

peoplesbudget™

CROWD-SOURCED BUDGET PLANNING

# City of New Orleans 2019 Report

Committee For A  
**BETTER**  
New Orleans

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# Introduction

## WHAT IS THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET?

The People's Budget is the result of a crowd-sourced effort to gather data-driven insight into the budgetary priorities of New Orleans residents. The Big Easy Budget Game (**[bigeasybudgetgame.com](http://bigeasybudgetgame.com)**) was launched in April 2016 as a first of its kind interactive website aimed at giving everyday New Orleanians a chance to learn how their budget works and to give input into the kind of spending they would like to see in their communities.

The Big Easy Budget Game is a budget simulation that effectively lets residents of New Orleans “play Mayor for a day.” After logging in, users are shown a list of city departments that receive general fund dollars, sorted by “results areas,” as defined by the city budget. Results areas are not actual funds, but a way of sorting city departments based on their primary objective, such as public safety or open and effective government. City department profiles include the minimum required spending amount, the amount the department received in the previous budget, and the amount of funding received from “other funds,” typically state or federal dollars that are restricted to particular projects. Department profiles also include a “learn more” button that pops up a description of the departments’ duties and consequences for providing more funding or decreasing funding. A link to most department websites can also be found under “Learn More.” By clicking +/- signs, users can dedicate funding to each department as they choose.

## RULES OF PLAY

All users were required to spend their entire allotted budget. This allowed the Committee for a Better New Orleans to see exactly where residents wanted funds to be spent the most. In the future the option to have a surplus may be allowed. However, per the New Orleans City Charter, deficit spending is not allowed.

Users were initially given the entire general fund budget to spend—a total of \$702 million in 2019. However, in order to make the game realistic and to show how much funding is automatically allocated to required spending such as consent decrees and pension funds, minimum spending limits were added to departments. Minimum amounts are subjective, but meant to show a realistic bottom line approach to spending: how much does this department need to keep our city running? Minimums were created both to teach users how much of our budget is already spoken for on day one of budget season, but also to help us provide realistic, useable data to city leaders.

## QUICK POLLS

Some departments also include quick polls as a part of their department profile. Next to the “Learn More” button, users see a button indicating a quick poll. These polls ask users specific questions about spending within this department. Quick polls were designed to get users thinking about real life implications of these funding dollars and alternate ways to think about spending within a department.

## VERIFICATION

Users must create an account to play; by verifying players with an email or Facebook account, each player is assigned a unique player identification number, allowing administrators to ensure that players do not play more than once and that no automation bots are being used to artificially inflate the data received.

## WHO CREATED THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET?

The People's Budget and the Big Easy Budget Game were created by the Committee for a Better New Orleans, a 53-year old non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Committee for a Better New Orleans is a result of a merger of the original Committee for a Better New Orleans and the Metropolitan Area Committee in 2002. The Metropolitan Area Committee was founded in 1966 as the first major community organization to reach across the lines of race and class. As other cities in the south grappled with the often violent effects of the civil rights era, the MAC was credited with beginning conversations between diverse local community, faith, business and higher education leaders. In 2016, CBNO celebrated its 50th Anniversary of creating opportunities for community voices and advocating for civic engagement in New Orleans.

Today the Committee for a Better New Orleans is governed by a board of local leaders from a diverse background of industries, interests, ages, faiths and cultures. CBNO was a founding and convening member of the Greater New Orleans Water Collaborative, Orleans Parish Education Network, and the New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance. Currently, CBNO is advocating to bring a formal citizen participation program, as called for by the city Master Plan, to fruition, and to further open our budget process through participatory budgeting.

The Big Easy Budget Game and the People's Budget were created as a part of CBNO's People's Budget campaign, aimed at bringing better education, transparency and resident input into the city budget process to create more equitable neighborhoods. More information on CBNO and its work can be found at [cbno.org](http://cbno.org).

# Who Participated in the People's Budget?

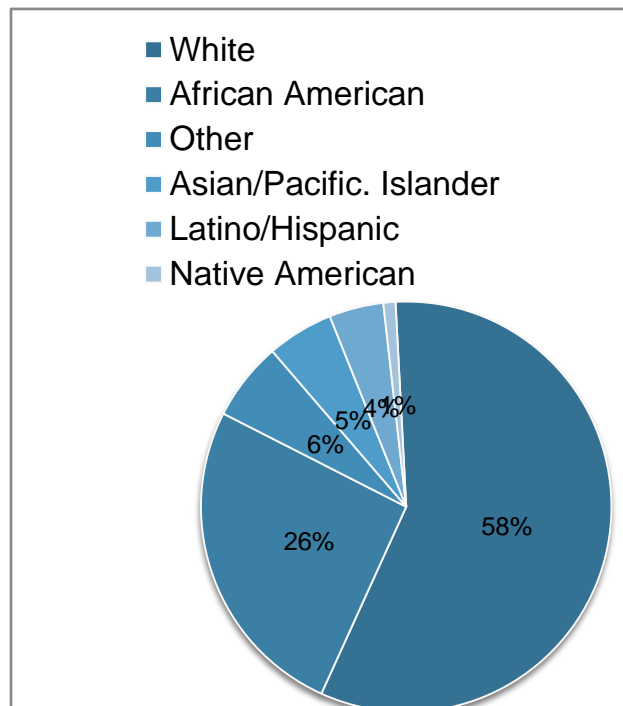
This year, just over 500 New Orleanians participated in the Big Easy Budget Game. The data included in this report comes from their responses. In addition to balancing the city budget, users were prompted to answer some demographic questions in a third-party survey. This survey also included some question about user’s current understanding and engagement in the budget process, as well as their general spending preferences. 46% of Big Easy Budget Game players completed the survey and their responses showcased a variety of demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of Big Easy Budget Game players were young adults, with 60% being between the ages of 19 and 38. Middle-aged players also represent an important group, as 22% of players were 39-58 years old. The Committee for a Better New Orleans works diligently to encourage participation of all segments of the population, and this year we had 11.2% of players younger than 18, but from just 4% in 2018, and 7% aged 59 or older. The age distribution of our players is somewhat in accordance with the city demographics. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2017 estimates, the percentage of persons 65 years and over in New Orleans is 12%, and the median age is 34.6.

The Big Easy Budget Game had moderately more players that identify as female (49.3%) than male (46.5%), while some identify as other (1.9%) or preferred not to respond (2.3%).

