



Chicago Public Library BGA Policy 2026 Budget Snapshot

Description

Table of contents

- [Departmental Highlights](#)
- [Historical Context](#)
- [Staffing](#)
- [Appropriations](#)
 - [Largest Appropriations](#)
 - [Change from Previous Year](#)

Departmental Highlights

Snapshot: Appropriation & Staffing Changes from 2025 Budget

	2025 Budgeted	2026 Proposed	Net Change	Percent Change	Average Annual Rate of Change (2011- 2025)	Inflation- adjusted Rate of Change (2011- 2024)
Appropriations	\$122,105,043	\$107,229,310	\$14,875,733	-12.2%	4.6%	1.4%
Positions & FTEs	1102	1033	-69	-6.3%	-0.2%	NA

- The public library draws on its own property dedicated Library Fund for the bulk of its revenue, along with state grants and (new this year) \$2 million in federal grant funding. The Library Fund is mostly funded with the library’s property tax levy (technically now handled as a transfer from the Corporate Fund, repaid with the library’s share of property taxes from the county). In recent years, TIF surpluses have provided an increasing share of the Library Fund revenue, up to 13.6%

in the current proposal.

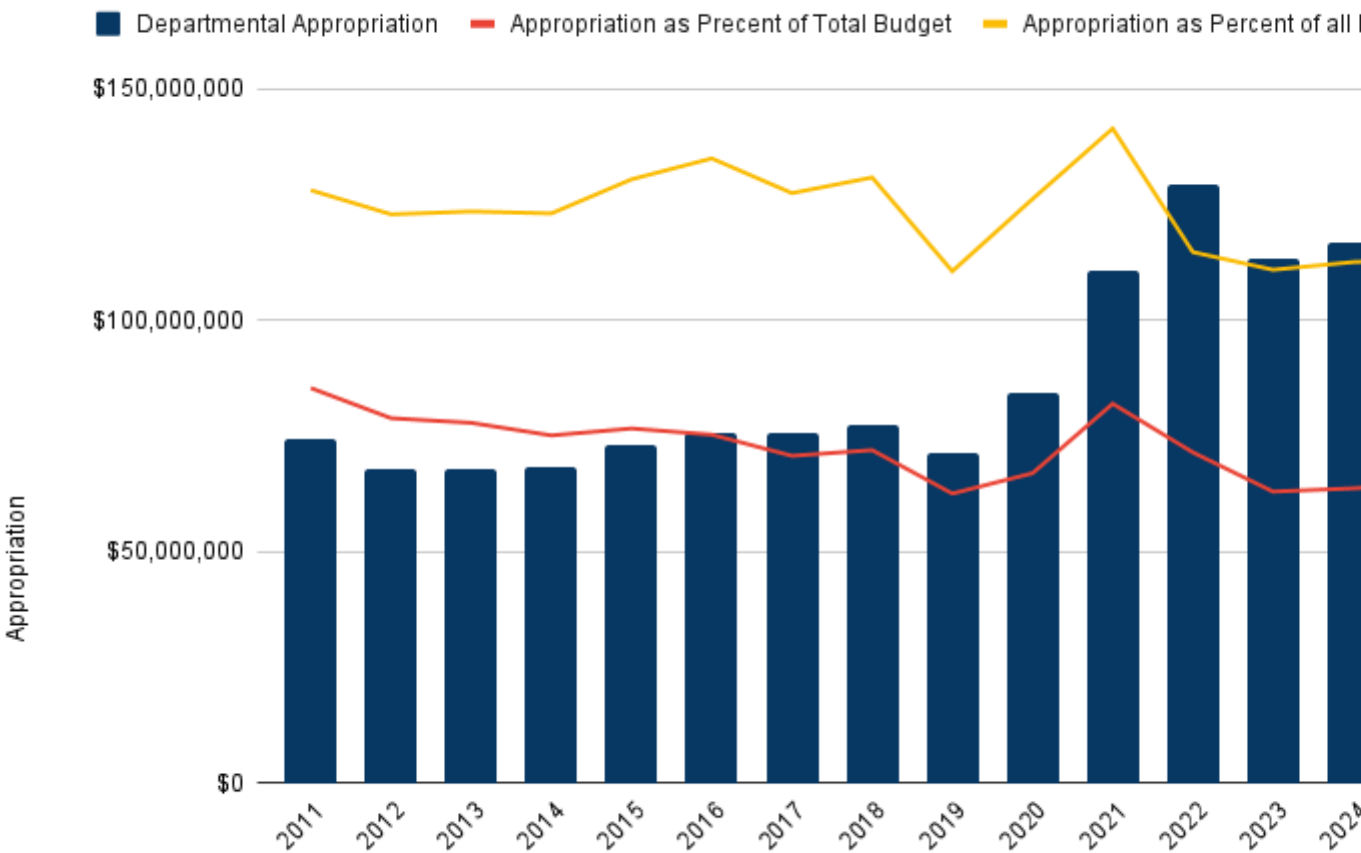
- The proposed 2026 budget would be a second year of steep staffing declines for CPL. Last year's budget cut 50 positions/FTEs from the department, with a further 69 positions/FTEs cut (-6.3%) in the 2026 recommendations. Combined, the two years would represent a 10.3% decline from the department's high water mark of 1152 budgeted positions in 2023 and 2024.
- A net -26 Librarian positions/FTEs across various titles have been eliminated, along with -15 Library Page, -9 Library Associate, and -8 Head Library Clerk positions/FTEs. All were titles/categories that saw cuts in the previous year's budget as well.
- Leadership positions underwent a more complicated shuffle, with nine positions added at a new Assistant Library Director title and six at a new Library Director title, replacing a net 15 positions across the Library Division Chief, District Chief, Regional Library Director, and Central Library Director titles.
- CPL's appropriation for library books and materials has been halved in this year's proposal, down from \$10 million to \$5 million. In the most recent year for which full-year actuals are available the department expended its full \$10 million appropriation almost exactly, spending 99.2% of budgeted funds.
- CPL's only appropriation increase was an additional \$2.5 million for salaries and wages on payroll, up 3.2%.

