**NEW YORK CITY
HOUSING AUTHORITY**

EMPOWERING FRONTLINE STAFF THROUGH ENHANCED CONNECTIVITY

SPRING 2025

Capstone Team:

Noam Brenner

Will Frolich

Evelyn Jiang

Zenayah Roaché

Faculty Advisor:

Thomas P. Quaranta

Client Advisors:

Yadhira Espinal

Yvette Andino

Ella Santos

Seth Guthartz

COLUMBIA | SIPA
School of International and Public Affairs

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary

This report, *Empowering Frontline Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity*, presents findings and recommendations from a semester-long consulting engagement between Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). This project investigates the best methods and strategies to bridge the technology connectivity gap and improve communication between NYCHA's Central Office and its property-based staff, particularly frontline caretakers who form the backbone of daily operations across 300+ developments in New York City. Despite their critical roles, caretakers and other frontline staff face significant barriers in accessing technology, receiving timely information and organizational updates, and engaging in two-way communication with NYCHA's Central Office. These barriers have led to operational inefficiencies, low morale, and a growing disconnect between central leadership and property-based staff.

To address these challenges, a team of four graduate students from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, in collaboration with NYCHA, conducted 15 key informant interviews with Central Office staff across various departments, including Property Management, Learning and Development, Communications, and IT. 6 site visits were carried out at developments across Manhattan and Brooklyn to interview property managers and observe technological infrastructure, communication practices, and day-to-day challenges faced by frontline staff, particularly caretakers. In addition, the project team distributed an anonymous survey and collected 86 responses from across the organization. The team also participated in working group meetings, including NYCHA's Resident Town Halls and the Change Ambassadors, to understand additional staff and tenants' experiences. Lastly, the team performed best practice research by analyzing case studies and academic literature to provide outside perspectives from relevant agencies. Together, the team used this information to create a current state assessment, offer targeted recommendations for improvement, and develop a proposed roadmap for how NYCHA could implement the recommendations over the next 5 years.

Through this research, the team identified persistent disconnects in communication flow, a lack of access to digital tools, and widespread feelings of frustration and underappreciation among property-based staff. The findings and corresponding targeted recommendations fall into three major themes:

The Digital Divide - NYCHA's frontline staff have far less access to the technology needed to stay up to date on relevant communications.

To bridge the digital divide between NYCHA's Central Office and property-based staff, revitalizing smart screens already installed at most developments would provide a cost-effective and low-barrier method for broadcasting training videos, updates, and staff recognition content during daily muster meetings. Second, creating a mobile-accessible app tailored to caretaker needs featuring development maps, procedures, HR links, and emergency updates would empower staff to access key information without relying on desktop infrastructure. In addition, the team recommends expanding desktop availability at developments and instituting an incentive program to promote regular logins, enhancing staff engagement with NYCHA's digital tools, and reducing reliance on supervisors for system access.

Strained Communication Processes - The sheer amount of communication between the Central Office and the property staff is overwhelming. Communication methods exacerbate the issue, causing ineffective message delivery.

To improve NYCHA's strained internal communication processes, the team recommends two key standardization efforts aimed at simplifying and unifying message delivery across departments. First, establishing a bulletin board posting policy would address the overwhelming and outdated information cluttering property spaces, ensuring that all new communications clearly indicate their purpose, duration, and relevance to existing policies. Second, implementing a communications decision flowchart would help staff determine the most appropriate channels and formats for various message types, whether operational, administrative, or urgent, while preserving departmental flexibility.

Unsupportive Workplace Culture - The work environment at developments lacks trust, and a culture of fear, resentment, and apathy grows.

To address the challenges of an unsupportive workplace culture at NYCHA, strengthening team culture begins with more consistent team-building and networking opportunities, such as dedicating time during muster meetings for collaborative activities and expanding social events that allow staff across developments to connect informally.

In addition, NYCHA should enhance supervisor instruction by introducing targeted training focused on tone, feedback, and empathetic leadership. Encouraging more in-person training and one-on-one feedback sessions would not only reduce communication barriers but also foster more open and reciprocal relationships between caretakers and their supervisors.

Rather than simply providing a diagnosis of NYCHA's internal communication and technology barriers, this report created a blueprint for organizational change. Implementing the recommendations will require sustained leadership commitment, cross-departmental coordination, and a willingness to engage frontline staff as equal stakeholders in the change process. By investing in digital infrastructure, streamlining communication, and strengthening workplace culture, NYCHA can empower its workforce, improve service delivery, and ultimately, reassert its role as a model for public housing authorities nationwide.

2. Project Description

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) provides affordable housing to 511,384 authorized residents in over 177,569 apartments within 335 developments through public housing, Section 8, and PACT programs. NYCHA serves 298,206 authorized residents in 152,926 apartments within 243 housing developments through the conventional public housing program (Section 9). NYCHA also serves 46,455 authorized residents in 24,639 units within 92 developments that have been converted under the Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) program (NYCHA Fact Sheet 2024). To manage the agency, NYCHA has over 10,000 employees between the Central Office and its developments located throughout all five boroughs of New York City. The organization's size and breadth pose challenges when communicating information to property-based staff with inconsistent access to technology.

To address this challenge, a team of four graduate students from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs engaged in a semester-long consulting project in partnership with NYCHA. Over the course of the project, the team collaborated with NYCHA and its internal teams, including Property Management, Operations, IT, Human Resources, Employee Engagement, and Communications. The objective was to investigate the best methods and strategies to bridge the technology connectivity gap between NYCHA's Central Office and its properties, mainly focusing on how to reach the frontline staff, known as 'caretakers', who operate and maintain the properties but have limited access to work phones or computers. This included communication on:

- HR communication, e.g., civil-service exams, postings, health benefits, leave, retirement.
- Timekeeping procedures and notices
- Standard Procedures, Compliance Advisories and Alerts
- Training information, e.g., classes, manuals, how-to videos
- Employee engagement activities, e.g., staff surveys, ambassador outreach
- Emergency notices, e.g., severe weather alerts, safety alerts, etc.
- General information, e.g., CEO, COO announcements, agency newsletters

The project team was asked to perform the following tasks:

1. Conduct a current state assessment of the current communication connectivity methods and technology tools used with property-based staff and their efficacy in use by the agency.
2. Perform staff interviews and surveys to explore what these staff want, in terms of communication platforms, what information is relevant to them, how they want to receive or access this information, etc.
3. Identify the gaps and opportunities in communication connectivity, thinking through how the agency can best meet their needs.
4. Perform research, including contacting other organizations for best practices and platforms for communications with property-based staff. Providing an analysis of the pros and cons of different platforms.
5. Provide recommendations to NYCHA on communication connectivity platforms and other change-management initiatives to strengthen communication.
6. Develop a proposed roadmap for how NYCHA could implement the recommendations over the next 5 years, with specific outcomes.

3. Background

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is the largest public housing authority in North America, housing over half a million, or 1 in 16 New Yorkers. Its goal is to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. Through funding from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the agency provides Section 9 public housing, Section 8 housing vouchers, and runs Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs (About NYCHA, 2025).

The organizational structure of NYCHA is divided between the Central Office and the properties or developments, here used interchangeably. Across the city, developments are organized by borough, overseen by the Borough Vice President, and then organized by NYCHA-specific neighborhoods. Each neighborhood has a Neighborhood Administrator who oversees property managers and all property-based staff. Property-based staff includes property managers, superintendents, caretakers, and maintenance workers.

For each property, there is a property manager who oversees all property-based staff. Caretaker staff are divided into X, G, and Js, and their work is divided into different responsibilities. Caretaker Xs perform cleaning, trash removal, and mold cleaning for residential buildings. Caretaker Gs work on groundskeeping tasks and outdoor area maintenance. Lastly, Caretaker Js work inside buildings and clean common areas, such as hallways, lobbies, and stairwells. All these caretaker staff are then overseen by various supervisors. The Supervisor of Caretakers (SOC) manages a team of caretakers, Caretaker Js and Caretaker Xs, and ensures cleaning and maintenance tasks are performed. The Supervisor of Grounds (SOG) oversees outdoor property maintenance and manages the Caretaker Gs (See Appendix B2).

Despite recent structural improvements organized by the 2021 Transformation Plan, communication challenges between the Central Office and caretakers persist. For example, there are only a handful of computers at the developments' management offices, often used by property managers and superintendents for their day-to-day work. As a result, caretakers do not have their own computers and must rely on their supervisors' computers to access the NYCHA intranet and attend virtual training sessions.

To access NYCHA's systems and information, every staff member at NYCHA is given an email and LAN ID to enter the NYCHA intranet, but caretakers face issues logging into the system. Part of the issue stems from the 120-day password reset policy that NYCHA's IT Department requires all staff to undergo for security purposes. Because the caretaker staff have limited access to computers and are not expected to log in except for mandatory training, they are often locked out by this 120-day limit, which causes frustration and discourages technology usage. Beyond computer access, most caretakers do not have a NYCHA-provided work phone. In a recent initiative, Caretakers X's were given work phones, but in general, most caretakers primarily use walkie-talkies or their personal devices to communicate with their coworkers daily.

With limited access to technology, caretakers and other property-based staff have challenges attending and scheduling required training, accessing employee work opportunities and promotions, learning about new standards and procedures, reviewing HR updates or benefits information, hearing about agency-wide news, and even receiving emergency notices. These communications issues negatively impact daily operations and make organizational efficiency and alignment difficult. There is also a risk that important messages do not reach caretakers, or by the time it does, the message is incomplete.

Recognizing the lack of technological access, there are several ways that the Central Office currently communicates with caretakers. Most information is disseminated via daily muster meetings. These meetings happen three times a day with all property-based staff at a development, where the property manager or other supervisory staff share important information. As of April 2024, the muster meeting curriculum was standardized, meaning meeting times and discussion/training topics are the same across the organization (NYCHA Now, 2024). Another way information is communicated from the Central Office is via paper printouts posted near time clocks and in break rooms. This information includes topics such as employee engagement opportunities, upcoming training, and HR updates. Lastly, break rooms are equipped with televisions that can share rotating information. Some developments have a smart screen, instead of just a television, which can be used to share information, host group virtual training, and/or serve as a place for staff to access the intranet and web.

Since information is not being directly shared with staff, it has to pass through multiple channels and people. For example, if there was a new procedure, a Borough Vice President would relay that information in an email or meeting to their Neighborhood Administrators. Then, those Neighborhood Administrators need to communicate with their various property managers. While Neighborhood Administrators have periodic meetings with all property managers, they mostly communicate via email. Now, those property managers need to figure out how to communicate that new procedure to staff. With the current communication system, property managers communicate changes to staff by posting the information on a printout and mentioning it at muster meetings. This extensive process of disseminating information takes up a lot of time; thus, the original message might get lost along the way.

