

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
CALIFORNIA

BOARD OF
NEIGHBORHOOD
COMMISSIONERS

LEONARD SHAFFER
PRESIDENT

KEREN WATERS
VICE PRESIDENT

DEBBIE WEHBE
GINA FIELDS
MAGGIE QUIROZ
RANDELL ERVING
DOUGLAS EPPERHART

Email:
commission@empowerla.org



Karen Bass
MAYOR

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS
EMPOWER LA
Department of
NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT

20th FLOOR, CITY HALL
200 NORTH SPRING STREET
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

TELEPHONE (213) 978-1551
TOLL-FREE 3-1-1
E-MAIL: EmpowerLA@lacity.org

CARMEN CHANG
GENERAL MANAGER

ERICK MUÑOZ
COMMISSION EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

www.EmpowerLA.org

April 21, 2026

Honorable Councilmember Katy Yaroslavsky, Chair
Members of the Budget and Finance Committee
Office of the City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**SUBJECT: COUNCIL FILE 26-0600 - DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD
EMPOWERMENT FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027 BUDGET REQUEST**

Honorable Members:

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (EmpowerLA) expresses our sincere gratitude for your leadership during the current fiscal challenges facing the City. The Mayor's Office and the Office of the City Administrative Officer (CAO) have been supportive partners in this process, providing steady guidance as we navigate another tough budget cycle.

We have reviewed Mayor Bass's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 and truly appreciate the collaborative spirit demonstrated in addressing our highest priority needs. We are deeply grateful for the support in adding funding and continuing resolution authority for two Project Coordinator positions to provide essential field support for the Neighborhood Councils (NCs). This investment for field staff support is critical, ensuring the continued employment of these existing staff members and enabling us to maintain a minimum acceptable level of service. We also thank the Mayor's Office for proposing \$128,000 to administer the 2027 Neighborhood Council Elections Outreach Campaign.

If the Mayor's proposal is approved as presented, the Department would spend the majority of Fiscal Year 26-27 transitioning our data and support structure from paid applications and utilize any City-provided applications, including the Google Suite platform, AI translation services, and case management applications. These efforts would maximize our ability to provide support to the NC system and board members given our limited funding.

I. Significant Budget Changes

The Department continues to face significant budget challenges in FY 2026-27, including severe reductions in both staffing capacity and operational expense accounts. These cuts directly impact our ability to meet new federal and state compliance mandates, execute critical NC elections outreach, and sustain essential support for the Neighborhood Council system.

1. Significant loss of staffing capacity - The Department faces a critical reduction in operational capacity due to the permanent loss of nine positions over the last two years, including two Project Coordinator positions deleted in FY 25-26 after the incumbents transferred. This overall reduction has significantly strained both direct NC support and essential administrative functions. The loss of a Senior Management Analyst position, who would have provided early intervention in board member disputes and mediation, is contributing to escalating tensions as staff attempt to address conflicts both at and outside of NC meetings. Furthermore, the loss of a Systems Analyst has increased demands on the IT support structure, which is crucial for managing website ADA compliance concerns, transitioning data and case management needs to low-to-no-cost application platforms, and working with ArcGIS software to update boundary maps based on bylaw changes.
2. The Department is confronting a further reduction of \$26,500 in its expense accounts, which compounds the financial strain from over \$140,000 in previous cuts made to meet citywide fiscal restraint exercises. This new reduction necessitates critical operational changes, including the abandonment of our primary database system (QuickBase) and the loss of paid licenses for essential services such as the Cornerstone platform (used for mandatory compliance trainings), and a significant number of staff licenses for Zoom and Canva. Consequently, Neighborhood Councils will also be required to reimburse the Department for any requested Zoom and Canva licenses. To mitigate these losses, we are actively transitioning our processes to City-approved, low-cost applications like AppSheet and Google Classroom; however, this shift requires a significant investment of time and resources to fully develop and implement these new systems.
3. Increased need for ADA compliance support - The DOJ's recent Interim Final Rule has officially extended the federal compliance deadline for the City of Los Angeles, providing a much-needed window to ensure our NC system is fully accessible. While the 2024 Final Rule originally mandated a deadline of April 24, 2026, the Department of Justice has now pushed this requirement for large public entities to April 26, 2027. This extension acknowledges the significant resource constraints and technical challenges—such as the limitations of automated remediation tools—that have made the initial timeline untenable for many agencies. For our 99 Neighborhood Councils, which are governed by unpaid board members who volunteer and dedicate their time managing diverse digital platforms, the 2026–27 fiscal year represents a critical period for hands-on remediation and training.

