



BLOG | CITY BUDGET

18,000 Vacant City Jobs Is More Than Enough

Vacancy Reduction Should Not Impede Hiring; How NYC Manages Will

March 30, 2022

The Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) eliminated 7,026 vacant full-time positions across 42 agencies, saving approximately \$290 million annually. This reduction has led some to be concerned that City agencies are short staffed. This concern is misplaced. The City's staffing challenges are not caused by too few vacancies; even after the PEG, the City could hire more than 18,000 full-time employees, plus thousands more in part-time positions.

Any staffing issues are the result of management, system, and labor market challenges, not a shortage of available positions. To ensure agencies can staff programs sufficiently to deliver results, the City should increase the flexibility of its systems that control, allocate, and reallocate headcount; and improve the systems it uses to control and manage hiring and to administer the civil service system.

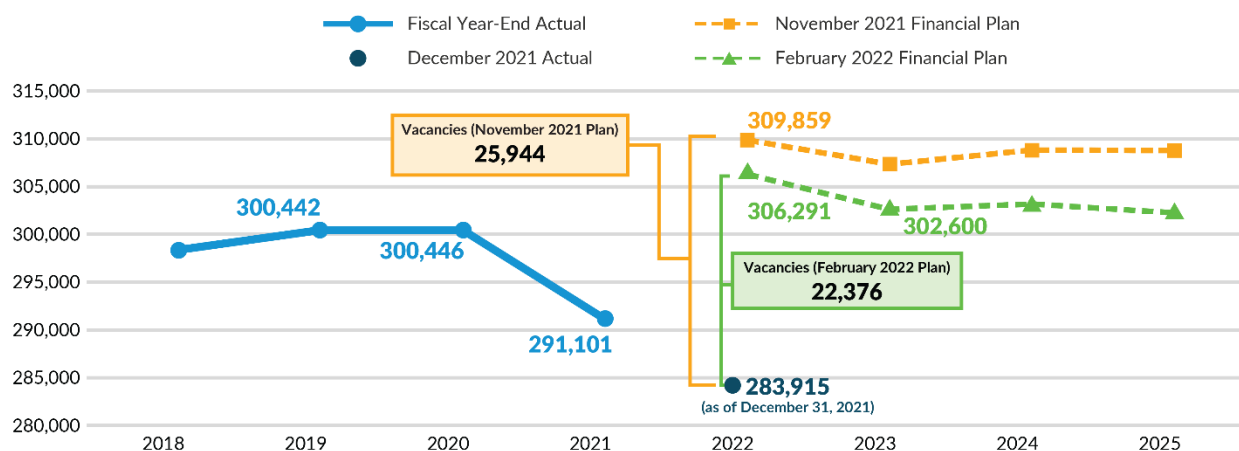
The City Will Continue to Have Over 18,000 Vacant Full Time Positions, and a Near Record Allowable Headcount

Even after the PEG, the City's authorized full-time headcount would allow the City to hire at record levels through fiscal year 2025, above the fiscal year 2020 peak of 300,446 onboard full-time staff.¹ (See Figure 1; this analysis considers only full-time, not part-time, positions.) Full-time authorized levels are 306,291 for fiscal year 2022 and 302,600 for fiscal year 2023. In fiscal years 2024 to 2026, the City will have an average of 302,667 authorized full-time positions.²

Based on December 2021 on-board staff and the authorized level in November 2021, the City had 25,944 vacant full-time positions. The PEG and other changes to authorized headcount reduced this to 22,376 positions that could be filled this fiscal year, resulting in a vacancy rate of 7.3 percent. With the authorized full-time headcount in fiscal year 2023 already set to decline to

302,600, based on the most recent onboard staffing data from December 2021, the City would start the year with about 18,685 vacant full-time positions, a 6.2 percent vacancy rate.³

Figure 1: New York City Actual and Authorized Full-Time Headcount, FY 2018 - FY 2025



Notes: Excludes full-time equivalents (FTEs) that are authorized at 28,142 in fiscal year 2022 and 26,586 in fiscal year 2023.

Sources: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (February 16, 2022), *November 2021 Financial Plan: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (November 30, 2021), and emails to Citizens Budget Commission staff (August 13, 2018, August 30, 2019, September 14, 2020, September 3, 2021, and February 18, 2022).

