

A New Face for Los Angeles: Preparing for LA County's First Elected Executive

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Kimberli Davila, Sebastian Fernandez, and Navid Goodarzi

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Prepared For: **Sara Sadhwani**, Assistant Professor of Politics at Pomona College and Member of the Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force

Faculty Advisor: **Rafael Carbonell**, Executive Director of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government and Adjunct Lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School

Seminar Leaders: **Suzanne Cooper**, Academic Dean for Teaching and Curriculum and Edith M. Stokey Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, and **Jack Donahue**, Raymond Vernon Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School



HARVARD Kennedy School
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

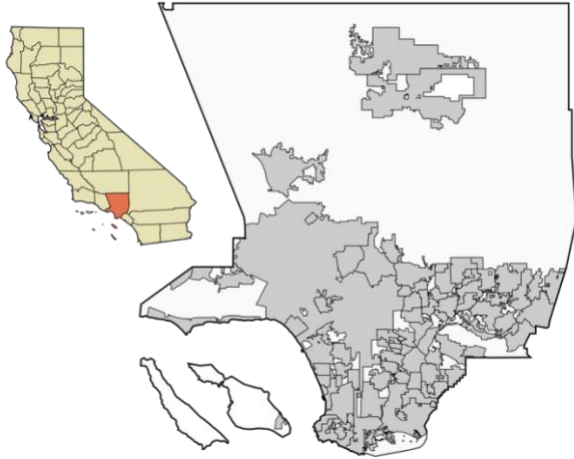
This report examines the establishment of an inaugural elected County Executive for Los Angeles County following the passage of Measure G, a County Charter Amendment approved by voters in November 2024. Measure G represents a historic shift in the County's governance structure. For over a century, Los Angeles County has operated under a structure in which executive, legislative, and quasi-judicial authorities were consolidated within the Board of Supervisors, a body of five officials elected in distinct districts. By separating these authorities, Measure G's provision on the elected County Executive aims to modernize governance, enhance accountability, and align Los Angeles County with practices observed in other large counties across the United States.

The Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force serves guides this transition in an advisory capacity, developing strategic recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding the scope of the

Executive's authority and design of the role. Although Measure G provides a detailed outline of executive powers, key questions around implementation and practice remain unsolved ahead of the 2028 election. This report examines those challenges and offers recommendations to the Task Force, drawing on case study analysis and qualitative interviews with other United States counties with elected county executive governance structures.

LA County's Challenge

Los Angeles County is the largest county in the United States, with a population of more than 10 million people, an annual budget of over \$52 billion (FY 2025-2026), and unique governance challenges exacerbated by a plethora of policy issues. Unincorporated areas comprise more than 65 percent of the county land area and include more than one million residents, so the newly elected Executive will serve as the primary head of local government for thousands of households.



**FIGURE 1: LOS ANGELES COUNTY
(MUNICIPALITIES IN GRAY)¹**

After the devastating wildfires in the City of Los Angeles and unincorporated Altadena in January 2025, residents' demands for greater accountability coincide with new opportunities presented by establishing an elected County Executive. Nevertheless, implementing Measure G presents a significant challenge. The County must transition from its long-standing governance model while maintaining continuity of services, managing institutional complexity, and balancing political accountability with modern, professionalized administration. Decisions made during this transition will influence the effectiveness of services and the trust of LA County's diverse communities.

Furthermore, the size of Los Angeles County vaults any future officeholder into the

second most influential executive role in California, behind only the governor in terms of size of population represented and total budget. The stakes of such significant representation will attract necessary scrutiny and discussion as the County Executive materializes in public debate and elections.

A Historic Opportunity

The creation of an elected county executive builds on a history of local efforts to clarify lines of authority, strengthen accountability to voters, improve strategic coordination across departments, and enable the Board of Supervisors to operate as a legislative and oversight body more effectively. If designed and implemented thoughtfully and strategically, the new executive structure may enhance public trust, improve service delivery, and better position the county to address regional challenges.

Faced with this major political restructuring, Los Angeles County can learn from other large counties with an elected executive. By utilizing the insights we have gathered from our literature review, interviews, and case studies from peer counties, the LA County Governance Reform Task Force can understand practices recommended by professionals working with elected County Executive positions.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Facing a significant political restructuring, how can the LA County Governance Reform Task Force recommend implementing the new county executive to mitigate frictions around the power transition in the short term while promoting fiscal efficiency, balanced powers, and executive accountability in the long term?

Sub questions:

- What policies or elements of county government structure have been proven to create greater efficiency and accountability?
- How does the executive structure outlined in Measure G compare with other peer counties, and how should this inform the Task Force's work?
- How can LA County learn from the successes of peer counties with elected executives to help shape a smoother transition and more effective executive operations?

Key Insights

From our analysis of peer counties with similar elected County Executive governance structures, we gathered insights on common practices and key features of county governance that promote fiscal efficacy, balanced powers, and accountability while managing frictions:

Relationship Building

County staff shared that the elected county executive should focus on early relationship building with current staff and department heads to invest in change management, short-term policy agenda setting, and prioritizing a balanced budget.

Early briefings with department staff alongside a transition team will help ensure continuity, while clarifying implications for current county staff anchored around countywide objectives and values through transition periods.

Budget Development & Coordination

Effective budget development and coordination between the County Executive and the legislative body depends on proactive, sustained communication

Peer Counties Studied

Selection Criteria

- Largest counties in the United States
- Countywide elected executive serves alongside a county legislature
- Comparable administrative complexity

California Context

- No California county operates with an elected County Executive
- San Francisco is a consolidated city-county and not structurally comparable

Counties Studied

- Allegheny County
- Cook County
- King County
- Miami-Dade County
- Milwaukee County
- Wayne County

Engagement

- 17 senior officials interviewed
- Executive, budget, policy, and operations leadership represented

before and during budget drafting to anticipate concerns and align expectations. Early briefings to promote alignment on shared countywide objectives can help reduce friction, shorten negotiations, and foster collaborative outcomes while preserving executive priorities.

Performance Evaluation

A newly elected County Executive should focus on strong performance evaluation of departments to center outcomes rather than compliance. Evaluation should be centralized in a dedicated department, integrated with the budget process, and built collaboratively with county departments to identify performance gaps and drive continuous improvements.

Unincorporated Area Representation and Community Engagement

LA County's elected executive will serve as a critical source of local accountability, necessitating a dedicated Department of Local Services. Creating a dedicated structure for centralized and formalized community outreach increases the ability for communities to be prioritized in both budgeting and service delivery.

Summary of Recommendations

Below is a matrix organizing our recommendations for the LA County Governance Reform Task Force. **Further details are included in the Recommendations section of this report.**

Higher Urgency / Lower Complexity:

Create a Governance Reform Transition Team/ Office. Dedicated staff, budget, and sunset date. Coordinates continuity from now through the 2028 inauguration, including a mandated 90-day handoff period.

Prioritize a balanced first-year budget. Begin developing the first executive budget handoff now. Fiscal credibility must be established in advance.

Institutionalize Executive-Board budget collaboration. Quarterly standing meetings dedicated legislative affairs staff, and relationship-building early on.

Higher Urgency / Higher Complexity:

Create an Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget. Creates metrics with departments, produces annual public reports, and provides recommendations to align with the budget.

Develop joint emergency and appointment protocols. Agreed authority for Executive during crisis response, board roles, and conflict-of-interest protocols for boards and commissions.

Allocate independence to the Board and ensure branch independence. Robust Legislative Analyst office, rules of engagement for cross-branch staff, and broad participation requirements for any future charter amendments.

Lower Urgency / Lower Complexity:

Establish a two-year budget cycle. Full budgets in odd years, mid-biennium review, and multi-year projections. Additionally, create an independent revenue commission.

Lower Urgency / Higher Complexity:

Create a Department of Local Services for unincorporated communities. Centralize authority for the ~1 million residents living in unincorporated areas. Require dedicated outreach and data tracking on services.

INTRODUCTION

The governance reforms detailed in Measure G raise important questions about the executive transition, fiscal efficiency, the balance of powers, and executive accountability. As the inaugural countywide executive election approaches in 2028, LA County faces both opportunities and risks associated with establishing new processes, expectations, and structures for executive leadership.

This project examines how LA County can design and implement governance reforms to effectively support the transition to an elected executive model, drawing on comparative case studies from six peer counties across the United States. The six counties selected are the next largest counties in the United States led by an at-large, elected county executive with broad administrative powers. All counties contain a major city governed independently from the county. We demonstrate these linkages through our case studies and provide an analysis of the extent to which the powers in their charters align with those granted to the County Executive by Measure G.

The six peer counties offer key lessons on their experience with an elected executive structure, transition processes, budgeting requirements, and inter-branch dynamics. This report incorporates qualitative insights gathered through 17 interviews with county staff, which surfaced both opportunities and challenges associated with an elected Executive role. These perspectives provide valuable insight into how the governance reforms detailed in Measure G may operate in practice.

By synthesizing interview findings, county charter powers, and literature of county governance models, this project **identifies actionable strategies and recommendations that can facilitate the initial transition and equip the County to benefit from the long-term opportunities of the reform.** The recommendations intend to inform LA County citizens, policymakers, transition staff, and county leadership as they operationalize the Executive.

This project also aims to **inspire future reforms as additional counties, both in California and throughout the U.S, move towards a modern, professionalized county government.** County governments

continue to play an immense role in the delivery of federal and state funding, acting as the primary institution of local services in California. For a county of this scale, with a population larger than 40 U.S. states, the

impact and magnitude of this effort will have implications for many other counties and serve as a model for governance nationwide.



THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY GOVERNANCE REFORM TASK FORCE. PHOTO COURTESY OF LOS ANGELES BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

BACKGROUND

History of LA County Governance Reform Efforts

The passage of Measure G is a significant milestone in Los Angeles County history, bringing changes to County government, supported and proposed by reformers for decades. Throughout the twentieth century, Los Angeles County exploded in size and population while political representation remained constant; today, each of the five elected supervisors now represents over 2 million constituents. In fact, LA County has been governed by a five-member legislature since 1855. This incongruous growth has motivated a rich history of political discourse and organizing

around governance reform, including robust discussions on whether Los Angeles County should implement an executive officer with managerial authority, and whether this officer would be elected or appointed. The current Governance Reform Task Force can draw upon over fifty years of civic insights and suggestions when shaping the newly elected executive role.

This study echoes previous efforts to research other counties to improve representation and outcomes for residents of Los Angeles County. In the early 1970's, the county commissioned two groups—the Los Angeles County Citizens Economy and Efficiency Committee, and the Los Angeles Grand Jury Ad Hoc Committee on Governmental Organization—to study the Los Angeles County charter and determine whether changes could help County government fulfill its duty to a rapidly expanding constituency.² Both groups

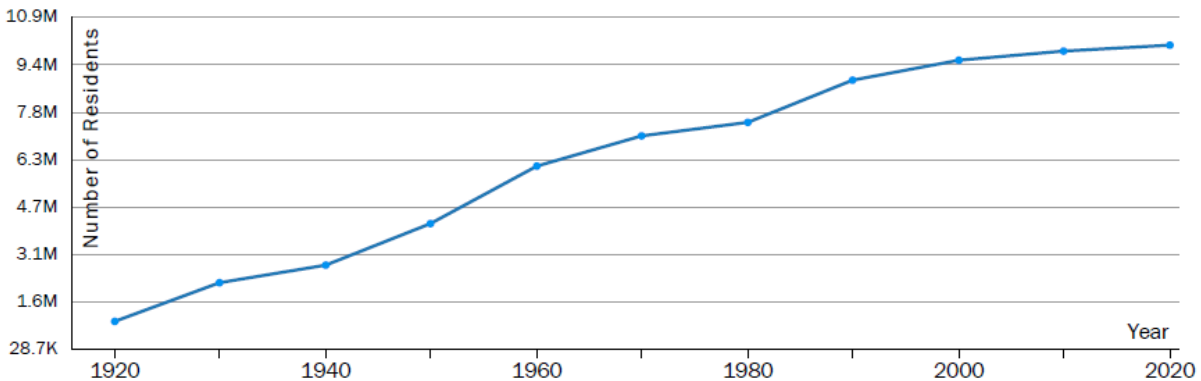


FIGURE 2: TOTAL POPULATION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY BY DECADE 1920-2020 (NACO DATA).³

emphasized the need for a single executive to manage day-to-day functions in Los Angeles County, which would improve visibility and leadership while enabling the Board of Supervisors to implement an auditing and ethics function without conflict of interest.⁴⁵⁶ These early studies paved the way for the Los Angeles County Bar Association to publish the landmark report *To Serve Seven Million* through its Public Commission on Los Angeles County Government, with funding from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. This commission unanimously supported the 1976 Proposition A “to establish the position of an elected County Mayor,” citing intentions to pursue a separation of powers similar to systems in federal and state government, accountability through sole executive responsibility, and political identity to improve county visibility among other branches of government that fund various county programs and services.⁷

Despite years of research and advocacy demonstrating clear benefits to establishing a county executive position with managerial authority over county operations, Los Angeles County did not approve such changes for decades. In 1990, the renamed Citizens Economy and Efficiency Commission again recommended that the County amend its charter to allow, this time,

for an appointed chief executive, eschewing previous calls for an elected executive that would balance the executive and legislative authority vested in the Board of Supervisors.⁸ The Board of Supervisors established the appointed chief executive position in 2007. Further studies, reports, and advocacy continued over the years, culminating in a voter-approved reform package through Measure G in 2024, with 51.62% of votes cast in favor of Measure G.

Defining the Elected Executive Role and Its Powers in LA County

Building on this extensive history, Measure G defines the role and powers of the elected County Executive while maintaining the core powers retained by the Board of Supervisors. Effective 2028, the Office of the County Executive will be elected every four years, with no term limits, to assume executive and administrative powers of the Board, excluding oversight of the County Legislative Analyst and Clerk. Moreover, the County Executive will have the ability to appoint department heads (subject to Board confirmation), remove department heads (subject to reinstatement by two-thirds Board vote), lead County emergency response efforts, and develop and submit the annual budget, including veto power over Board

amendments. The Board of Supervisors will retain legislative and quasi-judicial authority, including appropriating and authorizing all County funds, establishing organizational rules, procedures, and committees, overseeing the Legislative Analyst and Clerk, and authorizing lawsuits with the County Executive's concurrence, or by two-thirds Board vote if opposed.

