June 10, 2024

Council File: 22-0985
Council District: All
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**SUBJECT: C.F. NO. 22-0985 - SINGLE USER INTERFACE SYSTEM / PLATFORM / YOUTH RELATED SERVICES AND PROGRAMMING**

**SUMMARY**

On November 9, 2022, pursuant to Council File No. 22-0985 (Rodriguez-Krekorian), the City Council instructed the Youth Development Department (YDD), with assistance from the Information Technology Agency (ITA) and all City departments and offices that have youth programming and services, to report on recommendations for establishing a platform or single-user interface system to connect all departments' youth-related services and programs. The YDD conducted an assessment of City departments to assess the technologies and practices they have in place to provide information on City youth services to the public. The YDD used these findings to define the main components and estimated costs of a new, fully integrated platform to connect City departments, allow youth to register directly for programs, and track data and outcomes in one single portal. Overall, it would take three years, over nine new positions, and $4,800,000 to $6,900,000 to create and maintain a new single-user platform for youth services. Given the City's current financial challenges and future uncertainties, the YDD recommends using existing staff and resources to expand and improve its existing Earn Learn Play website, rather than allocate funding for a new and costly system at this time. Since 2021, Earn Learn Play has served as YDD's tool to centralize information on City youth programs, services, and locations for the public to find near them.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the City Council **NOTE** and **FILE** this report, as it is for informational purposes only.

## BACKGROUND

In Council File No. 22-0985, the City Council identified the need to consider options for a web-based platform to connect local youth to the City's youth-related programming, such as youth services, activities, and events provided by City departments. Each department currently has its own data platforms and websites designed and maintained individually to meet each department's needs. Departments also use their own staff, funding sources, and practices to maintain their online access points. The YDD maintains and updates the Earn Learn Play website (EarnLearnPlay.lacity.gov), which is the City's largest public repository of information on active City youth programs, services, and locations.

### Earn Learn Play

Since the summer of 2021, the Earn Learn Play website has enabled people to enter their addresses and find youth services within a certain mile radius of their homes. Earn Learn Play is powered by a standard and easy-to-use ArcGIS/mapping application that pinpoints the location of youth services in the city. It does not directly connect the existing data platforms of departments nor incorporate a single-user registration system (like Angeleno Account), as these components have cost estimates of millions of dollars. In prior years, the YDD collected youth program information for Earn Learn Play directly from key youth-serving Departments, such as the Economic and Workforce Development Department, Community Investment for Families Department, Department of Recreation and Parks, Public Library, and the Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development. Last year, from May 1, 2023, to April 30, 2024, Google Analytics indicated that the Earn Learn Play website had 9,694 users from the city. Approximately 81% of users access Earn Lean Play on mobile and 19% on desktop computers and other devices.

In 2024, the YDD is expanding the Earn Learn Play site to include additional departments, such as Animal Services, Civil + Human Rights and Equity, City Clerk, City Tourism, Cultural Affairs, Fire, Housing, Neighborhood Empowerment, Personnel, Police, Transportation, Zoo, as well as the Board of Public Works, Housing Authority, Port of L.A., and World Airports. The website will now yield results for over 2,400 youth services, activities, and sites of the departments and their contracted service providers.

The YDD plans to leverage its current staff and $22,000 in existing contractual services funding to continue improving the Earn Learn Play site. The YDD's staff will continue updating the website year-round and adding more program information from more departments. Staff also plans to increase the website's search functionality and accessibility, add user feedback options, and include translations for at least Tier 1 languages of the Citywide Language Access Plan.

## SINGLE-USER CENTRAL INFORMATION PLATFORM

For informational purposes only, the YDD describes below the main components and estimated costs of a new and fully integrated single-user platform for youth services. Such a platform could connect the systems of youth-serving City departments, allow youth to register for programs directly on the platform, and track data and outcomes over time in one single place. The description of the components is based on the assessment of City departments' current technologies and practices. Overall, it would take three years, over nine new positions, and more than $4.8 million for new technology and contractual services to create and maintain a new single-user platform for youth services, as described in sections F through H of this report.

