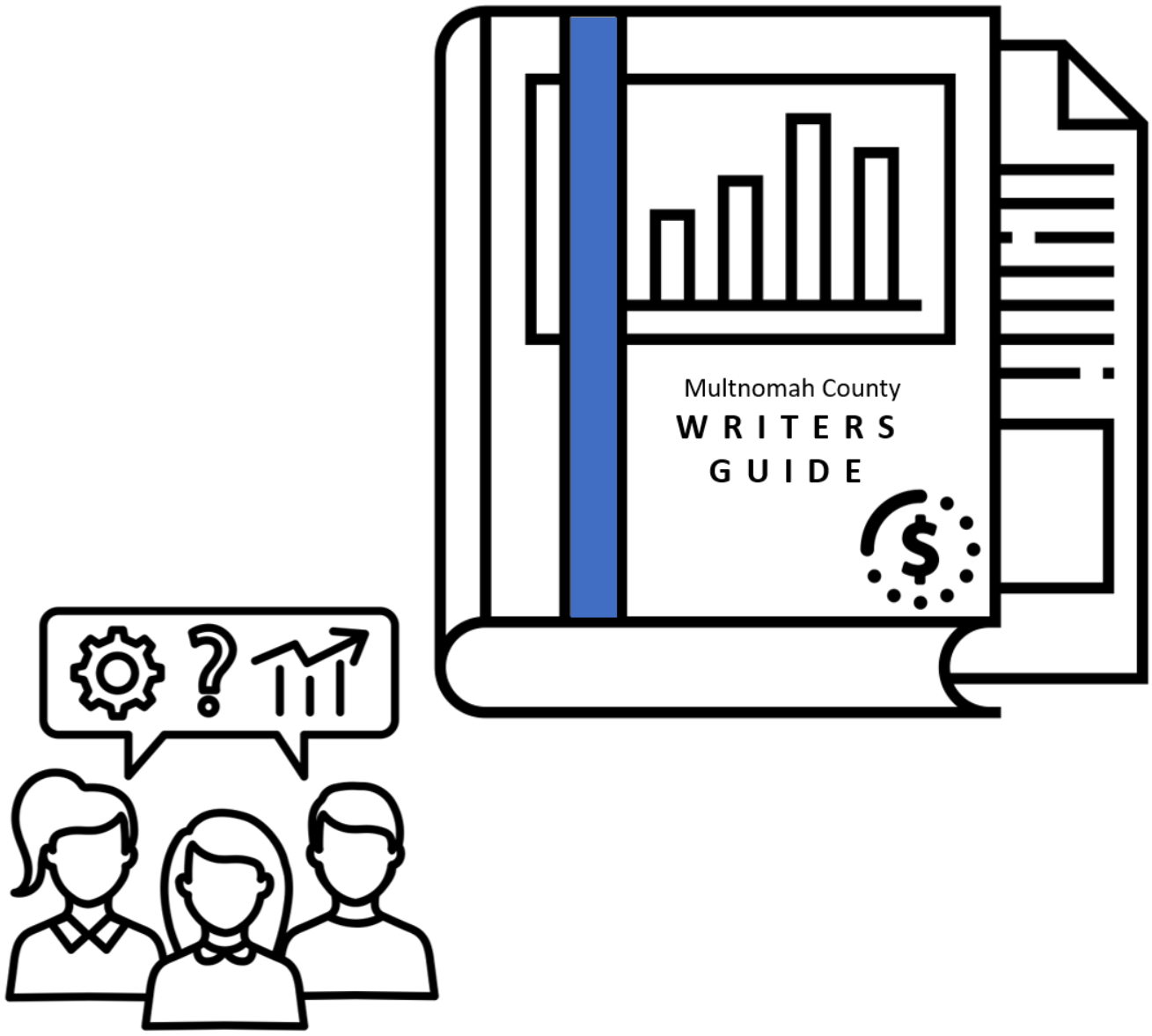

FY 2028
Multnomah County
Program Offer Writer's Guide

November 17, 2026
Version 1.0

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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 County's services. It tells the public what the County's priorities are and where the County is investing the community's resources. All County functions request funding through a **program offer**.

Program offers in the printed and online budget books include brief program descriptions, equity statements, budget summaries, and output performance data. Beginning in FY 2028, we will also provide a two-page program offer online with the remaining sections of the program offer, which are: Legal/Contractual Obligation, Explanation of Revenues, and Significant Changes.

