



Empower Oakland 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

Empower Oakland is a movement fueled by Oakland residents who recognize that “business as usual politics” will only further perpetuate Oakland’s downward spiral. We believe in empowering Oaklanders to amplify their collective voices for greater political impact and influence.

All submissions will be published on empoweroakland.com to educate Oakland voters and will be unedited for spelling and grammar. Empower Oakland will also use candidate submissions to help inform their Candidate Endorsement process. Candidates may be asked to interview in-person with the Empower Oakland Endorsement Committee. Final endorsement decisions will be made by early September.

Please email the completed questionnaire as a .docx or .pdf document to info@empoweroakland.com. Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.

Candidate Name: Baba Afolabi

Email: Babafordistrict3@gmail.com

Phone Number: +1(415) 936-3299

Office & District Sought: District 3 Council Representative

Campaign Website: <https://babafordistrict3.com/>

Social Media Handles

- Twitter: <https://x.com/BabaAfolabi4D3>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/babaafolabi>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/babafordistrict3/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/babaafolabi/>
- TikTok:

Expected total Fundraising Amount: \$50,000

Funds Raised To Date: \$5,000

General Questions

- What is your background/experience in Oakland?

I am a dedicated entrepreneur with an MBA in Leadership Management, and I have called Oakland home since the late '90s when I immigrated here from Nigeria. Over the years, I have successfully managed retail teams, founded three businesses that have created over 80 jobs, and played a pivotal role in revitalizing downtown Oakland after the 2008 financial crisis. My commitment to the community extends beyond business—I've worked to relocate a soccer team to West Oakland, organized the annual African festival Umoja, and launched pop-up shops and businesses that have brought new energy to our neighborhoods.



My experiences have deepened my connection to Oakland, particularly District 3, where I have seen both the challenges and opportunities we face. I am passionate about making our district the economic heart of Oakland, and I am committed to creating a thriving, safe, and sustainable community for all. Now, I am running for City Council to bring pragmatic, solution-driven leadership to District 3, and I am eager to work alongside you to achieve this vision. Together, we can build a stronger, more prosperous Oakland.

- **What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?**

The top two challenges facing Oakland today are the housing crisis and financial instability.

Housing Issues in Oakland:

Oakland is facing a severe housing crisis, characterized by rising housing costs, high rent burdens, and a growing homelessness issue. The rapid increase in housing prices has led to gentrification and the displacement of long-term residents and low-income families. Many renters are burdened by high rents, spending over 30% of their income on housing, which limits their ability to afford other essential expenses. The homelessness crisis has escalated, with many individuals living in encampments due to insufficient affordable housing and support services. Historical zoning laws and land use policies have further limited the construction of housing, complicating efforts to increase the housing supply. Additionally, city officials' responses to homelessness have inadvertently attracted individuals from other regions, worsening the situation. Addressing this crisis is crucial for Oakland's long-term social and economic health.

Financial Shortfalls in Oakland:

Oakland's financial stability is under strain due to recurring budget deficits, inconsistent revenue streams, and leadership challenges. The city has struggled to balance its budget while maintaining essential services, as rising costs and slow revenue growth have led to persistent deficits. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, reducing tax revenues and putting additional pressure on the city's finances. Economic disparities, coupled with safety concerns, have led to a decline in revenue, while increasing demands for public services, particularly due to rampant homelessness, have further strained the budget. The lack of direct support for small businesses has resulted in vacancies and closures in our commercial corridors, compounding the city's financial challenges. Tackling these financial issues is crucial for ensuring Oakland's long-term fiscal health and resilience.

Oakland's Bright Spots

As someone who has had the pleasure of calling this incredible city home, I strongly believe that Oakland's brightest spots are its small businesses. These businesses are the heart of Oakland. Beyond creating a sense of community, they provide financial stability and keep the city running.



As a business owner myself, I've witnessed firsthand the impact small businesses can have, especially here in the heart of the East Bay. It's no secret that these vital establishments, which are crucial to Oakland's economic growth, are facing significant challenges. Yet, despite the hardships—whether it's vandalism, unemployment, or a lack of city support—resilient business owners continue to fight.