In addition to these operational challenges, NYCHA is constantly working to address the growing maintenance needs required by its deteriorating assets. The housing stock, 70% of which was built prior to 1969, has continued to age, making the maintenance of buildings a constant challenge (STV and AECOM, 2023). According to the 2023 Needs Assessment, there was an estimated 20-year physical needs of $78.3 billion across 264 public housing properties and 161,400 apartments. This is a significant increase from the 2017 Needs Assessment of $45.3 billion (NYCHA 2025). This causes a constant stream of general workplace-related information flowing from the Central Office, as well as a high volume of urgent communications that need to be addressed. One interview the project team conducted revealed that in a given weekend, the agency may receive upwards of 2,000 tickets in the repair request system (See Appendix D12). For staff, this means there is always work to be done, often on competing or very short timescales, which overwhelms staff across the organization, especially property-based staff.

In response to growing challenges, NYCHA was put under federal monitorship, in an agreement between NYCHA, the City of New York, the United States Department of Justice, and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2019. The monitor oversaw efforts including "removing lead-based paint; providing adequate heat and hot water; reducing mold and moisture; providing adequate elevator services; managing pests and waste disposal; inspecting its properties and conducting repairs; completing needed capital projects; and reforming its organizational structure" (NYCHA Monitorship, 2025). Efforts to reform the organizational structure were required in a "Transformation Plan," which NYCHA developed in 2021.

The plan serves as a vision for sustainable change to NYCHA's governance and leadership structure, property management systems, and central support functions (NYCHA, 2021). As this plan is implemented to improve both operations and communications, new training, operational procedures, and compliance orders must be communicated to staff throughout the agency. Overall, these changes will help NYCHA for the better, but communicating these changes poses a significant burden to staff affected by the digital divide.
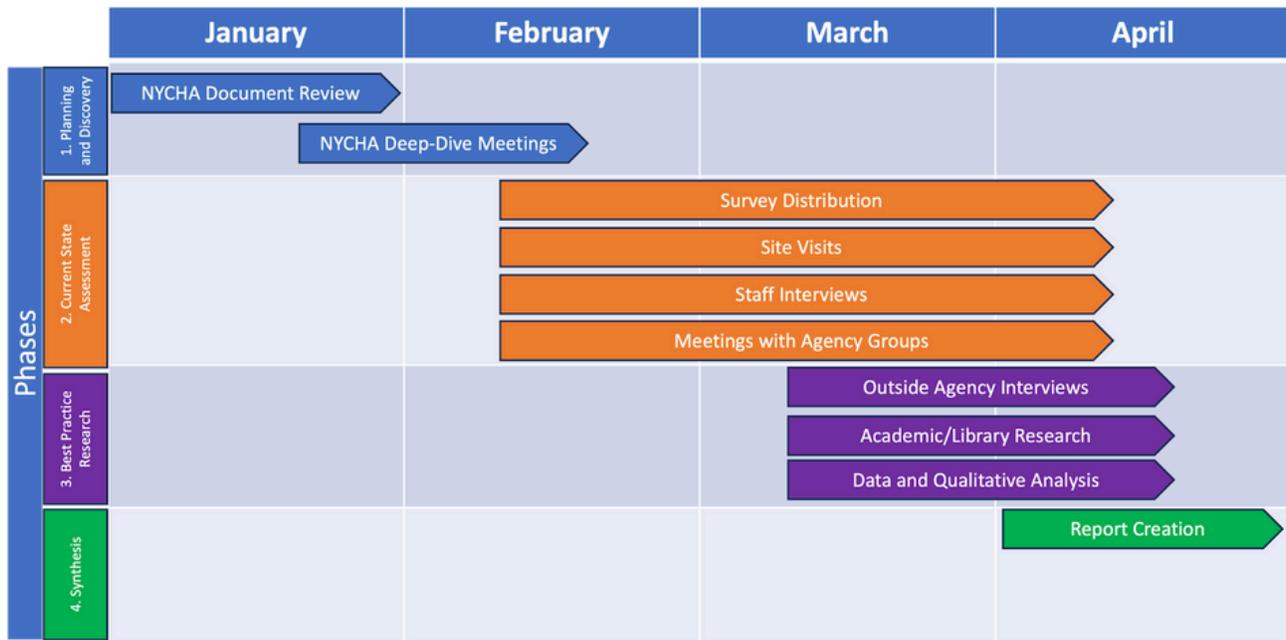
4. Methodology

The project team employed various methods to investigate the communication challenges and the digital divide between the Central Office and property-based staff.

The team's approach began in earnest in late January 2025 by breaking the project into discrete phases that helped inform the final report. Beginning with a Planning and Discovery Phase, the team was provided information by NYCHA, including written content and staff presentations that described the relevant context and history of the agency.

From there, the team began a Current State Assessment Phase, including key informant interviews with staff at the Central Office and properties, along with the distribution of a survey to all staff. This phase also included attending virtual meetings with important groups within the organization, including the Change Ambassadors, a group of volunteer staff members dedicated to improving NYCHA, and Tenant Roundtables, a collaboration between tenants and NYCHA management to improve operations. To execute this information gathering plan, the team held virtual interviews as well as visited sites throughout NYCHA's portfolio to conduct in-person interviews and attend muster meetings. This phase lasted from the middle of February to the middle of April.

Next, the project team moved into a Best Practices and Analysis Phase, where external experts and leaders from relevant agencies were interviewed while research was conducted on organizational management and change in other sectors. During this phase, the team also organized and prepared the collected survey data for analysis. This phase began in the middle of March and ran to the middle of April.

Finally, the team used the rest of April to organize its findings and produce this report. The proposed project plan is visualized below, along with an expanded explanation of each method deployed.

	January	February	March	April
1. Planning and Discovery	NYCHA Document Review	NYCHA Deep-Dive Meetings		
2. Current State Assessment		Survey Distribution / Site Visits / Staff Interviews / Meetings with Agency Groups		
3. Best Practice Research			Outside Agency Interviews / Academic/Library Research / Data and Qualitative Analysis	
4. Synthesis				Report Creation

4.1. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

To engage supervisory personnel from the Central Office and the developments, qualitative interviews were conducted to investigate NYCHA's technology suite, culture of communication, current dissemination practices, both upward and downward, and receptiveness of communication (See Appendix D). In total, 15 virtual and 14 in-person interviews were conducted across the entire organization, including property managers, neighborhood administrators, executive leadership, and representatives from Information Technology, Communications, and Employee Engagement. (See full list in Appendix D and E).

Interviews were conducted primarily by video call, but several were conducted in person as the team visited properties throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn. Interviews ran from early February to early April. The team initially sought to understand the organization as a whole, its culture, and communication challenges. As the interviews progressed, the team worked to validate what was heard while evaluating solutions to remedy the issues.

4.2. Surveys

Anonymous surveys were distributed over the course of our investigation to engage staff throughout the agency. These surveys investigated whether staff found various kinds of communication relevant to their day-to-day responsibilities, including training information, work task updates, HR communication, employee engagement activities, and general information (See Appendix C for full survey).

It also inquired about workplace metrics, such as average response times upward and downward, that could potentially reveal communication gaps. The survey aimed to comprehensively investigate the agency, identify opportunities for changes in the content of communication, and provide a forum for feedback to all staff.

4.3. Site Visits

The project team conducted various site visits at developments to connect with property-based staff and collect qualitative and quantitative field research. Site visits provided opportunities to observe Muster Meetings, connect with property-based personnel, and develop ethnographic research. At each site visit, the project team interviewed supervisory staff, held a discussion session with caretakers during afternoon Muster Meetings, and disseminated the survey. To gather authentic feedback during Muster Meetings, we requested that supervisors be excused after sharing the required information. From there, the project team split the caretakers into two groups and held smaller discussions with each group separately for 10-15 minutes. After both focus groups, caretakers were encouraged to fill out the survey online or in person on paper.

In total, six site visits were conducted at developments throughout NYCHA's Manhattan Neighborhood #3 and NYCHA's Brooklyn Neighborhood #9, namely at Fulton, Lower East Side II, Jacob Riis, Red Hook West, and Gowanus Houses (See Appendix D). Outside these neighborhoods, the project team also visited De Hostos Houses located on the Upper West Side.

NYCHA's Manhattan Neighborhood #3 and Brooklyn Neighborhood #9 were selected to cover a wide geographical spread. NYCHA Neighborhoods refer to a cluster of developments managed under the same administrative structure. Unlike traditional New York City neighborhoods, which are typically geographically cohesive, NYCHA neighborhoods can include developments spread across large distances. In the case of Manhattan #3, developments are as far apart as Midtown West and the Lower East Side. This distance poses challenges for neighborhood administrators to communicate effectively, which our team wanted to investigate further. For example, between Fulton and Lower East Side II Houses, Neighborhood Administrators travel a 2-mile distance to deliver in-person communication.
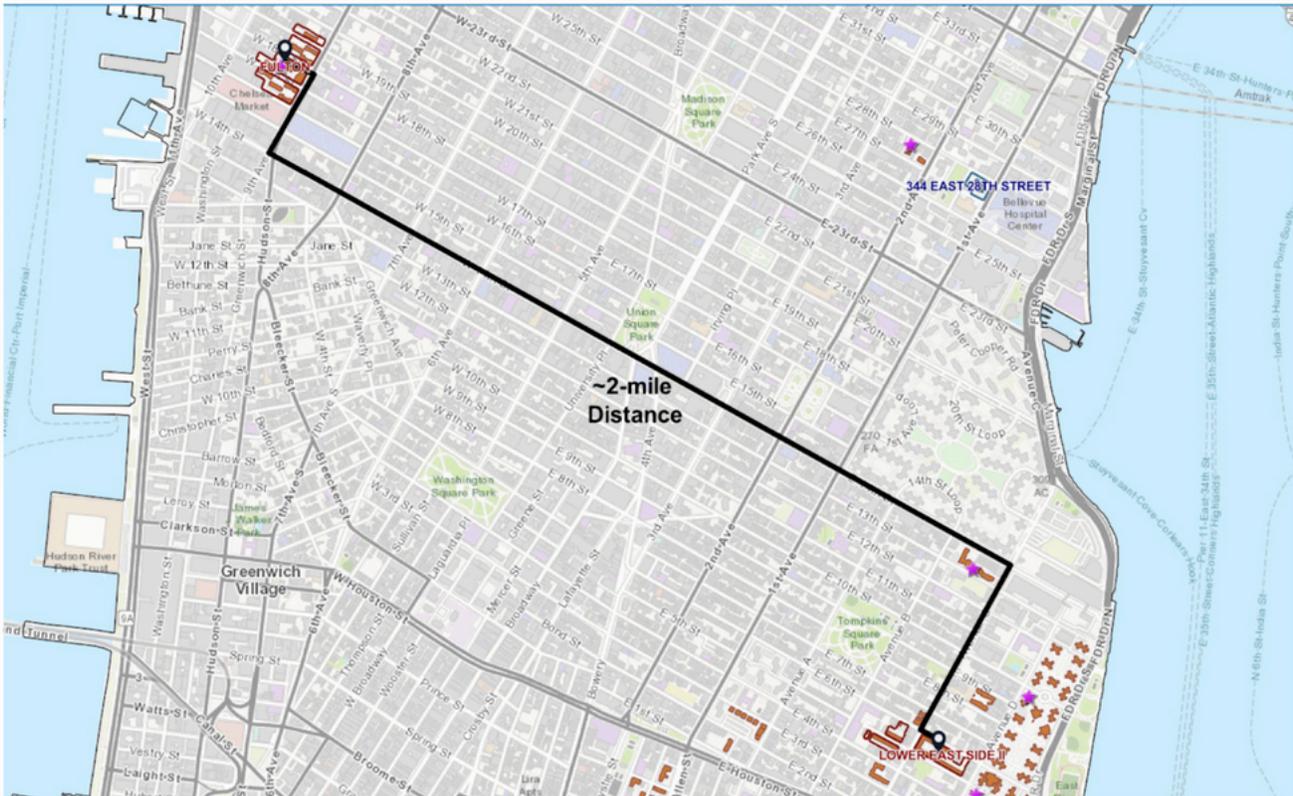
Image created using ArcGIS (NYCHA Development Interactive Map).

