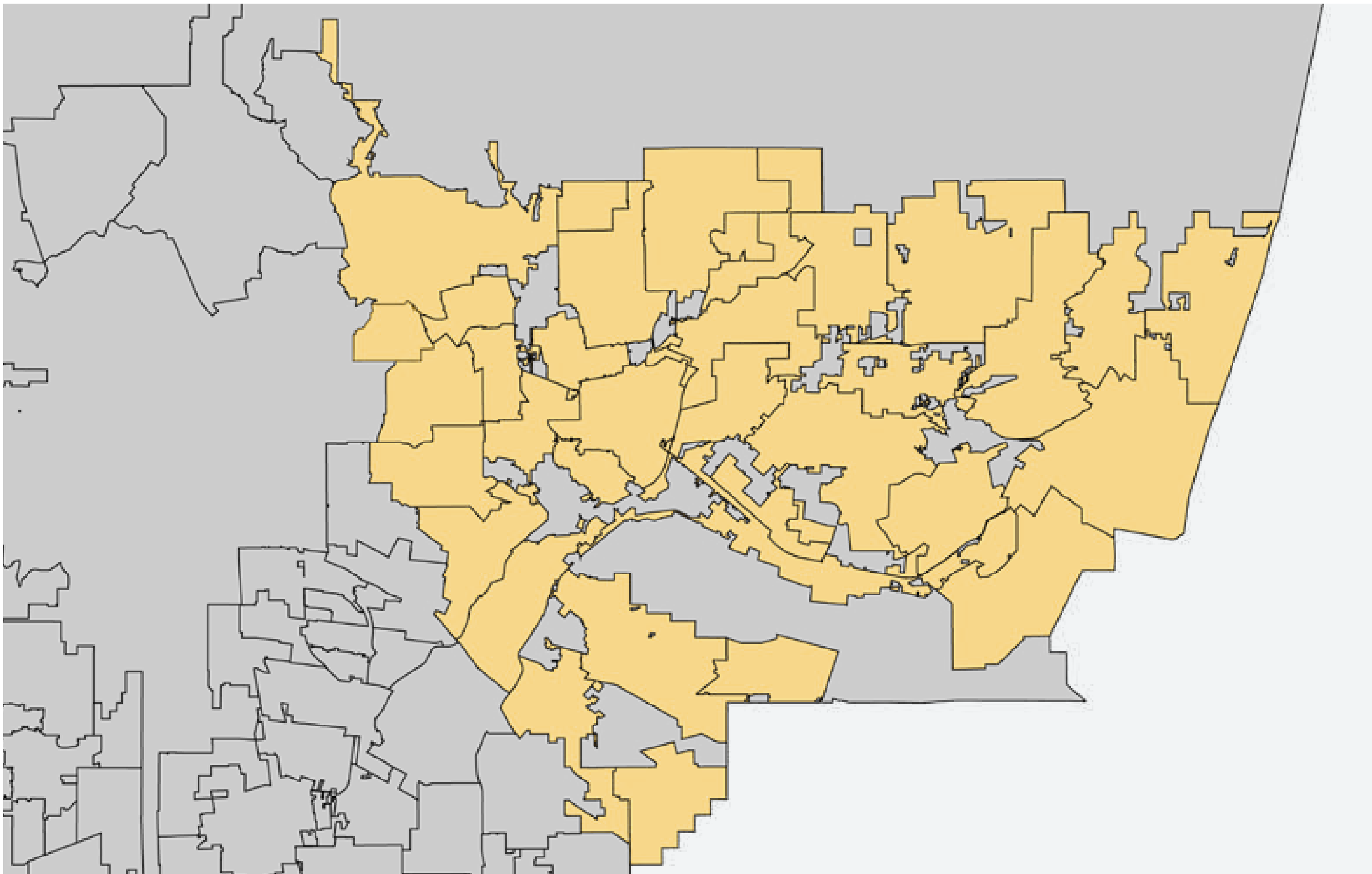

Measure G and the Remaking of the City-County Relationship in Los Angeles County

A report by the Rose Institute of State and Local Government, Claremont McKenna College

Generously funded by The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation

In collaboration with the San Gabriel Valley City Managers' Association

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The Rose Institute of State and Local Government is a leading source of objective, non-partisan information on California state and local governments. Founded at Claremont McKenna College in 1973, the Institute's mission is to enhance the education of students at CMC, produce high-quality research, and promote public understanding on issues of state and local government, politics, and policy, with an emphasis on California.

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About the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation

The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation is a 100-year-old institution dedicated to advancing effective governance and a more inclusive democracy across the Los Angeles region. Fifty years ago, the Foundation created and funded the independent, blue-ribbon Public Commission on Los Angeles County Government. The commission's landmark 1976 report, To Serve Seven Million, recommended an elected executive and a nine-member board. With the passage of Measure G, those recommendations have taken a large step closer to becoming reality. The foundation's commitment to effective and responsive county governance reform continues today with research funds for a range of related projects as well as convenings and presentations to inform and engage the community.

About the SGVCMA

Founded in 1990, the San Gabriel Valley City Managers' Association (SGVCMA) is an association comprised of the administrative heads of various municipalities within the San Gabriel Valley Region. This organization also serves as a regional subdivision "Area Managers Group" of the City Managers Department for the League of California Cities. The League of California Cities Area Management Groups are an essential communication conduit between the City Managers Department and the local government at the city and county level. The group consists of City Managers and Assistants who meet or communicate routinely for professional, training, networking, and/or social purposes. Furthermore, the organization also serves as a forum for detailed dialogue about statewide and regional issues that affect cities, local control, local revenues and governance.

Contents

I. Executive Summary

Measure G is the most significant reform to Los Angeles County government in more than a century. Approved by voters in November 2024, this landmark Charter Amendment will expand the County Board of Supervisors from five to nine members, create an elected County Executive, establish a new Ethics Commission, and create a Legislative Analyst's position, among other provisions. These reforms will redistribute executive and legislative authority, alter the management of county departments, and reshape how the county works with its 88 incorporated cities.

Measure G constitutes a high-stakes experiment. Some fear that by substantially altering the long-established governance system of the nation's most populous county, Measure G could destabilize the system and impair its effectiveness. Others believe the reforms present an historic opportunity to improve the County's performance and to create a model for other governments to follow. Accordingly, the measure's successful implementation is of critical importance.

Effective implementation of Measure G will require focused engagement with numerous stakeholders, including the County's incorporated cities, unincorporated communities, organized community groups, service providers, and residents. This report analyzes the measure's implications for cities. With support from The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation, the Rose Institute concluded that a study focusing on cities is warranted because they are essential governmental partners in the County's provision of many public services and will be instrumental to Measure G's long-term success. Accordingly, in this report, we seek to understand the current patterns of interaction between cities and the County and the ways implementation of Measure G can constructively reshape these relationships.

This study relies on insights from city managers. These officials serve as the primary points of contact between municipal and county government and bring extensive experience in intergovernmental coordination and the division of executive and legislative authority. Although we are interested in Measure G's implications for all 88 cities in Los Angeles County, we have chosen to focus this preliminary study on 35 cities in eastern Los Angeles County. Our selective approach enabled us to pursue in-depth research on city-county relationships in a significant portion of the County while still allowing us to cover a diverse mix of full-service, hybrid, and contract cities with varying levels of reliance on county services.

To assess the implications of Measure G's reforms and explore how they can be implemented most effectively, this study examines how cities in eastern Los Angeles County currently work with county government and how Measure G will affect these relationships. After pursuing background research on Los Angeles County and a limited number of comparison counties across the United States, the Rose Institute reached out to 35 city managers in eastern Los Angeles County, conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with 28 of them, and convened follow-up working group meetings with a subset of these leaders to review the findings and develop conclusions.

Our interviews revealed a complex and variable relationship between cities and Los Angeles County. Every city in the study interacts with the County in many ways, with the depth of the relationship greatest among cities that contract with the County for services. All city managers we interviewed recognize that their city has an important stake in county governance reforms.

When we asked about their current patterns of communication with county government, many of the city managers shared similar responses. Most reported that they routinely contact county departments directly to address practical concerns and, when circumstances warrant, seek assistance from their elected county supervisor or the supervisor's staff. Most also reported that they enjoy strong working relationships with their supervisor's office. Notably, however, they uniformly said they rarely if ever contact the County CEO for assistance and, in general, have very little interaction with the CEO's office. They understand that this lack of engagement with the County CEO will likely change substantially under Measure G, as the elected executive gains significant control over county administration and services.

When we turned to discussion of Measure G, we observed that the city managers' depth of awareness of its provisions was uneven and their opinions of the reforms varied. Most accepted the measure's expansion of the Board of Supervisors and broadly supported its ethics provisions. Many expressed concerns, however, about Measure G's creation of an elected County Executive. Several interviewees questioned whether candidates for this office would have the administrative experience necessary to manage an organization as large and complex as Los Angeles County. Many also worried that the office could become politicized, and that cities outside the executive's electoral or political base might receive less attention.

