

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

## Ashland, VA

Trends over Time

2014



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# 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 Ashland to its previous survey results in 2011. 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 seven percentage points between the 2011 and 2014 surveys, otherwise the comparison between 2011 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 Ashland for 2014 generally remained stable. Of the 75 items for which comparisons were available, 42 items were rated similarly in 2011 and 2014, 28 items showed a decrease in ratings and five showed an increase in ratings. Notable trends over time included the following:

- Within the pillar of Community Characteristics, several ratings decreased from 2011 to 2014. Among those that decreased from 2011 to 2014 were: the availability of paths and walking trails, overall quality of new development, affordable quality housing, shopping opportunities, preventive health services, openness and acceptance and Ashland as a place to retire. Two aspects of Community Characteristics increased from 2011 to 2014, these were ease of travel by car and child care/preschool.
- Several aspects of Governance decreased from 2011 to 2014, including: snow removal, sidewalk maintenance, preservation of natural areas, Town parks and welcoming citizen involvement.
- Within the pillar of Participation, ratings decreased from 2011 to 2014 for sense of community. More residents in 2014 than in 2011 reported that they had recycled at home, voted in local elections and felt that the economy would have a positive impact on their personal economic future.

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Note that the tables include benchmark comparisons for all survey years. In 2011, a smaller margin of error (MOE) was used for comparisons to other communities versus a larger margin of error in 2014. To aid in interpreting the relative benchmark change from 2011 to 2014, an additional 2014 column has been included, with a smaller margin of error (analogous to 2011). All of the interpretation in the set of 2014 reports is based on the larger margin of error.

Table 1: Community Characteristics General

|                         | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | Comparison to benchmark |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                         | 2011   | 2014 |                              | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Overall quality of life | 92%  | 85%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Overall image           | 86%  | 85%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Place to live           | 95%  | 89%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Neighborhood            | 87%  | 77%  | Lower                        | Higher                  | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Place to raise children | 92%  | 82%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Place to retire         | 85%  | 72%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Overall appearance      | 80%  | 82%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |

Table 2: Community Characteristics by Facet

|                     |                                 | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | Comparison to benchmark |                         |                          |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                     |                                 | 2011   | 2014 |                              | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Safety              | Overall feeling of safety       | NA   | 85%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                     | Safe in neighborhood            | 97%  | 94%  | Similar                      | Higher                  | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Safe downtown/commercial area   | 96%  | 94%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Mobility            | Overall ease of travel          | NA   | 88%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Similar                  |
|                     | Paths and walking trails        | 71%  | 63%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Ease of walking                 | 81%  | 79%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                     | Travel by bicycle               | 74%  | 68%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                     | Travel by public transportation | NA   | 35%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much lower              | Lower                    |
|                     | Travel by car                   | 77%  | 84%  | Higher                       | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                     | Public parking                  | NA   | 72%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                     | Traffic flow                    | 68%  | 65%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Natural Environment | Overall natural environment     | 85%  | 83%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                     | Cleanliness                     | 87%  | 79%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                     | Air quality                     | 85%  | 84%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Built Environment   | Overall built environment       | NA   | 61%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | New development in Ashland      | 63%  | 50%  | Lower                        | Higher                  | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                     | Affordable quality housing      | 53%  | 40%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Housing options                 | 57%  | 53%  | Similar                      | Similar                 | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Public places                   | NA   | 68%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |

