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April 22, 2025

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 25-0600 - DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD
EMPOWERMENT FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026 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 this tough budget cycle.

We have reviewed Mayor Bass's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 and would like to express our appreciation for the support to the Targeted Local Hire program (TLH). Recommending the regularization of 2 Administrative Clerks hired through TLH means the Department is better positioned to provide core services as frontline and customer service support to the board members of the Neighborhood Council (NC) system, as well as stakeholders and Angelenos. We are grateful to keep the Administrative Services Division at the current resources level. This division continues to be lean and we plan to elevate the level of infrastructure and service that will sustain NC operations in the coming years.

The Department agrees with the elimination of the 3 vacant positions (2 Regular Authority Neighborhood Empowerment Analysts and 1 Resolution Authority Senior Management Analyst I) and the significant recommended cuts to expense accounts due to the critical budget situation. The proposed elimination of 5 filled positions (1 Senior Project Coordinator (Director), and 4 Project Coordinators/NEAs) would pose significant challenges to the Department's current operational structure and affect our ability to provide core services to the NC System. We are open to considering additional

cuts to our expense accounts to preserve as many additional filled positions that might be feasible. We propose the following cuts to the Contractual Services Account: \$20,000 to Civic University, \$14,500 for QuickBase licenses, \$20,000 for Cornerstone licenses, and \$15,000 in Translation Services. If approved, the Department would spend the majority of Fiscal Year 25-26 transitioning our data and support structure from these paid applications and would utilize any City provided applications, including the Google Suite platform, AI translation services, and case management applications.

Top-line Core Services:

- A. Field Operations and Direct Neighborhood Council Support** - Every member of our current field staff performs field operations and direct NC support as core services in support of EmpowerLA's mission. Direct Neighborhood Council Support entails hands-on, day-to-day assistance to Neighborhood Councils by serving as facilitators, researchers, and connectors. This support helps NCs navigate City systems, promote civic participation, coordinate meetings and events, and ensure compliance with City policies. Staff offer guidance on board operations, provide technical and logistical support, help NCs engage with City Hall and community stakeholders, and foster collaboration across neighborhoods. This function is essential to empowering NCs to be effective, informed, and inclusive advocates for their communities.
- B. Civic Leadership Division** - Civic Leadership provides a learning roadmap to help board members obtain leadership skills to make positive contributions to their NC and community. These continuous onboardings, trainings, and sessions offered to newly elected and appointed NC members include topics such as the Brown Act, neighborhood and asset mapping, sharing challenges and best practices, outreach, event planning, and more. EmpowerLA hosts a centralized library of resources for all 1,800 NC board members.
- C. Policy & Government Relations Division** - This division advances a NC system legislative advocacy agenda in collaboration with the Mayor and City Council offices, Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (BONC), City departments, and other executive and legislative partners. The division oversees the Community Impact Statement (CIS) system (a powerful advocacy tool NCs use to weigh in and have a voice on pending legislation), shares regular legislative reports on pending City Council legislation to encourage NCs to submit CISs, supports BONC in the NC policy setting process, and administers the NC grievance portal.
- D. Awareness & Engagement Division** - Awareness & Engagement connects Angelenos and its residents to the NC system through direct public engagement programs, messaging campaigns, strategic community partnerships, civic participation, and NC elections. Primary functions include promoting engagement among NC boards and their constituents; connecting stakeholders across LA's diverse communities to their local NC, strengthening partnerships with City and governmental agencies, businesses, non-profits,

and academic institutions; and spearheading NC election outreach. This division's outreach strategies support underrepresented, densely populated, and hard-to-reach communities. By prioritizing these groups, we connect Angelenos to resources they need to gain full access to City services and actively participate in local governance.

E. Innovation Division - Innovation supports NC engagement with data-driven practices using publicly available research tools. Especially in tough fiscal times, this work fosters the culture of efficiency and creativity to inspire innovative approaches to influence decision-making at City Hall. This core service equips NCs with the tools and knowledge to engage communities effectively and advocate for local priorities using credible data and innovative practices. It strengthens NCs ability to function independently and efficiently, and supports long-term civic capacity building citywide.