In addition to the geographic spread between developments, these neighborhoods include various building types, such as scattered-site apartments, high-rises, and low-rises. This diversity often requires property staff to manage buildings that are not only physically distant from each other but also vary significantly in structure and maintenance needs, even within a single development. For a single development like Lower East Side Houses – a scattered site – caretakers cover 3.85 acres (NYCHA 2023).

4.4. Working Groups

In addition to site visits, the project team engaged with various groups within NYCHA to conduct large group interviews, disseminate surveys, and receive feedback on proposals. This included NYCHA Resident Town Halls and Change Ambassadors sessions. These spaces serve as an opportunity to engage with additional perspectives.

Resident Town Halls, composed of NYCHA tenants, employees, and external parties, started in June 2021 to involve tenant voices and pilot organizational changes with end users before official implementation. These town halls are divided into subcommittees covering topics such as Technology, Public Space and Safety, Resident Outreach, and Neighborhood Services. Of these subcommittees, the project team met with the Technology Subcommittee to gauge resident access and utilization of technological systems. The goal of joining this meeting was to hear about what systems residents use, how efficient they are, and the resources received to navigate them. This could then be compared with technological systems used by caretakers. Similarly, the project team met with the Neighborhood Services Subcommittee to investigate dynamics and experiences between tenants and caretakers. The discussions highlighted opportunities to strengthen coordination between staff and residents, enhance communication flows, and improve responsiveness to resident needs (See Appendix F3 and F4 for full line of questioning).

Together, the findings from both the Technology and Neighborhood Services Subcommittees provided a more comprehensive picture of how NYCHA's internal systems and processes influence the resident experience.

The NYCHA Change Ambassador program is an opportunity for various staff to connect with colleagues, to learn about other departments, hear directly from senior managers about upcoming initiatives, voice concerns, and ask questions (NYCHA Now, 2025). The project team met with the Change Ambassadors, both at the outset and conclusion of the project, which opened up discussions about NYCHA's culture of communication, desired solutions from staff, and logistics/feedback to implement them.

4.5. Best Practice Research
In the second half of the project, the project team researched best practices in communication from organizations outside of NYCHA. Conducting comparative research helped the project team better understand effective communication strategies from other large organizations, both from the private and public sectors. This included research on corporate and public sector communications, as well as key informant interviews with representatives from these sectors. Interviews included representatives from the NYC Parks Department, Columbia University Facilities, the NYC Fire Department, and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection.

In addition to conducting interviews, the team undertook library-based research to identify best practices from diverse case studies and scholarly sources. Using databases recommended by Columbia Libraries, the project team reviewed case studies published by Harvard Business Publishing, systematic literature reviews, and research articles focusing on topics such as organizational culture, supervisor-staff relationships, employee engagement, and institutional change management.

5. Findings

As the project team explored NYCHA's digital divide and how to best empower the frontline staff, three major themes were uncovered that hinder effective communication throughout the agency. Addressing them below, the team has laid out the findings about the problem, our recommended solutions, alternatives to our recommendations, and a timeline for implementation.

The major themes include:
- **The Digital Divide:** NYCHA's frontline staff have far less access to the technology needed to stay up to date on relevant communications.
- **Strained Communication Processes:** The sheer amount of communication between the Central Office and the property staff is overwhelming. Communication methods exacerbate the issue, causing ineffective message delivery.
- **Unsupportive Workplace Culture:** Developments' work environment lacks trust and a culture of fear and resentment, furthering the growth of apathy.

The project team collected 86 survey responses between February and mid-April 2025. Visualized results from these responses are below, along with some discussion that serves as a baseline analysis of the staff communication preferences (Appendix C1-C10).

Communication Relevancy By Group
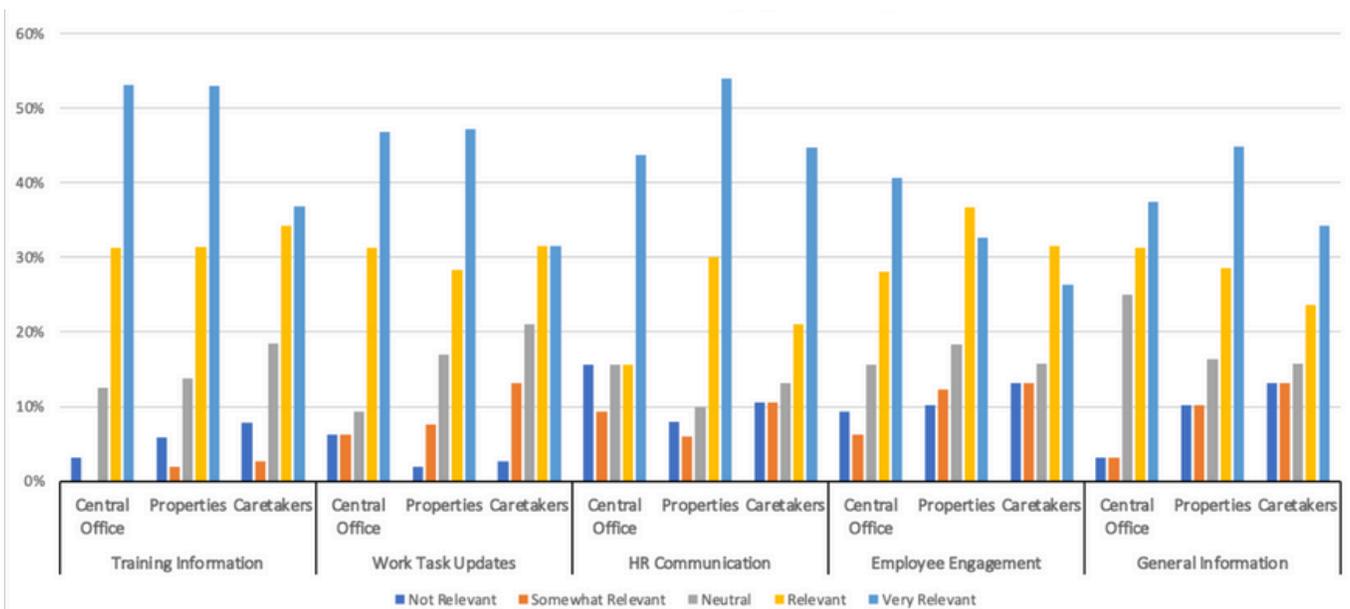
Central Office
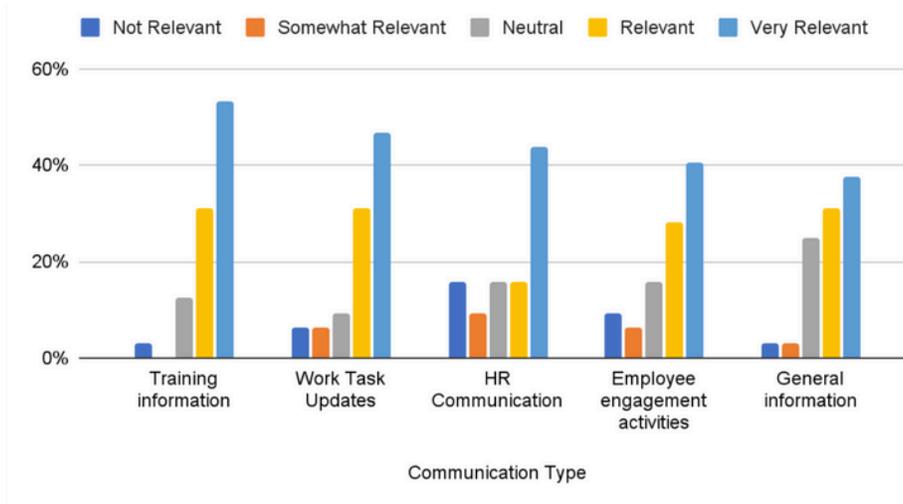
Property-Based Staff

