



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
BRAD LANDER

Understaffed, Underserved

Impact of Staff Vacancies on Agency Performance

MARCH 2023

Introduction

Employee retention and recruitment for City agencies continue to be areas of concern as the City of New York engages in the annual cycle of setting the City's financial priorities. As a follow-up to December's report, [Title Vacant](#), the Comptroller's Office compared staff vacancies as of October 2022 to the [Preliminary Mayor's Management Report](#) (MMR) released in January 2023, which provides a snapshot of the City's performance on metrics related to its agencies' core missions.

The Comptroller's Office matched nearly 1,000 performance indicators to 83 Units of Appropriation (U/A) across 35 City agencies, with a particular focus on agencies with high staff vacancy rates. A Unit of Appropriation represents the funding category for a particular program, purpose, or activity within an agency's budget. The priorities of agencies, and the metrics they track, are understandably quite diverse. Some MMR indicators have established "targets" that stay relatively constant year-over-

year. Others simply have a desired direction (e.g. bring processing times down, or revenue collections up). An agency may additionally designate some indicators as “critical” to their core mission. The Comptroller’s office used three standard measures of performance to compare all indicators for an agency and its Units of Appropriation:

1. *Proficiency*: If the indicator had a goal, is the agency on track to meet/exceed that goal this year?
2. *Short Term Improvement*: Is an agency performing better than they were last year?
3. *Long Term Improvement*: Is an agency performing better than the average of the past five years?

Key Findings

MMR Outcomes for Agencies with High Vacancy Rates

Among the 15 agencies with the highest vacancy rates highlighted in [Title Vacant](#), the **Department of Small Business Services (SBS)** stands out as an agency that is particularly struggling to meet performance metrics, with 50 percent or fewer of its *critical* indicators succeeding on the measure of proficiency or either measure of growth. The **Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)**, **Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)** and **Department of City Planning** are also consistently failing to meet or improve on the goals self-identified as critical.

Table 1: MMR Critical Indicators Met and Improving at Agencies with High Vacancies

Agency	Targets on Track (%)	Indicators Improving Compared to Last Year (%)	Indicators Improving Compared to Last Five Years (%)	Oct. 2022 Vacancy Rate (%)
Dept. of Small Business Services	33%	50%	25%	32.0%
Dept. of Investigation	100%	50%	50%	25.4%
Dept. of Buildings	43%	57%	57%	22.7%
Dept. of City Planning	67%	33%	33%	20.7%
Civilian Complaint Review Board	57%	57%	57%	20.5%
NYC Taxi & Limousine Commission	88%	44%	67%	20.1%
Dept. of Social Services	42%	47%	60%	20.0%
Housing Preservation & Development	33%	75%	25%	18.2%
Dept. of Finance	69%	41%	65%	18.0%
Dept. of Citywide Admin. Services	75%	50%	100%	17.7%
Dept of Design and Construction	33%	80%	80%	17.2%
Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene	50%	22%	39%	17.1%
Dept. of Environmental Protection	81%	56%	69%	17.0%

