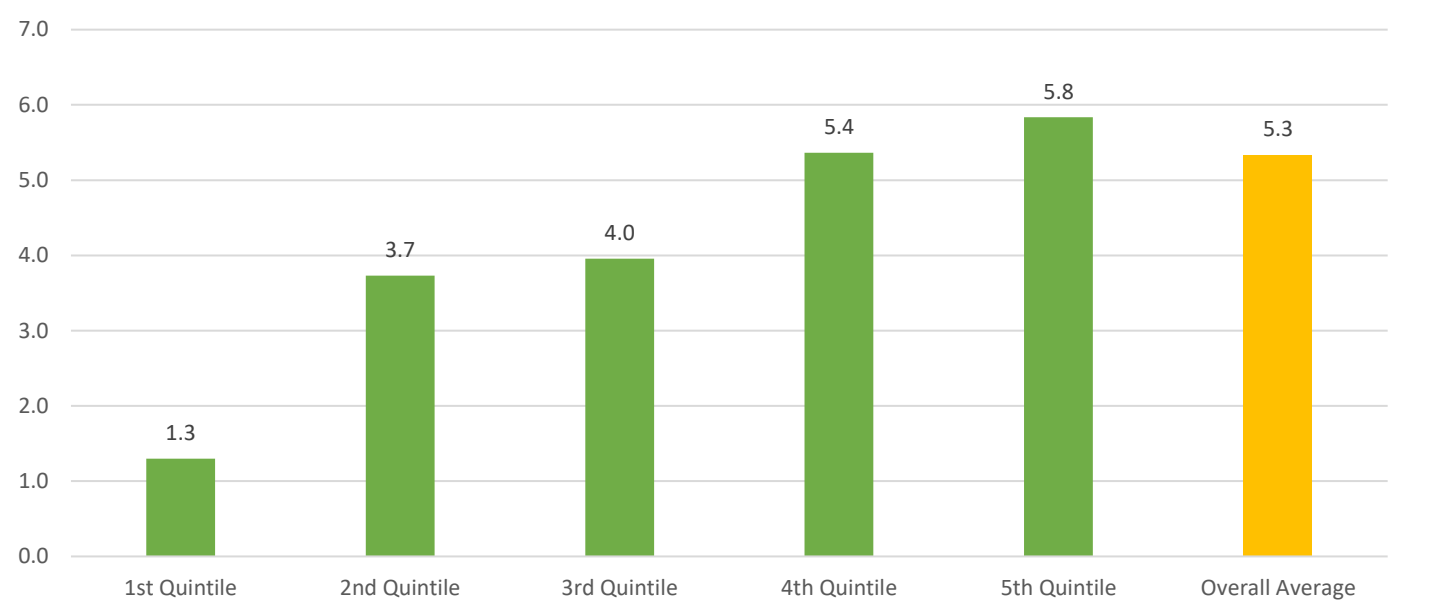


Figure 7: Average Years of Experience Requirement by Population

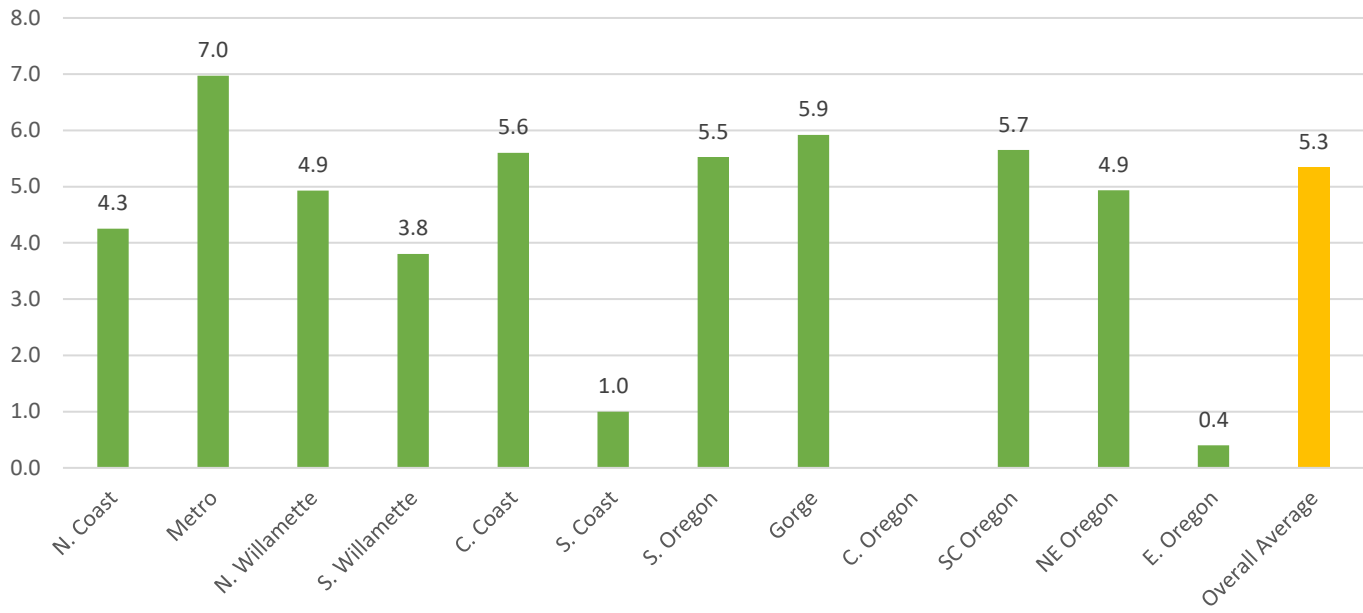


Figure 8: Average Years of Experience by Region (No respondent from Central Oregon provided an answer)

Other City Comments

Cities were asked when they had conducted their own salary survey for internal purposes. The average answer was 2024. Interesting is how this trended by region. Cities in the Metro and North Willamette regions were the least up to date on their salary evaluation (average 2022), which perhaps speaks to the increased complexity of such studies in cities with larger staff.

The most frequently cited hard-to-fill positions were in public works, utilities, and maintenance, especially public works director, operators, utility workers, and water/wastewater-related roles. Respondents most often attributed these difficulties to certification requirements, shortages of qualified applicants, lower municipal compensation compared