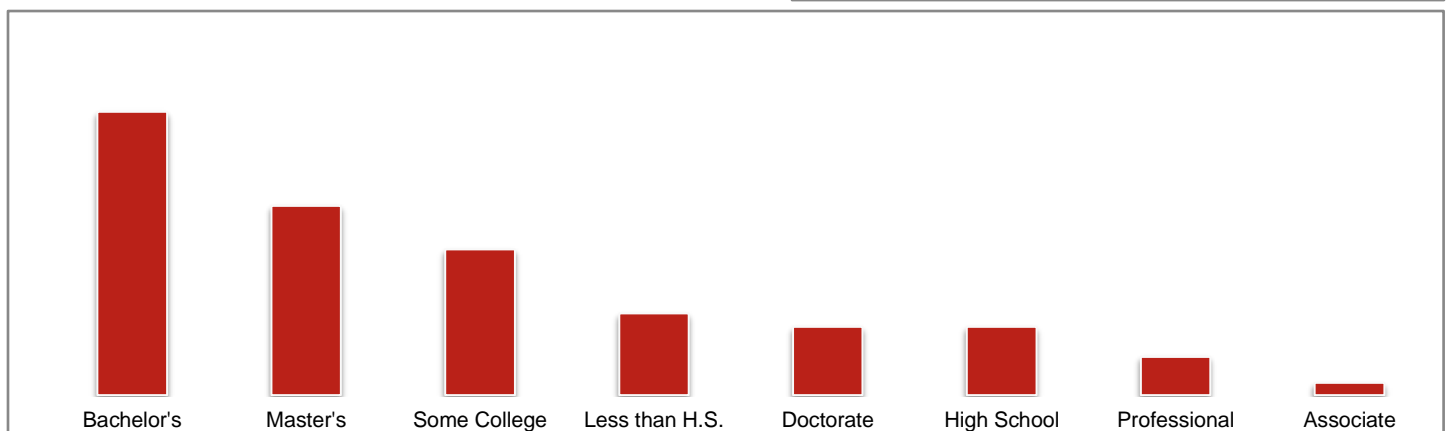
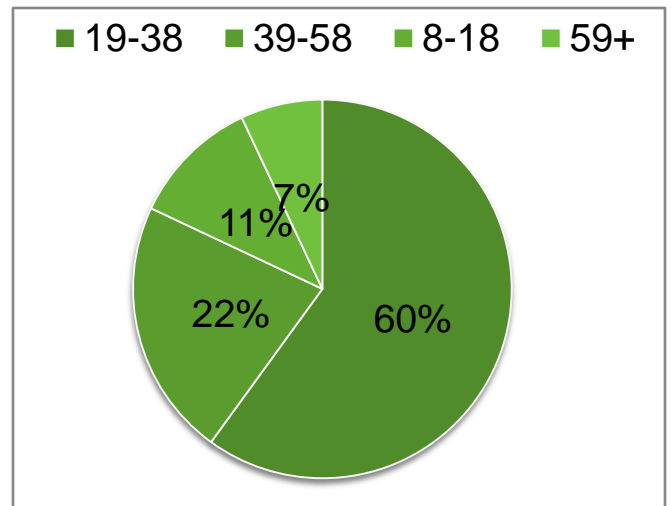
In relation to their primary race identity, the biggest groups of Big Easy Budget Game Players are White or Caucasian (57.6%) and Black or African American (25.7%), while the remaining players were distributed between other race groups such as Latino or Hispanic (4.3%), Asian or Pacific Islander (5.2%) and Native American or Alaskan Native (1%).



Despite substantial outreach by the Committee for a Better New Orleans and its partners, the racial data collected from users does not align with the overall racial breakdown of New Orleans as a city. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2017 estimates, 60% of New Orleanians are black, 30% are white, 5% Hispanic, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2% other. This shows the importance of targeted outreach to communities of color, and this will be a major focus for the Committee for a Better New Orleans as we look to the 2020 fiscal year Budget Game.

## SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Users of the game tended to be younger and more educated than the New Orleans population, with 60.9% of respondents claiming a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 36% of New Orleanians 25 years or older, reported in the U.S. Census Bureau 2012-2016 indicators. Only 9.2% of players have not completed a high school degree. Although this finding speaks favorably of our player population, it indicates the importance of continuing the outreach efforts to the bigger city population that does not have this level of education.



Household income of respondents also fell across a large span of socioeconomic statuses. While the majority of users claimed a moderate household income of less than \$50,000 (35.5%) or between \$50,000 and \$100,000 (30.9%), a significant portion claimed to earn between \$100,000 and \$150,000 (14%) and even more than \$150,000 (33.8%). The U.S. Census Bureau 2012-2016 identifies the median income of a household in New Orleans at \$37,488.

57.3% of respondents reported renting a home while 42.7% reported owning a house (including those under mortgage), which is higher than the New Orleans Data Center's 2011 report of 48% homeownership in Orleans Parish. 69.4% of users surveyed reported no children in their household, while 30.6% reported one or more children in the home. The New Orleans Data Center reported that 41% of homes in New Orleans claimed children in 2011.

Big Easy Budget Game Players represent a large variety of areas in the city and more than 80 neighborhoods. Out of the 62% that completed the survey at the end of the game, 48% of users completed the Big Easy Budget Game on a laptop, compared to 45% who played on a smartphone and 28% on a tablet. The average length of play was 13 minutes and 22 seconds. Data collected in the Big Easy Budget Game is available upon request.

## ENGAGEMENT IN OUR CURRENT BUDGET SYSTEM

As a part of the survey included at the completion of the Big Easy Budget Game, users were asked to describe their relationship with the budget process in previous years. Overall, users reported feeling deeply disenfranchised by the budget process, despite reporting a moderate level of understanding of the budget itself, and a significantly higher than average voting history, showing the majority of users are traditionally civically engaged in other ways.

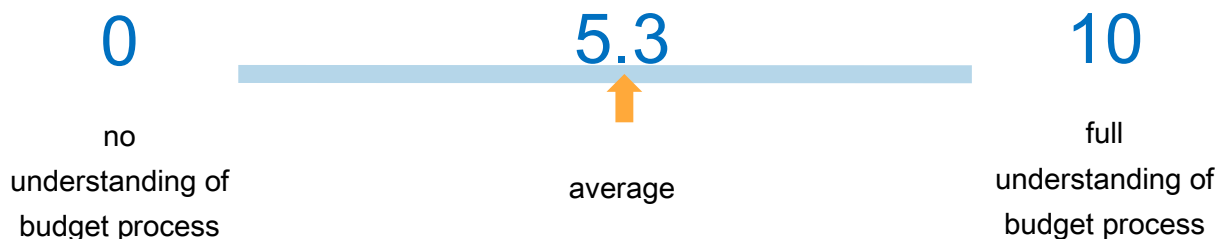
72% of survey respondents reported that they were not happy with the current budget system. Additionally, 78% of users do not feel that they are part of the decision-making process that goes into creating the city budget each year.

