



CITY OF CHICAGO
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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The City's Support of the New Arrivals Mission: An Explainer

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DAVID GLOCKNER | INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR THE CITY OF CHICAGO

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Acronyms

ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
CDA	Chicago Department of Aviation
CPD	Chicago Police Department
DFSS	Department of Family and Support Services
DPS	Department of Procurement Services
FHS	Favorite Healthcare Staffing, Inc.
OBM	Office of Budget and Management
OEMC	Office of Emergency Management and Communications
OIG	Office of Inspector General
RFP	Request for Proposal

I | Background

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a review of the City's new arrivals mission. The objectives of this project were to determine how much money the City spent on services for new arrivals, the sources of those funds, and how the City spent those funds. Additionally, this project analyzed whether the City followed its procurement and payment procedures during the new arrivals mission.

The review included City spending on services for new arrivals for the duration of the mission, August 31, 2022, to December 31, 2024.¹ The City spending included funds directly drawn from City accounts, as well as federal and state grants. OIG did not analyze any direct spending by other government entities or non-profit organizations.

II | The New Arrivals Mission

In August 2022, state governments—primarily the state of Texas—and non-governmental organizations based in Texas, Colorado, and New York began to transport newly arrived migrants to Chicago and other cities around the country. The people sent to Chicago included families with young children, mainly from Venezuela, who were seeking asylum in the United States.² In addition to Venezuela, people came from countries in the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Chicago officials referred to any migrant or asylum seeker who came to the City during this time and sought out City services collectively as “new arrivals.”³ The City's work to assist these people is known as the new arrivals mission. The new arrivals mission ended on December 31, 2024, with the launch of the One Shelter Initiative, discussed below.⁴

Upon arriving in Chicago, new arrivals needed services similar to Chicago's unhoused population, such as food, clothing, and housing, but also needed additional support, such as immigration assistance. In the fall of 2022, the State of Illinois began opening shelters to house and support new arrivals. The City opened its first shelters for new arrivals in May 2023. The City worked with the State of Illinois, Cook County, non-profit organizations, and sister agencies such as Chicago Public Schools, and Chicago Park District to support this population. Figure 1 shows the services provided to the new arrivals in Chicago.

¹ To capture services provided through December 31, 2024, OIG reviewed City payments made until April 25, 2025.

² The Secretary of Homeland Security or the Attorney General may grant asylum to an applicant if they meet the definition of a refugee as defined in 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(42)(A). Asylum is a protection-based form of immigration relief that people can claim if they have suffered past persecution or have a credible fear of future persecution, and their government cannot or will not protect them. The feared persecution must be on account of the asylum applicant's race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. *Id.*

³ OIG uses the terms “new arrivals” and “people” interchangeably throughout this report.

⁴ City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, “Mayor Brandon Johnson Announces Equitable Transition to a One System Initiative,” October 21, 2024, accessed June 22, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2024/october/Equitable-Transition-to-One-System-Initiative.html.

Figure 1: The City provided new arrivals with key services.



Source: Public City presentations and City department interviews.

According to City records, over the duration of the new arrivals mission, the City received at least 46,282 new arrivals. In addition to operating a landing zone and 38 shelters, the City leveraged existing facilities, including certain police stations and the airports, to temporarily shelter the new arrivals.⁵ To support this work, Chicago's financial records show that it spent \$639,654,965 in City and grant funds.

The City employed a whole-of-government approach to providing services during the new arrivals mission. This involved coordinating multiple City departments to address the issue collectively. The mission's leadership team included the Executive Director of the Office of Emergency Management and Communication (OEMC), the Commissioner of the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), and senior staff from the Mayor's Office. Staff from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) helped the leadership team by performing various spending analyses for the mission. The Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) provided physical space for new arrivals awaiting shelter placement. Beyond the participation of department leadership, Figure 2 shows how departments and City vendors contributed to the mission.

Figure 2: City departments and vendors provided a variety of resources for the mission.

Department or Vendor	Leadership Team	Data Verification	Financial Planning	Shelter Operations	Physical Space
DFSS	✓			✓	
OEMC	✓	✓		✓	
Mayor's Office	✓		✓		
OBM			✓		
CPD					✓
CDA					✓
City vendors				✓	

Source: Interviews with listed City departments.

⁵ The landing zone was a location designated for buses to drop-off new arrivals. It allowed the City to centralize intake operations.

Thus, many City departments played a role or provided services to support the mission.⁶ However, while departments told OIG that the mission increased their workloads and impacted their facilities, they also characterized the additional work as part of their normal duties in responding to emergency events and providing assistance to people in need.