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|                          |   | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | Comparison to benchmark |                         |                          |
|--------------------------|---|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                          |   | 2011   | 2014 |                              | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Economy                  | Overall economic health                           | NA   | 71%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                          | Vibrant downtown/commercial area                  | NA   | 39%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Business and services                             | 69%  | 62%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Cost of living                                    | NA   | 49%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Similar                  |
|                          | Shopping opportunities                            | 62%  | 46%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | Employment opportunities                          | 39%  | 37%  | Similar                      | Higher                  | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Place to visit                                    | NA   | 67%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Place to work                                     | 63%  | 61%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Recreation and Wellness  | Health and wellness                               | NA   | 64%  | NA                           | NA                      | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | Mental health care                                | NA   | 31%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much lower              | Similar                  |
|                          | Preventive health services                        | 62%  | 41%  | Lower                        | Higher                  | Much lower              | Lower                    |
|                          | Health care                                       | 56%  | 42%  | Lower                        | Higher                  | Much lower              | Similar                  |
|                          | Food  | 77%  | 64%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Recreational opportunities                        | 66%  | 59%  | Similar                      | Similar                 | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | Fitness opportunities                             | NA   | 67%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Education and Enrichment | Religious or spiritual events and activities      | 82%  | 77%  | Similar                      | Higher                  | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Cultural/arts/music activities                    | 70%  | 66%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
|                          | Adult education                                   | NA   | 47%  | NA                           | NA                      | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | K-12 education                                    | NA   | 80%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Similar                  |
|                          | Child care/preschool                              | 50%  | 62%  | Higher                       | Higher                  | Much higher             | Higher                   |
| Community Engagement     | Social events and activities                      | 75%  | 64%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                          | Neighborliness                                    | NA   | 70%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Similar                  |
|                          | Openness and acceptance                           | 71%  | 51%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | Opportunities to participate in community matters | 73%  | 61%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Opportunities to volunteer                        | 79%  | 67%  | Lower                        | Higher                  | Lower                   | Similar                  |

Table 3: Governance General

|                                  | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | Comparison to benchmark |                         |                          |
|----------------------------------|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                                  | 2011   | 2014 |                              | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Services provided by Ashland     | 82%  | 77%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Customer service                 | 81%  | 73%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Value of services for taxes paid | 62%  | 66%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Overall direction                | 65%  | 66%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |

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|   | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | Comparison to benchmark |                         |                          |
|---|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | 2011   | 2014 |                              | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Welcoming citizen involvement               | 67%  | 55%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Confidence in Town government               | NA   | 58%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Acting in the best interest of Ashland      | NA   | 58%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Being honest                                | NA   | 59%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Treating all residents fairly               | NA   | 56%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Services provided by the Federal Government | 44%  | 35%  | Lower                        | Similar                 | Similar                 | Similar                  |

Table 4: Governance by Facet

|                         |                               | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | Comparison to benchmark |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                         |                               | 2011   | 2014 |                              | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Safety                  | Police                        | 86%  | 84%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                         | Crime prevention              | 87%  | 79%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                         | Emergency preparedness        | NA   | 62%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Mobility                | Traffic enforcement           | 82%  | 79%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                         | Street repair                 | 69%  | 66%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                         | Street cleaning               | 82%  | 79%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                         | Street lighting               | 70%  | 63%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                         | Snow removal                  | 70%  | 60%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                         | Sidewalk maintenance          | 75%  | 61%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                         | Traffic signal timing         | 78%  | 66%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Natural Environment     | Garbage collection            | 90%  | 84%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                         | Recycling                     | 82%  | 79%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                         | Yard waste pick-up            | 78%  | 77%  | Similar                      | Higher                  | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Natural Environment     | Natural areas preservation    | 69%  | 54%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                         | Open space                    | NA   | 58%  | NA                           | NA                      | Lower                   | Similar                  |
| Built Environment       | Storm drainage                | 72%  | 63%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                         | Land use, planning and zoning | 68%  | 59%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
|                         | Code enforcement              | 52%  | 46%  | Similar                      | Higher                  | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Economy                 | Economic development          | 53%  | 51%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Recreation and Wellness | Town parks                    | 88%  | 74%  | Lower                        | Higher                  | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                         | Health services               | NA   | 50%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much lower              | Similar                  |
| Education and           | Special events                | NA   | 70%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |

