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Inside the City's Personnel Growth and Agency Hiring Practices

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There were 313,092 full-time and full-time equivalent positions employed by the City of New York as of June 30, the final day of last fiscal year, according to headcount data provided by the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB). According to forecasted staffing levels in the Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2017, released by OMB on June 14, the City plans to add another 10,108 full-time and full-time equivalent (FTE) positions by the end of the current fiscal year, to bring the total number of city government employees to 323,200 by July 1, 2017.

According to the FY2017 Adopted Budget, there are 12 city agencies each forecasted and budgeted to add over 300 full-time and FTE positions by next summer.

Those agencies are, in order of budgeted additional hires: the NYPD (civilian staff only); the Department of Social Services; the Administration for Children's Services; the Department of Corrections; the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; City University of New York; the Department of Environmental Protection; the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications; The Department of Education (pedagogical staff only); the Department of Sanitation; the Department of Citywide Administrative Services; and the Department of Buildings.

This increase comes on the heels of unprecedented growth in city government headcount through the first two-and-a-half years of Mayor Bill de Blasio's term. De Blasio has enjoyed robust city revenues and private sector job growth, allowing him to increase city spending, including on hiring of government personnel.

While the city has also been able to increase savings to record levels, de Blasio has received some criticism for the increases in city spending and headcount. Still, he is forging ahead with additions at a variety of city agencies. What is not always clear to the public, though, is what positions are being added and why; what happens when agencies are not able to fill the positions they are budgeted for; and why increases in certain types of personnel are not accompanied by decreases in others.

Under de Blasio, the two most high-profile broad personnel increases have been the addition of hundreds of new pre-kindergarten teachers and the addition of about 1,300 new police officers, staffing the expansion of de Blasio's universal pre-K program and his neighborhood policing model, respectively.



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“This administration has proven that you can be both responsible and progressive,” said Freddie Goldstein, a mayoral spokesperson for budget matters. “Our increased headcount helps us move forward the initiatives that make a real difference in the lives of New Yorkers - Pre-K For All, Vision Zero, more police officers keeping people safe. We’ve budgeted for these new hires and have done so while increasing our reserves to historic levels,” said Goldstein.

Budgeting and Hiring Processes

The adopted budget, released after a new budget agreement between the Mayor’s Office and the City Council, is the last step in the process starting with the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget and including the Mayor’s Executive Budget, two rounds of City Council hearings, public lobbying, and behind-the-scenes negotiations. In part, the adopted budget indicates how OMB will allocate funding to different city departments, much of which is dedicated to agency personnel, including new employees each agency is expected to hire.

Providing a clear snapshot of the positions currently in the process of being filled requires information from city agency representatives, departmental website job portals, and other databases. While forecasted headcount is relatively easy to find on the OMB website, Gotham Gazette needed to request the end-of-fiscal-year actual headcount data from FY13 through FY16 and more information regarding the types of positions being filled. The actual headcount data from 2013 was provided by the Citizen Budget Commission (CBC), a nonpartisan nonprofit budget watchdog group.

While the city is now several months into the new fiscal year, executive budget hearing reports from the Spring, while dated, also offer important insight into each department’s intentions when it comes to hiring.

Agencies do not necessarily hire people for as many positions as the city has allocated funding, nor is there a maximum headcount departments may not surpass, though agencies must get permission from OMB for additional spending and often must explain why they do not hire for all the positions they have been budgeted for if that is the case.

The Department of Social Services (DoSS) was forecasted to add 805 positions in FY16. Instead, DoSS actually decreased its headcount by 289 full-time and full-time equivalent positions over the course of the fiscal period. And like with other agencies that did not meet last year’s forecast, DoSS is again forecasted to add many new hires in FY17, in its case for 1,616 positions.

Two questions that often faces agencies, OMB, and the Mayor’s Office is why an agency may not be able to reach its targeted hiring and whether money should be reallocated in the following budget for unfilled positions. The answers to these questions are determined in budgetary



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meetings between OMB teams and representatives from individual agencies throughout the year as headcounts real and forecasted are in flux.

