

FY 2026
Multnomah County
Program Offer Writer's Guide

December 6, 2024
Version 1.0

Budget Office Staff Directory

Each County department has a Central Budget Office analyst who is responsible for helping departmental staff prepare department budgets and analyzing those budgets for the Chair and Commissioners. Central Budget Analysts can assist with questions about the budget process or Questica. The Central Budget Office is available to all employees involved in creating the budget.

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Table of Contents

Budget Office Staff Directory	2
Introduction: Program Offer 101	4
What’s New in FY 2026?	4
What Makes a Good Program Description?	4
Additional Considerations	5
Policy Direction from the Chair	5
Equity in Budgeting	5
Budgeting for Results: An Intro to Outcome-Based Budgeting	5
Program Description Template	6
Program Description Examples	7
Entering Data in Questica	8
Finding a Program Offer Request Form	8
Program Offer Details & Narrative	9
Program Description Data Field	9
Artificial Intelligence and the Budget Process	10
Creative Writing Tools	10
County Policy Perspective	10
Suggested Prompts for Gemini	10

Introduction: Program Offer 101

The budget is one of the most important policy documents that the County produces. The budget helps the Chair, the Board of County Commissioners, and our community understand the factors that affect the programs and services provided to the community. All County functions – from operating programs to the General Fund contingency account – request funding through a **program offer**.

Program offers help to break down department divisions into more manageable, nuanced packages that allow the Board to add or cut specific services. Program offers include detailed program descriptions, budgets, and performance data for a given set of services. The Chair and the Board use this information to build the County’s budget. The community, including departmental and central Community Budget Advisory Committees, community partners, and clients, use this information to understand and evaluate County operations. Thus, it is critical that that program offers are written in a way that the program's activities and goals are easily understood by all readers.

This guide focuses on writing strong program offer descriptions. However, additional information related to program offer request form data beyond the description is available at the end of this guide. It is also included in the comprehensive FY 2026 Budget Manual, which can be found at www.multco.us/info/fy-2026-budget-manuals-forms-calendars-and-other-resources.

The Central Budget Office is here to help! If you have a question or need training or support, please don’t hesitate to call or email.

What’s New in FY 2026?

For FY 2026, program offers will no longer have an Executive Summary section. All narrative will be included in the program description section, which is now longer. These fields were often duplicative so we are removing them for efficiency. The Board and public should be able to read the program description section and clearly understand what the program produces.

What Makes a Good Program Description?

Multnomah County staff work hard every day to better the lives of everyone in the community. That’s a story worth telling. One way to tell that story is through program offer narratives, or the “program description” in Questica. A good program description is easy to understand for someone unfamiliar

with the program and will show the relationship between the program and the results it produces for the community. To do that well, consider the following:

- Use plain language in all program offer sections. Spell out acronyms and reduce reliance on jargon.
- Clearly describe program outputs (i.e., products or services). What's the program elevator pitch?
- Cite research or other data that support the program's services.
- Describe how the program offer supports department and division strategies for achieving results in the community. If the program supports a specific division outcome, or a department policy objective, name it. Examples include the Emergency Management Plan, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Facilities Disposition Plan, Climate Action Plan, Five Year Capital Plan, or Asset Preservation Plan.
- Indicate partnerships with other departments or governmental or quasi-governmental organizations, but *do not name non-profit organizations, providers, contractors, consultants, or employees.*
- Demonstrate the value provided for the cost.

Additional Considerations

Policy Direction from the Chair

When crafting program descriptions, it is advantageous to refer to the Chair's budget guidance when applicable. County Chair Vega Pederson's budget guidance can be found at: www.multco.us/info/fy-2026-budget-manuals-forms-calendars-and-other-resources.

Equity in Budgeting

Consider communicating how the program uses an equity lens in relation to services provided and, when the data is available, include demographic information about the program's target population and how it reaches this population. The Office of Diversity and Equity has put together a [FY 2026 Budget Equity Tool](#) and accompanying [Worksheet](#) to provide guidance to departments on the application of equity concepts to budgeting. Please use that tool while preparing program descriptions.

Budgeting for Results: An Intro to Outcome-Based Budgeting

For FY 2026, the Budget Office has produced a guide with recommendations for strategically linking program offers to division-level outcomes. Please see the guide here: www.multco.us/info/fy-2026-budget-manuals-forms-calendars-and-other-resources.

