

A Closer Look at Mayor Bass' Proposed City Budget

2023-24

Proposed City

Budget



BLOG

A Closer Look at Mayor Bass' Proposed 2023-24 City of LA Budget

By InclusiveAction • April 28, 2023

Budgets give us an opportunity to dive deep into our priorities and values as a city. City of LA departments have worked on their proposed budgets for months now, and Mayor Bass announced her [2023-24 proposed city budget](#) last week, highlighting budget priorities, including homelessness and policing—issues that she campaigned on.

However, a \$13B budget for nearly 40 City departments serving 4 million LA residents can hardly be summarized in one [press release](#). In this blog post, we highlight two notable changes and trends in this budget that give us a glimpse into the City government's priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. We also share an overarching recommendation to create more transparent budgets and make the data usable.

(If you are itching to do your own analysis, here's the [City's Open Budget raw data](#) and the [tabular departmental budget summary data on our GitHub](#)!)

#1 Who Gets the Short End of the Stick

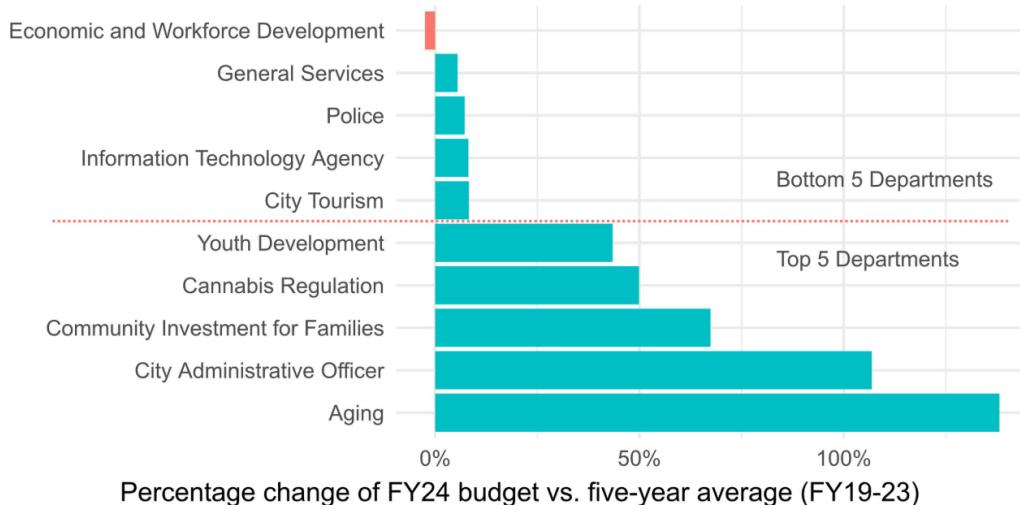


Fig 1. Relative change of FY24 budget compared to the average of the previous five years, showing the top and bottom five departments.
Note: Some new departments do not have budgets for all five years, and in those cases, the average was generated using budget from available years.

Mayor Bass's homelessness priority is clearly reflected in the FY24 proposed budget. The Community Investment for Families Department, which houses the homelessness prevention program, has one of the largest budget increases (**45%** compared to FY23 and **67%** compared to the previous two years). However, policing, the Mayor's other priority, actually ranked third from the bottom in terms of the budget percentage increase by comparing the department's FY24 proposed budget to the average of the previous five years. At the same time, given the behemoth police budget, the small percentage increase still translated to an increase of \$18M—the equivalent of the total budget of Civil, Human Rights and Equity, Emergency Management, Public Accountability, Neighborhood Empowerment, and Youth Development, combined! In contrast, the Economic and Workforce Development (EWD) budget is proposed to have the largest decrease compared to both FY23 and the average of the previous five years. The department is also the only one with a negative relative budget change compared to the previous years. This raises questions for us about why this happened and what implications it will have for the underserved populations Inclusive Action serves.

