



BLOG | PUBLIC WORKFORCE

Rising Again

City Reverses Course on Workforce Reduction

June 8, 2021

During the first five years of Mayor Bill de Blasio's Administration, New York City added 29,390 municipal workers—increasing actual on-board headcount from 297,349 in fiscal year 2014 to its peak of 326,739 in fiscal year 2019.¹ Through most of the pandemic, the City had reversed this trend; the workforce declined to a low of 312,250 in February 2021. The decline was the result of natural attrition and slower hiring as the City continued a hiring freeze for certain positions. The Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget shows that the City now intends to change course again by proposing to fill an additional 6,850 positions, effectively eliminating half of the headcount reduction of the last 14 months.²

Furthermore, with the infusion of nearly \$16 billion in federal funds the City plans to increase its authorized headcount—the total number of currently filled and unfilled positions. While the City had reduced projected growth in authorized headcount during the pandemic, the City plans to restore 5,235 positions in fiscal year 2022, bringing authorized headcount to 331,662. Authorized headcount increases further to 333,107 by fiscal year 2025.

With annual budget gaps in fiscal years 2023 to 2025 nearing \$5 billion (including unspecified labor savings), the City should not increase the size of its workforce. Instead, federal aid and current vacancies are an opportunity to hire strategically to reallocate City workers to where they are necessary and restructure operations to prioritize efficient service delivery that benefits all New Yorkers.

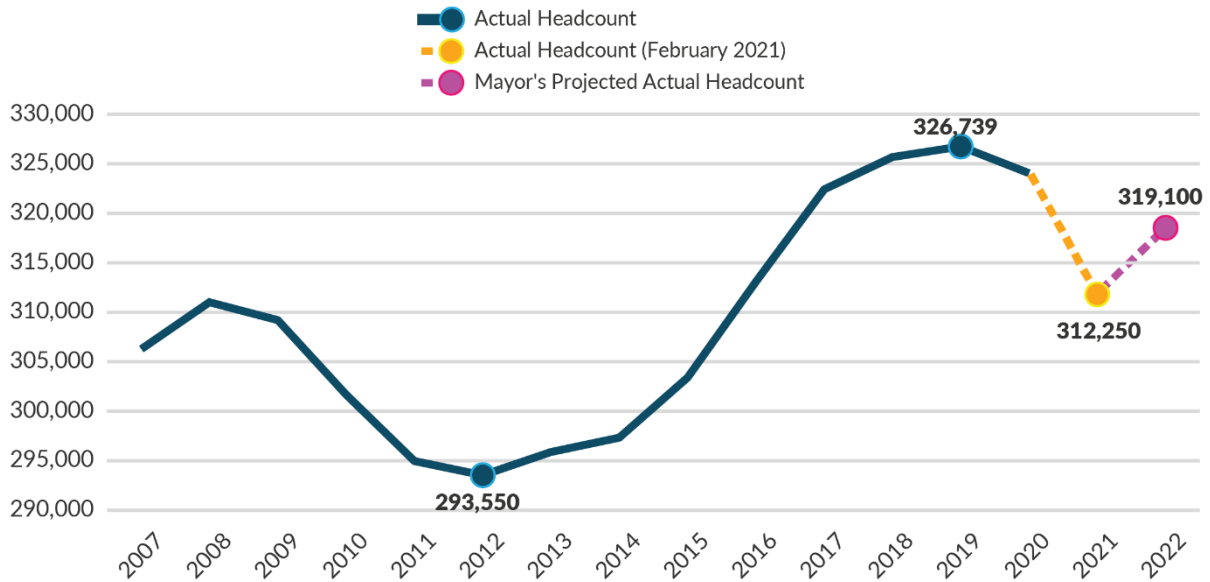
Actual Headcount Decline of 13,364 During COVID Pandemic to be Partially Reversed

Actual headcount, the number of full-time and full-time equivalent City employees currently on board, grew significantly since the Great Recession. (See Figure 1.) After initially declining by nearly 17,500 during the Great Recession, actual headcount increased by 33,189 positions from a low of 293,550 in fiscal year 2012 to a high of 326,739 in fiscal year 2019, an 11.3 percent increase. Nearly 90 percent of this growth, 29,390 positions, occurred during Mayor de Blasio's tenure.