II. Requested Alterations:

The Senior Project Coordinator (Director) position proposed for elimination serves a dual role in the department and provides critical leadership for a division that oversees a major area of core services. Each Director supervises a team of Neighborhood Empowerment Advocates (NEAs) that provides direct NC support in field operations, including NCs that enter into Exhaustive Efforts (requiring the majority of staff time), mediation to address board dynamics, and investigation of board members that violate BONC's Code of Conduct. Additionally, this position ensures their program-specific work aligns with departmental goals and contributes to interdepartmental and citywide coordination. Removing this role would place disproportionate strain on the remaining Directors, disrupt continuity, and reduce the Department's ability to respond proactively to community needs and challenges. The Department would lose a specialist in a significant area directly tied to our mission and objectives. Although the entirety of proposed eliminations to filled positions currently represents a 14% reduction in staffing levels, the loss of a Director additionally represents the elimination of 20% of the direct and programmatic services provided to the Neighborhood Councils.

NEAs are the primary connection between the Department and NCs. They provide direct support through onboarding and training, meeting facilitation, governance and compliance guidance, and outreach assistance. While the ideal staffing ratio is one NEA for every 5 NCs (supporting 110-120 board members), our current NEAs each support 8-9 NCs (176-198 board members), plus additional responsibilities tied to citywide initiatives (including Civic University, civic youth and women's leadership programs to develop the leadership pipeline, the Homelessness Liaison program, the Emergency Preparedness program, and outreach to underserved communities to ensure representation), NC alliances, and policy work. Reducing the NEA team to 9 staff members would raise the ratio to 11 NCs per NEA (supporting an average of 242 board members through onboarding, trainings, board retreats, monthly board meeting preparations, outreach, Exhaustive Efforts, mediating board dynamics, and addressing Code of Conduct violations), a level that is unsustainable. Eliminating 3 Project Coordinators and 1 Neighborhood

Empowerment Analyst would result in diminished NC service quality, reduced presence in communities, delayed support, and increased staff stress and burnout.

As a result, we cannot guarantee that NEAs will be able to consistently attend NC meetings and critical communication follow ups will be delayed. This not only disrupts NC operations and undermines the trust and relationships we have built with NC board members and stakeholders over time, but the field staff will not be able to conduct adequate outreach to encourage Angelenos and residents to participate in the NC system.

NCs experiencing board dynamic issues often require intensive staff attention and intervention. Without adequate staffing and less capacity to train, these complex situations consume a disproportionate share of resources, reducing our ability to serve other boards, support leadership development, and proactively prevent conflicts. A declining field presence also increases the City's liability, delaying our ability to proactively and effectively address disruptions and escalating disputes.

NEAs are also charged with building and developing programming that strengthens board leadership, fosters civic engagement, and supports the overall growth of the NC system. As staffing levels decrease, there will be significantly less time and fewer resources available to design and implement Civic Leadership programming. In addition, our ability to onboard and train new board members - a key component in sustaining effective, accountable NCs - will be undermined. Without dedicated staff to guide and support new members, we risk lower participation, weaker governance, and a loss of institutional knowledge that is vital to long-term board success.

Furthermore, with fewer NEAs, there is significantly less time for capacity building, cultivating relationships with communities and partner organizations, and conducting Awareness & Engagement outreach to engage new voices in the NC system, especially the youth, women, and those in low-income communities. We would need to further lean on Innovation's tools to identify the most efficient support, while acknowledging that many Angelenos traditionally marginalized will continue to be left out of participation. The long-term consequence is a weakened, less connected, and less representative and equitable system - the opposite of the Charter's vision.

Both NEA and Director positions are foundational to the success of the Neighborhood Council system. These roles directly impact our ability to provide consistent, equitable, and timely support to neighborhoods across Los Angeles. If funding is realized, we sincerely hope to retain these positions and contractual services to protect core services, staff effectiveness, and the long-term success of our engagement strategy. The General Manager hopes to engage the Budget and Finance Committee, as well as all City Councilmembers, for further discussion.

III. Organization Chart:

We have included versions of our organizational chart that include details on our current staffing and operational levels, versions that detail programs and operations handled within each division with adopted contracting dollars sections for BFY 2024-25, and also an organizational chart that reflects the impacts of the proposed budget.

