

NYC Customer Service Newsletter

Volume 7 issue 1 – June 2015

2014 Excellence in Customer Service Awards Ceremony

The 2014 Excellence in Customer Service Awards Ceremony was held on March 4 at the Manhattan Surrogate's Court Building. The ceremony recognized agency honorees, and other City staff who made contributions to key Mayoral initiatives – Paid Sick Leave, Free Universal Pre-K, Vision Zero and Language Access. In total, over 90 City staff were recognized. Each honoree received a certificate signed by Mayor de Blasio.



Mayor's Office of Operations Director Mindy Tarlow addresses 2014 Excellence in Customer Service honorees

The awards ceremony was attended by more than 200 people, including the honorees, agency heads, and agency Customer Service Liaisons. The ceremony was hosted by Mindy Tarlow, Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations. Anthony Shorris, First Deputy Mayor and Richard Buery, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives both spoke. Refreshments were provided and photographers from the Fire and Buildings Departments were available for the attendees.



Transportation's Vision Zero Street Team at the 2014 Excellence in Customer Service Awards ceremony

Some examples of special project honorees included:

- Juana Abreu from Consumer Affairs, for helping make Paid Sick Leave a reality for small business employees;
- Chief John Regan from the Fire Department for leading that agency's inspection efforts to ensure that Universal Pre-K sites were safe;
- Xuchun Lin from the Department of Probation and Isabel Lucido from NYCHA for providing translation and interpretation as members of the Volunteer Language Bank; and
- Brian Sullivan from the Parks Department and Sylvia Chan from the Department of Education for providing excellent assistance to the Language Access Secret Shoppers who visited their services and pretended to not know English.



Consumer Affairs (DCA) agency honoree Debra Halpin, First Deputy Mayor Anthony Shorris, DCA Commissioner Julie Menin, and Paid Sick Leave honoree Juana Abreu.

Top Service Center Performers Assist the Department of Education's New Family Welcome Centers Initiative

The Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH), two agencies with excellent performance in customer service centers, shared their experiences and ideas with staff from the Department of Education (DOE) to help the DOE establish its new Family Welcome Centers (see related story below). At the request of the Mayor's Office of Operations, DOT and OATH participated in a session where they shared best practices and provided advice based on years of experience improving the way they provide service at their walk-in centers.

Tailored to meet the needs of the DOE project leaders, the session focused on:

- Improving customer relationships and establishing workplace values
- Maximizing output from existing staff and managing the change to new roles and responsibilities
- Using customer feedback and multi-lingual surveys to measure performance and identify customer needs
- Identifying facility improvements to adapt to new responsibilities

DOE, OATH and DOT expressed interest in continuing the exchanges. This mutual exchange of ideas will ensure that all participating agencies continue improving their practices to provide the best service possible to their customers. Plans are underway to videotape the sessions to create a training video illustrating customer service best practices at New York City's public service centers.

DOT was well represented at the session with staff from Equal Employment Opportunity; Accessibility; Highway Inspections and Quality Assurance; Permit Management; and Parking and Permits. Staff from OATH and the Mayor's Office of Operations were also present.



Participants at the best practices session at DOT's conference room exchange ideas to help DOE with their new Family Welcome Centers

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Hosts Two Training Sessions

As reported in the last newsletter, in 2015 the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) will host a series of training sessions around language access issues. The purpose of the sessions is to provide key agency staff with the tools and information needed to support Mayor de Blasio's language access priorities.

Introductory Training – Immigrant Populations in New York City

On January 21, 2015, MOIA held the first language access training session for senior staff, language access coordinators and other agency staff. Joe Salvo, Director of the Population Division at the NYC Department of City Planning, reviewed NYC's immigrant populations, including demographics around individuals with Limited English Proficiency, and discussed how agencies can be more effective in serving these populations. Salvo displayed maps that pinpointed the leading languages and immigrant populations by neighborhood.