## A. Assessment of Departments

In the fall of 2023, YDD and consultant K+H Consulting Group (KH) conducted an assessment with the support of City departments, youth, parents, and service providers to develop recommendations regarding establishing a single-user interface platform (Central Information Platform or CIP) to connect all youth services and programs of City departments. The assessment had four core objectives: (1) reviewing existing web-based platforms City departments use to connect young Angelenos to City programs, services, and events; (2) proposing the specifications of a tailored single-user system that pulls youth program data from existing different platforms of City departments to create one streamlined and user-friendly online hub for young people; (3) advising on the proposed roles and responsibilities of various City departments regarding the creation and management of the Central Information Platform; and (4) identifying the estimated costs associated with the technology, staffing, and other resources necessary to build and maintain the CIP.

## B. Assessment Findings

1. Build on Existing Strengths and Similar Efforts
Current City efforts and practices can serve as models for developing and managing a CIP tailored for youth services and programming. Examples of practices implemented by some departments include going beyond Google Translate to develop language-inclusive platforms with easy navigation for non-English speakers; integrating mapping tools that allow users to locate services and programming within geographic proximity easily; integrating search tools that functionally enable users to filter by geography, age group, type of service and programming, and availability; developing a comprehensive systematic search query approach that assists inexperienced users relevant discover services and programming; designing an engaging interface that effectively integrates visuals, media, and narratives relevant to users; engaging users with strategic formatting and succinct text; integrating a single-user account system to allow users to access different services across departments using a single account; and integrating call center support to provide users additional assistance in learning about and accessing services and programs.

2. Inconsistent User Experiences across Disparate Entry Points
Exploratory analysis, focus groups, and user surveys reveal inconsistencies in the user experience across these entry points. Each department has different capacity (e.g., funding, staff, knowledge) in developing and managing a website or platform that adequately engages youth, guardians, and service providers. Departments have different strategies and priorities when showcasing youth services and programming on their respective platforms. This existing system of disparate entry points ultimately does not effectively connect users to the appropriate services and programming they need. Many departments are siloed or have limited partnerships, making it difficult for users to learn and access relevant services. Furthermore, overall challenges include complicated interface designs that increase task time for users and consequently reduce user engagement and satisfaction (i.e., "too many clicks"); missing and outdated information about youth services and programming, including broken links; language inaccessibility, including lack of effective translation tools and convoluted text filled with jargon; and ineffective search and filter tools to help discoverability of relevant youth services.

3. Opportunities to Increase Service Uptake by Improving Overall Accessibility and Awareness
To create an effective CIP, assessment findings recommend the following key objectives to ensure inclusive and equitable outcomes:

i. <u>Engaging Interface Design</u>**:** The CIP interface must be designed intentionally with simple but engaging content. The CIP should incorporate a mix of colorful images, short videos, and relevant visuals and use simplified and succinct language.

ii. <u>Language Inclusive</u>: At a minimum, the CIP should prominently integrate Google Translate as a tool on each page. For Tier 1 threshold languages, the CIP should use non-AI translation services to develop a language-inclusive site and check its accuracy.

iii. <u>Digital Equity</u>: To be more inclusive of users with varying digital access and skills, the CIP should be mobile-friendly and supported by a call center (e.g., MyLA311) that could assist potential users facing digital challenges.

iv. <u>Comprehensive Database</u>: The CIP should rely on a comprehensive database of youth service and programming, similar to other aggregate models (e.g., Earn Learn Play).

v. <u>Powerful but Simple Tools</u>**:** The CIP should include various tools for finding relevant services and programming, including a comprehensive search function and a mapping tool.

vi. <u>User Feedback</u>**:** The CIP platform should make it easy for users to give feedback on the platform itself, including when reporting a bug or making recommendations to make it more accessible.

vii. <u>Single-User Registration System</u>**:** The CIP should eventually have an optional registration system that allows users to apply, access, and request youth services. Given existing resources and the goal of streamlining City services, using Angeleno Account is highly recommended for the CIP.

viii. <u>Collective Ownership</u>**:** This CIP will allow improved partnerships with community stakeholders and departments serving youth, especially to raise awareness about lesser-known and under-enrolled programs and services.