The Mandate of the Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force

With Measure G establishing the legal and structural basis for reform, the responsibility of translating these reforms into actionable governance rests with the Los Angeles Governance Reform Task Force. The Task Force holds the ability to guide implementation of various aspects of Measure G, including the expansion of the Board of Supervisors from five to nine members, the creation of an ethics commission, and the establishment of the elected County Executive. As an advisory body, the Task Force is charged with

developing informed, practical recommendations within current institutional, fiscal, and administrative considerations. The Task Force is comprised of five Board-appointed members, three labor-nominated members (one by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, one by SEIU Local 721, and one by the Coalition of County Unions), and five at-large members. At least two of the members reside in unincorporated LA County, and at least one member represents each of the following: business, municipal government, community-based organizations, and public sector ethics expertise. The Task Force is required to conclude its work by December 3, 2028, subject to extension by the Board. The Task Force consists of ad hoc committees, including the ad hoc committee on the Elective Executive, with Sara Sadhwani serving as the Chair and David Phelps serving as the Co-Chair.

Current members of the Los Angeles Governance Reform Task Force are listed in Appendix A.

METHODOLOGY

Each research method outlined below corresponds to one of the three research questions identified within our problem statement (see Executive Summary).

1. Literature Review of County Governance Models and Reform

We conducted a survey of research on county governance structures and reforms, drawing on scholarly writing and data available through the National Association of Counties (NACo). Our literature review process studies the various forms of county governance, as well as the impacts of form on service delivery and budgeting. We find that most research and scholarly attention focus on cities and municipalities rather than county governments; nonetheless, we discuss the few findings that have been established from a limited body of work. We also find insufficient large-county case studies and data to offer objective clarity on governing a large jurisdiction like Los Angeles County.

Given those limitations, we orient our additional research methodologies around structured comparisons and case studies of peer counties, analyzing the specific authorities proposed in Measure G, and gathering qualitative insights from senior officials to form recommendations.

2. Executive Structure Comparison

To ground our case study analysis in a rigorous comparative framework, we analyze the executive structures of six peer counties, developing an overview of the similarities, differences, and limitations across jurisdictions. First, we assemble the list of executive powers defined in the structure laid out by Measure G. Next, we collect the county charters and various explanatory resources for each of the peer counties. Finally, we conduct a structured review of the authorities granted to the County Executive in each, placing them into one of three categories:

1. The peer county possesses the power and exercises it in the same manner prescribed by Measure G.
2. The peer county possesses the power, but some key aspects vary.
3. The peer county does not have an equivalent power, or the power is

exercised through a fundamentally different structure.

Peer counties were initially selected based on their population size, governance structure, and annual budget, ensuring that comparison counties can best resemble the administrative complexity and scale of Los Angeles County. These are the six largest counties by population with elected chief executives. We strengthen the case for comparison by identifying the specific ways their governing structures resemble Measure G. We also highlight the few areas where they differ, as it's important to consider how structural asymmetries will affect the usefulness of some borrowed policies in LA County.

Additionally, we use county budgets and public data to compare the functions and resources of LA County with its peers.

As previously noted, no counties in California follow a governance structure with an elected County Executive, except for San Francisco. However, San Francisco uses a consolidated city-county structure and thus oversees a vastly different set of services over a vastly different scope than LA. For this reason, there is no acceptable county within California to examine for this study.

3. Case Studies & Stakeholder Interviews

Following the literature review and executive structure analysis, we conclude that qualitative interviews with peers are the most effective way to collect relevant policy options and practices for LA County.

We report findings from interviews with 17 County staff in the six different peer counties. These are Allegheny County (seat: Pittsburgh, PA), Cook County (seat: Chicago, IL), King County (seat: Seattle, WA), Miami-Dade County (seat: Miami, FL), Milwaukee County (seat: Milwaukee, WI), and Wayne County (seat: Detroit, MI). County staff titles include former County Executives, Chiefs of Staff, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Financial Officers, Deputy Directors of Policy, Budget Strategy Directors, and County Managers. These interviews provide insight into the workings of elected County Executive administrations. They inform our recommendations, building upon the framework established in our literature review and structure comparison.

A full list of the County staff we interviewed for this study can be found in Appendix A.

COUNTY GOVERNANCE MODELS: LITERATURE REVIEW AND COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

Overview of County Governance Models in the U.S.

To further examine the shift from the current appointed Chief Executive Officer model to the elected executive model in LA County, it is vital to provide a foundational understanding of the county governance models that exist across the U.S.

American counties commonly exist under two different sources of authority: Dillon’s Rule and Home Rule. Under Dillon’s Rule, counties must obtain approval from the state legislature to make changes in structure, functions, or organization.⁹ Alternatively, Home Rule counties possess broader authority and autonomy in structural, functional, and fiscal domains.¹⁰ In California, county authority follows a “restrictive home rule” structure, wherein there are both general law counties, which follow state-designated parameters, and charter counties like Los Angeles County,

that are free to determine many aspects of their governance in a county charter.

Counties use three common governance structures, including County Commission, Commission-Administrator, and Commission-Elected-Executive.¹¹ Currently, Los Angeles County operates within a Commission-Administrator structure, with the Board of Supervisors possessing executive, legislative, and quasi-judicial powers and appointing a Chief Executive Officer. Separation of powers is central to the county reform movement. According to the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Commission-Elected Executive form sometimes positions the county executive as both the executive of the county and as a voting member and chair of the board.¹² Others only grant the elected executive management of the executive branch. In moving towards an elected County Executive structure, Los Angeles County is essentially moving from one reformed structure to another.

Despite embarking on unprecedented governance reform, Los Angeles County will move to a model consistent with hundreds of counties across the United States. Currently, 696 of 3,069 U.S. counties have an elected County Executive. Of these 696 counties, NACo reports that 97% of elected executives

serve four-year terms and only 8% have term limits. Measure G itself did not prescribe term limits to the elected County Executive,

putting LA in line with most similarly structured counties in the U.S.

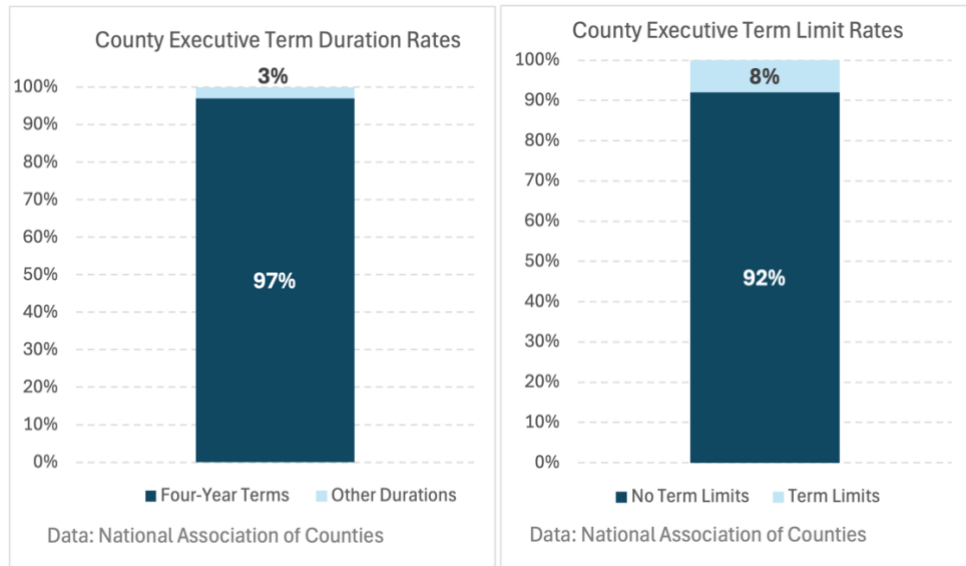


FIGURE 3: BAR GRAPH OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE DURATION RATES AND COUNTY EXECUTIVE TERM LIMIT RATES PER NACO DATA.¹³

Literature on Structural Reform and County Performance

As Krebs notes in his analysis of LA County’s Measure G on the Elected Executive, the connection between county government structure and fiscal policy choices varies within available research and literature.¹⁴ Regarding efforts like Measure G, which institutes a Commission-Elected-Executive structure, no clear indication of “whether reformed counties spend more (or less) than unreformed ones” has been established

yet.¹⁵ Scheider and Park also suggest that research on counties has been sparse, particularly research on service delivery.¹⁶ However, they note that counties with elected chief executives tend to spend more on service delivery than counties with other forms, which could suggest a greater political focus on county services under elected executive governance structures. Yet, as Krebs suggests, empirical literature collapses County Administrator and County Elected Executive into a single reformed category which can make attributing solely to County Elected Executives an overstatement. Under

this framework, Measure G moves LA County from one reformed form to another.

While findings on efficiency and performance are slim, there is some literature suggesting that county spending and fiscal policies are similar across forms of governance. In a study of counties in the U.S. South, Campbell and Turnbull found that government structure had no significant effect on county spending.¹⁷ Morgan and Kickham examine fiscal policy changes through the “modernization” of county governance and find no effect on fiscal behavior for counties that changed from a commission form to either an elected executive or appointed administrator.¹⁸ This result conflicts somewhat with that of Schneider and Park, but Morgan and Kickham ultimately also underscore a lack of data and point to the need for more research.

Marando and Reeves examine how serving the needs of unincorporated areas can act as a driver of structural reform. Like their academic peers, they find that more research is necessary to state definitively whether counties with large, unincorporated areas are more or less likely to adopt an elected executive structure.¹⁹

The dearth of scholarly knowledge leaves it difficult to point to objective ideals for county governance, making qualitative input and common practices from close peers an essential source of data.

CASE STUDY COUNTY COMPARISON

Identifying Our Peer Counties

We selected six counties that could deliver meaningful insights surrounding elected executive governance while attempting to reach similar levels of scale and complexity to Los Angeles County (a national outlier due to its size). Reviewing the sequence of United States counties by population, Allegheny County, Cook County, King County, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee County, and Wayne County were selected

because they are governed by a county executive elected at-large in their jurisdiction – the chief concern of this study.

Differences in the various governing mandates, populations served, and operational levels among peer counties provide critical context and opportunities for analysis to understand how recommendations may carry over to Los Angeles County. To further demonstrate applicability, we analyze how county executive powers laid out in respective peer county statutes mirror the powers enumerated to the elected executive in Measure G, and we analyze how executive offices in peer counties differ by staff number and budget.

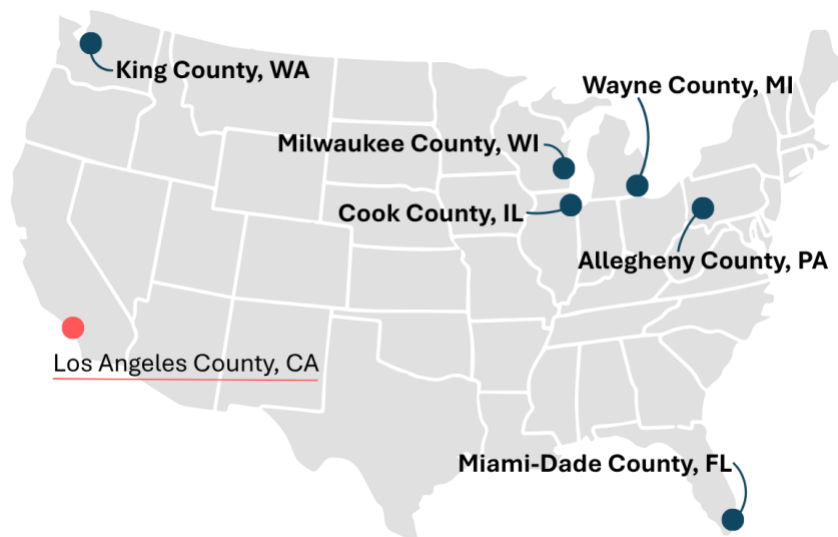


FIGURE 4: MAP OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND SIX PEER COUNTIES, SELECTED FROM THOSE NEXT-LARGEST COUNTIES WITH AN ELECTED COUNTY EXECUTIVE.

Each peer county contains a major city that is governed independently from the county in a further attempt to mirror the governance structure imposed by Measure G. Given these selection constraints, no other counties in California could be selected for this study. California counties either operate through a structure like Los Angeles County before Measure G, or in the case of San Francisco, a consolidated city-county executive structure that diverges too significantly from the responsibilities assigned to county leadership. Therefore, no counties in California could be selected for this study, cementing Los Angeles County as a state leader towards greater electoral control over county operations.

County Profiles

Los Angeles County

The County of Los Angeles is the most populous in the United States. With over ten million residents spread over 4,060.3 square miles, Los Angeles County has a density of 2,466 people per square mile. Of the 10,014,009 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 3,259,427 (32.5%) identify as White alone, 794,364 (7.9%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 163,464 (1.6%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 1,499,984 (15.0%) identify as

Asian alone, 24,522 (0.2%) identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 2,784,180 (27.8%) identify as some other race alone, and 1,488,068 (14.9%) identify as two or more races.²⁰

In Los Angeles County, over half (52.2%) of residents speak a language other than English alone, according to the 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. These estimates also predict that 13.3% residents of Los Angeles County live in poverty and 37.2% residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.²¹

Los Angeles County operates an enormous workforce and budget to meet residents' needs in a variety of ways, including direct service provision to unincorporated areas and member cities. The most recent budget for fiscal year 2025-2026 approved more than \$50 billion in spending and salaries for over 100,000 employees.