4. NC Elections 2026-27 - A limited investment in outreach resources challenges our department's need to modernize engagement and incorporate lessons learned from previous NC Election cycles. One of the critical challenges is the inability to execute a broad, citywide awareness campaign that targets hard-to-reach communities, including youth, renters, non-English speakers, and those who are not already engaged with their local Neighborhood Council. We will not be able to meet engagement expectations around digital engagement that is equitable, accessible, consistent, high-quality, and strategic. Reliance on organic engagement will be challenging due to its declining reach. There exists a large, continued need for language accessibility and culturally responsive outreach – a one-size-fits-all approach will not be successful. The current budget proposal limits translation, community partnerships, and advertising, which results in entire communities being uninformed about NC Elections. The outcome will not only lead to lower turnout but also less representation. As we prepare for the 2028 Olympics & Paralympic Games, it is important to grow our civic engagement with Angelenos across the City. Joining Neighborhood Councils will help foster and recruit leaders and volunteers for the big events coming our way.
5. The coordination and execution of the annual Congress of Neighborhoods and Budget Day events face significant fiscal challenges in the FY 26/27 Proposed Budget due to citywide financial constraints. EmpowerLA manages special fund accounts for these critical events, which are funded exclusively by voluntary contributions from individual NCs. These popular events, coordinated with the Congress of Neighborhoods Planning Committee and the Neighborhood Council Budget Advocates, provide education and engagement on civic leadership and the City's budget, rely heavily on these contributions. Due to recent fiscal adjustments, the maximum individual NC appropriation account was reduced from \$32,000 to \$25,000, leading to a substantial drop in overall contributions for the Department's special funds. This decrease in dedicated event funding presents a major challenge to the successful execution of both the Congress of Neighborhoods and Budget Day in the coming fiscal year, impacting the department's ability to support grassroots democracy and community-wide engagement.
6. The implementation of Senate Bill 707 (SB 707) introduces a significant new operational demand by stipulating that the 72-hour public accessibility clock for agendas begins only when the agenda is successfully published on the City's Early Notification System (ENS), not upon submission. This strict adherence to Brown Act requirements mandates that Department staff must be available outside of normal business hours to ensure compliance for meetings held early in the week. Specifically, the Department is now required to arrange for one person to work four hours on Saturday and another person to work four hours on Sunday to process and digitally post agendas. This necessary operational shift represents a permanent change and a new demand on existing personnel resources beyond the traditional Monday-Friday work week.

II. Requested Structural and Position Changes

The Department is not requesting any structural changes or changes to position authorities for the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget cycle. We are grateful to the Mayor's Office for the 2 positions which were included in the proposal and will do our best to maintain an acceptable level of service with our current staffing levels.

III. Requested Restorations of Services or Programs

The Department respectfully requests the following considerations for increased funding in the amount of \$402,000 to better serve the Neighborhood Council system and meet the critical federal and state compliance demands arising from recent legislative updates. While we are unable to provide funding offsets due to our limited, "bare bones" operational budget, we remain open to creative solutions and partnerships with other City agencies to provide necessary support wherever applicable.

1. EmpowerLA requests \$150,000 in Contractual Services (Account 3040) to address a critical, newly identified resource gap essential for bringing the 99 Neighborhood Councils (NCs) into compliance with the Department of Justice's (DOJ) ADA Title II regulations. While the original deadline for large public entities was April 2026, an Interim Final Rule published on April 20, 2026, has officially extended the compliance date for the City of Los Angeles to April 26, 2027. This extension acknowledges that the DOJ previously overestimated the advancement of technology; current tools, including generative AI, cannot yet reliably automate the remediation of inaccessible content at scale, leaving entities like the NC boards with a significant manual and technical burden that requires dedicated expertise.

This funding is a necessary enhancement to our core work plan, as Neighborhood Councils are public entities legally required to ensure all digital services—including websites, mobile apps, and "conventional electronic documents" like PDFs—conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards. These funds will procure specialized technical experts to remediate thousands of digital assets, including NC websites, social media accounts, and archive-heavy agendas and minutes, ensuring they are usable for residents who rely on assistive technologies. Although EmpowerLA cannot identify a funding offset due to our extremely limited budget, we are open to supporting an equivalent funding increase for the Department on Disability or the Information Technology Agency, provided those resources are specifically earmarked to support the unique technical remediation and training needs of the Neighborhood Council system.