<u>4. Departmental Buy-in and Sustainable Funding Key to Overcoming Anticipated Barriers</u>
There were significant concerns voiced by department stakeholders that developing and managing a CIP would not be feasible without adequate departmental buy-in and funding. Stakeholders highlighted that similar past efforts (e.g., City Data Portal, City calendar) to work across departments to aggregate opportunities and resources failed to be relevant when departments did not consistently contribute to the database. Further, funding is a large concern given the capacity issues that departments face, including understaffing in key departments that would help develop and manage the technical side of the platform. To address these concerns, the City will need to allocate the necessary funding to the CIP and institutionalize an Advisory Committee of engaged representatives from participating departments.

## C. Strengths of Existing User Systems and Interfaces

An analysis of departments' websites, supported by user input from focus groups, shows which key functions, tools, and designs help increase awareness of programs and services among new and existing users. These practices can serve as foundations for a CIP specific to youth services and programming.

i. <u>Earn Learn Play</u>: The Earn Learn Play platform serves as a model for CIP in many ways because of its strength in engaging guardians and youth through its interactive mapping tool. This mapping tool allows users to input their address and find youth services and programming near the inputted address and by type of opportunity.

ii. <u>Angeleno Account</u>: Through the Angeleno Account, the City provides "a single, private and secure account to access City services." It aims to improve the user experience by eliminating the need for multiple usernames and passwords across different City departments, agencies, and offices that provide services. The current interface allows users to easily navigate to the appropriate website through clearly marked tiles and

succinct descriptions. Users with an Angeleno Account can easily register and request services using the same username and password across participating departments, agencies, and offices. Regarding data sharing, Angeleno Account does not keep the user information; it accesses the information from other systems maintained by partners. However, an important issue that needs to be considered is user privacy and security concerns. Stakeholders and focus group participants repeatedly highlighted how requiring registration to access resources can be a disincentive. Developing and implementing a single-user system for a CIP should consider account registration as an option for users to reduce redundant tasks.

iii.   MyLA311**:** Participating users and focus group participants uplifted the need for a call center to support CIP efforts, particularly for users with less digital experience and greater challenges navigating the online platform. MyLA311 is a prime model and possible partner in integrating a call center for support. It was created to serve as a single-entry point for non-emergency services and to connect people to the city via their preferred communication channel. The call center operated by MyLA311 can potentially serve as a partner that assists YDD in responding to calls and requests. Currently, MyLA311 supports service requests for ten different departments and is governed collaboratively via stakeholder input. Given YDD's limited capacity (e.g., staff), this option may be the most feasible with more complex calls and requests rerouted to YDD (i.e., screened for relevance).

## D. Weaknesses of Existing User Systems and Interfaces

i.   Inaccessibility of Existing Platforms Impacts Vulnerable Angelenos: Findings indicate that many existing department platforms are not fully accessible, especially to the most vulnerable Angelenos. Issues regarding accessibility include disparate access to reliable internet and computing devices, nonexistent or inadequate language translation options, comprehensibility of website jargon, and unclear eligibility requirements:

ii.   Persistent Challenges in Navigating Websites: Findings indicate that focus group participants experienced several challenges navigating departments' platforms. These challenges include poorly organized websites that lack clarity on their youth services and programming, inadequate navigational tools, and inaccurate information.

iii.   Tools Designed to Help Users Either Too Complex or Underdeveloped: Findings indicate that existing tools with steep learning curves can diminish engagement and raise equity concerns about access, particularly for those with more limited digital skills. Websites and their embedded tools must balance functionality and complexity with ease of use and simplicity so that users can quickly and intuitively find the information they need.

iv.   Relevant Youth Services and Programming Not Easily Discoverable: Findings indicate that youth services and programming are not easily discoverable on many existing platforms. Participating users consistently shared that the search yielded limited, generally unhelpful results. In other instances, department websites redirected participants to separate, standalone websites that contained information about their youth programming.

v.   Departments are Disconnected and Siloed: Focus groups with internal stakeholders indicate current efforts to raise awareness and access to youth service and programming are disconnected and siloed. Users need to conduct time-consuming research across the many distinct City departments' websites to understand which services are available and which organizations facilitate them. The current systems/databases used by

departments to house youth-related events are not capable of sharing that data with other systems.

