



Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events BGA Policy 2026 Budget Snapshot

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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	\$72,961,225	\$62,003,597	- \$10,957,628	-15.0%	6.7%	5.6%
Positions & FTEs	81	80	-1	-1.2%	0.2%	NA

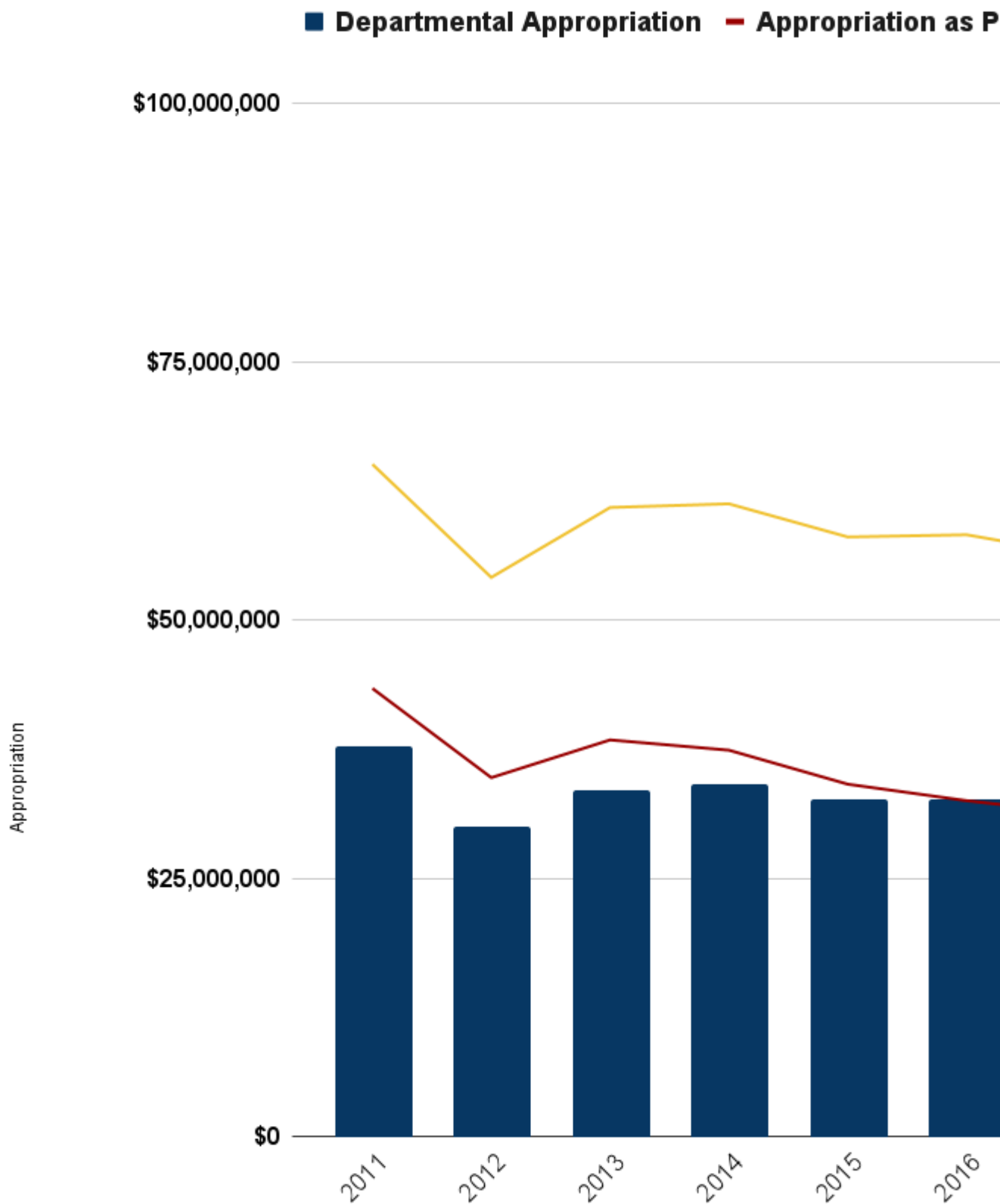
- DCASE retained the same number of full-time positions as the previous year. (Total positions and FTEs declined by a rounded -1 due to the elimination of a half-FTE’s worth of hours in the Clerk II Hourly position, which was cut from DCASE’s budget this year.)

