



## **GENERAL FUND CONTINGENCY AND FUND BALANCE BEST PRACTICES**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Board Policy DBA General Fund Contingency and Reserves requires a minimum fund balance for general fund of 5% of total actual revenues to maintain financial stability, provide an emergency reserve, avoid borrowing to meet cash flow needs, respond to uncertainties of state and federal funding and help ensure a District credit rating that would qualify for lower interest rates.

The Government Finance Officers Association (“GFOA”) recommends that governments maintain an unrestricted fund balance in their general fund of no less than two months of operating revenues or 16.67%. Additionally, GFOA recommends fund balance measures be applied in the context of long term forecasting to avoid the risk of placing too much emphasis on the level of fund balance at any one time.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended the Board discuss the General Fund Contingency and Fund Balance best practices.

**District Goal:** All students will show continuous progress toward their personal learning goals, developed in collaboration with teachers and parents, and will be prepared for post-secondary education and career success.

The Beaverton School District recognizes the diversity and worth of all individuals and groups. It is the policy of the Beaverton School District that there will be no discrimination or harassment of individuals or groups based on race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, marital status, age, veterans' status, genetic information or disability in any educational programs, activities or employment.

## Fund Balance Research Summary

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Fund Balance Range</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)	16.67%	Two months of operating expenses – best practice
Portland Public Schools	3-5%	3% additional PERS reserve fund
Salem-Keizer	5-7%	
Hillsboro	5%	Target – no policy
Denver	15%	Two months of expenditures
Wake County, North Carolina	6%	Funded by county
Seattle	3-5%	Minimum of budgeted expenditures
Washington	5-10%	No state requirement most districts use 5-10%
State of California	3% - 20%	May be changed by governor to 6% cap
Kentucky	Up to 10%	No minimum
Michigan ASBO	15-20%	Years to rebuild: 12.5-15% one year 10-12.5% three years <10% five years
Minnesota ASBO	11%	Current Fund balance of all Minnesota School Districts
Texas Education Agency	16.67%	Considering relaxing 16.67% optimum due to lower funding levels

Note: Many large suburban and countywide districts are not independent local government entities; they report to a city or county, and do not have fund balance policies.

## GENERAL FUND CONTINGENCY AND RESERVES

The Board will require a minimum 5% appropriation<sup>1</sup> for contingency during the budget development process, and the Board directs the Superintendent to manage the adopted budget in such a way as to ensure an ending fund cash balance of at least five (5) percent of total actual revenues. By establishing an appropriation for contingency, the Board is directing the minimum ending fund balance will be at least equal to the amount of the appropriation for contingency.

The contingency appropriation is necessary to:

1. Maintain financial stability for program continuity and public confidence;
2. Ensure budget and financial compliance with Oregon Revised Statutes and Oregon Administrative Rules;
3. Provide an emergency reserve to balance risk of availability and liquidity of resources in other funds as well as the potential drain upon general fund resources; liquidity; and designations. Such factors will be reviewed annually;
4. Protect the District from unnecessary borrowing in order to meet cash-flow needs;
5. Provide prudent reserves to meet unexpected emergencies and protect against catastrophic events;
6. Meet the uncertainties of state and federal funding; and
7. Help ensure a District credit rating that would qualify the District for lower interest costs and greater marketability of bonds that may be necessary in the construction and renovation of school facilities.

During times of emergency or catastrophic events, the Board may approve action to reduce the contingency appropriation. The Board's authority will be limited to the currently adopted budget or a budget for the following fiscal year. Any proposal to reduce the appropriation must include a "recovery plan" that demonstrates the Board and Superintendent's commitment to restore the contingency appropriation.

Prior to the ending fund balance becoming less than projected, staff will notify the Board of the possibility the ending fund balance may fall below the minimum targeted level. The Board will approve any transfers from the appropriation for contingency.

END OF POLICY

Legal References:

ORS 294.331 (18)

OAR 150 — 294.352(8)

ORS 3294.371

ORS 332.107

ORS 294.305 — 294.565

1 The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recommends, at a minimum, that general purpose governments, regardless of size, maintain an unreserved fund balance in their general fund of no less than 5 to 15 percent of regular general fund operating revenues, or of no less than one or two months of regular general fund operating expenditures. The Oregon Association of School Business Officials recommends, at a minimum, an unreserved ending fund balance of no less than 3 to 8 percent of the general fund budget. In general practice, levels of fund balance, typically, are less for larger governments than for smaller governments because of the magnitude of the amounts involved and because the diversification of their revenues and expenditures often results in lower degrees of volatility.



## GFOA Best Practice

### **Determining the Appropriate Level of Unrestricted Fund Balance in the General Fund**

**Background.** Accountants employ the term *fund balance* to describe the net assets of governmental funds calculated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). Budget professionals commonly use this same term to describe the net assets of governmental funds calculated on a government's budgetary basis.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, fund balance is intended to serve as a measure of the financial resources available in a governmental fund.

Accountants distinguish up to five separate categories of fund balance, based on the extent to which the government is bound to honor constraints on the specific purposes for which amounts can be spent: *nonspendable fund balance*, *restricted fund balance*, *committed fund balance*, *assigned fund balance*, and *unassigned fund balance*.<sup>2</sup> The total of the last three categories, which include only resources without a constraint on spending or for which the constraint on spending is imposed by the government itself, is termed *unrestricted fund balance*.