The city managers' most consistent and immediately addressable concern involved communication: "Whom do we call after the reforms take effect?" They said they want clearly defined lines of communication, assurance that smaller cities will continue to have meaningful access to county decision-makers, and greater clarity about whether traditional relationships with supervisors and department heads will continue.

Based on our findings from these interviews and supplemental research, we developed several recommendations for consideration.

The County Executive's office should have personnel who are responsible for the office's communication and collaboration with cities on matters of common concern, potentially through a dedicated intergovernmental affairs office or designated senior staff. L.A. County should learn from other counties with elected executives that use offices of intergovernmental relations, local affairs coordinators, regional committees, and other formal structures to maintain municipal relationships.

During the implementation process, the Government Reform Task Force (GRTF) and the broader county government should actively seek input from cities regarding the design of the County's new governance structures. Moving forward, the County should create and maintain mechanisms for cities to provide input on ounty deliberations.

Cities should strengthen their collective capacity to work with the County on issues of common interest, through existing organizations such as the Councils of Governments (COGs) or alternative systems for multi-city collaboration and city-county engagement.

A public-facing interactive visualization of intergovernmental and service delivery relationships between the County, its incorporated cities, and its unincorporated communities should be developed to promote community awareness of city and county governments' respective areas of responsibility.

II. Background and Approach of the Study

Background

Established as one of California's original 27 counties, Los Angeles County elected its first governing body in 1850, comprised of a "three-man Court." Two years later, in 1852, the California Legislature dissolved the governing body and established a five-member Board of Supervisors.[1] Ever since, the Board has possessed both executive and legislative powers, and, due to its tremendous authority over county matters, has been called the "five little kings"—now "five little queens" due to the Board's current all-female composition.[2] Members of the Board have significant discretion within their own districts, and critics of the system have argued that each district operates like a fiefdom, with other supervisors generally deferring to the district's representative.[3]

The County has grown massively since the Board's origin. When the Board was established in the 1850s, Los Angeles County had a population of 3,530, and each supervisor represented approximately 706 people.[4] By 2024, L.A. County's population had skyrocketed to 9,757,179, making it by far the most populous county in the United States, and each supervisor now represents nearly two million people. As the County became densely populated and highly complex, many concluded it had outgrown its original governance model and required reform.[5]

1 County of Los Angeles, Chief Executive Office, *Guide to County Services* (Los Angeles: County of Los Angeles, accessed August 13, 2026), https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lac/1027491_FINAL-CitizensGuide-AUG17.pdf.

2 Rebecca Ellis, "The L.A. County Supervisors: The Five Little Queens," *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/la-influential/story/2024-07-07/five-little-queens-los-angeles-supervisors-solis-mitchell-horvath-hahn-barger.

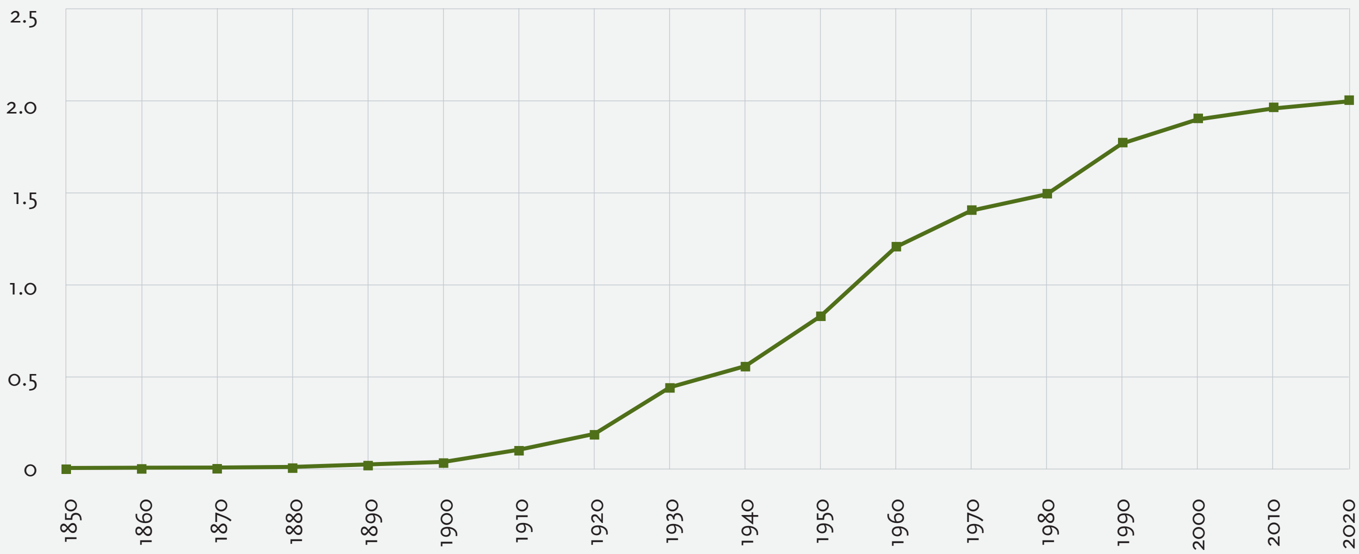
3 "Fiefdoms Under Fire," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1988, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-06-12-op-7303-story.html.

4 U.S. Census Office, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850—California* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850-census-report-california.pdf.

5 Cathy Le and George M. Hayward, "How Counties That Have Topped One Million Population Have Changed Over Time," U.S. Census Bureau, March 17, 2025, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2025/03/million-person-counties.html ; Tom Sitton, *L.A.'s Titans of Temple Street: Los Angeles County Government since 1950* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2023), 94–110.

Figure 1. Change in Number of Constituents per Supervisor (1850-2020)

Constituents (in Millions) per Supervisor by Year



Source: Los Angeles Almanac, "Population," accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.laalmanac.com/population/po02.php.

Growth of Cities

Meanwhile, as the County grew, so too did its cities. The City of Los Angeles, the County's first incorporated city, grew from a small Spanish and Mexican pueblo to become the nation's second most populous city after New York. With a population of 1,610 when it was incorporated in 1850, L.A. grew to 102,479 by 1900. Growth accelerated in the twentieth century, with the city's population reaching 1,970,358 in 1950 and 3,694,820 by 2000.[6] The current population is approximately 3.87 million, comprising about 40 percent of the County's 9.65 million residents and dwarfing all of its other cities. Long Beach is the County's second largest city with about 447,000 residents.[7]

The incorporation of Lakewood in 1954 was an important milestone for Los Angeles County. Lakewood contracted with the County to provide services to the city. This model became known as the "Lakewood System." Over time, many cities in the County have adopted this model. By contracting core services through county departments, cities benefit from economies of scale and avoid building entire departments of their own. The Lakewood System, combined with rapid population growth, led to the incorporation of 32 contract cities in Los Angeles County between 1950-1970.[8]

All cities in Los Angeles County, except the City of Los Angeles, employ a council-manager form of government. Inglewood and Glendale were the first California cities to adopt this system in 1914. They followed the small city of Ukiah, in Northern California, which was the first city in the nation to hire a chief executive selected by the city council.[9] In a council-manager system, the city manager acts as the chief executive and is charged with administering the full range of municipal operations. Elected representatives (council and mayor) set policies and the

6 Los Angeles Almanac, "Population," accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.laalmanac.com/population/index.php#historical.

7 County of Los Angeles, *88 Cities, Incorporation and Population*, 2025, https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lac/1043530_09-10CitiesAlpha.pdf.

8 Ryan Reft, "The Lakewood Plan: Homeownership, Taxes, and Diversity in Postwar Suburbia," PBS SoCal, January 16, 2015, https://www.pbssocal.org/history-society/the-lakewood-plan-homeownership-taxes-and-diversity-in-postwar-suburbia.

9 Rose Institute of State and Local Government, *2025 California City Manager Survey: A Profile of the Profession* (Claremont, CA: Claremont McKenna College, 2025), https://www.cmc.edu/sites/default/files/2025%20CCMF%20Report_June182025_0.pdf.

Table 1. Board Expansion and Elected County Executive Attempts

Year	Reform Efforts	Purpose	Outcome
1926	Proposal did not reach ballot	Board Expansion	Failed
1962	Prop D	Board Expansion	Failed
1971	SB 192	Board Expansion	Failed
1976	Prop A	Elected County Executive	Failed
1976	Prop B	Board Expansion	Failed
1978	Prop C	Elected County Executive	Failed
1992	Prop B	Elected County Executive	Failed
1992	Prop C	Board Expansion	Failed
1999	SCA-7	Board Expansion	Failed
2000	Measure A	Board Expansion	Failed
2015	SCA-8	Board Expansion	Failed
2017	SCA-12	Board Expansion and County Executive	Failed

Note: The 1926 reform effort was a committee recommendation that the Board of Supervisors declined to put it on the ballot.