Program offers are designed to offer **concise summaries for decision-makers and the public**. For in-depth information, departments use board briefings, budget work sessions, reports, and websites.

Program offers separate department activities into more manageable packages. This helps the Chair and Board make budget decisions about keeping, adding, or cutting specific services. The community uses this information to understand what services we provide and who we serve. **You should write program offers clearly so anyone can understand them.**

This guide covers all the text in program offers except performance measures. For help writing performance measures, see the Budgeting for Results Guide on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

It is important that program offers reflect the way the work is actually structured and funded. Please review your program offers to see if they need changes to do so. This may require you to rewrite narratives and outputs, realign the accounting structure, or split or combine program offers. Work with your department business manager and Central Budget Analyst if you have questions about how to align program offers with operations.

The Central Budget Office is here to help! If you have questions or need training, please call or email the Central Budget Analyst for your department.

Use Plain Language

The Board has stated that **"program offers should be drafted using clear, everyday language aimed at a sixth- to eighth-grade reading level."** (FY 2027 Budget Note on Budget Process Accessibility)

This means you want to write in plain language – clear, simple writing that is easy to understand the first time you read it. For all sections of your program offer, you should:

- Write short, clear sentences.
- Use simple words and phrases. Choose familiar or commonly used words over unusual ones. Avoid jargon or excessively technical language.
- Make your points as directly as possible.
- Write in the active voice: "This program funds X and Y services." Active voice clarifies who will take which actions. Avoid using the passive voice: "The services funded by this program are X and Y."
- Spell out all acronyms on first reference.

You can learn more on Multnomah County's plain language website.

You may also want to try using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools or the Hemingway Editor to assess and update the reading level of your program offer.

Pro tip: When you have a draft ready, ask a colleague who is not familiar with your work to review the program offer.

Space Limitations

Program offers are meant to be concise summaries. As a result, they have limited space for each section of text. Once you have entered your text in Questica, you will need to check the final pdf to make sure no text is cut off.

If you want to draft or refine your narrative outside of Questica, you can use a copy of the Program Offer Template Google Doc. The template will show you the approximate space you have in Questica. You'll find it on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

What Makes a Good Program Description?

Multnomah County staff work hard every day to improve the lives of everyone in the community. That's a story worth telling. One way to tell that story is through the "program description." This description should:

- Identify the issue the program is trying to address,
- Briefly describe what the program does and who it serves, and
- Be easy to understand for someone unfamiliar with the program.

If you only had a few minutes to explain your program to someone, what would you say?

Use the guidance below each heading to help you write your description. Departments should tailor their description to reflect their unique operations and approaches.

Identify the Issue

Summarize the issue your program addresses in one or two sentences. What problem are you solving? State the community need or problem your program is focusing on. This helps the Board and the community understand why your program deserves funding.

Every program offer must connect to at least one division outcome statement. Know which outcome statement your program supports. You don't need to list the outcome statement in the offer, but understanding it will help you write a better description.

For more information on division outcome statements, see the Budgeting for Results guide on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

Explain What the Program Does & Who It Serves

Briefly explain your program's services. What specific actions does your program take to solve the problem?

Identify who your program serves. Describe the group of people affected by this problem. If you have data that strengthens the description, include it. You can cover some demographic details in your Equity Statement instead. Make sure the Program Description and Equity Statement clearly show who your program helps.

For a clear way to describe your activities, try this structure:

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

Please do not name employees or suppliers in the program offer.

Easy to Understand

Use plain language – that is, clear, concise, well organized language that readers can understand the first time they read it. Will a non-expert reader understand what the program does, who it serves, and why it's important?

What Should be in the Equity Statement?

Each program offer has a separate, short section to address equity. The Equity Statement helps readers understand how County resources :

- address systemic disparities,
- embed equity in systems and processes,
- increase fair access to services and spaces, and/or
- improve workforce equity.

A program intended to advance equity needs a documented approach to who it serves and how. The statement must be a clear summary of your program's work to advance equity. It can also summarize how your program removes barriers to access and how you have designed resources to measurably

improve results for your intended population. Your program description and equity statement should complement each other. Please avoid repeating the same language in both sections.

For programs designed to reduce disparities in access, outcomes, or service delivery, the Program Description may provide the full detail, and the Equity Statement should summarize it.