with the private sector, rural location challenges, housing availability, and cost-of-living. Police positions were the second most commonly cited difficult-to-fill category.

Finally, when asked whether the cities felt their salaries and wages offered were fair to the position's duties, the overwhelming majority responded in the affirmative. However, more than a quarter of respondent cities (both large and small cities and from all regions) were uncertain. Just six percent of cities (mostly from 1st and 2nd Quintile cities) responded, "no."

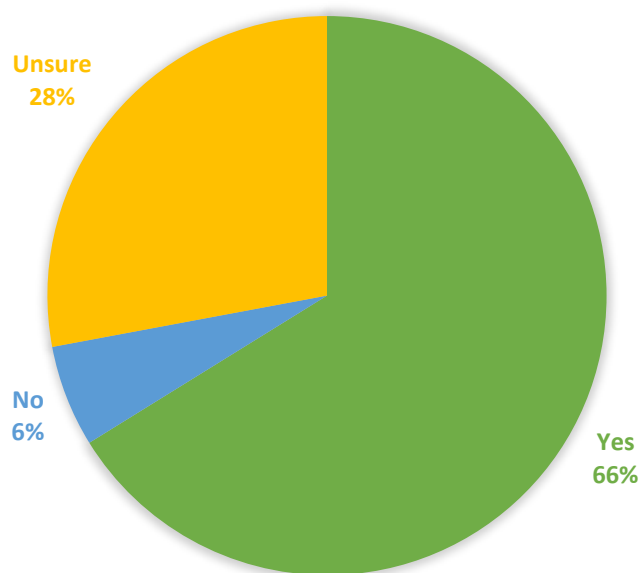


Figure 9: Do you feel your salaries and wages offered are fair to the positions' duties?

Methods

This survey was conducted from March 16 to April 10, 2026, and responses were received from 83 member cities. These cities represent 1.4 million residents, or 47% of Oregon's population residing in cities. The LOC created the survey with Qualtrics software and distributed it to city managers and city recorders.

