

Budget Justice Coalition

BUDGET REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS – 12/1/17

The Budget Justice Coalition is a collaboration of over 30 community-based and labor organizations serving impoverished people working towards a City budget that prioritizes poor communities in San Francisco. As members of the Budget Justice Coalition, we believe that the City's budget should increase resources to address the unmet needs of the City's most vulnerable populations.

We are a broad based coalition working to ensure that the San Francisco budget invests in and fills the unmet needs of everyday San Franciscans. We believe that our entire community benefits when we all have what we need to live and thrive. We believe the city's budget should reflect these values by fully funding programs that ensure everyone has safe and affordable housing, stable employment with fair wages, sufficient healthy food, essential health care, quality early care and education and other investments including those that empower and develop communities. The budget should reduce inequities and benefit San Francisco's low-income people, children and families, people of color, including homeless people, seniors, people with disabilities, low-wage workers, low-income tenants, youth of color, people living with HIV/AIDS, transgender people, and people in the criminal justice system.

We have come together to develop common recommendations for structural reform of our flawed city budget process. We value public/democratic participation in deciding the use of public dollars.

We seek structural budget reforms that promote equity by:

- Increasing the amount of time that the Board of Supervisors has to review and amend the Mayor's proposed budget including increased participation by all members of the Board of Supervisors
- A renewed shared focus on discussing, pursuing and implementing new revenue
- Increasing information-sharing with the public and the accessibility of budget information
- Increased opportunities for the public to participate in guiding the city's policy and finance priorities – in meaningful ways that go beyond advocacy for specific programs or policies
- Limiting the amount of funding that individual Supervisors allocate for District-specific funding requests to a reasonable percentage of available addback funds in order to maximize equitable allocation of funds to address citywide needs

RECOMMENDATION DETAILS

- **Increasing the Board of Supervisors' active participation, effectiveness and public accessibility throughout the budget process, including increased participation by all members of the Board of Supervisors:**
 - a. Extend 5-member BoS Budget & Finance Committee to 6 months
 - b. Shift the focus from a one-month *cut and addback* role in June to a six-month *collaborative* role driven by values, public input and long-term policy goals
 - c. The 11-member BoS should hold a public hearing to provide input into the Mayor's budget instructions before the Mayor issues them.
 - d. In January, the 11-member BoS should hold a public hearing with public comment at which they provide the Mayor's Office, department heads and Commissioners with their policy priorities for the City budget
 - e. Following the submittal of departmental budgets to the Mayor, the BoS Budget Committee should hold public hearings where departments provide an overview of proposed budgets, including any significant new revenue and expenditure proposals, any proposed budget reductions, and discussion of consistency with the Board's policy priorities
 - f. Require the Mayor's Office to provide regular updates to the BoS on significant new revenue and expenditure proposals throughout the budget process. The Board should hold public hearings on these proposals.
 - g. The BoS should meet as a Committee of the Whole to hear public comment on the proposed City budget and be present during public deliberations of the add-back process during the final week. Hearings should take place during the daytime rather than late at night, and should avoid conflict with major Pride Week events.
 - h. **It is imperative that the BoS assess their spending priorities before engaging in accepting or rejecting savings recommendations from the Budget and Legislative Analyst in order to make more informed decisions.**
 - i. The Mayor has the power to make mid-year budget cuts unilaterally in times of budget shortfall. This undermines the democratic process. Reductions in the middle of the year should follow similar budget processes, where the Board reconvenes the five-member Budget Committee, holds public hearings, gathers input, and is able to make decisions alongside the Mayor on spending priorities.

- **A renewed shared focus on discussing, pursuing and implementing new revenue:**

Too much of the process focuses on the expense/use side of the budget. The city needs an institutionalized venue for discussing and vetting philanthropic, tax-based and other revenue proposals, including but not limited to those that require voter approval during election cycles.

We therefore propose:

- a. The creation of a Revenue Committee that would consider, discuss and analyze new revenue proposals for the City and County
- b. The Revenue Committee would outline a 10-year plan for raising necessary revenue to support both capital and programmatic goals
- c. The Revenue Committee would also be an ongoing venue for a regular analysis of cost savings and expenditure savings as well as cost overruns that Departments and contractors are incurring

This has the potential to move the City away from a cut first budgeting strategy to a more comprehensive and wholesome approach. We also believe that incorporating a revenue-proposal process into a multi-year budget process could help de-politicize the process with more intentional planning.

- **Increasing information-sharing with the public and the accessibility of budget information:**
 - a. Proposed budgets should be easy for an average member of the public to understand and available in multiple languages.
 - b. To increase transparency, all budget proposals, from the Mayor's Office or BoS, including proposed Departmental budgets, the proposed city budget, proposed budget cuts, etc., should be available online in a centralized place on sfgov.org. The Controller's Office and Budget Analyst's budget-related reports should also be available at that site. The site should also include a calendar of budget-related Commission and Board of Supervisors hearings.
 - c. Ensure compliance from all city departments and policy-makers with the sunshine ordinance.
 - d. Require all departments to provide written information to the public in a consistent citywide format regarding the department's budget and mid-year reductions (amount of staff/management reduced, number of clients impacted, assessment of services and populations impacted) prior to holding a public hearing.
 - e. Increase transparency during the budget process by making the proposed add-back list public, and holding public hearings on the addbacks with public comment.
 - f. Continue to hold public hearings throughout the budget process, including on the Mayor's budget instructions and regular Controller reports.
 - g. The Mayor should report to the BoS quarterly any unspent funding that the Board allocated during the addback process.

- **Increased opportunities for the public to participate in guiding the city's policy and finance priorities – in meaningful ways that go beyond advocacy for specific programs or policies:**
 - a. Enhance the dignity of public speakers and service providers by providing opportunities for input and communication that go beyond one day of two-minute comments.
 - b. Board of Supervisors to hold District community budget meetings in every District that are issue-based and neighborhood-based, open-ended to allow for unrestricted subject matter, and structured for maximum public understanding of the city budget and maximum public input into prioritization of public dollars.
 - c. The Mayor should hold at least one community hearing on the framework of the Budget
 - d. The Board should explore opportunities for off-site participants to call in and provide audio or video comment where there are barriers to attendance (e.g. students during the school day; seniors and people with disabilities who face mobility challenges).

- **Limiting the amount of funding that individual Supervisors allocate for District-specific funding requests to a reasonable percentage of available addback funds in order to maximize equitable allocation of funds to address citywide needs, emerging needs, and other equitable distribution to address the needs of marginalized populations. These district allocations are a recent development and have grown rapidly in a short time period.**