DFSS managed the process of providing shelter for new arrivals, with a primary focus on keeping them safe and warm. Staff from the department initially ran shelters, but the City transitioned to using staffing agencies to directly run the facilities, with DFSS staff providing oversight. DFSS used a combination of existing and new contracts to provide food and other essential services.

OEMC staff oversaw landing zone operations and were the first City point of contact for new arrivals. The landing zone became a centralized intake hub where the City assessed people's immediate needs, such as food and clothing, and helped connect them to shelter placement. As the number of new arrivals increased, the landing zone itself was also used as a temporary shelter for people waiting for the City to make more formal arrangements.

OBM created a cost projection tool to compare different scenarios of spending options. It stated that the tool helped prioritize the various uses of funds available for the new arrivals mission.

At the end of 2024, the City launched the One Shelter Initiative, transitioning from the new arrivals mission to a unified shelter system that serves all those experiencing homelessness in Chicago, including new arrivals. This transition officially ended the mission. The City's press release for the One Shelter Initiative states, "[the] shift will focus on adding 3,800 beds to the 3,000 legacy DFSS beds in the homelessness services system in collaboration with State of Illinois partners and advocates."⁷

III | The City Received at Least 46,282 New Arrivals

In October 2023, the City began publishing a "daily snapshot" report providing data on the number of new arrivals in Chicago.⁸ The initial version of the daily snapshot reported the number of new-arrival buses since August 2022; the total number of new arrivals; the number in shelters; and the number awaiting shelter placement, broken down into those waiting in police stations, and in O'Hare and Midway airports. Figure 3 is a screenshot of the daily snapshot from October 13, 2023.

⁶ The mission spanned both former Mayor Lightfoot's and Mayor Johnson's administrations. Due to the timing of OIG's work and staffing turnover at the City, OIG did not speak with anyone from the Lightfoot administration and members of the Johnson administration stated that they were not given transition memos or information about the strategic choices made by the previous administration.

⁷ City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, "Mayor Brandon Johnson Announces Equitable Transition to a One System Initiative," October 21, 2024, accessed June 22, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2024/october/Equitable-Transition-to-One-System-Initiative.html.

⁸ City of Chicago Office of the Mayor, "New Arrivals Situational Awareness Dashboard," October 2023, accessed June 22, 2026, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/Dashboard.html>.

Figure 3: Early daily snapshots had less detailed information than later iterations.

New Arrivals Daily Snapshot	
Total Shelter Census	10,852
Total Awaiting Placement	3,775
Total Waiting in Police Station	3,064
Total Waiting at O'Hare	711
Total Waiting at Midway	0
Total New Arrivals Served	18,000
Total Buses Arrivals Since 8/31/2022	407

Source: Screenshot of the City's new arrivals website from October 13, 2023.

Over time, the City added more categories to the daily snapshot. Figure 4 is a screenshot of the City's final snapshot on December 18, 2024.

Figure 4: By the last daily snapshot in December 2024, the City provided more detailed information.

New Arrivals Daily Snapshot	
Total Individuals Seeking Asylum Arriving via Texas Buses & Airplane *	51,648
Total Individuals Seeking Asylum Arriving via Airplane Since June 2023	5,209
Total Bus Arrivals in Chicagoland Area Since 8/31/2022	946
Total Individuals Resettled **	17,183
Total Individuals Reunited with Sponsors **	7,689
Total Shelter Census	2,487
Total Awaiting Placement ~	0
Total Waiting in Police Station	0
Total Waiting at O'Hare	0
Total Waiting at Midway	0
Total Waiting at Landing Zone ~	0

AS OF DECEMBER 18TH, 2024, AT 1:00PM

~ THIS NUMBER IS FLUID AND CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE DAY
 * DOES NOT INCLUDE INDIVIDUALS ARRIVING INDEPENDENTLY OR GREYHOUND.
 ** REPORTED WEEKLY