IV. Reorganize and Realign Personnel

In light of potential reductions in staffing, the Department is preparing for a realignment of personnel and programs to maximize available staffing and resources. We are proposing the consolidation of Policy & Government Relations objectives with those of Innovation to create a renamed “Policy, Government, and Innovation Division.” Additionally, the Department will centralize the responsibilities of direct field support services into the Field Operations Division as a core service provider with a dedicated Director and NEAs to ensure uniformity and consistency of support services externally with NCs and internally across all divisions. The objective of this division will be to ensure that the Project Coordinator/NEAs’ customer service is of the highest quality. To further support these realignments, we propose to redistribute Project Coordinators/NEAs among the Directors to ensure balanced support to both the NCs and division program objectives outlined in the Charter. The reduced number of available Project Coordinators/NEAs means that Directors will be required to be more fully immersed in the day-to-day communications and support services to the NCs while also “wearing the dual hat” - fulfilling the mission critical objectives of their respective divisions. Although these proposed realignments move objectives and priorities between Director positions and their teams, we wish to clarify and emphasize the long standing collaborative work relationship between divisions. All divisions and NEAs (as well as the administrative services team) support the work of Field Operations, Civic Leadership, Policy & Government, Innovation, and Awareness & Engagement. These priorities and objectives to support the Neighborhood Council System and all board members are defined in the Charter, Article IX, Sections 900 and 901(a) through 901(g).

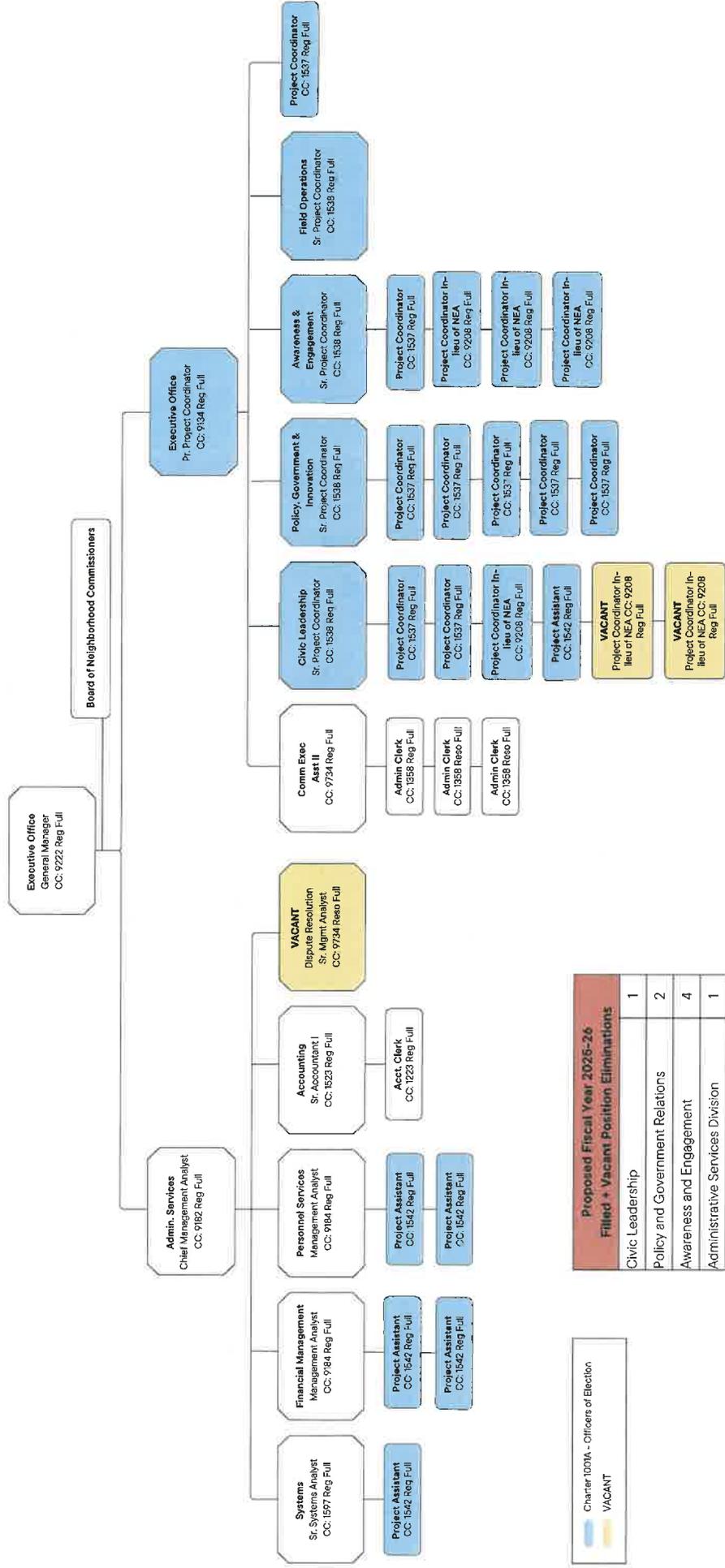
Thank you for your continued support of EmpowerLA’s mission to support the Neighborhood Council system.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carmen Chang
GENERAL MANAGER