Source: Sitton, *Titans of Temple Street*, 94-110.

city manager implements them, but the city manager often shares responsibility for policy formation as well.[10]

As noted above, there are 88 incorporated cities in Los Angeles County, each with its own elected city council. L.A. County also includes significant land not contained within these 88 cities, known as unincorporated areas. These areas encompass more than 2,600 square miles, about two-thirds of the territory of Los Angeles County, and range from areas as small as a few blocks, to urban centers with more than 100,000 residents (such as East Los Angeles), to vast swaths of the high desert. There are at least 120 unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County.[11] Several cities in the County, such as Los Angeles, Covina, Azusa, Claremont, and Palmdale, include within their boundaries "islands" of unincorporated land.[12]

Some one million people live in unincorporated L.A. County. For them, the Board of Supervisors is their "city council" and the elected supervisor for the area is essentially their "mayor."[13] L.A. County departments provide municipal services to these areas.

Pre-Measure G County Reform Efforts

Measure G contained many ideas that were not new. For example, 50 years ago a public commission sponsored by the L.A. County Bar Association and funded by the Haynes Foundation produced a report titled *To Serve Seven Million*. The report proposed expanding the Board of Supervisors from five to nine members and establishing an elected County Executive.[14] Other studies produced

10 Ibid.

11 Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, "Unincorporated Los Angeles County," accessed August 13, 2026, https://planning.lacounty.gov/unincorporated-los-angeles-county/.

12 County of Los Angeles, *Los Angeles County Map: Incorporated Areas, Unincorporated Areas, and Supervisorial District Boundaries*, August 2022, https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lac/1043452_BasicColorMap.pdf.

13 Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, "Unincorporated Los Angeles County."

14 Public Commission on Los Angeles County Government, *To Serve Seven Million: A Report on Los Angeles County Government* (Los Angeles: Public Commission on Los Angeles County Government, 1976), https://haynesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/To-Serve-Seven-Million-7-29-24-1.pdf.

similar analyses and recommendations. Yet proposals of this type repeatedly failed, due in part to opposition from the Board of Supervisors (whose power these changes would diminish), fear of concentrating power in the hands of an elected executive, and cost concerns.

Instead, Los Angeles County steadfastly maintained the institutional arrangements common to all of California's county governments save San Francisco—that is, a system in which a five-member Board of Supervisors wields both legislative and executive powers and sometimes delegates management authority to an appointed, professional county executive.

In 1938, the Board of Supervisors established the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO).[15] This officer, appointed and removable by the Board of Supervisors, was tasked with various administrative responsibilities, including managing departments and presenting the county budget to the Board.[16] Over time, as the County grew more complex and its government assumed new responsibilities, the Board faced pressure to strengthen the executive. In 2007, rather than making the executive an elected officer, the Board approved a $1.7 million restructuring plan that maintained the county executive's appointed status but gave the position new powers. Among other changes, the restructuring plan renamed the CAO the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), gave the CEO hiring and firing authority over county officials, and required department heads to report to the CEO rather than the Board. This plan aimed to improve department communication and efficiency.[17] However, a 2015 report found that the 2007 reforms had failed to achieve these goals, due to tension between the CEO's office and the supervisors' offices, ineffective communication between departments, and other problems.[18] That year, the Board of Supervisors rescinded the 2007 restructuring provisions and readopted a weak executive model.[19]

LOS ANGELES COUNTY STEADFASTLY MAINTAINED THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMON TO ALL OF CALIFORNIA'S COUNTY GOVERNMENTS SAVE SAN FRANCISCO—THAT IS, A SYSTEM IN WHICH A FIVE-MEMBER BOARD OF SUPERVISORS WIELDS BOTH LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE POWERS AND SOMETIMES DELEGATES MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY TO AN APPOINTED, PROFESSIONAL COUNTY EXECUTIVE.

15 Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, "List of Officers," accessed August 13, 2026, https://ceo.lacounty.gov/list-of-officers/.

16 Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, "Chief Executive Office," accessed August 13, 2026, https://ceo.lacounty.gov/; Sitton, *L.A.'s Titans of Temple Street,* 94-110.

17 Susannah Rosenblatt, "County CEO to Get More Power," *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 2007, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-may-23-me-cao23-story.html.

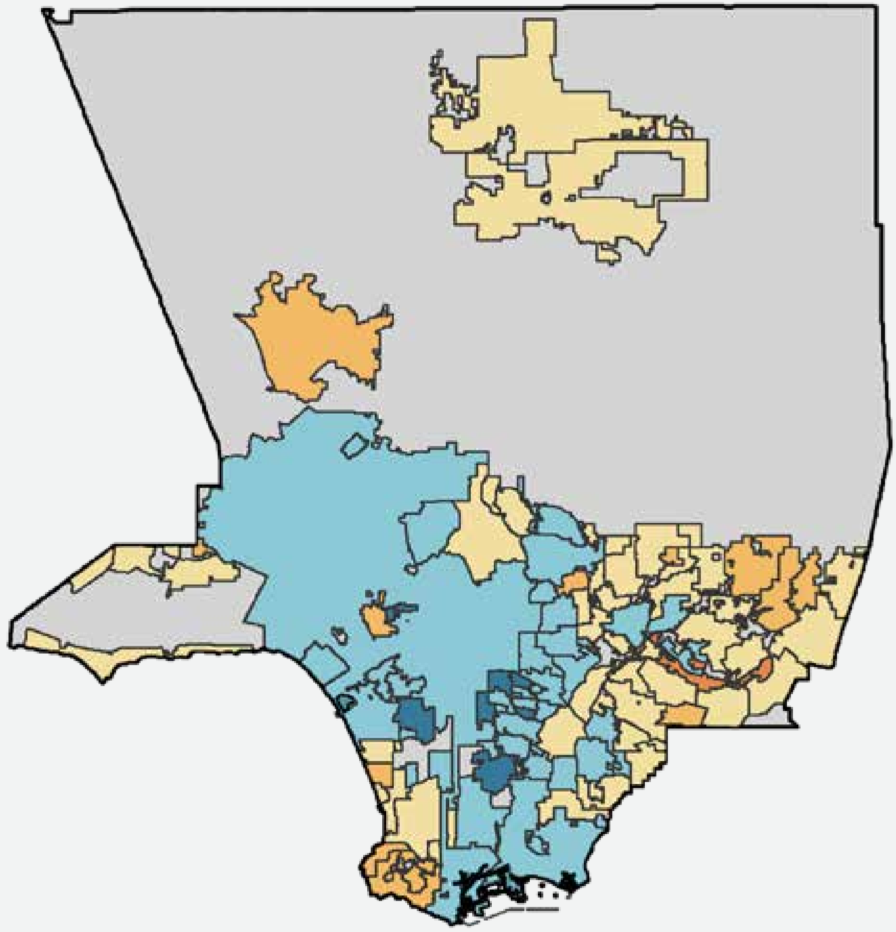
18 Sachi A. Hamai, "County Governance Report," July 7, 2015, https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/95324.pdf.

19 Ibid.

Figure 2. 2024 Measure G Votes by City

Margin of Victory

- Yes +20 and above
- Yes +0 to +20
- No +0 to +20
- No +20 to +40
- No +40 and above



Source: Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, *Votes Cast by Community: November 5, 2024, General Election*, December 2, 2024, https://content.lavote.gov/docs/rrcc/svc/4324_community2ef9435975a46c55bf9dff0f00945460.pdf.

Measure G

On July 9, 2024, Supervisors Lindsey Horvath and Janice Hahn moved to put Measure G, a charter amendment, on the November 5, 2024, ballot. The Board adopted the proposal by a 3-2 vote, with Supervisors Horvath, Hahn, and Hilda Solis supporting the measure, and Supervisors Holly Mitchell and Kathryn Barger opposed.[20] The measure's most consequential provisions would establish an independent Ethics Commission and compliance office by 2026, create an elected County Executive by 2028, and expand the Board of Supervisors from five to nine members by 2032. The measure would also require creation of a Charter Review Commission by 2034 and establish several new governance and ethics protocols. Additionally, Measure G would create a Governance Reform Task Force to implement these changes and aid the transitional process. Measure G passed narrowly, with voters supporting it by a 51.62% margin.