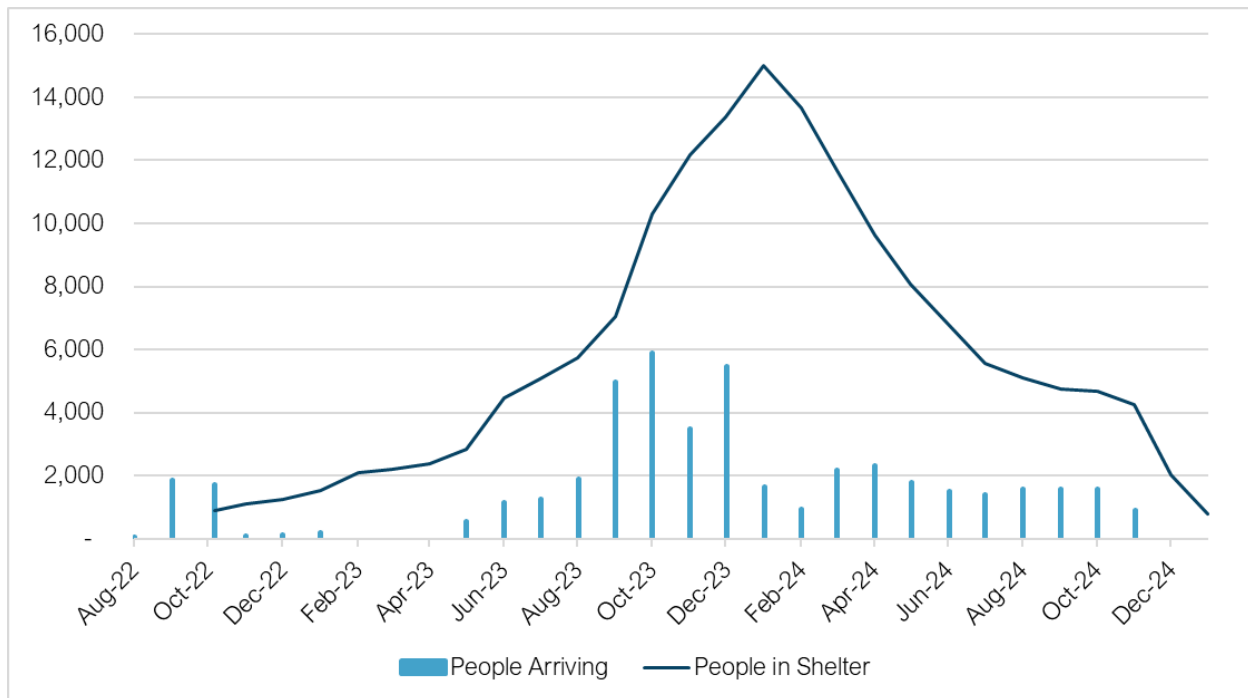
Source: Screenshot of the City's new arrivals website from December 18, 2024.

As shown above, the City publicly reported that Chicago had received 51,648 people throughout the course of the mission. Due to the mission's evolving nature, however, the City experienced data challenges. In particular, its underlying records only substantiate the arrival of 46,282 people during

that period, a discrepancy of approximately 5,000. At some point, OEMC staff determined that approximately 5,000 people had not been included in the count. OEMC stated that once it realized this, it manually adjusted the total to provide accurate public reporting.

As shown in Figure 5, after the initial influx in late 2022, the City did not receive new arrivals for several months. However, starting in September 2023, thousands of people entered the system. At the mission's peak, in January 2024, there were more than 15,000 new arrivals staying in shelters and staging areas throughout the City. The number of arrivals tapered off through the end of that year.

Figure 5: The highest number of new arrivals entering City shelters occurred between September and December 2023.

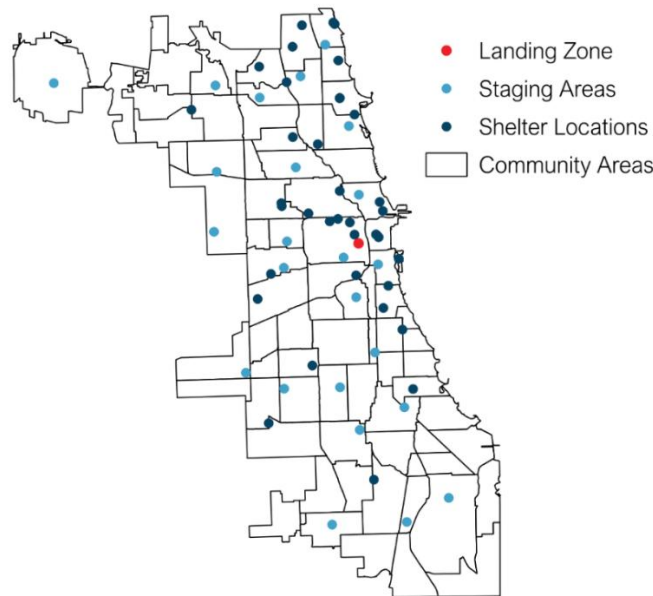


Source: City Provided Data of monthly counts of incoming new arrivals and shelter headcounts from the 1st of each month.