“As programs move forward, agencies revise up and down how much staff is needed based on how best to achieve its goals as effectively and efficiently as possible,” said Goldstein, de Blasio’s budget spokesperson. “If an agency continues to need the positions to provide the services/programs, the headcount will still be available to them in the next fiscal year.”

There can be a variety of reasons why an agency does not meet its forecasted headcount, including difficulty competing with private sector employers for highly skilled applicants or finding it can do its work with fewer employees than initially expected. There are also logistical hurdles in hiring and not every agency has a well-oiled hiring process. Filling a large number of positions can be time-consuming for those most involved in hiring. It can also take time for higher-ups to approve certain hires.

While it’s more common to hire fewer employees than budgeted, in some circumstances agencies have expanded their headcount past the yearly budgeted amounts. When agencies exceed their forecasted headcount the circumstances often have to do with new city policies, as presented by the Mayor or the Mayor and the City Council, that involve hiring new employees.

There are several city departments involved in different phases of the hiring process beyond each agency’s internal process. While OMB has authority over allocation of the budgeted headcount, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) has actual oversight of hiring processes, and internal human resources offices handle the execution of each agency’s hiring protocols.

DCAS is responsible for administering the civil service system, which largely pertains to uniformed city employees like police officers, firefighters, corrections officers, and paramedics, and includes plumbers, electricians, and many other positions. Someone hoping to be hired in one of these positions must pass a civil service exam to be placed, in order of exam score, on the Civil Service List. The human resources department at each agency then hires from that list for the positions it covers, which often excludes top positions at each agency.

There are several exceptions to this system. For instance, the Mayor’s Office has its own independent hiring process for the hundreds of positions that fall under its purview. This is another area where de Blasio has greatly increased headcount.

Commissioner appointments are overseen by the Mayor’s Office of Appointments and made by the Mayor, oftentimes in consultation with the relevant Deputy Mayor. Other top departmental positions -- like Chief of Staff, Deputy Commissioner, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, etc. -- require agencies to receive various levels of approval depending on the situation.



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The Office of Appointments also works with the Department of Investigation, City Council, and the NYPD to vet potential higher-level managerial candidates.

Individual Agency Expansions

While the NYPD is continuing to add police officers to fill the additional 1,297 uniformed positions that the Mayor previously agreed to in negotiations with the City Council, according to the Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2017, the NYPD is forecasting to add an additional 1,930 civilian staff by next summer. These civilian openings include school safety agents, police communications technicians (911 operators), and traffic enforcement agents, all of which are posted on the NYPD website. The NYPD press office said there are currently 1,627 open positions and that the department expects to fill all of them.

The NYPD currently employs 35,990 uniformed officers, according to the department, while it seeks an average uniformed headcount of approximately 36,300 officers. According to OMB data, the NYPD's uniformed headcount grew by 1,372 police officers in the previous fiscal year to reach its current number. The police academy is training four classes of officers throughout the fiscal year, according to the department, though the adopted budget only funds 35,780 of those positions -- 210 fewer officers than the department already employs.

According to the NYPD's Executive Budget Hearing Report, the additional school safety agents will be sent as "meal relief" to schools with only one safety agent; the 911 operators will be staffing the newly opened Public Safety Answering Center II in the Bronx; and the traffic enforcement agents will be primarily dispatched in Manhattan to enforce the "Block the Box" initiative, aimed at enforcing the prohibition on vehicle operators obstructing traffic at an intersection.

The Department of Education (DOE), which has traditionally had the largest headcount in the city and has sustained the most significant growth in headcount of any city agency under de Blasio, is continuing to add to pedagogical staff while also being budgeted to lose civilian headcount.

The DOE is forecasted to add a total of 9,276 full-time and FTE positions (pedagogical and other) by the end of de Blasio's term -- more than any other city agency. The department has already added 7,343 of those positions in the first two-and-a-half years under de Blasio. As of October 4, there were 120 open non-pedagogical positions listed on the DOE website. Pedagogical positions are not publicly listed on the department website. In order to view pedagogical listings, qualified applicants must file a general application to work in the DOE school system before being granted access to the teachers jobs portal.

