

Painting the Town's Budget: An Overview of Department of Cultural Affairs Expense Funding, 2017-2026

Introduction

The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) is the largest municipal funder of arts and culture in the United States, with an operating budget of \$300 million in 2026 as of the Adopted Budget passed in June 2025. (All years refer to City fiscal years.) DCLA's [mission](#) is to “promote and advocate for quality arts programming and to articulate the contribution made by the cultural community to the City's economic vitality,” including providing funding to nonprofit organizations for cultural programming. The agency is funded almost entirely by the City, with only about 1% of its budget coming from the State or [federal government](#). DCLA's \$300 million budget is about 0.3% of the total City budget (\$116 billion as of the [Adopted Budget](#)). Beyond its operating budget, also known as the Expense Budget, DCLA's Capital Budget includes more than \$2 billion over the next 10 years, as of the September Capital Commitment Plan released in September 2025. This report focuses on the Expense Budget; capital project funding is not included.

At the request of Candice Anderson, Executive Director of Cool Culture, a nonprofit that connects families with cultural programs and supports families to advocate for cultural equity in their communities, IBO analyzed the last decade (2017-2026) of DCLA spending by budget area. [Public budget](#) and fiscal documents, such as the [Annual Comprehensive Financial Report](#), are not sufficiently detailed as to allow for a programmatic analysis of DCLA funding. This report provides a look back at DCLA spending and context for the [notable increase to the agency's budget](#) this year. Unless otherwise specified, all dollar values are real dollars, which have been adjusted for inflation to 2025 dollars. Unadjusted amounts, called nominal dollars, are what is reported in City budget documents. Dollar amounts in this report are primarily dollars spent, also known as actuals, rather than budgeted amounts. Accordingly, totals in this report may differ from budget numbers publicly cited by DCLA.

A substantial portion of funding administered by DCLA is allocated by the City Council through a process called discretionary funding, or Schedule C funding. [Per the Council](#), Council Members “allocate discretionary funds to not-for-profit organizations in order to meet local needs and fill gaps in City agency services.” Prior to 2024, Schedule C contracts were registered one year at a time. Agencies may now register contracts for [up to three years](#), provided the amount allocated by the City Council remains within the registered amount in years two and three. However, because DCLA awards grants rather than contracts, the multiyear contract reform does not apply. Schedule C allocations flow through agencies like DCLA, which distribute funding provided by the Council to the Council's designated recipients.

Until the 2025 Adopted Budget passed in June 2024, it was not possible to fully distinguish between mayoral and City Council funding within DCLA's budget because budget lines for members of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) included both mayoral and Council funding. In the first section of this report, “Spending and Budget Overview,” IBO analyzes DCLA spending from 2017 through 2025, as well as the 2026 Adopted Budget amount, with Council discretionary funding to CIG members included in the “CIG” category.

Council funding that can be broken out is included under "Non-CIG Council Initiatives and Member Items" in this section. In the second section, "2025 and 2026 Discretionary Analysis," IBO highlights how budget transparency is improved by the creation of new CIG Council discretionary budget codes, focusing on 2025 spending and the 2026 Adopted Budget to provide a fuller picture of discretionary funding administered by DCLA.

Spending & Budget Overview

DCLA spent 10% more in 2025 (\$257 million) in real terms compared with 2017 (\$234 million). The agency's 2026 budget is \$42 million higher than its 2025 spending (16% increase) and \$66 million higher than its 2017 spending (28% increase).

- DCLA's spending in 2025 was slightly lower than its 2022 and 2023 actuals (\$260 million and \$263 million, respectively).
- Agency spending dipped to \$220 million in 2021, down 14% from the prior year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After increasing to around \$260 million in 2022 and 2023, spending dipped again to \$231 million in 2024 (12% decrease) due to the implementation of a citywide savings program.

Figure 2
Percentage of DCLA Funding by Budget Category
Fiscal Years 2017-2025 are Actual Spending, 2026 is Budgeted Spending