Perhaps one of the greatest successes of the Big Easy Budget Game is the successful reach into communities of users who had never participated in the city budget process before. Historically, New Orleanians have never had a formal opportunity to provide input into the city budget before the proposed budget's release and review by City Council, though the Landrieu administration conducted a series of budget town hall meetings, held each year in each council district. However, only 18% of users had ever attended one of these meetings. Moreover, 76% of Big Easy Budget Game respondents reported that they do not feel that their input at these meetings is valued. This means the feedback provided here is representative of a group of New Orleanians not traditionally heard from during budget conversations.

## UPDATE TO BUDGET SYSTEM IN 2019

Certainly, attendance at the town halls, though standing room only in their first years, diminished significantly by the end of the Landrieu administration. Often, the city employees, department heads, and elected officials in the room outnumbered actual residents. Moving the budget town hall meetings earlier in the year— to the late spring, when department heads make their initial budget offers— may provide residents a more meaningful experience in the budget process rather than waiting until the months before the budget is released to seek community input. Additionally, the interim method of large-scale conference calls makes participation very difficult and impossible to track. We encourage the current administration to thoughtfully consider making changes to facilitate participation as we prepare for 2020.

Overall, residents rated their understanding of the city budget at 5.3 on a scale of 1-10, with 0 being not at all, and 10 being extremely well. This average understanding of the local budget may be a product of the slightly higher than typical education rates reported by users, or a reflection of learning that took place throughout the experience of using the Big Easy Budget Game.





However, the level of disenfranchisement in the budget process that Big Easy Budget Game users reported does not mean that they are not civically engaged in other ways. 72% of survey respondents reported voting in the last election, 77% reported volunteering regularly with a non-profit, 36% attended a religious service regularly, 30% are members of their neighborhood association, 19% are members of a Mardi Gras Krewe, and 13% are members of a social aid and pleasure club.

# Overview of Results

## TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND TRANSPARENCY

Respondents of the survey rated their trust in local government at 4.2 on a scale of 1-10, with 0 being not at all and 10 complete trust. Although worrisome, this is not surprising, as New Orleanians have a historically perceived the government as corrupt and mistrust in local officials. Big Easy Budget Game users also expressed support for more robust processes that foster government transparency along with civic engagement.

## A MEANINGFUL INVESTMENT IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Overall, users dedicated 26.5% more funding to the Sustainable Communities results area when compared to the 2019 adopted operating budget. Every department that falls under this category represented a significant funding increase except for the Department of Sanitation.



The Mayor's Office of Community Development represents the largest percent increase under this results area, due to the low amount of general fund resources that this department receives. Users chose to allocate \$14 million to this department— funds that they could have used to solve a number of other problems facing the city. In addition to investments directly in affordable housing, users also gave additional funding to Safety and Permits (a 51.8% increase), the Law Department (a 100% increase), and the City Planning Commission (a 233% increase).

This investment in affordable housing, blight reduction, and regulation by hundreds of New Orleanians is a clear vote for more and better affordable housing options at a time when many New Orleanians are feeling pushed or priced out of their communities.

## IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS WITH CITY GOVERNMENT SECTORS

Throughout the Big Easy Budget Game users allocated more money to departments that included a path for strengthening relationships with aspects of the city government.



Users supplied an increase of 150% to Civil Service which focuses on city employees and therefore facilitates easier and more effective interactions with city government for New Orleans residents. When compared to the 2019 adopted budget the Office of the Independent Police Monitor represents a 800% increase in funding. This department specifically works with the community and the New Orleans Police Department to build trust. The Office of the Inspector General/Ethics Review Board represented an increase of 69.3%. These results have been consistent over several years of data from the Big Easy Budget Game, and show that residents value transparency and accountability in local government.

These funding decisions by hundreds of New Orleanians communicate the need for both effective and accountable government which in turn builds trust between City Hall and the people of New Orleans.

## REDUCING OUR PUBLIC SAFETY EXPENSES



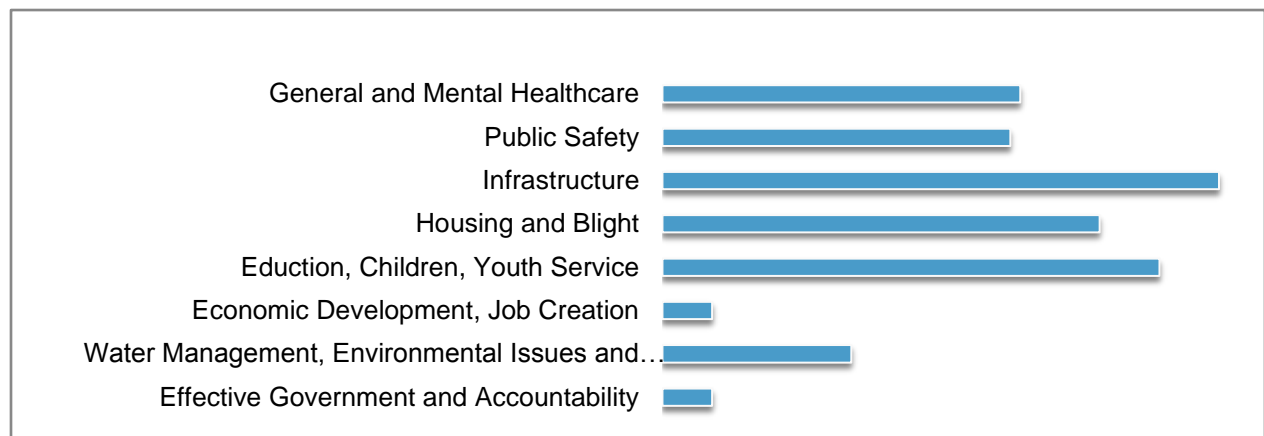
In almost every instance, users chose to reduce funding for departments related to public safety. The New Orleans Police Department, the department that receives the largest amount of funding from both the administration and our users, saw a 19.6% decrease from users. The New Orleans Fire Department budget was reduced 12.9%, the District Attorney 19.4%, and the Sheriff 23%—the largest cut to any departmental budget in the game. Overall, the public safety results area saw a 9.2% reduction from the 2019 adopted budget.

It should be noted that within the public safety results area, some departments did see increases—the Health Department (35.3%), the Coroner’s Office (104%), and the Youth Study Center (100%) are all offices that offer mental health services, screenings, or determinations to constituents. Anecdotally, mental health care programming was one of the areas most asked after by users.

## FUNDING PREFERENCES

When asked directly about their priorities for funding in the city, 22% of Big Easy Budget Game Players positioned infrastructure at the top, mentioning specifically the repair and maintenance of streets. The second most mentioned area residents wish would receive more funding is education, opportunities for youth, and recreation (20%); issues of affordable housing and blight were third (18%), tied at 14% are public safety and general and mental health care, water management, environmental issues and sanitation (largely recycling) (8%), and economic development, job creation, and government transparency (2%).