Measure G promises to be the most significant governance reform in L.A. County history. Increasing the Board of Supervisors from five to nine members is expected to reduce each board member's individual power while improving constituent representation and responsiveness. The elected County Executive will possess appointment, veto, and emergency powers, as shown in Table 2, and will establish a system of separation of powers and checks and balances with the Board of Supervisors. This office has the potential to become one of the most powerful public executive positions in the nation, governing a county with more constituents than

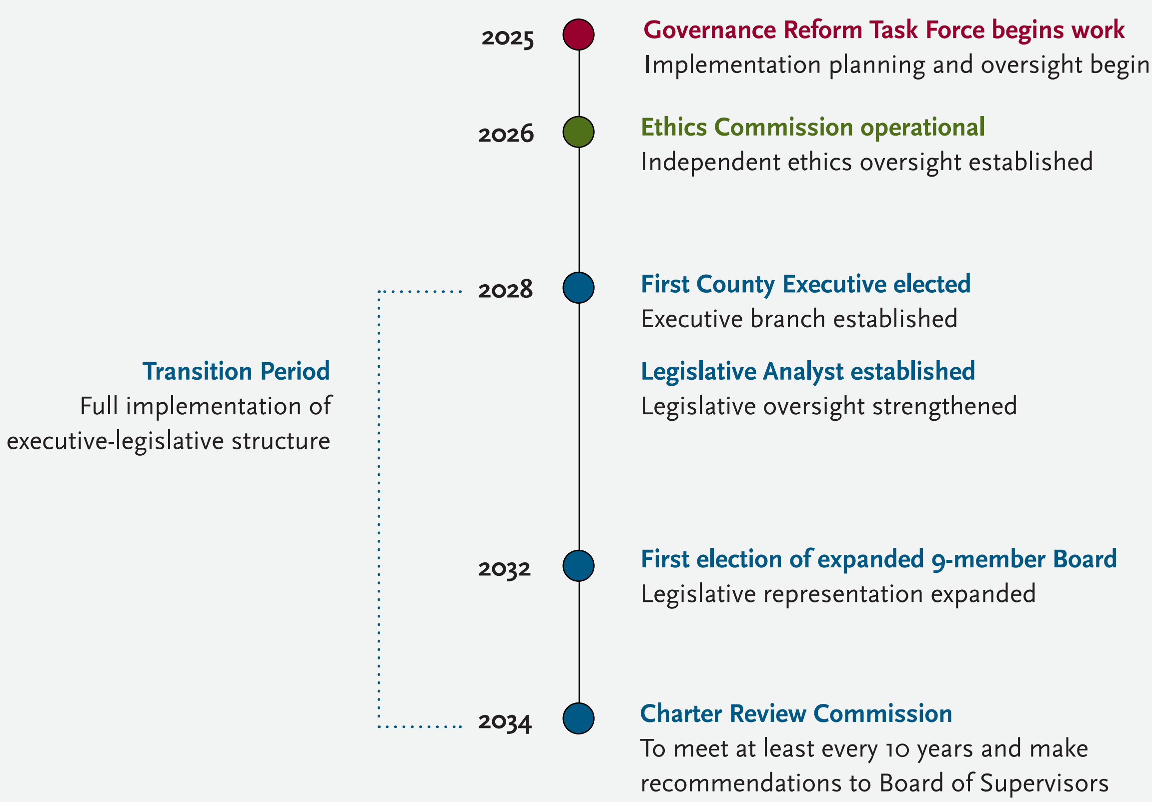
20 Lindsey P. Horvath and Janice Hahn, "Increasing Effectiveness, Responsiveness and Accountability of County Government through Charter Reform," July 9, 2024, https://lindseyhorvath.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/070924_Governance_Reform_Motion_FINAL.pdf.

Table 2. Distribution of Institutional Powers under Measure G

Function	County Executive	Board of Supervisors	Ethics Commission	Legislative Analyst
Prepare budget	Yes	No	No	No
Approve budget	No	Yes	No	Advisory role only
Appoint department heads	Yes	Confirmation authority	No	No
Pass legislation	No	Yes	No	No
Veto legislation	Yes	Override authority	No	No
Manage administration	Yes	No	No	No
Investigate misconduct	No	Limited	Yes	No
Provide policy analysis	No	No	No	Yes

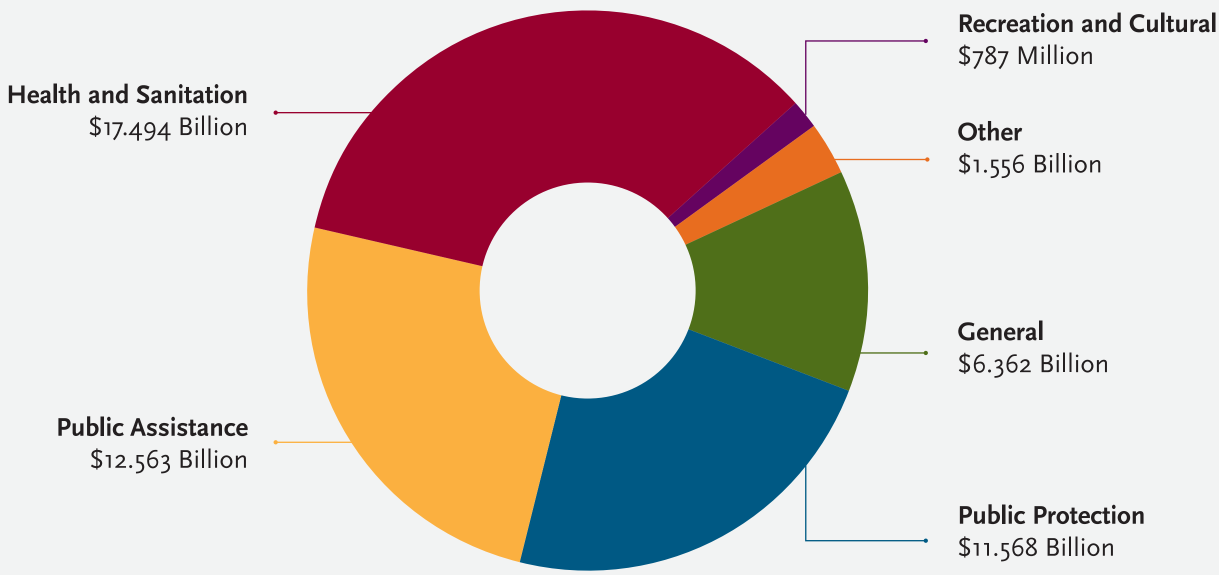
Source: Los Angeles County, *Charter of the County of Los Angeles*, art. II, accessed August 16, 2026, https://library.municode.com/ca/los_angeles_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CHCOLOAN.

Figure 3. Measure G Implementation Timeline



Source: Los Angeles County, *Proposed Amendments to the Charter of the County of Los Angeles*, 2024, https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/25033256/la-county-charter-proposed-amendments.pdf.

Figure 4. 2026-2027 Adopted L.A. County Budget



Source: County of Los Angeles, Chief Executive Office, *2026–27 Adopted Budget Charts* (Los Angeles: County of Los Angeles, 2026), https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lac/1211765_2026-27AdoptedBudgetCharts.pdf.

reside in most states.[21] The Ethics Commission is also expected to provide important accountability mechanisms for county leaders. Altogether, these reforms represent a significant reduction in the Board's powers and a substantial restructuring of county operations.

These changes carry high stakes. Los Angeles County's government has heavy responsibilities, with millions of people depending on it for essential services. The County has an annual budget of $50.3 billion, which supports 39 different departments and more than 115,000 employees.[22] The County provides almost all local government services to the one million people living in unincorporated communities, and many services to residents in incorporated cities, as well.[23] Indeed, many cities sign contracts with the County for services, including sheriff, fire, public health, animal control, libraries, and public works.[24] These contracts are essential for many cities, especially smaller ones that may not have the resources to provide services on their own.

Given their shared responsibilities, cities and the County have long needed to work together to provide services for residents. By necessity, they have developed practices for intergovernmental collaboration. Measure G's restructuring of county government will require both sides to reassess and adjust those practices.

21 County of Los Angeles, *Proposed Amendments to the Los Angeles County Charter*, 2024, https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/25033256/la-county-charter-proposed-amendments.pdf.

22 Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, "LA County Budget," accessed August 13, 2026, https://ceo.lacounty.gov/budget/.

23 Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, "Unincorporated Los Angeles County."

24 County of Los Angeles, *Services Provided to Cities by the County of Los Angeles (Via Agreement)*, September 2025, https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/ceo/legi/1194711_MATRIXCONTRACTSERVICES-_updatedSeptember2025_.pdf.

Study Approach

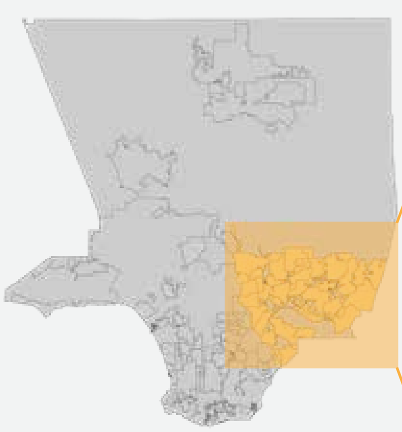
While many stakeholders require attention, this study focuses on how its reforms will affect cities—and, more broadly, intergovernmental relations within the County. More specifically, in this study, we seek to understand the current relationships between cities and the County and the ways Measure G will remake these relationships. The study relies on insights from city managers, because these officials serve as the primary points of contact between municipal and county government and bring extensive experience in intergovernmental coordination and the division of executive and legislative authority. Although we are interested in Measure G's implications for all 88 cities in Los Angeles County, in this initial phase of our research we have chosen to focus on a sample of 35 cities in the County's eastern region.