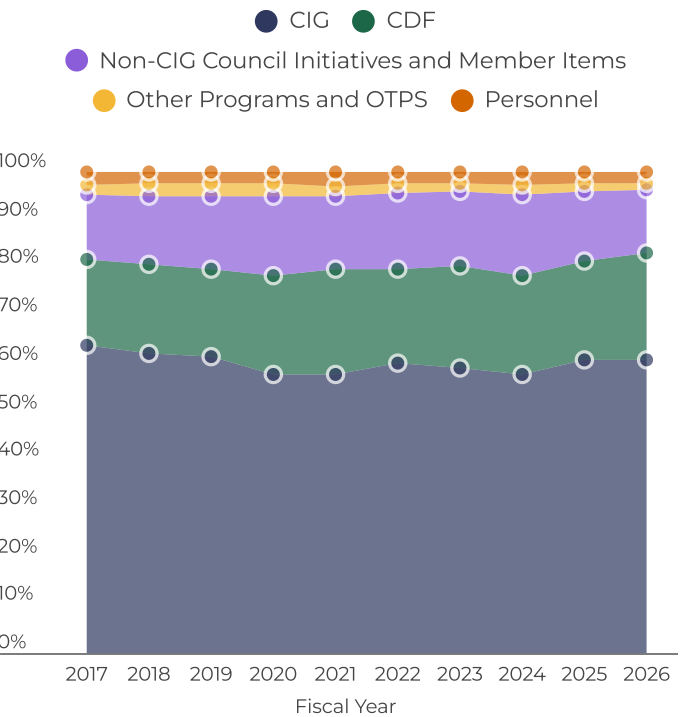
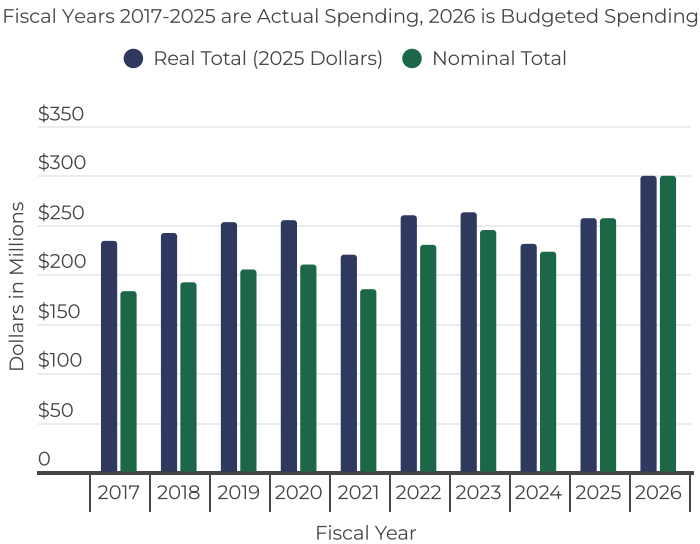




Figure 1
DCLA Spending (2017-2025) and 2026 Budget in Real and Nominal Terms



The CIG and the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) are the agency's largest programs.

- Members of the CIG—in 2025, 34 cultural organizations located on City property—receive direct subsidies from the City to maintain their facilities and offer discounted cultural programming to the public. Five nonprofits were [added to the group](#) in 2026, bringing the total to 39.
- The CDF is a competitive grant program that funds cultural programs provided by local nonprofits. More than 1,000 organizations [received CDF awards](#) in 2025.
- From 2017 through 2025, CIG payments made up 60% of DCLA spending on average (ranging from 58%-64%)—inclusive of funding provided by City Council, as discussed above—while CDF grants made up 20% on average (ranging from 18%-22%).

-  The additional funding in DCLA's 2026 budget slightly changed the share for the CDF, which now comprises 22% of the agency's total 2026 budget. Subsidies to members of the CIG account for 61% of DCLA's budget in 2026, again inclusive of Council funding, which is broken out in the second section of the report.
-  Other programs and administration comprised 4-5% of DCLA's spending each year. This includes programs such as Materials for the Arts and the CUNY Cultural Corps, in addition to personnel and administrative costs. In 2026, 4% of the agency's budget is allotted for these costs.

CIG and CDF spending were both higher in 2025 than in 2017 in real terms.







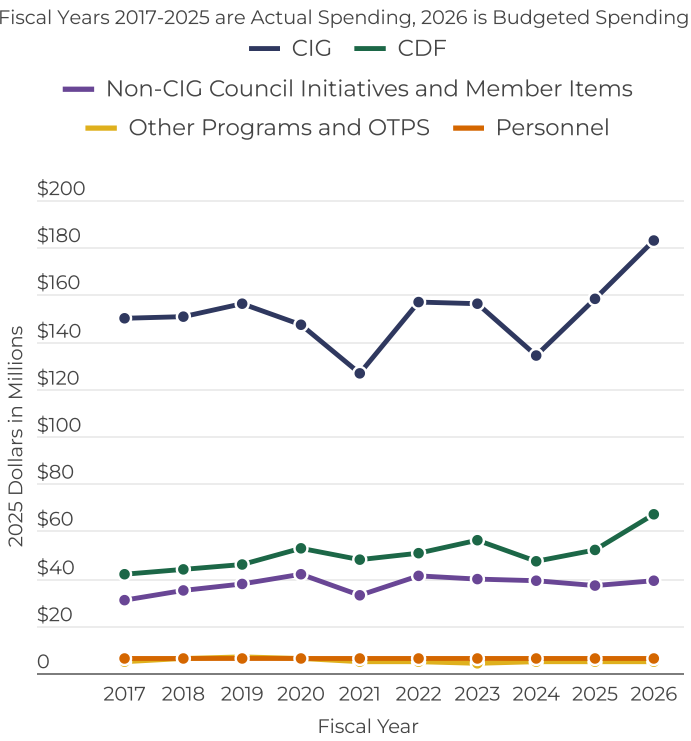


-  Aside from dips in 2021 and 2024, funding to members of the CIG was relatively stable in this period, with 2025 spending (\$156 million) about 5% higher than 2017 spending (\$150 million) in real terms. (Includes Council funding.)
-  The 2026 budget for the CIGs is \$183 million, \$27 million (17%) higher than the agency's 2025 spending and \$34 million (22%) higher than its 2017 spending. (Includes Council funding.)
-  CDF spending grew 24% in this period—from \$42 million in 2017 to \$52 million in 2025.
-  Exclusive of Member Items, the 2026 budget for the CDF is \$67 million, \$15 million (28%) higher than 2025 spending and 60% higher than in 2017.
-  Personnel costs have hovered around \$6 million annually in real terms, including in the 2026 budget.
-  Other non-Council programs and non-personnel administrative costs (called OTPS, or Other than Personal Services) over this decade ranged from \$4 million (2023) to \$7 million (2019). The 2026 budget for these items is \$5 million.

