



RON GALPERIN
CONTROLLER

September 14, 2022

Honorable Eric Garcetti, Mayor
Honorable Michael Feuer, City Attorney
Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council

Re: Follow-Up Audit — Room to Grow: A Framework for Youth Development in Los Angeles

In July 2019, my office released the report, “Room to Grow: A Framework for Youth Development in Los Angeles,” which examined the City’s approach to delivering youth programming. The report found that the City lacked a central entity and blueprint to guide funding decisions and measure overall impact.

Since then, the City has taken several crucial steps to bolster its youth development strategy and protect vulnerable children and families, particularly amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many young Angelenos continue to face barriers to success and some subpopulations, such as youth experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ youth and youth in low-income families, are especially at-risk of isolation and falling behind their peers.

Given the importance of ensuring future generations of Angelenos are positioned for success, my office initiated this follow-up review to assess the City’s implementation of the initial report’s recommendations. The table below summarizes our evaluation of the City’s ongoing efforts:

2019 Recommendations	Status	Comments
Establish or designate a lead office or department for youth initiatives, including advocacy and citywide youth development strategy.	Implemented	The City established the Youth Development Department (YDD) in 2021 to serve as the central agency coordinating youth development and engagement.
Analyze demographic, wellness and achievement data to examine	<i>In progress</i>	YDD recently awarded a contract to a consulting firm to assist with several initiatives

the specific needs of young Angelenos, and identify areas where programming is falling short of community needs and expectations.		related to youth development and programming, including an assessment of policies and data relative to the City's youth.
Develop a formal master plan which establishes goals for the City, establishes an implementation plan to achieve those goals, and guides departments as they make investment and operational decisions.	<i>In progress</i>	YDD's consultant is tasked with the development of performance metrics and performance indicators to assess the annual progress and impact of the newly-developed Strategic Plan.
Explore partnership opportunities and collaborate with key stakeholders to improve programs and maximize the number of young Angelenos benefiting from youth services and opportunities.	<i>In progress</i>	YDD's consultant is tasked with assessing how the department can leverage partnerships with regional stakeholders in coordinating the implementation of the City's strategic plan.
Develop a formal, consistent reporting platform in the form of progress reports or report cards, to allow policymakers, stakeholders, and the public to monitor the well-being of young Angelenos over time.	<i>In progress</i>	YDD's adopted budget for FY 2022-23 includes funding for contractual services to establish a central information platform for accessing City youth programs and services offered by the City.

While Los Angeles has taken steps to improve the delivery of youth development programming, there is still work ahead. Investing in our City's young people is an investment in our shared future. I am encouraged by the findings of this follow-up report and I urge the City to continue seeking lasting solutions that promote a more equitable society where all youth can thrive.

Sincerely,



RON GALPERIN
L.A. Controller

Follow-Up Audit

Room to Grow: A Framework for Youth Development in Los Angeles



RON  **GALPERIN**
LA CONTROLLER

Follow-Up Audit—Room to Grow: A Framework for Youth Development in Los Angeles



BACKGROUND

Nearly a third of the City's residents are under the age of 24. Providing young people with access to resources is especially important throughout their developmental stages. Actively participating in safe and enriching programs can help improve self-confidence, increase academic achievement, and promote feelings of safety, belonging, and connectedness.

In July 2019, we released our report [*Room to Grow: A Framework for Youth Development in Los Angeles*](#). **The report examined the City's approach to delivering youth programming and found that the City's piecemeal approach was not unified by a central entity or strategy to guide funding decisions and measure overall impact.**

Our report also identified several high-risk groups who are most in need of help. While Los Angeles is home to an array of institutions offering learning and development programs, an increasing number of young Angelenos face barriers that can make it challenging to take advantage of available opportunities. Subject matter experts highlighted several subpopulations that are most at risk of feeling isolated and falling behind—**many of the City's youth fall into these categories.** These subpopulations include:

- youth experiencing homelessness;
- youth in low-income families;
- youth involved with child welfare or justice systems;
- youth exposed to violence;
- LGBTQ youth;
- youth with disabilities;
- immigrants; and
- English language learners.

