

2026 City Survey Detailed Methodology

You can find additional results and information about this and prior City Surveys at sf.gov/citysurvey.

SAN FRANCISCO CITY SURVEY

Every two years, the City and County of San Francisco's Controller's Office conducts the City Survey to assess residents' perceptions of, use of, and satisfaction with City services. The survey's goals are also to gauge attitudes around issues facing the City. In 2023, EMC Research conducted the 18th City Survey, which included an additional topic of COVID-19 recovery in addition to the traditional ratings of City services. InterEthnica supported community outreach. For the 19th City Survey in 2026, EMC Research worked with the Controller's Office on how perceptions of downtown and commuting have shifted in a post-pandemic environment.

Residents answered questions about how frequently they use city services and infrastructure like the library, Muni, public safety, and street cleanliness, and rated their satisfaction with those service areas. This year residents also responded to questions about how often they visit downtown, why they do or do not go, and commuting / workplace patterns.

The City works to maintain continuity across time in the survey but has allowed methodology and content to shift over the years where necessary to maintain relevance and capture the most representative sample of City residents. The following document details the methodology of the current City Survey, how results are calculated and reported, and how the City verifies these findings through statistical analysis.

2026 METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

Data Collection Strategy

From 1996 to 2013 the City Survey was administered by mail. In 2017 and 2019 the City updated the methodology to a telephone survey using a random digit dialing (RDD) methodology, plus a very small online component. Over the recent years, RDD and other traditional, telephone-based data collection methods have met new challenges, such as declining telephone response rates, and increased inaccuracy of random dialing. In 2023, the City began collecting data through a combination of online and phone surveys, with some in-person intercept interviews. The 2026 survey used phone and online modes only, from a listed sample of San Francisco residents. InterEthnica conducted in-person outreach to boost participation; it did not conduct intercept interviews. Through these modes, the City Survey collected 2,505 responses, with a maximum margin of error of ± 1.95 percentage points at the 95% confidence interval.

Data Collection

Survey responses were collected across telephone and online mode options to a random listed sample of residents of San Francisco. Survey access was controlled only to those who were randomly invited to participate in the survey. Telephone surveys were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog, with the same languages available for self-administered online surveys plus Russian. The survey was administered from April 7th to June 7th, with a 1-week pause to review data at the midpoint of survey administration. Upon the completion of data entry and quality checks, data from the telephone and online surveys were merged together to form one single dataset for weighting and analysis purposes.

More detailed information about each mode is presented below.

Telephone Mode Data Collection

Live-telephone interviews were conducted by trained professional interviewers via landline and cell phone calls, with identified cell phone numbers manually dialed by interviewers as required by law. EMC staff monitored the early telephone interviewing to ensure interviewers adhered to survey administration standards, and gave necessary feedback. Telephone interviews were available in English, Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Tagalog. Bilingual interviewers were used as much as possible to dial targeted areas with expected higher language prevalence to boost response rates among non-English speakers.

Online Mode Data Collection

EMC Research adapted the questionnaire language for online administration, including necessary prompts and clarifications for participants. The online version of the questionnaire was programmed and hosted on the Qualtrics platform, to which respondents were invited via email and text invitations. Access was limited only to those who were invited to participate through unique links for each invited participant, and each participant was allowed to complete the survey one time only. The online survey was available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Russian, and participants had the ability choose their preferred language.

In-Person Survey Outreach and Engagement

While the survey did not include any in-person intercept interviewing, a targeted strategy of in-person survey outreach and engagement was executed to boost participation from communities that are harder to reach with telephone and online interviewing strategies alone. Staff from InterEthnica tabled at the following 12 community events and high-traffic locations, which were strategically chosen to raise the profile of the survey with targeted communities including Black/African American residents; Spanish- and Chinese-speaking residents; residents under age 25; residents with less than a college degree; Asian women, particularly those age 65 and older; lower-income residents; and less-educated residents age 25 and older, particularly Asian and Hispanic residents.

At each event, InterEthnica staff stood at a table with a large engagement board that read “How would you rate the current state of San Francisco?” to attract attention and interest in the survey. As residents approached the table, they were told about the survey, handed a postcard with a QR code that would take them to the online survey, and asked if they would prefer to give a phone number to complete the survey by telephone. Residents were offered a tote bag after engaging with staff.

