

FY 2026 Budget Note on Span of Control

Introduced by Commissioner Meghan Moyer

The ratio of management-to-staff is often guided by the principle of "span of control." Best practice generally suggests a 1:5 to 1:10 ratio of managers to staff, with each manager leading approximately 5-10 direct reports. However, the ideal ratio can vary based on the nature of the work, the experience of employees and managers, and the level of interaction between them. That being said, on an organizational level it is important to maintain a cumulative management-to-staff ratio in line with our objective of maximizing the number of employees whose primary responsibilities are delivering direct services to the community.

It is vital that Multnomah County maintains the ability to deliver high-quality services in a leaner environment. An important step toward this leaner operating model is an evaluation of the span of control and a tighter adherence to maximizing the number of frontline employees while learning to manage that work in a more efficient management structure.

This budget note directs the following to take effect by January 2026:

1. Each department and non-departmental office must submit in writing to the Board of Commissioners a plan to achieve an average management-to-staff ratio of 1:7 or greater. The plan should include organizational charts and an implementation strategy.
2. Beginning in January 2026, If the plan includes any managers who manage less than seven direct reports, an exception must be approved by the Chief Operating Officer.
3. The Chief Operating Officer must report any approved exemption to the Board of Commissioners within thirty days.