Caretakers

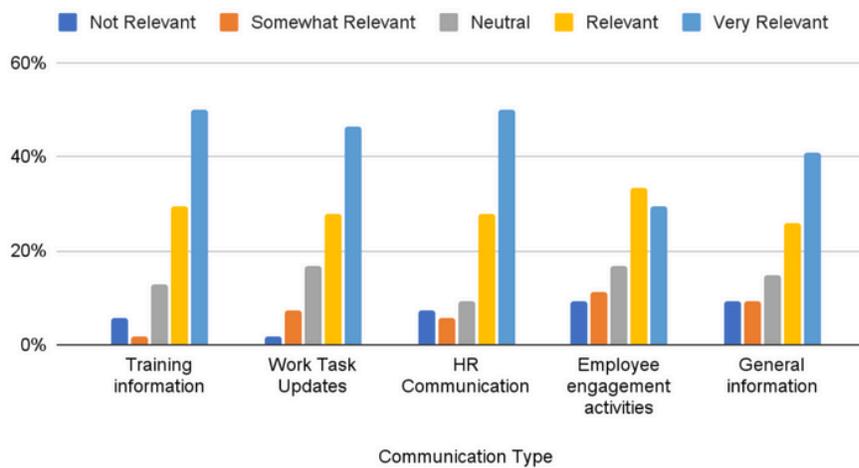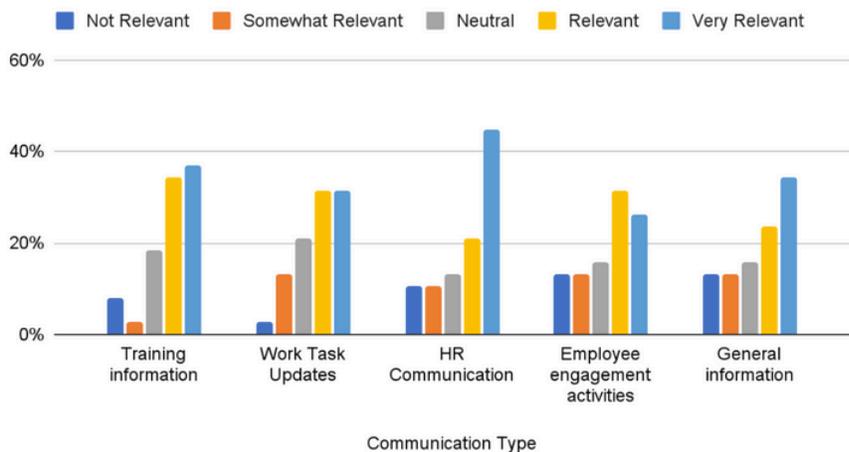Out of the 86 responses from NYCHA staff, 32 were Central Office staff, 54 were property-based staff, and 38 of the 54 were caretakers. Overall, a majority of NYCHA staff found that the various communication topics were relevant or very relevant to their job, and very few found the topics to be not relevant. There is also little variation between the Central Office and the property staff, with caretakers viewing topics slightly less relevant than the Central Office. However, there are a few differences of note. Central Office staff viewed employee training information and employee engagement activities as much more relevant, while caretakers cared more about HR updates. General information was also found to be the least relevant of all the topics, but was still relevant to a majority of staff.

At the outset of the project, the team suspected that the survey might reveal opportunities for significant change to the communication at NYCHA, either by demonstrating that a particular type of communication was completely irrelevant to staff or in need of elevation.

Furthermore, the project team asked a qualitative open question to staff to "suggest one improvement for communication with your supervisors or staff." Categorized, the most common responces were: Active Listening, Clarity in Communication, Emotional Awareness, Regular Check-ins, and Effective Training (Appendix C9).

Ideas of Improvement
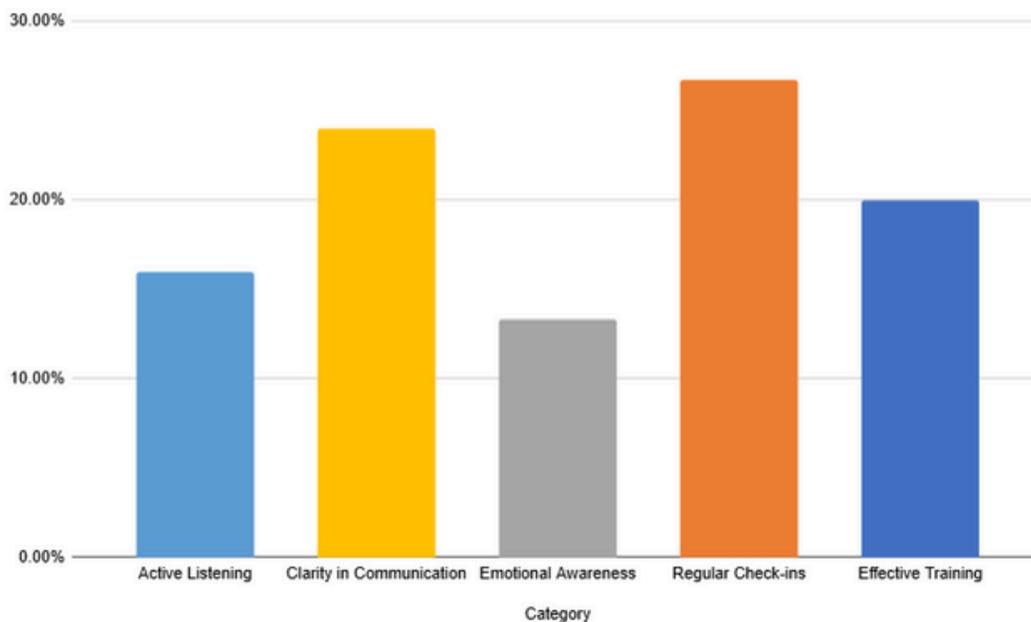
5.1 The Digital Divide

5.1.1 Problem: Caretakers, as well as much of the property-based staff, are cut off from the rest of the agency because they do not have dedicated methods for accessing the information that NYCHA distributes digitally, either through email or via the suite of software tools.

The main focus for the project team was the dramatic gap in technology access between the Central Office and property-based staff. As noted, the aim was to understand how to overcome this divide and improve communication for a variety of work-related messages.

Based on interviews and outreach to the developments, the project team uncovered some striking insights into the availability of computers, work phones, and connection to NYCHA's overall IT systems. From a hardware perspective, the team learned that above all other types of technology, the most critical aspect of the digital divide is the limited access to desktop computers for use by the caretaker staff. In several muster meetings, property managers and frontline staff described scenarios where caretakers had almost no access to a dedicated desktop computer. As it pertains to general communication, this means that anything posted on NYCHA Connect or that is accessible via NYCHA's suite of tools on the intranet is effectively out of reach for a major portion of the workforce. Where devices are provided to staff, such as the work phones given to Caretaker Xs, the team learned of difficulty implementing the program due to hesitancy in using the technology, a lack of application to their day-to-day work activities, and a fear of being monitored. NYCHA IT informed the project team that in some months, as many as 200-300 phones are being disconnected due to prolonged periods (over 90 days) of inactivity (Appendix D7).

Beyond the inability to receive communication, the lack of desktop access hinders productivity and prevents staff from accessing training and other critical tools. At multiple site visits, staff described situations where caretakers are forced to use their supervisor's computer to access the required online curriculum. This creates a burden on the supervisors who have to give up their desktops to the entire staff, as well as the caretakers who are further restricted from taking advantage of what NYCHA's systems can offer on a regular basis.

The project team's research also uncovered structural issues with the IT systems that are exacerbated by the digital divide. One of the most common complaints is the limited lifespan of employees' LAN IDs and passwords. As a result of having minimal access, caretakers are frequently locked out of the NYCHA network when their LAN ID and password are deactivated or need to be reset. These features are deactivated due to extended periods of inactivity, which is the case for caretakers who are only incentivized to use the minimally available technology when there is mandated training. One of the most common scenarios heard by the project team was one where caretakers are locked out of access and must spend multiple hours working with their supervisor and an IT hotline to recover or reset the LAN ID and password. The end result is a workforce that is disenchanted with the technology offerings because they are either battling for time with hardware assigned to their supervisor or frustrated with wrestling to simply access the software. In both cases, frontline staff have become apathetic towards using the vast suite of available tools that have been made difficult to access. In sum, the team found that many of the tools being leveraged to communicate with staff are largely inaccessible to frontline workers, including the intranet and email.

Ultimately, this has created skepticism in the Central Office that information is being shared accurately with property staff, leading to a pattern of routinely reminding management at the properties of updates and key information. Meanwhile, departments that do attempt to bridge the divide routinely emphasize tools that caretakers are not familiar with because they are not routinely accessing said tools. Unfortunately, this pattern reinforces the impression that the Central Office does not understand the properties, increasing the cultural and informational divide.

The team recognizes that throughout the property staff, there is a significant hesitancy in using new technology as demonstrated by the number of phones that are being deactivated monthly, the number of smart screens that the team encountered both turned off or with cameras covered, and the anecdotes heard about training staff to use anything new. That said, the team feels as though the most important mechanism for improving staff's hesitancy about technology is to habituate them to using it. Furthermore, the team recognizes that introducing new technology places additional demands on NYCHA's IT

which is already under pressure due to the growing reliance on technological solutions to address agency-wide challenges. The team's recommendations aim to balance the need for improved digital engagement with frontline staff while minimizing the administrative burden associated with implementing new tools.

5.1.2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Revitalize the smart screens that are located at each development.

Addressing the digital divide starts by increasing the amount of technology at the disposal of the caretaker staff. In order to do so, NYCHA should leverage currently available hardware at all developments, specifically the smart screens installed at developments a handful of years ago. These screens, which are located at nearly every development, are part of an initiative that was launched several years ago that, but have fallen into a state of underutilization. Despite being high-grade, $3,000/screen products meant to be kept on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the reality is that most of the screens are not on or have key elements, such as a camera and microphone, blocked off (Appendix D7). Seeing the screens off at every property the team visited, the revitalization of them seemed like an obvious option for addressing NYCHA's communication gaps. It is imperative that whatever strategy is used to revive the screens, that measures are taken to address the reasons why they have been disregarded in the first place. The team has considered some options for how to do this below but a rigorous strategy needs to be established along with this process.

The smart screen here is turned off, a common sight at NYCHA properties (Appendix E3).

> *"The smart screens are high-grade, $3,000 products that are meant to be on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The reality is that most of them are off or have the camera covered up with a trash bag, and having them off prevents necessary software updates." - NYCHA IT Staff Member (Appendix E3)*

Although addressing the underutilization of the smart screens is a low-cost and implementation burden for the involved Central Office departments, the team recognizes that this recommendation would not address all of the workplace notifications outlined in the project description. That said, revitalizing the smart screens would have a significant impact on improving communication while demonstrating a commitment from the Central Office to reach and enhance the work experience of the property staff. The project team feels strongly that the smart screens are an effective way to communicate employee engagement activities, standard procedure compliance advisories and alerts, training information, and general information. Notably, this recommendation would likely not cover HR communications or other personal information. The team was informed through interviews with caretakers that along with the persistent monitoring fears, there is a general lack of privacy when using the screens for personal uses like accessing NYCHA Connect because the screens are mostly located in lunch rooms and public gathering spaces for staff.

That said, given the desire from the outset of the project to not overburden the IT staff by attempting to solve the digital divide entirely with more technology, the project team finds that this use of preexisting technology is a viable middle ground.

The team envisions the smart screens becoming an additional aspect of the muster meeting curriculum as a vehicle for videos on new procedures, training, or agency news. On a more continuous basis, the screens should be deployed as general information hubs with rotating tiles or slides that can be checked daily as caretakers come in for the morning and midday muster meetings. The vision for these screens is something similar to what one might find in a doctor's waiting room or an office lobby.