Program Description Template

Program descriptions are **not required** to follow any particular format as long as it accounts for the criteria above. However, we recommend using the following format to structure your program offer’s program description field.

A narrative section covering the program’s issues, goals, and activities:

Issue: Describe the issue the program is attempting to address. Why should the community be interested in funding this program?

Program Goal: What is the change in the community this program intends to make? What are the results of the program’s outputs (i.e., products or services)?

Program Activity: What does the program offer do? Who does it impact? How do people access the program? How does the activity contribute to the desired program goal? If the program has multiple activities, describe them all here.

A bulleted list of outputs:

Program Outputs: Clear, concise descriptions the program offer’s products and services in a bulleted format. Think of this as the program’s elevator pitch. For clarity and consistency, write your output statements in the following format. Data should be entered at the end of the “Program Description” field in Questica. Examples of output statements are listed below. There are no requirements stating how many outputs are required, but most program offers will likely have 2-4 outputs. **Please note that these output statements are different from output performance measures. Please see the Budgeting for Results guide [here](#) for more information.**

Activity/Action	What? The Product or Service	For/to whom?
Processes	pet licenses	for new pet owners
Hosts	summer reading program	for children and teens
Provides	peer delivered behavioral health services	for BHRC clients
Provides	emergency shelter facilities during severe winter weather	to houseless county residents

Departments may include output statements like the example below:

“This program offer

- Provides immunizations to all animals under our care
- Provides microchipping services for cats and dogs
- Performs emergency medical procedures to animals in crisis, and
- Provides low-cost spay/neuter procedures for the public.”

Program Description Examples

(Excludes example Program Offer Output statements)

Program #25141 - YFS - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach FY 2025 Adopted

Department:	County Human Services	Program Contact:	Rachel Pearl
Program Offer Type:	Operating	Program Offer Stage:	Adopted

Program Description

ISSUE: According to the Oregon Food Bank (2020), over 133,230 of Multnomah County residents are experiencing food insecurity. Children and communities of color experience hunger at even greater rates. Food insecurity and poverty are linked. In Multnomah County, the highest poverty rates are in East County and North/Northeast Portland areas where residents are predominantly Black, Indigenous, Native and other communities of color. While SNAP benefits can help, the application can be difficult to complete and benefits can be hard to access. The economic impact of the pandemic has increased economic hardships and the number of people needing help accessing food.

PROGRAM GOAL: The SNAP Outreach program provides targeted outreach ensures that communities with the highest rates of poverty and geographic barriers have access to food. The focus is serving those with the highest levels of food insecurity and lowest participation rates: Black, Indigenous, Latinx and People of Color, immigrant and refugees and college-age students primarily in North/Northeast Portland and East Multnomah County, so that poverty does not mean going hungry.

PROGRAM ACTIVITY: SNAP outreach activities help increase awareness about the SNAP program and offer assistance with the application. Staff work with other County departments and community organizations in many settings. This includes schools, colleges, local workforce offices, community events and fairs and farmers markets. They also help people complete the application and guide them through the process. Because the application can be complex, it can be a barrier. The SNAP staff help answer questions and address any barriers. A unique and key aspect of their work is the relationships and trust they build with those they serve. This helps people complete the application as well as maintain the benefits when it's time to renew them. In addition, they stay connected with people and they feel comfortable reaching out when they need help. This increases access to SNAP benefits for first time applicants and those who need to renew benefits.

Program #80001 - Central Library FY 2025 Adopted

Department:	Library	Program Contact:	Shelly Jarman
Program Offer Type:	Operating	Program Offer Stage:	Adopted

Program Description

ISSUE: Public spaces to access information, educational opportunities, technology, and an area to connect with others are systemically lacking in Multnomah County. There are substantial limitations for no-charge, culturally specific community hubs that provide access to language learning, early literacy and learning, technology support, and more.