When asked directly which departments users felt received too much funding, 59% of respondents listed public safety, most commonly the District Attorney, police or prison. Other areas that users identified as overfunded included administrative offices (24%), other city services such as sanitation or health (11%), tourism (5%), and a frustration that what money we have is not used effectively (2%).



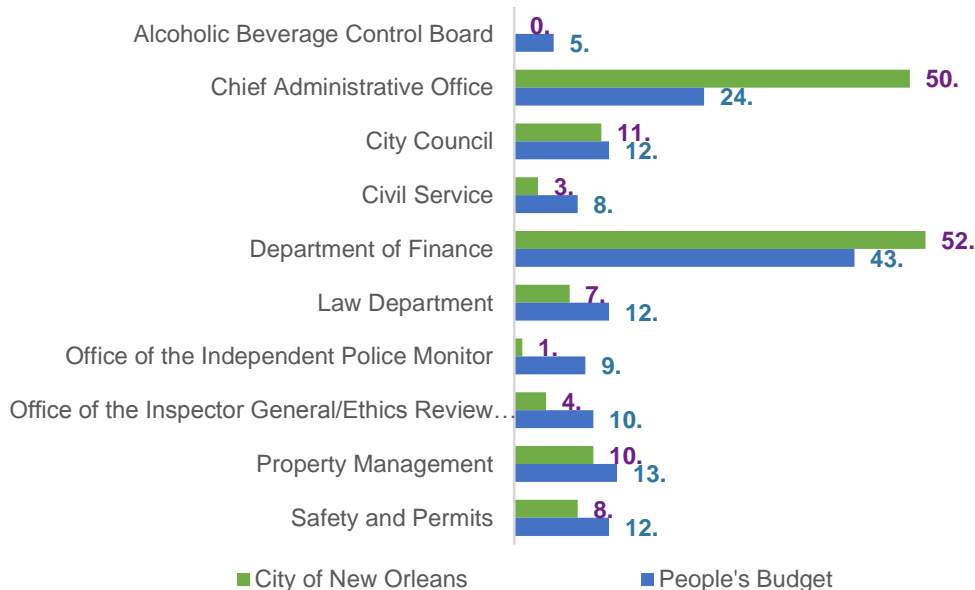
## Spending Priorities by Results Area

Results areas are general areas of spending as defined by the City of New Orleans as a part of the Budgeting for Outcomes process. These results areas do not represent actual funds or departments in city government, but are used as a way of organizing and characterizing spending. In order to provide an analogous look at resident spending priorities and to help users play through the Big Easy Budget Game, the site was designed in keeping with a very similar structure. Mayor Cantrell’s administration has announced a “zero-based” budget system to replace the budgeting for outcomes system.

### OPEN AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

As defined by city government, this results area ensures sound fiscal management and transparency, promotes effective, customer-driven services and fosters active citizen engagement in city government. Overall, Big Easy Budget Game users allocated \$148 million to the results area compared to \$146 million in the 2020 proposed budget. This represents an **overall 1.3% decrease** in funding by users. In the 2019 adopted budget, this results area was assigned relatively the same funding, with an allocation of \$134 million.

### Budget Allocation for Open and Effective Government (Millions of US\$)



### **Alcoholic Beverage Control Board**

The Alcoholic Beverage Control Board received the smallest average funding amount from users at \$5 million. This is still a larger amount than the department typically receives; in the adopted 2019 operating budget, the department received only \$1,500. Funding for this department has oscillated throughout the years but has leveled off at \$1,500 since 2017. Users were not required to fund this department at all, given the small funding they typically receive and the relatively large (\$1 million) increments available to players.

One possible reason for the significant increase in spending is that many players felt the need to allocate some funding to this department, but were not able to break down those funds to increments small enough to be comparable. Users' responses may also reflect concern about the number and character of ABOs throughout the city.

### **Chief Administrative Office**

The Chief Administrative Office received an average of \$24 million from users, a **51% decrease** compared to the \$47 million the office received in the adopted 2019 budget. A possible reason for this substantial decrease could be an aversion to and disappointment in city government in general. Another possible explanation for this decrease is that the actual function of the department is difficult to quantify in real terms, even when described to users in person. In the 2020 proposed budget, this department was allocated even more funding: \$49,956,464.

### **City Council**

On average, users allocated an average of \$12 million to the New Orleans City Council. In the adopted 2019 budget, city council received \$11 million. Users' allocation is therefore very similar to the city budget allocation with only a **9.0% increase**. The budget game users on average allocated relatively the same amount that was given to the department in last year's city budget. The City Council funding remained flat at \$11 million in the 2020 proposed budget.

### **Civil Service**

The civil service department received an average of \$8 million from Big Easy Budget Game users, over twice what the department was allocated in the adopted 2019 budget, \$3.2 million. This translates into a **150% increase**. Users were only required to allocate \$1 million to civil service. This increase in funding may be a sign that New Orleanians want to see continued investment in city employees to make interaction with city government easier and more effective and/or the desire to see easier hiring for city positions, making more jobs available to more New Orleanians through the local government. The 2020 proposed budget remains very similar in funding at \$3.4 million.

**QUICK POLL – Users were asked if they would support a living wage of \$15 an hour to all city employees and contractors. 91% of respondents said they do support the wage, and 9% responded no.**

## Department of Finance

The Department of Finance received an average of \$43 million from users, making it the most funded administrative department in city government and the third most funded department overall. It is important to note that users were required to allocate at least \$28 million to the department.

Despite this relatively high level of funding by users, this is a **14% decrease** from the 2019 adopted budget which allocated \$50,281,274. Some possible reasons for the game user decrease in funding to the Department of Finance could be that average residents see much more tangible, pressing needs in their communities that they would rather see funded, or a general lack of prioritization for investment in long term financial health. This funding decrease by users to the Department of Finance comes at a time when the city has taken specific steps to invest in paying off old debts and ensuring better overall financial health.

**QUICK POLL –Users were asked if money generated from the tourism and hospitality industries should be used to fund programs that directly benefit workers in tourism and service industries and culture workers, such as affordable housing, transportation, healthcare, and childcare. 100% of respondents replied yes, with some highlighting transportation as a priority.**

## Law Department

On average, the Law Department received \$12 million from users. This is a **100% increase** when compared to the 2019 adopted budget which allocated \$6 million to the department. This increase in the allocation by users could be due to a desire to have more fairness and representation that is associated with law in general. For 2020, this department has a minimum allocation of \$4 million. Users may be indicating support for more cases to be adjudicated by the Law Department, such as trying issues of blight or illegal short term rentals.