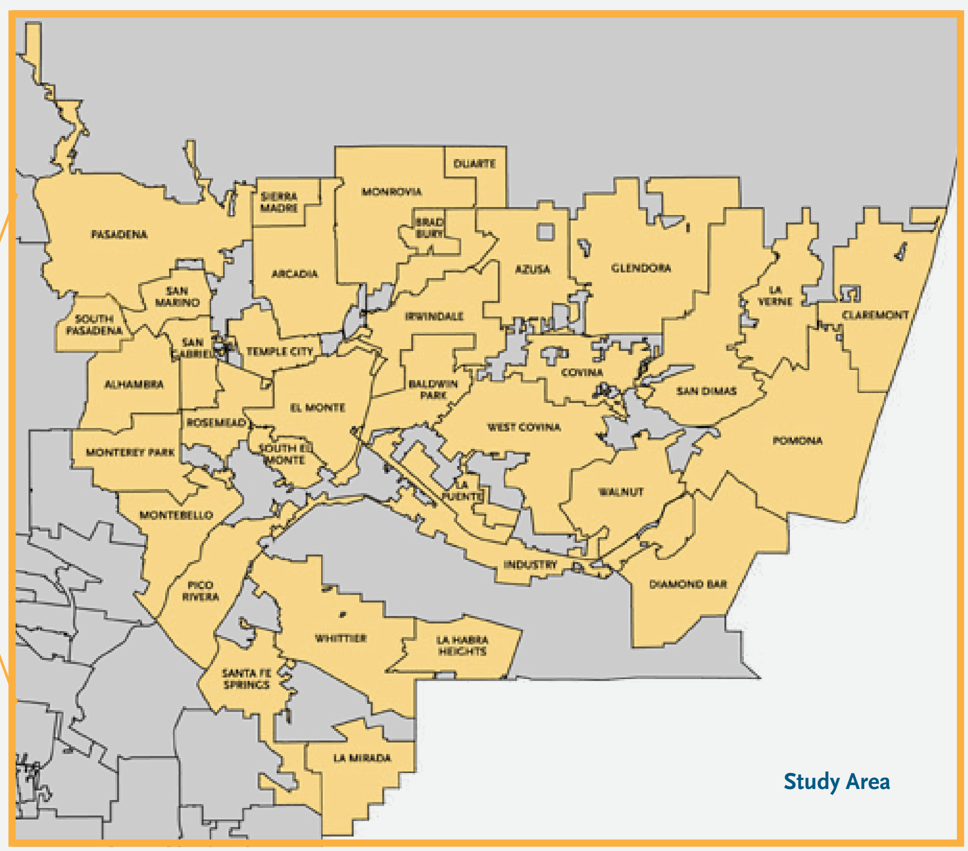
Our focus on eastern L.A. County has allowed us to pursue an in-depth study of city-county relationships in a significant portion of the County. This region includes a diverse mix of full-service, hybrid, and contract cities, each with varying levels of administrative capacity and reliance on county services. Moreover, these communities face recurring concerns involving service costs, access to county decision-makers, local control over funding, and attentiveness to regional priorities. The study thus provides useful insights regarding challenges of city-county intergovernmental relationships and opportunities for improving those relationships under Measure G. That said, our narrow focus prevented us from gaining input from cities in the rest of the County or fully pursuing some ideas that our interviews surfaced. This historic governance transition would benefit from additional research in these areas. Future research could include: soliciting input from city managers in other parts of the County; engaging with elected city officials as well as city staff; more fully documenting the respective responsibilities of cities and the County in providing services; and developing models of city-county collaboration.

As background research for this study, we reviewed public records to examine how cities currently interact with the County through contracted services, emergency

Figure 5. Cities in the Study Area

Los Angeles County





OUR FOCUS ON EASTERN L.A. COUNTY HAS ALLOWED US TO PURSUE AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF CITY-COUNTY RELATIONSHIPS IN A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE COUNTY. THIS REGION INCLUDES A DIVERSE MIX OF FULL-SERVICE, HYBRID, AND CONTRACT CITIES, EACH WITH VARYING LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY AND RELIANCE ON COUNTY SERVICES.

management, public health, homelessness programs, and other forms of intergovernmental coordination. We also developed an inventory of large counties with elected executives in other states to identify institutional arrangements that may be relevant to Los Angeles County as it designs the new executive office.

We then conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with 28 city managers in eastern Los Angeles County from March through May 2026. These interviews explored the city managers' current relationships with the County, their experiences with county departments and county-contracted services, their understanding of Measure G, and their expectations, concerns, and hopes regarding the measure's implementation. We also interviewed several experts on county governance to place the city managers' observations in a broader institutional context. Finally, we invited seven city managers who had offered particularly detailed or insightful perspectives to participate in two working-group meetings. The participants in the working groups reviewed the emerging findings, discussed possible institutional responses, and developed potential proposals to improve communication between cities and the County.

We presented preliminary findings to the County's Government Reform Task Force and the GRTF's Ad Hoc Committee on the Elected Executive in June 2026 and received input from Task Force Members. We also made presentations to the San Gabriel Valley City Managers' Association, the Southeast LA (SELA) Collaborative, the Gateway Cities Council of Governments, and the California Contract Cities Association.

III. Comparative Research

We found that Measure G largely aligns Los Angeles County with other large counties that include a separately elected executive in their governance systems.

Los Angeles County's current governance structure is similar to that of other counties in California, whereby the County is governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors that possesses both legislative and executive power. The only exception in California is San Francisco, which has adopted a combined city-county government with a separately elected executive (the Mayor) and an 11-member Board of Supervisors. Aside from San Francisco, Los Angeles is the first county in California to establish an elected executive and the first to expand its Board of Supervisors to more than five members. Accordingly, California offers no models of stand-alone counties with an expanded Board of Supervisors or an elected executive.

However, many counties in other parts of the United States have adopted these arrangements. We identified six large counties in other states with elected executives and documented how they distribute institutional authority. Specifically, we compared their legislative structures, budget and veto processes, executive appointment authority, administrative responsibilities, and formal channels for communicating with municipalities.

We found that Measure G largely aligns Los Angeles County with other large counties that include a separately elected executive in their governance systems. Measure G's expansion of the Board of Supervisors from five to nine brings it closer to the board size in these comparison counties, even though it will still have a much larger ratio of constituents per board member than the other counties. With respect to budgeting, Measure G maintains the County Executive's role in preparing the county budget and the Board's control over budget approval, but introduces an executive veto, a common feature in the counties we studied. Moreover, Measure G gives the County Executive control over appointment of department heads, subject to legislative approval, another governance feature we found in the comparison counties.

Importantly for this study, our analysis also examined how counties with elected executives structure communication with cities within their jurisdiction. This institutional feature is critical for Los Angeles County to consider because Measure G's restructuring of county government will necessarily redirect cities' existing patterns of communication toward the County Executive, but the measure does not establish institutional arrangements for cities to communicate with that office. Several comparison counties have established dedicated intergovernmental affairs staff, local-affairs coordinators, legislative committees, or regional committees to facilitate communication between municipal governments and the county executive. We note that while we identified these features in the comparison of county governments, our research scope did not include investigating how these arrangements operate in practice. Measure G implementation would benefit from further study of best practices of city-county relations in these or other counties.

Table 3. Government Models in Comparison Counties

Jurisdiction	Major City	Population (2025)	Leg Size	Appointment of Dept. Heads	Budget Prep
Allegheny, PA	Pittsburgh	1.2 million	13	Executive, subject to confirmation	County Manager
Cook County, IL	Chicago	5.1 million	17	Executive	Budget Director
Cuyahoga County, OH	Cleveland	1.2 million	11	Executive, subject to confirmation	Executive
King County, WA	Seattle	2.3 million	9	Executive, subject to confirmation	Executive
Miami-Dade County, FL	Miami	2.8 million	13	Executive, subject to confirmation	Executive
Salt Lake County, UT	Salt Lake City	1.2 million	9	Executive, subject to confirmation	Executive
LA County (Pre-Measure G)	Los Angeles	9.7 million (2024)	5	No	Executive
LA County (Post-Measure G)	Los Angeles	9.6 million	9	Executive, subject to confirmation	Executive

Sources: Salt Lake County. Code of Ordinances of Salt Lake County, Utah. Accessed August 16, 2026. https://library.municode.com/ut/salt_lake_county/codes/code_of_ordinances; Cook County, Code of Ordinances of Cook County, Illinois, pt. I, chap. 2, art. II, "President and County Board," accessed August 16, 2026, https://library.municode.com/il/cook_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIGEOR_CH2AD_ARTIIPRCOBO; Cuyahoga County, Charter of Cuyahoga County, accessed August 16, 2026, https://cuyahogacounty.gov/council/legislation/cuyahoga-county-charter; King County, King County Charter, accessed August 16, 2026, https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/council/clerk/code/03_Charter.htm; Miami-Dade County, The Home Rule Amendment and Charter, as amended through November 8, 2022, https://www.miamidade.gov/charter/library/home-rule-charter.pdf; Salt Lake County, Code of Ordinances of Salt Lake County, Utah, accessed August 16, 2026, https://library.municode.com/ut/salt_lake_county/codes/code_of_ordinances; Shadi Kardan, "Separation of Powers" (presentation to the Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force, May 13, 2026), accessed September 1, 2026, https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/ce6374c2-6cdb-470f-b361-18ef8f17fe76/Separation%20of%20Powers-Final.pdf.