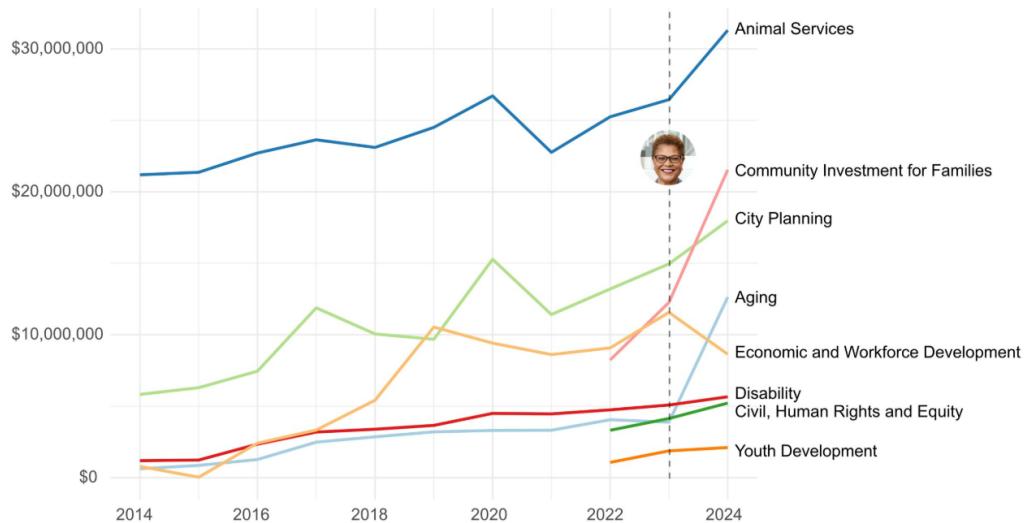


Fig 2. General Fund appropriation by selected service-oriented departments

The General Fund is usually used at the discretion of the city. Analyzing the fund gives us an even clearer look at the City's priorities. Out of the eight selected **service-oriented** departments, only Economic and Workforce Development's budget dipped in FY24. And the Department of Aging surpassed EWD's general fund appropriation for the first time. The graph excludes Police, Fire, Neighborhood Empowerment, and Cultural Affairs. The first two are proposed to appropriate \$1,826M and \$824M from the General Fund in FY24, 60 times larger than the highest funded department on the current graph. The latter two don't appropriate from the general fund. With [LA's aging population](#) and [climate change](#), we can understand some of the investments. Still, we continue to ask how these decisions will affect the local economy, small businesses, and entrepreneurs.

#2 Budget Cuts with the Potential to Hurt the Local Economy

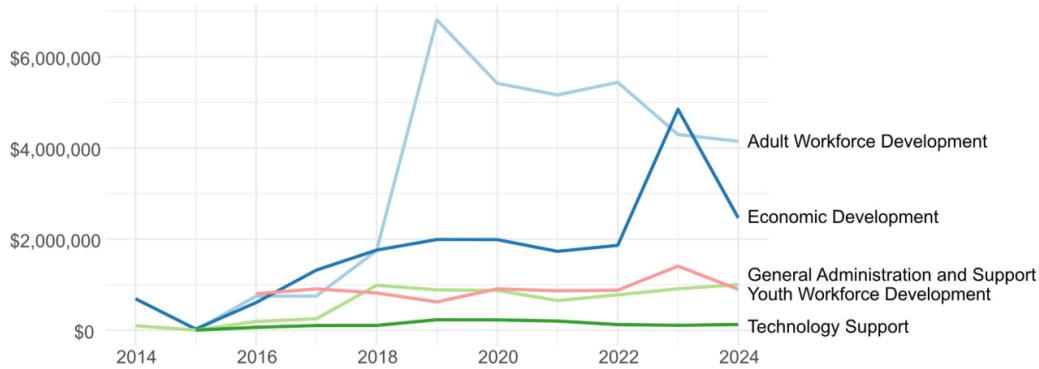


Fig 3. General fund appropriation by programs at the Department of Economic and Workforce Development

Taking a closer look at the programs at EWD—the department with the largest proposed relative budget cut in FY2024—the Adult Workforce Development program budget had a significant increase in 2019 but has been decreasing ever since; FY24 proposed budget for the program is 40% lower than the 2019 level. The Economic Development Program FY24 proposed budget has been cut in half from the previous year's elevated budget. Department-wide, there's a \$3M budget cut from the general fund, corresponding to the \$3M decrease in contractual "economic development and job creation strategy consulting services". This raises further questions for us. We recommend that **the city and the department outline the future service changes related to this budget cut and its impact on low-income micro-entrepreneurs and small businesses**.

#3 Let There Be (transparent and accessible) Data!

In an effort to understand the budget and its implications for our work and the people we serve, we noticed that it isn't easy, but it could be! Each City department has multiple programs, and each program houses a variety of services. Program descriptions are written at a high level in the proposed budget documents, and budgets for existing services tied to specific outcomes or deliverables are not shown. Only the aggregate changes to the services are shown. We understand that including granular information at the service level could make the already thousand-page-long budget blue books denser. But who reads a book anyway? We are committed to advocating for more accessible and usable budget data. For starters, the City's Open Budget [interactive interface](#) needs to be advertised (why is it not linked to on the [City's main budget landing page?](#)), and the budget needs to be disaggregated down service level with clear service descriptions.

In the current budget blue books (and white books), disparate service functions are lumped together where disaggregation will be useful. For example, the Bureau of Street Services' \$3.8M sidewalk vending enforcement and outreach budget change are lumped together. And we know from previous analysis that enforcement uses most of that budget. For example, from [sidewalk vending program budget data](#) from 2019-2020, enforcement cost \$5.4M while outreach received \$0.35M.

What's next for the City budget? The City Council will wrap up the budget hearing process by **May 4th; Monday's hearing** will be a big one (see below). If you plan to join the hearings and need support digging into specific departments and programs, we can support you! Send your questions to chihwei@inclusiveaction.org.

At Inclusive Action, we work alongside communities to push for transformative, systemic change in pursuit of [economic justice](#). And because our budgets reflect our values and Angelos deserves an active voice in how this money is used, we will continue advocating for transparent and inclusive budgeting!

For those Interested:

Check out the [Budget hearing schedule](#)

5/1 - Disability, Aging, Community Investment for Families, Animal Services, City Clerk, Zoo, General Services, Library, Cultural Affairs, Civil + Human Rights and Equity, Cannabis Regulation, Economic Workforce and Development, Emergency Management, City Tourism, Neighborhood Empowerment, Youth Development, Office of Public Accountability, El Pueblo

Other resources:

- [Mayor office press release](#)
- [LA Controller tweets](#)
- [LA Controller visualization tool](#)
- [LA Controller's tutorial on how to read city budget](#)
- [Councilwoman Hernandez's video on budget hearing process](#)
- [Unrig LA tweets](#)
- [LA Open Budget Portal](#)
- [LA budget data \(used for the analysis above\)](#)
- [LA departmental budget trend interactive visualization](#)
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2900 E Cesar E Chavez
Los Angeles CA 90033

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