Attendees at first MOIA training session view DCP map showing language variances by borough

Azi Khalili, Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives at MOIA, described the new language access complaint process available via 311, and how agencies can respond to these complaints. The new complaint process went live on April 1st. Language access advocates have been updated on the initiative. When in place, individuals who do not receive interpretation service when needed can now file a complaint via 311. MOIA and the Mayor's Office of Operations will track complaints and work with the agencies to ensure that they are resolved.

And finally, Kavita Pawria-Sanchez, Assistant Commissioner at MOIA, reviewed federal and local laws around language access, including mandates for City agencies through Executive Order 120, Local Law 73 and Title V.

The second training session occurred on March 24, 2015 and focused on the need for plain language and the impacts that difficult-to-comprehend documents have on populations with low literacy and limited English proficiency.

Second Training Session - Limited English proficiency, Low Literacy and Plain Language

On March 24, 2015, MOIA hosted a two-hour training for general counsels, directors of communications and language access coordinators on plain language. Over 110 people attended this event and it was a huge success.

Azi Khalili, the Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives at MOIA, opened by noting that language access is one of the Mayor's priorities and that the City is committed to eliminating language barriers to promote the general welfare of all New Yorkers. State-of-the-art language access programs must start with clear and effective, easy-to-read English documents. Numerous errors in translation occur because the original English text is full of jargon, agency legalese, or is overly wordy or simply written with vague language that is open to multiple interpretations. And when the quality of communication – in any language – is not what it should be, we fail to get our message to its intended audience, resulting in lower rates of compliance and ultimately less ability to achieve the Mayor's ambitious agenda for all New Yorkers.

Khalili stated that the goal of "plain language" is just that: to enable City agencies to better achieve their missions through more effective communications with constituents. "We want every New Yorker who reads a City document to understand it well enough to be able to take appropriate action. We want to eliminate the results of poorly written documents: people making errors when filling out forms, calling 311 looking for help with what is written in the document, not appearing in person or submitting required information, not complying with agency rules and requirements, etc. Though no one knows the total cost of poor communication, the information we have suggests it is unnecessarily high. Writing in plain language isn't easy, but it pays off in creating good outcomes for New Yorkers and in greater efficiency in our customer service efforts."



Peter Lobo from the Department of City Planning explains data on immigration trends, limited English proficiency and illiteracy

In New York City 50% of New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home and 23% of New Yorkers are limited English proficient. Anthony Tassi, the Executive Director of Literacy Partners, noted that 45% of NYC adults read at an 8th grade level or below, and that reading skills trail the last year of schooling by two to up to five years.

The average City document requires an 11th grade reading level to understand, which is above the reading level of 45% of the City's adult population. In addition, many City documents are written in technical, formal, or impersonal language that is not always as clear, concise and customer-focused as it could be. Documents written at a high level with complex English are much more prone to errors in translation, undermining the goals of language access. Often, staff who oversee translations do not fully understand the English original to adequately assess the accuracy of the translation.

The combination of illiteracy and limited English proficiency create a substantial challenge to effective communication. Many City agency writers have met this challenge by adhering to six elements of clear and effective communication:

1. **Every document has a clear purpose** that is evident from the title, overall document design or from skimming the first few sentences;
2. **Only relevant information is included** that is required to achieve the purpose of the document (i.e., for the reader to take appropriate action); typical readers have a very low threshold for information overload; everything readers need to know should be included, but nothing more;
3. **Plain or simple language** is used that avoids jargon, abstract or metaphorical words and overly formal or "important-sounding" language in favor of a helpful, conversational tone with mostly common words that have tangible meaning and short explanations of jargon or technical terms that are required;
4. **Active voice** is used in most cases to make clear who is doing, deciding, etc., and who is responsible and accountable for results;
5. **Clean design makes documents easier to read** with large font, limited use of bold print, numbered lists, lots of white space, short paragraphs with headings, etc.; documents that are visually appealing with photos or graphics as appropriate are more likely to be read; and
6. **Appropriately low reading level** that is achieved by using smaller words, shorter sentences, and fewer sentences in each paragraph; reading level of any document can be assessed using spell check in Microsoft Word.