For programs with a broader focus or programs that support internal staff, use this section to discuss your approach to equity. When relevant, this should include the program's connection to the Workforce Equity Strategic Plan (WESP).

The Office of Diversity and Equity has a Budget Equity Tool and Worksheet to guide departments. You should use these materials to help craft your program's Equity Statement. You can find them on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

Your department equity managers and the Office of Diversity and Equity are also great resources to help you write the statement. You could also ask your equity manager for examples of well-written statements from last year's budget.

Just like the program description, use plain language to make sure your equity statement is easy to understand.

Additional Program Offer Sections

Legal and Contractual Obligation

Some programs must follow specific legal or contractual requirements. These could come from State laws or rules, grants, the County charter, or others. When these requirements apply, you must briefly explain what they are and where they come from (statute, contract, etc.).

Only list the requirements the Board **has** to follow. Explain what happens if they are not followed. Be specific about what is required and what is not. For instance, state if the program has a required goal or number of people to serve. If there is no specific target, mention that as well. Keep in mind that most requirements do not have specific service levels.

Note: Not every program offer has legal or contractual requirements. If there are none, please write "Not applicable."

Explanation of Revenues

List your program's funding here using bullet points, not a long paragraph. This will probably be the hardest section to write in plain language. Please do your best.

For every grant, fee (whether in the General Fund or Other Funds), or other revenue, include:

- **Amount:** Include all revenues that support the program. If the program uses both General Fund and other revenue sources, describe how funding sources work together. For example, General Fund dollars are included because the State matches them two-for-one.
- **Name**: The name of the funding, such as Medicaid or Senate Bill 1145.
- **Calculation:** Explain how you figured out the amount. Describe any match and ratios assumed. State any assumptions behind the estimates. **Please make an extra effort to provide this information. It is key to understanding how your revenues work and there is more space available in FY 2028.** For example:
    - Expected number of client visits multiplied by the rate per visit.
    - Expected number of people served for the upcoming year and how the grant provider distributes funds based on caseload.
    - Description of two-year funding split for State funding (e.g. what percent of the funding is budgeted in this fiscal year).
    - Size of the grant award and length of award and/or the percentage of the grant to be received in the current fiscal year.
    - County share of State revenue (e.g. the County receives 22% of the State Department of Corrections funding, which equals $X)
- **Source:** Label your revenue source to assist Government Relations. For FY 2028, we have updated the options to:
    - Federal,
    - Federal through State,
    - State,
    - Other: Local Government Name (such as Other: City of Portland), or
    - Other: Miscellaneous

Here is an example of what an Explanation of Revenues section might look like:

> $1,000,000 - Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). Formula funding that requires a 25% in-kind match. (Federal through State)
>
> $500,000 - TriMet Community Transportation Local Match. Cash match paid to Medicaid to obtain $1.0M in Medicaid funding (Other: TriMet)
>
> $438,750 - U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) School Lunch Program. Payment for costs at $3.75/lunch served. The budget estimates 650 youth/day for 180 school year days ($3.75 x 650 x 180). (Federal)

$425,000 - Department of Corrections through Senate Bill 1145. The County receives 17% of statewide allocation. This is Year 2 of the 2025-2027 two-year State budget, with 51% of the total award budgeted this year. (State)

$400,000 - Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). Competitive award of $1.2M over 3 years (10/2/23-9/30/26). (Federal)

$5,000 - Drug Diversion Fees from clients. Fees are collected on a sliding scale, adjusted depending on the client's income. Fees range from $0-$150. All fees collected are passed through to the contractor that runs the drug diversion program. (Other: Miscellaneous)

Significant Program Changes

This section explains significant changes to a program, compared to the previous year's Adopted budget. Please talk to your Central Budget Analyst if you are not sure whether a change is significant.

The following are examples of changes you must discuss in this section:

- Increases or decreases in the scope or level of services.
- Increases or decreases in total positions (FTE) in the General Fund or Other Funds.
- Expenses that are backfilled with General Fund. For example, "In FY 2028, 0.30 FTE of a Data Analyst is backfilled with General Fund. In FY 2027, this FTE was funded by Grant XYZ. This grant has been decreasing over the years. From FY 2027 to FY 2028, the award amount decreased from $150K to $100K."
- Increases or decreases in revenue.
- Departmental or program offer reorganizations that combine or split program offers. Focus on how those changes impact the program offer. Division narratives have a significant changes section where you can describe broader impacts.