The following descriptions of peer counties serve to outline contextual and operational differences when compared to Los Angeles. Figure 5 compiles important information for easier comparison among case study counties. To understand them in more detail, see Appendix B for a list of peer county organizational charts.

| | Los Angeles | Allegheny | Cook | King | Miami-Dade | Milwaukee | Wayne |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| State | CA | PA | IL | WA | FL | WI | MI |
| County Seat | Los Angeles | Pittsburgh | Chicago | Seattle | Miami | Milwaukee | Detroit |
| Population (2020 US Census)²² | 10,014,009 | 1,250,578 | 5,275,541 | 2,269,675 | 2,701,767 | 939,489 | 1,793,561 |
| Founded | 1850 | 1788 | 1831 | 1852 | 1836 | 1834 | 1815 |
| Executive Title | County Executive | County Executive | County President | County Executive | County Mayor | County Executive | County Executive |
| Legislators | 5 <i>(9 by 2032)</i> | 15 | 17 | 9 | 13 | 18 | 15 |
| Annual Budget | \$52.477B <i>(25-26)²³</i> | \$1.312B <i>(2026)^{24,25}</i> | \$10.117B <i>(2026)²⁶</i> | \$9.849B <i>(2026)²⁷</i> | \$12.934B <i>(25-26)²⁸</i> | \$1.39B <i>(2026)²⁹</i> | \$2.200B <i>(25-26)³⁰</i> |
| Spending Per Capita | \$5,240 | \$1,049 | \$1,918 | \$4,340 | \$4,787 | \$1,609 | \$1,227 |
| Number of Departments and Agencies | 38 | 35 | 91 | 18 | 33 | 30 | 12 |
| Number of Staff | 104,900 | 6,149 | 19,800 | 15,500 | 41,200 | 4,132 | 4,242 |

FIGURE 5: KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF LOS ANGELES AND PEER COUNTIES.

Allegheny County

Representing Pittsburgh and surrounding areas, Allegheny County holds over 1.25

million residents. Spreading over 730 square miles, Allegheny County has a density of 1,713 people per square mile. Of the

1,250,578 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 946,321 (75.7%) identify as White alone, 163,678 (13.9%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 1,909 (0.2%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 58,541 (4.7%) identify as Asian alone, 357 (0.0%) identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 14,066 (1.1%) identify as some other race alone, and 65,706 (5.3%) identify as two or more races.³¹

In Allegheny, only 9% of residents speak a language other than English alone, according to the 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. These estimates also predict that 11.8% of Allegheny County residents live in poverty and 48% residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.³²

Although operating at a reduced scope, Allegheny County provides an array of services for its residents. The 2025 Adopted budget records 6,149 employees, with most of the county's headcount dedicated to operating Community Living Centers (1,100 staff), Court of Common Pleas (840), County Jail (840 staff), and Human Services (670).³³

Cook County

Behind Los Angeles, Cook County is the second most populous county in the United States. Cook County is the densest county studied, where over 5 million residents live

within 945 square miles (5,583 people per square mile). Of the 5,275,541 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 2,345,983 (44.5%) identify as White alone, 1,205,824 (22.9%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 56,984 (1.1%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 413,271 (7.8%) identify as Asian alone, 1,864 (0.0%) identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 705,153 (13.4%) identify as some other race alone, and 546,552 (10.4%) identify as two or more races.³⁴

In Cook County, over one-third (36.3%) of residents speak a language other than English alone, according to the 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates. These estimates also predict that 13.8% of residents of Cook County live in poverty and 44.3% have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.³⁵

Cook County government provides the closest measure to Los Angeles County in terms of population served. For fiscal year 2026, County staff estimate spending \$10.12 billion and employing 23,829 full-time staff equivalents. Cook County provides residents of Chicago and surrounding communities with services such as a public hospital and ambulatory clinic system, CountyCare (a Medicaid-managed care insurance plan), policing, corrections, justice administration

through the Circuit Court System, property valuation and tax administration (including for all local jurisdictions), economic development, transportation, and elections administration. Cook County also provides municipal services like issuing permits to unincorporated areas of the county.³⁶

Toni Preckwinkle currently serves as the 35th president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Sixteen years into her tenure, she was first elected to the office in 2010 and has focused on reducing pension liabilities and restoring credibility.³⁷ Budget deficits are a major challenge impacting Cook County, with a \$211.4 million gap projected for the 2026 fiscal year.

King County

The only other West Coast County in the study, King County holds over two million residents across 2115.7 square miles, at a density of 1,073 residents per square mile. Of the 2,269,675 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 1,273,054 (56.1%) identify as White alone, 151,468 (6.7%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 19,073 (0.8%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 452,475 (19.9%) identify as Asian alone, 20,022 (0.9%) identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 117,830 (5.2%) identify as some other race

alone, and 235,753 (10.4%) identify as two or more races.³⁸

In King County, the 2024 ACS estimates that 33% of residents speak a language other than English alone, 8.7% residents live in poverty, and 57.9% residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.³⁹

King County resembles Los Angeles County by providing regional services countywide as well as additional local services to unincorporated communities. The \$19.7 billion and 18,200 employees recorded in the 2026-2027 budget provide countywide services including public health, transit, wastewater treatment, housing, behavioral health, elections, property assessment, solid waste transfer and disposal, corrections, regional parks and trails, and the prosecution, defense, and adjudication of felonies. Approximately 250,000 residents living in unincorporated areas rely on King County to provide roads, police protection through the Sheriff's Office, land-use regulation and permitting, and surface water management. Furthermore, King County executes contracts with local governments to provide services such as police protection, courts, jails, and public defense.⁴⁰

The King County elected executive position has remained an object of study for

governance reform advocates in Los Angeles since its inception in 1968. As of November 2025, Girmay Zalihay serves as the seventh elected King County Executive, replacing 16-year incumbent Dow Constantine after Shannon Braddock, a participant in this study, served as an interim Executive.⁴¹

Miami-Dade County

Like Los Angeles County, Miami-Dade County is a diverse metropolis with a significant Spanish-speaking population. Miami-Dade County has 1,422 people per square mile for the 1900 square mile land area it occupies. Of the 2,701,167 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 796,893 (29.5%) identify as White alone, 400,002 (14.8%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 9,107 (0.3%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 44,124 (1.6%) identify as Asian alone, 641 (0.0%) identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 319,419 (11.8%) identify as some other race alone, and 1,131,581 (41.9%) identify as two or more races.⁴²

In Miami-Dade County, the 2024 ACS estimates that over three-quarters (75.7%) of residents speak a language other than English alone, 14.1% live in poverty, and 37% have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴³

Miami-Dade County also operates within a two-tier local governance system, providing regional services across the county and a greater level of service to residents in unincorporated areas. Countywide services include public health and social services, transportation, regional parks, county roads, support for the court system, regional sheriff services, and jails. For the estimated 1.2 million residents living in unincorporated Miami-Dade (43.4% of county population), county government provides services such as local sheriff patrol, local parks and roads, planning, and code enforcement. Miami-Dade County works with its 34 municipalities to coordinate services such as fire rescue.⁴⁴ County staff also maintain Miami International Airport and Seaport.

Milwaukee County

With under one million residents living within 241.5 square miles, Milwaukee County is the smallest county represented in this study. Nevertheless, Milwaukee County is denser than Los Angeles with 3,890 people per square mile. Of the 939,489 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 488,198 (52%) identify as White alone, 245,863 (26.2%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 7,507 (0.8%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 46,446 (4.9%) identify as Asian alone, 369 (0.0%) identify as Native

Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 63,932 (6.8%) identify as some other race alone, and 87,174 (9.3%) identify as two or more races.⁴⁵

In Milwaukee County, the 2024 ACS estimates that 20.1% of residents speak a language other than English alone, 16.6% live in poverty, and 36.1% have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁶

Milwaukee County is one of the few fully incorporated jurisdictions, simplifying the county's role in providing services. For fiscal year 2026, Milwaukee County allocated 4132.40 full-time positions across 30 departments with a countywide adopted budget of over \$1.3 billion. Key functions provided include health and human services (over 1000 employees), sheriff services, court and trial administration, road maintenance, as well as administration of parks, two airports, and a zoo. Striving towards continuous improvement, Milwaukee County embarked on a countywide performance measurement initiative in 2017.⁴⁷

Wayne County

In Wayne County, shy of two million residents live across 611.8 square miles at an average

density of 2,932 people per square mile. Of the 1,793,561 residents recorded in the 2020 Census, 882,484 (49.2%) identify as White alone, 674,782 (37.6%) identify as Black or African American Alone, 7,218 (0.4%) identify as American Indian and Alaskan Native Alone, 64,947 (3.6%) identify as Asian alone, 433 (0.0%) identify as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 52,972 (3.0%) identify as some other race alone, and 110,725 (6.2%) identify as two or more races.⁴⁸

In Wayne County, the 2024 ACS estimates that 18.5% of residents speak a language other than English alone, 22.2% live in poverty, and 28.2% have attained a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴⁹

Wayne County provides public safety, infrastructure, legal, and health and human services to residents across its 43 communities. The current Executive Warren C. Evans has served since 2015; in his tenure, he streamlined operations, cut costs, and improved service delivery in a successful effort to deliver Wayne County budget surpluses rather than deficits.⁵⁰

Executive Structure Comparison

We conduct a comparative analysis of executive power structures in Measure G and our peer counties, for various objectives:

- 1. Establishing Comparability:** First, by substantiating the similarity of executive power structures in Measure G and our peer counties, we can legitimize the comparability of these peers and confirm the validity of borrowing their common practices and policies.
- 2. Highlighting Areas of Interest in Measure G:** Next, we can identify whether there are any specific provisions of Measure G that may warrant further review. The implementation process is highly political, and a side-by-side comparison with peers can help clarify whether future charter amendments may be necessary.
- 3. Providing a Foundation for Legal Analysis:** We cite the various authorizing documents included in this analysis. These documents and our findings can continue to serve as a basis for legal research throughout the transition.^{51 52 53}
^{54 55 56} This section does not constitute legal advice nor formal legal analysis.

Peer Counties' Authorizing Documents

Allegheny County

- The Home Rule Charter of Allegheny County

Cook County

- The Code of Ordinances of Cook County

King County

- The King County Charter

Miami-Dade County

- The Miami-Dade County Home Rule Amendment and Charter

Milwaukee County

- Wisconsin Statutes §. 59.17 County executive

Wayne County

- The Home Rule Charter for the County of Wayne

In the table below, we list the 12 most significant powers of the County Executive as structured in Measure G. We compare them with those same powers as structured in the peer counties' authorizing documents.

They're categorized on a three-point scale, with an exact parallel power receiving one point (✓), a slightly different power receiving half a point (~), and an absent or fundamentally different power receiving zero points (x). Finally, we sum the totals for each executive power and each peer county.

Executive Powers Comparison Table

| Executive Powers | LA | Alleg-heny | Cook | King | Miami -Dade | Milwa-ukee | Wayne | Total |
|--|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|-------|
| Executive Power: Holds the executive and administrative authority of the County | ✓ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 5.5/6 |
| Charter: Powers are authorized by a charter | ✓ | ✓ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ | 4.5/6 |
| Appointments: Appoints department heads (subject to legislative confirmation) | ✓ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 5.5/6 |
| Removals: Removes department heads (subject to reinstatement by two-thirds legislative vote) | ✓ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 5.5/6 |
| Free Removal: Appointees can be removed at any time, for any reason | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 5/6 |
| Emergency Management: Leads county emergency response efforts | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6/6 |
| Budget: Develops and submits the annual budget | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6/6 |
| Veto: Can veto legislative ordinances and resolutions (subject to two-thirds override) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 6/6 |
| Budget Veto: Can veto or reduce appropriations in the legislature's budget amendments | ✓ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | 5/6 |
| No Referendum Veto: Can not veto referenda | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ | 5/6 |
| Legislative Contracting: The legislature holds contracting authority and can delegate it to the executive | ✓ | x | x | x | ✓ | x | ✓ | 2/6 |
| No Legislative Power: Can't sit on or vote with the legislative body | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 5/6 |
| Total Points Per County | 12 | 8 | 9.5 | 11 | 11.5 | 9 | 12 | |

Executive Structure Findings

We find a near-exact resemblance between Measure G and the six peer counties across most major powers of the County Executive. We find a mean power similarity score of 5.083, indicating that, on average, more than five of the six peer counties share each of the major powers we identified. We find a mean county similarity score of 10.167, indicating that, on average, more than 10 of the 12 major powers we identified are found in each of the peer counties. **This suggests very high comparability between Measure G and the structures found in our six peer counties, an essential precondition to the validity of the policies and common practices found in our staff interviews.**

What aspects of the structure in Measure G are the MOST SIMILAR to peer counties?

- **Emergency Management (6/6):** All peer executives lead emergency management.
- **Budget (6/6):** All peer executives propose the county budget.
- **Veto (6/6):** All peer executives can veto ordinances and resolutions.

Where did counties LOSE similarity points?

- **Legislative Contracting (2/6):** One of the primary areas of uncertainty, we

found that the executive holds the principal authority over contracts rather than the legislature in four of our six peer counties.

- **Budget Veto (5/6):** In Miami, revenue vetoes must be accompanied by equal or greater expense vetoes. In Allegheny, the specificity of county budget line-items is restricted by state law, so appropriations vetoes are significantly less precise and less powerful.
- **Charter, No Referendum Veto (4.5/6, 5/6):** Milwaukee County's authority comes directly from state law. It has no county charter, and consequently no charter referenda.
- **No Legislative Power (5/6):** The Cook County President has full legislative power in addition to executive power. It's an outlier among peers.
- **Executive Power, Appointments, and Removals (each 5.5/6):** Allegheny County has slight differences in each of these powers because it uses a County Executive-Manager structure. The public elects a chief executive, but they delegate many administrative responsibilities to an appointed County Manager.

Executive Office Staffing

A key challenge for LA County staff and members of the Governance Reform Task Force will be recommending and implementing staffing and organizational structures. This section details how publicly available data on peer counties can help construct a model that predicts an appropriate size for an elected LA County Executive's staff, proposing opportunities for further analysis.

Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) and Expenditures in Peer County Executive Offices

Staff and expenditures in executive offices vary by the populations, budgets, and executive functions in each respective county. Figure 6 includes key data for the executive office in our six counties, as published in their latest available budgets. Allegheny County FTEs and expenditures were taken from the 2026 Recommended Budget figures for the County Executive (Code 10) department. In Allegheny County, the County Executive appoints a County Manager – who has day-to-day oversight functions – with 16 FTE, and \$2,908,172 in expenditures that we did not include in our report. We derived FTEs and expenditures in Cook County using the detailed reporting in

Volume 2 of the 2026 Approved & Adopted Annual Appropriation Bill for Office of President (Code 1010). In King County, FTEs and expenditures were calculated using annualized figures from 2026-2027 Executive Proposed budget line items in the County Executive (Code EN_A1100) and Office of the Executive (Code EN_A12000) departments. Estimates for FTEs and expenditures for the Office of the Mayor in Miami-Dade County were gathered from the FY 2025-26 Proposed Budget and Multi-Year Capital Plan. We used data from Milwaukee County's 2026 Adopted Budget to find FTEs and expenditures for the County Executive General Office (Code 110). Milwaukee County also has a County Executive Office of Government Affairs (Code 103) with 2 FTE and \$435,412 in expenditures that we did not include in our report. The most recent budget data for Wayne County accessible online is from FY 2023-2024, so we used FY 2024-2025 Projected figures for FTEs and expenditures in the Office of the County Executive Officer.