Most Agencies Have Adequate Vacancies

While vacancy rates vary widely, most agencies currently have vacancy rates exceeding 5 percent, sufficient to staff priority functions.⁴ (See Table 1 at the end.) Excluding the eight agencies with headcount at or above authorized levels, agency vacancy rates range from 2.0 percent to 37.5 percent at the Board of Correction (12 positions); among agencies with over 1,000 full-time staff, the vacancy rate is highest at the Department of Buildings (23.4 percent, 473 positions) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (17.7 percent, 1,093 positions). Fifty-five agencies' rates are more than 5 percent, and 38 agencies are above 10 percent. Only 8 agencies have vacancy rates between 2 percent and 5 percent.

Among larger agencies, vacancy rates are 9.0 percent at the Department of Education (12,717 positions), 9.2 percent at the Department of Transportation (507 positions), and 13.4 percent at the Department of Housing and Preservation (353 vacancies) and the Department of Social Services (1,745 positions). The uniformed agencies have lower vacancy rates, in part due to hiring uniformed employees in classes. Employment at the Department of Sanitation is 3.2 percent over authorized levels (299 positions), but vacancy rates are 2.1 percent at the Fire

Department (360 positions), 2.8 percent at the Police Department (1,410 positions), and 3.9 percent at the Department of Correction (368 positions).

While most agencies have sufficient vacancies, three agencies may face challenges unless City systems are improved to be more flexible and efficient.

- The City University of New York has only 11 vacant full-time pedagogical positions (0.3 percent), despite an overall vacancy rate of 2.2 percent. However, CUNY often uses part-time adjuncts to teach courses and may have sufficient part-time vacancies;
- The Department of Sanitation has more on-board uniformed employees than authorized and will need to reduce headcount through attrition to meet the lower authorized level;⁵ and
- The Department of Correction exceeds the number of authorized uniformed employees, largely due to staffing needed to address the extraordinary number of on-board employees unavailable for work.⁶

More Flexibility in Managing Vacancies and Better Hiring Management are the Solutions

The City as a whole, and most agencies individually, has sufficient vacant positions to hire in priority areas. Still, there are units and perhaps agencies that should have more full-time staff on board. This should be solved not by creating and funding unneeded additional vacant positions, but rather by improving how the City allocates positions and manages agency personnel and hiring.

Providing greater flexibility to allocate and reallocate headcount to better align vacancies with priorities could make the City nimbler in responding to staffing needs and labor availability. The current systems are inflexible and cumbersome, and are better at facilitating control than hiring. Vacant positions are not easily moved across functions within agencies, let alone between agencies. Greater flexibility—to move headcount across agencies, within agencies across units or to allocate vacancies agency-wide—would improve the ability to hire priority staff.

Improving recruitment and hiring systems and processes could reduce the time to fill positions, thereby increasing the number of on-board staff, and perhaps eliminating the slowness that commonly is thought to discourage some from working for the City. Many offices, within and outside service-providing agencies, are involved in multiple steps in the hiring process, including

posting open positions, making offers, approving salary levels, and setting start dates. Speeding the process is especially important in the current competitive job market.

Ensuring adequate, timely civil service tests and lists also will speed hiring and encourage more to seek City employment. Compounding historical challenges, in-person civil service testing was paused during the pandemic and titles may not have active lists with enough candidates at this time. Furthermore, the time between administering tests and certifying civil service lists is very long; in the first four months of fiscal year 2022, the median time between exam administration and results was 246 days (though still below the City's target of 290 days).⁷ DCAS should seek to leverage technology and other process reforms to speed up the process.

Conclusion

A focus on eliminating a small share of vacant positions from authorized headcount misses the real challenge the City faces in staffing priority activities—rigid headcount management and time-consuming hiring processes. The City has the authorized headcount and budget to fill nearly 19,000 vacant full-time positions and most agencies have vacancy rates over 5 percent. Increasing authorized headcount will not increase on-board staff; increasing flexibility and improving systems will.