This resilience reflects the spirit that lives on within every Oakland resident, especially those who operate small businesses.

As a candidate for City Council, I am committed to addressing these critical issues with pragmatic, solution-driven leadership, focused on creating a sustainable future for Oakland.

- **Why are you running for office and why are you uniquely qualified to fulfill the office you are running for at this time?**

I am a father, small business owner, and community member who believes we need to change our approach to safety, support small businesses, rethink affordable housing, and strive for a clean environment. These initiatives can only succeed when we collectively believe in what's possible as a community. I am not a politician; I am a community member ready to step up. As a business owner, I have invested in our community by building multiple businesses and creating over 80 jobs in the last 10 years. My focus is to bring balance and help foster sustainable change we can all be proud of, giving the next generation a better city to look forward to. I have lived in and been a part of the Oakland community long enough to truly understand the challenges we face.

My decision to run came shortly after I had to close down another business, Mushin Lounge, due to a lack of support from the city. Seeing the profound effect this decision had on my staff and the safe space the business created brought to light a problem that needs solving. The decision to close down came after a series of issues that can be directly linked to the challenges everyday Oaklanders face: safety and security, small business sustainability, affordable housing, and a clean environment. These issues are at the heart of the actions we must take to move forward. Oakland is my home, and I am here to stay. I believe in creating a community that my children can be proud of. I am running because I believe in Oakland and all its potential. I am running because now is the time for me to give back to the community that has given me so much.

- **Prior to running for office, how were you involved in local government and/or your community? What were your biggest accomplishments?**



Before running for office, I was deeply involved in several grassroots projects and community initiatives in Oakland. I played a key role in supporting minority-owned businesses through projects like “In the Black,” which aimed to boost the local economy by promoting these businesses. I also helped to create and manage pop-up shops in Old Oakland and the Cathedral Building, which provided platforms for local entrepreneurs to showcase their products and grow their businesses.

In addition to my work with small businesses, I organized community events such as First Friday art shows and performances, often featuring local students from Oakland School for the Arts. These events not only highlighted Oakland’s creative talent but also fostered a sense of community and cultural pride.

My involvement extended to mentoring young entrepreneurs, helping them navigate the challenges of starting and sustaining businesses in Oakland. Through these projects and initiatives, I built strong relationships within the community and developed a deep understanding of the issues we face, which ultimately led me to run for office to make a broader impact.

Oakland City Council

- **What specific and measurable improvements in public safety will you deliver for Oaklanders in 2 years? 4 years? Please describe how you plan to deliver these public safety improvements.** As part of your response, please:
 - a. Summarize what existing public safety investments you might increase, reduce or eliminate to ensure adequate resources for you to meet your goal.
 - b. Discuss your perspectives on:
 - i. The effectiveness of Oakland’s non-sworn responses to public safety issues. Which ones (if any) are successful and should be continued? Which ones (if any) are not successful and should be discontinued?
 - ii. The appropriate staffing level of sworn police officers for the city of Oakland (provide a specific number of officers you would like to see in place by December 2028).
 - iii. Your prioritized strategies for addressing various types of crime, including gun violence, retail robbery, bipping, residential burglary, traffic violence, and any others.
 - c. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

- **What specific and measurable improvements in Oakland’s homelessness and housing affordability crisis will you deliver for Oaklanders in 2 years? 4 years? How do you plan to deliver these homelessness and housing affordability wins for Oakland?** As part of your response, please:



- a. Describe the biggest problems our city faces that keep us from solving the housing crisis.
 - b. Summarize what homelessness/housing investments you might advance, reduce, or eliminate to ensure adequate resources are available to meet the goals you stated above. What trade-offs might need to be considered in distributing resources between different solutions?
 - c. Discuss your perspectives on:
 - i. The respective roles of affordable (below-market-rate) housing and market-rate housing
 - ii. The City's Housing Element and proposed zoning reforms
 - iii. Oakland's Encampment Management Policy, implementation of it to date, and improvements needed moving forward
 - iv. The City/County's approach to mental health and substance abuse treatment
 - d. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?
- **What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver with respect to Oakland's public infrastructure in 2 years? 4 years? How do you plan to deliver these improvements?** As part of your response, please:
 - a. Summarize the biggest problem(s) Oakland faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable).