Due to the issues outlined above and the importance of ensuring future generations of Angelenos are positioned for success, our office initiated a follow-up review of the City's implementation of our prior recommendations. This report summarizes our assessment of the City's efforts in implementing recommendations made in our prior report.

Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on young Angelenos

While many aspects of young Angelenos' daily lives have slowly reverted to their pre-pandemic routine, the impacts of the pandemic continue—and will continue likely into the future. This is

especially true for young people who belong to at-risk groups or live in households struggling with poverty.

- Several studies have raised alarms about the condition of youth mental health resulting from a combination of factors such as grief, loneliness, and disruption. The impacts of this trauma are significant—suicide rates have increased and a growing number of young people have reported contemplating suicide.
- While changes in routine and the shift to remote school schedules affected most school-aged youth, existing gaps in academic achievement and access to opportunities have worsened during the last two years. In addition, chronic absenteeism has soared—the Los Angeles Unified School District reported that nearly half of its students missed at least 9% of the 2021-22 academic year.
- Decreases in physical activity have contributed to increasing levels of childhood obesity and associated health risks.

The City has taken several steps during the pandemic to protect vulnerable youth, such as providing direct financial assistance to low-income households. But the conditions described above further highlight the need for a comprehensive and responsive youth development strategy. **Overall, we found that the City has made important progress towards implementing our recommendations, but there is still much more work ahead.**

KEY ISSUES FROM 2019 REVIEW

Although City departments reported spending more than \$175 million on youth programs—which likely did not include the full inventory of programs and costs—our 2019 review found that the City did not have a youth-specific organizational framework. This created several challenges that needed to be resolved in order to ensure high-quality services are available to all young Angelenos.

Lack of a centralized entity to guide youth programming and spending

We found that there was no single entity tasked with carrying out critical initiatives such as establishing citywide youth development goals, monitoring youth outcomes, evaluating programs to ensure efficient service delivery, and improving service equity and inclusion. Generally, each department was responsible for developing their own goals and programs based on their operations and subject matter expertise. This approach made it difficult to measure impact, address specific community needs, and identify service gaps or redundancies.

In the past, citywide coordination and advocacy was the responsibility of the Commission for Children, Youth, and Their Families. However, this commission was eliminated in 2010 as a result of budgetary constraints.

No comprehensive strategic or master plan

Both the National League of Cities and Federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs emphasize the need for governments to develop strategic plans to guide their short- and long-term decisions about youth services planning, program development, and funding. Effective strategic plans add value by providing a comprehensive vision, outline needs and available resources, and create a structured plan for implementing successful youth programming.

Challenges accessing youth program opportunities

There is was no single point of entry or information source for residents seeking youth program information; residents needed to navigate multiple department websites or phone numbers. The overall effectiveness of any program is limited if potential participants are unaware of available opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION FOLLOW-UP

Our previous report recommended steps the City should take as it evaluates development and implementation its youth programs. These steps are intended to lay the foundation for a long-term strategy for youth programming decisions. **As described below, the City has made important progress—but remains in the early stages on essential components of its reimagined framework.**

Establishment of the Youth Development Department (YDD) is a step toward addressing the service gap left by the elimination of the youth strategy manager and youth commission during the Great Recession. The department is currently led by an Executive Director and also includes a team of seven employees with community engagement, strategic planning, and administration responsibilities. As the City works toward implementing our recommendations, it should support the department's efforts to build in-house capacity. In addition, the City should consider ways to maximize the value of available resources that are most suited for supporting and interacting with the City's youth, such as the Department of Recreation and Parks and its facilities.

- 1. The City should establish or designate a lead office or department for youth initiatives, including advocacy and citywide youth development strategy.**

Status: Implemented

In June 2021, the City passed an ordinance creating YDD. The City established the department to serve as the central agency coordinating youth development and engagement and to ensure youth programing and investments are operating under a unified youth development strategy.