Historical Context

Rahm Emanuel made significant cuts to the public library staff in his first budget (2012), from which the department's budget and headcount slowly increased over time, with a large number of new positions added under Lori Lightfoot.

From 2011-2025, CPL's total appropriations increased by an average annual rate of 4.6%, or 1.4% adjusted for inflation, compared to a citywide average rate of 8.3% (inflation-adjusted 4.4%).

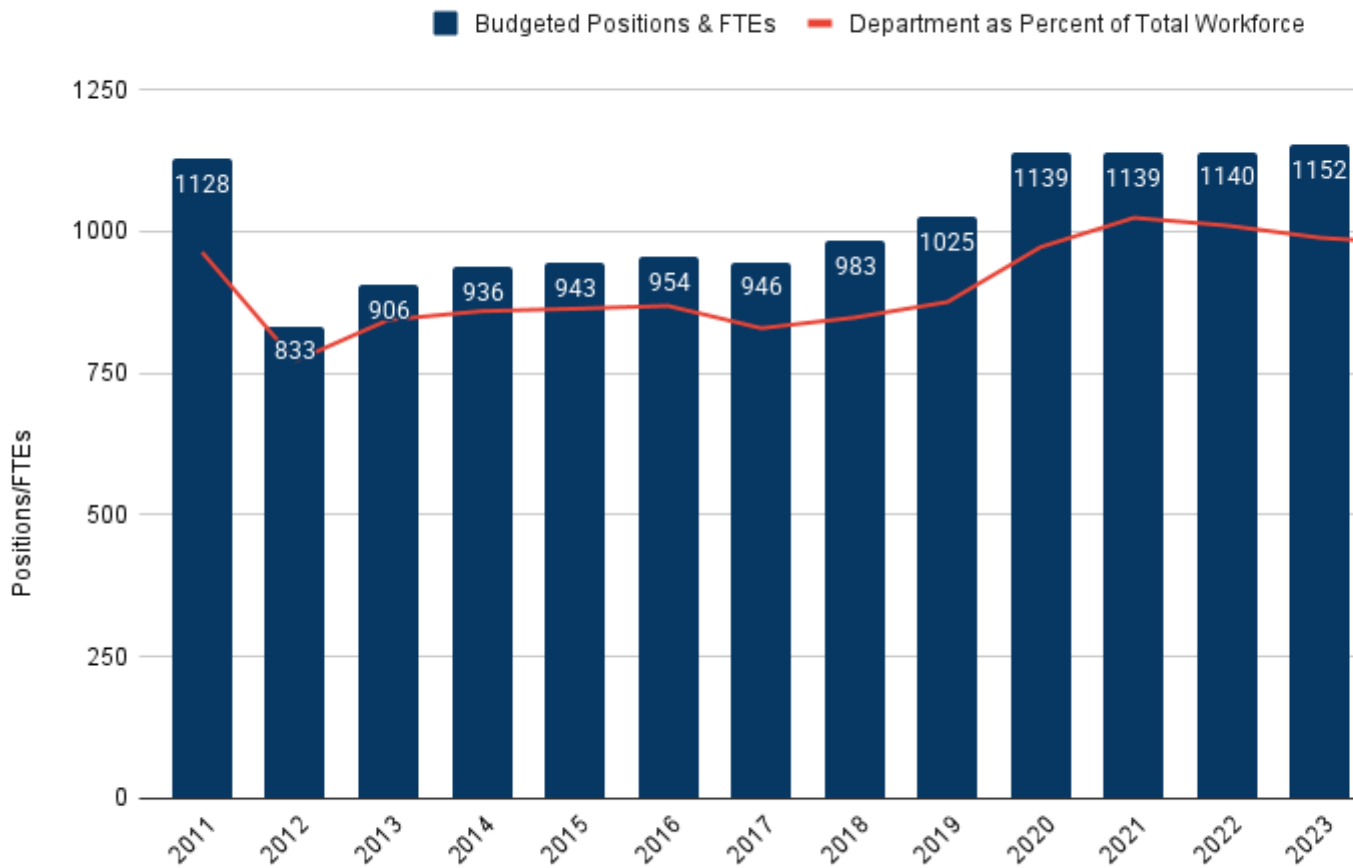
CPL Appropriation, Chicago City Budgets 2011-2026 (proposed)