2. EmpowerLA requests \$222,000 in additional NC Election Outreach funding. This additional \$222,000 investment will amplify our inclusive outreach campaign and strengthen the foundation of grassroots democracy across our city. Additional Salaries-As Needed staffing (\$65K) will ensure we can execute an effective engagement program to meet Angelenos where they are, including door-to-door canvassing, community events, business and partner stewardship, and

- neighborhood-specific communications. The increased funding (\$22K) for printing and binding supports the design and production of postcards, flyers, door hangers, and signage to reach those without regular digital access. This is reinforced by our contractual services, where additional funding (\$82,500) would ensure accessibility through translation and culturally responsive digital advertising. Additional Office and Administrative funding (\$27,500) will support website development that is informational, inclusive, and accessible. Administrative support for election-related materials ensures effective coordination and alignment with the Office of the City Clerk and other departments that support our NC Elections. Incorporating focused communication services (\$25K) as part of our outreach campaign will enable consistent messaging with trusted community networks and partners, and local media. This key investment will further our NC elections awareness and reinforce the importance of civic participation.
3. EmpowerLA requests \$20,000 in restoration funding for the Office & Administrative (Account 6010) account to ensure the successful execution of the annual Congress of Neighborhoods and Budget Day events. This funding would restore a historical departmental contribution—cut from our baseline operational funds about five years ago due to fiscal reduction exercises—by allocating \$10,000 to support each event's administrative costs, such as LAPD security services and table/chair rentals. The restoration is critical because both events, which rely entirely on voluntary contributions from Neighborhood Councils (NCs) through special fund accounts, have seen a significant drop in support following the recent reduction of individual NC appropriation accounts from \$32,000 to \$25,000.
 4. EmpowerLA requests \$10,000 in As-Needed Funding (Account 1070) to secure part-time staff for mandatory weekend agenda posting shifts. The strict adherence to Senate Bill 707 (SB 707) and Brown Act requirements mandates the Department to arrange for staff to work four hours on both Saturday and Sunday in order to process and digitally post agendas to the Early Notification System (ENS) for compliance for meetings held early in the week. This new, permanent operational demand on existing, overstretched full-time staff capacity, which requires them to regularly work evenings on the weekend, will inevitably lead to morale issues, burnout, and staff turnover.

IV. Organization Chart:

The Department is comprised of four primary divisions: Civic Leadership (\$25,529 in contractual services), which focuses on empowering board members through training in governance and civil discourse; Policy, Government, & Innovation (\$0 in contractual services), which serves as a strategic nexus for advancing legislative priorities and fostering a data-driven culture; Awareness & Engagement (\$67,500 in contractual services), dedicated to connecting the community and government through inclusive engagement and conducting Citywide Neighborhood Council elections; and General Administration and Support (\$7,618 in contractual services), which provides essential executive, budget, personnel, information technology, and operational support services.

V. Reorganize and Realign Personnel

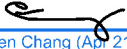
The Department has already implemented significant reorganizations in response to the City's financial challenges in FY25-26. This included the consolidation of the Policy & Government Relations Division with the Innovation Division to create the new Policy, Government, and Innovation Division. Additionally, the approach of the Neighborhood Empowerment Advocates (NEAs) was reworked following the loss of five Project Coordinator positions in the current and prior years; NEAs now focus primarily on capacity support, training, and outreach, with attendance at Neighborhood Council meetings occurring as is operationally feasible.

Thank you for your continued support of EmpowerLA's mission to support the Neighborhood Council system.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carmen Chang