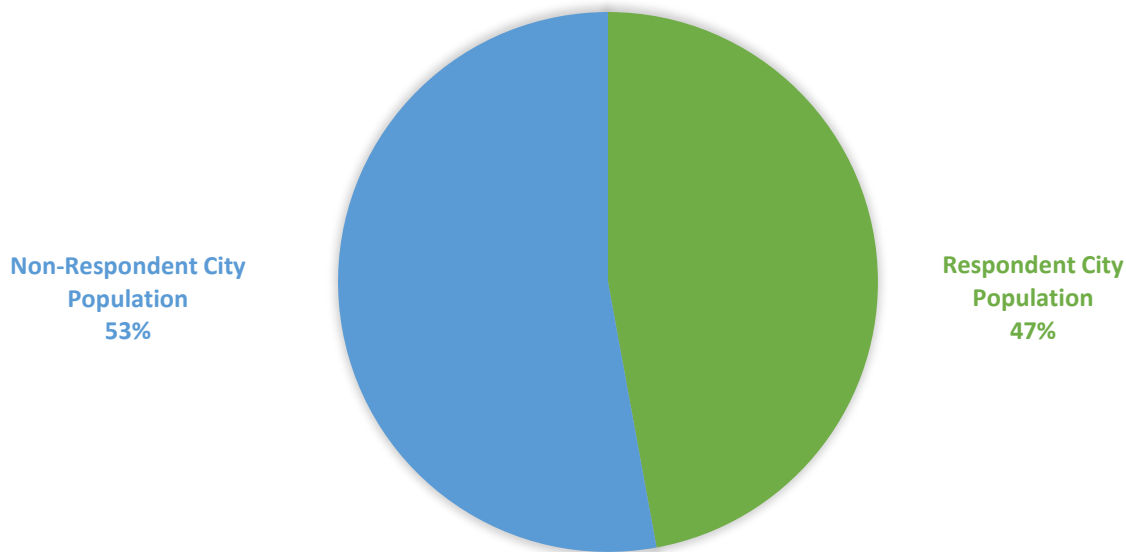


Figure 10: Respondent Population Proportionate to Total Oregon City Population

Cities statewide are divided into population quintiles, or groups that each represent roughly one-fifth of the 241 total cities. This is done to provide more accurate comparison of differences among city populations. If the LOC randomly selected cities from each quintile, we would expect 20% to come from each of the five quintiles. Furthermore, it is assumed that while city councils vary in size, regions and populations average the same amount of city councilors (about five). Among responding cities, the survey had an underrepresentation of cities in the Metro, North Willamette, Central Coast, South Coast, Gorge and Eastern Oregon Regions. The survey had a common underrepresentation in the 1st Quintile.

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

2026 LOC City Employee Salary Survey

The League needs your help—please respond to the LOC Salary Survey by **the deadline: Friday, April 10th at 5pm.**

The League's most requested data information in previous years centered around city wages, salaries, and benefits. For this reason, it was important for LOC to meet this demand in 2026. Salary data allows cities to better compare their own salaries with other cities to offer competitive compensation. The data is also useful in planning for future budget needs. Further, this information can be used by LOC to analyze differences in salaries on the basis of population and region. The information gathered in this survey is expected to be available on LOC-Data a week after the close of the survey. A technical report will follow a month later.

This survey should take less than an hour to complete.

Please Note: This survey asks for additional materials. Please submit all answers using the online form. Please use the attached PDF only for information and guidance.

Survey Link Below:

https://orcities.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0MzCe6BfuUOwZLw

Thank you in advance for your participation and quick response.



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www.orcities.org

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

2026 City Employee Salary Survey

Q1 Respondent Information:

- ☐ City Name: (1) _____
 - ☐ Your Name: (2) _____
 - ☐ Your Job Title: (3) _____
 - ☐ Your Email Address: (4) _____
 - ☐ Your Phone Number: (5) _____
-

Q2 Does your city currently employee any staff?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Skip To: Q14 If Does your city currently employee any staff? = No

Q3 What is your FTE (Full Time Equivalent) count for the entire city government?

Q4 Please mark the information below for all positions the city staffs. If your city does not employ a specific position listed, please leave this blank. The League recognizes that staff positions differ from city to city; as such, please choose the position that will best reflect your staff's duties or given title.