IV. City Manager Interviews: Findings

To understand how Measure G will affect cities' relationships with Los Angeles County, our interview protocol divided conversations with city managers into two sets of questions. First, we explored the cities' current interactions with the County with a focus on their communication patterns. Second, we sought the city managers' perspectives on how Measure G's implementation may alter the city-county relationship.

Summary

Our findings, divided between "Perspectives on Current City-County Relationships" and "Perspectives on Measure G Reforms," reveal the deeply interwoven nature of city and county service delivery, particularly in cities that contract core services with county agencies. This high degree of integration means cities must navigate a complex county bureaucracy to communicate with corresponding agencies, partner on shared projects, and resolve any disputes. City managers regularly communicate with the County in two ways: 1) by contacting county department staff directly and 2) by reaching out to their supervisor's office. By contrast, city managers reported that they have *little to no interaction with the County CEO's office*. Regarding the state of county services, city managers expressed satisfaction with county fire and sheriff services but held varying opinions of other county services, due to a perceived imbalance of costs and benefits.

City managers' knowledge of Measure G ranged from simple awareness of its top-level reforms to in-depth understanding of its provisions and the status of the implementation process. Across the board, city managers expressed uncertainty about how Measure G would work in practice.

While the city managers broadly accepted Measure G's expansion of the Board of Supervisors, with several suggesting this change will improve representation in the County, many shared concerns about the creation of an elected County Executive. In part, this wariness can be attributed to their professional orientation. City managers embrace their identity as appointed, professional, non-partisan, expert managers. Many are skeptical of a system that hands the County's executive authority to an elected politician without any required professional management training or credentials. They also have practical concerns about how cities will navigate the new county system—most notably, uncertainty about how channels of intergovernmental communication will work once the reforms are in place.

Perspectives on Current City-County Relationships

FINDING 1

Cities have extensive interaction with the County, which scales with the number of contracted services.

The city managers we interviewed emphasized they have frequent engagement with county government. Cities are generally categorized as either "contract cities," which enter into agreements with the County to provide core services such as fire and law enforcement, or "full service" cities that maintain these services on their own. However, the line between "contract" and "non-contract" or "full service" cities is not always clear, because the cities' contracting of county services ranges across a spectrum. One city manager noted, "we're a true contract city… so I contract for everything… County Sheriff, County Fire, Public Works." But other "contract cities" enter agreements with the County to provide some major services but not others, and some "full service" cities maintain a few contracts with the County, for planning and building checks and more minor services such as mosquito and vector control.

Our interviews confirmed that a city's status as "contract" or "full service" affects the nature and scope of its relationship with the County. As one city manager explained, "[cities that] contract directly with the County… their regular interactions are going to be very, very different," due to the need to coordinate contracted services with other city functions, soliciting community feedback, and negotiating contract terms and service delivery.

Another feature of the city-county relationship is confusion over their respective spheres of responsibility. For example, with few exceptions, the County, rather than cities, is charged with providing services such as public health, social services, and care for the homeless. Yet city managers reported that residents frequently do not understand this division of governmental responsibility and complain to city hall, rather than county government offices, when they believe those services have been inadequate. This jurisdictional confusion is compounded by the prevalence of pockets of unincorporated areas throughout the County, sometimes in the form of unincorporated "islands" surrounded entirely by an incorporated city. City managers emphasized the confusion related to unincorporated areas as residents bring their feedback and concerns to city halls, which city staff then relay to county officials.

FINDING 2

City managers seldom interact with the County CEO. Instead, they work with county departments and supervisor offices. Many cities have developed a strong relationship with their supervisor's office.

While the current appointed county CEO oversees many logistical and administrative elements of county government, that official has little interaction with city managers. Multiple managers told us they had never engaged with the CEO or the CEO's office. One noted: "It's really difficult to get an audience with the CEO... I've never actually met with the CEO of L.A. County." Another said: "I couldn't even tell you who the CEO of the County is."

When asked why they do not communicate with the CEO, many said they can more successfully address operational issues through other channels—namely, by directly contacting county departments or their supervisor's office. Several noted they believed the current County CEO office is not set up to engage with cities and recognized the difficulty of managing relationships with 88 cities. One contrasted the lack of CEO engagement to Orange County, where the county executive has frequent interaction with city managers, while acknowledging that Orange County has only 34 cities, not 88. Another possible explanation for the cities' lack of interaction with the County CEO's office is that in 2015 the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors removed the CEO's control over county departments, thus reducing the cities' incentive to appeal to that office.

In any event, city managers uniformly emphasized that they work directly with the staff at county agencies or with their supervisor's office rather than with the County CEO.

Interaction with County Departments

City managers described how cities often engage with county departments "staff-to-staff" – that is, a member of the city manager's staff contacts a counterpart in a county department to address an issue. One city manager described how staff-to-staff collaborations occur across city functions: "The staff at every level throughout my organization has counterparts in the county organization. So, for example, if we're working on a park issue, our Director of Community Services has long-standing relationships with county parks folks. And it may be the department directors, or it may be the folks in the more manager or staff level positions for whatever they're looking for ... The majority of the time, that gets handled without any issues from a staff-to-staff level."

Interaction with Supervisor Offices

Cities also frequently interact with their supervisor's office. Many city managers emphasized the importance of that office advocating on their behalf to address their city's needs, especially when the city experiences difficulty with a county department. At present, because supervisors exercise both legislative and executive power, they can effectively intervene with the county bureaucracy to address cities' concerns. Moreover, under current norms, other members of the Board tend to defer to a colleague's judgment regarding matters within that supervisor's district.

The five supervisors' offices are well-staffed with both regional field deputies and policy deputies who develop relationships with the cities in their districts and respond to their needs. The current city-county relationship is thus centered on the connection between cities and their supervisor's office.

City managers clearly understand the importance of this relationship. Many spoke positively of the responsiveness of their supervisor and the supervisor's staff. One said: "I would say we have a very good relationship with our supervisor... whether it's city staff or city council, if they pick up the phone and give her a call, she answers." Other city managers shared that they felt heard by the supervisor's office and noted the efficiency of communication. As one said: "[Our supervisor] has always been really good to us, and, when we need something and reach out, we will get to her, and she will help us."

Although most city managers we interviewed were highly satisfied with their supervisor's office, a few thought the supervisor was sometimes inattentive or unhelpful. A possible explanation was that supervisors pay less attention to cities that are not seen as a core part of the supervisor's political base. One city manager described what he perceived as favoritism in city-supervisor relationships: "Those cities that have good relationships with their supervisors, and they see eye to eye on political views, you know, tend to be rewarded with funding, grants, etc." Again, these critical assessments of the city-supervisor relationship were the minority view.

FINDING 3

Cities are generally satisfied with county fire and sheriff services but had mixed views regarding other county services.

Many city managers expressed satisfaction with county fire and sheriff services. One city manager commented, "we are extremely supportive of the Fire Department." Another stated "we have really good communication with law enforcement through the substation that covers our area." The responses typically emphasized frequent communication, accessibility, positive community relations, and a clear understanding of the level of service received as part of the contract.[25] Even when discussing costs, city managers tended to compliment the quality of service, with one saying, "we're completely happy with the Sheriff's Department, but cost does become a bottom line."

When assessing other county services, opinions were more mixed. The most common source of frustration was the County's homelessness services. One said, "I don't see that there's any coordination at all" between the County and cities in addressing homelessness. Another said that responding to the homeless problem placed an unfunded burden on his city. "All of our encampment cleanups, all of our interactions with the folks out on the street really is falling on the shoulders of the city. And we have to spend our own general fund money, which we have very little of, to do that type of work… it becomes very frustrating because we're not making any progress."

City managers had a range of views of other county services. Some lodged complaints at public health enforcement, social-services delivery, public works, and overall county responsiveness. One city manager expressed frustration at the L.A. County Health Department, saying, "[the Department is understaffed] and that's always a big challenge for us… We have illegal vendors that sometimes proliferate throughout the city… We have to spend a lot of resources on our own code enforcement to regulate some of these operations, and it's something that we think the County should do [because] they're funded for it… we have to pick up the slack if we want to have some control." At the same time, several shared that they have had helpful interactions with county departments. A number of them mentioned positive engagement with the County Office of Emergency Management, with one describing it as "one of the better relationships that we have with the County." Others praised their partnership with the County's Department of Public Works, with one calling it "great to work with" across a number of public improvements.

25 Sebastian Fernandez, Kim Davila, Navid Goodarzi, and Rafael Carbonell, "A New Face for Los Angeles: Preparing for LA County's First Elected Executive" (presentation to the Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force, Harvard Kennedy School, March 11, 2026), accessed September 1, 2026, http://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/231046b8-ee29-490d-b3c7-b668aa0c6b72/Harvard%20Kenney%20School%20of%20Government%20Presentation.pdf.

FINDING 4

Cities express frustration over their lack of local control over countywide tax measure revenues.