The data suggests that executive office FTEs exhibit a scalar relationship with the size of the county. To investigate this theory, we ran several regressions of executive FTEs on peer county population and operating budget totals. Despite our small sample size, we found an **R-squared of**

0.83467269 for FTEs on population total—an excellent result for such a small experiment, indicating that the populations of these six counties account for 83.5% of the variance in their respective county executive staff sizes.

| | Allegheny | Cook | King | Miami-Dade | Milwaukee | Wayne |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Executive Office FTE | 20 | 42 | 23 | 45 | 8 | 9 |
| Executive Office Expenditures | \$659,388 57 | \$6,787,859 58 | \$8,650,993 59 | \$9,265,000 60 | \$1,046,131 61 | \$7,279,704 62 |

FIGURE 6: RECENT FTE AND EXPENDITURES FOR PEER COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICES.

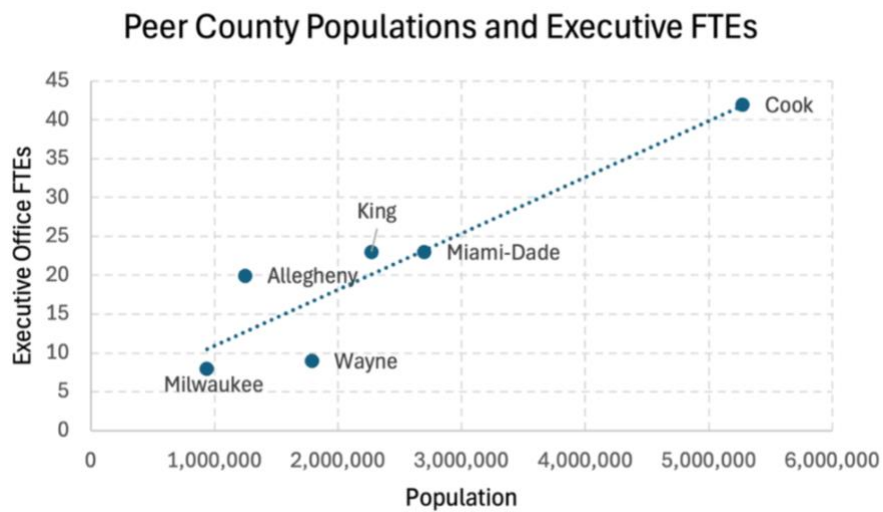


FIGURE 7: REGRESSING FTEs ON POPULATION.

Peer County Operating Budgets and Executive FTEs

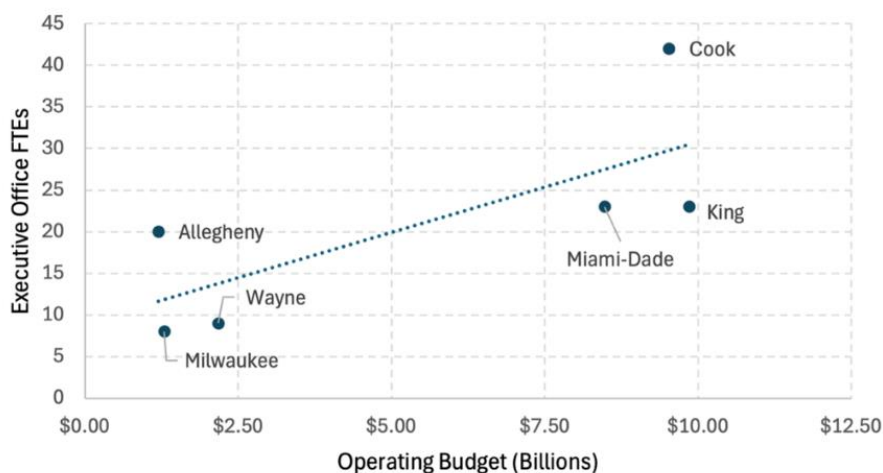


FIGURE 8: REGRESSING FTEs ON OPERATING BUDGET.

Our regression of executive FTEs on operating budgets was less successful. Visually, the plot still features a weak positive relationship, but with an **R-squared of 0.56319718**, it’s harder to say whether budget is a reliable predictor of executive staff size.

Ultimately, with only six data points, neither of these results should be used to model LA’s executive staff size. However, they provide proof of concept that an expanded model (ideally, at least 30 of the largest counties in the US with elected county executives), including several variables at

once (population, operating budget, number of departments/services provided), is both technically feasible and could provide a highly accurate prediction of staffing needs. Los Angeles County may also consider additional research on staff titles in the various positions that comprise each county executive office. Line-item budgets for Cook and Allegheny counties provide this granular information in a manner accessible online, and further research may involve retrieving lists of positions to further understand what functions staff in the office of an elected county executive must fulfill.

INTERVIEWS WITH CASE STUDY COUNTY OFFICIALS

Overview

After establishing the comparability of our peer counties, we conducted in-depth interviews with each county to learn how their policies and practices might inform our problem statement:

Facing a significant political restructuring,

how can the LA County Governance Reform Task Force recommend implementing the new county executive to mitigate frictions around power transition in the short term while promoting fiscal efficiency, balanced powers, and executive accountability in the long term?

Details on interview participants and question formats are available in the Appendices.

Our findings are organized into eight topics:

Topic

Core Questions for LA County

Transition and Change Management

How do we make the 2028 Transition as smooth as possible?

Performance Evaluation

How does the executive drive fiscal efficiency through performance accountability?

Executive-Legislative Budget Collaboration

How do the executive and board work together on the budget?

Budget Cycle

Should LA County consider a 2-year budget?

Unincorporated Area Services

How does the executive remain accountable to unincorporated communities?

Board and Commission Appointments

How should appointments be handled ethically and strategically?

Emergency Management

What is the executive's role during a crisis?

Branch Independence

How do we prevent one branch from dominating the other?

Transitions and Change Management

These findings examine how LA County can implement a smoother transition to an elected County Executive in 2028. **Seven** officials across **four** peer counties contributed. King County was especially informative, having recently completed a transition from Executive Shannon Braddock to Executive Girmay Zahilay, elected November 2025.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|--|
| High - (Mentioned by 3 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in change management to clarify implications for current staff |
| Medium - (Mentioned by 2 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After executive transitions, prioritize passing a balanced budget • Maintain neutrality and transparency with internal executive candidates • After executive transitions, prioritize executive relationship-building, especially through liaisons and designated “connector” staff |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require briefings from department heads to all incoming elected officials • Establish a formal transition team to coordinate continuity • Anchor work around countywide objectives and values (“true north”) through transitions • Allow sufficient time (ideally >3 weeks) for the transition • Have the incoming administration develop a clear short-term policy agenda • Designate an independent expert to consult on Measure G uncertainties • Involve current elected officials in implementation • Plan to show how residents have been involved as the election nears |

Key Findings

Change management is the most universal concern. Officials across Cook, King, Milwaukee, and Wayne counties highlighted

the risk of staff feeling confused and destabilized by structural reforms. The consensus recommendation was to invest early in transition materials such as onboarding, training, and clear

communications that explain what the change means for current employee's roles and responsibilities. Milwaukee officials put it plainly: *"Folks outside of conversations will feel like they're at the mercy of decisions being made."* Milwaukee officials also warned that involving current supervisors and officials in implementation planning carries risk, since they may be incentivized to design systems that favor their own political futures.

King County offers the most developed transition model. Having just completed an executive transition in 2025, King County officials described a structured approach built around a dedicated transition team, assembled before the new executive arrives, that includes current executive office staff, political liaisons, and department-designated leads. The team's job is to collect key priorities, concerns, and performance data, and to equip the incoming administration to resume operations with minimal disruption. Critically, the team also handles the human side: preparing briefings for current staff that explain the implications of the change and actively work to sustain morale.

King officials also identified two structural factors that smooth transitions over time. First, countywide strategic plans create a shared "true north" that survives leadership changes, departments know what

they're working toward regardless of who is in office. Second, the county's charter-mandated 20-day transition period was flagged as a problem: *officials explicitly recommended that LA County build in more time.* King County's experience suggests that three weeks is not enough to transfer institutional knowledge to the scale of a large, complex county.

"Executives may arrive with many policy goals, but none can be advanced until debt is stabilized and fiscal stability is secured."

One additional challenge King faced recently: two sitting council members ran for county executive simultaneously, creating significant conflict-of-interest risk. The county managed this by being rigorous about inviting both candidates to all relevant meetings and events, a practice worth formalizing in policy for LA County, given the likelihood of internal candidates in 2028.

Fiscal stability is the new executive's first job. Both Cook and King County officials emphasized that passing a balanced budget should be the incoming executive's top

priority, regardless of what policy goals they campaigned on. King County's experience confirms this: one recent executive's decision to focus on closing deficits early generated the credibility and stability needed to pursue longer-term priorities.

LA County should expect a surge in public interest closer to 2028. Milwaukee officials observed that, while community engagement around governance reform tends to be low during implementation, interest spikes as elections approach. They recommended developing a proactive public engagement strategy now, both to genuinely incorporate resident input and to have a clear record of that engagement ready when scrutiny increases. This is particularly relevant for LA County given the scale of Measure G's

changes and the likely media attention surrounding the first county executive election.

The executive will need connectors. Both Milwaukee and Wayne County officials stressed that the incoming executive will need to build an extensive web of relationships, with the board, with local government leaders, with state and federal contacts, that take time to develop. Dedicated liaison and government affairs staff who can serve as connectors are not a luxury; they are infrastructure. Wayne County summarized the right mindset for the executive-board relationship: *"Don't treat the board as a rubber stamp, but they're also not adversaries."*

Performance Evaluation

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote fiscal efficiency through the county executive’s role in performance evaluation. We include findings on successful policies shared by **11** officials across **five** of our peer counties.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|---|
| High - (Mentioned by 4-5 / 5 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and publish reliable and frequent data to enable evaluation • Establish evaluation metrics through collaboration with each department |
| Medium - (Mentioned by 2-3 / 5 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralize performance evaluation in a dedicated department • Integrate performance evaluation with budget processes • When setting up an evaluation system, communicate transparently so departments know they won’t be punished if underperforming |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 5 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When performance toward a certain goal is lacking, push for stricter compliance with evaluation standards • To push for performance, use evaluation standards to locate “pain points” • When setting up an evaluation system, get departments in the door first and worry about finding the best metrics second • Measuring outcomes allows counties to be more strategic than just measuring compliance with output levels • Push for spending on compliance and evaluation, as council members tend to underfund these in favor of direct services • Where there is little discretion around spending, evaluate outcomes • When setting up an evaluation system, have the strategy department implement changes first to set an example, and roll out changes across multiple departments at a time to spread out attention |

Key Findings

Reliable, regularly updated data is essential. Officials across Allegheny, Cook, King, Milwaukee, and Wayne counties shared a variety of approaches and practices around evaluation, but all are rooted in data.

Executive offices leverage department-level dashboards and metrics to make informed decisions based on evidence. With robust data, analysts can expose “pain points,” highlighting where performance is not meeting goals, and hence where executive leadership may be falling short on policy.

Large counties succeed by authorizing a dedicated department to oversee evaluation. Cook, King, and Milwaukee counties all feature dedicated performance departments. They generally focus on budget or strategy as well, with strategic plans guiding evaluation, and performance informing budgeting. Once the county executive establishes policy priorities, departments make sure they are clearly reflected in the budget and evaluations.

Performance departments generally use metrics established in collaboration with staff from the other departments, so having a dedicated department simplifies this by consolidating oversight under a fixed team, ensuring standardization and uniformity. The

“For a huge county, you have to ask a question like, can the executive really spend time on details like department performance?”

performance department engages in an interactive process with county departments, establishing performance metrics and setting up dashboards to be updated regularly.

Communication and trust facilitate evaluation. Especially if a county has not employed a standardized evaluation process in the past, staff will be concerned about consequences from underperformance. Officials and leaders should communicate proactively to help staff and departments feel safe reporting data. The goal of evaluation is simply to understand how the county can improve where goals aren’t being met.

Milwaukee County recommends several procedures to build trust. If any fundamental change to evaluation processes is being implemented, the performance department takes the lead and pilots the change for itself first, and when rolling out process changes for other departments, proceed in clusters of several departments at once, so that no one department receives disproportionate attention and scrutiny.

Executive-Legislative Budget Collaboration

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote fiscal efficiency through effective budget collaboration between the county executive and the supervisors. We include findings on successful policies shared by **15** officials across **all six** of our peer counties.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|--|
| High - (Mentioned by 3-4 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate proactively with legislators before and during drafting to anticipate wants and concerns • Budget staff build strong relationships with legislators • Empower liaisons to clarify legislators’ priorities—especially in partisan systems |
| Medium - (Mentioned by 2 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold public budget hearings to clarify the executive’s intentions • Begin briefing legislators more thoroughly about three months before they will vote • Hold standing meetings between the legislative and executive to enable dialogue around budget expectations and priorities • Breaking budget negotiations into hearings based on topic can help create space for legislators’ wide-ranging interests |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislators’ interests and communication styles can vary dramatically, so the executive should work to understand them as people and as politicians • Tax increase requests are especially divisive; communicate their purposes and impacts clearly and tactfully • Allow legislators to “take the glory” when the executive includes their wants in a budget • Earmarking a small lump of funds for the council can help earn favor and shorten negotiations • Consider reducing or increasing communication frequency based on the legislature’s analytic/interpretive capacity • Countywide objectives (“true north”) can facilitate collaboration on the budget |

- Prioritize communicating with any other elected officials who provide budget requests

Key Findings

Communication is everything. Nearly all peer counties shared that their executive office is highly transparent and collaborative with legislators. Timing and methods vary across counties, but most agreed that proactive communication, usually no less than three months before a first draft is presented, helps clarify expectations, reducing negotiations and unexpected conflicts further down the line.

Collaboration also varies significantly by council member. Engagement is a deeply political and individualized process, so executive staff must understand the profile and needs of each member. To help navigate these differences, several executive offices appoint a “legislative affairs” member to act as a liaison, helping figure out the legislators’ priorities. Additionally, key officials in the executive office, like the CFO, are expected to develop strong relationships with the legislators.