- From February through September of 2025, the months for which the city released full-time position vacancy data, DCASE averaged a 23.1% vacancy rate, among the highest of the city departments. The citywide average for the same period was 11.2%.
- In 2024, the most recent complete budget year for which local fund actuals and encumbrances data is available, DCASE spent 85.2% of its locally-funded budget. A \$2.2 million ••••• For Redemption Expensesâ••••• appropriation was not used at all that year, according to the 2024 local fund actuals data. In 2025 and in the 2026 proposal, \$2.6 million was budgeted for the same category.
- The Matching and Supplemental Grants appropriation was almost completely eliminated from this yearâ•••s budget proposal, down -\$2.04 million (-91.5%) from last year. Pass-through spending to delegate agencies increased by nearly the same amount, up \$2.025 million (70.2%), the departmentâ•••s largest single-category increase.
- Grant funds held in reserve saw the largest single-category decrease, down -\$12.5 million (-62.3%) from the previous year.

Historical Context

After a relatively stable decade of funding, DCASEâ•••s budget underwent several years of dramatic fluctuations during the COVID-19 pandemic. DCASEâ•••s budget initially dropped in 2021 as shutdowns of events and hotels cut off its main source of revenue, then rebounded with pandemic relief funds in 2022, peaking at 2024 and beginning a decline in 2025 that continues with a -\$11 million (-15%) cut from the previous year in the 2026 proposal.