The pandemic and consequent recession led the City to reduce its workforce. Between April 2020 and February 2021, when staffing during the pandemic was lowest, headcount shrank 4.1 percent, or 13,364 positions. This decline is attributable to attrition—the City hired fewer employees than left its workforce by delaying hiring and a partial hiring freeze.³ While the partial hiring freeze was implemented prior to the recession, this practice had not been effective in reducing actual headcount prior to April 2020.⁴ (See Figure 2.) It was tightened during the pandemic—first to one hire for every two eligible vacancies, and then to one hire for every three eligible vacancies as of January 2021. However, its effectiveness was constrained because the majority of the workforce was exempt, including positions associated with health, safety, teaching, and revenue-generation.

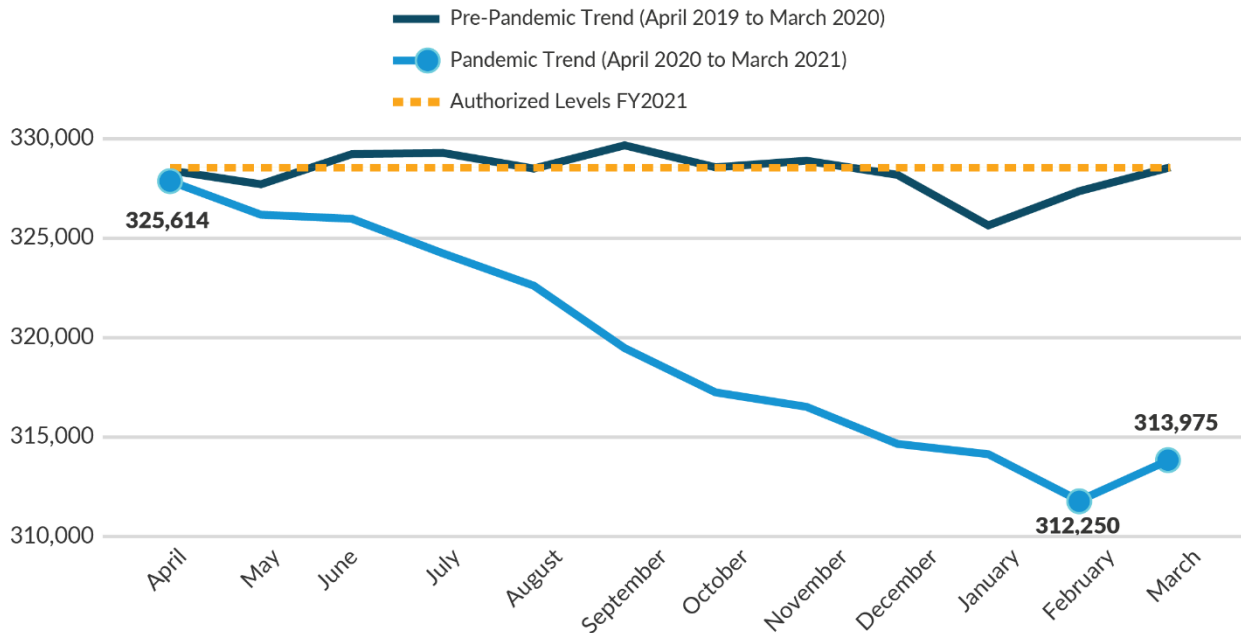
In the Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget, the Mayor announced that with significant new federal resources, the City would increase actual headcount to 319,100 by the end of fiscal year 2022, an increase of 6,850 from the February 2021 low. The City plans to fill vacant positions and hire for new and expanded programs, such as school re-opening efforts, the Cleanup Corps, and expansion of early childhood for three-year-old children (3K).⁵ In fact, headcount has already started to increase; in March 2021, headcount was up 1,625 to 313,875.

