

Seattle City Council Confirmation Questions & Answers
Julie Dingley – Director, City Budget Office

Background/Vision

1) Why do you want to be the Director of the City Budget Office (CBO)?

I have dedicated my professional life to public service and have worked in a central government budget office since 2010. If I have learned anything in those nearly 12 years, it is that, at the end of the day, this work is about relationships. When you're doing it right, you understand that there are people and livelihoods behind the numbers on the page. That the numbers we see tell a story about who we are, what we're responsible for, and what we value. Two years into this pandemic, I believe the City is at a critical inflection point where we have to decide not just where we want to go, but how we want to get there. The 'how' is where CBO can play a strong role.

I can also say without reservation that you will never find a more brilliant, dedicated, thoughtful, and hard-working set of public servants than those within the budget office. This team knows the awesome weight and responsibility that comes with this work – and are constantly striving to make it better. It has been an honor to work alongside this team, and an even greater honor to be asked to lead them.

I want to be the Director of the City Budget Office so that I may have the opportunity to serve the people of my community the best way I know how: through working alongside people of integrity as they seek to solve challenges and create new opportunities.

2) The CBO website states that the City Budget Office (CBO) is responsible for developing and monitoring the City's annual budget, carrying out budget-related functions, and overseeing fiscal policy and financial planning activities. CBO provides strategic analysis in relation to the use of revenues, debt, and long-term issues. The department also provides technical assistance, training, and support to City departments in performing financial functions. How do you see this description changing under your tenure?

CBO is a strong institution filled with dedicated public servants. It is also an organization that is in the process of significant change. Budget offices tend, as many components of a bureaucracy do, to be creatures of habit. We budget incrementally and make change incrementally. While the core work of ensuring policymakers have the best information and options available, ensuring departments have what they need to implement those investments, and providing sound financial stewardship will always remain, there is enormous opportunity in the coming years to critically review how we do the work that we have traditionally done and ask ourselves: is this work introducing unintended harm? Are we hearing from the right voices? How do we know if our work is having the intended result? Elevating the great RSJI work throughout the budget will be key to helping Seattle achieve its goal of becoming an anti-racist City.

3) What is your vision for CBO and what do you hope to retain/change about the processes, plans, portfolio, and communications for CBO?

I envision CBO as a workplace where team members thrive, where good ideas can be turned into action, where there is deep accountability, and where we can move the organization toward its goal of becoming an anti-racist City. We are the quality control engine of the City, keeping trains on the tracks and ensuring that our public dollars are used to their highest and best purpose.

There are two primary areas where I see opportunities within CBO:

- How we incorporate performance into our budgeting. There is more we can do to meaningfully understand and communicate well how our investments are performing.
- I want to pull together the great work that has been done throughout the City on key community indicators of well-being and resilience – particularly disaggregated by race. These indicators can be used in the future to level-set during budget formulation around how we're doing, what problems need solving, and provide insight into where investments are most needed. Over time, these indicators, among other inputs, could give us a sense of whether we have made the intended impact on the community.

4) How do you intend to balance being a member of the Mayor's Cabinet with the vital role of providing unbiased, complete and timely fiscal information to all branches of City government?

I intend to balance the role with transparency and collaboration. Anyone who has worked with me knows I always have and always will put the interests of City and our residents first. I will, of course, be asked to find ways to fund policies that reflect the Mayor's priorities, and will ensure that in doing so, we maintain our responsibility to the residents of Seattle as good financial stewards. Foundationally, I am committed to transparency and timely information sharing in this role and look forward to working in partnership with the Council as we seek to tackle the City's most pressing challenges.

a. How do you anticipate developing your relationship with the Finance as well as Select Budget Committees as well as their Chair and Vice-Chair?

Many of these relationships were forged under the acute pressure of COVID response in determining how the City should allocate our Federal resources. I have a deep respect for the important role of each member of these committees and look forward to continually building on those relationships with transparency and honesty.