## Office of the Independent Police Monitor

The Office of the Independent Police Monitor, the department that works with the community and New Orleans Police Department to build trust, received an average of \$9 million from users, even though they were not required to fund this department at all. This represents a **800% increase** than the 2019 adopted budget allocation of \$1,123,186. A possible reason for this increase could be the great need for better relationships between police and citizens both nationally and specifically in New Orleans. In the 2012-proposed budget, this office received \$1,154,971 in funding.

## Office of the Inspector General/Ethics Review Board

The Office of the Inspector General received an average of \$10 million from users, a **69.3% increase** from the \$3,860,951 allocated in the 2019 adopted budget. Users were required to allocate \$2 million to this department, showing a general commitment to additional funding from users. The increased funding could signal support in the community for a strong inspector general who can enforce accountability in government. The 2020 proposed budget allocation for this office is slightly larger than before, at \$4,300,061.

### **Property Management**

Property management received an average of \$13 million from users, a **30% increase** from the \$10 million allocated in the adopted 2019 budget. Users were only required to allocate \$4 million to the department. The additional funding for the department could signal that residents want to see better investment and maintenance of city owned properties. For 2020, this department has been proposed to receive a similar amount as the previous year.

**QUICK POLL –Users were asked to assume the city could obtain a fair price for the Municipal Yacht Harbor facilities, if they would support selling it to a private entity and using the money for sewer, water and other infrastructure repairs. Users responded 36% no, 45% responded yes, and 18% responded that they needed more information before reaching a decision.**

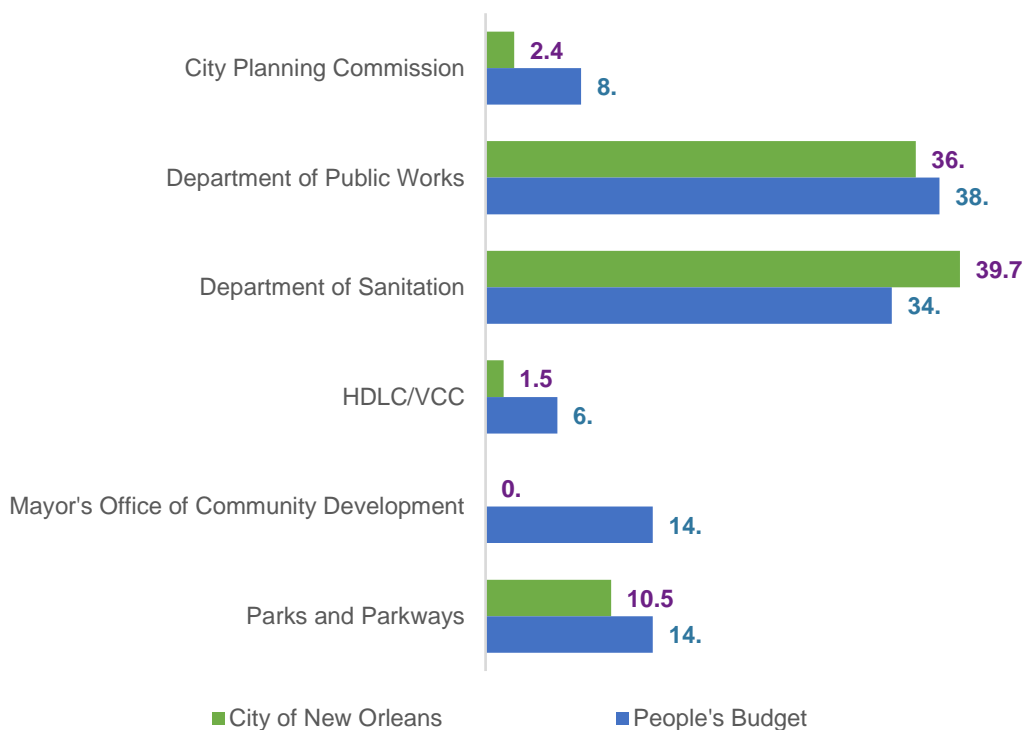
### **Safety and Permits**

On average, safety and permits received \$12 million from users, a **51.8% increase** over the \$7,963,720 funded in the 2019 adopted budget. Users were only required to allocate \$3 million to Safety and Permits. Additional funding for this department may indicate that users want to see more code enforcement on blighted properties, increased Efficiency at One Stop Shop, and/or better regulation of taxis. Safety and Permits is also involved with flood plain regulations, which may be a priority for many residents. The proposed budget for 2020 has increased the funding for this department to \$8.5 million.

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

As defined by the city, this results area supports sustainable communities that integrate quality housing, transportation, schools, commercial development, energy efficiency, parks and green space, flood protection and cultural assets. On average, users of the Big Easy Budget Game allocated \$114 million to this results area whereas the 2019 adopted budget funded this area with \$90.1 million. This represents an **overall 26.5% increase** in funding. In the proposed budget for 2020, this area is set to receive \$90.5 million, representing just a slight increase in funding from the previous year.

### Budget Allocation for Sustainable Communities (Millions of US\$)



#### City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission received an average of \$8 million from users, a **233% increase** over the allocated funding for the department in the adopted 2019 budget which was \$2.4 million. Users were required to allocate only \$1 million to this department. The significant increase in funding to City Planning Commission from residents may signal the desire for more comprehensive, thoughtful city planning techniques, such as better water management to reduce flooding or increased resident participation in the planning process in neighborhoods. Another possible reason for the funding increase is the desire for the commission to find solutions to the present housing and short term rental crisis. In the 2020 proposed budget, this commission is set to receive \$2,439,320, relatively similar funding from last year.



**QUICK POLL – Users were asked if developers should be required to provide community benefits such as affordable housing or water management when receiving public funds for their projects. Most respondents supported developers being required to provide community benefits with 91% of game users responding yes and 9% of users responding no.**

### **Department of Public Works**

The Department of Public Works received an average of \$38 million from users, almost twice the required minimum funding level of \$20 million and an **increase of 17.2%** from the 2019 adopted budget, which allocated \$36 million. Residents and the administration both agree that we need to do more to fix the infrastructure of New Orleans. One of the most widespread issues that players of the Big Easy Budget Game want to address is fixing the potholes that plague the city's streets. This increase in funding is likely due to the widespread agreement that streets need to be repaired. For 2020, this department was allocated \$36 million in the proposed budget, a flat amount from the previous year.