PROGRAM GOAL: Central region libraries' language learning and educational programs improve employment opportunities and quality of life for those with low English proficiency and limited resources. Library services such as tech access, 1:1 tech help, and job search help support critical life skill development and digital literacy. Library Crisis Intervention Services perform intervention and referrals for members of the public experiencing mental health crises. Central Library will be refreshed through the Capital Bond project to create more space, support efficiency through Automated Materials Handling, and add new furniture and layouts to support a variety of needs. The Mobile Library vehicle will connect to communities with significant barriers to accessing library services. Initial focus will be in areas where libraries are closed for construction.

PROGRAM ACTIVITY: Reopening libraries after COVID-19 closures has focused on strategies to best serve marginalized communities and advance racial equity. Reopening decisions were informed using a community needs assessment and the prioritization of services based on identified needs: technology access and assistance, collection access, craft and educational kits, information access, library materials pick-up, and dedicated hours for immunosuppressed patrons. The result was expanding in-person services while continuing to support patrons via virtual programs and services. Library services were prioritized to serve those from underserved communities and provide a cultural- and/or language-specific lens. This included early literacy programs, ESL and citizenship classes, crisis intervention services, and 1:1 tech training.

Entering Data in Questica

Program offers can be found in the Request Form section of Questica. The Request Forms captures critical data including the program description, performance measures, legal/contractual obligations, revenue/expense detail, explanation of revenue, and significant program changes. Metadata is also captured including program offer type, contact name, and related programs. This data is compiled into the [annual budget document](#) as well as various [budget dashboards](#).

Finding a Program Offer Request Form

To get started, see the “Find a Program Offer or Other Request Form” QRG or training video on the [Commons Questica Learning Resources page](#).

Once you have a program offer open, from the “General” dropdown menu, select “Request Form.” You will see the following screen:

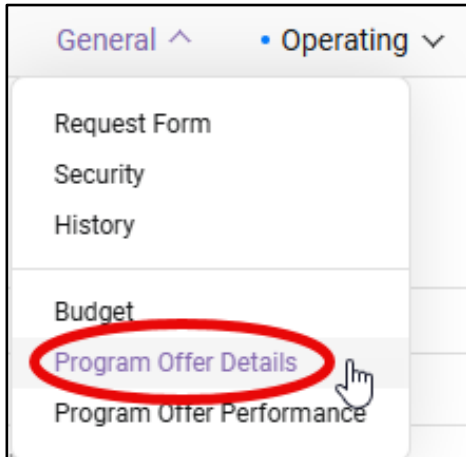
The screenshot displays the 'Request Form Information' section of the Questica interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with four dropdown menus: 'General' (selected), 'Operating', 'Capital', and 'Reports'. Below the navigation bar, the 'Request Form Information' section contains four input fields:

- Request Form Name (PO Name, Amend Name, etc.) ***: A text input field containing 'Fund Level Transactions'.
- Request Form Number ***: A text input field containing '95000'.
- Department ***: A dropdown menu showing '92 - Overall County'.
- Request Form Type ***: A dropdown menu showing 'Program Offer'.

- **Request Form Name** – Here, you can enter or edit the program offer name.
- **Request Form Number** – Informational only. Program numbers start with the department’s two digit number (e.g. 72 = Department of County Management). To update this number, contact your business manager, who will work with the Central Budget Office to make necessary changes.
- **Department** – Informational only. You will only see request forms for your department.
- **Request Form Type** – Informational only. Request form types include: program offer, budget adjustment, amendment, or budget modification.

For more information, view the “Update Program Offer Name or Number” training video in the Narrative Preparers section of the [Commons Questica Learning Resources page](#).

