



Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 316  
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Phone 313•224•3710  
Fax 313•224•1750  
[www.detroitmi.gov](http://www.detroitmi.gov)

**To:** Councilmember Coleman A. Young

**From:** Denise Starr, Director of Human Resources *Denise Starr*

**Date:** March 24, 2025

**Re: Responses to 2025-2026 Budget Analysis**

---

Please find below responses to your questions sent on March 21, 2025, regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 Proposed Budget for the Human Resources Department

1. The Skills for Life program has enrolled 850 Detroit residents, with 295 completing training. What steps are being taken to increase completion rates and ensure participants transition into long-term employment?

**Answer:**

The Skills for Life work and training initiative was a collaborative effort between the City of Detroit and Detroit at Work. Upon completion, participants were connected with the City's Talent Acquisition team and encouraged to apply for full-time positions. For those pursuing opportunities outside City government, Detroit at Work offered continued support and resources to aid in their job search. Thus far, the City of Detroit has hired 308 of the APRA/Skills for Life participants for civil service and appointed positions.

2. With over 3,000 new hires, including bus drivers, firefighters, and seasonal workers, what targeted retention strategies are in place to reduce turnover and ensure long-term workforce stability, especially in critical roles?

**Answer**

The HR Department collaborates closely with departments to develop targeted retention strategies aimed to reduce turnover. These initiatives collectively strengthen retention by ensuring better job preparedness, continuous learning improvements, and accessible support for new employees.

To improve retention among Transportation Equipment Operators (TEO's), Department of Transportation (DDOT) has introduced an attendance incentive program. This program offers a \$1,500 quarterly bonus for bus drivers who maintain good attendance. Moreover, TEO students receive uniforms and Secretary of State testing vouchers during their training period, reinforcing the COD's commitment to employee support and professional development.

To support firefighter retention, recruits are assigned a mentor who provides guidance and support throughout their probationary period. Their progress is closely monitored to ensure they receive the necessary resources for success. An "open loop communication" system is in place, allowing continuous dialogue between recruits and their mentors. Additionally, recruits have access to tutoring and extra resources outside of their regular job duties to help them meet performance expectations. To further support their success, they are given up to three opportunities to pass the required National (NREMT) and State Firefighter I & II exams. These initiatives help build confidence, enhance skills, and increase overall retention within the department.

We also conduct new hire and exit surveys and communicate key concerns with departments to help identify trends and implement strategies that support employee retention.

1. The Executive Leadership Development Program has successfully completed its third cohort and is implementing its fourth. What measurable impacts have these leadership programs had on workforce efficiency, and how does HR plan to expand professional development citywide?

**Answer 1 of 2:**

The Executive Leadership Development Program is designed to support the internal pipeline for executive-level leadership roles within the City of Detroit. The program expands internal capacity and capability. Our measurable impact includes both qualitative and quantitative measures from participants, leader/sponsors, and the overall municipality. Acceptance into our program is highly sought. We have consistently achieved or exceeded our metrics.

**Our Metrics**

Metric #1: Number of internal leaders successfully completing the process and program.

Rationale: Improves the internal human capital value proposition: we value internal talent and provide opportunities for learning growth and development. Addresses internal equity.

Metric #2: Number of participants promoted into positions with increased responsibility.

Rationale: Expands opportunities for employee advancement, stabilizes the organization, and secures effective and efficient operations during times of change and transition. Addresses internal opportunities.

Metric #3: Number of participants who maintain employment for at least 12 months, after completing the program.

Rationale: Improves leadership capacity, fosters continuous improvement, and drives innovation by managing, maintaining, and utilizing institutional knowledge. Addresses business case for employee retention.

**Answer 2 of 2:**

Our comprehensive Professional Development strategy includes various opportunities city-wide. Additionally, our course offerings are expanded to include all city Agencies, Boards and Commissions, Public Safety, DWSD, the Detroit Land Bank, and Library, etc. Courses are offered in all learning formats across multiple platforms, i.e. in-person, online, on-demand, and virtually.

- We are currently updating our offerings. Our current course offerings and certification programs are published and distributed monthly, with weekly and same-day reminders when applicable.
  - Additionally, we are IACET accredited and provide Continuing Education Units (CEU) for our internally developed courses.
  - Through our Scholar's Program, we have developed Strategic Partnerships with 20 Colleges and Universities. These colleges and universities provide Tuition Discounts ranging from 10 up to 50% tuition discount for City of Detroit employees and in some cases, immediate family members, waived application fees, and financial aid support.
  - Our course offerings and certification programs include embedded workforce efficiency methodologies and strategies across all employee levels.
2. The employee engagement survey score increased by 7% (from 67% to 74%). What specific initiatives contributed most to this improvement, and what strategies are being explored to further enhance employee morale and productivity?

**Answer:**

The **7% increase in the employee engagement survey score** (from 67% to 74%) highlights the positive impact of targeted initiatives designed to enhance employee satisfaction and retention.

**Key Initiatives That Contributed to the Improvement:**

- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Established to promote inclusivity, collaboration, and employee engagement. We currently have (9) resources groups focused on varied initiatives.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Strengthened teamwork across departments to create a more connected workplace.

- **City-wide Employee Recognition:** Celebrations such as Public Service Recognition Week, Milestone Service Awards, and Hometown Heroes acknowledge and appreciate employees' contributions.
- **Employee Well-Being Programs:** Initiatives focused on mental and physical health, and life coaching to support overall well-being.
- **Employee Focused Events:** Employee Resource fairs, Information sessions, and lunch and learns to highlight the various resources and benefits available to employees.
- **Work-Life Balance Enhancements:** Flexible work arrangements that create a more supportive and positive work environment.
- **Professional Development & Growth:** Expanded leadership training and career development programs to empower employees.
- **Improved Internal Communication:** City-wide newsletters and enhanced transparency efforts to keep employees informed and engaged.