### **Department of Sanitation**

On average, residents allocated \$34 million to the Department of Sanitation. This is an **8.2% decrease** from the \$39,739,504 million allocated in the adopted 2019 budget. A possible explanation for the user decrease of funding is a collective feeling of using their allotted city dollars for other areas that affect residents in a larger way. This could also allude to residents not facing any pressing issues from this department, opening up options for other choices of allocation. In the 2020 proposed budget, this department was assigned an almost identical amount of funding at \$39,765,413.

**QUICK POLL – A quick poll under this department asks users if they would support residential trash pick up one day a week if it saved the city a significant amount of money. If so, what would they support spending that money on? 54% of respondents supported spending those savings on repairs to the water and drainage system, 18% supported using the savings for street repairs, 18% did not support one day a week trash pick up, and 9% supported adding glass to the curbside recycling program.**

### **Historic District Landmarks Commission/Vieux Carre Commission**

The Historic District Landmarks Commission and Vieux Carre Commission were combined for the purpose of the Big Easy Budget Game because of their relatively small general fund allocations and the similarities between their work. On average, users allocated \$6 million to these two departments as a whole. In the adopted budget for 2019, the Historic District Landmarks Commission received \$993,417 and the Vieux Carre Commission was allocated \$529,063 for a combined allocation of just over \$1.5 million.

User's allocation translates to a significant **increase of 300%** in funding to these departments, although they were not required to allocate any funds to these departments. This may be interpreted as a desired investment in the city's historic infrastructure— mirroring a similar increase in infrastructure investment seen in the Department of Public Works, as an investment in our tourism market through our historic architecture, or as a call for better code enforcement in

historic districts. This could also suggest an emotional attachment to the city's unique history along with simply tourism-focused priorities. Both of these departments together received \$1,464,463 in funding in the 2020 proposed budget.

### **Mayor's Office of Community Development**

Users allocated an average of \$14 million to the Mayor's Office of Community Development, a division of the Mayor's Office that's responsible for fighting blight and the creation and upkeep of affordable housing in New Orleans. Users were not required to allocate any funds to this department, as this division received only no money from the general fund in the 2019 adopted budget. The vast majority of funding for this department comes from the federal government, specifically the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In the 2020 proposed budget, the city will continue to fund this department with state and federal funding, and will not contribute from the general fund.

Because issues of affordable housing have been front and center in New Orleans in recent years, we wanted to give residents the chance to weigh in by separating this division from the rest of the Mayor's Office. Users' increase is in line with affordable housing as a top priority for likely voters in New Orleans, as reported in a 2017 survey by Enterprise Community Partners Inc. Survey participants ranked affordable housing as the second most important issue for the City to focus on, behind Public Safety/Crime and ahead of other issues such as Flood Control, Jobs and Economy and Infrastructure.

Another likely reason for this immense increase in user spending compared to the city budget is the desperate need for a solution to the wide-spread blight in New Orleans. Multiple surveys report that at least 20% of New Orleans properties are blighted, creating a large problem for citizens. There is no other department that directly addresses blight and affordable housing in the Big Easy Budget Game. Another reason for the vast increase could be users treating this as a department rather than a division, therefore allocating more money to it. It could also be more appealing since the description of responsibilities is more specific.

**QUICK POLL – Users were asked if they would support doubling the millage that currently funds the Neighborhood Housing Improvement Fund from 1 to 2 mils to bring in roughly \$6 million/year, up from the current \$3 million/year. Seven percent of users responded no and 93% of users responded yes.**

### **Parks and Parkways**

Users allocated an average of \$14 million to the Department of Parks and Parkways, the department responsible for maintaining green space such as neutral grounds and public right of ways in New Orleans. Users were only required to allocate \$4 million to this department, showing an average three-fold investment in public green space over the lowest funding option.

This **34.6% increase** in funding over the \$10,404,882 allocated in the adopted 2019 budget compliments similar spending by users on property management expenses. Users could also be indicating support for expanding the uses of our green spaces by funding more water management practices in flood prone neutral grounds, such as the inclusion of bioswales or rain gardens, and/or making better use of city-owned land under the purview of Parks and Parkways.

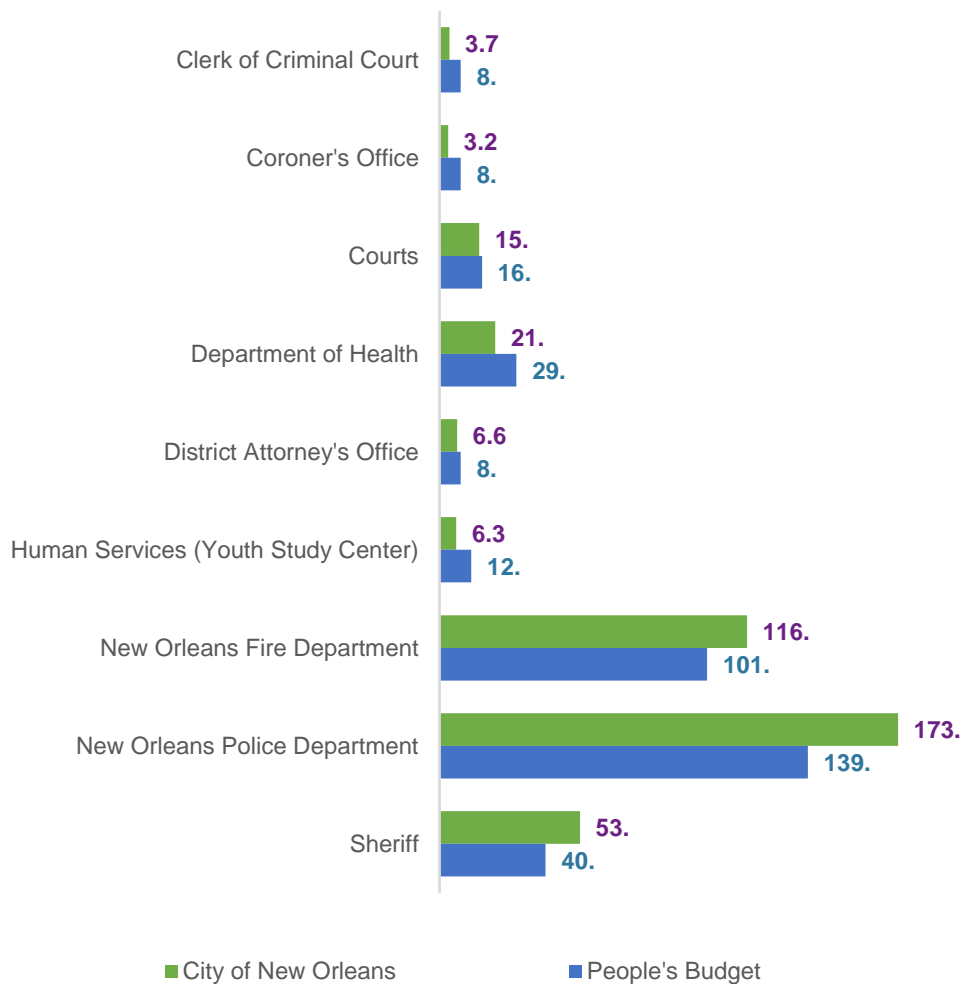
The funding for this department in the 2020 proposed budget is similar to the 2019 allocation at just over \$10.5 million.