By Ana Champeny

Table 1: Full-Time Authorized, Actual, and Vacant Positions by Agency, FY 2022

Agency	December 2021 Actual	FY 2022 Authorized (February 2022)	FT Vacant Positions (based on December 2021)	FY 22 Vacancy Rate	FY23 PEG Vacancy Reduction
Board of Correction	20	32	12	37.5%	
Borough President - Bronx	48	69	21	30.4%	
Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	277	391	114	29.2%	(18)
Civilian Complaint Review Board	186	259	73	28.2%	(3)
Borough President - Staten Island	34	45	11	24.4%	
Dept. of Buildings	1,548	2,021	473	23.4%	(81)
NYC Emergency Management	180	230	50	21.7%	(29)
Dept. of City Planning	272	340	68	20.0%	(9)
Commission on Human Rights	109	136	27	19.9%	(18)
Dept. of Consumer and Worker Protection	366	447	81	18.1%	(26)
Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene	5,095	6,188	1,093	17.7%	
Dept. of Small Business Services	255	306	51	16.7%	(17)
Mayoralty	1,085	1,291	206	16.0%	(60)
Public Administrator - New York	11	13	2	15.4%	
Equal Employment Commission	12	14	2	14.3%	(1)
Borough President - Manhattan	48	56	8	14.3%	
City Council	357	414	57	13.8%	
Dept. of Social Services	11,298	13,043	1,745	13.4%	(62)
Dept. of Housing Preservation & Development	2,287	2,640	353	13.4%	(28)
Independent Budget Office	33	38	5	13.2%	
Campaign Finance Board	113	130	17	13.1%	
Dept. of Environmental Protection	5,511	6,333	822	13.0%	(18)
Dept. of Design and Construction	1,169	1,343	174	13.0%	(5)
Dept. of Citywide Administrative Services	2,110	2,423	313	12.9%	(140)
City Clerk	61	70	9	12.9%	
Public Administrator - Queens	7	8	1	12.5%	
Public Administrator - Bronx	7	8	1	12.5%	
Civil Service Commission	7	8	1	12.5%	
Dept. of Investigation	308	352	44	12.5%	(33)
Taxi and Limousine Commission	491	561	70	12.5%	(25)
Office for Collective Bargaining	15	17	2	11.8%	
Dept. for the Aging	289	326	37	11.3%	(12)
District Attorney - Prosecution Special Narcotics	213	239	26	10.9%	
Dept. of Records and Information Services	51	57	6	10.5%	(5)
Comptroller	702	783	81	10.3%	
Dept. of Youth and Community Development	464	517	53	10.3%	(20)
Dept. of Finance	1,789	1,992	203	10.2%	(167)
Dept. of Veterans' Services	36	40	4	10.0%	(4)
Business Integrity Commission	74	82	8	9.8%	(3)
Dept. of Parks and Recreation	3,821	4,227	406	9.6%	(250)
Law Dept.	1,536	1,698	162	9.5%	(97)
Dept. of Transportation	4,999	5,506	507	9.2%	(159)
Dept. of Homeless Services	1,874	2,064	190	9.2%	(131)

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Table 1: Full-Time Authorized, Actual, and Vacant Positions by Agency, FY 2022 continued