Staff Management

5) Like many city departments, CBO experienced significant transition and turnover during the past year. What measures will you put into place to ensure stability in the department? What is your overall philosophy towards management of your team?

- a. Specifically, describe your philosophy towards managing a team, developing and implementing a budget (for your department), overseeing data collection and information systems, addressing internal personnel issues, and ensuring that work plans are followed?**

I hold several core beliefs around this work that govern how I manage:

- hire smart people and give them the tools to succeed;
- a collaborative approach is nearly always the best path; and
- there is enormous wisdom to be gained from listening.

At the end of the day, people should feel valued in their work and believe that what they're doing matters. They want to be seen, heard, and understood. As evidenced by my previous answers, I hold the CBO team in the highest esteem and ensuring that they are fulfilled is my highest priority.

CBO will continue to ensure policymakers and elected officials have the best information and options available, that City departments have the resources needed to implement those investments, and that the investments are being made with both short- and long-term financial impacts in mind. I believe there is shared accountability in the employee-manager relationship that will ensure these critical functions will continue.

6) The culture of an office or organization is critical – what will you do to ensure that CBO is an inclusive, supportive work environment where employees feel safe, valued, and respected?

I think this is the question of our time. Among many realizations, the pandemic has either forced or provided the opportunity for people to consider what they want out of a job and how that job should fit into their life, not the other way around. Unfortunately, but understandably, we have seen incredible turnover from dedicated staff who simply were burned out through responding to the endless challenges wrought by the COVID pandemic. While virtually all have left for incredible promotional opportunities, I have an obligation to ensure the well-being remaining staff and new staff we bring on.

Relationships are the foundation upon which this work is conducted. I lead with empathy and believe we are not doing our jobs as managers if we simply focus on the output created, without also holding space for the whole employee. It is essential that managers and I regularly visit with members of our team to assess what we can do to foster our people's growth and development.

Race and Social Justice

7) In your role as Director, how will you address racial and social inequities through the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative?

There are many layers to this question. There is how are we doing within our organization, but also how are we ensuring that our practices don't perpetuate white supremacy / dominant culture and cause harm. CBO analysts have taken a leadership role in creating CBO's first RSJI Change Team. (CBO previously participated in a joint Mayor's Office-CBO team). I sit on the Change Team and fully support it remaining analyst-led. I participate primarily to listen and to learn. We are in the process of developing the 2022 work plan for the Change Team, which will have elements that are both internally and externally focused. I look forward to continuing to support and create space for the Change Team's work in CBO. Please see the answers below for further detail.

8) What are your specific ideas for addressing institutional and structural racism in the workplace?

I want to be clear in this response that my views are informed and shaped by the bravery, honesty, and generosity of so many others who have come before me. In addressing institutional and structural racism in the workplace, the charge of leadership is to support, create space for, and engage actively in

the work toward the goal of becoming an anti-racist City. Seattle's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has been an incredible partner with CBO over the last couple of years in helping to pull back the curtain on an otherwise not-terribly-transparent system/set of processes within the budget office. As mentioned above, our Change Team has been instrumental to creating a safe, welcoming space to challenge our norms and critically reflect on the choices we make.

My answers below provide more specifics around addressing RSJI across all aspects of CBO's work.

9) How will you incorporate racial equity principles into all aspects of CBO's work, including:

a. Staff management and development

In my first few months at CBO, I had a vacancy to fill on my team. I had the choice between running a hiring process the way it had always been done or taking on the harder path of re-working the process to eliminate barriers. I chose the latter, and in working with an incredibly bright and dedicated team, we looked at the skills that made someone successful in our office and realized that a certain educational degree did not predict future success, so we removed it from our minimum requirements. We looked at how and who was evaluating applications and changed that. We rewrote interview questions to assess whether someone possessed those core skills that make someone an asset to the City and not just could demonstrate that they've done this before. The result has been phenomenal. It's important that CBO be representative of the people of Seattle and has people that come from a variety of backgrounds that can help inform all of the work that we do. We continue to examine how we hire, train, and retain people with these goals in mind, as having a wealth of perspectives in analyzing the City's budget work means that our work becomes more well-rounded and informed.