Accommodating the needs of the new arrivals required increasing the number of shelter beds. The City ran a total of 38 new shelters dedicated to temporarily housing the new arrivals. Not all of these shelters were used at the same time; the City periodically closed shelters and opened new ones. Because it took time to open each new shelter, many new arrivals stayed in staging areas while awaiting shelter placement.⁹ These staging areas included all 24 police district locations, O'Hare and Midway airports, and the landing zone. Figure 6 maps the City's shelters and staging areas used throughout the mission.

⁹ Staging areas refer to locations throughout the City where new arrivals stayed but which were not fully equipped shelters. These locations did not have showers or beds.

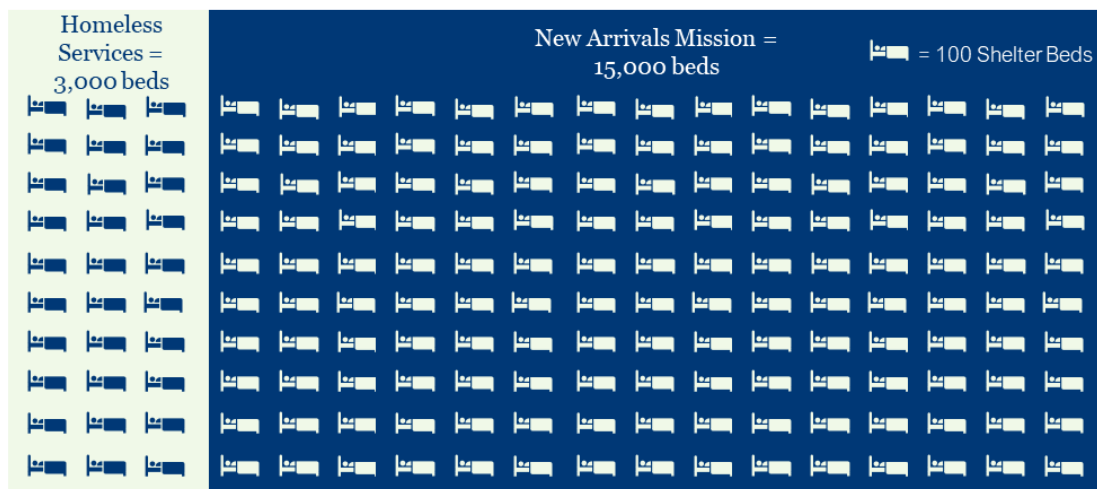
Figure 6: The City opened many shelter locations and temporary staging areas for the mission.



Source: City reported shelters, staging areas, and the landing zone locations. Chicago has 77 community areas whose boundaries have remained largely unchanged since their creation in the 1920s.¹⁰

According to DFSS, its shelter capacity prior to the new arrivals mission was about 3,000 beds. As mentioned above, throughout the mission, DFSS managed shelters with a combined capacity of 15,000. Figure 7 compares the scale of the new arrivals shelter system to the previously existing homeless services system.

Figure 7: The new arrivals mission shelters peaked at roughly five times the size of the City's existing homeless services system.



Source: Interviews with DFSS leadership.

¹⁰ For more information about community areas see, Chicago History Museum, "Mapping Chicago and Beyond: What are Chicago's Neighborhoods, Community Areas, and Wards?" accessed June 22, 2026, <https://www.chicagohistory.org/mapping-chicago-and-beyond-what-are-chicagos-neighborhoods-community-areas-and-wards/>.

Beginning in April 2023, the City relied heavily on CPD district stations as staging areas for new arrivals awaiting shelter placements. By October 2023, over 3,000 such people remained in district stations throughout the City; a population larger than the maximum capacity of the pre-existing shelter system. CPD stated that this use greatly impacted the district stations, which were not designed or equipped to have people living in them. For example, the Department needed to repair and clean station restrooms more often during this time. In addition, front desk staff complained about the noise levels in the lobbies. CPD also had to request special cleanings to prevent bed bug infestations and disease outbreaks. The Department told OIG that it did not assign specific staff to handle new arrivals staying at the district stations, but it did have to assign additional units to monitor the areas surrounding large City-run shelters throughout the City.

CDA also provided spaces at O'Hare and Midway airports as staging areas for new arrivals awaiting shelter placements. These spaces, which were in unused areas of the airports, needed minimal supplies to prepare for housing people. For example, contractors simply hung drapes on pipes within the staging areas to allow for privacy. CDA Aviation Security Officers provided security over the areas while they were in use.

IV | The City Accurately and Transparently Reported Its Spending on the New Arrivals Mission.