Event	Neighborhood	Date	Time
Tenderloin Family Housing Event	Tenderloin	Tuesday, May 5	9:00 AM – 2:00 PM
The Coronet Housing Event	Richmond	Wednesday, May 6	4:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Willie “Woo Woo” Wong Outreach Event	Chinatown	Wednesday, May 6	3:00 PM – 7:00 PM
Rose Pak Station Chinese Outreach Event	Chinatown	Thursday, May 7	8:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Rose Pak Station Chinese Outreach Event	Chinatown	Thursday, May 7	3:00 PM – 6:00 PM
Portsmouth Square Chinese Outreach Event	Chinatown	Thursday, May 7	1:00 PM – 5:00 PM
Mission Hub Food Distribution	Mission	Friday, May 8	9:30 AM – 1:30 PM
NK Saturday School Event	Chinatown	Saturday, May 9	9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Sunnydale Food Distribution Event	Sunnydale	Tuesday, May 12	9:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Mission Hub Food Distribution	Mission	Friday, May 15	9:30 AM – 1:30 PM
Family Connections Event	Visitacion Valley	Friday, May 29	2:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Alemany Farmers’ Market Event	Bernal Heights (Serves all of Southeast San Francisco)	Saturday, May 30	7:30 AM – 2:00 PM

Representativeness and Weighting Approach

The target number of completed interviews from specific demographic subgroups were determined based on the US Census Bureau’s ACS (American Community Survey) 2024 5-year estimates. Per the Census Bureau website, “The 5-year estimates from the ACS are ‘period’ estimates that represent data collected over a period of time. The primary advantage of using multiyear estimates is the increased statistical reliability of the data for less populated areas and small population subgroups.”

The updated methodology combining various data collection modes for the 19th City Survey was designed to reach a broad cross-section of San Francisco residents. This approach is meant to minimize the need for any drastic subgroup weighting on the final survey data to bring the data in line with actual population distributions. This does not eliminate the need for weighting altogether, but mitigates risks associated with larger weight values applied to small subgroups.

Throughout the survey data collection window, demographic data was reviewed daily, and targets were adjusted as needed before telephone dialing / online survey invitations and reminders were issued each day. To closely approximate the demographic makeup of San Francisco residents with greater accuracy, the final survey data was weighted to the ACS 2024 5-year estimates on age, gender, ethnicity, education, and zip code-based regions.

Overall and nested weighting targets were generated automatically to ensure representativeness of subgroups including gender, age, ethnicity, education, and combinations thereof. Reliable demographic information was backfilled from sample as necessary for gender and age when no response was given. Overall weights were applied to five zip code-based regions, and the share of transgender men, women, and non-binary/genderqueer respondents were held steady overall and among key subgroups. The share of Middle Eastern or North African respondents was weighted to a target based on responses to the detailed race question in the 2020 census. An iterative proportional fitting (raking) process was used to determine weights to achieve these weighting targets. Respondent weights were capped at 3.5, such that no individual respondent has a weight exceeding 3.5 times that of the average respondent.

The combination of these strategies for ensuring representativeness have ensured that no datapoint carried too significant of a weight value as compared with others in the dataset. The table below shows the comparison of weighted and unweighted overall survey demographics to ACS estimates.

City-Level Weights	ACS Population Estimate	Unweighted Sample %	Weighted Sample %
18-24	7.7%	8.7%	7.7%
25-29	11.0%	12.0%	11.0%

30-34	12.8%	13.8%	12.8%
35-44	19.0%	15.4%	19.0%
45-54	15.2%	14.3%	15.2%
55-64	13.9%	13.3%	13.9%
65-74	11.5%	13.2%	11.5%
75+/Unknown	8.9%	9.4%	9.0%
Male	51.4%	50.1%	50.7%
Female	48.6%	48.9%	48.2%
Genderqueer/Non-binary/Transgender	-	1.1%	1.1%
Hispanic/Latino	14.9%	15.5%	14.9%
Black/African American	4.9%	6.6%	4.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	36.5%	40.2%	36.5%
White/Other	43.7%	37.8%	43.7%
Zone 1 (94102, 94103, 94104, 94105, 94107, 94108, 94109, 94111, 94130, 94133, 94158)	28.7%	27.0%	28.7%
Zone 2 (94115, 94118, 94121, 94123, 94129)	17.0%	15.1%	17.0%
Zone 3 (94116, 94122, 94127, 94132)	17.2%	17.7%	17.2%
Zone 4 (94112, 94114, 94117, 94131)	21.1%	22.7%	21.1%
Zone 5 (94110, 94124, 94134)	16.0%	17.4%	16.0%