## E. Opportunities to Improve Access and Engagement

i.   <u>An Integrated System to Improve Existing Efforts and Reach Shared Goals</u>: Assessment participants agreed that a youth-focused CIP could be an effective tool to improve accessibility and uptake for the public and collaboration across departments. Additionally, this centralized platform can allow for a more comprehensive analysis of data and metrics on city-wide youth services and programming.

ii.  <u>Building Better Relationships Among Departments Serving Youths:</u>
In developing a CIP and sharing information, departments can strengthen their working relationships and become more aware of each other's portfolios of youth services.

iii. <u>Improve Public Perception of Local Government as a Resource for Youth Services</u>: Improving awareness and access to youth services and programming offered through the City will positively shape public perception of the City's role in serving the public interest and increase the overall well-being of Angelenos.

iv.  <u>Addressing a Growing Need For A Mobile-Friendly Platform:</u> A mobile-friendly option for the platform is important to ensure equitable access to youth service and programming. Research shows that "reliance on smartphones for online access is especially common among younger adults, lower-income Americans, and those with a high school education or less."[1]

## F. Recommended CIP Functionality

i.   <u>Prioritize Accessibility in Design Practices to Improve Engagement</u>: CIP accessibility should be pursued in various ways, especially web design, information organization, language accessibility, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

ii.  <u>Engage with Succinct Information, Interactive Media, and Relevant Narratives</u>: Focus groups and user surveys indicate that a CIP needs to be engaging without too much information to retain users' attention. In particular, it is key that online resources be visually engaging, utilize media in an instructive fashion, and communicate in simple language that is relevant to users.

iii. <u>Integrate a Comprehensive Search Tool and Searchable Database:</u> Assessment participants expressed interest in search functions, including commonly asked questions and the ability to filter searches based on criteria like location or age. These additional layers can reduce the overwhelming number of cluttered search results.

iv.  <u>Develop and Integrate Mapping Tools:</u> Similar to search tools, mapping tools with filter functionality help users more effectively and quickly identify relevant resources and where they would need to travel to access those services and programs.

v.   <u>Provide Account Registration as an Option in a Single-User Interface</u>: The assessment recommends that the CIP incorporate Angeleno Account as its single-user registration system to streamline access and reduce duplication of work for users. The CIP should

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[1] Pew Research Center. (2021, April 7). Mobile Technology Fact Sheet. Retrieved from
https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/?tabId=tab-d40cde3f-c455-4f0e-9be0-0aefcdaeee00

still retain a "check out as a guest" option to address some users' privacy and security concerns.

vi. <u>Integrate Functions that Allow Users to Provide Feedback:</u> The CIP should have clear options and tools for users to submit feedback, suggestions, questions, and comments. User feedback can improve the CIP by identifying services and programming that are not yet offered, barriers to access, bugs, and broken links.

vii. <u>Integrate Functions and Resources to Raise Awareness of Relevant Services:</u> Prominently spotlighting different youth services and programming on the CIP landing page, allowing users to sign up for monthly updates through electronic newsletters that highlight different youth services and testimonials, and using machine learning to provide users with suggested opportunities.

viii. <u>Ensure the CIP Is Mobile-Friendly</u>: With youth as the primary target audience, the CIP needs to be designed, coded, and promoted to function equally well on both mobile devices and computers.

ix. <u>Integrate Social Media Functions</u>: The CIP should integrate functionality that allows users to seamlessly share information with others about services and programming they find on the platform with their social media posts on sites like X/Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and others. The platform should also include functionality to share easily and quickly via email or text messaging.

x. <u>Develop and Integrate Resources Specifically for Guardians and Other Adults</u>: The CIP should have a parent/guardian resource page to help inform adults about how they can help their children or youth in their community access resources.

xi. <u>Partner with MyLA311 Call Center</u>: Besides YDD staff, 311 Call Center support staff could help answer inquiries about programs or application processes or refer calls to the appropriate City staff contact about specific programs and more detailed information.