Schedules and structures for collaboration vary. Cook County livestreams public hearings before and after the first draft is proposed, with public comments taken

before each hearing. They also hold quarterly CFO roundtables, which enable ongoing communication around budgetary expectations and priorities. In King and Milwaukee Counties, budget hearings are broken down based on topic, looping in relevant committees. This creates dedicated spaces for specific policy area negotiations, which helps account for the councilmembers’ wide-ranging interests.

Counties recommend several practices

“Our commissioners are almost overly aware of what the CFO and budget director are trying to do.”

and gestures for building trust. In Cook County, when a draft proposal funds a commissioner’s wants, the executive steps aside and lets them “take the glory,” effectively shortening negotiations. In King County, officials repeatedly found that there was little practical discretion around much of the budget, leaving little room to fund legislators’ wants (for example, waste collection and prisons are hard to defund or

overfund). As a result, the executive decided to earmark 1% of the budget entirely for the council's discretion every cycle.

Strategic planning can build collaboration toward budgeting for shared goals. In Milwaukee County, negotiations are shortened and conflict is reduced by the fact that the county has very strong agreement around its one-line strategic goal. Milwaukee County went through a collaborative strategic

planning process in 2019, deciding on public health as a top priority. Officials share that the broad belief in this unifying goal helps guide budgeting.

Collaborating with other non-legislative officials can be equally important. Though collaboration with the board is a focus, staff in Wayne County shared that budget frictions often come from disagreements with elected officials other than the legislators.



Budget Cycle

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote fiscal efficiency through the executive’s control over the budget cycle, with a particular focus on the risks and benefits of two-year budget cycles. Of our six peer counties, only King County adopts its budget in two-year cycles. We include findings on successful policies shared by **12** officials across **all six** of our peer counties.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|---|
| High - (Mentioned by 3 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build stability around one-year budgets by setting expectations with multi-year projections |
| Medium - (Mentioned by 2 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-year budgets can enable longer-range planning for complex services and initiatives |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When considering a two-year budget, remember that annual adjustments and appropriations will likely still be necessary • Create an independent revenue commission as an “external validator” for internal projections • Allow off-year amendments of a two-year budget as insurance against uncertainty • Two-year budgets can save time and resources from going toward budgeting • Two-year budgets can mitigate the political conflicts of interest of election-year budgeting • When considering a two-year budget, assess the stability of your county’s revenue sources • Two-year budgeting may face opposition from legislators if they seek more involvement in the drafting process |

Key Findings

King County adopts its budget in two-year cycles, saving county staff time and reducing the interference of politics in conducting county operations. Officials don't foresee going back to a one-year budget cycle because they believe the two-year cycle is more suited to the scale and complexity of the county's budget, and that it's a crucial time-saver. The executive is free to spend more time improving services, and the legislators are spared from reacting to a new budget every year. If the executive finds any significant areas for improvement, they are allowed to make limited adjustments in an off-year budget amendment.

Budgets are drafted in odd years, so staff acknowledge operational benefits when elected officials need not write budgets during elections. A two-year budget cycle mitigates political conflicts of interest that might arise when budgeting during an election year, allowing elected officials to prioritize county stability over campaign positions. Furthermore, staff assigned to the budget process can dedicate more time and attention to performance management, community outreach, or process improvement in the odd years.

Political relationships may inhibit the feasibility and practicality of a two-year budget process. Believing a two-year runway would give the executive a better idea of how budget adjustments impact performance, Milwaukee County officials are interested in a

“We save the equivalent of 20 FTEs in the year when the budget isn't written. For a county like Los Angeles, they should be thinking about a biennial budget.”

two-year budget cycle. However, they anticipate resistance from county board members who would lose opportunities to engage in the drafting process, especially considering that board members only serve two-year terms. Officials in Miami-Dade County don't think a two-year budget cycle is practical due to their state-level political environment. In recent years, state tax cuts have significantly altered the county's budget year-to-year, so officials prioritize the agility of an annual budget. Any elected executive in Los Angeles County must evaluate relationships with the Board of Supervisors

and California State officials when considering a two-year budget cycle.

Counties with one-year budget cycles consider multi-year budget projections essential to long range planning. In Wayne County, each item in the annual budget includes a projection for the next fiscal year. Allegheny County officials publish five-year projections with each annual budget. Cook County officials recommend adopting an annual budget and maintaining three and five-year projections. Interviewees in Wayne, Allegheny, and Cook County all felt confident that publishing projections alongside annual budgets sets expectations adequately compared to two-year budget cycles.

Cook’s budget projection team creates its multi-year projections in collaboration with an independent revenue commission.

The independent revenue commission was created several years ago as a form of “external validation,” backing up the county when people scrutinized estimates. The commission is comprised of four people: Cook County’s CFO, two professional economists, and one educator (currently, a professor from the University of Chicago). They hold quarterly meetings, during which they adjust projections for economic trends and handle annual recommendations into key areas of concern (for example, sales taxes in unincorporated areas, operational costs for hospitals).

Unincorporated Areas Services

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote executive accountability through the representation of and delivery of services to unincorporated communities. We include findings on successful policies shared by **seven** officials across **two** of our peer counties (several do not contain unincorporated communities).

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

Common Practices

- Standardize data geocoding to enable the evaluation of unincorporated services
- Use region-specific and neighborhood-specific data to inform unincorporated area decision-making
- Analyze the taxes unique to unincorporated areas to inform budgeting
- Centralize unincorporated area issues in a dedicated department
- Conduct deliberate and varied public outreach in unincorporated areas
- Empower dedicated staff to respond to residents in unincorporated areas
- Empower dedicated staff to collect and process data from unincorporated areas

Key Findings

Form a specific department for unincorporated areas. King County shared they created a Department of Local Services, a department specifically dedicated to unincorporated areas. This is a critical change for greater accountability, as previously, unincorporated areas tended to be forgotten due to their relatively limited political power. The new department has empowered King County to arrange wider public engagements, reaching new populations and building trust. Previously,

the County had relied on community councils when engaging unincorporated communities. King has empowered bureaucrats and professionals to address unincorporated issues, where previously, residents would have contacted the legislator from their district. Lastly, the Department of Local Services has made it simpler to evaluate performance in unincorporated areas. Although data formatting can present problems, King now has staff dedicated to working with other departments and resolving those issues. Cook County officials share

that it can be difficult to evaluate services to unincorporated communities without a dedicated department. One of the greatest barriers is that Cook doesn't have an enterprise-wide data strategy, making geocoding inconsistent.

“They (unincorporated areas) now have a much clearer understanding of what the county can do to assist them.”

Utilize data to determine how unincorporated areas are serviced and to evaluate service delivery. Cook County's strategy and budget team has produced district-level performance reports at the request of the council, which slightly helped inform unincorporated area services by offering a bit more geographic granularity. Cook County also collects certain taxes that are unique to unincorporated areas, which inform them how much the County spends in those areas.

Board and Commission Appointments

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote executive accountability through the ethical and tactful handling of board and commission appointments. We include findings on successful policies shared by **five** officials across **four** of our peer counties.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|---|
| High - (Mentioned by 2 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicate great attention and tact to appointments involving public health, safety, and large budgets • Limit board and commission creations and responsibilities to mitigate waste |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impose relevant restrictions on board and commission participation to avoid conflicts of interest • Encourage staff or officials with subject matter expertise to participate in relevant boards and commissions (if they are not especially contentious) • Charge the county’s ethics body with investigating board and commission conflicts of interest |

Key Findings

Dedicate greater attention to appointments with larger budgets, particularly those related to public health and safety. In Allegheny County, staff shared that their most contentious appointments are to the County Jail Oversight Board and the Health Board. Staff noted there may be more sensitivity on boards that have a large impact on public health and safety. King County officials share that appointments to the Harborview Medical Center Board of Trustees

are high-profile due to their importance for public health. Appointments to the board of Sound Transit, the greater Seattle area’s public transit agency, are also contentious due to the agency’s large budget. Like Cook County, officials regret that many boards and commissions are created to solve political problems; they warn against the pattern of starting a board or commission to resolve disagreements.

Implement parameters around Board and Commission appointments to avoid conflicts of interest and promote relevant expertise. Cook County officials noted that their Board of Ethics oversees resolving controversies around conflicts of interest in boards and commissions. The greatest friction around boards and commissions in Cook is not appointments, but the excess of boards and the bandwidth needed to run them all. The County has streamlined responsibilities and put parameters around creation to mitigate waste and excess burden on staff. To avoid conflicts of interest, King

County restricts certain positions from serving on certain boards and commissions. Because these safeguards protect against ethical concerns, the executive is generally free to approve of the appointments preferred by council members, serving as an opportunity to build favor and collaboration between branches. Milwaukee County has not encountered much controversy around any appointments, even finding that it can be helpful to involve county officials or staff with subject matter expertise in a relevant board or commission, a benefit that may be lost with participation restrictions.

Emergency Management

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote executive accountability through effective emergency management. We include findings on successful policies shared by **10** officials across **all six** of our peer counties.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|--|
| High - (Mentioned by 3 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During a crisis, legislators focus on empowering and platforming the executive as the lead decision-maker |
| Medium - (Mentioned by 2-3 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build key relationships proactively: state agencies, state police, federal agencies, local government leaders • During a crisis, brief legislators frequently and create standing meetings to ensure they understand the needs of the executive |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 6 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During a crisis, prioritize unincorporated communities, as they likely receive more emergency services than other areas • During a crisis, work with the corporation counsel to clarify the limits of power and identify possible needs or exemptions to be approved by legislators • During a crisis, restructure communications systems to reduce noise and increase agility |

Key Findings

During a crisis, legislators should focus on empowering and platforming the executive as the lead decision-maker. Allegheny County’s executive acts as the primary decision-maker while council members focus

on being communicators and unlocking regulatory powers to reduce noise and enable decisive action. Cook County commissioners are expected to sponsor the executive’s disaster declaration and approve any necessary requests or exemptions. The Milwaukee County executive unlocks unique

emergency powers during crises, so they work closely with the corporation counsel to understand these powers and identify requests to be approved by the supervisors. Staff in King and Wayne counties also indicate that their legislatures step aside during times of crisis; the prevalence of this belief among peer counties suggests that executive leadership is essential to crisis management.

Frequent communication with legislators and county staff helps County Executives unify county crisis response. To enable dynamic and productive collaboration, the Cook County executive advises and briefs commissioners on a regular basis during declaration periods. Officials in Cook and King counties suggest frequent, standing meetings with legislators so they understand what the executive needs during a crisis.

Los Angeles County officials must proactively build relationships across state and federal governments to smooth collaboration during crises. Staff in Allegheny County acknowledge that the executive will collaborate closely with state police and federal agencies, so it's important

that they build these relationships proactively. Wayne County staff emphasize the executive's coordination with state officials and other essential parties as one of their most important responsibilities.

“During an emergency, you don't want extra people in a chain of command.”

Local accountability is critical for adequate disaster response. Officials in Miami-Dade highlight that the executive must navigate a highly fractured local governance structure of over 30 municipalities to remain accountable to all the residents of the county during a disaster. Funding flows from the county to these municipalities during crises, so they're important relationships to have created. King County staff underscore the county's outsize role in clearing streets and providing services to unincorporated areas during disasters, so it's especially important that an elected executive in Los Angeles County step up in those areas.

Branch Independence

These interview findings examine LA County’s opportunities to promote a productive balance of power through policies that mitigate against undue coercion or control between the branches of government. We include findings on successful policies shared by **9** officials across **four** of our peer counties.

Common Practices Identified Across Peer Counties

| Common Practices | |
|---|---|
| High - (Mentioned by 2 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate administrative and analytic capacity to the legislature to avoid conflicts of interest from staff working across branches |
| Consider - (Mentioned by 1 / 4 Counties) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust the capacities of the executive and legislative branches as needed to ensure they are well-equipped to collaborate Ensure residents and diverse county officials participate in any charter revisions so that they are not misused to consolidate power Outline rules of engagement in policy or law for any county staff who advises both the executive and the legislature to avoid conflicts of interest Move any county staff who advises both the executive and the legislature under an independent elected official to avoid conflicts of interest |

Key Findings

Effective staffing is key to ensuring branch independence and avoiding conflicts of interest. In Cook, King, and Miami-Dade counties, dedicated administrative and analytic staff were created for the legislators when independence was a concern, as these positions helped lessen the need for county staff to answer to the interests of both the

legislators and the executive. Staff in Milwaukee County flagged a similar warning to be cautious with staff who support both branches. They suggested establishing clear “rules of engagement” that outline the degree of interaction between that position and representatives of either branch. They also suggested having cross-branch staff report to independent officials (usually the sheriff,

comptroller, or clerk of court) so that they don't have a greater responsibility to either branch.

Charter amendments and referenda place the balance of power in flux. Milwaukee

County officials caution that charter reforms can be abused to claim power or neuter positions—as happened in 2015, when Milwaukee County's executive worked with allies in the state legislature to drastically reduce the board's staff, hours, and wages.



CRITERIA FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The following five criteria guide the evaluation of all policy recommendations made to the LA County Governance Reform Task Force. Each criterion reflects a core goal of Measure G. Recommendations are assessed against all five criteria, with relative weighing informed by Task Force Member input.



FIGURE 9: FIVE CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING POLICY OPTIONS.

Criterion 1

Representation and Accountability

Community voice, transparency, and responsiveness

This criterion measures the extent to which a recommendation may increase community voice and accountability to the diverse communities across LA County, particularly those in unincorporated areas. It examines whether a recommendation may create pathways for public input, improve transparency in executive decision-making, and establish mechanisms that ensure the new Executive is responsive to all regions of the County.

INDICATORS:

- Expands meaningful community access to executive decision-makers.
- Improves transparency and public-facing communications, particularly during crises.
- Establishes clear accountability mechanism and performance reporting.
- Strengthens engagement with unincorporated and historically underserved communities.

Criterion 2

Implementation Priorities

Sequencing and readiness before the November 2028 election

Given that the Executive role will be elected in November 2028, this criterion identifies which reforms must be prioritized ahead of the election to ensure continuity of services, staffing, and compliance with Charter and budget requirements. It evaluates whether a recommendation aligns with the Task Force's current implementation timeline.

INDICATORS:

- Time sensitivity is relative to the election and transition timeline.
- Risk to service continuity if delayed.
- Clear phasing and sequencing plan aligned with the Task Force's implementation schedule.