Figure 3
DCLA Actuals (2017-2025) and 2026 Budget by Budget Category, Adjusted for Inflation



2025 and 2026 Discretionary Analysis

As previously mentioned, until 2025, it was not possible to identify the totality of Council funding through DCLA's published budget structures. In this section, IBO focuses on actual spending in 2025 and budgeted spending for 2026, incorporating the newly created Council budget codes for members of the CIG.

-  The total Council funding distributed through DCLA was \$48 million in 2025: \$37 million went to non-CIG organizations (described above) and \$11 million to members of the CIG (new budget codes). DCLA's 2026 budget includes \$53 million in Council funding, of which \$39 million is budgeted for non-CIG organizations and \$14 million is budgeted for members of the CIG.
-  With the new budget codes added to the "Council Initiatives and Member Items" category, Council discretionary funding makes up about 18% of DCLA's spending and budget (19% of spending in 2025 and 18% of the agency's budget in 2026). For 2025 spending, this is about 4 percentage points (28%)

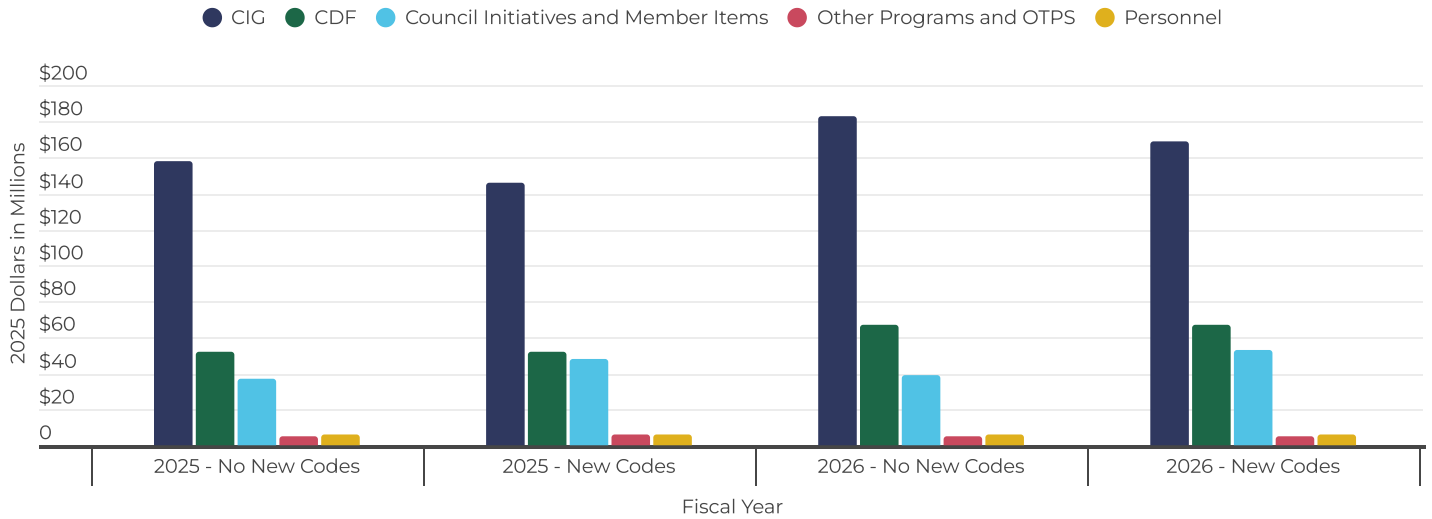
higher than the share without these budget codes. For the 2026 budget, it is about 5 percentage points (37%) higher.



Exclusive of Council funding, CIG subsidies make up 56% of DCLA's 2026 budget and 57% of the agency's 2025 spending.

Figure 4

New Discretionary Codes: DCLA 2025 Actuals and 2026 Budget by Budget Category



Sources & Notes for Figures

Figure 1

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Financial Management System (FMS) data

NOTE: Fiscal years 2017 through 2025 numbers reflect actual DCLA spending, with 2025 reported as year-to-date spending as of September 26, 2025. Fiscal year 2026 reflects the DCLA budget from the Adopted Budget passed in June 2025.

Figures 2-4

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Financial Management System (FMS) data.

NOTE: The CDF amount does not include Council Member items. Fiscal years 2017 through 2025 numbers reflect actual DCLA spending, with 2025 reported as year-to-date spending as of September 26, 2025. Fiscal year 2026 reflects the DCLA budget from the Adopted Budget passed in June 2025.

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