b. Department oversight

For years, CBO has included a series of questions related to RSJI into our department change requests (documents that capture a department's requested incremental change for the upcoming budget year). In 2020-2021, CBO in partnership with OCR, held a series of meetings with departments to demystify the budget process and review alternate options to achieving needed reductions. As part of that conversation, CBO encouraged departments to incorporate their department change teams into their deliberations around budget changes. We have convened additional sessions to hear from departments on how this went, share success stories, and figure out ways to improve it moving forward.

c. budget and policy development

As mentioned previously, I want to lift up great work that has been done throughout the City, including at the Office of Planning & Community Development, the Department of Neighborhoods, and the Office for Civil Rights, on key community indicators of well-being and resilience. This is an area I have recently engaged with our Change Team to ask the key question: how can we better align City resources with measurable RSJ outcomes / indicators and use the analysis to:

- raise awareness of how Seattle is doing across key wellness indicators;
- steer limited resources to key areas of need; and
- measure progress of the City's investments toward filling these gaps.

The potential for a strategy like this, coupled with the great work from departments in engaging their Change Teams, and our own CBO Change Team's thoughtful perspective will help us to further incorporate race and social justice throughout CBO's work.

Coordination/Communication/Stakeholdering

10) Last year, the city began the process of forming an Office of Economic Revenue Forecast (OERF). The former CBO director is now the head of OERF. How do you anticipate coordinating with OERF? What changes to CBO personnel, work program, and product do you envision as a result of the new office?

We have already begun discussions with OERF on issues ranging from timing and format to coordination of economic and revenue forecast delivery so CBO can maintain its budget development, oversight and production schedules throughout the year. This work has been collaborative and ongoing. My primary goal for this year is to make for a smooth transition for the new office as CBO manages shifts in personnel. I look forward to receiving OERF's forecasted components at the same time as the City Council so we can collectively respond to forecasting and budget needs accordingly.

11) As Seattle moves towards exploring participatory budgeting, what role does CBO have in considering non-City stakeholders as part of budgeting, appropriations, and financial oversight?

CBO has been a key partner in helping the Council and the Office for Civil Rights develop the participatory budgeting pilot program that will lead to budget recommendations for the Mayor and City Council to fund later in 2022. We look forward to continued partnership in refining and improving the program, and also learning lessons from the experience to inform policymakers' future decisions.

12) What is your overall approach to managing external communications and media relations for CBO?

As an internal-facing City department that develops the Proposed Budget for the Office of the Mayor and the Adopted Budget for the City, CBO usually allows elected officials and City departments that engage with the community to highlight budget proposals, successes and challenges. CBO posts the entirety of the Proposed and Adopted Budgets and Capital Improvement Program online, including information on the City's revenue streams, fund outlooks, and appropriations at the Program level. Hard copies of the budget are provided to the Seattle Public Library for users who need or prefer to review in that manner.

13) What is your general philosophy for working and communicating effectively with the City Council? How do you plan to ensure that Councilmembers and their staff receive information from your department to make policy and financial decisions? How will you be responsive to Council requests, specifically regarding priorities that may differ from those of the Executive Branch?

My philosophy in working with the Legislative branch is transparency, conveying information in a timely manner, and collaboration. As evidenced in our work the last two years on receiving, understanding, and appropriating federal Coronavirus Relief funding, the City works best when we have shared priorities and vision and the information needed to achieve those priorities and vision. CBO staff already knows my goal in collaborating with Councilmember offices and Council Central Staff and the transparency in information required to achieve it. Mayor Harrell has made it clear that he wants to be collaborative with the Council and that is a goal he has emphasized to all department directors. In the

rare occasion that the Mayor and Council's priorities diverge, I will make sure that CBO and department finance staff get Council and its staff the material it needs to make informed policy choices.