Agency	December 2021 Actual	FY 2022 Authorized (February 2022)	FT Vacant Positions (based on December 2021)	FY 22 Vacancy Rate	FY23 PEG Vacancy Reduction
Dept. of Education	128,501	141,218	12,717	9.0%	(3,642)
Civilian	12,635	13,403	768	5.7%	(186)
Pedagogical	115,866	127,815	11,949	9.3%	(3,456)
Landmarks Preservation Commission	65	71	6	8.5%	(6)
Dept. of Information Technology & Telecommunications	1,602	1,749	147	8.4%	(127)
District Attorney - Bronx	1,008	1,099	91	8.3%	
Public Administrator - Kings	12	13	1	7.7%	
Public Advocate	52	56	4	7.1%	
Tax Commission	43	46	3	6.5%	(2)
Borough President - Brooklyn	63	67	4	6.0%	
Dept. of Cultural Affairs	49	52	3	5.8%	(3)
Administration for Children's Services	6,665	7,073	408	5.8%	(227)
Dept. of Probation	1,034	1,097	63	5.7%	(42)
Community Boards	148	157	9	5.7%	
Office of the Actuary	41	43	2	4.7%	(1)
Conflict of Interests Board	24	25	1	4.0%	(1)
Dept. of Correction	9,054	9,422	368	3.9%	0
Civilian	1,553	1,962	409	20.8%	
Uniform	7,501	7,460	(41)	-0.5%	
Financial Information Services Agency	407	423	16	3.8%	(7)
Police Dept.	48,683	50,093	1,410	2.8%	(770)
Civilian	13,912	15,063	1,151	7.6%	(770)
Uniform	34,771	35,030	259	0.7%	
Office of Payroll Administration	145	149	4	2.7%	(1)
City University of New York	5,950	6,084	134	2.2%	(128)
Civilian	1,648	1,771	123	6.9%	
Pedagogical	4,302	4,313	11	0.3%	(128)
Fire Dept.	16,905	17,265	360	2.1%	(155)
Civilian	6,184	6,320	136	2.2%	(155)
Uniform	10,721	10,945	224	2.0%	
Public Administrator - Richmond	5	5	0	0.0%	
District Attorney - Richmond	209	207	(2)		
Sanitation Dept.	9,773	9,474	(299)		(493)
Civilian	1,928	1,992	64	3.2%	(188)
Uniform	7,845	7,482	(363)		(305)
District Attorney - Queens	807	782	(25)		
District Attorney - Kings	1,170	1,097	(73)		
Borough President - Queens	67	54	(13)		
District Attorney - New York	1,545	1,185	(360)		
Board of Elections	720	517	(203)		
Districting Commission		11	NA - established for redistricting		
TOTAL	283,915	306,291	22,376	7.3%	(7,026)

Notes: Excludes full-time equivalents. Current FT Vacant Positions equals February 2022 authorized level less December 2021 actual level. While the PEG headcount reduction number is as of fiscal year 2023, most agencies saw PEG headcount reductions in fiscal year 2022. For agencies with lower baseline headcount in fiscal year 2023, the vacancy rate may be slightly lower in fiscal year 2023.

Sources: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (February 16, 2022), *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Program to Eliminate the Gap* (February 16, 2022), and email to Citizens Budget Commission staff (February 18, 2022).

ENDNOTES

- [1] Before the PEG, the City's authorized full-time headcount was 309,859 in fiscal year 2022 and averaged 308,317 thereafter. While the PEG eliminated 7,026 vacant full-time positions, the near-term net headcount reduction was lower—3,568 in fiscal year 2022 and 4,746 in fiscal year 2023—because the PEG shifted some City-funded headcount to federal funds or added new positions in other programs. City of New York, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (February 16, 2022), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/feb22-stafflevels.pdf>, *November 2021 Financial Plan: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (November 30, 2021), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/nov21-stafflevels.pdf>, and email to Citizens Budget Commission staff (September 14, 2020).
- [2] City of New York, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (February 16, 2022), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/feb22-stafflevels.pdf>.
- [3] Not knowing how many full-time staff will leave City service or be hired between January 2022 and June 2022, the projected vacancy rate for the start of fiscal year 2023 is calculated using the most recent on-board data provided to CBC by the City.
- [4] Vacant full-time positions and vacancy rate based on on-board staff in December 2021 compared to the authorized fiscal year 2022 level, as of February 2022.
- [5] On-board uniformed headcount above the authorized level at DSNY is likely due to bringing on a class of 800 sanitation workers in October 2021. The headcount will decrease due to separations in coming months, while another class will not be hired. DSNY saw an average of 46 separations per month in fiscal years 2014 through 2020; at that rate, the on-board headcount should be 276 fewer by June 30, 2022, which is just 23 positions above the authorized level. However, DSNY headcount is further reduced in fiscal year 2023 due to elimination of the curbside organic expansion, and expanded street basket collection funded in fiscal year 2022 that is not in the baseline.
- [6] The Department of Correction has struggled with high rates of sick leave use among uniformed staff, as well as staff on modified duty who are not available to staff housing units. According to the Preliminary Fiscal Year 2022 Mayor's Management Report, the Department of Correction paid absence rate in the first four months of fiscal year 2022 was 26.6 percent, compared to 5.6 percent for the first four months of fiscal year 2021. City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2022 Mayor's Management Report: Paid Absence Rates* (February 2022), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2022/paid_absence_rates.pdf.
- [7] City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2022 Mayor's Management Report: Department of Citywide Administrative Services* (February 2022), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2022/dcas.pdf>.