2-Year Goals: I hope to collaborate with my fellow council members to prioritize the following;

1. **Street and Sidewalk Repairs:** Ensure that 70 to 80% of the most deteriorated streets and sidewalks are repaired, with a focus on high-traffic areas and historically underserved neighborhoods. My goal is to address these issues effectively 7 to 8 times out of 10, ensuring that residents can see and feel the impact of the work being done in their communities.
2. **Street Lighting and Safety Enhancements:** Increase street lighting by 20% in all areas as it seems every corner of our city is filled with high crime rates. This is an effort to improve public safety and reduce accidents.
3. **Blight Reduction and Cleanliness:** Implement a citywide initiative to reduce illegal dumping and blight by 45%, focusing on waste management and community-led cleanups throwing more sports to organizations such as Oakland beautification and Oak Central.

4-Year Goals:



1. **Public Transit Improvements:** Partner with AC Transit and regional agencies to enhance bus routes, aiming to reduce wait times by 15-25% and boost rider satisfaction. I will also propose introducing a centralized scheduling system for all transit services operating in Oakland. This system would ensure seamless transitions between different transportation providers, creating a more consistent and efficient experience for riders across the city.
2. **Affordable Housing and Homelessness Solutions:** Build or preserve 500 units of affordable housing and establish at least 200 supportive housing units for the homeless, integrating them into mixed-use developments.
3. **Cleanliness as a culture:** Make cleanliness a priority and turn into a cultural phenomenon model after Chicago downtown and Tokyo Japan. Introduce more urban tree-planting initiatives, particularly in areas with poor air quality, while enhancing blight management programs.

Key Problems:

1. **Aging Infrastructure:** Much of Oakland's infrastructure is outdated, leading to unsafe streets, inadequate public transit, and poor housing conditions.
2. **Homelessness and Housing Crisis:** The lack of affordable housing and growing homelessness put additional pressure on public spaces and services.
3. **Economic Inequities:** Disparities in investment across neighborhoods have left underserved areas without the basic infrastructure needed for growth.
4. **Struggling Small Businesses:** High crime rates, among other challenges, have severely impacted our small business community. Many have not fully recovered since the pandemic, compounded by the failures and inadequacies of the current city government over the past few years.

Solutions and Trade-offs:

1. **Balanced Investment:** Focus on equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that underserved communities receive their fair share of improvements. This may require reallocating funds from other projects. Heavily focused on Downtown so as to help revitalize the other section of our city.
2. **Short-Term Disruption for Long-Term Gain:** Some infrastructure projects may cause temporary inconveniences, such as road closures or construction delays. These disruptions are necessary to achieve long-term benefits.
3. **Collaboration Over Competition:** Encourage citywide collaboration among departments and agencies to streamline project delivery. This may involve trade-offs in how funding is prioritized across different initiatives.
4. **Support Small Businesses:** Implement targeted programs to assist and sustain small businesses facing challenges, particularly downtown Oakland. This includes offering financial assistance, such as grants or low-interest loans, and providing resources for business development and marketing. Additionally, I will work to simplify the permitting



process, making it easier for businesses to open and operate. By fostering stronger partnerships between local government, community organizations, and entrepreneurs, we can help stabilize small businesses in Oakland.

Plan to Deliver These Improvements

- **Data-Driven Prioritization:** Use data to identify the highest-need areas for street repairs, lighting upgrades, and infrastructure investments. This approach ensures that resources are directed where they'll have the most impact.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with local businesses, nonprofits, and regional agencies to pool resources, secure additional funding, and leverage expertise for more efficient project delivery.
- **Community Engagement and Accountability:** Regularly engage residents through town halls, surveys, and advisory committees to ensure their voices guide infrastructure decisions. Establish clear benchmarks and report progress publicly to maintain accountability.
- **Smart Budgeting and Resource Allocation:** Prioritize long-term financial planning and redirect funds from inefficient programs to critical infrastructure needs. Explore new funding sources, such as bonds or grants, to cover large-scale projects.
 - a. Discuss any specific improvements you expect to make during your 4-year term related to:
 - i. Blight, Litter and Dumping