For more information on these trainings and to receive a copy of [Easy to Read NYC- Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communications](#) please contact Azi Khalili, Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives, at akhalili@moia.nyc.gov.

Department of Education Converts Borough Enrollment Offices to Family Welcome Centers

In December 2014, the Department of Education's (DOE) Office of Student Enrollment made the transition to support Chancellor Fariña's goal to engage families in every aspect of school life by converting borough enrollment offices to Family Welcome Centers. The Family Welcome Centers are part of the Office of Student Enrollment's mission to increase access to high quality schools for all New York City students.

Staff members at 13 Family Welcome Centers across the five boroughs help over 100,000 families each year with enrollment, transfer, and admission processes. They will now help families learn about other DOE services that support their child, including transportation, after-school programs, school food, immunizations, and adult education.

Learn more by visiting: nyc.gov/schools/WelcomeCenters or calling 718-935-3500. If you would like to visit a Family Welcome Center, please contact Kathryn Lattimer, Executive Director for Customer Service Strategy, at klattimer@schools.nyc.gov.



Multi-language welcome sign for Family Welcome Centers

Fire Department Announces New Initiatives to Help Protect Senior Citizens and to Teach CPR to New York City Teens

In October 2014, Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro visited the quarters of Engine 95/Ladder 36 to remind all New Yorkers to change the batteries in their smoke and carbon monoxide detectors when they change their clocks for the end of Daylight Saving Time, as well as to announce a new fire safety effort in all five boroughs: the Senior Citizens Alarm Installation Campaign.

For the Department's newly launched Senior Citizens Alarm Installation Campaign, members from the FDNY's Fire Safety Education Unit will hold fire safety presentations and visit homes to conduct fire safety reviews and install smoke/carbon monoxide and hard-of-hearing alarms in neighborhoods identified as most vulnerable to fire.



Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro speaks to the crowd about the importance of fire safety

Adults aged 65 or older, who, while representing only 17 percent of the population, comprised 40 percent of fire deaths in New York City in 2013. The Senior Citizens Alarm Installation Campaign is funded by a \$686,000 grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency secured with the support of New York Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand.

In December, the FDNY launched a joint CPR training initiative with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and NYC Service at the FDNY High School for Fire and Life Safety. The goal of the new initiative is to teach 5,000 New York City high school students compressions-only CPR.

This new life-saving educational program, called "Be 911: Teens Take Heart," is the first of its kind in New York City. It is taught by the FDNY Mobile CPR Training Unit and funded by more than \$100,000 in grants from NYC Service and FDNY Foundation. Several students took a compressions-only CPR lesson during the ceremony to launch the campaign.

Fire Department Announces Year-Long Observance of 150th Anniversary

At the end of the year, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro announced the city's year-long celebration of the FDNY's 150th anniversary in 2015.

The Fire Department of New York, established as a paid professional organization in 1865, will host a series of events throughout the year, including multiple community-based events. They will be designed both as a celebration of the Department's history of service and to encourage young men and women to pursue the extraordinary public service careers available in the Department as firefighters, paramedics and EMTs.

FDNY's 150th anniversary events will be funded by the FDNY Foundation. Funds raised by the FDNY Foundation during this year-long celebration will support free fire safety education and CPR classes for all New Yorkers, as well as important training initiatives for FDNY staff.

Watch the official anniversary video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6izRdk-OHU>

NYC311 has Record Breaking Year in 2014

For a city that never sleeps, New York City has a Contact Center that can match the demand. Setting a record in 2014, NYC311 received over 28 million contacts via calls, texts, the mobile app, chat and online visits. This number surpasses the previous record in 2011 by 16%.

"This unprecedented number of customer contacts is a testament to the extraordinary daily efforts of our 311 team to inform the public on all City matters and deliver essential services to New Yorkers in every neighborhood," said Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Customers connected with 311 for information on a host of issues including the top new programs in 2014: Pre-K, Affordable Care, and Paid Sick Leave. This record growth of contacts 311 is a testament to the dedicated staff at 311 and something that they take pride in. "NYC311 is committed to meeting our customers where they are and providing excellent customer service," said NYC311 Executive Director Joseph Morrisroe.