Criterion 3

Effective Executive Authority

Clarifying mandate, cohesion, and institutional legitimacy

This criterion determines whether a recommendation appropriately leverages the visibility, convening power, and political mandate of an elected County Executive to

improve outcomes countywide. Because this will be a new role, recommendations should help clarify executive responsibility, strengthen administrative cohesion, and build institutional legitimacy.

INDICATORS:

- Clarifies executive roles and lines of authority
- Supports crisis leadership and emergency responsiveness
- Preserves appropriate checks and balances with the Board of Supervisors

Criterion 4

Legal and Charter Alignment

Consistency with Measure G and voter mandate

Measure G clearly outlines the powers granted to the Executive and those granted to the Board of Supervisors. This criterion assesses whether a recommendation is consistent with the scope, objectives, and voter intent of Measure G.

INDICATORS:

- Consistency with Charter authority and Measure G
- Clear delineation of executive and legislative functions

Criterion 5

Fiscal Sustainability

Cost alignment with County budget constraints

This criterion ensures that projected costs are not beyond the constraints or deficits in the county, ensuring fiscally sustainable actions. This also includes budgetary constraints from the Executive branch, such as limits on budgetary actions.

INDICATORS:

- Alignment with current County budget constraints and deficit projections
- Scalability to available resources across implementation phases

TASK FORCE INPUT

On March 11, 2026, the research team presented these five criteria to the Governance Reform Task Force and solicited member feedback. Members spoke in favor of the criteria as originally presented, placing emphasis on representation and accountability (Criterion 1) and expressing concerns about our study deprioritizing recommendations that may fall outside Measure G (Criterion 4).

The Governance Reform Task Force represents the current Board of Supervisors, unions, community groups, and various stakeholders, and we consider their approval an initial check on our study’s political feasibility. Members act as liaisons to the Board of Supervisors, who will ultimately be responsible for approving and implementing any recommendations this study informs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Phase 1: Pre-Election (Before 2028)

Recommendation 1.1: Establish a formal transition team by mid-2026.

LA County should create a dedicated Transition team with defined staff, budget, and sunset date. This team would coordinate continuity of operations by collecting departmental priorities and concerns, preparing briefings for the incoming executive, and addressing the “people” dimension of structural reform through change management training. King County’s experience shows that well-planned transition infrastructure ensures smoother handoffs than ad hoc efforts. The office should include representatives from the current CEO’s office, the Board, and at least one external governance or Measure G expert.

Criteria Addressed: Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority, Legal and Charter Alignment

Recommendation 1.2: Mandate a minimum 90-day transition period in the implementing ordinance.

King County’s charter-mandated 20-day transition was flagged by officials as short for

an organization of its size and scale. LA County, which is five times larger and taking on a larger structural change, should codify a minimum 90-day transition period. This period should mandate department head briefings for incoming executives, structured knowledge transfer protocols, and formal handoff of all active budget, litigation, and emergency management matters.

Criteria Addressed: Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority, Legal and Charter Alignment

Recommendation 1.3: Develop and roll out a staff change management strategy in 2027.

Milwaukee County officials identified staff confusion and fear as the largest risk in governance reform. LA County’s 117,000 employees will need consistent communication about the new executive structure and what it means for their roles, their reporting relationships, and job security. This strategy should include department-level briefs and designated points of contact in each department. The strategy should be developed and tested before the 2027 executive campaign begins, as once candidates are in the race, the political

environment can make neutral communication significantly harder.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority

Recommendation 1.4: Establish a formal neutrality protocol for the 2027-2028 executive election.

King County faced significant governance risk when two sitting council members ran for county executive simultaneously. LA County should anticipate a similar dynamic, as sitting supervisors and senior officials may run for the new position and develop a protocol in advance. At a minimum, this should include: a requirement that all internal candidates receive identical access to county resources and information, a clear policy on the use of county staff time by candidates, and a designated ethics officer to handle neutrality complaints.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority

Recommendation 1.5: Develop joint emergency management and appointment protocols before 2028.

LA County's January 2025 wildfire response exposed critical gaps in inter-agency coordination during crises. Peer county

officials across all six jurisdictions confirmed that the elected executive must serve as the key public entity during crisis response, with the Board empowering rather than competing with that role. The Task Force should work with the current CEO's office to draft a joint emergency management protocol that delineates executive decision-making authority, Board approval responsibilities (such as emergency declarations), and communication cadence during active crises. This protocol should be codified in an implementing ordinance before the 2028 election, so the incoming executive inherits a functional framework rather than building one under pressure.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority

**Phase 2: Early Executive Term
(Year 1-2)**

Recommendation 2.1: Prioritize a balanced first-year budget above all other policy goals.

Both Cook and King County officials independently stressed the same point: no policy agenda can advance until fiscal credibility is established. The Task Force should begin modeling a balanced first-year budget under the new structure, including the

costs of staffing the executive office, expanding the Board, and launching the Ethics Commission. The incoming executive should inherit a realistic fiscal picture through model scenarios. LA County's Chief Executive Office (CEO) prepares a recommended budget in April and a supplemental budget in the fall. The Supplemental Budget should forecast the upcoming structural changes.

Criteria Addressed: Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority, Fiscal Sustainability

Recommendation 2.2: Establish an Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget.

Three peer counties, Cook, King, and Milwaukee, have built dedicated offices that sit at the intersection of these functions. All three credited this office with making the executive more effective and accountable. Measure G creates the opportunity to establish an equivalent office that sets performance metrics collaboratively with each department, produces an annual public performance report for all departments, and ensures the executive's policy priorities are reflected in the budget.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Implementation Priority, Effective Executive Authority, Fiscal Sustainability

Recommendation 2.3: Institutionalize structured executive-board budget collaboration.

Creating a schedule for interaction, as well as a dedicated function within the Executive to liaise with the legislature, are both critical to budget formulation. Officials from the peer counties we analyzed suggested various forms of joint budget hearings between the Board and the Executive Office.

Institutionalizing standing meetings and enabling formal dialogue around budget expectations and priorities is central.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Implementation Priority, Fiscal Sustainability

Recommendation 2.4: Limit the creation of extraneous political bodies.

Interviewees in Allegheny, Cook, King, and Milwaukee counties flagged that boards and commissions tend to proliferate as short-term political solutions that end up wasting staff and resources in the long run. LA County should set new limitations and criteria for the creation of boards and commissions, and vest conflict-of-interest oversight in the incoming Ethics Commission established by Measure G.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and

*Accountability, Implementation Priority,
Fiscal Sustainability*

Phase 3: Ongoing Governance (Year 2+)

Recommendation 3.1: Develop a Department of Local Services for unincorporated communities.

In 2018, King County’s Executive Dow Constantine proposed a Department of Local Services, which gained unanimous approval by the King County Council. The purpose of this department was to address the accountability gap for residents in unincorporated areas. In comparison, Los Angeles County has approximately four times more residents in unincorporated communities than King. This department should be an early structural priority to create a dedicated public-facing point of contact for unincorporated residents and build a data infrastructure to evaluate service delivery in these areas.

In East Los Angeles, the largest unincorporated community by population in LA County and all of California, residents have expressed a need for a greater voice in county matters. The Board of Supervisors has recently considered establishing a Municipal Advisory Council (MAC) for East LA, which would give residents a formal voice under

state law. The Department of Local Services would foster a stronger connection to the unincorporated communities and MACs by formalizing a channel and dedicated staff to receive and integrate community input.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Effective Executive Authority, Legal and Charter Alignment

Recommendation 3.2: Adopt a two-year budget cycle with multi-year projections and an independent revenue commission.

Of the six peer counties studied, King County is the only one with a two-year budget cycle. At LA County’s scale, with over 100,000 employees, 38 departments, and a \$52 billion budget, the administrative burden of an annual budget consumes significant bandwidth that could be directed towards performance and implementation. King County’s experience also highlights the benefit that budgets drafted in odd years would avoid the political dimensions of election-year budgeting. The elected executive will face reelection every four years, so an odd budget cycle could insulate fiscal decisions from campaign pressures.

Miami-Dade County notes that two-year budget cycles require stable and predictable revenue environments, which are currently difficult to guarantee for LA County, so this is

a long-term recommendation. Introducing a biennial budget before the executive has established trust with the expanded nine-member Board could create unnecessary political risk in light of the challenges ahead.

An additional goal is to establish an independent revenue commission. Cook County's commission, comprised of the CFO, two external economists, and an academic, meets quarterly to validate internal multi-year budget estimates and expand fiscal credibility.

Criteria Addressed: Legal and Charter Alignment, Fiscal Sustainability

Recommendation 3.3: Allocate independent capacity to the Board and protect branch independence.

The expansion of the Board of Supervisors from five to nine members under Measure G creates both an opportunity and a risk. A larger Board will need more analytic and administrative support to function as an effective legislative body rather than relying on executive branch staff, which could create conflicts of interest across branches. The newly created Legislative Analyst will help mitigate this risk. Any County staff with cross-branch advisory role should have their reporting structures, scope of work, and conflict-of-interest rules defined in policy before the executive takes office.

Criteria Addressed: Representation and Accountability, Effective Executive Authority, Legal and Charter Alignment

RISKS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The recommendations in this report assume a stable implementation environment. In practice, several risks could undermine the transition to an elected executive structure. We highlight several key risks, their potential impacts, and recommend mitigation strategies.

1. The Board of Supervisors resists executive authority.

Even with Measure G's passage, the Board of Supervisors could use legislative tools and its current executive authorities to constrain the incoming executive in ways that the charter cannot fully anticipate. Risk is highest during implementation, as norms around the new structure are still being established. Districts with smaller unincorporated communities or stronger political power may resist certain changes, such as a possible Department of Local Services, which would shift responsibility away from the Board.

Mitigation: The implementation phase must include conflict resolution mechanisms. The LA County Governance Reform Task Force should identify decisions that are likely to generate conflict and develop protocols for resolving conflicts with the Board. A joint

Board-Task Force working group should establish collaborative norms.

2. Residents' feedback multiplies as the County Executive election approaches.

Milwaukee County officials observed that community engagement around governance reform is typically low during implementation and spikes as elections near. In LA County, given the visibility of the January 2025 wildfires and the scale of Measure G's changes, public and media scrutiny will likely arrive soon, both earlier and more intensely than in peer counties.

Mitigation: The Task Force should develop a proactive public engagement strategy by the end of 2026. It should document community input at each stage of implementation and compile evidence and feedback collected during previous engagement efforts.

3. Labor unions resist reorganization.

LA County's workforce is substantially unionized, and any structural reorganization, particularly the creation of new departments, reallocation of staff, or changes to reporting relationships, will require negotiation under existing labor agreements.

Mitigation: The transition team should prioritize labor relations from day one and ensure early communication with unions.

4. Charter ambiguities invite litigation or follow-up referenda.

Several provisions of Measure G could generate legal disputes or interest in additional referenda. These might include the Ethics Commission’s independence, the scope of executive power, and the number of additional supervisors.

Mitigation: The Task Force should commission a targeted legal analysis of any ambiguous provisions in Measure G and develop ordinance language that resolves

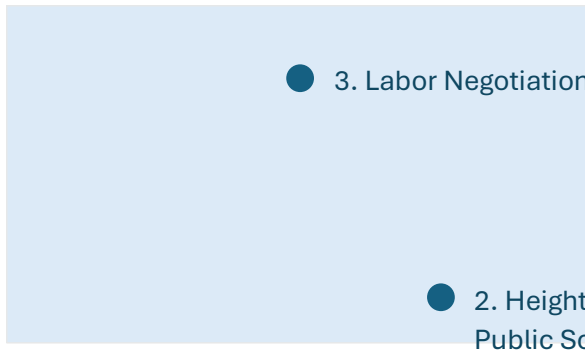
them for the public interest. It should approach referenda cautiously, as further reforms could increase uncertainty.

5. Fiscal stress places pressure on the incoming executive.

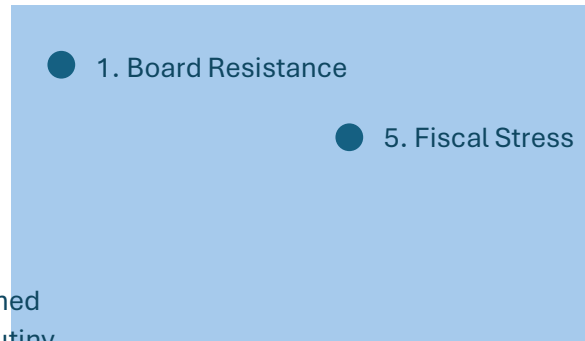
Cook County's experience demonstrates that an incoming executive who inherits a deficit without a clear plan might lose credibility before they can pursue a substantive agenda.

Mitigation: The current CEO’s office should model transition costs and publish a realistic fiscal readiness assessment before the 2028 election so that candidates can campaign on accurate numbers.

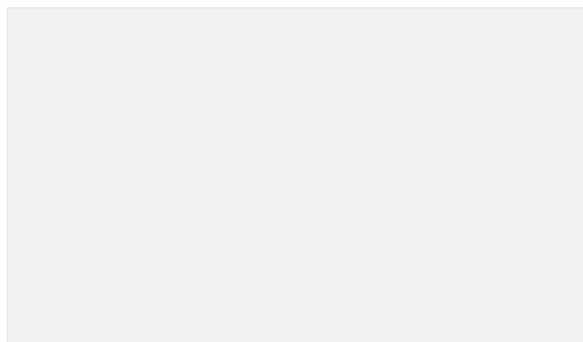
Higher Likelihood / Lower Impact:



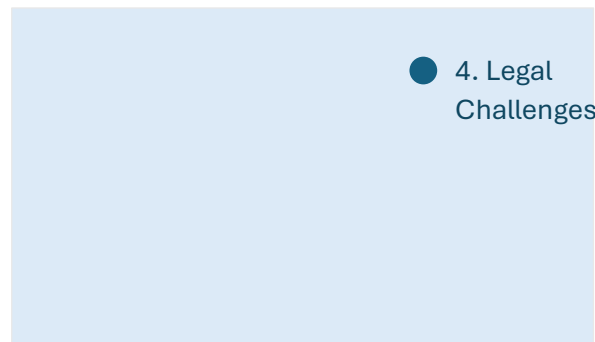
Higher Likelihood / Higher Impact:



Lower Likelihood / Lower Impact:



Lower Likelihood / Higher Impact:



Concluding Remarks

The Los Angeles Governance Reform Task Force faces an incredible and historic opportunity to usher in a new era of County leadership for decades to come. For more than fifty years, reformers, civic commissions, and residents have advocated for the kind of structural accountability that Measure G now makes possible. The work ahead is not simply administrative, but an opportunity to fundamentally redefine what government can deliver for ten million people, and to demonstrate to counties across California and the nation that large, complex jurisdictions can modernize their governance without sacrificing stability or service continuity.