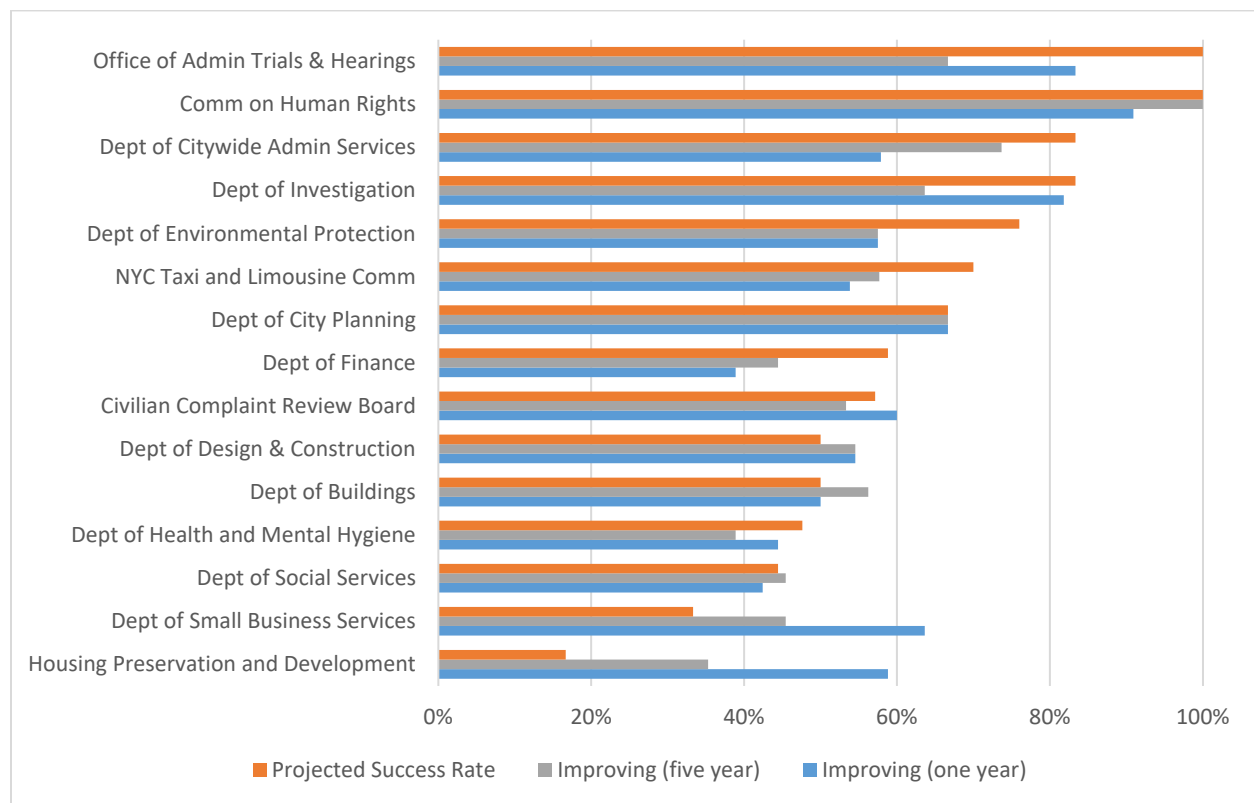
SOURCE: Comptroller’s office analysis of Mayor’s Management Report metrics on Open Data , accessed February 15, 2023, and FMS.

NOTE: The Commission on Human Rights and Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings do not designate any of their MMR indicators as critical, and thus are excluded from this table.

When the lens is widened to include all MMR Indicators for high-vacancy agencies, **HPD, DOHMH** and the **Department of Social Services** all appear to struggle to meet their targets or outperform prior years.

Other agencies, including the NYC **Commission on Human Rights**, the **Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings**, **Department of Investigation**, and **Department of Citywide Administrative Services** have maintained progress on their goals at a high level, despite high vacancy rates.

Figure 1: All MMR Indicators Among Agencies with High Vacancy Rates



SOURCE: Comptroller’s office analysis of Mayor’s Management Report metrics on Open Data, accessed February 15, 2023, and FMS.

Units of Appropriation with Low Performance and High Vacancies

Units of Appropriation (U/As) provide greater insight into the operations of various programs. Tying MMR performance to the specific U/A reveals more granular insight into functions within an agency that are in need of particular attention. Table 2 therefore looks at U/As where there were failures across all three MMR measures, and where vacancy rates exceed 10%. We found 10 such Units of Appropriation.