14) Seattle has needed and appropriated state and federal aid through the pandemic. What is CBO's role in advocating for additional funds and maintaining relationships with governmental partners?

The Office of Intergovernmental Relations is the lead agency for maintaining relationships with governmental partners, and the Office of Emergency Management is the lead agency for disaster response. Throughout the pandemic, CBO worked in close partnership with both departments to ensure that the City maximized resources available to respond to and recover from the pandemic. Going forward, CBO will continue to work in close partnership with these two offices.

15) Could you please elaborate on your experience working for the Federal Office of Management and Budget as a Senior Program Examiner overseeing a \$18-\$25 billion portfolio? And more specifically your work on grant-making components for offices like the Office on Violence Against Women and funding for tribal grants?

I worked as a Senior Program Examiner as part of the Justice Branch of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Each member of the Justice Branch team was assigned different areas of the Federal Department of Justice (DOJ) and related agencies' budgets. During my tenure in that role, I had oversight responsibility for several areas of DOJ's budget, but most recently covered DOJ's grant-making components contained in the Office of Justice Programs, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Office on Violence Against Women.

As an Examiner, I advised OMB and White House policy officials on budget and management issues within their portfolio. I analyzed and evaluated budget request and policy proposals from DOJ and other stakeholders and developed funding recommendations that were supported by the best available information to inform decision-making. Oversight in that role covered both the budget formulation (building the budget) and execution (how the dollars were spent).

Specifically, with respect to the work on grants, I would partner with the component leadership, in this case the leadership of the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and White House stakeholders, principally the former Vice President (now President)'s staff, to review/analyze potential areas to invest, to learn how the dollars were being used on the ground, and better understand how our dollars were or weren't having the intended impact.

16) How can your experience help the City of Seattle respond to critical issues like violence against women and implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)?

Through my federal government experience, I have a strong understanding of how the federal government works, how funding moves throughout it, how decisions are made, and the appropriations process. I understand how to read and interpret underlying authorizing legislation as well as regulations. This knowledge helped considerably during the pandemic with interpreting and applying the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act funding. With the infrastructure bill making its way through federal agencies and rulemaking, and the potential Build Back Better Act, there will be further opportunities to use that insight in partnership with our Office of Intergovernmental Relations to ensure we are maximizing resources for the City.

The shared responsibility in responding to issues like violence against women is significant – it affects every level of government and nearly every issue area. The work spans from ensuring human service providers and the criminal justice system have a trauma-informed approach and working to close loopholes around domestic violence-related gun laws, to providing legal assistance for survivors and understanding their unique needs with respect to intimate domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking and beyond. My Federal experience has heightened my awareness and understanding of these issues, which allows me to act as an ally throughout my work to ensure the voices of survivors are recognized in our policymaking. With my ability to read and interpret underlying authorizing legislation, regulations, and federal appropriations bills, I can also keep a watchful eye out for future opportunities for more resources in this area.

17) How will you use your federal experience working with the Department of Justice on tribal grant-making to improve the City of Seattle’s investments in native communities and with Tribal Government partners?

While at OMB, I had the honor of visiting the Tohono O’odham and Pascua Yaqui tribes in southern Arizona, to hear about their experiences and concerns, particularly with respect to the border with Mexico. While many of the concerns they faced were similar to those of non-native groups, their preferred solutions were uniquely their own. The biggest lesson I took away from that experience was that the federal government does not have all of the answers. We can improve how we serve these communities by taking the time to listen and ensure that our investments and policies reflect that we are not serving a monolithic community – even within funds for native communities specifically.

Current City Budget Climate

18) Over the past several years, City spending has outpaced new revenue, resulting in a potential cliff for city services – two common solutions are: appropriate less and bring in new revenue. What is your opinion on how the City should solve for this issue (note this question seeks your vision on solution, not on process)?