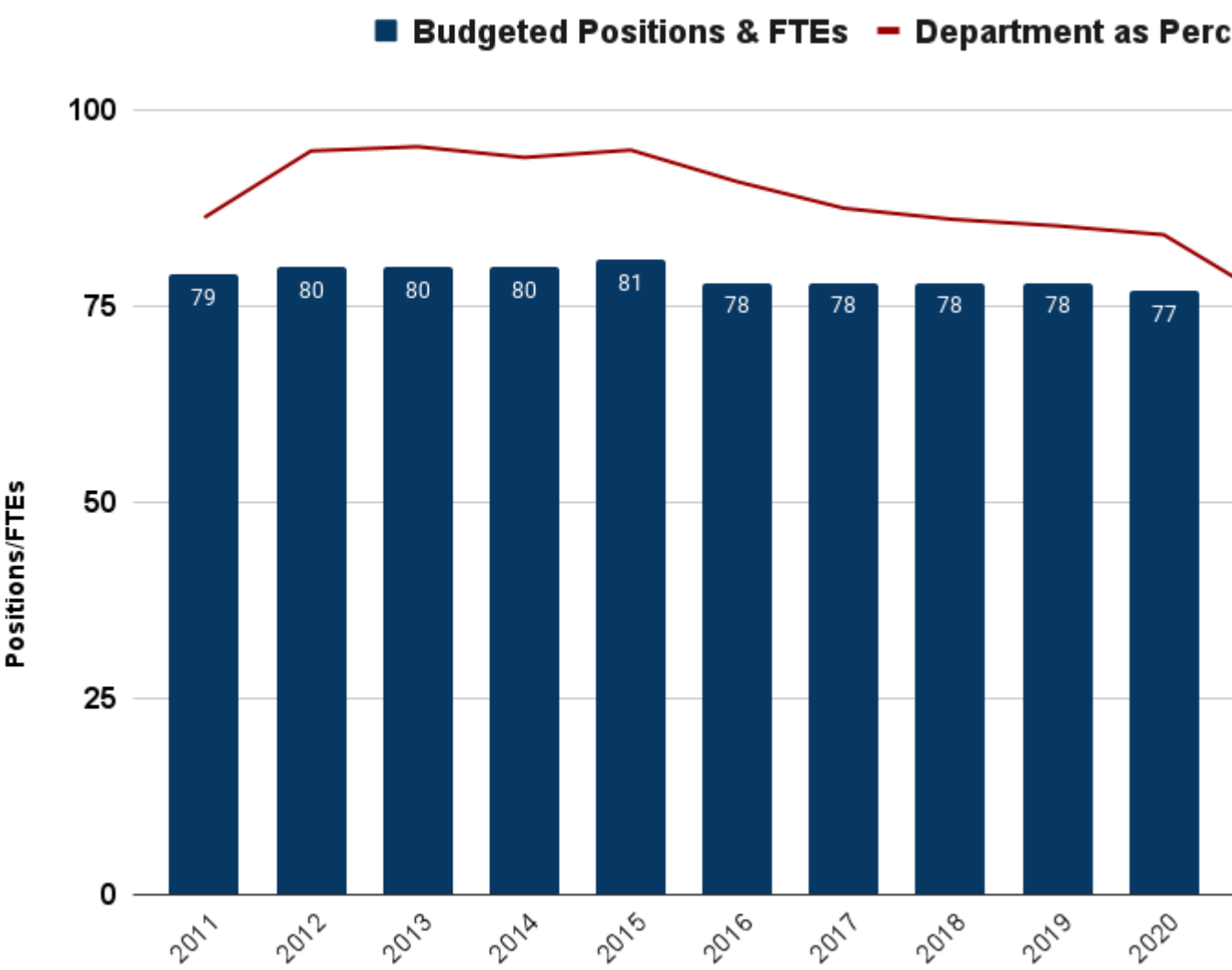
DCASE Appropriation, Chicago City Bu



Over the past three complete budget years for which local fund actuals/encumbrances data is available, DEPT spent on average 85% of its locally funded budget, compared to the citywide average 86.4% local fund spend.

Unlike its budgeted funds, DCASE’s budgeted headcount has remained very consistent, apart from a single-year dip in 2021. Overall the department’s workforce has grown at an average annual rate of 0.2% from 2011-2025, compared to a citywide average annual change of -0.1%.

DCASE Budgeted Workforce, 2011-2026



From February through September of 2025, the months for which the city released full-time position vacancy data, DCASE averaged a 23.1% vacancy rate, among the highest of the city departments. The citywide average for the same period was 11.2%.

Nine 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:

Budgeted Position Changes

DCASE retained the same number of full-time positions as the previous year. Total positions and FTEs declined by a rounded -1 due to the elimination of a half-FTE’s worth of hours in the Clerk II’s Hourly position, which was cut from DCASE’s budget this year.

Appropriations

DCASE is 70.4% locally-funded in this year’s budget proposal, down from the previous year’s 60.7% due to declines in all its grant fund categories.

All of DCASE’s local funds come from its dedicated Special Events and Municipal Hotel Operators’s Occupation Tax Fund, making it one of only a handful of city departments to receive no Corporate Fund appropriations.

Fund	Fund Code	2025 Budgeted	2026 Proposed	Net Change from 2025	Percent Change from 2025	Percent of 2026 Recommended Funds
Special Events and Municipal Hotel Operators’s Occupation Tax Fund	355	\$44,292,225	\$43,667,597	-\$624,628	-1.4%	70.4%
Local Public and Private Grant Fund	0	\$13,939,000	\$12,876,000	-\$1,063,000	-7.6%	20.8%
Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund	0	\$13,645,000	\$4,910,000	-\$8,735,000	-64.0%	7.9%
Federal Grant Fund	0	\$353,000	\$296,000	-\$57,000	-16.1%	0.5%
State Grant Fund	0	\$732,000	\$254,000	-\$478,000	-65.3%	0.4%

Largest Appropriations

Unlike most city departments, personnel expenses are not the largest of DCASE's appropriations. In the 2026 budget proposal, \$11.2 million for festival production is the department's largest standalone appropriation, followed by \$9.7 million for outside contracting through the professional and technical services appropriation.

In 2024, the most recent complete budget year for which local fund actuals and encumbrances data is available, DCASE spent 85.2% of its locally-funded budget.

A \$2.2 million "For Redemption Expenses" appropriation was not used at all that year, according to the 2024 local fund actuals data. In 2025 and in the 2026 proposal, \$2.6 million was budgeted for the same category.

Change from Previous Year

The Matching and Supplemental Grants appropriation was almost completely eliminated from this year's budget proposal, down -\$2.04 million (-91.5%) from last year. Pass-through spending to delegate agencies increased by nearly the same amount, up \$2.025 million (70.2%), the department's largest single-category increase.

Grant funds held in reserve saw the largest single-category decrease, down -\$12.5 million (-62.3%) from the previous year.