During my 4-year term, I plan to implement the following specific improvements to address blight, litter, and illegal dumping:

- **Increase Clean-Up Efforts and Community Engagement:** Launch targeted clean-up initiatives like a quarterly district wide clean up campaign called Operation Sweep where all streets and roads are closed for one Saturday or Sunday from 7am to 10am for all members of our community to just focus on cleaning their surroundings. The goal with this is to help create a culture of cleanliness. In addition, partnering with community groups and volunteers to regularly address blight and litter. Establish community-led "Adopt-a-Block" programs that empower residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods in District 3.
- **Expand Enforcement and Penalties for Illegal Dumping:** Strengthen enforcement by increasing fines and penalties for illegal dumping while deploying more surveillance cameras in dumping hotspots. Collaborate with local law enforcement and community reporting systems to identify and prosecute repeat offenders.
- **Subsidize Dumping Fees:** To combat illegal dumping, I will propose subsidizing dumping fees for low-income residents and small businesses. By making it more



affordable to dispose of large items and waste properly, we can reduce the incentive to dump illegally.

- **Improve Waste Management Services:** Work with waste management providers to enhance trash collection services in underserved neighborhoods and establish more accessible disposal sites for bulk waste. Introduce scheduled bulk waste pick-up days to prevent illegal dumping.
- **Increase Funding for Blight Reduction and Beautification Projects:** Secure additional funding for projects focused on revitalizing blighted areas through public art, green spaces, and urban renewal initiatives. Support grants for small businesses and property owners to upgrade their storefronts and reduce neighborhood blight.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch educational campaigns to inform residents about proper waste disposal and the harmful impacts of illegal dumping on the community. Encourage civic pride and involvement in keeping neighborhoods clean.
 - i. Road repair & repaving
 - ii. Bike/pedestrian safety and public transportation
 - iii. Streetscape improvements (trees, parklets, etc)
 - iv. Stormwater management
- b. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

My experience as an entrepreneur, community member and a father uniquely positions me to deliver on these goals for Oakland. Over the years, I have built and scaled businesses in Oakland while navigating challenges similar to those faced by many residents and business owners today. My work as a mentor and business leader has also allowed me to help others overcome hurdles and achieve success in this city.

- **Please describe how you plan to address Oakland's immediate fiscal budget crisis AND long-term structural budget deficit. What specific and measurable improvements will you deliver in 2 years? 4 years?** As part of your response, please:
 - a. Summarize the largest contributors to Oakland's budget challenges and your understanding of why previous Councils/Mayoral administrations have not solved the issue(s).
 - b.
 - c. Describe how you will reduce expenses (including cuts you would make to specific programs) that will free up resources that can be allocated toward addressing other budget priorities.
 - d. Describe how you will increase revenues to fund much-needed services, avoid painful cuts, invest in the city's future growth, and address the structural deficit.
 - e. Discuss your perspectives on:



- i. Major sources of general fund revenues, and any recent trends or changes

Ans: The general fund relies heavily on sales taxes, property taxes, and utility taxes. Recent trends show volatility in sales tax revenues and a need to stabilize property tax income.

- ii. Major general fund expenditures, and any recent trends or changes

Ans: Major expenditures include public safety, employee salaries and benefits, and infrastructure maintenance. Rising costs in these areas have strained the budget.

- iii. Unfunded liabilities, including pensions and deferred maintenance, and any recent trends or changes:

Ans: Pensions and deferred maintenance represent significant long-term liabilities. Recent trends indicate growing pension obligations and increasing maintenance backlogs.

- f. Describe how you will maintain objectivity despite pressure and specific budget asks by the groups and organizations that have endorsed you.