The City of Seattle has a legal requirement to propose and pass a balanced budget. In my opinion, all options are on the table, but the answer to this question is ultimately a policy one for the elected leadership of the City. I look forward to working with the new Administration, the new Office of Economic and Revenue Forecasts, and the Council to find ways to close the projected gap for 2023 without compromising our values as a City. While the Mayor and Council consider their options on that bigger policy question, the City Budget Office and I will scour the City’s budget to ensure that the policymakers have a complete understanding of the City’s available resources and the different levers that can be pushed/pulled to impact spending and revenue.

19) Seattle has tremendous challenges and opportunities ahead of us – from economic recovery, to post-pandemic livability to affordable housing and homelessness. What is CBO’s role in helping shape our city’s agenda?

Our role is to support the City’s residents, workers, business owners, students, and visitors who thrive through the investments made by the elected officials and policymakers. We do that by giving those policymakers the best information and options available, ensure that City departments have the

resources needed to implement those investments, and that the investments are being made with both short- and long-term financial impacts in mind.

20) How would you define fiscal sustainability, and, working from that definition, how do you intend to communicate to the Mayor, the City Council, and the community, the City's sustainability challenges, including strategies for, and progress towards, improving fiscal sustainability?

Fiscal sustainability is the ability to meet our ongoing commitments with our projected level of resources. The City has for years maintained the highest bond rating and continuing to do so will require strong financial stewardship. I think that conversation starts as an honest one, reviewing our commitments to ensure our ongoing policies align with the resources available, making difficult choices, and understanding that this work is our collective responsibility. I am committed to transparency and timely communication in this role and prefer a collaborative approach as it is in all of our interest to ensure the fiscal health of the City.

21) How will you continue to improve the information presented to the Council to inform their decision-making on the annual budget (e.g., details for each department supporting the wages and salary budget, assumptions embedded in the 6-year financial plan, performance indicators)?

I think we could do a better job at telling our story within the City, whether that's with financial or performance information. This is an area I know the new Administration is committed to improving.

On the budget side, historically the Mayor and Council have made changes to the budget at the program level for the operating budget (the City's 30+ departments have over 400 discrete budget programs) and at the CIP Project (500+) level for the capital budget. The budget book reflects that level of appropriation detail. If Councilmembers would like a more granular approach, either in the formal transmittal of the budget or in budget briefings, we are happy to discuss further with your offices. The budget materials, including the Proposed Budget book, that CBO delivers to the City Council in late September every year, is a product of previous Councils, Mayors, and Budget Directors. Continuous improvement means we're always looking at better ways to do the work.

Mayor Harrell shares the passion for performance indicators as a driver for policy and budget decisions. CBO plans to work with the Innovation & Performance Team to develop metrics to measure success of City investments and programs, and we would welcome Council input on which investments, programs, and metrics are top priority.

22) If not already addressed, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing CBO this year?

In a normal year, the CBO spends December, January and February putting together the Adopted Budget after the Council's late November action. In March and April, we make refinements to the budget process, get a sense of current year priorities, and work with the central rate departments to set the rates for Human Resources, IT, and facilities. In May, June, and July, we analyze department budget proposals and prepare those for Mayor's Office decisions. In August and September we get final decisions and build the next year's Proposed Budget. In October and November we work with the Council, particularly Central Staff, on helping inform the Council's choices.

In 2020, 2021, and now in 2022, due to the financial realities of budgeting in a global pandemic, we have asked CBO staff to do that whole process multiple times in a year. In 2020, we went through a mid-year budget reduction process; in 2021, we went through a federal funding budget process; and now as we face a \$150m+ deficit for 2023, we are doing an “every option on the table” exercise. And all of this was done remotely, without the regular tools that CBO employees usually use or the face-to-face interactions that make the job easier.

Staff burn-out in CBO is a real concern, as it is in Council offices and all over the City, as thousands of City employees have stepped up in response to a city in need, all the while being asked to do more with fewer resources and with the stress that the pandemic and its impacts on their families.

My hope is that in 2022 we can realign our expenditures and revenues for ongoing sustainability, which will allow CBO to return to that annual cycle, allowing the employees time to breathe and take a break, and lower staff turnover.