Effective August 2021, YDD was tasked with:

- serving as the central public information center to access youth services in the City;
- developing a road map for long-term youth program planning, coordinating with other City departments, regional agencies, and other providers of youth services to develop a Citywide three-year Youth Development Strategic Plan;
- advising the Mayor and the City Council on youth programs to ensure efficient use of City resources and the greatest return on investment; and
- providing necessary staffing for the Olivia E. Mitchell LA City Youth Council.

YDD staff noted that they expect the department's roles and responsibilities to continuously evolve in the department's early years as the City further explores how to best serve young Angelenos. For example, during the FY 2022-23 budget development process, the City Council allocated funding to establish a youth protection division within YDD. Staff indicated that responsibilities of the youth protection division will include the development of safety and protection policies for youth utilizing the City's programs and services. In addition, YDD staff indicated that the City Council is seeking to expand YDD's responsibilities as outlined in the ordinance in order to more effectively fulfill its responsibilities.

2. The City should analyze demographic, wellness, and achievement data to examine the specific needs of young Angelenos, and identify areas where programming is falling short of community needs and expectations.

Status: In progress

Target date: May 2023

YDD recently awarded a contract to a consulting firm to assist with several initiatives related to youth development and programming. The scope of contracted services includes an assessment of policies and data relative to the City's youth and identification of gaps between community needs and offered programs. The consultant is also tasked with assessing geographic areas with that are underserved by the existing network of programs.

3. The City should develop a formal master plan which establishes goals for the City, establishes an implementation plan to achieve those goals, and guides departments as they make investment and operational decisions.

Status: In progress

Target date: May 2023

The consulting engagement described above includes development of a three-year Youth Development Strategic Plan. As outlined in the contract, the plan will be developed at the conclusion of a larger process that includes original research/analysis, reviews of best practices

in other jurisdictions, and input from a mix of stakeholders including YDD, the Olivia E. Mitchell LA City Youth Council, elected officials, City departments, youth participants, and community stakeholders.

4. The City should establish outcome-based performance indicators which measure the City's progress towards achieving goals, and emphasize both program utilization and program impact.

Status: In progress

Target date: May 2023

YDD's consultant is tasked with development of performance metrics and performance indicators to assess the annual progress and impact of the newly-developed Strategic Plan. YDD indicated that one of the key goals of the strategic planning process is to assist the department in developing milestones related to measuring participation in youth programs throughout City departments, measurement guidelines to track resources invested and utilized, and performance indicators to assess the success of each program.

5. The City should explore partnership opportunities and collaborate with key stakeholders to improve programs and maximize the number of young Angelenos benefiting from youth services and opportunities.

Status: In progress

Target date: May 2023

The scope of the consulting contract includes assessing strategies on how YDD can leverage partnerships with regional public and private stakeholders including youth serving community-based organizations, City and County agencies, and private philanthropic partners in coordinating the implementation of the City's strategic plan. In addition, the contract includes development of recommendations for the establishment, management, and long-term funding of a network of Youth Hubs in the City through a partnership with Recreation and Parks, and other youth serving organizations. The implementation of identified partnership strategies will be a part of the Department's ongoing work, subject to the City's annual budget evaluation process.

Internally within the City, YDD established a liaison network throughout most City Departments and throughout the City's Council Offices. The liaison network will be leveraged in coordinating the delivery of youth programs and related policy development under a unified citywide youth development strategy.

In May 2022, YDD launched the Earn Learn and Play (ELP) platform. The platform is an awareness campaign with a portal providing centralized access to information on hundreds of free and low-cost recreational and educational youth programs and paid internship opportunities throughout the City.

6. The City should develop a formal, consistent reporting platform in the form of progress reports or report cards, to allow policymakers, stakeholders, and the public to monitor the well-being of young Angelenos over time. These reports will allow the City to assess the impact of investments, and should be used to make necessary updates to youth master plans.

Status: In progress

Target date: June 2023

YDD's adopted budget for Fiscal Year 2022-23 includes funding for contractual services to establish a central information platform for accessing City youth programs and services offered by the City. The department notes that the platform will also serve as a reporting portal to track service levels and outcomes across programs and to track the City's investments on youth programs. The reports will be used to assess the impact of the City's programs on the City's youth populations and to help guide the City's master planning efforts.