It is essential that governments maintain adequate levels of fund balance to mitigate current and future risks (e.g., revenue shortfalls and unanticipated expenditures) and to ensure stable tax rates. Fund balance levels are a crucial consideration, too, in long-term financial planning.

In most cases, discussions of fund balance will properly focus on a government's general fund. Nonetheless, financial resources available in other funds should also be considered in assessing the adequacy of unrestricted fund balance (i.e., the total of the amounts reported as committed, assigned, and unassigned fund balance) in the general fund.

Credit rating agencies monitor levels of fund balance and unrestricted fund balance in a government's general fund to evaluate a government's continued creditworthiness. Likewise, laws and regulations often govern appropriate levels of fund balance and unrestricted fund balance for state and local governments.

Those interested primarily in a government's creditworthiness or economic condition (e.g., rating agencies) are likely to favor increased levels of fund balance. Opposing pressures often come from unions, taxpayers and citizens' groups, which may view high levels of fund balance as "excessive."

**Recommendation.** GFOA recommends that governments establish a formal policy on the level of unrestricted fund balance that should be maintained in the general fund.<sup>3</sup> Such a guideline should be set by the appropriate policy body and should provide both a temporal framework and specific plans for increasing or decreasing the level of unrestricted fund balance, if it is inconsistent with that policy.<sup>4</sup>

The adequacy of unrestricted fund balance in the general fund should be assessed based upon a government's own specific circumstances. Nevertheless, GFOA recommends, at a minimum, that general-purpose governments, regardless of size, maintain unrestricted fund balance in their general fund of no less than two months of regular general fund operating revenues or regular general fund operating expenditures.<sup>5</sup> The choice of revenues or expenditures as a basis of comparison may be dictated by what is more predictable in a government's particular circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a government's particular situation often may require a level of unrestricted fund balance in the general fund significantly in excess of this recommended minimum level. In any case, such measures should be applied within the context of long-term forecasting, thereby avoiding the risk of placing too much emphasis upon the level of unrestricted fund balance in the general fund at any one time.

In establishing a policy governing the level of unrestricted fund balance in the general fund, a government should consider a variety of factors, including:

- The predictability of its revenues and the volatility of its expenditures (i.e., higher levels of unrestricted fund balance may be needed if significant revenue sources are subject to unpredictable fluctuations or if operating expenditures are highly volatile);
- Its perceived exposure to significant one-time outlays (e.g., disasters, immediate capital needs, state budget cuts);
- The potential drain upon general fund resources from other funds as well as the availability of resources in other funds (i.e., deficits in other funds may require that a higher level of unrestricted fund balance be maintained in the general fund, just as, the availability of resources in other funds may reduce the amount of unrestricted fund balance needed in the general fund);<sup>7</sup>
- Liquidity (i.e., a disparity between when financial resources actually become available to make payments and the average maturity of related liabilities may require that a higher level of resources be maintained); and
- Commitments and assignments (i.e., governments may wish to maintain higher levels of unrestricted fund balance to compensate for any portion of unrestricted fund balance already committed or assigned by the government for a specific purpose).

Furthermore, governments may deem it appropriate to exclude from consideration resources that have been committed or assigned to some other purpose and focus on unassigned fund balance rather than on unrestricted fund balance.

Naturally, any policy addressing desirable levels of unrestricted fund balance in the general fund should be in conformity with all applicable legal and regulatory

constraints. In this case in particular, it is essential that differences between GAAP fund balance and budgetary fund balance be fully appreciated by all interested parties.

**Notes:**

- 1 For the sake of clarity, this recommended practice uses the terms GAAP fund balance and budgetary fund balance to distinguish these two different uses of the same term.
- 2 These categories are set forth in Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Statement No. 54, *Fund Balance Reporting and Governmental Fund Type Definitions*, which must be implemented for financial statements for periods ended June 30, 2011 and later.
- 3 Sometimes restricted fund balance includes resources available to finance items that typically would require the use of unrestricted fund balance (e.g., a contingency reserve). In that case, such amounts should be included as part of unrestricted fund balance for purposes of analysis.
- 4 See Recommended Practice 4.1 of the National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting governments on the need to "maintain a prudent level of financial resources to protect against reducing service levels or raising taxes and fees because of temporary revenue shortfalls or unpredicted one-time expenditures" (Recommended Practice 4.1).
- 5 In practice, a level of unrestricted fund balance significantly lower than the recommended minimum may be appropriate for states and America's largest governments (e.g., cities, counties, and school districts) because they often are in a better position to predict contingencies (for the same reason that an insurance company can more readily predict the number of accidents for a pool of 500,000 drivers than for a pool of fifty), and because their revenues and expenditures often are more diversified and thus potentially less subject to volatility.
- 6 In either case, unusual items that would distort trends (e.g., one-time revenues and expenditures) should be excluded, whereas recurring transfers should be included. Once the decision has been made to compare unrestricted fund balance to either revenues or expenditures, that decision should be followed consistently from period to period.
- 7 However, except as discussed in footnote 4, not to a level below the recommended minimum.

*Approved by the GFOA's Executive Board, October, 2009.*