L.A. County voters have recently approved several ballot measures funding social services programs, typically through countywide sales tax increases. Many city managers we interviewed expressed frustration that cities receive only a small percentage of the revenue from the county tax measures and little local control over these resources.

Measure A of 2024 was the canonical example. L.A. County voters approved the measure, which included a half-cent sales tax to address homelessness across the County. Many city managers took issue with the distribution of these funds. One said: "Measure A generates about a billion dollars a year. And $96 million of that is a 'local return,' meaning money's going back to cities. Close to $60 million of that is going to the City of L.A. Of the 31 cities in the San Gabriel Valley, they've been provided about $8 million total to share with those 31 cities."

City managers also expressed frustration at the administrative burden required to access funding. One manager contrasted the low returns with the high administrative costs: "Our direct allocation back is small, and then it's burdened with administrative requirements. In fact, we actually took a picture of it. Our reporting criteria on a quarterly basis is two inches thick of single-sided printed documents that we have to send back to them. It's a lot of administrative work."

The city managers pointed to Measure A as a recent example of their concerns regarding a lack of city control over the County's distribution of funds for core services. More broadly, several shared they believe many cities have the capacity to partner more actively with the County in providing services and could thereby improve overall service delivery. They contended, however, that the County is often unwilling to share responsibility for delivering services or to provide cities the necessary resources to do so.

FINDING 5

Cities rely on inter-city collaboration and regional Councils of Governments.

City managers in our study area emphasized their increased reliance on Councils of Governments (COGs) to pool resources and serve as a unified means for cities to engage with the County. COGs are regional joint powers authorities dedicated to regional planning and coordination among cities and unincorporated communities. Importantly, COGs do not have land use or taxing authority, and their leadership typically consists of elected representatives of participating cities. There are six COGs in Los Angeles County broken down by the following regions: the San Gabriel Valley, the Gateway Cities, the South Bay Cities, the San Fernando Valley, the Westside Cities, and Las Virgenes/Malibu. Our study area included cities covered by the San Gabriel Valley COG and Gateway Cities COG.

Historically, COGs have tended to focus on formal regional planning efforts such as transportation and housing plans that impact multiple cities and require regional coordination and asset sharing. As one manager put it, "the COG is very useful, because, again, being a small city, we're getting such small pieces of funding from bigger projects that it helps to pool [resources] and do regional things." City managers in our study area emphasized how their COGs have also evolved in recent years to coordinate regional responses to homelessness. As one manager said, "the COGs have undergone a transition over the last five to ten years, taking on more of those homeless programs and social service needs. The COG is integral into those programs and how we provide services to… homeless individuals." This change was driven by homelessness becoming a higher-profile issue among study area cities, as well as by frustration with the lack of dedicated homelessness funding allocated to cities, as discussed in the previous finding with regard to Measure A.

COGs also serve a role in coordinating broader communication with the County, although city managers are divided on whether COGs should serve as an advocacy vehicle for cities. One city manager praised how the San Gabriel Valley COG "does a really fine job of finding ways to provide services to cities, and they really carry, quite frankly, a lot of the water and communication with the Board of Supervisors … having that larger voice is really important." The COGs' increased role is, in part, driven by cities' frustration with their inability to influence county policy, with one city manager stating, "a lot of us have just been so disenchanted, we just don't engage, and we let the COGs kind of… handle that. We just stick to what we do best, and try not to get too frustrated with the County." However, other managers were skeptical and felt that advocacy went beyond the COGs' mandate, on the view that "the COG's primary function is to… improve interagency cooperation, rather than to advocate on behalf of the [member] cities."

COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS (COGS) ALSO SERVE A ROLE IN COORDINATING BROADER COMMUNICATION WITH THE COUNTY, ALTHOUGH CITY MANAGERS ARE DIVIDED ON WHETHER COGS SHOULD SERVE AS AN ADVOCACY VEHICLE FOR CITIES.

Perspectives on Measure G Reforms

FINDING 1

City managers have uneven awareness of Measure G and uncertainty about how the new governance model will work.

Across our interviews, city manager awareness of Measure G varied widely. Some had detailed understanding of the measure's provisions and were closely tracking its implementation, while others had only a general understanding of its main provisions. Those who knew less about the measure typically said they were not following the reforms until they affected the city's day-to-day operations.

Given the city managers' pragmatic orientation and the preliminary nature of the Measure G implementation process, the most common sentiment was uncertainty about the measure and how it will affect their city's interactions with the County. One city manager shared "a lot of confusion about it. An elected CEO or CAO is complicated [and] what that means, and everything associated with it." Another asked: "What does it mean? There's so many unknowns about what it means."

Some traced their uncertainty to their lack of information regarding implementation. As one put it: "This is the structure we've dealt with for a long time … and within 18 months from now, or so, that's going to be flipped on its head." Some questioned whether the speed and complexity of the reforms would result in a lack of detailed consideration of cities' needs. "They're sort of, what, building the plane while they're flying, or building the car? I don't think they really have answers to where this is going either, and I think we'll have to get it in place and then figure it out."

Despite their frustrations with the status quo, these city managers have developed ways to navigate county government by engaging with departments and supervisors. None was sure how to navigate a system with an expanded number of supervisors and an empowered, elected County Executive. As one city manager put it: "other than electing a County Executive, we don't really know how it's going to play out."

FINDING 2

City managers generally accept board expansion and the Ethics Commission.

When asked about the specific provisions within Measure G, most city managers expressed support for expanding the Board of Supervisors from five to nine members and spoke positively of the Ethics Commission reforms.

The city managers we interviewed had a high awareness of Measure G's expansion of the Board of Supervisors to nine members starting with the 2032 election. Most of them accepted the rationale for this change, noting that each supervisorial district currently encompasses nearly two million residents, and that increasing the number of supervisors would improve representation by dividing these large constituencies by nearly half. Some respondents noted that the expansion to nine supervisors would not fully address the problem of large-population districts, since each supervisor will still represent more than a million residents. Yet, those who made this point still thought the Measure G provision was a movement in the right direction. One city manager also noted that board expansion would likely make districts more geographically compact, which would help address the problem of supervisorial districts that straddle distant communities—such as the San Gabriel and Antelope Valleys, separated by a formidable mountain range. Based on these representational benefits, most managers believed this provision of Measure G would be good for county residents.

The city managers had a range of views regarding how an expanded board would affect cities' ability to navigate county government. One common view was that newly constructed supervisorial boundary maps may allow some regions of the County to have more focused representation. Some city managers hoped to have a supervisor paying closer attention to their specific needs. One said, "I think the opportunity for greater representation in and around the County going from five to nine definitely lends itself to opportunities for cities in the East San Gabriel Valley and in different areas to have more of a voice in various county issues."

Some respondents were skeptical that any increased attention from a supervisor with a smaller district would offset the increased competition for county resources created by additional supervisors' offices and an empowered County Executive. One city manager thought that more seats just meant "more bureaucracy. You're going to break it up into more politics, right? ... You think five is tough, you're going to have nine?" Adherents of this view believed that even a supervisor focused on the needs of a smaller region would not be able to get the same results from county departments who will now be overseen by an elected executive and eight other supervisors. As another city manager put it, "now we're going to be dealing with ten electeds: nine elected supervisors, and one elected CEO, and each department head is going to be pulled in a lot of different ways."

Meanwhile, most of the city managers we interviewed viewed the new Ethics Commission positively as a good governance measure, but few had much more to say about it. This is likely because, as some noted, the commission will focus on the County rather than cities.

THE CITY MANAGERS HAD A RANGE OF VIEWS REGARDING HOW AN EXPANDED BOARD WOULD AFFECT CITIES' ABILITY TO NAVIGATE COUNTY GOVERNMENT. ONE COMMON VIEW WAS THAT NEWLY CONSTRUCTED SUPERVISORIAL BOUNDARY MAPS MAY ALLOW SOME REGIONS OF THE COUNTY TO HAVE MORE FOCUSED REPRESENTATION.

FINDING 3

City managers have substantive concerns about the elected county County Executive.

The city managers we interviewed were most concerned with Measure G's creation of an empowered, elected County Executive. Nearly all of them had principled, philosophical objections to shifting the office from an appointed to an elected position, as well as practical concerns about the ability of a single city (especially a small one) to gain access to a single official overseeing the entire County.

City managers' philosophical concerns are based in part on their own professional norms. Deeply rooted in the early twentieth century Progressive Movement, the city manager profession is committed to the ideals of professional, non-partisan, expert public management. Most city managers have pursued specialized education, often obtaining master's degrees in public administration. They are appointed by their respective city councils rather than elected by voters and are careful to avoid partisan politics. Indeed, several city managers declined our invitation to participate in anonymous interviews because they felt it would be inappropriate for them to comment on what they saw as political matters. City managers are trained to view themselves as implementers of policies developed by democratically elected city council members.