Los Angeles County has the advantage of time and the benefit of peer experience. However, it is important to note that LA County's size exceeds that of the peer counties studied. For this reason, our

recommendations are directional rather than prescriptive. Our research across six peer counties signals a need to invest early in transition infrastructure, communicate clearly with staff, plan fiscally, and set norms around branch independence and collaboration. The 2028 election is not the beginning of this reform; it is the culmination of a transition that must begin now.

The stakes of this moment extend beyond Los Angeles. The County Executive will be the second-largest executive role in California with the duty to serve a population larger than forty U.S. states. The structure LA County builds will be studied, cited, and potentially replicated. The Task Force has the rare opportunity to do something that endures, not just for the residents who voted for change in November 2024, but for every community that looks to Los Angeles as proof that democratic accountability and effective governance go hand in hand.

APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Listed below are the experts and stakeholders consulted for this study.

County Staff Interviewed

- **JOHN FOURNIER**, County Manager, Allegheny County
- **KANAKO ISHIDA**, Budget Director at Cook County
- **CARRIANNE CARALLIS**, Director at the Cook County Department of Research, Operations, and Innovation
- **TANYA ANTHONY**, Chief Financial Officer at Cook County
- **LANETTA HAYNES TURNER**, Chief of Staff, Office of the Cook County Board President
- **SHANNON BRADDOCK**, Former King County Executive
- **MICHAEL WHITE**, Chief of Staff, Office of the King County Executive
- **JEFF MUHM**, Chief Policy Officer, King County Council
- **DWIGHT DIVELY**, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget at King County
- **CHRISTOPHER HUDTWALCER**, Chief of Staff, Office of the Miami-Dade County Mayor
- **JORGE DE LA PAZ**, Senior Strategist for Government Innovation, Office of the Miami-Dade County Mayor
- **ISSAC ROWLETT**, Strategy Director, Milwaukee County
- **MARY JO MEYERS**, Chief of Staff, Office of the Milwaukee County Executive
- **KYLE ASHLEY**, Director of Community Outreach, Office of the Milwaukee County Executive
- **GENELLE ALLEN**, Chief Operating Officer at the Office of the Wayne County Executive
- **STEPHEN CADY**, Research and Policy Director, Office of the Comptroller at Milwaukee County
- **ROBERT W.F. WIDIGAN**, Former Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Wayne County

Academic Experts

- **TIMOTHY KREBS**, Professor of Political Science at the University of New Mexico

Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force Members

- **MARCEL RODARTE**
- **NANCY YAP**
- **JOHN FASANA**
- **GABRIELA GIRONAS**
- **DAVID GREEN**
- **DEREK HSIEH**
- **JULIA MOCKERIDGE**
- **STEVE NEAL**
- **DAVID PHELPS**
- **SARA SADHWANI**
- **ROSA SOTO**
- **DEREK STEELE**
- **BRIAN CALDERON TABATABAI**

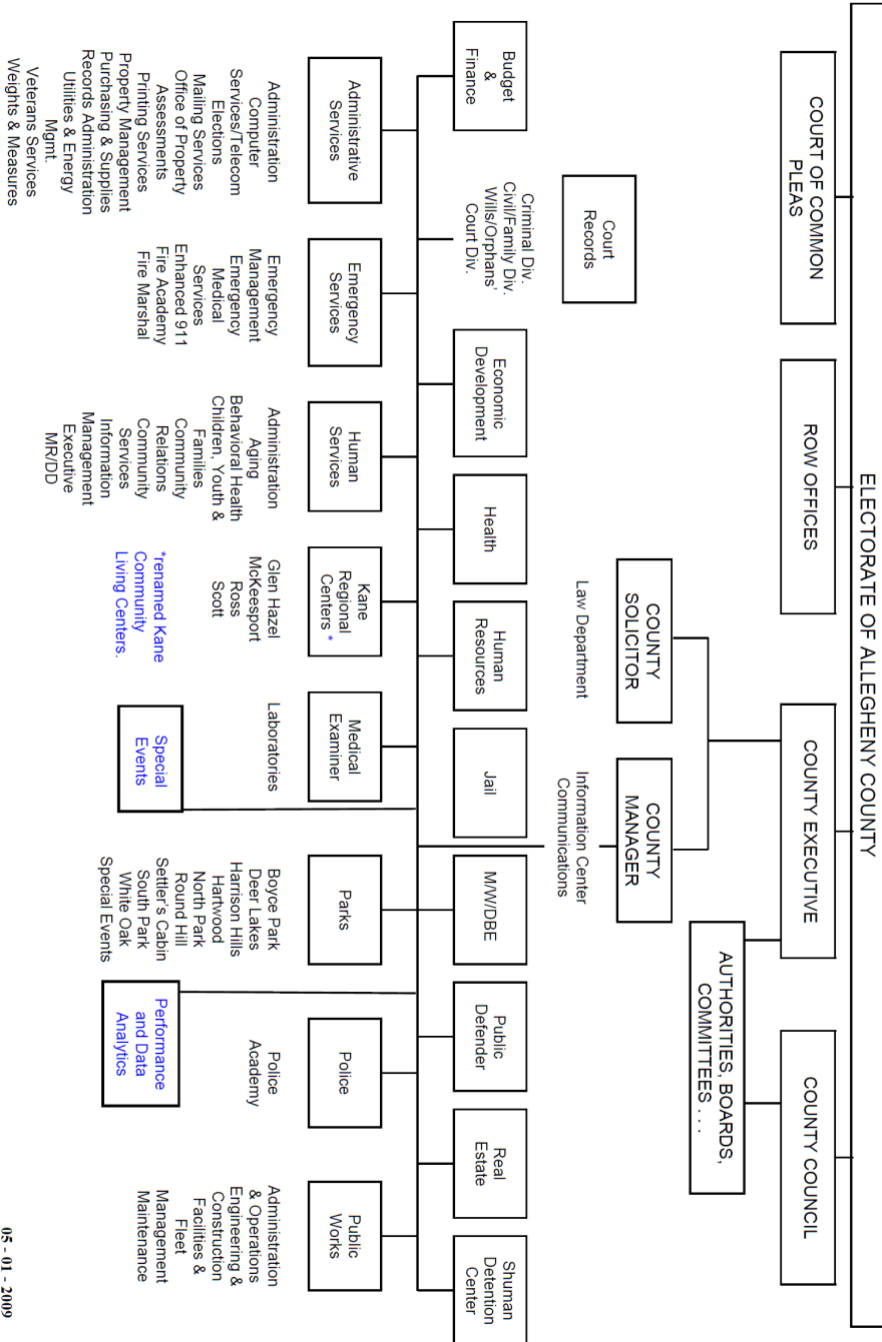
Below is a sample of questions used to conduct interviews with county staff for this study.

Sample County Staff Interview Questions

- How do your County Executive and legislative body collaborate during budget formulation?
- How does your County Executive evaluate the performance of departments? Is there a budget hearing for each department?
- LA County's Clerk of the Board of Supervisors and new County Legislative Analyst support and administrate Board activities. Ordinances prescribing their powers are not subject to veto. How does your county support the self-administration and independence of the legislative office?
- Think back to a specific crisis your county faced. How did you determine the responsibilities of the executive and the board? Were they held accountable for those responsibilities?
- Can you tell us about some of the greatest sources of tension that inhibited you from carrying out your policy priorities? These might include political tensions with councilmembers, municipal, or state leaders, operational difficulties, or any other form of inhibitor.
- How does your county ensure the Council's institutional independence from the priorities of the executive? What internal offices or roles exist to help the Council conduct independent research or analysis?
- Are there structural or statutory factors that strengthen (or weaken) the Council's autonomy from the Executive branch?
- Can you describe the Council's experience or perspective around making appointments to boards and commissions? What are the most contentious appointments made by your county officials?

APPENDIX B: PEER COUNTY ORGANIZATION CHARTS

FIGURE 10: ORGANIZATION CHART, ALLEGHENY COUNTY. OBTAINED FROM 2009 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART, MODIFIED WITH WEBSITE INFORMATION OBTAINED APRIL 2026.



Information updated using the Allegheny County website. "Departments and Divisions under the County Executive." accessed April 2026.

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FIGURE 11: ORGANIZATION CHART, COOK COUNTY. OBTAINED FROM 2026 ANNUAL APPROPRIATION BILL, VOLUME 2, DEPARTMENT LINE ITEM.

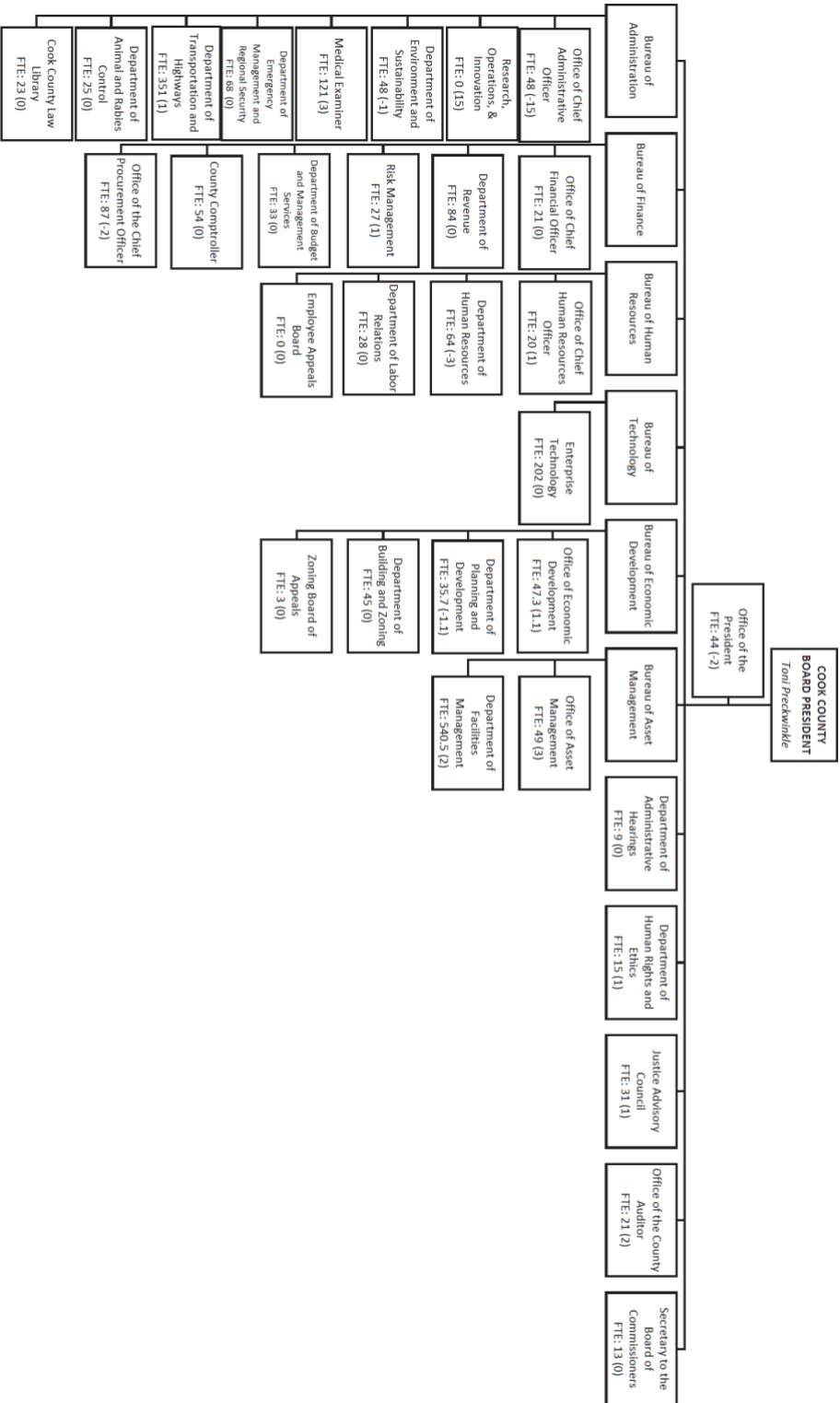


FIGURE 12: ORGANIZATION CHART, KING COUNTY. OBTAINED FROM 2026-2027 BIENNIAL BUDGET, EXECUTIVE PROPOSED, SEPTEMBER 2025.