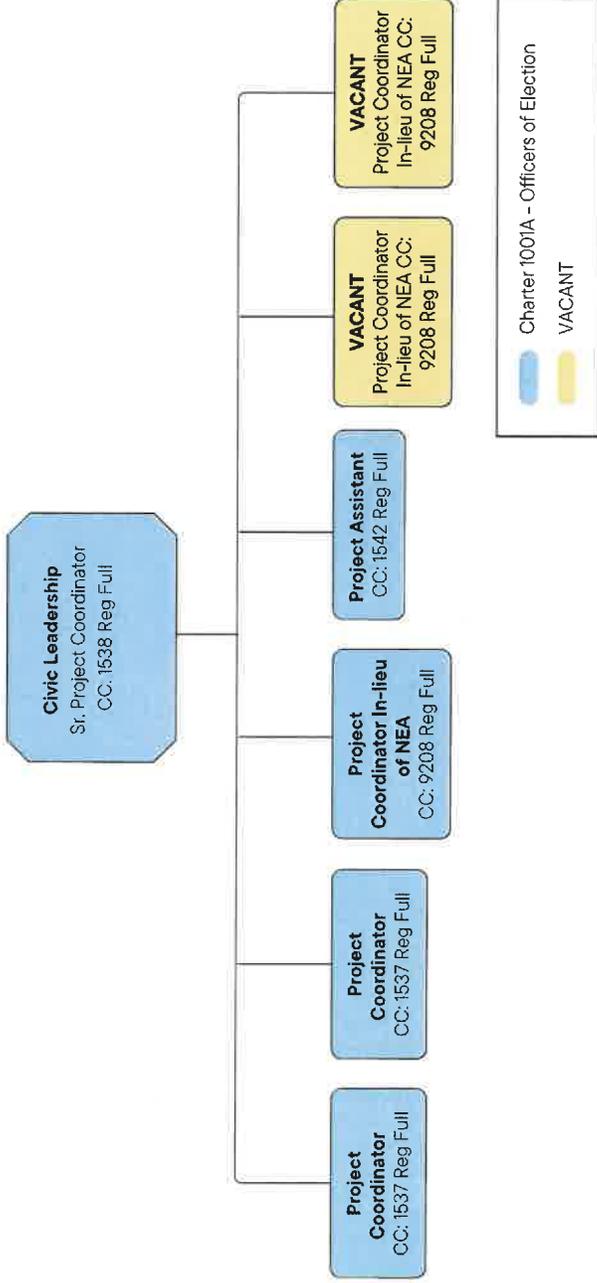
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment Organizational Chart Fiscal Year 2024-25



Proposed Fiscal Year 2025-26	
Filled + Vacant Position	Eliminations
Civic Leadership	1
Policy and Government Relations	2
Awareness and Engagement	4
Administrative Services Division	1
Total	8