If applicable, explain how the changes affect other departments or service delivery.

Resources

Policy Direction from the Chair

The Chair's budget guidance provides important information about how to approach decisions. It may be a helpful resource in deciding what to write about or emphasize in the program description. When available, it will be posted on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

Equity in Budgeting

The Office of Diversity and Equity has a Budget Equity Tool and Worksheet to guide departments. Please use those materials when you work on your program descriptions and equity statements. They can be found on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

Budgeting for Results

The Budget Office has a Budgeting for Results guide to outcome-based budgeting on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website. The guide describes a three-step approach that is relevant to the development of program offers:

1. Establish division outcome statements (so we understand *why* we do what we do),
2. Align program offers (so we understand how we are going to achieve the desired results), and
3. Analyze performance (so we understand the progress we are making toward our desired results).

Style Guide

Appendix B of the FY 2028 Budget Manual is a Style Guide to help us write budget documents consistently. It includes rules for capitalization, numbers, and word choices. The Budget Manual is available on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

Artificial Intelligence and the Budget

You can use Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an optional tool to help write or refine language in your program offers. To learn more, see Navigating AI Tools Together and the County's Artificial Intelligence Guidelines.

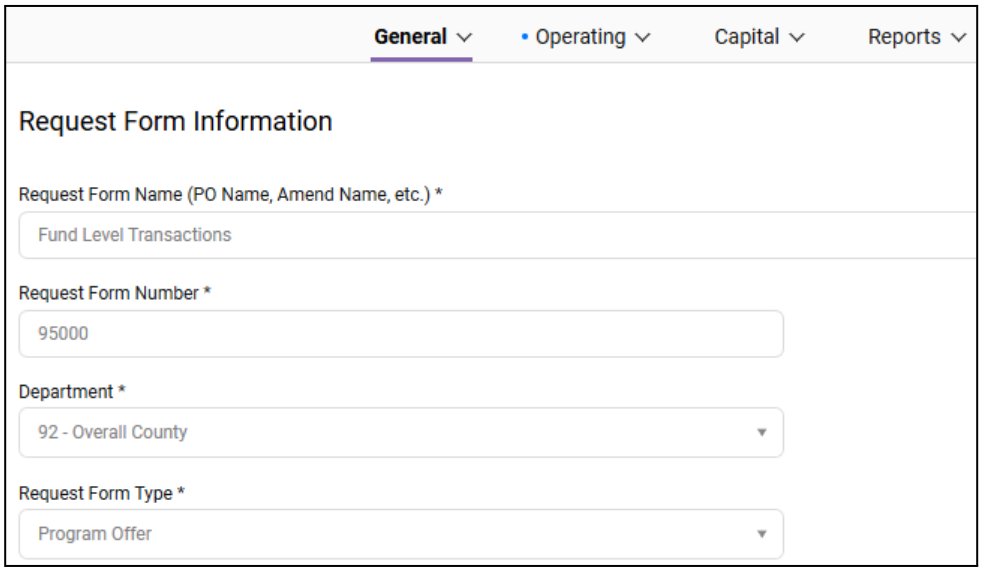
Entering Text in Questica

Program offers are in the Request Form section of Questica. In FY 2027, the printed program offers shifted from two pages to one page. The shorter document includes the Program Description, Equity Statement, summary table of dollars and FTE, and two performance measures. Beginning in FY 2028, we will also provide a two-page program offer online with the remaining sections of the program offer, which are: Legal/Contractual Obligation, Explanation of Revenues, and Significant Changes. This means departments still need to fill out all program offer Request Form sections in Questica.

1. Finding a Program Offer Request Form

To get started, see the "Find a Program Offer or Other Request Form" Quick Reference Guide (QRG) or training video on the Questica Learning Resources page.

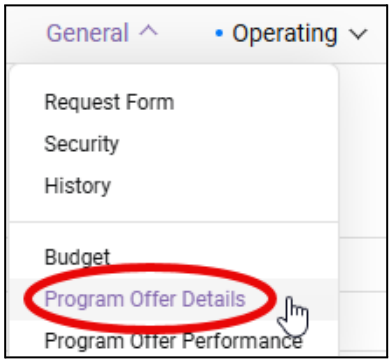
Once you have a program offer open, go to the "General" dropdown menu, then select "Request Form." You will see the following screen:



- **Request Form Name** – This is where 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), followed by three digits to identify the offers. To update this number, contact your business manager, who will work with the Central Budget Office to make necessary changes.
- **Department** – Informational only. This identifies your department number and name.
- **Request Form Type** – Informational only. Request form types include: program offer, budget adjustment, amendment, or budget modification.