However, it's also critical to maintain fresh and interesting content to prevent the screens from returning to a place of underutilization. Last, using the screens in this manner bridges the communication and technology gap without taking caretakers away from their core responsibilities.

The team also recommends the screens be used in conjunction with the subsequent recommendations. For recommendations in section 5.2, the screens would support the effort to standardize the frequently outdated postings found throughout the developments. Further, for recommendations in section 5.3, the screens would help develop a culture of support and recognition by spotlighting the good work of staff members at the development and agency wide.

Integrating the screens back into the day-to-day operations of the properties will alleviate the communication gaps between the Central Office and the property based staff in a number of key ways. The advantages for the caretakers are clear, being able to more readily access new procedures and other information. For other departments, the screens will lower the burden of distributing information thereby reducing the number of repetitive emails being sent out. For example, the Department of Communications could use the screens to publicize stories about staff by instantly sharing and refreshing the content to the entire agency. Emergency notifications can also be sent more quickly and new procedures can be announced in a multi-pronged approach, first by posting them on the screens, then by adding them to the muster curriculum, etc.

Although the smart screens do not address caretaker access to information available on NYCHA Connect or other platforms and may also add to the IT workload having to restart and maintain the screens, the advantages posed by the screens are significant compared to the current state while the burden of effort and cost is still lower compared to other solutions.

"Besides the privacy concerns that lead staff to cover up the cameras, it's not realistic to expect staff to engage with them as computers because people don't want to be searching for potentially personal information in front of their coworkers." - NYCHA IT Staff Member (Appendix D1)

Cost and Implementation Considerations:

This is a lower-cost recommendation from a capital standpoint compared to the other recommendations outlined below because the properties already have the screens installed. Instead, the burden of this recommendation is on the human capital that will be required to turn the screens back on, keep them up and running, and provide evergreen content that continues to engage and inform staff.

From our discussions, the team was informed that because many of the screens have been disabled for long periods of time, necessary software updates may not have been completed. Turning the screens back on will likely require some level of monitoring and maintenance over the initial months to ensure that the screens are functioning properly. Further, combating the issues that lead to the screens being turned off in the first place is critical to the success of this recommendation. Both the use of trusted messengers like the Neighborhood Field Technicians and the persistent creation of interesting, relevant content will aid in combating the hesitation that has developed previously.

The project team suggests that the screens be used in combination with the updated posting policy, which is covered in the Strained Communication Processes section, either to supplement or supplant the postings. Additionally, entertaining and thought-provoking content, primarily short-form videos (think TikTok), should be deployed via the screens at morning muster meetings multiple times a week. These videos could provide agency updates, morning announcements, team-building games, or employee engagement "questions of the day" to spur discussion at the properties. The success of this recommendation relies on supervisors who are able to integrate the smart screens into the daily workflow at muster meetings, but the team believes that with updated content, the screens can become a vital part of the property workplace. A proposed implementation plan is outlined below.

Implementation Plan:

1-6 Months:
- Work with the IT team and the Neighborhood Field Technicians to perform a complete accounting of the smart screens that are on-site and usable.
- For screens that are deemed usable, the relevant team should also attempt to restore the screens and update their software while on site.
- Remove any screens that are not in use.

6-12 Months:
- Work with Learning & Development and Communications to develop content to be used on the screens on a rotating basis.
- Create a procedure where all Central Office departments can submit content requests to the screens.

1-3 Years:
- Monitor the screen usage, rewarding high-use developments and removing those that are not in use.

Recommendation 2: Create a mobile accessible app with basic details specifically tailored to the caretaker staff.

The second recommendation for bridging the digital divide is the creation of an app that property-based staff can access on their personal mobile devices that contains basic information relevant to working at NYCHA and being a caretaker.

This recommendation provides access to the basic but potentially personal information not readily available to property-based staff via the smart screens in an on-demand platform. Content including site maps, emergency notifications, job responsibilities or procedures, and a connection to Workday would benefit staff who often come to their development feeling underprepared. At several properties, management staff told the team that staff frequently arrive after orientation without knowing anything about the development itself, including how to get around (Appendix E2). From our interviews with a NYCHA executive, the team learned that centralized guidebooks or handbooks for a given role at a development do not currently exist. This app would be the first step in working to address this gap while supplementing the added benefits of the smart screens (Appendix D6).

The success of the app concept would rely on its ability to offer useful information in a simplistic, unthreatening format and to deploy the app in a timely manner.

"A lot of staff come to the development after orientation without knowing how to get around the development itself. We have paper maps on the walls, but some people can't read them." - Manhattan-based property management staff member (Appendix E2)

One key advantage to using an app instead of installing hardware or providing hand-held devices is that it avoids the hesitancy staff have demonstrated when using new technology, and it likely mitigates the persistent credentialing difficulties staff have when using desktop computers. Also, the app concept consistently resonated with staff, especially the Change Ambassadors. In talking with a Department of Environmental Protection Executive about this issue at their agency, they acknowledged that while they don't do a great job reaching frontline staff, it's their belief that those who look for information will do what they need to find it (Appendix G4).

In the case of the app, NYCHA would provide a simple-to-use and readily accessible format for anyone looking for work-related information in a completely self-service format. The opt-in model may reduce the use of the app but would increase trust in the tool overall. The app also has the added benefit of not having to worry about providing fresh content, as is the case with smart screens. Once the key content is in the app, the majority of the functionality will be accomplished and the rest will be maintenance and any potential additions when the time comes. An app offers flexibility in that it can remain as a basic space for information or be further developed to include training content, a space for employee feedback, or other important information.

Conversely, there are some questions about whether staff would ultimately use a tool like an informational app, as there were mixed responses from caretakers about using their personal devices for work-related purposes. Again, as is the case with smart screens, some also expressed the same hesitancy about being monitored. Part of the consideration of using personal devices is the reality that not all developments have sufficient wifi. Without sufficient wifi, staff may be less inclined to use their cell phone data provider to access the app. Along with the potential of having to upgrade wifi at developments, the app would add to the burden of the IT department in developing and maintaining the app to be minimally functional. Additional upgrades to the app's functionality would also be a time and cost burden.

It is important that NYCHA collects data on downloads and usage to better understand the frequency of use and the kinds of information that are being accessed most often in order to improve the app experience and better tailor the content to staff.

Overall, the team finds that given the ubiquity of smartphones, creating an app to reach caretakers is an effective strategy that would require less training compared to more hardware focused solutions.

"Something like a guidebook for a given role/development doesn't currently exist; that could be an interesting idea." - NYCHA Executive (Appendix D6)

Cost and Implementation Considerations:

If properly implemented, this method could supplant the need for adding desktops (Recommendation 3) to the properties, but it comes with associated development costs. The team is aware that NYCHA is currently working on making NYCHA Connect available via the cloud, thereby expanding access on mobile devices. Should the NYCHA Connect project be a sufficient form of providing information to staff, it's possible that the app may not be necessary. The recommendations here assume that the NYCHA Connect project does not supplant the app concept. A visual mockup is below.

Potential app design for caretaker staff.

Implementation Plan:

1-6 Months:
- Compare and consider any overlap/opportunities with the cloud-based NYCHA Connect project.
- Design the app layout and content.

6-12 Months:
- Contract a vendor to develop the app.
- Pilot a rollout of the app using the change ambassadors.

1-3 Years:
- Monitor app usage and collect feedback from users.
- Update the app based on feedback.

Recommendation 3: Increase the number of desktops available at properties dedicated to caretaker staff and institute a program that incentivizes monthly or quarterly log-ins by frontline staff.

An efficient way of increasing technology access for caretakers is to increase the number of dedicated desktop computers accessible to frontline staff to connect to NYCHA's suite of digital tools.

This recommendation is inspired by the tenant services kiosks that were visible during site visits. While the kiosks specifically may be a viable option depending on the cost compared to desktops, the team views the deployment of desktop computers instead as a faster and more approachable option.

The key to this recommendation's success is ensuring that the caretaker staff recognize the value in having additional access via a desktop. Simply placing more desktops on site will be minimally effective in addressing the digital divide. The objective in this proposal is to increase the amount of access to communication that frontline staff have at their disposal, increase confidence in the NYCHA systems, minimize the amount of time supervisors need to spend away from their desks or helping staff recover their passwords, and minimize the time spent by IT solving issues with LAN IDs and passwords. Ultimately, having greater access to desktops is an effective way to improve HR communication, timekeeping procedures and notices, standard procedure compliance advisories and alerts, training information, and general information.

Although the team finds that access to desktop computers with regular access requirements and training would be the most ideal solution to the communication and technology divide, the team recognizes that this recommendation requires an outlay of funds from the agency that is likely higher than the other two. Weighing the overall costs compared to the other solutions should ultimately determine which option is best suited for NYCHA. It is for this reason, as well as the added administrative burden on the IT department, that this recommendation is third overall compared to the other two solutions. The cost details are projected below.

Technology at developments: A computer-like kiosk available to tenants at Gowanus Houses (Appendix E3).

Cost and Cost and Implementation Considerations:

Assuming that there are no available desktop computers that can be repurposed, the team estimated the cost and number of computers that would be needed to support the caretaker staff. The project team was informed by the Desktop Management team that the cost of a new desktop is in the range of $800 (Appendix F2) and has a useful life of about 5 years, which is a mark that has not consistently been hit by the agency overall (Appendix D7). Taking the headcounts for each NYCHA-managed property and using the provided estimate that 55% of the staff at each property are caretakers, the team finds the average number of caretakers at a property to be 23 (Appendix B1). With NYCHA's cost constraints, the team recommends adding 1 computer to each property per every 23 caretakers at a managed location. Using this standard and adding a second desktop where the number of caretakers is greater than 5 above the average, finds that the majority of developments would only need 1 desktop added. Some developments such as Douglass Consolidated, Baruch Consolidated, Sheepshead Bay Consolidated, and Castle Hill have significantly more than 5 additional caretakers which could support the addition of a third computer on these sites.

Overall, without any sites having three desktops, the team finds that at a minimum there would be 157 desktops needed across the 121 "managed bys" with 33 developments needing 2 desktops. This projects to roughly $125,600 for the hardware portion of the recommendation. As we heard in the case of the program for purchasing phones, there may be an opportunity to find cost savings by ordering in bulk or the ability to repurpose unused computers from throughout the organization (Appendix D7). The team also heard that there are costs associated with provisioning LAN IDs and emails, the costs of which are still being confirmed, and would be part of this plan to ensure all caretakers can access the technology.

The physical location of the desktops is also important to consider for this recommendation. The team recommends that the desktops be located where muster meetings take place, however, these spaces are also not fully conducive to privacy, nor the longevity of the equipment. Given that muster meetings typically take place in cramped lunch rooms, there is a premium on available space and a higher likelihood of the desktops being damaged by spills or other accidents. Identifying suitable locations will be tricky but should be left up to the properties to determine where the devices will receive the most use.