■ Charter 1001A - Officers of Election
■ VACANT

Civic Leadership - 4701

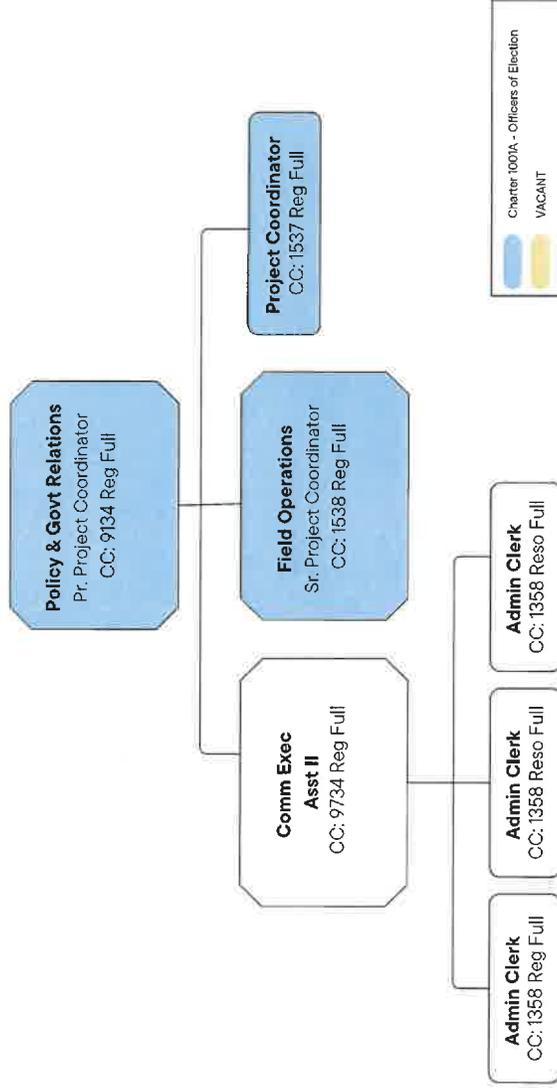


Program & Operations

- Develop a structured learning roadmap to equip board members with essential leadership skills.
- Establish a centralized library of resources for Neighborhood Council leaders.
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in training programs and educational materials.

24-25 Adopted Contract	Amount
Translation Services	\$10,000
Cellular Telephone Service & Maintenance	\$20,529
Neighborhood Council Online Training & Educational Services	-
Photocopier Leases	5,000
Civic University	\$20,000
Youth & Women Leadership Events	\$30,000
Civic Leadership Total	\$85,529

Policy & Government Relations - 4703

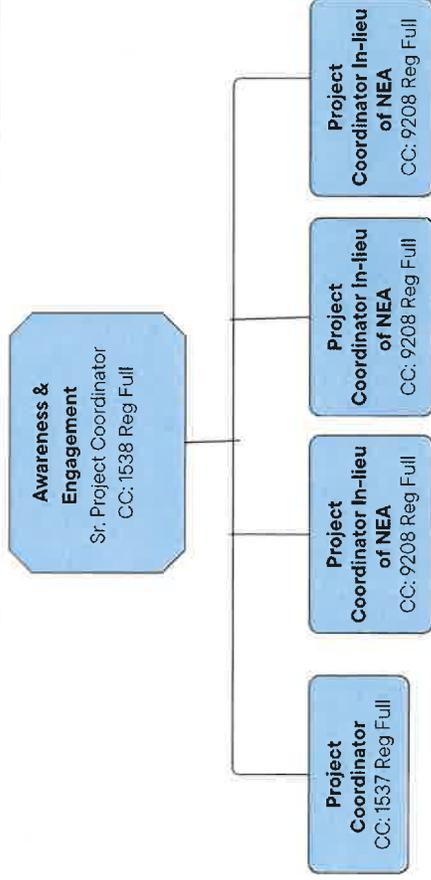


Program & Operations

- Develop partnerships with elected officials, government agencies, and civic institutions to enhance civic participation.
- Provide regular legislative updates to Neighborhood Council (NC) board members, encouraging informed engagement on pending City Council legislation.
- Support the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners in developing policies for the NC system.
- Foster policies that advance civic engagement and strengthen NC operations.

24-25 Adopted Contract	Amount
Translation Services	\$5,000
Policy & Government Total	\$5,000