## G. Recommended CPI Processes

i. <u>Develop and Integrate Iterative User Feedback</u>: YDD will continue to recruit youth and guardians of various backgrounds for further focus groups to gather feedback for ongoing process improvements and feature additions.

ii. <u>Institute an Advisory Committee and Memorandum of Understanding</u>: An advisory committee can play a strong role in breaking down silos between departments serving youth. This group can be central in helping to address the challenges of developing a complex platform, including providing guidance on the handling of large amounts of potentially sensitive data, the utilization of resource-intensive tools like geographic information systems, and solving problems that naturally emerge when developing a platform that pulls information from multiple, distinct sources. An Advisory Committee can also be an effective space to explore other options and alternatives to move the CIP forward, including collaborative approaches to funding and leveraging other resources. The advisory committee would likely need to establish a Memorandum of Understanding to solidify departments' agreed-upon responsibilities, their corresponding accountability measures, and data-sharing contributions and specifications.

iii. <u>Designate a Team Dedicated to Maintaining and Updating the CIP</u>: The platform will need a designated team responsible for working with participating departments to keep

the platform's information updated and accurate. This team will need to foster consistent, proactive communication to counteract barriers like staff turnover and ensure that CIP remains as useful as possible. At a minimum, this team would need to include YDD and ITA staff or IT contractors. It will most likely need to work closely with the Advisory Committee to ensure that other departments and their liaisons meet their roles and responsibilities.

iv. <u>Collaborate with Community Partners to Raise Awareness</u>: As a part of the implementation process, YDD will need to prepare training materials (e.g., videos) and regularly facilitate training on how to use the CIP for relevant department staff, community partners, and other community ambassadors. This hands-on community engagement is necessary as it engages youth and other potential users through trusted community partners.

v. <u>Establish a Process to Streamline Data and Metrics Sharing with Departments:</u> Given that the creation of a CIP will necessitate a large volume of data sharing between departments, the departments need to agree upon the data or metrics they will share, what processes they will use to share it (e.g., system integration), and how they will be maintained. The Angeleno Account is recommended to serve as a data and metric-sharing model. CIP's analytics would allow the City to better understand which youth services are underutilized, which youth populations are underserved, and which areas in the City lack appropriate services.

## H. Recommended Implementation

i. <u>Develop Alignment and Targets for Successful Implementation</u>: To increase the likelihood of a timely and effective CIP implementation, the YDD should establish and consistently review and revise roles and responsibilities, timelines, and updates with the Advisory Committee. The YDD would act as the secretariat to the Advisory Committee, facilitating meetings and conversations that will establish co-ownership of the development and management of the CIP.

ii. <u>Elicit Insights with a Request For Industry Comment (RFIC)</u>: Given the complexity of developing a CIP, including the option of integrating the departments' varying systems, the YDD, with advisory support from ITA, should develop and release a request for industry comment (RFIC). The RFIC would solicit input from businesses with extensive knowledge and experience building similar platforms. The CIP development would require YDD to contract with an outside vendor. The RFIC can help inform YDD on ideas and approaches to solve difficult development problems.

iii. <u>Develop and Roll Out CIP in Phases</u>: A CIP should be developed and implemented in three phases, considering development barriers related to project complexity, capacity, and interdepartmental buy-in. Developing and rolling out the CIP in phases would also allow appropriate user feedback to improve the platform while incrementally socializing its use among the public and departments.

    a. <u>Phase One: Develop and Release a Pilot CIP 1.0</u>: The first phase focuses on forming an Advisory Committee and developing key functionalities like a database of youth services and programs, a user-friendly interface, and search tools. Training resources can be established to improve access to the CIP among various stakeholders.

b. <u>Phase 2: Develop and Release CIP 2.0</u>: This second phase focuses on improvements based on user feedback and internal assessments. Key areas include addressing bugs, integrating advanced, user-friendly tools, and providing relevant service notifications. New features like an AI-powered recommendation system, personalized newsletters, and social sharing functions aim to boost user engagement. YDD would conduct ongoing user research through focus groups to ensure a positive user experience and address emerging problems. Training resources will also be updated, and trainers will be continuously trained to improve access to the CIP for all stakeholders.

c. <u>Phase 3: Develop and Release CIP 3.0</u>: The third phase focuses on a major system integration between the CIP and various departments. This complex and expensive process would require clear communication and collaboration between departments and the CIP team to ensure real-time data updates. Additionally, this phase would explore including youth services offered by external agencies and organizations. The YDD would continuously assess the feasibility of this plan, considering potential limitations like staffing shortages and funding issues. User research and training updates would also continue throughout this phase.

iv. <u>Evaluate CIP Development and Implementation</u>: The YDD and the Advisory Committee would establish a process and team, including outside experts and partners, to evaluate the development and management of the CIP to ensure continuous improvement of the CIP. The evaluation would be necessary before implementing any further actions beyond the three-year project timeline, including efforts to create a mobile app, an interdepartmental referral system, and gamifying the platform to encourage civic engagement among youth. The evaluation would also yield recommendations on improving and managing the CIP on an ongoing basis.