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|                      |                    | Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | Comparison to benchmark |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------|--|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                      |                    | 2011   | 2014 |                              |                         | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Enrichment           |                    |  |      |                              |                         |                         |                          |
| Community Engagement | Public information | 67%  | 62%  | Similar                      | Similar                 | Similar                 | Similar                  |

Table 5: Participation General

|                             | Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | Comparison to benchmark |                          |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                             | 2011  | 2014 |                              |                         | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Sense of community          | 87%   | 75%  | Lower                        | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Recommend Ashland           | 93%   | 92%  | Similar                      | Much higher             | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Remain in Ashland           | 87%   | 89%  | Similar                      | Higher                  | Much higher             | Similar                  |
| Contacted Ashland employees | 45%   | 43%  | Similar                      | Much lower              | Lower                   | Similar                  |

Table 6: Participation by Facet

|                     |   | Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | Comparison to benchmark |                          |
|---------------------|---|---|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                     |   | 2011  | 2014 |                              |                         | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Safety              | Stocked supplies for an emergency           | NA  | 48%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Higher                   |
|                     | Did NOT report a crime                      | NA  | 70%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much lower              | Similar                  |
|                     | Was NOT the victim of a crime               | 86%   | 91%  | Similar                      | Similar                 | Higher                  | Similar                  |
| Mobility            | Carpooled instead of driving alone          | NA  | 47%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                     | Walked or biked instead of driving          | NA  | 71%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Higher                   |
| Natural Environment | Conserved water                             | NA  | 79%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Made home more energy efficient             | NA  | 77%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Recycled at home                            | 63%   | 80%  | Higher                       | Much lower              | Lower                   | Similar                  |
| Built Environment   | Did NOT observe a code violation            | NA  | 50%  | NA                           | NA                      | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                     | NOT under housing cost stress               | 64%   | 70%  | Similar                      | Similar                 | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Economy             | Purchased goods or services in Ashland      | NA  | 98%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                     | Economy will have positive impact on income | 13%   | 23%  | Higher                       | Lower                   | Similar                 | Similar                  |

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|                          |  | Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes) |      | 2014 rating compared to 2011 | 2011 (+/- 3 points MOE) | Comparison to benchmark |                          |
|--------------------------|--|---|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                          |  | 2011  | 2014 |                              |                         | 2014 (+/- 3 points MOE) | 2014 (+/- 10 points MOE) |
| Recreation and Wellness  | Work in Ashland  | NA  | 37%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much lower              | Similar                  |
|                          | Visited a Town park                                    | 81%   | 75%  | Similar                      | Lower                   | Much lower              | Similar                  |
|                          | Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables                | NA  | 86%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity | NA  | 86%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | In very good to excellent health                       | NA  | 61%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
| Education and Enrichment | Participated in religious or spiritual activities      | 48%   | 47%  | Similar                      | Lower                   | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | Attended a Town-sponsored event                        | NA  | 69%  | NA                           | NA                      | Much higher             | Higher                   |
| Community Engagement     | Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate            | NA  | 28%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                          | Contacted Ashland elected officials                    | NA  | 20%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                          | Volunteered  | 40%   | 39%  | Similar                      | Lower                   | Lower                   | Similar                  |
|                          | Participated in a club                                 | 24%   | 27%  | Similar                      | Much lower              | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Talked to or visited with neighbors                    | NA  | 95%  | NA                           | NA                      | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                          | Done a favor for a neighbor                            | NA  | 84%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Attended a local public meeting                        | 24%   | 27%  | Similar                      | Lower                   | Higher                  | Similar                  |
|                          | Watched a local public meeting                         | 33%   | 31%  | Similar                      | Much lower              | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Read or watched local news                             | NA  | 89%  | NA                           | NA                      | Similar                 | Similar                  |
|                          | Voted in local elections                               | 73%   | 83%  | Higher                       | Similar                 | Higher                  | Similar                  |