Ans: To maintain objectivity, I will:

- **Adopt Transparent Processes: Ensure all budget decisions are made transparently and based on data-driven analysis rather than political pressure.**
- **Engage in Open Dialogue: Regularly communicate with stakeholders, including those who have endorsed me, to explain the rationale behind budget decisions and seek input.**
- **Prioritize City-Wide Benefits: Focus on policies and budget allocations that benefit the city as a whole, rather than yielding to specific group demands.**

- a. Describe the experience(s) from your past that should give Oaklanders confidence you can deliver on these goals?

Ans: My experience in operations management and strategic planning equips me to handle complex budget challenges effectively. I have a proven track record of optimizing resources, securing funding, and implementing sustainable business practices. As a business owner and mentor, I have navigated financial constraints and achieved growth through disciplined planning and innovative solutions. This background gives Oaklanders confidence in my ability to deliver on these financial goals and ensure a stable fiscal future for our city.



- **Please describe what you plan to do differently from business-as-usual in city hall to ensure effective, efficient, transparent, and accountable governance in Oakland.**

As part of your response, please:

- a. Describe in what ways the City of Oakland is meeting and/or not meeting your definition of good government.

Ans: **Meeting the Definition of Good Government:**

Community Engagement: Oakland has made efforts to engage with residents through public forums and advisory committees.

Dedicated Public Servants: Many city employees are committed and work diligently to serve the community.

Community Committees: Many residents actively serve as commissioners and advisors across various segments of community engagement, contributing their expertise and perspectives to city governance.

Not Meeting the Definition of Good Government:

- **Lack of Transparency:** There is often limited visibility into decision-making processes, budget allocations, and performance outcomes.
- **Inefficiencies and Bureaucracy:** The current system can be slow and cumbersome, with bureaucratic hurdles hindering timely service delivery and project execution.
- **Inconsistent Oversight:** There is a perceived lack of rigorous oversight in contracting and grant-making, leading to concerns about accountability and effectiveness.

- b. Summarize what changes you would make in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of city governance and increase transparency.

Ans: **2. Proposed Changes for Improvement:**

Enhanced Transparency:

- **Open Data Initiatives:** Implement a comprehensive open data platform that allows residents to access real-time information on city budgets, expenditures, contracts, and performance metrics. This platform would provide clear visibility into how public funds are being used and the outcomes achieved.
- **Regular Reporting and Communication:** Establish regular, accessible reports and updates on key city projects, financial performance, and policy decisions. This includes monthly briefings and public dashboards to keep residents informed and engaged.
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- a. Answer how Oakland City Council can provide greater oversight and public accountability in contracting, grant-making, and outcomes/performance management.
- **For incumbents:** What is a vote you're MOST and LEAST proud of in the last four years. Briefly describe the issue, why you voted the way you did, and what you think now about that vote.
 - **For new candidates:** What was the most impactful Council vote in the past four years? Briefly describe the issue, what you think of the Council's decision, and what you would have done had you been on the Council.

Ans: One of the most impactful Council votes in the past four years was the decision on Measure U, which approved the allocation of \$200 million in emergency funding to address the city's homelessness crisis. This measure was significant as it directed substantial resources towards immediate relief efforts, including emergency shelters, supportive housing, and services for homeless individuals.

Council's Decision: The Council's decision to approve Measure U demonstrated a commitment to tackling the urgent issue of homelessness. The allocation of funds aimed to provide immediate relief and support to those in need, reflecting a responsive approach to a critical problem.

What I Would Have Done Differently: Had I been on the Council, I would have advocated for a more comprehensive and strategic plan alongside the emergency funding. This would include:

- **Long-Term Solutions:** Ensuring that the funding not only addresses immediate needs but also contributes to long-term solutions that will return some of that money back to us such as funding small businesses that hire unhouse individuals, job training programs, and mental health housing and services for chronically ill individual that are roaming the street now.
- **Performance Metrics:** Establishing clear performance metrics and accountability measures to track the effectiveness of the funding and ensure that resources are used efficiently and transparently. And ensure funds are disbursed based on effectiveness.
- **Community Input:** Engaging with residents, particularly those directly affected by homelessness, to gather input and tailor solutions to meet the specific needs of the community.