Figure 1: Actual Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent NYC Headcount FY2007 to FY2020, Actual as of February 2021, and Mayor's FY2022 Projection



Sources: City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Actual Fiscal Year 2021 Headcount as of February 28, 2021, Actual Fiscal Year 2020 Headcount as of June 30, and Fiscal year 2007 to 2019 editions*; *Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (April 26, 2021); and *Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Summary* (April 26, 2021).

Figure 2: Monthly Actual Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent NYC Headcount, April 2019 to March 2021, and FY2021 Authorized Levels



Sources: City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Actual Fiscal Year 2021 Headcount as of March 31, 2021, and April 2019 to February 2021 editions*; and *Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (April 26, 2021).

Authorized Headcount to Grow Over to 330,000

While actual headcount declined fairly rapidly over the past year, authorized headcount—the upper limit of staffing allowed that includes both current on-board staff and vacancies—declined more modestly. Reducing authorized headcount does not necessarily mean reducing on-board staff. Rather, reductions in authorized headcount usually eliminate vacant positions. Like actual headcount, however, authorized headcount has been revised upward by the Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget.

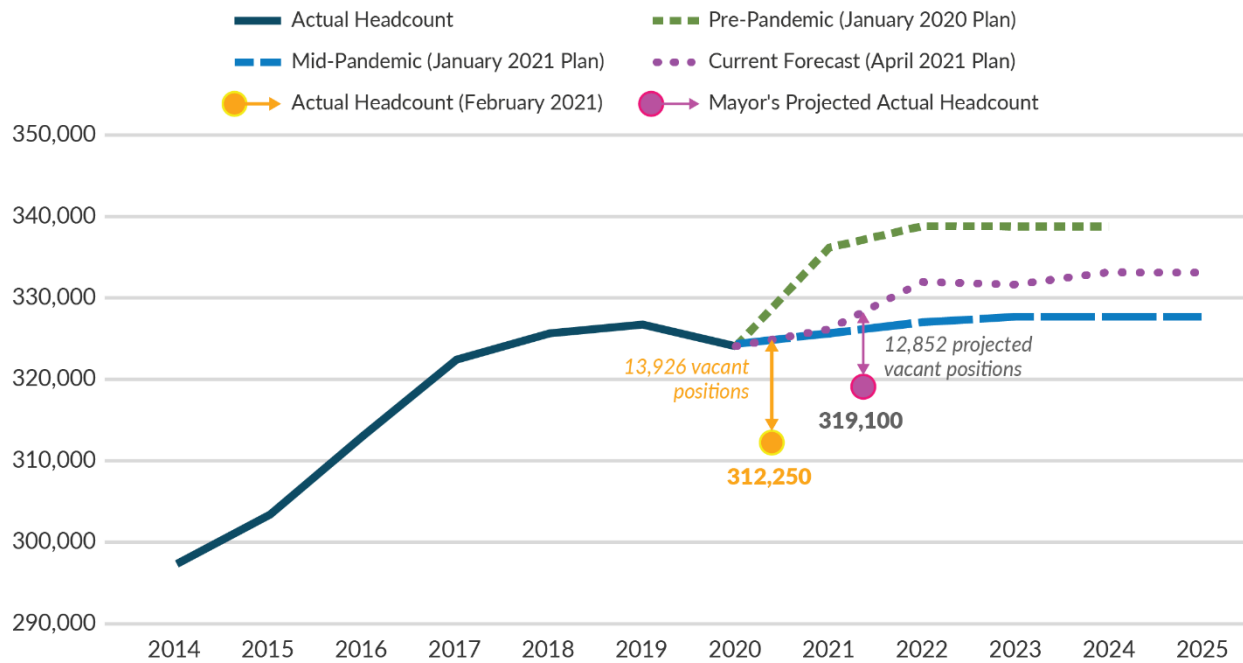
As of February 2021, 13,926 (4.2 percent) of the City's 326,176 authorized full-time and full-time equivalent positions were vacant, including 7,109 full-time positions and 6,817 full-time equivalent positions.⁶ Despite these vacancies, the Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget increased authorized levels to 331,952 positions – 5,776 above fiscal year 2021 authorized levels. (See Figure 3.) The plan to increase actual headcount to 319,100 in fiscal year 2022 would leave 12,852 positions vacant.