Program Offer Details & Narrative

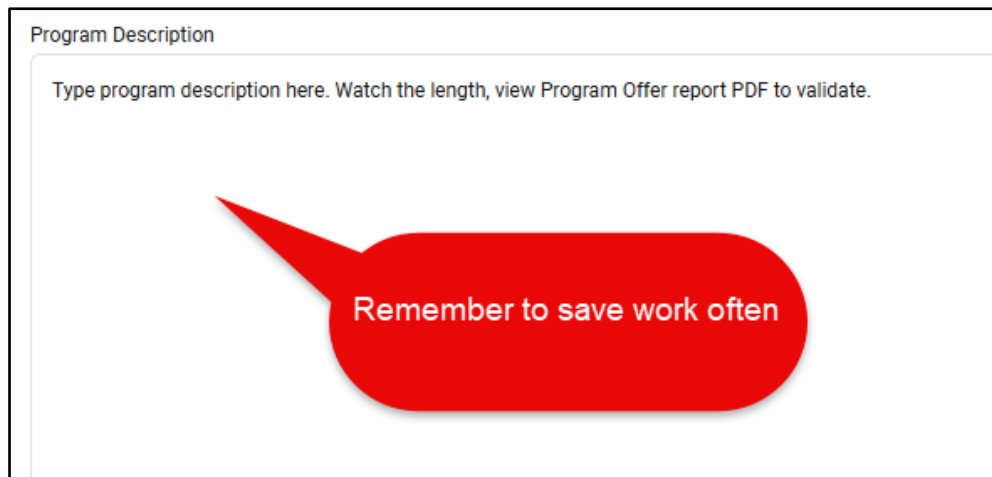


Departments enter program offer narrative information in the “Program Offer Details” section of Questica, which is found under the “General” dropdown menu. The published budget book will include this narrative information.

For more information, view the training videos in the Narrative Preparers section of the [Commons Questica Learning Resources page](#), as well as the FY 2026 Budget Manual located on that page and at www.multco.us/info/fy-2026-budget-manuals-forms-calendars-and-other-resources.

Program Description Data Field

The narrative content described above will be captured in the Program Description data field in Questica. Please note that Questica will allow you to enter unlimited text, despite making only a limited amount of text visible in the printed program offer. To make sure your text fits in the printed program offer, view the PDF version of the program offer. (To review a program offer, see the QRG titled [Run a Program Offer Report](#) or watch the training video [Run a Program Offer Report](#), both located on [Questica Commons](#).)



TIP: Only one person can edit a Request Form at one time. If two or more people are editing an item at the same time (e.g. Request Form, Program Offer Details, Program Offer Performance Measures), Questica will only keep the edits of the last person to save. **You may wish to write longer narratives**

in Word or Google Docs before copy/pasting into Questica to reduce the chance of lost information.

For more information, view the “Create a Program Description” training video in the Narrative Preparers section of the [Commons Questica Learning Resources page](#).

Artificial Intelligence and the Budget Process

NEW! The following information was provided by the County’s Deputy Chief Information Officer.

Creative Writing Tools

The County has a number of tools to help craft budget narratives and program offer measures. These include Gemini, Google’s Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) embedded into the Workspace suite of tools, and Writer, also a generative AI tool. To access these tools submit a software request [here](#). Enter “[Gemini](#)” or “[Writer](#)” as the Software Name and press the “Search” button. Select “Learn more and request now” to order the tool after approving the cost with the relevant manager.

County Policy Perspective

The use of Gemini or Writer for improving written content is allowable in County [Administrative Policy IT-4](#) and is specifically covered in (B) (1), *uses that do not require approval*. Use of these tools as part of program offer budget narratives is similar to how we use Gemini to help write letters in Google Docs. The key to this use is that a human should always be responsible for the final content that’s published. Note that the County does not support the use of AI when making decisions, conclusions, and recommendations that impact staff and the community.

Suggested Prompts for Gemini

- Copy and paste a block of text into [Gemini](#) or click the “Help me write” button in Google Docs. Try these prompts:
 - “Improve this content”
 - “Simplify this content”
 - “Make this text more positive in tone”
 - “Make this statement more applicable to the community”

- Remember that Generative AI tools like Gemini and Writer remember context. Each new prompt can build upon the last prompt. This means you can keep adding information and asking questions, refining the prompts, as you go.
- Now copy and paste your proposed measures into Gemini and ask:
 - “Can these measures be improved and/or simplified?”
 - “Do the measures accurately reflect the budget narrative?”
- If you like the suggestions, accept them, and use the text in your document. Be sure to make any final edits to the text before it's published in Qwestica to keep the human in the loop.
- In these examples, Gemini is not making any decisions, conclusions, or recommendations, but it is helping improve the language we as humans have written. We remain in control of the final text submitted as part of the departments’ requested budget.
- How you phrase the question, or in this case “prompt”, can make a big difference in the quality of the results. Our [Gemini Support site](#) has some good guidance on how to write advanced prompts. Also, don’t be afraid to try a couple of different prompts to see what you like best. Iteration is key to getting the most out of generative AI tools.