Awareness and Engagement - 4704



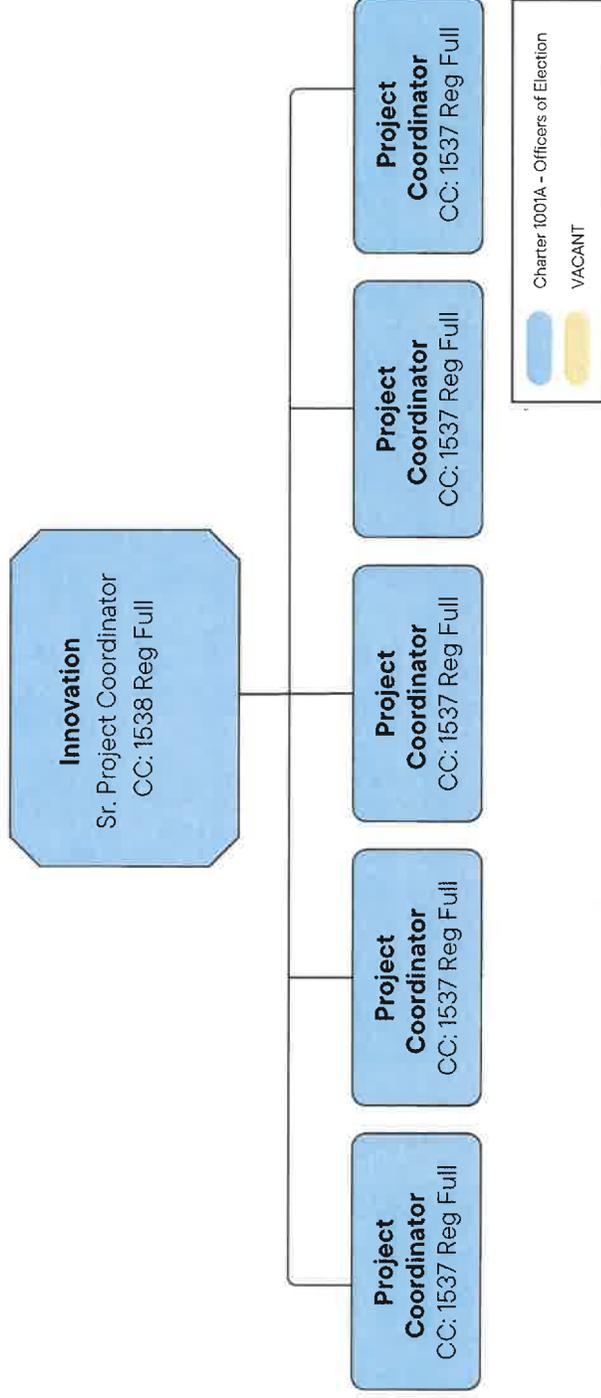
Charter 1001A - Officers of Election
VACANT

- Program & Operations**
- Promote participation in Neighborhood Councils (NCs).
 - Engage stakeholders from diverse communities
 - Support Neighborhood Councils through every phase of the election cycle.
 - Develop partnerships with community groups and other City and governmental partners.
 - Offer training and support to strengthen NC effectiveness.
 - Create and implement digital tools to boost NC performance.

24-25 Adopted Contract	Amount
Neighborhood Council Elections Engagement - Translation Services	-
Neighborhood Council Elections Engagement - Community-Based-Organizations	\$90,000
Neighborhood Council Elections Engagement - Digital Advertising	-
Neighborhood Council Elections Engagement	-
Awareness & Engagement Total	\$90,000

Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
Organizational Chart Fiscal Year 2024-25

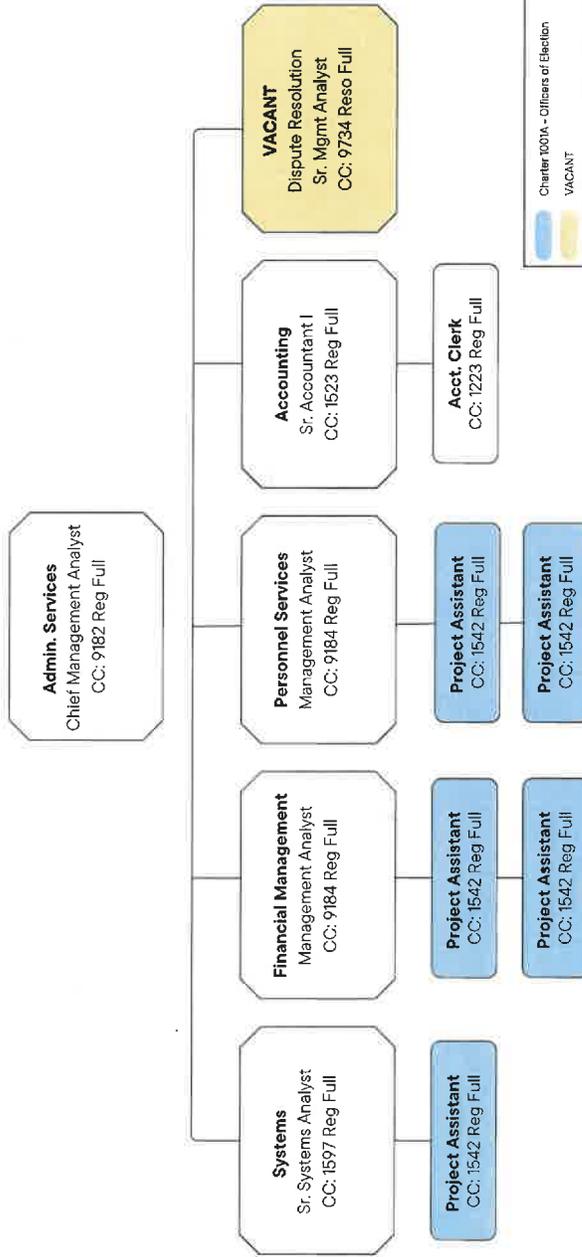
Innovation - 4705



Programs & Operations

- Support Neighborhood Councils in using data and research tools to increase participation, advance equity and inclusion, and strengthen community-focused city programs.
- Encourage creative and innovative approaches to influence City Hall decision-making.
- Enable communities to leverage open data and technology through accessible, community-led approaches.