	# of FTE in City (1)	Average Salary or Annual Wage (2)	Is This Position Contracted Out? (Y/N) (3)
Administrative Assistant (1)			
Assistant City Manager (2)			
Building Official (3)			
City Attorney (4)			
Assistant City Attorney (27)			
City Administrator (5)			
Community Development Director (6)			
City Engineer (7)			
City Manager (8)			

City Recorder (9)			
Economic Development Director (10)			
Fire Chief (11)			
Finance Director (12)			
Franchise Coordinator (13)			
Human Resources Director (14)			
IT Manager (15)			
Librarian (16)			
Municipal Judge (17)			
Police Chief (18)			

Planning Director (19)			
City Planner (20)			
Parks & Recreation Director (21)			
Public Relations Manager (22)			
Public Works Director (23)			
Superintendent of Streets (24)			
Superintendent of Water (25)			
Superintendent of Wastewater (26)			
Entry/Mid-level Police Officer (29)			

Q5 Please mark the information below for all positions the city staffs. If your city does not employ a specific position listed, please leave this blank. The League recognizes that staff position differ from city to city; as

such, please choose the position that will best reflect your staff's duties or given title. If your city does not offer one of the following benefits, please leave this blank.

	# of FTE in City (1)	Average Annual Sick Days (2)	Average Annual Vacation Days (3)	Average Annual Paid Time Off (PTO) (4)	Average Annual Executive Leave (5)	Over Time Rate (6)
Administrative Assistant (1)						
Assistant City Manager (2)						
Building Official (3)						
City Attorney (4)						
Assistant City Attorney (27)						
City Administrator (5)						
Community Development Director (6)						

City Engineer (7)						
City Manager (8)						
City Recorder (9)						
Economic Development Director (10)						
Fire Chief (11)						
Finance Director (12)						
Franchise Coordinator (13)						
Human Resources Director (14)						
IT Manager (15)						

Librarian (16)						
Municipal Judge (17)						
Police Chief (18)						
Planning Director (19)						
City Planner (20)						
Parks & Recreation Director (21)						
Public Relations Manager (22)						
Public Works Director (23)						
Superintendent of Streets (24)						

Superintendent of Water (25)						
Superintendent of Wastewater (26)						
Assistant City Attorney (28)						
Entry/Mid-level Police Officer (29)						
Mid/High-level Police Officer (30)						

Q6 Does your city offer health benefits to employees?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Unsure (3)

Display this question:
If Does your city offer health benefits to employees? = Yes

Q7 Please describe these health benefits. Please include the percent of the health premium the city covers for the employee as well as the percent the city covers for the employee's family members.

Q8 Please describe any other benefits and perks offered to city employees below:

Q9 Please send a document containing the staff salary and wage schedule to research@orcities.org

Q10 For the following positions, please list the position's required education level and experience to be considered for the position.

	Required Educational Attainment (1)	Required Years of Experience (2)
Administrative Assistant (1)		
Assistant City Manager (2)		
Building Official (3)		
City Attorney (4)		
Assistant City Attorney (30)		
City Administrator (5)		
Community Development Director (6)		
City Engineer (7)		
City Manager (8)		
City Recorder (9)		

Economic Development Director (10)		
Fire Chief (11)		
Finance Director (12)		
Franchise Coordinator (13)		
Human Resources Director (14)		
IT Manager (15)		
Librarian (16)		
Municipal Judge (17)		
Police Chief (18)		
Planning Director (19)		
City Planner (20)		

Parks & Recreation Director (21)		
Public Relations Manager (22)		
Public Works Director (23)		
Superintendent of Streets (24)		
Superintendent of Water (25)		
Superintendent of Wastewater (26)		
Entry/Mid-level Police Officer (28)		
Mid/High-level Police Officer (29)		

Q11 When was the last time your city conducted a salary survey for its own purposes?