From August 31, 2022, through December 31, 2024, the City spent a combined \$639,654,965 on the new arrivals mission.¹¹ To support the mission, the City received grant funds from various sources, such as asylum seeker grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, state asylum seeker grants, and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grants. While the ARPA grants allowed for flexible use of the funds, most grants were limited to specific purposes.

In executing the new arrivals mission, the City also spent money from its corporate fund, the general appropriation for basic municipal operations and services. This fund principally comprises various local taxes and non-tax revenue, such as license fees and fines for violations of the Municipal Code of Chicago (MCC).

- In May 2023, the City appropriated \$51 million from the corporate fund for “New Arrivals Services.”¹²
- Moving forward, the City’s 2024 Budget included \$150 million for the new arrivals mission from the corporate fund.¹³

¹¹ To capture services provided through December 31, 2024, OIG reviewed City payments made until April 25, 2025.

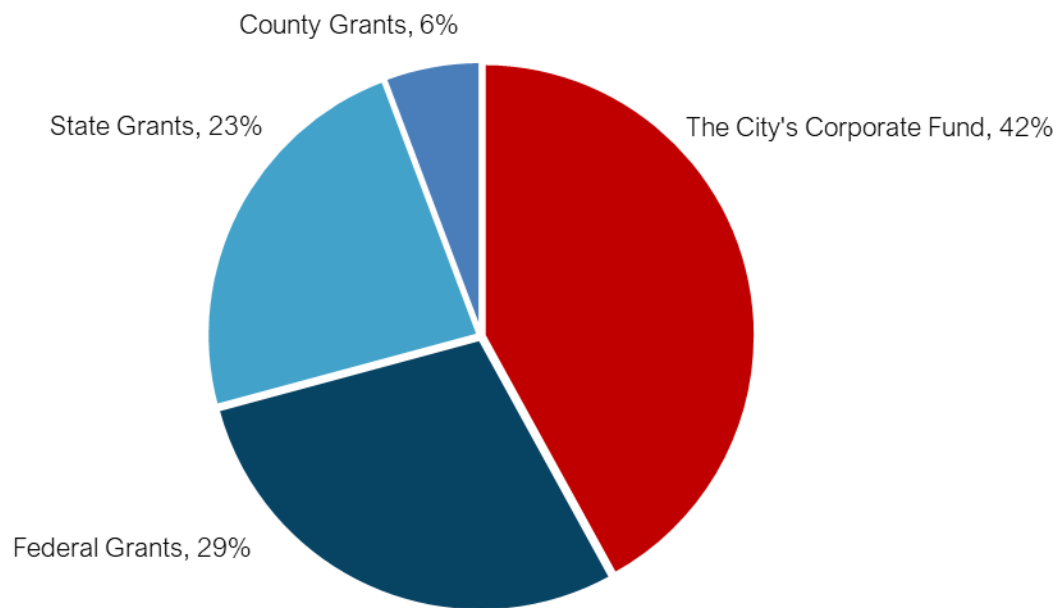
¹² Journal of the Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago, Illinois, June 22, 2023, 484, accessed May 20, 2026, https://chicityclerk.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public-1/reports/2023_05_31_Journal.pdf?VersionId=SWcogqYXl.LgMPPM9I7vV7CMhfn5NRvD.

¹³ City of Chicago OBM, “2024 Budget Ordinance,” 252, December 2023, accessed June 22, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/obm/supp_info/2024Budget/2024_Ordinance_Book_web_TOC.pdf

- Finally, in April 2024, the City appropriated an additional \$70 million, also from the corporate fund, for the mission.¹⁴

In total, the City appropriated \$271 million from the corporate fund to the mission and spent of \$269.1 million of that amount. Figure 8 breaks down mission spending by the source of the funds.

Figure 8: Most of the funding for the new arrivals mission came from federal, state, and county grants.