Additional considerations for this plan include training and rollout of the desktops in a manner that is both welcoming to staff and incentivizes staff to continue to log into the computers on a routine basis. One way of achieving this would be to leverage the Neighborhood Field Technicians, who have become a trusted voice among the properties, to train the property staff (Appendix D7). A dedicated training curriculum may also be required to introduce the computers and their benefits. A major component will be combating the hesitation towards technology and fear of being monitored that is pervasive throughout this segment of the organization.

The project team suggests a program that closely monitors each development and its caretakers to see how often they log into the computers. Developments with the highest percentage of staff logging in over a month or quarter should be rewarded or recognized. Of course, this is exactly the kind of monitoring that staff are concerned about; however, it's important that the utilization of the tools is understood and those with the best performance are rewarded accordingly. Supervisors could also be encouraged to ensure that the caretakers are logging in at regular intervals to check emails, job postings, Workday, etc. This kind of encouragement could be tied to the employee evaluation process, a structure that is similar to what the project team heard from the Columbia Facilities Human Resources Department although this would have to be collectively bargained with the union to become a more formal incentive program (Appendix G2).

"We hear about job postings during muster meetings, and we see them posted by the time clock, but then where do I go to fill out the application? Who can I talk to about the job? I don't have many options to do that here." - Brooklyn-based Caretaker (Appendix E3)

Implementation Plan:

1-6 Months:
- Conduct an accounting of the properties to understand the current status of equipment and how many developments lack a communal desktop.
- Use this research to identify the number of desktops needed and critically, where in the development they would go to create visibility of the tools, privacy for the users, and security that the desktops would not be tampered with.
- Work with the New York State Office of General Services and/or set up a bid/buy process for hardware.
- Create a deployment plan using the Neighborhood Field Technicians that can deliver the desktops on a rolling basis within the year.

6-12 Months:
- Create a new training curriculum to ensure staff are regularly accessing the computer and that supervisors understand the benefits.
- Empower property staff to create a plan for their development that dedicates time for computer access for undesked staff.

1-3 Years:
- Using regularly monitored usage data, identify properties that are not taking advantage of the desktop and work with those properties to host in-person training to improve uptake by staff.
- Develop and deliver an engagement survey to gather feedback from the properties.

Alternative 1: Provide all caretaker staff with hand-held devices.

The last option the team explored for bridging the digital divide is providing cell phones to all caretakers. While an intuitive and direct option for addressing the stated problem, discussions with staff and NYCHA's experience providing cell phones to Caretaker Xs led the team to conclude that this is not as impactful of a solution compared to the above recommendations.

Although cell phones would directly connect caretakers to the Central Office, the team found mixed levels of interest from caretakers when discussing the possibility. In some cases, staff expressed a desire to have handheld devices, noting that a handheld device would directly connect staff to necessary information and show a level of appreciation that is currently missing.

Others admitted there wouldn't be much use for them on a regular basis and that they would ultimately serve as another opportunity for discipline. Currently, caretakers can't submit maintenance requests/tickets and must relay any issues they spot throughout the property to a supervisor, who then submits the tickets. Without the ability to submit a ticket, the most a caretaker could do with a phone, beyond accessing information, would be taking photos of potential issues or calling their supervisor/coworkers (Appendix E5).

The agency's experience trying to get Caretaker Xs to use cell phones has been difficult thus far as well, indicating that a further rollout would lead to similar issues. NYCHA's current effort to provide some caretakers with phones came out of a need to enable the direct closing of work orders upon completion, ensure timely completion of mold-related work orders to meet HUD requirements, and improve reporting (Appendix D13).

Describing the cell phone rollout, Central Office staff described scenarios where caretakers are locked out from the cell phones they have received or never pick them up in the first place. As noted, hundreds of devices are being deactivated each month, many from the Caretaker staff (Appendix D7). The team also heard that the phones are often treated very poorly, being damaged when equipment is rested on top of the phones or, in some cases, going so far as to prop open doors with the phones. NYCHA currently procures phones from Verizon and T-Mobile by paying the cost of the service as well as a case. The phone itself is provided for free, which may be a reason for their mistreatment. Because the phones themselves are free for NYCHA, as phones are damaged or disconnected, they are generally left uncollected, meaning they can't be repurposed (Appendix D7). It's possible that better awareness and training could alleviate these persistent issues by demonstrating value to the staff and improving uptake. More than likely, the team finds that a full cell phone distribution program would end up more wasteful than helpful.

5.2 Strained Communication Processes

5.2.1 Problem: Current communication processes at NYCHA are fragmented, cumbersome, and complex. Information flows through multiple channels, oftentimes with a conflicting and overwhelming amount of information, which deters clear message delivery between the Central Office and property-based staff. Combined with the digital divide, these long communication processes make it challenging to disseminate information to property-based staff, especially caretakers, oftentimes leaving them siloed, misinformed, and subject to operational inefficiencies.

The secondary focus for the project team was communication connectivity. Within this focus, the team's methodologies revealed two key issues: 1) overwhelming and conflicting messaging and 2) independent communication processes across departments.

Across various interviews, the project team learned that information overload overwhelms staff's time and impacts efficiency in completing daily work tasks. One Neighborhood Administrator noted that it is typical that they have at least six meetings a day (Appendix D15). Others noted that one day off from work can amount to hundreds of emails when they return (Appendix D15). When the team conducted site visits, it was common for property managers to receive multiple phone calls in the short time dedicated to the interview. Caretakers recalled instances of repairing one unit but having to leave midway to tend to another elsewhere due to new directives from the Central Office, furthering sentiments of NYCHA's reactivity.

"There is a new directive every day." - Neighborhood Administrator (Appendix D15)

In addition to the overwhelming amount of messaging, the content often lacks clarity about its purpose and any interaction with previous communications. Conversations with Central Office staff and caretakers revealed common acknowledgment of the reductive messaging behind most communication. When developments receive new policies or directives, they are communicated without justification and simply with deadlines, further exacerbating the division between the Central Office and property-based staff.

Furthermore, communication methods vary across teams and departments, resulting in fragmented and inefficient workflows. NYCHA has approximately 30 departments. Generally speaking, how departments communicate messages correlates with their gravity, urgency, and complexity. For instance, high-level changes and initiatives that impact developments are typically introduced in borough meetings with borough Vice Presidents, property managers, and superintendents, whereas new regulations can be introduced through emails and on-site visitation (Appendix D13).

Although NYCHA encourages multipronged communication approaches, each department deploys these approaches to various degrees. This was confirmed on two accounts, a Central Office interview and site visit, where disparities between Operations, Human Resources, and IT teams disseminating information on-site were revealed. Further confirmation was received during an interview with a supervisory staff member when one of the project team members painted the following hypothetical: *If I were hired today and had to communicate X message to a specific channel, would there be a decision flowchart and/or manual on how to go about that?* The answer was no; things are ad hoc (Appendix D15).

Without mechanisms to standardize communication and ensure quality assurances across the organization, NYCHA's overreliance on department-specific and email-dominant systems perpetuates missed messaging. While individual communication styles empower staff to do their jobs, without proper standardization, there are lapses in key messaging that ensure the longevity and operational efficiency of NYCHA as well as the livelihood of residents.

Based on these findings, the project team proposes two recommendations and one alternative that would be viable with additional organizational restructuring. These two recommendations speak to the need for standardized communication throughout NYCHA. Given NYCHA's previous success in standardizing the muster meeting curriculum, the project team is confident that standardizing communication establishes a baseline for staff and ensures simplicity, replicable processes, and improved message delivery across departments.

5.2.2. Recommendations
Recommendation 1: Standardize bulletin board posting policies.

Throughout interviews and site visits to numerous developments, issues around bulletin board postings continually arose. These postings are generally curated by the departments responsible for them. However, when new postings are circulated, there is often little to no mention of what to do with the old ones and how, if at all, they interact with previous policies. In an interview with a former NYCHA executive staff member, they noted that bulletin boards are overwhelmed by communication that date back to the 1990s (Appendix D5). This is not the fault of developments alone, but rather the lack of standardization.
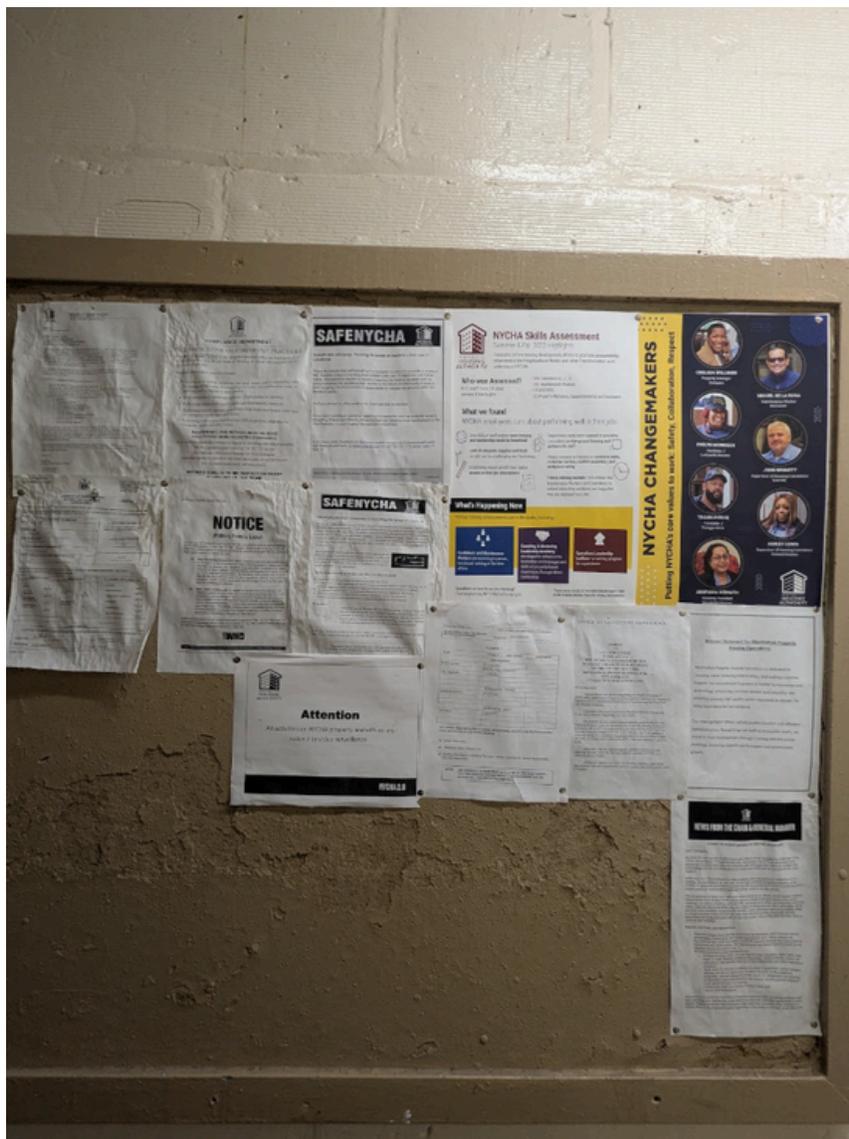
Safety Postings at Riis Houses: Postings showing clear signs of water damage (Appendix E5).