For more information, view the training videos in the Program Offer Writers section of the Questica Learning Resources page.

2. Getting to the Program Offer Details Section

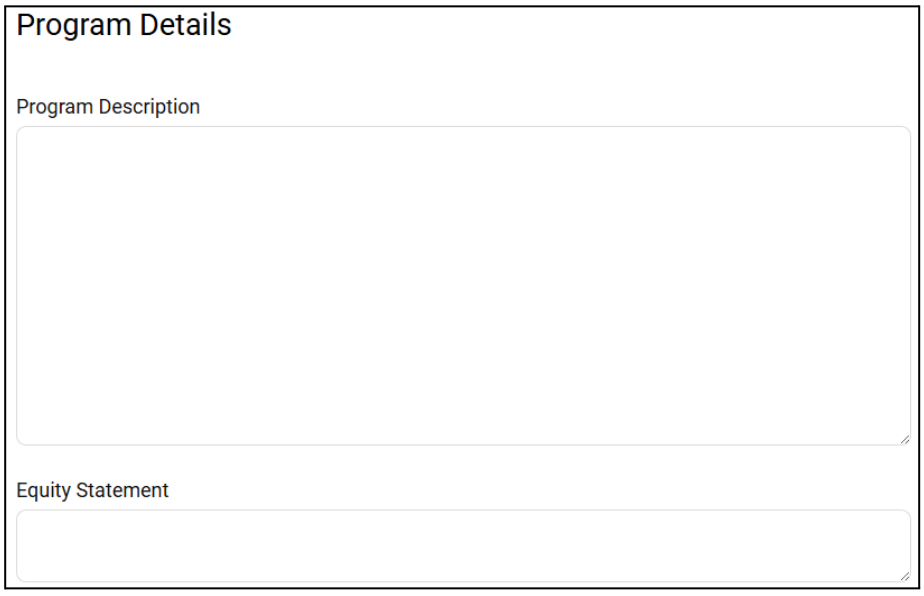


Departments put program offer narrative information in the "Program Offer Details" section. Find it under the "General" dropdown menu. The published budget book will include this narrative information.

For more information, view the training videos in the Program Offer Writers section of the Questica Learning Resources page and the FY 2028 Budget Manual on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website.

3. Entering Text in the Program Details Fields

Once you've found the "Program Offer Details" screen, scroll down to the "Program Details" section. This has text fields for all the sections discussed in this guide. Add your text to these fields. Click the Save button on a regular basis to ensure you don't lose progress.



Multiple editors

If two or more people are editing a request form screen at the same time, Questica will only keep the edits of the last person to save. So if you and a colleague are both editing text on the Program Offer Details screen at the same time, only one of you will have your changes saved. **You may want to write your narratives in Word or Google Docs before copy/pasting into Questica to reduce the chance of lost information.**

Google Doc Program Offer Template

If you want to draft or refine your narrative outside of Questica, you can use a copy of the Program Offer Template Google Doc. The template is on the FY 2028 Budget Manual and Other Resources website. **Please remember to enter all program offer information into Questica when you're done.**

Training videos

You can find training videos in the Program Offer Writers section of the Questica Learning Resources page.

4. Reviewing Program Offers in PDF Form to Make Sure Text is Not Cut Off

It is very important to check that your text is not cut off in the pdf form of the program offer. The program offer pdf has limited space for each section of text, but Questica will let you enter unlimited text in the system. It won't cut you off when you reach your space limit. You need to look at the pdf version of the program offer to make sure you haven't entered too much text.

To review a pdf of your program offer, see the "Run a Program Offer Report" Quick Reference Guide or training video. You'll find them on the Questica Learning Resources page. Keep in mind that, **new for FY 2028**, there are two versions of the program offer report - a one-page version for the budget books, and a two-page version that will appear online with additional sections.

Budget Office Contacts

Every County department has a Central Budget Office analyst who helps staff prepare their budgets. The Central Budget Office team also analyzes budgets for the Chair and Commissioners. Your Central Budget Analyst can answer your questions about the budget process or Questica. To find the analyst for your department, visit the Budget Office Contact Information site.