New Yorkers can connect with 311 by:

- Visiting [311 Online](#).
- Texting 311-692.
- Calling 311 or (212) NEW-YORK, (212) 639-9675, from outside New York City.
- Skyping NYC311.
- Contact 311 using a Video Relay Service (VRS) at (212) NEW-YORK, (212) 639-9675.
- Contacting 311 using TTY or Text Telephone at (212) 504-4115.
- Following 311 on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).
- Downloading 311's [iPhone](#) or [Android](#) app

Meeting the Challenges of Providing Language Services in City Jails

The New York City Department of Correction takes seriously the responsibility to address the communication needs of all detainees in its facilities, including those who are limited English proficient. The Department has contracts with vendors to create written material in various languages, as well as telephonic language interpretation for family who visit detainees.

To support these efforts to provide limited English proficient detainees the services they need, the Department identified multi-lingual staff on all facility rosters who were willing to volunteer and created the Language Service Team (LST), which provides additional staff at each facility to translate or interpret. The LST is staffed by Correction Officers and civilians and is on call 24/7. Volunteers are recruited through individual initiative, by supervisors, fraternal organizations, Academy instructors and peers.

Today 25 staff are active on the LST and can translate or interpret 17 languages: Polish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese Chinese, Urdu, French, Spanish, Punjabi, Taiwanese, German, Italian, Portuguese, Korean, Fukienese, Haitian Creole, Ukrainian, and Yoruba. Retired LST staff and non-LST members provide languages which include Turkish, Tamil, Sinhalese and Vietnamese. Facility rosters also include Edo, Hebrew, Arabic, Armenian, Romanian, and Hindi language coverage.

Since 1999, the LST has responded to more than 500 requests, both internal and external, for language services. In addition to these officially recorded requests, in the course of their daily work LST staff routinely provide translation and interpretation.

The Department will continue to work with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and other offices to ensure that detainees in its care get the language services they need.

Record Number of Service Centers Inspected Receive Perfect Score

In 2014, 60 sites that were inspected by the Street Condition Observation Unit Team (SCOUT) during the Customers Observing and Reporting Experience (CORE) inspections received perfect scores of 100. This is a significant increase from the seven that received a perfect score in 2010. SCOUT inspectors check facility conditions, customer service interactions and language access signage. Centers with perfect receive a certificate of recognition signed by the Mayor.

Walk-in service centers receiving a perfect score include:

Agency	Service Category	Address	Borough
City Commission on Human Rights	NYC Human Rights Community Service Center	1932 Arthur Avenue	Bronx
Civilian Complaint Review Board	Intake Center	100 Church Street	Manhattan
Department of Citywide Administrative Services	Manhattan Computer-based Testing and Applications Center	2 Lafayette Street	Manhattan
Department for the Aging	Senior Employment Services	40 Worth Street	Manhattan
Department of Buildings	Special Enforcement Unit	280 Broadway, 5th Floor	Manhattan
Department of Buildings	Scaffold Safety Team	One Centre Street, 23rd Floor	Manhattan
Department of Buildings	The Development Hub	80 Centre Street, 3rd Floor	Manhattan
Department of Buildings	Borough Office	10 Richmond Terrace, 2nd Floor	Staten Island
Department of Education	District Office	501 Courtlandt Avenue	Bronx
Department of Education	District Office	557 Pennsylvania Avenue	Brooklyn
Department of Education	District Office	355 Park Place	Brooklyn
Department of Education	Enrollment Center	333 7th Avenue	Manhattan
Department of Education	District Office	166 Essex Street	Manhattan
Department of Education	Enrollment Center	28-11 Queens Plaza North	Queens
Department of Education	Enrollment Center	30-48 Linden Place	Queens
Department of Education	District Office	90-27 Sutphin Boulevard	Queens
Department of Education	Enrollment Center	715 Ocean Terrace	Staten Island
Department of Finance	Manhattan Business Center	66 John Street	Manhattan
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene	Immunization Clinic	1826 Arthur Avenue	Bronx
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene	Early Intervention Office	90-27 Parsons Boulevard	Queens
Department of Transportation	Permit Office	55 Water Street	Manhattan
Department of Transportation	Parking and Customer Service	28-11 Queens Plaza North	Queens
Department of Transportation	Highway Inspection and Quality Assurance	120-55 Queens Boulevard	Queens
Department of Transportation	Permit Office	10 Richmond Terrace, 2nd Floor	Staten Island
Department of Parks and Recreation	Bronx Permit Office	1 Bronx River Parkway	Bronx
Department of Parks and Recreation	Owen Dolen Recreation Center	2551 Westchester Square	Bronx
Department of Parks and Recreation	Metropolitan Recreation Center	261 Bedford Avenue	Brooklyn
Department of Parks and Recreation	Thomas Jefferson Recreation Center	2180 1st Avenue	Manhattan
Department of Parks and Recreation	Tony Dapolito Recreation Center	3 Clarkson Street	Manhattan
Department of Parks and Recreation	Chelsea Recreation Center	430 W 25th Street	Manhattan
Department of Parks and Recreation	Arsenal Basement Permit Office	830 Fifth Avenue	Manhattan
Department of Parks and Recreation	AI Oerter Recreation Center	131-40 Fowler Avenue	Queens
Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence	NYC Family Justice Center, Bronx	198 East 161st Street	Bronx
Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence	NYC Family Justice Center, Manhattan	80 Centre Street	Manhattan
Fire Department of New York	Public Records	9 Metrotech Center	Brooklyn
Human Resources Administration	SNAP	30 Thornton Street	Brooklyn
Human Resources Administration	Office of Child Support Enforcement Borough Office	1 Metrotech Center	Brooklyn

Agency	Service Category	Address	Borough
Human Resources Administration	SNAP	4055 10th Avenue	Manhattan
Human Resources Administration	Medicaid Office	520-530 West 135th Street	Manhattan
Human Resources Administration	Office of Child Support Enforcement Family Court	151-20 Jamaica Avenue	Queens
Human Resources Administration	Job Center	219 Beach 59th Street	Queens
Human Resources Administration	SNAP	32-20 Northern Boulevard	Queens
Human Resources Administration	Job Center	34-00 Northern Boulevard	Queens
Human Resources Administration	Medicaid Office	215 Bay Street	Staten Island
New York City Housing Authority	Resident Employment Services	787 Atlantic Avenue	Brooklyn
New York City Housing Authority	Minority-owned, Women-owned and Small Business Enterprises (MWSBE)	90 Church Street	Manhattan
New York City Housing Authority	Prevailing Wage Enforcement	250 Broadway	Manhattan
New York City Housing Authority	Services for People with Disabilities	250 Broadway	Manhattan
New York City Housing Authority	Investigation of Equal Employment & Fair Housing Discrimination Complaints	250 Broadway	Manhattan
New York Police Department	Rifles and Firearms Licensing	120-55 Queens Boulevard	Queens
Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	Branch Office	9 Bond Street, 7th Floor	Brooklyn
Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	Branch Office	66 John Street	Manhattan
Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	Health Tribunal Branch Office	66 John Street	Manhattan
Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	Branch Office	350 St. Marks Place	Staten Island
Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings	100 Church Street	Manhattan
Department of Small Business Services	NYC Business Solutions Center	400 East Fordham Road	Bronx
Department of Small Business Services	Workforce 1 Expansion Center	10 Grand Army Plaza	Brooklyn
Department of Small Business Services	NYC Business Solution Center	79 John Street	Manhattan
Department of Small Business Services	Workforce 1 Expansion Center	41-17 Main Street	Queens
Department of Small Business Services	Workforce 1 Expansion Center	3845 Richmond Avenue	Staten Island

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