



Office of the City Manager

CONSENT CALENDAR  
May 20, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager  
Submitted by: Jennifer Louis, Chief of Police  
Subject: Contract No. 32400003 Amendment: Cooke & Associates Background Investigations

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute a contract amendment with Cooke & Associates, a background investigation services provider for public safety personnel, to increase the contract amount by \$280,000 to a total contract of \$580,000 and extend the contract term for two additional years expiring on July 31, 2028. This amendment will allow the Berkeley Police Department (BPD) and Berkeley Fire Department (BFD) to continue utilizing Cooke & Associates for timely, thorough, and high-quality background investigations of candidates, and will provide the City Manager with the authority to spend funds as needed under the amended contract to support ongoing public safety hiring needs.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Funds for this contract in FY 2025 are allocated in the following budget codes:

- Berkeley Police Department special fund: 126-71-702-805-0000-000-421-612990
- Berkeley Fire Department: Measure FF 164-72-742-831-0000-000-422-612990

The amendment includes \$160,000 for BPD and \$120,000 for BFD.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The ability to conduct background investigations quickly and thoroughly is critical for filling vacancies in public safety positions. Delays in hiring lead to extended vacancies, increased workload on current staff, and reduced service capacity. Cooke & Associates has consistently delivered high-quality, efficient investigations that support timely hiring decisions.

Both BPD and BFD continue to experience staffing shortages and face a competitive hiring landscape. The existing contract with Cooke & Associates has enabled both departments to process more applicants, particularly for urgent roles such as police

officers, dispatchers, and firefighter/paramedics. This ensures we are able to identify and select the most qualified candidates.

The original contract with Cooke & Associates, which began on May 15, 2023, was approved for \$50,000 and set to expire on May 15, 2025. In August 2023, the contract was amended to increase the not-to-exceed amount to \$300,000 and extend the term through July 31, 2026. As of today, a total of \$261,865.11 has been spent by BPD and BFD under this contract.

While acknowledging that there is a hiring freeze in place, there will continue to be needs for police and fire hiring, and positions will be assessed by public safety and city manager staff for case specific decisions. Due to the success of the partnership and ongoing hiring needs, BPD is requesting authority to spend up to an additional \$160,000 and BFD is requesting an additional \$120,000 to continue utilizing Cooke & Associates' services.

#### BACKGROUND

Cooke & Associates has been a trusted vendor for the City of Berkeley, providing detailed, timely, and POST-compliant background investigations. They have demonstrated strong communication, flexibility, and responsiveness to department needs, especially during high-volume recruitment periods.

Their services have helped both BPD and BFD avoid delays in academy enrollments and onboarding processes. The proposed amendment will ensure continued support at a time when public safety vacancy rates for the Berkeley Police Department are at 17.7% for sworn staff. For the Berkeley Fire Department, vacancies for firefighters are at approximately 12%.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

No identifiable environmental effects or opportunities are associated with this report's subject.

#### RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Cooke & Associates has a proven track record with the City of Berkeley. Their investigative work supports effective public safety hiring by ensuring thorough vetting of candidates. The additional funding will support ongoing hiring efforts and help the City meet current and future staffing demands.

#### ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

Relying solely on internal staff for all background investigations would extend hiring timelines and reduce capacity during peak hiring periods. Additionally, current staffing levels would require much of this internal work to be done on an overtime basis, making outsourcing this work the more fiscally responsible approach.

Contract: Cooke & Associates Background Investigations

Consent Calendar  
May 20, 2025

CONTACT PERSON

Melanie Turner, Lieutenant, Berkeley Police Department, 510-981-5970

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution
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**RESOLUTION NO. ##,### N.S.**

**CONTRACT AMENDMENT: COOKE & ASSOCIATES FOR BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION SERVICES FOR PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL**

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley continues to face critical public safety staffing needs; and

WHEREAS, timely and comprehensive background investigations are essential to hiring qualified personnel in law enforcement and fire services; and

WHEREAS, Cooke & Associates has provided the City of Berkeley with professional and reliable background investigation services that meet POST standards; and

WHEREAS, the City's existing contract with Cooke & Associates needs to be amended to provide additional funding to support continued services for the Berkeley Police Department and Berkeley Fire Department; and

WHEREAS, funds for this contract amendment have been allocated in the following budget codes:

- Berkeley Police Department special fund: 126-71-702-805-0000-000-421-612990
- Berkeley Fire Department: Measure FF 164-72-742-831-0000-000-422-612990

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the City Manager is hereby authorized to execute an amendment to the existing contract with Cooke & Associates for background investigation services, increasing the contract by \$280,000, for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$580,000 and extend the contract term for two additional years to July 31, 2028.