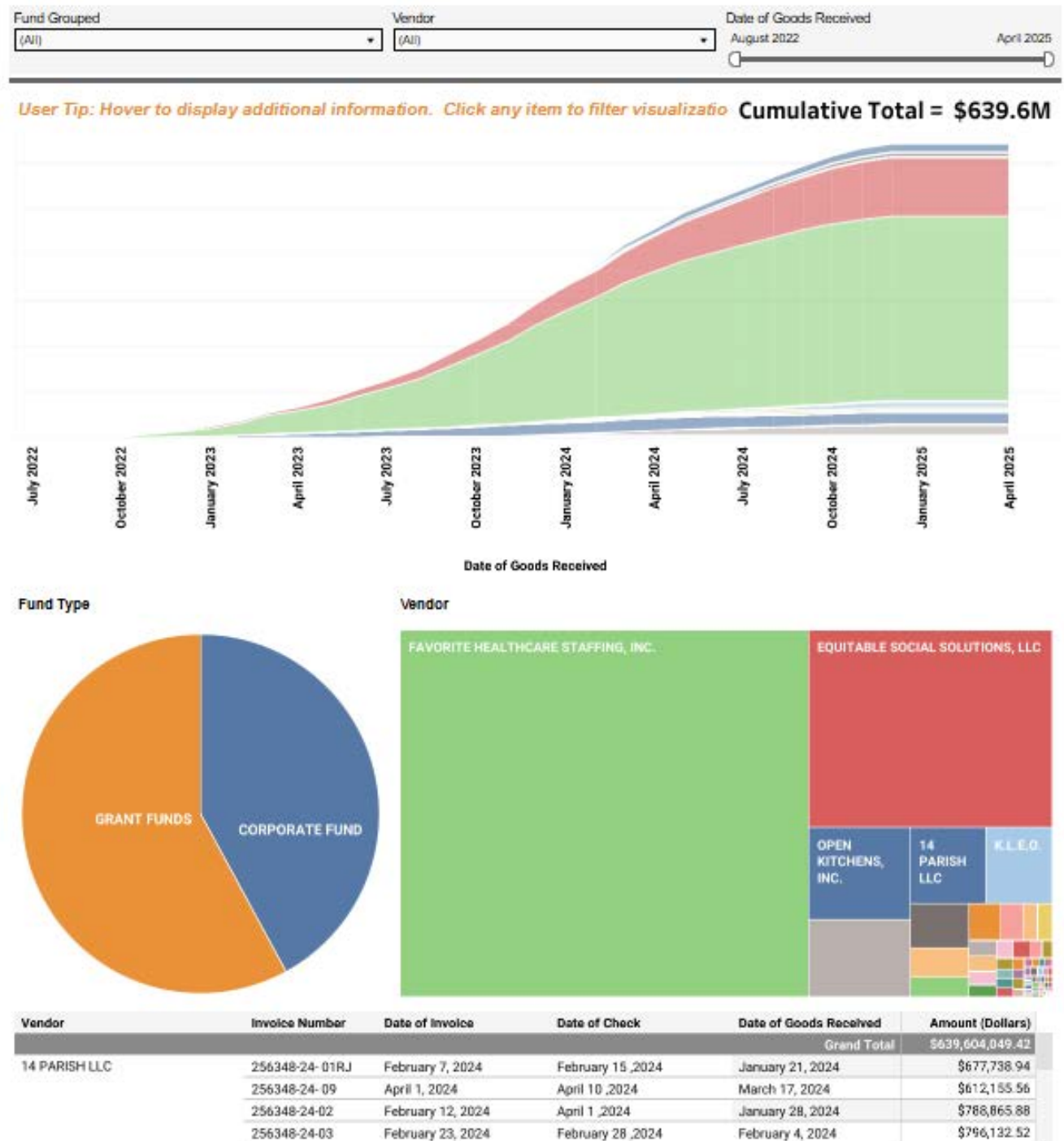
Source: New arrivals spending data from the City's accounting system.

In December 2023, OBM provided public transparency into City spending on the new arrivals mission by publishing a Vendor Payments dashboard.¹⁵ This dashboard reported the cumulative total spent, the total spent by fund type, the total spent by vendor, and discrete line-item payments. It allowed members of the public to examine the data and find answers to questions they might have. For example, one could see on the dashboard that the City used more grant funds than municipal funds to support the mission. One could also see that Favorite Healthcare Staffing, Inc., Equitable Social Solutions, and Open Kitchens were the mission's largest vendors. These entities provided, respectively, staffing at shelters, shelter locations, and meals. Figure 9 is a screenshot of OBM's Vendor Payments dashboard.

¹⁴ Journal of the Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago, Illinois, April 19, 2024, 11491, accessed June 22, 2026, https://chicityclerk.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public-1/reports/2024_04_19%20Journal%20of%20the%20Proceedings.pdf?VersionId=V.EnUZmnwDUReocBgUeXv_vCEBtVZaAn.

¹⁵ City of Chicago Office of Budget and Management, "Vendor Payments – New Arrivals Mission," December 2023, accessed June 22, 2026, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/cost-dashboard.html>.

Figure 9: OBM's Vendor Payments dashboard provided public access to data regarding the City's spending for the new arrivals mission.