- **What are the major challenges faced by Oakland businesses? What specific steps will you take to ensure that Oakland businesses can thrive and are able to create more jobs and improve the Oakland economy?**

Ans: Major Challenges Faced by Oakland Businesses:

1. **High Crime Rates:** Businesses in Oakland are often affected by crime, including vandalism and theft, which deter investment, customers and disrupt operations. I was a victim of this issue.
2. **High Operating Costs:** Rising costs for rent, utilities, and wages can strain small businesses, particularly those in underserved neighborhoods and downtown corridors.
3. **Regulatory Burdens:** Complex and often burdensome regulatory requirements can be challenging for businesses to navigate, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
4. **Access to Capital:** Limited access to financing and investment opportunities can restrict business growth and expansion.
5. **Infrastructure Issues:** Poor infrastructure and maintenance, including inadequate transportation and public services, can impact business operations and customer access and staff.

Steps to Support and Empower Oakland Businesses:

1. **Enhance Public Safety:**
 - **Increase Police Presence:** Collaborate with local law enforcement to improve safety in commercial areas through increased patrols and community policing.
 - **Crime Prevention Unit:** Support and fund crime prevention unit to be stationed in downtown to monitor and prevent crimes.
2. **Reduce Operating Costs:**
 - **Rent Assistance Programs:** Develop programs to provide rent subsidies or negotiate long-term leases at reduced rates for small businesses in high-rent areas.
 - **Utility Discounts:** Explore options for discounts or incentives on utility costs for small retail businesses in our downtown, and those in economically disadvantaged areas.
3. **Streamline Regulations:**
 - **Simplify Permitting Processes:** Work to reduce bureaucratic red tape by streamlining and simplifying the permitting and licensing processes for businesses.
 - **Regulatory Support:** Provide resources and guidance to help businesses understand and comply with regulations, including offering workshops and one-on-one assistance.
4. **Improve Access to Capital:**



- **Small Business Grants and Loans:** Increase the availability of grants and low-interest loans specifically targeted at brick & mortar businesses across districts but start with district 3 first. .
 - **Partnerships with Financial Institutions:** Collaborate with banks and investment organizations to create programs that facilitate access to capital for local entrepreneurs.
 - **Small Business Retention Fund:** Explore redirecting funds from business license fees, sales tax, Oakland's progressive business tax*, and impact fees to support this initiative. Additionally, encourage public donations, grants, philanthropy, and private funds to enhance financial support. This multi-faceted approach can provide a robust funding structure, ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the program. By leveraging diverse funding sources, we can create a well-rounded and resilient financial foundation for the initiative's success. By incorporating these strategies, we can establish a sustainable funding program that offers essential support to businesses in District 3, bolstering the economic strength and resilience of the community. Through collaboration and engagement with stakeholders, we can ensure that the program effectively meets the needs of businesses and fosters a thriving business ecosystem in Oakland.
5. **Upgrade Infrastructure:**
- **Invest in Public Spaces:** Enhance infrastructure around business districts, including improving roads, sidewalks, and public transit to make commercial areas more accessible.
 - **Support Transportation Solutions:** Work with transportation agencies to improve public transit routes and connectivity to key business areas.
6. **Foster Economic Development:**
- **Business Incubators and Accelerators:** Support the creation and expansion of business incubators and accelerators to nurture startups and small businesses.
 - **Networking and Mentorship Programs:** Facilitate networking opportunities and mentorship programs to connect local businesses with experienced mentors and industry experts.
7. **Promote Local Business Initiatives:**
- **Buy Local Campaigns:** Launch campaigns to encourage residents and other businesses to buy locally and support Oakland-based companies.
 - **Events and Promotions:** Organize events, such as street fairs and market days, to promote local businesses and attract customers.
- **There are important ballot measures that are up for vote in November. How would you vote on the following and why?**
 - a. Would you vote to Recall District Attorney Pamela Price? (NO)
 - b. Would you vote to Recall Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao? (YES)
 - c. Would you vote to pass the Oakland Measure Z renewal? (YES)



d. Would you vote to pass California Prop 36 (makes changes to Prop 47)? (YES)