Previously, in response to the crisis, authorized headcount for fiscal year 2022 was reduced from 338,821 as of January 2020 to 326,717 as of January 2021. However, with the infusion of federal aid, the April 2021 Executive Budget restored 5,235 positions, bringing the authorized headcount plan down 6,869 positions on net from the pre-pandemic January 2020 plan.

Most of the 6,869 reduction in authorized headcount has not been allocated to specific agencies. (See Table 1.) Of allocated reductions, the agencies most affected are:

- The Department of Correction (DOC) (1,521 fewer positions), reflecting planned closure of jail facilities at Rikers Island and in the boroughs. However, the number of actual on-board staff as of February 2021 was currently 1,497 positions above authorized levels due to lower-than-expected attrition and delays in the closure of facilities due to COVID;
- The Police Department (1,483 fewer positions), reflecting the cancellation of the July 2020 police academy class along with some civilian reductions; and
- The Department of Social Services (972 fewer positions), an agency which has long had high vacancy rates.

Figure 3: Actual Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent NYC Headcount FY2014 to FY2020, Mayor's FY2022 Projection, and Authorized Headcount Plans FY2021 to FY2025



Notes: Vacant positions include full-time and full-time equivalent positions. The 13,926 vacant positions for fiscal year 2021 are based on February 2021 actual headcount and authorized levels in the Executive Fiscal Year 2022 Budget. The 12,852 projected vacant positions are based on the Mayor's projected fiscal year 2022 actual positions announced in the Executive Fiscal Year 2022 Budget and the Executive Fiscal Year 2022 authorized headcount levels.

Sources: City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Actual Fiscal Year 2021 Headcount as of February 28, 2021*, *Actual Fiscal Year 2020 Headcount as of June 30*, and *Fiscal year 2014 to 2019* editions; *Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (April 26, 2021); *Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Summary* (April 26, 2021); *Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (January 14, 2021); and *Fiscal Year 2021 Preliminary Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (January 16, 2020).

While total authorized headcount declined, not all agencies had authorized headcount reduced. Agencies with the largest increases in authorized headcount are:

- The Department of Education (1,500 additional positions), reflecting additional teachers associated with re-opening efforts and the expansion of 3K;
- The Department of Parks and Recreation (855 additional positions), reflecting increased staffing for the Cleanup Corps, which is primarily housed in this agency; and
- The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (323 additional positions), reflecting ongoing pandemic related health response.

Table 1: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Actual NYC Headcount FY2020, and Authorized Levels for FY2022