Source: Screenshot of OBM's Vendor Payment – New Arrivals Mission dashboard. The screenshot depicts the types of data people could explore.

To verify the City's total spending reported on the Vendor Payments dashboard, OIG compared the reported figures with information in the City's accounting system. Within that system, the City used a general appropriation code and specific project codes to track new arrivals expenditures. OIG

compared the payments in the dashboard to reports generated by the accounting system using those project and appropriation codes. To ensure the dashboard numbers were complete, OIG also searched for potential additional payments not explicitly categorized as for new arrivals by conducting keyword searches for pertinent invoice descriptions and similar funding sources.

OIG found that OBM reported the overwhelming majority of new arrivals spending. OIG did find \$50,916 in transactions involving new arrivals related items that should have been included in the publicly reported total on the dashboard but were not. These transactions involved such items as small supply purchases, children's enrichment activities, and the retention of legal counsel related to new arrivals staying in the airports.

A | The City spent the majority of new arrivals funds on staffing, facilities, and food

For the new arrivals mission, in addition to playing a direct role in operating the shelters, the City also hired vendors to secure locations for the shelters, to staff them, and to provide meals, as well as other services such as laundry and transportation. The City's method of sheltering the new arrivals differed from its typical approach to sheltering the unhoused. In the established shelter system, the City awards grants to non-profit organizations, known as delegate agencies, which operate the shelters and provide all related services. As shown in Figure 10, the City paid \$622.2 million to the top ten vendors for new arrival services.

Figure 10: More than 97% of new arrivals spending went to ten vendors.

Vendor	Service Provided	Dollars
Favorite Healthcare Staffing, Inc.	Staffing	\$400,374,308
Equitable Social Solutions, LLC	Shelter	128,986,340
Open Kitchens, Inc.	Food	24,991,350
Seventy-Seven Communities Meal Services LLC	Food	21,247,149
14 Parish LLC	Food	15,373,458
K.L.E.O. Community Family Life Center	Shelter	13,570,971
Britepath Consulting Inc.	Shelter	6,817,856
Kaizen Health, Inc.	Transportation	4,625,489
Laundry Ops, LLC	Laundry	3,105,364
YMCA Of Metro Chicago	Shelter	3,091,770
Total		\$622,184,055

Source: City's spending on new arrivals from OBM's Vendor Payments – New Arrivals Mission dashboard.

The City used its existing procurement processes to hire new arrivals vendors. Some had existing contracts or relationships with the City, while others had existing contracts with the State of Illinois. As discussed below, Favorite Healthcare Staffing, Inc. (FHS) provided staffing for the state during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the City had previously contracted with Open Kitchens, Inc. to provide food for senior citizens. Some vendors were new to City contracting, such as 14 Parish, LLC, which provided food for new arrivals.

As a general rule, the Department of Procurement Services (DPS) administers Chicago's procurement process. During the new arrivals mission, the City used a combination of competitive

bidding, requests for proposals (RFPs), joint procurements, reference contracts, and independent departmental contracting authority.¹⁶

In competitive bidding, the City selects the vendor that can provide the required goods or services for the lowest cost. In an RFP, the City selects the vendor based on a scoring process that takes into account not only the candidates' abilities to provide the required goods or services, but also other specifically targeted criteria. For example, when selecting food vendors for the new arrivals mission, the City used an RFP to evaluate each candidate's ability to provide culturally appropriate food. In a joint procurement, the City works with another governmental entity to obtain goods or services. Similarly, in a reference contract, the City uses an existing contract held by another governmental entity to obtain goods or services at a price equal to or lower than the terms of that contract. Some City departments also have the authority to enter contracts directly with vendors outside of DPS procedures.

In addition to contracts, the City also used direct vouchers to pay new arrivals vendors. Departments use direct vouchers in limited circumstances to pay for goods or services when there is no active contract in place. For example, departments routinely use direct vouchers to pay for items like utilities or newspaper subscriptions. In other instances, they use direct vouchers to pay for goods or services while the City is in the process of procuring a new contract. In both situations, a department is required either to select an allowable category for the direct voucher from an established list or to provide DPS with supplemental information for direct-voucher approval.

The City also has an emergency procurement option. This approach is available only during bona fide emergencies and is subject to a \$1 million cap imposed by the MCC.¹⁷ On May 9, 2023, Mayor Lightfoot declared an emergency arising from the influx of new arrivals. This declaration expired 15 days later, when Mayor Johnson did not extend it after the completion of the first City Council meeting under his administration on May 24, 2023. According to DPS, the City did not use its emergency procurement power during the new arrivals mission because the spending limit was too low relative to the goods and services needed.