**QUICK POLL – Users were asked if they would support an increase to the Parks and Parkways budget if it mean that more neutral grounds could be designed to trap and store more water during heavy rains. Seventy-eight percent of respondents replied yes, 14% needed more information, and 7% responded no.**

## PUBLIC SAFETY

As defined by the city, departments under the Public Safety results area include police, fire, EMS, the Sheriff's Office, courts, and other departments that ensure New Orleans is safe. Overall, Big Easy Budget Game users allocated \$361 million to the Public Safety results area. Comparatively, the adopted 2019 budget allocated \$397.8 million. This represents an **overall 9.2% decrease** in funding. However, this does not mean that New Orleanians want to spend less on keeping the city safe. As will be noted in each department's section, user's allocated less funding on traditional means of safety, while focusing on alternative approaches, such as mental health and support. In the 2020 proposed city budget, this results area received additional funding compared to the previous year, with an allocation of \$404.6 million.

### Budget Allocation for Public Safety (Millions of US\$)



### **Clerk of Criminal Court**

The Clerk of Criminal Court received an average of \$8 million from users, a **59.4% increase** over the \$3,726,330 million allocated in the 2019 adopted budget. The increased allocation to the Clerk of Court may be in response to the Clerk's public demands for additional staff and funding over the years, or an interest in an efficient court system and appropriate handling of evidence in criminal cases. The funding for the Clerk of Court rose slightly in the proposed 2020 budget to \$4 million.

### **Coroner's Office**

On average, the Coroner's Office received \$8 million from users, even though they were only required to allocate \$1 million to this department. The **104% increase** over the 2019 funding of \$3.2 million may signify support for the recent improvements made to the Coroner's Office, for better handling of remains after death in the case of a crime, and/or for some of the Coroner's lesser known responsibilities such as rape kit testing or mental health screenings. It is a good signal that the proposed budget for 2020 has assigned a very similar funding amount to the office.

One of the more common questions asked by users while playing the game was where they could find mental health care in the budget, and many were surprised to find forensic testing such as the handling of rape kits under the Coroner. Because one of the initial goals of the Big Easy Budget Game was to educate residents about how city government works, it is not surprising to see additional funding for an office that provides more duties than residents may have originally been aware of.

### **Courts**

All courts that receive general fund dollars were combined for the purpose of the Big Easy Budget Game. These include Juvenile Court, First City Court, Civil Court, Municipal Court, Traffic Court, Criminal District Court and the Judicial Retirement Fund, a pension plan no longer offered but continuing to pay out to retired judges and their widow/ers. Though the courts were consolidated, users can view specific funding for each court, as well as whether they receive funding from other sources such as the state.

On average, users allocated \$16 million to the court system. This is a small **decrease of 10%** from the 2019 budget which allotted \$17.9 million. This indicates that, on average, users gave the department roughly the same of what was shown as being received the previous year. In 2020 court funding will remain largely unfunded.

### **Department of Health**

On average, users allocated \$29 million to the Department of Health, a **35.3% increase** from the 2019 general fund allocation of \$21.4 million. In the 2020 proposed budget, the funding for this department is slightly higher at \$22.7 million.

Echoing priorities seen in the Coroner's Office funding, many users wanted to invest in mental health care, access to health care for children, and programs to support vulnerable populations such as the homeless. Health education resources could also be a reason for inflated funding. Additional funding may also be a desire for shorter 911 response times, as addressed by the

administration through changes to the Orleans Parish Communications District, or the 911 dispatch center.

### **District Attorney's Office**

On average, users allocated \$8 million to the District Attorney's Office. This represents a **19.4% decrease** over the adopted 2019 funding of \$6.7 million. Users were required to allocate \$3 million to this department. This is the first year in several years that users have chosen to cut the District Attorney's budget, possibly because of recent negative headlines about the DA's use of illegal subpoenas or possibly because users hope to see prosecution funding more in line with funding for indigent defense. This office was assigned \$6,678,029 in the 2020 proposed budget.

### **Human Services (Youth Study Center)**

On average, users allocated \$12 million to the Youth Study Center, called the Department of Human Services. The 2019 adopted budget allocated \$6,374,611, showing users allocated almost a **100% increase**. The center will receive \$7.2 million in the 2020 proposed budget.

This funding choice by residents may signal a desire to keep juvenile offenders out of Orleans Parish Prison, where 15-year old Jaquin Thomas committed suicide in may and violence among adult inmates is common. This could also offer an allusion towards more rehabilitative services rather than punishment. It is also possible that the titles such as Human Services and Youth Study Center do not accurately portray to some users the actual function of the center. A description of the center's function was included with the department profile.

### **New Orleans Fire Department**

The New Orleans Fire Department received the second largest average allocation from users at \$101 million. Users chose to spend under the \$116 million received in 2019. Specifically, the user allocation showcases an **12.9% decrease** in funding. In the 2020 proposed budget, the Fire Department received \$118 million.

The Big Easy Budget Game required a minimum allocation of \$80 million to the New Orleans Fire Department partly to fund the pension fund—a court mandated cost. The Committee for a Better New Orleans felt it was important for users to understand how much of our general fund is already mandated by pensions and consent decrees before actual spending may begin.

It is possible that users felt the minimum number was high enough, and opted not to give as much additional funding to the New Orleans Fire Department as other departments. Some users may have disagreed with the pension ruling and expressed that through their allocation. It is also possible that users do not prioritize fire safety and preparedness as much as other issues facing their communities.

### **New Orleans Police Department**

The New Orleans Police Department received the largest average allocation from users at \$139 million. Users chose to spend less than the \$173,366,314 of funding received in 2019. This represents a **19.6% decrease** in spending.

While federal consent decree funding is mandatory, and the administration and police leaders have long sought to grow our police force, it seems that to a small degree the additional funding for NOPD is out of step with resident spending priorities in relation to spending on the whole. Although the New Orleans Police Department still seems to be a major aspect of the budget, considering it is the most-funded, it seems as though residents are trying to communicate a focus on other approaches through this decrease in funding. The choice to spend less on police could also be related to the mounting tension between police forces and citizens both nationally and in New Orleans. However, the Police Department's funding is likely to increase considerably, as it was allocated \$175,401,302 in the 2020 proposed budget.