These norms contrast with the County Executive office established by Measure G. Several city managers emphasized that the people who will hold this position will likely lack professional qualifications or training in public administration and instead will excel at winning elections. As one said, "you're taking what is effectively an administrative or operational responsibility and potentially politicizing it... with an elected official, there's no guarantee that you're going to get somebody with the requisite expertise to manage an entire county's operations." City managers contended that electoral success and administrative success often require distinct skillsets and that, "the tools that help you get elected are not necessarily the tools for effective governance." As one city manager put it, "whoever gets the most votes wins, and that person doesn't have to have any experience, or any ability to actually govern...That's scary."

City managers also expressed concern that electoral incentives may eliminate the executive's motivation to work with smaller cities outside his or her electoral base. In this view, the County Executive could ignore the priorities of substantial segments of the County and still win reelection. "How difficult in a county of ten million people is it going to be to unseat an elected official who has garnered six million votes, or whatever ... I think it's going to be exceedingly hard to hold that person accountable." Some city managers believed that these electoral factors could make it harder for a city to have access to the elected executive if that city was small, politically disfavored, or otherwise outside the executive's electoral coalition.

CITY MANAGERS ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT ELECTORAL INCENTIVES MAY ELIMINATE THE EXECUTIVE'S MOTIVATION TO WORK WITH SMALLER CITIES OUTSIDE HIS OR HER ELECTORAL BASE. IN THIS VIEW, THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE COULD IGNORE THE PRIORITIES OF SUBSTANTIAL SEGMENTS OF THE COUNTY AND STILL WIN REELECTION.

FINDING 4

The new communication structure is the top operational concern: "Who do I call?"

As documented in our general findings, cities currently work with the County by communicating directly with county departments or, when necessary, contacting their supervisor's office. When asked about how they plan to operate under Measure G, city managers most frequently focused on the need for the County to establish clear channels of communication for cities to resolve operational issues. One city manager asked, "Who do I call? Do I still call the county supervisor? Or now, do I also need to call the CEO's office...? I'm probably going to bombard both, because I don't know." Another said, "We would want clarity on whom do we call when we have an issue."

Some of this uncertainty related to the County's creation of separation of powers. A new system consisting of an expanded number of supervisors who hold diminished powers and a separately elected official with broad executive authority presents a new set of challenges for a city leader looking to resolve a city's issues. City managers want to know whether their supervisor or the executive's office will be their preferred point of contact when they need to work with the County. One asked: "Are we going to bypass our supervisor and go straight to the elected CEO?"

City managers seemed open to working primarily with the supervisor's office or with the County Executive—whichever would be most effective in addressing their needs. More than anything, they hoped to see clearer definition of the new county arrangements and creation of effective channels for resolving issues, particularly during a years-long transition period as Measure G is put into effect.

FINDING 5

Contract city arrangements need special attention.

City managers' focus on communications with the County was often grounded in concerns over contracted county services and the costs of those contracts. As mentioned in our general findings, most cities in Los Angeles County contract with the County for fire, sheriff, or other services. These cities negotiate, communicate, and collaborate closely with the County on the provision of contracted services, and these services often constitute a large share of their budgets.

Many cities are able to provide a full suite of services only by outsourcing key functions to county agencies. Yet many city managers believe they have little power to negotiate the terms of those contracts. One described how the negotiations occur under the current system, contending that "it's not really a negotiation ... It's kind of like, all right, L.A. County... How much more are we paying this year?" For smaller cities, concerns over contract prices can seem existential. One city manager said, "All the contracts and agreements ... can easily crush me. You know, if the costs of those things escalate a lot, then I can't afford it.... Is the city still viable? Can we continue in the future?"

Changes to how those services are negotiated or governed could affect the cities' core operations and fiscal solvency. Accordingly, many city managers expressed strong interest in who will be responsible for setting contract terms after implementation of Measure G—that is, how much contracting authority will shift to the County Executive's office, and how much will be retained by departments and the Board of Supervisors.

Some raised related concerns. One city manager mentioned liability payouts, stating that "it's not clear what will happen with those liability claims that go to the Board of Supervisors now. Are we just dealing with the CEO, and that's one person making that decision? Is it not a legislative body that's making that decision on some of these huge claims? That has a direct financial impact to... contract cities."

V. Recommendations

Our findings reflect early reactions of a large group of city managers within our study area to the County's most significant governance reform in more than a century. At present, the Government Reform Task Force and other county leaders are deeply engaged in developing recommendations for implementing Measure G's broad mandates. This study highlights the central importance of the city-county relationship to the success of this process. Based on the study's findings, and with this consideration in mind, we offer the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Ensure the elected County Executive's office has personnel who are responsible for the office's communication and collaboration with cities on matters of common concern, potentially through a dedicated inter-governmental affairs office or designated senior staff.

Cities' most consistent concern is how they will work with the County once the elected executive takes office. We recommend the County consider establishing official channels and personnel for cities to communicate directly with the elected executive's office. Other large counties have faced similar challenges, and L.A. County can learn from peers who have tested various organizational models of effective intergovernmental relations with cities. Examples include dedicated liaisons tasked with understanding city issues, an intergovernmental relations office focused on cities, or other defined mechanisms to identify and resolve issues of common concerns.

RECOMMENDATION 2

County leaders should actively seek input from cities both during and after the transition period.

Given their stake in county operations, city managers want opportunities to provide input on Measure G's implementation throughout the transition process. By engaging cities throughout the process, the GRTF and the broader county government can help ensure the success of Measure G's reforms and gain a deeper understanding of the nuanced partnerships between county government and cities. Specifically, this input could focus on establishing appropriate communication channels between cities and the future County Executive's office. Active communication, even as simple as city-specific updates and opportunities for input, could help resolve some of the uncertainty and familiarize city leaders with the process as it evolves. Moving forward, the County should consider creating and maintaining mechanisms for cities to provide ongoing input on county deliberations. Cities consistently expressed a desire for greater representation and involvement in county deliberations, especially related to the delivery of contracted county services. One manager expressed interest in a system "where there is a seat for cities at the table, to have a collective voice." Others raised the prospect of a standing committee, advisory board, or system of partnership with existing Councils of Governments (COGs) or other organizations tasked with representing regional groups of city governments. Regardless of the specific form, incoming county leadership could explore means of partnering with cities to identify ways to improve the city-county working relationship.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Cities should strengthen their collective capacity to work with the County on issues of common interest.

Cities share responsibility in finding ways to improve intergovernmental relations with the County during this transition process. Even if the incoming County Executive is fully committed to soliciting greater input from cities, maintaining relationships with 88 cities with varying perspectives is a daunting task, and it is difficult to act on conflicting, disorganized feedback. Cities need to establish new means of collaborating and organizing their advocacy efforts with one another. To the extent cities are able to better synthesize their ideas, they will be better positioned to effectively coordinate with county leadership.

It is up to cities to decide whether novel forms of engagement may require novel institutions. Cities could work through existing COG structures to represent their respective regions. However, the city managers we spoke to were divided on whether or not the COGs were the ideal long-term vehicle for advocating on behalf of cities across all intergovernmental issues. Alternatively, cities could establish new institutions for multi-city and city-county collaboration that focus on specific function areas or smaller geographic footprints than the eight existing COGs that are designed with the purpose of improving communications with a single elected executive's office.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Residents would benefit from additional tools to understand the complex web of intergovernmental relationships and service delivery.

A recurring theme in our interviews was the confusion among residents, particularly residents in and around unincorporated areas, regarding who is responsible for public services. This confusion results in cities receiving inquiries from residents about services the city does not control and also means residents remain unaware of how to best engage local government.

One means of improving resident awareness would be to create an interactive tool and visualization of intergovernmental and service delivery relationships between the County, its incorporated cities, and its unincorporated communities. Such a tool could promote community awareness of city and county governments' respective areas of responsibility, eliminate confusion, and make it easier for residents to resolve issues for the public services they depend on.

VI. Looking Ahead

This study highlights the central importance of the city-county relationship to the governance of Los Angeles County and the critical need for the County and its cities to work together to reinvent that relationship in the post-Measure G era. This task will not be easy. The County is incredibly complex, with nearly ten million residents, 88 incorporated cities, numerous and varied unincorporated communities, many active community organizations, and a large county workforce. The County provides essential services to millions of residents, with many of its operations contracted through and interwoven into 88 distinct cities. For decades, cities and other stakeholders have relied on well-established norms for engaging with county government, centered around relationships with the five-member Board of Supervisors. That system is coming to an end. After implementation of Measure G, the Board will retain considerable power, but the traditional patterns will necessarily shift to include the elected County Executive. There is no precedent for how to manage such a fundamental change in a county so massive and complex, and one can expect considerable uncertainty and friction as old arrangements give way to new ones. At the same time, the transition presents an historic opportunity to improve county governance and enhance the partnership between cities and the County.

The new city-county partnership will necessarily develop and evolve over time, but it is essential for both sides to secure its foundation now, at this formative moment. Accordingly, we recommend the County work with cities through the Measure G implementation process to design institutional channels that guarantee cities meaningful access to the County Executive's office, and for cities to develop new, constructive ways to work collectively with the County on matters of common concern. We believe that these commitments to enhancing the city-county partnership will benefit both levels of government and the residents they serve.

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