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NEW YORK CITY HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION

Improving the process of applying for supplemental food assistance

The New York City Human Resources Administration (NYC HRA) is the largest social services agency in the US. It helps more than three million New Yorkers through over 12 major public assistance programs, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Adult Protective Services (APS), Domestic Violence Services and housing assistance including Emergency Rental Assistance. The agency has more than 14,000 employees, and its annual operating budget for 2016 was USD 9.7 billion.

Business challenge

The New York City Human Resources Administration (NYC HRA) wanted to cut costs and improve service by enabling citizens to apply for benefits and services using mobile and online technology.

Transformation

NYC HRA upgraded its existing Cúram platform and made it available on multiple channels, including self-service kiosks in 15 offices throughout the city. The new platform supports seven languages and special services for the visually impaired, and it guides users through the application process.

Lauren Aaronson
Former Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Business Process Innovation, New York City Human Resources Administration

Business benefits

- Shifts the channel to digital making it possible to improve service delivery despite an increase in applications
- Improves customer service with a straightforward user interface that walks applicants through the process
- Increases access to benefits by providing information in seven languages and offering access in SNAP offices

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Lauren Aaronson, Former Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Business Process Innovation, New York City Human Resources Administration

Simplifying service delivery

In 2008, NYC HRA began seeking ways to improve service delivery while dealing with increased caseloads. NYC HRA was looking for ways to reduce spending without decreasing the availability or quality of its services.After considering several options, NYC HRA determined that investing capital in benefit and service delivery would decrease the overall cost of doing business while improving customer experiences and outcomes. To that end, the department proposed building out its screening tool, ACCESS NYC, in a way that would change its service delivery model from one that required multiple in-person visits to one that allowed citizens to apply for and manage benefits and services from multiple channels.

“These days, people perform the majority of their business at arm’s length, and there is an expectation that social services should be deliv-ered in that manner too,” explains Lauren Aaronson, assistant deputy commissioner of business process innovation at NYC HRA.

The ACCESS NYC website is based on Cúram software. First launched in 2006, the solution and its implementation drew many accolades, including the 2007 Prize for Public Service Innovation from the New York Citizens Budget Commission and the 2007 Best of New York Award for Best IT Collaboration Among Agencies from the Center for Digital Government.

Building on the success of the ACCESS NYC solution, the department decided to use a newer release of Cúram, leveraging additional features of the modular software to further extend the features citizens accessed through the ACCESS NYC portal. Using Cúram’s Income Support module, NYC HRA focused on making it possible for citizens to submit benefit applications and recertifications through the portal.

A key focus of the project was putting citizens' needs first, particularly for SNAP. Explains Aaronson, "When we upgraded all the components of ACCESS NYC to the newest version of Cúram, we took great pains to make sure that the user interface is extremely easy to use with simple icons that show exactly what steps are next in the process." The Cúram platform software supported the department's efforts with out of the box evidence management and eligibility capabilities. The software's prebuilt social program components, program-specific toolsets and clear user interfaces automate and simplify the entire social management lifecycle, from intake to outcome.

To increase access to the solution, the department added computers to 15 of New York City's 16 SNAP centers so that citizens can submit SNAP applications directly through the ACCESS NYC tool. This helps ensure that people from all over the city have access not only to SNAP applications but also to technology they may not have access to otherwise for applying. "What we find," notes Aaronson, "is that 75—80 percent of the people who come into our centers are willing and able to use our computers. We get about 40,000 new SNAP applications a month and an equal amount of recertifications. About 80 percent of those are coming through the online channel at this point, whether that's through mobile devices, personal computers, public computers or the computers at the SNAP centers."

New York City boasts an extremely diverse population, and NYC HRA works hard to make its services available to people from a wide variety of countries and cultures. To that end, the ACCESS NYC tool is available in seven languages, including English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Arabic and Haitian Creole.NYC HRA also offers the tool to the visually impaired through a Job Access With Speech (JAWS) interface. Aaronson explains: "Testing for JAWS capability was a pretty large undertaking. Just because a product says that it's JAWS-compliant doesn't mean that it will be fully compliant straight out of the box. Fortunately for us, the Cúram solution was."

Cutting costs, improving service

NYC HRA also worked with Diona to incorporate a mobile app into the SNAP system that allows applicants to take photos of their eligibility documents and submit them electronically. The system then passes the documentation into NYC HRA's existing paperless office system (POS), where it is processed. "They submit them to us with four data elements, and then we use an algorithm to connect them to the pending case action so that when a worker goes in, they're already connected," explains Aaronson.

The ACCESS NYC buildout resulted in significantly improved customer service by making SNAP available to more people through straightforward and user-friendly technology. "This is being praised as a great example of a user-focused design," says Aaronson. "We're really proud of that." Perhaps most important, the upgraded ACCESS NYC tool makes benefits available for more New Yorkers than ever. With support for JAWS interface users and multilingual people, along with free computer use and a straightforward application process, the department has seen a momentous shift to the digital channel. This has made it possible for NYC HRA to absorb an increase in applications while simultaneously improving service delivery.

"The best thing for New York City is that everybody who is potentially eligible for food stamps applies for and gets them," explains Aaronson. "Put simply, there is no downside to making sure everybody who's eligible is getting the food stamps they deserve."

About Cúram

Cúram by Merative has over 25 years of experience helping national, regional, and local governments, and organizations across health and social ecosystems, to transform the delivery of social services, empower caseworkers, and help individuals and families access the programs they need to achieve better outcomes. Cúram solutions and services expertise are trusted in 12 countries and jurisdictions, and support over 970 government programs. Available in 7 languages, the Cúram platform connects benefits administrators, social services agencies, and case managers, to serve and protect 187 million citizens annually.

Learn more at merative.com/curam

About Merative

Merative provides data, analytics, and software for healthcare and government social services. With focused innovation and deep expertise, Merative works with providers, employers, health plans, governments, and life sciences companies to drive real progress. Merative helps clients orient information and insights around the people they serve to improve decision-making and performance.

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