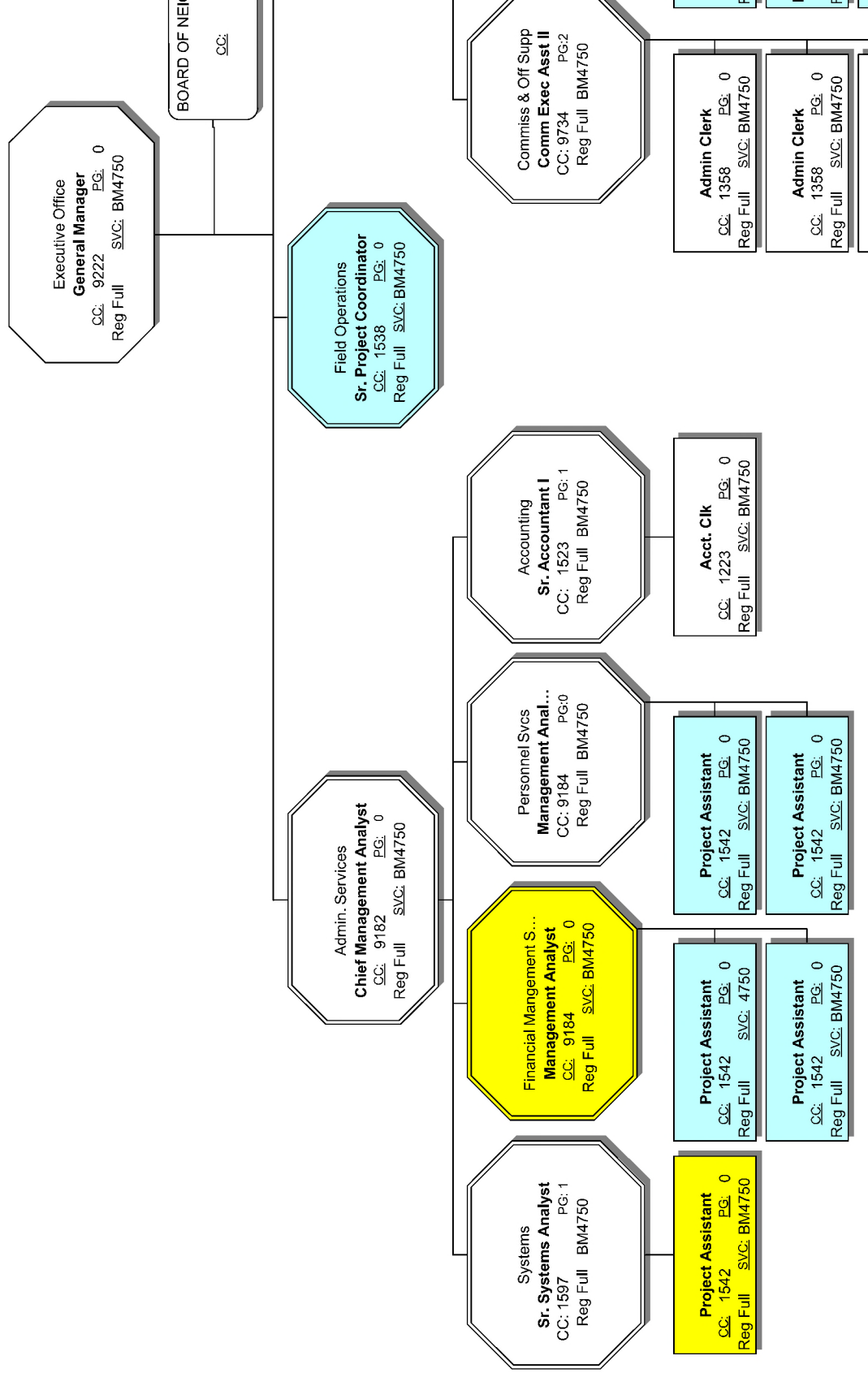
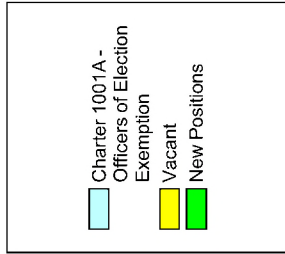
GENERAL MANAGER


Carmen Chang (Apr 21, 2026 09:25:05 PDT)



DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL CHART FISCAL YEAR 2026-27

99 Certified Neighborhood Councils








Proposed Org Chart FY 26-27 4-20-26-combined

Final Audit Report

2026-04-21

Created:	2026-04-21
By:	Kevin Argueta (kevin.argueta@lacity.org)
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAA2bRML94tTDVswodoqFjJfg7JhMOQ5SZA

"Proposed Org Chart FY 26-27 4-20-26-combined" History

-  Document created by Kevin Argueta (kevin.argueta@lacity.org)
2026-04-21 - 4:09:17 PM GMT
-  Document emailed to Carmen Chang (carmen.chang@lacity.org) for signature
2026-04-21 - 4:09:24 PM GMT
-  Email viewed by Carmen Chang (carmen.chang@lacity.org)
2026-04-21 - 4:23:27 PM GMT
-  Document e-signed by Carmen Chang (carmen.chang@lacity.org)
Signature Date: 2026-04-21 - 4:25:05 PM GMT - Time Source: server
-  Agreement completed.
2026-04-21 - 4:25:05 PM GMT