Over the past three complete budget years for which local fund actuals/encumbrances data is available, CPL spent on average 91.7% of its locally funded budget, compared to the citywide average 86.4% local fund spend. Within local funds, it was one of the most budget-accurate departments across all three years.

From 2011-2025, CPL budgeted headcount decreased at an average annual rate of -0.2%, very close to the citywide average of -0.1% in the same time period. Recent years have seen steeper declines, with 50 positions eliminated from the 2025 budget, and a further 69 positions cut (-6.3%) in the 2026 recommendations. Combined, the two years would represent a 10.3% decline from the department’s high water mark of 1152 budgeted positions in 2023 and 2024.

CPL Budgeted Workforce, 2011-2026 (proposed)



From February through September of 2025, the months for which the city released full-time position vacancy data, CPL averaged an 8.3% vacancy rate, compared to the citywide average of 11.2%.

52 of the department's budgeted full-time positions were persistent vacancies, meaning that the same title/division/section/subsection combination was vacant for all eight months of available data:

Staffing

A net -26 Librarian positions across various titles have been eliminated, along with -15 Library Page, -9 Library Associate, and -8 Head Library Clerk positions/FTEs.

Leadership positions underwent a more complicated shuffle, with nine positions added at a new Assistant Library Director title and six at a new Library Director title, replacing a net 15 positions across the Library Division Chief, District Chief, Regional Library Director, and Central Library Director titles.

Appropriations

CPL is 80.9% locally-funded in this year’s budget proposal, up from the previous year’s 72.7% due to a decline in state grant funds.

The public library draws on its own property dedicated Library Fund for the bulk of its revenue, along with state grants and (new this year) \$2 million in federal grant funding.

The Library Fund is mostly funded with the library’s property tax levy. (Budget documents refer to this as “proceeds from debt” or “series B” bonds, a leftover from when the library system would use short-term bonds to cover the gap between the start of the year and the actual receipt of property tax revenues from the county. To reduce debt costs this is now handled as a transfer from the Corporate Fund, which is then repaid with the library’s share of property taxes from the county).

In recent years, TIF surpluses have provided an increasing share of the Library Fund revenue, up to 13.6% in the current proposal.

Fund	2025 Budgeted	2026 Proposed	Net Change from 2025	Percent Change from 2025	Percent of 2026 Recommended Funds
Library Fund	\$88,824,855	\$86,757,310	-\$2,067,545	-2.3%	80.9%
State Grant Fund	\$33,280,188	\$18,472,000	-\$14,808,188	-44.5%	17.2%
Federal Grant Fund	\$0	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	New Fund	1.9%

Largest Appropriations

As with most departments, personnel costs make up the bulk of CPL’s appropriations, with salaries and wages on payroll by far the largest expense category.

Despite a substantial reduction from the previous year, the “reserve balance” appropriation, indicating grant funds not intended to be spent during the budget year, remained CPL’s second-largest appropriation in the 2026 proposal.

Library books and materials remained the third-largest appropriation, despite being halved from the previous year.

In 2024, the most recent complete budget year for which local fund actuals and encumbrances data is available, CPL spent 94.8% of its locally-funded budget, including more than 99% of its appropriation for library books and materials, which has been halved in the 2026 proposal.

Change from Previous Year

CPL's appropriation for library books and materials (which the department nearly exactly expended in the most recent year for which full-year actuals are available, spending 99.2% of budgeted funds) has been halved in this year's proposal, down from \$10 million to \$5 million.

Grant funds held in reserve balance have likewise been halved, down \$12.2 million.

CPL's only appropriation increase was an additional \$2.5 million for salaries and wages on payroll, up 3.2%.