	Fiscal Year 2020 Actuals	Fiscal Year 2022 Authorized Levels		
		Pre-Pandemic January 2020 Plan	Mid-Pandemic January 2021 Plan	Current April 2021 Plan
Department of Education	147,792	153,562	153,648	155,062
<i>Pedagogical</i>	121,558	127,568	127,680	128,795
<i>Civilian</i>	26,234	25,994	25,968	26,267
Police Department	53,416	53,965	52,298	52,482
<i>Uniform</i>	35,910	36,201	35,030	35,030
<i>Civilian</i>	17,506	17,764	17,268	17,452
Fire Department	17,480	17,643	17,350	17,448
<i>Uniform</i>	11,047	10,951	10,945	10,945
<i>Civilian</i>	6,433	6,692	6,405	6,503
Department of Social Services	12,520	14,598	13,600	13,626
City University	8,314	10,286	10,111	10,111
<i>Pedagogical</i>	5,490	6,533	6,533	6,533
<i>Civilian</i>	2,824	3,753	3,578	3,578
Department of Sanitation	9,926	10,417	9,735	9,963
<i>Uniform</i>	7,755	7,805	7,381	7,483
<i>Civilian</i>	2,171	2,612	2,354	2,480
Department of Correction	11,040	10,892	8,961	9,371
<i>Uniform</i>	9,237	8,790	7,060	7,460
<i>Civilian</i>	1,803	2,102	1,901	1,911
Department of Parks and Recreation	6,487	7,629	7,468	8,484
Administration for Children's Services	7,059	7,483	7,287	7,340
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene	6,907	6,976	6,948	7,299
Department of Environmental Protection	6,105	6,407	6,401	6,429
Department of Transportation	5,817	5,920	5,798	5,953
Department of Citywide Administrative Services	2,460	2,808	2,754	2,758
Housing Preservation and Development	2,429	2,558	2,534	2,611
Department of Finance	2,018	2,227	2,180	2,187
Department of Homeless Services	2,119	2,121	2,105	2,159
Department of Buildings	1,734	1,898	1,821	1,988
Law Department	1,809	2,025	1,897	1,920
Department of Information Technology and Telecommunication	1,687	1,899	1,829	1,859
Mayoralty	1,252	1,334	1,333	1,342
All Other	15,665	16,173	15,596	16,012
Citywide Savings Initiative	-	-	(4,937)	(4,452)
TOTAL	324,036	338,821	326,717	331,952

Sources: City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Actual Fiscal Year 2020 Headcount as of June 30; Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels (April 26, 2021); Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels (January 14, 2021); and Fiscal Year 2021 Preliminary Budget Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels (January 16, 2020).*

Conclusion

In fiscal year 2020, 52 percent of the City's budget was spent on salaries, wages, fringe benefits, and pensions. The size of the City's workforce is one of the greatest determinants of City spending. Given annual budget gaps for fiscal years 2023 to 2025 that approach \$5 billion when accounting for unspecified labor savings and the uncertainty of the strength of the economic recovery, the City should continue to reduce actual headcount, albeit more slowly, rather than reversing course to increase both actual and authorized headcount. Current vacancies provide an opportunity to target hiring to provide high quality services to New Yorkers, ensuring all services are provided efficiently.

By Adrian Pietrzak

ENDNOTES

1. Headcount includes the total full-time staff/positions plus full-time equivalent staff/positions. For headcount growth by year and by agency, see: Ana Champeny and Adrian Pietrzak, *NYC Employee Headcount*, Citizens Budget Commission (March 22, 2021), <https://cbcny.org/research/nyc-employee-headcount>.
2. The difference between February 2021 actual headcount, the low point, and the Mayor's Executive Budget Proposal that actual headcount will reach 319,100 at the end of fiscal year 2022. City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Summary* (April 26, 2021), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/sum4-21.pdf>.
3. There were no layoffs to reduce headcount during this time.
4. A partial hiring freeze was first implemented in April 2017 and tightened numerous times. See: Robert Callahan, *Workforce Savings: The Mayor's Budget Plan Includes Trimming the Number of City Workers*, New York City Independent Budget Office (June 2020), <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/workforce-savings-the-mayors-budget-plan-includes-trimming-the-number-of-city-workers-foeb-june-2020.pdf>.
5. While the Citywide Cleanup Corps is to add 10,000 workers, these positions are part-time. The City reflects part-time workers as full-time equivalents (FTE), not individual workers. Therefore, headcount increases are less than 10,000. For example, a part-time staff member working 3 days a week year-round would be 0.6 FTEs. One FTE could be two year-round part-time employees working 17.5 hours a week or four full-time seasonal workers working for three months.
6. This difference includes both vacant full-time positions and currently unfilled part-time positions, measured against a projection for June 30. Due to the seasonal nature of some full-time equivalent work, those positions may not be planned to be filled at a specific point in time.