Therefore, the team's first recommendation proposes just that: standardize bulletin board posting policies. Doing so ensures that property-based staff have a clearer understanding of new policies and operations without the overload of outdated information.

Currently, NYC's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), a comparable governmental agency as noted by a NYCHA executive (Appendix D6), prescribes a lifespan to their postings. Conversations with a DPR executive revealed that flyers are routinely replaced when events end. For postings that don't have a set timeframe, like policies and procedures, supervisors receive an update regarding their relevance on the 15th of every month. DPR's success, combined with the need for a posting structure, inspires this recommendation.

Cost and Cost and Implementation Considerations:

The core of this recommendation requires an additional standard section to be added to bulletin board postings that explicitly outlines the relevancy/lifespan of new policies. This section should address three key elements: 1) which policies are being replaced by new policies, 2) why and/or where changes come from, and 3) their impact on property staff's everyday functioning.

To implement this recommendation, an executive memo from C-Suite personnel would be sent to all departments that share policies with property-based staff. This memo would include a summary of the standardization change, its rationale, and an example of how departmental policies should look going forward. Modeling what future bulletin board postings should look like will give departments tangible examples to refer to as they acclimate to the change. The project team created a prototype for this memo, which is attached below.

Although this recommendation is a top-down change that does not involve additional costs, it will add an additional, though relatively minuscule, burden to departments as they adjust to the new change. Nonetheless, this recommendation can be imposed in the immediate future as other recommendations throughout this report take place.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

90 Church Street | 10th FL | New York, NY | (212) 306- 4633

COO Memo #
DATE: May 5, 2025

TO: Central Office Departmental Heads
FROM: Eva Trimble, Chief Operating Officer
SUBJECT: New Bulletin Board Posting Policy

This memorandum serves as a policy to all Departmental Heads of NYCHA's new effort to standardize bulletin postings at developments.

Beginning June 2, 2025, all bulletin-related communication to developments should include a section that addresses the following: 1) which policies are being replaced by new policies, 2) why/where changes come from, and 3) their impact on property staff's everyday functioning.

Currently, developments' bulletin boards are overcrowded with information. As a result, property-based staff, specifically caretakers, may not have relevant information to confidently do their jobs, navigate updated news, or engage in citywide opportunities. To remedy this reality, the new policy will improve communication gaps between the Central Office and property-based staff by ensuring clear message delivery and effective operations.

Former bulletin-related communication styles are still relevant, however, they must include this standardized section before official release to developments (See below for an example). **Quality assurance tests will be conducted six months after the effective date to test the effectiveness of changes with property-based staff and the use of the new standard by department personnel.**

Adhering to this policy will prevent lapses in key messaging that ensure the longevity and efficiency of NYCHA as well as the livelihood of residents.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL DEPARTMENTAL PERSONNEL WHO SHARE NEW POLICIES WITH PROPERTY-BASED STAFF.

NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

HR Memo #
DATE: May 5, 2025

TO: All Employees
FROM: Nicole van Gendt, Senior Vice President Human Resources
SUBJECT: New Policy on Appropriate Workplace Attire

This memorandum serves as a notice to all employees of NYCHA's new policy on appropriate workplace attire.

Due to disparate adherence to previous policies on appropriate workplace attire, all employees are now required to wear NYCHA-branded uniform pieces during work hours, irrespective of job title. These pieces must be purchased through NYCHA's trusted vendor, with whom HR has diligently partnered with to ensure affordability and accessible website use. This new policy overrides HR Memo 28-24, which formerly required uniforms for employees who served in titles that warranted them and allowed other employees to dress in an appropriate manner for a business environment.

This change will take effect on September 1, 2025, and impact current and new employees. Between now and then, further communication will be shared with all employees, including but not limited to the vendor website, income-based discounts, and uniform giveaways.

Adhering to these guidelines will support the Authority's efforts to maintain a productive, mutually accountable, and professional work environment.

Thank you for your cooperation.

PLEASE POST IN CONSPICUOUS COMMON AREAS

Implementation Plan:

1-6 Months:
- Brainstorm with the Department of Communications on the requirements of the additional standard section.
- Coordinate with the Department of Communication regarding the executive's memo and modeling of the new policy.
- Share executive memo with Central Office departments that send memos to developments.
- Enforce a start time for these departmental changes.
- Conduct a 6-month analysis on the effectiveness of changes with property-based staff and the use of the new standard with department personnel.
- Iterate new requirement, if necessary.

Recommendation 2: Standardize communication processes across NYCHA.

Addressing the ad hoc nature of NYCHA's departmental communication also requires standardization. As noted previously, standardizing communication processes does not mean the absence of individuality. Individual communication styles fuel empowerment, a key priority for NYCHA at all levels of the organization. Instead, standardization means more streamlined communication processes within the organization, hence our recommendation for a decision flowchart.

At its core, the decision flowchart is a tool for all NYCHA employees to use when handling communication processes. This tool empowers employees to assess the nature of their communication and departmental requirements while still choosing the best path for clear message delivery.

To begin this process, it is imperative to identify the types of communication that NYCHA typically distributes. Based on our findings, these include agency initiatives, policies and regulations, process changes, organizational changes, and trainings. From there, the following questions will inform the decision flowchart:

1. Who is the audience?
2. Is the nature of this communication personal, operational, or administrative?
3. When is the turnaround time for this communication type?
4. How can this message be reinforced after the original outreach?

Once the communication method is derived from the decision flowchart, other forms of standardization that reinforce focused and funneled communication should be integrated. In conversation with a communications consultant to city departments like FDNY and NYPD, clear formatting—highlighted headers, short summaries, repeated key messages—ensured important points stood out at these organizations. Currently, NYCHA practices clear formatting by following the city's plain language guide established in 2017 (New York City Conflict of Interest Board, 2017). However, combined with the proposed decision flowchart, NYCHA's efforts can expand via format changes that reduce confusion, reinforce clear ideas, and create a focused system across the organization.

The project team created a prototype for this flowchart, which is attached below, as a baseline for NYCHA personnel to expand upon before official implementation.

Costs and Cost and Implementation Considerations:

Similar to recommendation one, there are no associated costs. Based on the project's findings, an initial version of the decision flowchart is offered below. However, cross-departmental collaboration will be required to integrate feedback before official implementation. For example, the Department of Communications will be a key stakeholder to engage before implementing this flowchart to ensure additional considerations are included, such as more nuanced and dynamic circumstances than the typical communication types aforementioned.

Additional communication methods could also be introduced before releasing this flowchart to ensure they're considered by NYCHA employees when using the tool. For example, information sharing at borough meetings is one method of communication that fits under "in-person visit" in the flowchart. However, at present, in-person visits are typically conducted by operational departments such as Planning and Project Management. By expanding this kind of information sharing to appropriate departments (i.e., Employee Engagement and Learning & Development), users of the flowchart can associate various forms of communication within a particular avenue.

Finally, the flowchart could be enhanced by coupling it with a communications schedule. Similar to the muster meetings' rotation of topics (Mindset Mondays, Safety Tuesdays, Administrative Wednesdays, Training Thursdays, and Recap Fridays), Central Office's adoption of a comparable schedule establishes expectations across the agencies of the kinds of information they will receive, and how they'll receive it, on a given day.

Decision Flowchart for NYCHA Communication to Property-Based Staff

Who is the audience?

- EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP
- CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF (90 CHURCH ST.)
- CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF (NON- 90 CHURCH ST.)
- PROPERTY MANAGERS & OFFICE STAFF

Communication Type

- ADMINISTRATIVE (ORG-WIDE)
- PERSONAL (1:1)
- OPERATIONAL (TEAM-LEVEL)

Turnaround Time

URGENT (<24 HRS) → USE DIRECT CHANNELS →
- CALL/SMS
- IN-PERSON VISIT
- FOLLOW-UP: 1) CALL AND/OR 2) WRITTEN SUMMARY

MODERATE (2-5 BUSINESS DAYS) → USE WRITTEN CHANNELS →
- EMAIL
- FORMAL MEMO
- FOLLOW-UP: 1)TEAM MEETING AND/OR 2) DOCUMENTATION