A large portion of the DOE's initial headcount growth under de Blasio is attributable to the mayor's universal pre-kindergarten initiative, for which the department is continuing to fill positions, even those beyond classroom posts, like the Director of Special Projects that will "oversee the



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implementation of the Pre-K component of ThriveNYC, a citywide, mayoral initiative to support the mental health of New Yorkers,” according to the job description posted online.

According to the DOE’s Executive Budget Hearing Report from May 16, 2016, a good portion of the budgeted headcount growth for the current fiscal year is in response to rising need around special education students and properly serving those students in district schools.

In addition to hiring teachers trained in special education, the DOE is filling positions like “Special Education Operations Manager, Charter Partnerships” and “Director of Data Management - Special Education” -- both highly technical roles that will aid the department in providing the necessary tools and expertise needed for students with individualized education plans. Skilled data analysts are in high demand both in and out of government - this is one type of position where it can be more difficult for government agencies to attract qualified applicants.

The DOE declined to respond to a request from Gotham Gazette seeking information explaining the agency’s protocols and infrastructure for filling open positions and actual headcount data.

Currently, the Department of Sanitation has approximately 200 civilian vacancies, according to Vito Turso, a spokesperson for the department. According to the FY17 adopted budget, Sanitation is set to add a total 393 civilian and uniformed positions by next summer. As of October 4, there are 32 Sanitation civilian openings accepting applications via the citywide jobs portal. Civilian positions are first approved by OMB and then approved by the department’s internal human resources office. Within the department, the areas with the largest number of civilian vacancies are in the program areas of technology, building maintenance, motor equipment, and enforcement, according to Turso.

Uniformed sanitation worker positions are filled through the civil service list. While the FY17 adopted budget forecasts only 25 additional uniformed positions, Turso said the department is in fact expecting to hire over 350 sanitation workers by June 2017.

The Department of Buildings (DOB) is expanding its headcount as well. According to department spokesperson Joseph Soldevere, DOB’s hiring target for FY17 is 257 positions, including 57 for inspections, 79 technical positions, and 121 administrative or other staffers. The city has allocated funds for an additional 181 positions, according to the FY17 adopted budget, but the department has set their own goal of hiring 257 employees, as stated by Soldevere.

“The [DOB’s] staffing is up 31% over the last four years, and up 18% over the prior year,” said Soldevere, crediting “an expanded advertising push for job opportunities, numerous interview days for new graduates and industry professionals, and increasing our recruitment targets,” for the headcount growth. This increase comes as New York City is experiencing a historic construction boom, which as Soldevere pointed out, makes it difficult to hire construction professionals for



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public service positions. DOB is largely responsible for permitting construction and for building inspections.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is also expanding its civilian and uniformed headcount in the current fiscal year. According to actual headcount data provided by OMB, DOC had 11,508 employees at the end of June. Based on the FY17 adopted budget, DOC expects to add another 1,060 positions by the end of FY17.

“DOC is striving to fill all budgeted positions as quickly as possible,” said DOC spokesperson Eve Kessler, by email. “No particular positions are expected to go unfilled, however there is a possibility that some may not be filled by the end of the fiscal year.”

According to DOC’s Executive Budget Hearing Report, several new uniformed and civilian staff will be allocated to the central visiting center on Rikers Island -- where there was a rise in inmate-on-inmate violence over the last year -- in order to better keep drugs and weapons out of inmate possession.

At many smaller agencies and offices, headcount has drastically increased in proportion to the number of department employees before de Blasio took office. One such agency is the NYC Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), which is forecasted to double in size by the time de Blasio’s current term is over -- increasing from 61 positions in 2013, to 123 by the end of FY17. Internally, the department has two human resources staffers and they use the citywide jobs portal to fill openings, according to CCHR spokesperson Seth Hoy.

“The rapid expansion of the NYC Commission on Human Rights over the last two years is reflective of Mayor de Blasio’s mission to ensure a viable and effective venue for all New Yorkers to report discrimination and get justice, regardless of who they are, where they came from or who they love,” said Hoy.

According to Hoy, CCHR is adding 12 positions in the current fiscal year including four community relations positions, five administrative staffers and three legal openings. One is for “testers,” who, according to the job description, are “sent to apply for specific jobs with specific companies and report back about their experiences...If a white tester was called for job interview, but an equally qualified African-American tester was not, it may show evidence of discrimination.”