B | OIG reviewed invoices related to new arrivals spending

To verify that the City followed its procurement and invoicing procedures on the new arrivals mission, OIG reviewed a sample of 100 invoices reported on the OBM Cost Dashboard between August 2022 and June 2024. The sample included both randomly selected and targeted invoices. OIG targeted specific invoices based on the dollar amounts, the sources of funds, date of invoice, vendors identified in discussion with departments, and public interest in the transactions. The 100 invoices totaled \$20.4 million in spending. Figure 11 breaks down the sampled invoices.

¹⁶ For a complete list of procurement processes used for City contracting see the DPS website: City of Chicago Department of Procurement Services, "Procurement Fundamentals Resource Guide," October 2023, accessed June 22, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dps/Outreach/Resource%20Guide_ProcurementFundamentals_Aug2023_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁷ Municipal Code of Chicago § 2-92-644, Emergency procurement.

Figure 11: Within OIG’s sample, 73% of spending went to delegate agencies.

Contract type or Vendor	Description of Goods/Services	Sum of Spending within the Sample	Percent of Sample	Number of Invoices
Delegate Agency	Food and shelter	\$14,969,570	73.2%	12
Favorite Healthcare Staffing, Inc	Shelter staff	3,911,760	19.1%	20
Direct Vouchers	Payments for goods or services without a contract	675,690	3.3%	21
Work services and facilities maintenance	Custodial and laundry services, snow plowing, security personnel	359,094	1.8%	31
Property lease	Shelter locations	258,661	1.3%	7
Direct Comptroller – Approval	License agreement, environmental assessment, fencing	180,936	0.9%	5
Commodities	Cables, janitorial supplies, or air conditioners	90,432	0.4%	4
Total		\$20,446,143	100.00%	100

Source: OIG Analysis of city spending in the Financial Management and Purchasing System.

OIG reviewed 20 randomly selected invoices for FHS totaling \$3.9 million. Within the sample, the pay rates matched the contract specifications, and payment of overtime rates properly began only after employees had worked 40 hours.

FHS was the largest single recipient of funds from the new arrivals mission. In total, it received \$400.4 million, 62.6% of the total spending. These payments included \$139.9 million from the City corporate fund, and a combined \$260.5 million from Federal Emergency Management Agency asylum seeker grants, state asylum seeker grants, and American Rescue Plan Act grants.

The City entered a series of reference contracts and joint procurements with FHS. As discussed previously, both contracting methods involve a vendor providing services for another governmental entity. In this case, the City partnered with the State of Illinois. FHS provided surge staffing for the State of Illinois during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of hours worked, and billing rates charged by FHS during new arrivals mission were similar to those worked and charged during the surge staffing event.

Overall, OIG found that 88 of the 100 sampled invoices followed the City’s procurement and invoicing procedures. The remaining 12 totaled \$79,736—only 0.39% of the reviewed spending—and included,

- one work service invoice for \$9,518 for “Covid-19 cleanings” at several libraries, which was not new arrivals related and should not have been classified as new arrivals spending; and

- 11 direct voucher payments approved by DOF despite the fact that the selected category did not accurately identify the nature of the spending. For example, the purchase of tables and chairs for a shelter was categorized as a “festival” expense.

V | Conclusion

The City accurately and transparently reported spending a combined \$639,654,965 from municipal and grant funds on goods and services provided during the new arrivals mission from August 31, 2022, through December 31, 2024. In that period, Chicago received at least 46,282 people from Venezuela and other countries. The City housed the new arrivals across 38 shelters, and at its peak in January 2024 sheltered more than 15,000 people. OIG found that the City’s publicly reported cost dashboard was generally complete. Moreover, review of a sample of 100 invoices totaling \$20.4 million in spending on the mission found that 99.61% followed the City’s procurement and invoicing procedures. Finally, while City departments told OIG that the mission increased their workloads and impacted their facilities, they also characterized the additional work as part of their normal duties in responding to emergency events and providing assistance to people in need.



Matthew Jacobson
Senior Performance Analyst

Karl Heinz
Senior Information Analyst

Amy Dupuis
Performance Analyst

Jessica Franklin
Assistant Inspector General

Kathleen O'Donovan
Chief Performance Analyst

Darwyn Jones
Deputy Inspector General, Audit and
Program Review

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Talk to Us

(833) TALK-2-IG / (833) 825-5244

talk2ig@igchicago.org

igchicago.org/talk2ig

OIG Business Office

(773) 478-7799

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