Table 2: Units of Appropriation with Low Performance And High Vacancies

Agency	Unit of Appropriation	Targets on Track (%)	Indicators Improving Compared to Last Year (%)	Indicators Improving Compared to Last Five Years (%)	Vacancy Rate for U/A (%)
Dept. of Education	Early Childhood Programs/Univ Pre-K	17%	50%	17%	23%
Dept. of Parks and Recreation	Design & Engineering	50%	50%	50%	21%
Dept. for the Aging	In Home Services	25%	25%	0%	19%
Housing Preservation and Development	Office Of Administration	0%	0%	0%	17%
NYC Emergency Management	Personal Services	20%	50%	40%	16%
Human Resources Administration	Public Assistance	0%	33%	33%	15%
Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene	Environmental Health	0%	14%	43%	15%
Dept. of Finance	Administration & Planning	0%	17%	33%	15%
Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene	Disease Control	0%	29%	14%	11%
Dept. of Records and Info Svcs	Personal Services	33%	47%	47%	11%

SOURCE: Comptroller’s office analysis of Mayor’s Management Report metrics on Open Data, accessed February 15, 2023, and FMS.

The U/As that are experiencing trouble represent a spectrum of City services, from direct services that immediately impact vulnerable New Yorkers, to risk management and planning indicators that are less visible but will accumulate over time and may cause long-term harm to the city and its residents. A few examples:

Direct Services

- The **Department for the Aging’s** In-Home Services, with poor performance on home meals delivered and case management services.
- **Human Resources Administration’s** Public Assistance, with much-reported deficiencies in SNAP application processing and Cash Assistance provision.
- **DOHMH**, where childhood immunizations are noticeably down, STI cases are up, and restaurant inspections are down.
- The **Department of Finance’s** Administration & Planning is taking longer to process Senior Citizen and Disability Rent Increase Exemptions (SCRIE and DRIE).

Planning and Risk Management

- At **NYC Emergency Management**, the number of emergency preparedness drills and tabletop exercises is down.
- The **Parks Department’s** Design and Engineering is completing fewer capital projects on time.

What Can NYC Do

The City should take steps to modernize its hiring and retention practices, by implementing recommendations in the Comptroller’s office’s [Title Vacant](#) and the 5BORO Institute’s [Solving the Staffing Crisis](#).

Both of those reports recommend expediting hiring, allowing hybrid work for appropriate positions, reconsidering compensation levels for key hard-to-recruit slots, and designating Chief Talent/Recruitment/Retention Officer(s) to drive this work.

In the recently-announced [tentative agreement](#) between the NYC Office of Labor Relations and DC 37 (the City’s largest municipal labor union), the parties agreed to establish a “Flexible Work Committee” to discuss options to provide greater flexibility and enhance employee morale, including remote work, compressed and flexible work schedules, and improve transit benefits. The parties’ goal is to begin a pilot program that includes remote work no later than June 1, 2023.

Methodology

We narrowed the focus to MMR indicators that had valid data for October 2022, a Desired Direction, and were identifiably associated with an agency for which we had employment data. These parameters narrowed the scope to 975 indicators, of which 279 were Critical Indicators.

We estimated the full-year FY23 performance to compare with prior years. For cumulative indicators, we projected the full-year level by scaling the reported Oct. 2022 value by the portion of that indicator's full-year value which was typically achieved by October in prior years. This was done both for indicators marked as additive in MMR data and others where the pattern of prior year data showed they were logged cumulatively. For rate-type indicators not logged cumulatively, we treat the Oct. 2022 value as an estimate for FY23 full-year value.

We measure agency success in three ways: whether the projected performance surpasses the goal this year, whether the performance is improved compared to FY22, and whether performance is improved compared to the average performance over the last five years. We compute the percentage of critical indicators that are successful across each agency and the percentage all indicators that are successful across each unit of appropriation.

Each indicator is a measure of a broader Service. (For instance, the indicator "Average days between electrical inspection request and inspection" measures the Department of Building's Service of "Facilitat[ing] safe and compliant development"). We identified the appropriate Unit of Appropriation for each Service.

We build on our prior analysis of vacant positions across City agencies (detailed in ['Title Vacant'](#)) and focused our analysis on the performance of agencies and units of appropriation which have the highest vacancy rates.

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