### **Sheriff**

On average, the Sheriff's Office received \$40 million from users. This represents a **23% decrease** in spending on this department from the 2019 budget, which allocated \$53,188,976. The 2020 proposed budget allocated the same amount of money to this office.

The Big Easy Budget Game did clarify to users that the Sheriff's office no longer received funding on a per diem, or per inmate, basis. The minimum amount of funding for the Sheriff was \$28 million as a way of enforcing the funding of the federal consent decree. While users were required to give a fairly substantial amount of money—roughly the average operating budget for the prison before the consent decree was funded in full—average funding does not reflect the full investment made into the prison. Most likely, the already-high mandatory spending amount did not encourage users to allocate significant amounts of additional funding to the prison. Also likely, many users did not want to give significant amounts of funding to a prison many in our city feel is too large, too violent, and too ineffective. A general sense of distrust for our prison system may have contributed to the largest decrease in spending shown by users in the process.

## CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

As defined by the city, departments under Children and Families promote health and well-being of youth and families by ensuring that educational, economic, health and recreational programming opportunities are available for all. Overall, Big Easy Budget Game users allocated \$25 million to this results area whereas the city budget of 2019 allocated \$3,099,534. This represents an **overall 733% increase** in spending, though this inflated number is largely due to the fact that the New Orleans Recreation Department does not receive funding directly from the general fund but from a dedicated tax source.

### Budget Allocation for Children and Families (Millions of US\$)



#### **Mosquito Termite and Rodent Control Board**

On average, users allocated \$7 million to the Mosquito Termite and Rodent Control Board. This is a **133% increase** over the 2019 spending of \$2,999,534. Users were not required to allocate any funding to this department. The increase may be due to concerns about the Zika and West Nile Viruses affecting other cities and countries in tropical climates, desires for pests to be better controlled in residential areas, or because in the English version the MTRCB appears as the first department in the game. In the 2020 proposed budget, this board was assigned \$3,099,534.

#### **New Orleans Recreation Development Committee**

On average, users allocated \$18 million to the New Orleans Recreation Development Committee. Users were not required to allocate any funding to this department. Although NORD does not receive any funding directly from the general fund, it does receive funding directly from a dedicated tax source. This was the first year that NORD was broken out of the Department of Miscellaneous budget to be weighed in on directly by users. Because users regularly seek ways to fund opportunities for youth and families, the Committee for a Better New Orleans thought it would be appropriate to open this department to users to see what results may be.

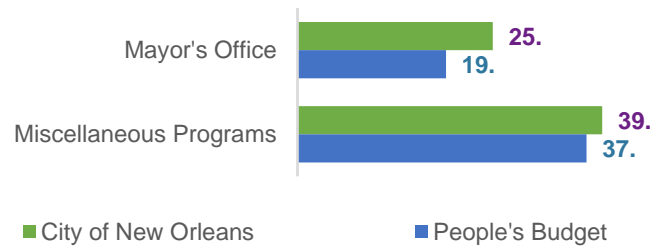
**QUICK POLL – Users were asked if they felt the city would benefit from the creation of a master plan and annual evaluation for parks and green spaces. 95% of users responded yes.**



## OTHER OFFICES AND SERVICES

Though not a results area as identified through the city budget process, we have identified two departments which allocate money fairly evenly across all results areas and have listed them as Other Offices and Services. Overall, Big Easy Budget Game users supplied \$56 million to fund this results area. The 2019 adopted budget allocated \$64 million. This is an **overall 12.5% decrease** in funding based on users. However, the 2020 proposed budget increased the combined funding of these two departments to \$69.6 million.

### Budget Allocation for Other Offices and Services (Millions of US\$)



#### Mayor's Office

For the purposes of the Big Easy Budget Game, several departments that fall under the Mayor's Office have been combined. Included here are the traditional functions of the Mayor's Office: communications directors, staff, budget staff, etc., as well as the Department of Homeland Security, Criminal Justice Coordination, and the Office of Resilience & Sustainability. This also includes the new departments of Transportation and Children and Families.

On average, the Mayor's Office received \$19 million from users. This funding is slightly under the \$25 million the Mayor's Office received from the general fund last year, not including the Office of Community Development which was separately evaluated. This represents a difference of a **24% decrease**. This decrease could be due to other areas being more important in citizens' communities. It could also be the sentiment that we heard commonly working with people on the budget game that the mayor already has enough money and won't use it wisely even if they receive more, though it is stressed that the mayor does not have sole discretion over this budget.

However, the 2020 proposed budget allocated significantly more funds to the Mayor's Office at \$26,952,620.

**QUICK POLL –Users were asked if they supported additional funding to fully staff the new Office of Transportation to create better connectivity and mobility options. 93% said yes, 7% responded no. Since the time the quick poll was published, the office has been fully staffed.**

## **Miscellaneous Programs**

Miscellaneous Programs includes funding for any organization or service not mandated by the city charter. While many residents may feel this could be an easy place to cut money, the Committee for a Better New Orleans worked to directly call attention to the many important quality of life areas of the budget that are included in Miscellaneous Programs, such as the Public Defender's Office, the Council on Aging, and the Arts Council. In the department profile, divisions of the department were shown and explained.

On average, residents dedicated \$37 million to Miscellaneous Programs. This is slightly less than the department's \$39,057,359 allocation in 2019, and it represents a **5% decrease**. Users were required to spend \$25 million in Miscellaneous Programs, much of which was required funding for the New Orleans Police Department Consent Decree. The lower level of funding for this department may have been a function of the seemingly trivial title of Miscellaneous Programs, or an indication that residents want to see less focus on the programs housed under this budget area. In the 2020 proposed budget this department received \$42,773,436.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the data supplied by hundreds of New Orleanians from across the city and from a variety of ages, races, and socioeconomic statuses does not significantly contradict the 2020 city budget. In many ways, the administration and the people of New Orleans have said with their money that they want the same things: a better quality of life. In the differences that do exist, much can be learned about the daily life of communities across New Orleans. This quantitative look at the needs of our neighborhoods is another way to approach solving the issues facing our city with limited funding.

This most basic common goal is exactly the reason that New Orleanians deserve a greater voice in their city budget. While the Landrieu administration’s town hall budget meetings and the Cantrell administration’s telephone town halls are a first step towards involving citizens in spending decisions, they did not fully serve that function, qualitatively or quantitatively. With better education about how city government works and how it spends money, residents can make better, more informed decisions, empowering local leaders to do what is best for our communities.

The Committee for a Better New Orleans is proud to present this data from the people of New Orleans, and looks forward to further outreach to the community to provide even more insight into the needs of residents in the next fiscal year. We welcome all partners, public and private, to join us in making sure that the People’s Budget is the first step to a more meaningful public input process into our city budget.