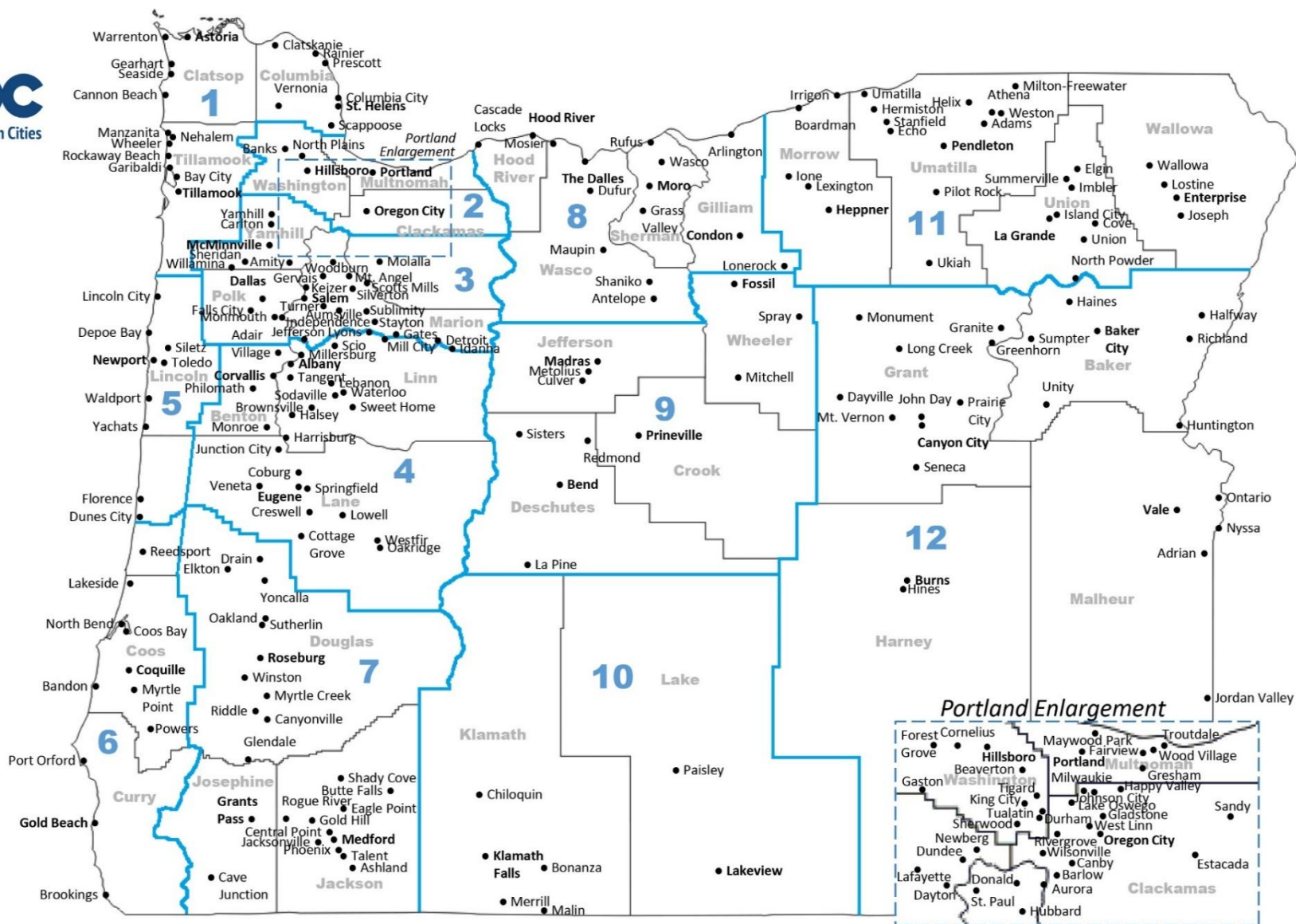
Q12 Historically, what positions have your city had the most difficulty filling and why?

Q13 Do you feel your salaries and wages offered are fair to the positions' duties?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Maybe (3)

Q14 Do you have any additional comments about this survey?

Appendix C: Map of Small Cities Regions



Appendix D: Population Quintile and Regional Breakdowns

Quintile Ranges	# Cities	% Cities
1st Quintile <490	48	19.8%
2nd Quintile 491-1,375	48	19.8%
3rd Quintile 1,376-3,275	48	19.8%
4th Quintile 3,276-10,950	48	19.8%
5th Quintile >10,950	49	20.2%
Small Cities <5,000	159	65.7%
Top 5 % >45,000	12	5.0%

	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7	Region 8	Region 9	Region 10	Region 11	Region 12	
	N. Coast	Metro	N. Willamette	S. Willamette	C. Coast	S. Coast	S. Oregon	Gorge	C. Oregon	SC Oregon	NE Oregon	E. Oregon	TOTALS
1st Quintile	3	1	4	3	0	0	2	9	3	2	8	13	48
2nd Quintile	2	4	5	6	2	2	6	3	1	3	10	4	48
3rd Quintile	8	2	9	5	3	3	5	1	2	1	5	4	48
4th Quintile	5	4	9	7	4	5	6	1	2	0	3	2	48
5th Quintile	1	20	8	5	0	1	5	1	3	1	3	1	49
TOTALS	19	31	35	26	9	11	24	15	11	7	29	24	241
	8%	13%	15%	11%	4%	5%	10%	6%	5%	3%	12%	10%	100%