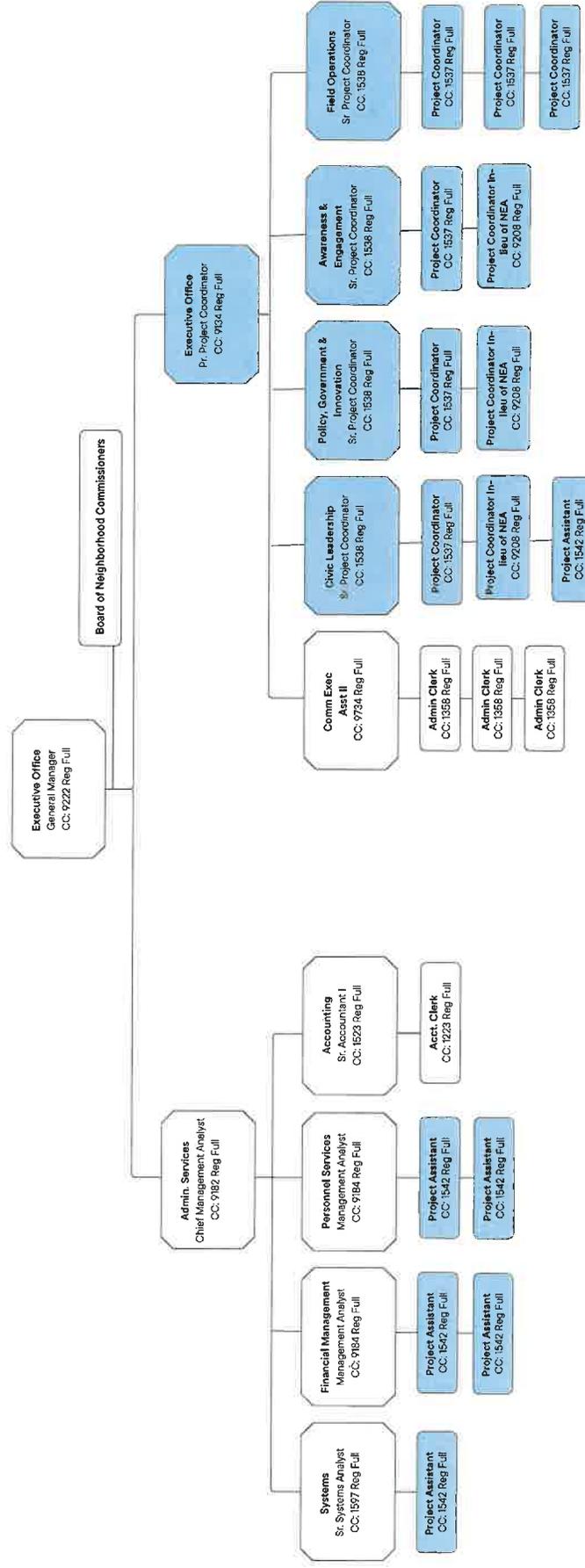
Administrative Services - 4750



- Program & Operations**
- Payroll
 - HR Support
 - Accounting Operations
 - Financial Management
 - Systems
 - Contracts Services
 - Facilities
 - Records Management

24-25 Adopted Contract	Amount
Neighborhood Council Online	\$20,000
Training & Educational Services	
Information technology equipment, software, and annual platform fees	\$5,000
Temporary Staffing	-
Office Supplies	\$5,118
Project management software subscription	\$14,500
Website Updates	-
Photocopier Leases	-
General Administration and Support Total	\$44,618

Department of Neighborhood Empowerment Organizational Chart Fiscal Year 2025-26



Charter 1001A - Officers or Election
VACANT

Note: Organizational Chart includes 1 Senior Project Coordinator that is currently proposed for elimination