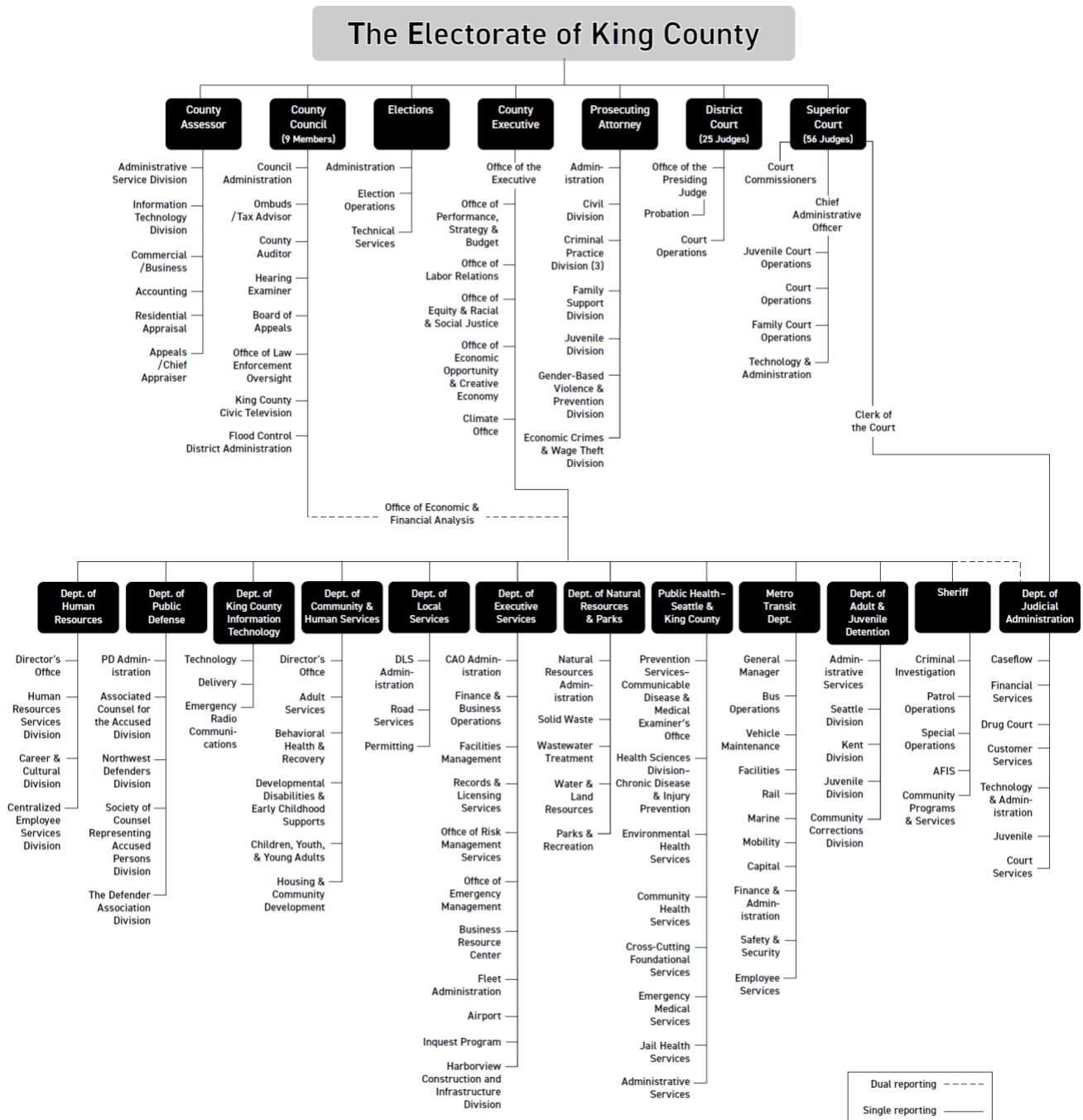


FIGURE 13: TABLE OF ORGANIZATION, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY. OBTAINED FROM 2025-26 OPERATING BUDGET, 2025.

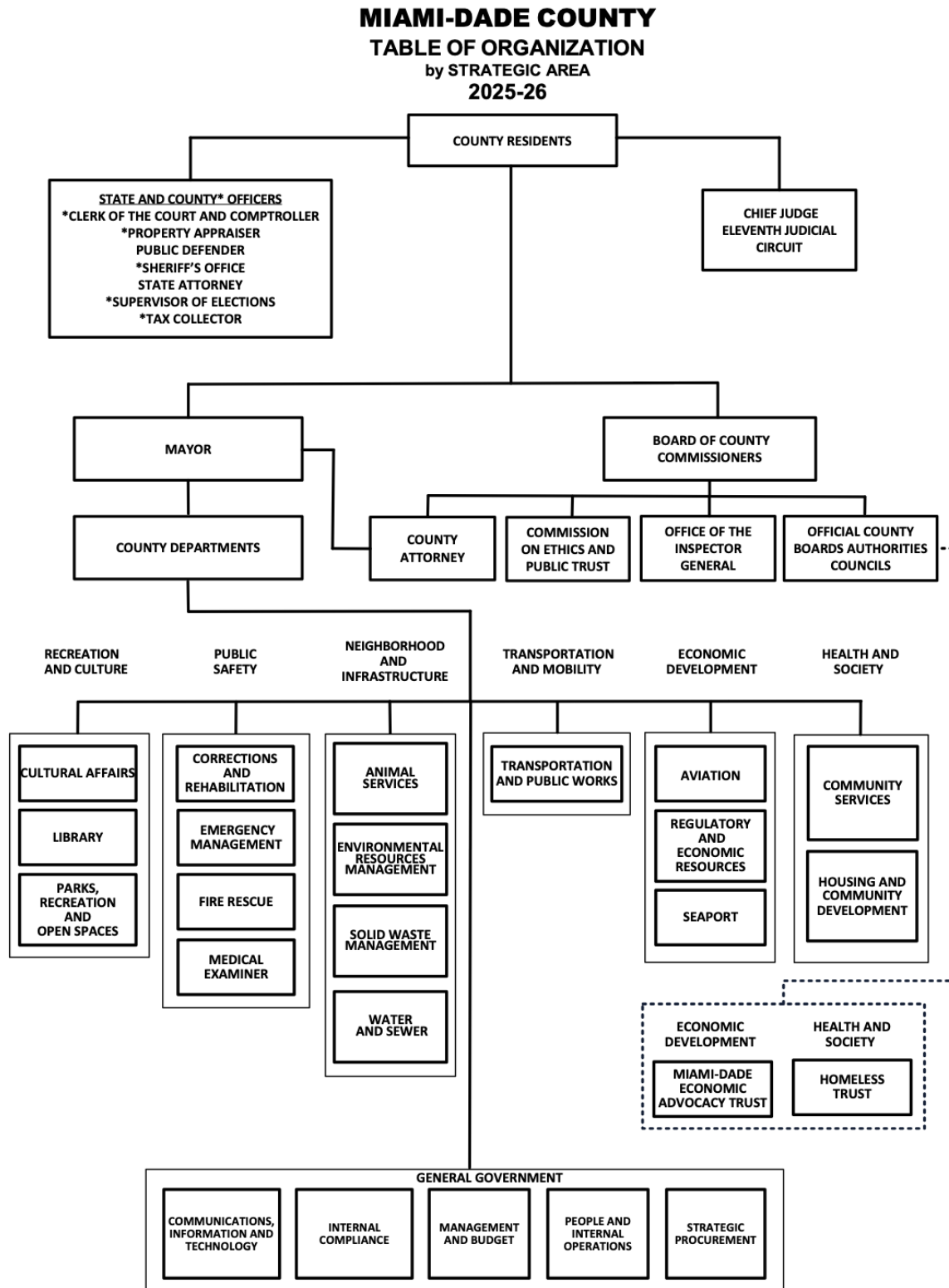


FIGURE 14: ORGANIZATION CHART, MILWAUKEE COUNTY. OBTAINED FROM 2026 OPERATING BUDGET, SEPTEMBER 2025.

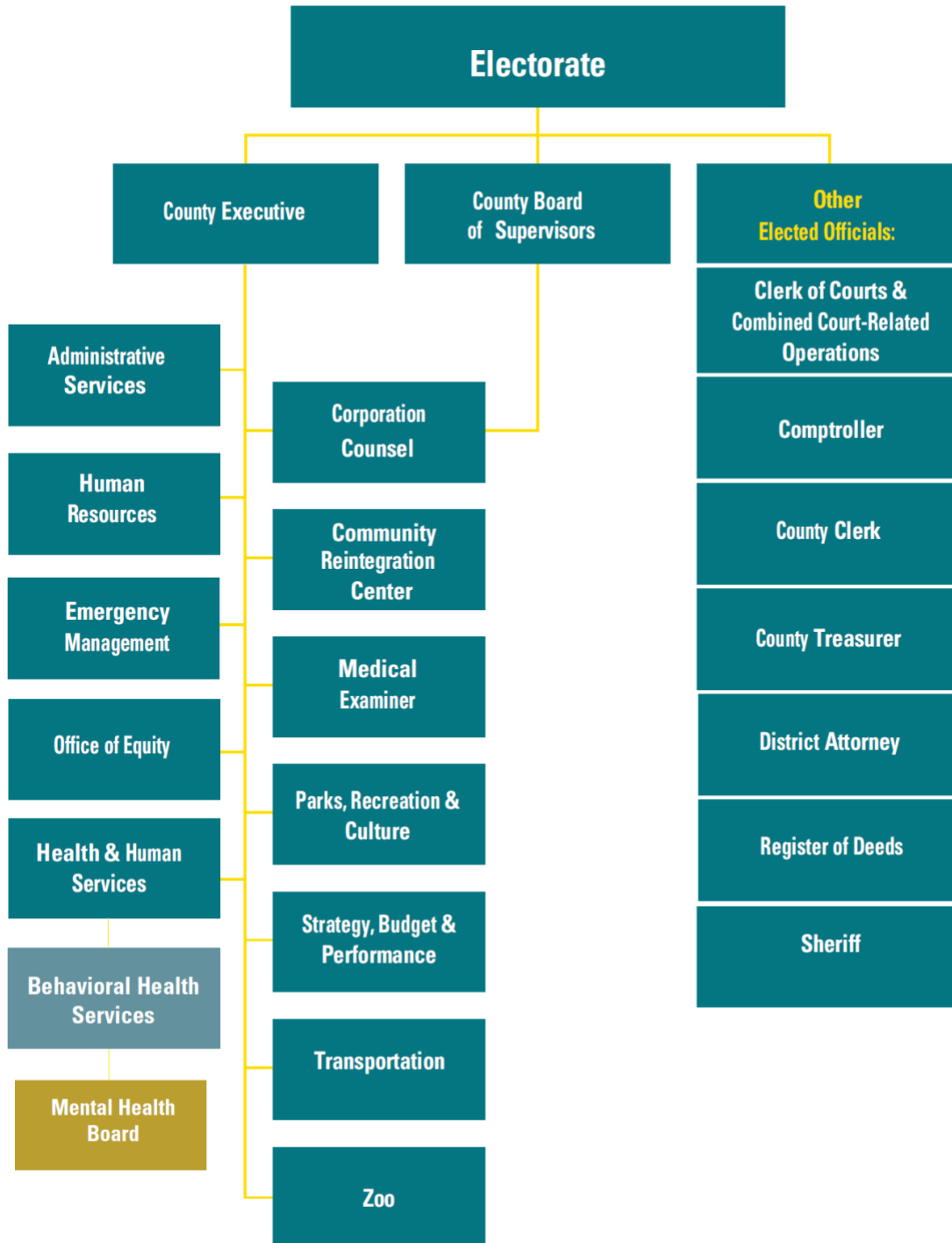
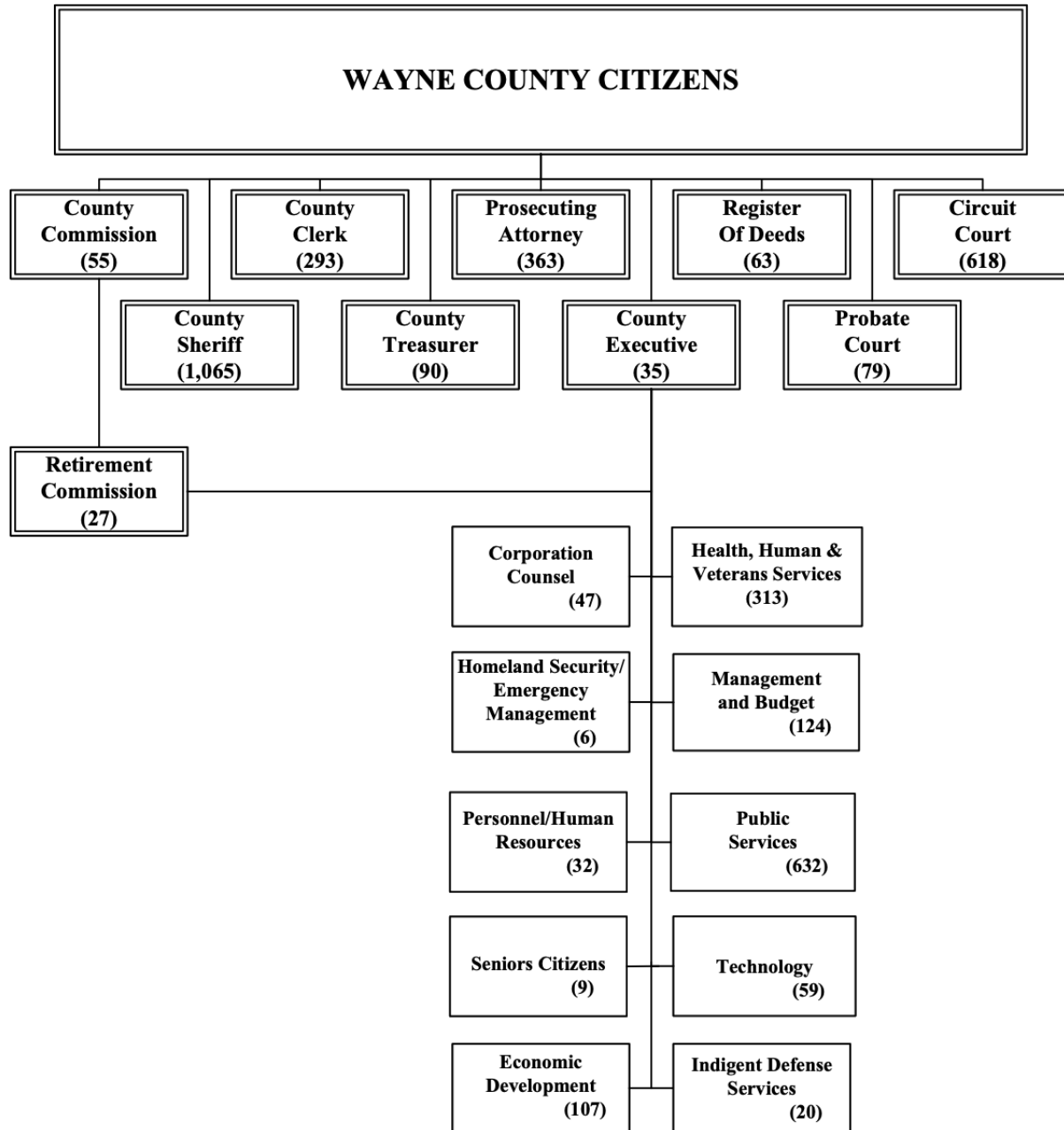


FIGURE 15: ORGANIZATION CHART, WAYNE COUNTY. OBTAINED FROM ADOPTED BUDGET FY 2022-23 AND PROJECTED BUDGET FY 2023-24, 2022.

WAYNE COUNTY, MICHIGAN ORGANIZATION CHART



TOTAL NUMBER OF POSITIONS: 4,037

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