City Survey Main Outcomes and Calculations

Most outcomes in the City Survey are ratings that use a five-point scale (Excellent equals five points and Failing equals one point). The City translates responses to the point scale and averages responses to create a mean score. The full survey instrument from the 2026 City Survey is posted online and can be found through the City Survey landing page sf.gov/citysurvey.

The three main ways the City reports the results are:

- a weighted mean from this scale,
- the corresponding letter grade, or
- the weighted percent of respondents who graded a service an A or B.

Weights are used in the reporting to control for any differences between the demographics of the respondent sample and the overall population of San Francisco.

Results in this report for previous years may not match the exact number from earlier publications. For each survey publication, the City modifies where and how weights are used in calculating outcomes depending on what is most appropriate for the most recent data. The exact calculation for reporting the percent of respondents grading a service an A or B has been slightly adjusted this year. Finally, while most reported service ratings are now based on a single, overarching question, some are based on the average of multiple rating questions. The exact questions used to calculate ratings have changed over time, though the City has worked to keep year-over-year comparisons as similar as possible and notes where any changes could impact a rating or interpretation.

Calculating Ratings

There are two ways the City Survey asks residents to rate service areas: by rating subcomponents of a service or by providing an overall rating for the service. Historically, most service areas had multiple subcomponents, such as cleanliness or employee courtesy. When only the subcomponent questions appeared on the survey, the overall rating is a calculated average of the subcomponents. The City has added a single overarching question asking about the respondents' perception of that service to most services. Once the survey includes a question that directly asks residents to provide an overall rating, the response to that question is reported as the overall rating. Most service area ratings have been using these overarching questions since 2017.

- Library ratings were an average of subcomponent ratings through 2015. 2017 on uses the overall rating.
- Parks ratings were an average of subcomponent ratings through 2009. 2011 on uses the overall rating.
- Muni ratings were an average of subcomponent ratings through 2015. 2017 on uses the overall rating.
- Street and Sidewalks average rating in 2026 is an average of street and sidewalk cleanliness, street condition, and sidewalk and curb ramp condition.
 - For 2011-2017, the average includes ratings for street lighting.
 - In prior years, the Streets and Sidewalks rating was combined with the Utilities rating for an overall infrastructure rating, but Streets and Sidewalks ratings are now separate from Utilities ratings and the data reported has been separated.
- Utilities ratings are an average of the water rating and sewer rating. CleanPowerSF and Hetch Hetchy power are included in the overall rating for 2026.
- The Safety rating is an average of each resident's grade of their feeling of safety in their neighborhood during the day and at night.

Because all shifts from subcomponent calculated ratings to overall ratings happened several survey iterations ago, the City does not always note on data visualizations where that change happened. If that shift caused a major change in the rating, that is noted and reported.

Weighted means

The City uses weighted averages to report the overall grade for each service. The survey implementation firm calculated the weight for each respondent (detailed above). The City uses that weight to calculate a weighted mean ratings, and uses the methodology detailed in the table below to translate the rating into a letter grade.

Numeric to Letter Grades		
Letter Grade	Lower Mean	Upper Mean
A+	5.00	5.00
A	4.67	4.99
A-	4.33	4.66
B+	4.00	4.32
B	3.67	3.99
B-	3.33	3.66
C+	3.00	3.32
C	2.67	2.99
C-	2.33	2.66
D+	2.00	2.32
D	1.67	1.99
D-	1.33	1.66
F	1.00	1.32

Where ratings are based off of two or more subcomponent questions, the City first averages the score for each respondent, using equal weights for each question, then calculates the weighted mean for the sample. This follows historical precedent from prior City Surveys and is used for service areas where the questions remain unchanged.

Weights are used both when calculating the rating of the entire sample or a subgroup (such as ratings by gender, income, or race).