## I. COST IMPLICATIONS OF CIP DEVELOPMENT

### i. Project Complexity

The City's previous efforts to establish centralized or cooperative systems across departments have faced barriers that have, so far, been insurmountable. The City's web presence approach and strategy has been to delegate to each department the design and implementation of its own platforms. Retroactive efforts to consolidate or coordinate systems have been fraught with difficulty. As a result, the technical, administrative, and operational elements of establishing a CIP would be challenging and costly, given the complexity of the project and the desired functionality.

For a Citywide youth service and programming database, departments would need to integrate systems to ensure information is updated in real-time. City staff who participated in the assessment shared that this is difficult and time-consuming and would require departments to reallocate resources that may have been targeted to other priorities.

### ii. Data Gathered

Five of the 12 operating departments that received the survey responded. The most common data elements collected were a user's name, phone, and gender. The majority of users requested age, date of birth, and address. Beyond that, no consistency of information was required. Differences are attributable to the operational and regulatory

requirements of the departments, and the extent to which they use online platforms for registration, payment, or initial eligibility assessments. How to handle the different departmental needs and data consistency will be an issue to be addressed by the Advisory Committee and will significantly impact implementation costs.

### iii. Cost Estimates (Research and Technology)

KH researched City and County expenditures for similar IT efforts. Of crucial importance is an Application Programming Interface (API), which is a set of programming codes that queries data, parses responses, and sends instructions between one software platform and another. Other costs include licensing, training, implementation support, maintenance, and platform fees. The costs identified through the assessment are estimates, as they do not encompass the details of cost variables applied to these contracts and differ in tasks (e.g., developing versus enhancing):

Application Programming Interface
- Implementation training and support – $250,000
- Annual licensing – $45,000
- Additional hourly charges – $150

Cloud-based open data management platform
- Implementation training and support – $438,000
- Annual maintenance and platform costs – $110,000

Departmental Web Functionality
- Initial implementation – $200,000
- Implementation and upgrades – $1,300,000
- Annual license fees – $60,000

It would be prudent for the City to spend initial dollars researching the current structure of the City departmental web platforms, including a diagram of the data structures, and the platforms being used. This information will be valuable to potential vendors in a competitive service bid.

Exclusive of internal staffing costs, the current range of budget estimates for the first three years to build a new platform—rather than enhancements to existing platforms—based on the costs of similar projects and industry standards validated by experts is **$4,800,000 to $6,900,000.**

Year 1: $200,000
- Evaluation of current City platforms – $200,000

Year 2: $2,300,000 to $3,400,000
- Design and platform costs (e.g., labor) – $2,000,000 to 3,000,000
- Training implementation – $100,000
- Incremental interdepartmental costs associated with proprietary platforms – $200,000 to $300,000

Year 3: $2,300,000 to $3,300,000
- Design and platform costs (e.g., labor) – $2,000,000 to 3,000,000
- Further raining implementation – $100,000
- Licensing and user costs – $200,000

These estimates assume that the City would prioritize the implementation of the CIP with services and programming from the 12 identified departments. However, if YDD were to incorporate more departments, the costs are expected to increase substantially. If the City seeks to implement all functionality immediately, the cost estimates above will likely be understated.

iv.    **Cost Estimates (Staffing)**

All surveyed departments indicated the need for additional staffing to support the development and implementation of a CIP, including a database of youth services and programming. Just as each department's online platforms differ, the staffing and levels of expertise to build and maintain each department's website vary. From survey responses, the number of staff working on departmental web presence ranged from one to ten, and the number of Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) ranged from less than one to two.

The additional workload associated with this effort includes the management of the API implementation; YDD project management staff to support the Advisory Committee and coordinate department liaisons; ongoing CIP support to resolve technical issues; and staff to manage dedicated CIP Help Desk.

In summary, the assessment estimates that **3 - 4 additional FTEs for YDD for project management and oversight and 0.5-1.5 FTEs per participating department** are needed.

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