LONG-TERM (5+ BUSINESS DAYS) → PLANNED/ RECURRING CHANNELS →
- REPORTS
- MEETINGS
- FOLLOW-UP: 1) ORG-WIDE EMAIL AND/OR 2) FAQ DOC
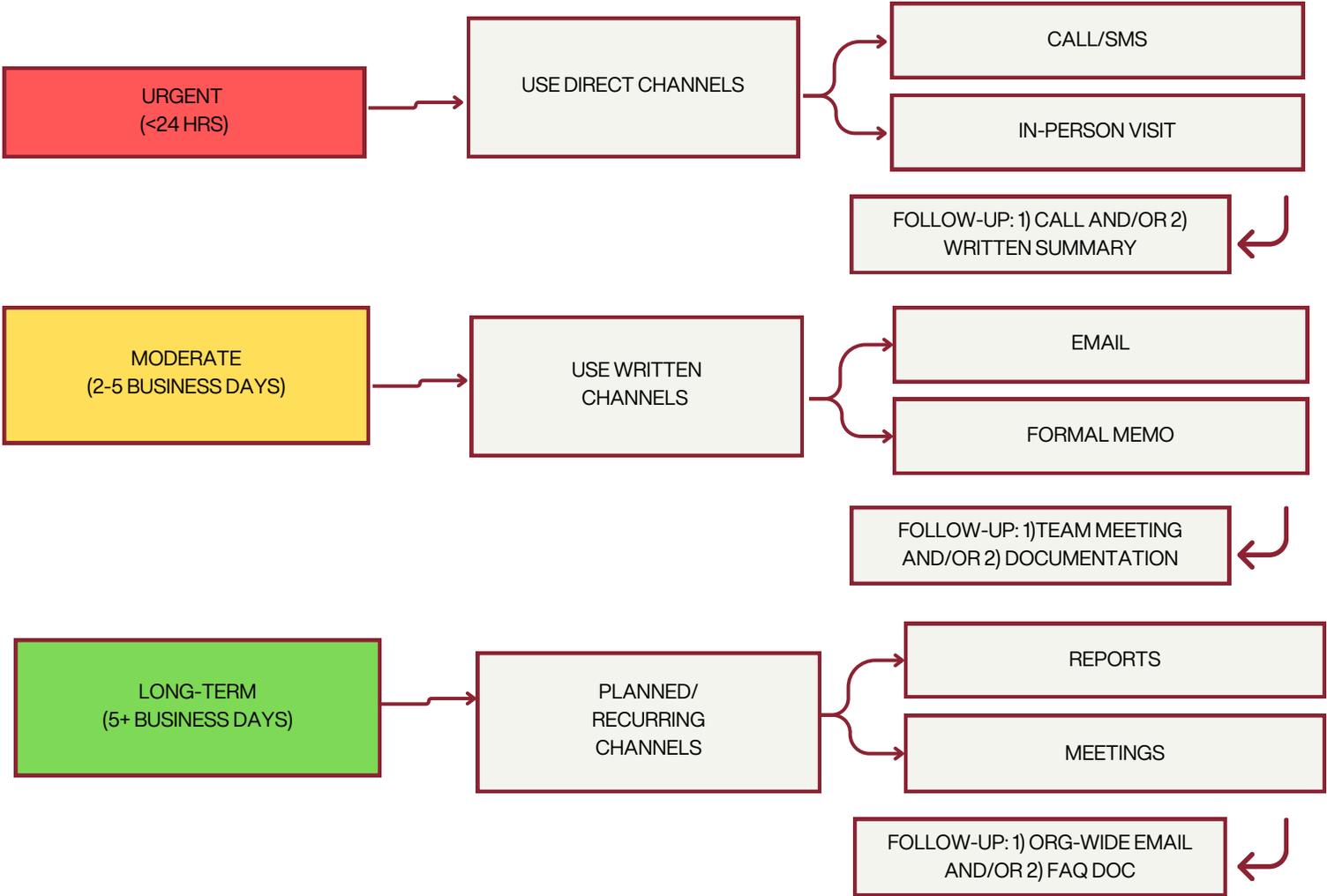
Implementation Plan:

1 Month:
- Review the decision flowchart with the Department of Communications to ensure additional considerations are included.

2-4 Months:
- Establish an informal committee amongst departmental heads.
- Meet biweekly to gauge employee input on the decision tree.

5-6 Months:
- Revise organizational formatting with the Department of Communications for each communication type.

7-8 Months:
- Distribute the new decision flowchart and organizational formatting to staff.

9-12 Months:
- Conduct a 3-month analysis on the effectiveness of changes with staff and the ease of use by departments.
- Iterate new requirement, if necessary.

Alternative 1: Funnel existing Central Office staff to serve as liaisons for developments.

Along with standardized communication strategies, multiple interviews highlighted the need for personalized communication between the Central Office and property-based staff via liaisons. Throughout NYCHA's current channels, there is a repeated lack of knowledge about whom someone can talk to when various issues arise. This lack of knowledge spans both supervisory and non-supervisory roles.

For example, Neighborhood Administrators are the primary point of contact for communication from the Central Office. Yet, even in this direct line of communication, Neighborhood Administrators expressed a desire for standardizing who they report to, while Central Office staff simultaneously expressed needing more than a Neighborhood Administrator to roll out programs to. These desires were also revealed in interviews with departments that don't regularly communicate with property management. Most importantly, these sentiments were consistent across property-based staff who expressed frustration while talking to automated systems and being on hold for hours before speaking to another human being about essential employee benefits.

"If there was a liaison on the property management side who works with the Department of Communications, that would be helpful... Standardization would be inherent in that process to help DOC with dissemination." - NYCHA Department of Communications staff member (Appendix D3)

NYCHA already recognizes this need. In an interview with a NYCHA executive, the team learned that part of NYCHA's organizational restructuring includes creating liaison roles from preexisting Central Office staff (Appendix D6). These liaisons would serve each borough or neighborhood to facilitate better communication and support between caretakers and the Central Office. This restructuring will begin as a pilot program in hopes of scalable implementation. Because this effort is already underway, the project team did not consider it a key recommendation.

However, as NYCHA looks to launch a pilot program and scale it in the future, there is an opportunity for union members to fill the role of liaisons. Currently, NYC's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) empowers the union to disseminate information to field staff. To mend different positionalities and interests as well as ensure clear message delivery, DPR meets monthly with the union and reviews issues with disseminating information. The team suggests that NYCHA adopt similar practices, considering the relational fracture between Central Office and property-based staff and the preexisting trust between the union and caretakers. As NYCHA liaisons, union members would specifically serve caretakers, compared to property-based staff overall, and solely provide support with employee-related benefits such as job opportunities and pensions. Organizational messaging, such as new policies and processes, would remain in the hands of NYCHA employees.

5.3 Unsupportive Work Culture

5.3.1 Problem: Communication challenges between the Central Office and the properties are exacerbated by NYCHA's workplace culture.

Due to the persistent physical issues throughout the housing stock and the resulting stream of cleanup and repairs, NYCHA staff are routinely inundated with new procedures and repair requests. As the Central Office attempts to resolve physical problems, deal with federal scrutiny, and mitigate tenant issues, the frontline staff are expected to perform the ever-growing list of responsibilities on shorter and shorter timelines. In the end, the demands of working at NYCHA create a high-pressure environment where a lack of patience and understanding among staff has developed into resentment throughout. The level of resentment was highlighted as a problem by both the Central Office and property-based staff throughout the project team's investigation.

This lack of understanding, coupled with growing resentment, can lead to job apathy among property staff. Some property staff have become apathetic to their work and do not feel connected to the organization or the mission of providing housing to residents. Caretakers also do not feel part of a larger NYCHA community, and most only care about the development they work for. The confusion in communication, the lack of trust of property staff, and some of the recent scandals among staff have also led some to be fearful of their jobs or making mistakes. In fact, fear of retaliation and the need fore more active listening was a common area of improvement that staff voiced in the project team's survey (Appendix C10).

Overall, when staff members feel misunderstood, it can lead to growing frustration and diminished trust in supervisors and organizational leadership.

"The culture is not very positive, there isn't a lot of encouragement, and the Central Office really doesn't understand the life of the caretakers. What it's like to be cleaning up and being so short staffed and dealing with residents." - Brooklyn Property Manager (Appendix E3)

Furthermore, there is a sense amongst caretakers and other property staff that they are not appreciated for their work. They feel overlooked, and even when they request additional support, it is not given. Symbolic gestures of appreciation, like a day off, are perceived as inadequate as caretakers seek genuine recognition. There is also a strong sentiment of being undervalued. When issues arise, they feel solely responsible for addressing them. This lack of support consequently leads to feelings of resentment, especially for incidents outside their control (e.g., things happening after hours). Property staff feel they bear disproportionate pressure for maintaining order and cleanliness, often without backup.

"We are never told good job." - Caretaker (Appendix E3)

Lastly, much of the work requested of property staff is delivered via directives that offer little explanation. This effort to be efficient is often in response to the pressing nature of the work. However, as a result, caretakers are often told what to do, but do not always understand the purpose of the information. There is also a sense that the Central Office is disconnected from the properties and does not understand the day-to-day life of the properties. Meanwhile, the property staff don't understand why Central Office communication is important or the purpose of directives. Furthermore, when asked during site visits, property-based staff were unclear as to what the Central Office does on a day-to-day basis. Overall, the disconnect furthers the feelings of resentment and makes it challenging for property staff to feel part of the organization when they do not understand what occurs outside of their development.

*"There needs to be a culture shift to provide the why and give property staff the full picture. The tone that supervisors use with their staff is not the nicest, and I would not want to work in that environment. It is really important to understand how people communicate. Really important to show people why they are doing something and why it's important."
- Central Office staff member (Appendix D4)*

5.3.2. Recommendations
<u>Recommendation 1:</u> Create more team-building and networking opportunities to build connections between developments and across the organization.

NYCHA should develop more team-building activities both during and outside work hours. When speaking with caretakers during on-site visits, there was enthusiasm for team building, events, and opportunities to connect and meet other staff.

While these events are not exclusively about communications, they foster trust, encourage knowledge-sharing, and help build supportive relationships that improve service delivery and staff morale. For example, in researching best practices, the project team examined a workplace initiative in the BC Public Service in British Columbia, Canada. This organization successfully achieved cultural transformation by embedding six core values: accountability, courage, curiosity, passion, service, and teamwork (Diacu, 2015). These values were emphasized rhetorically and were adopted to define clear behavioral standards for government employees and align daily conduct with broader organizational goals. Their approach illustrates that cultivating trust and strong relationships across roles and departments can enhance internal communication and foster a more cohesive and collaborative work environment.

At work, NYCHA can establish dedicated time during muster meetings for networking and team building, which would be incorporated into the new muster curriculum. Team-building activities would center around caretakers at the development and focus on building better communication, trust, collaboration, and a more positive work environment. Networking activities would provide opportunities for staff to connect with developments in their NYCHA neighborhood.

Additionally, there should be more meetings between neighborhood administrators or between property managers within a neighborhood. In interviews with property managers, the project team heard that neighborhood-level meetings are mostly about providing information and do not have room for property managers to connect and share common challenges. Therefore, there should be more periodic meetings between property managers to instill greater cooperation, connection, and support between property managers within a neighborhood. For example, during an on-site visit, the project team heard that a Manhattan property manager had difficulty getting a new sink. They needed to call a central hub to get the parts they needed, but the central hub was in another borough.

By the time the necessary parts would have arrived, it would have been too late to resolve the issue and get the new sink (Appendix E5). This could have been mitigated if property managers had an opportunity to share common struggles in these additional meetings.

Outside of work, NYCHA should expand upon existing or previous social events. This includes organization-wide holiday parties, cultural events such as the Puerto Rican Day Parade, and the Corporate Challenge. In best practice research, the project team found that public events like these, as practiced by companies like Goodyear Tires and outlined in Corporate Communication: Concepts and Practice, have helped break hierarchical barriers and encourage staff at all levels to socialize in informal, respectful settings (Jethwaney, 2024). These large events will make staff feel more connected to NYCHA and give staff from all levels of the organization an opportunity to meet.

Cost and Implementation Considerations:

Two major considerations that must be addressed are time and resources. Staff across NYCHA already express feelings of being overburdened with existing responsibilities. Dedicating extra time during work for networking or team building may generate pushback from staff. Team-building activities during muster may also be challenging when time is limited and staff have other responsibilities that take priority. The other major consideration is cost. Large events may require additional funding; therefore, leveraging current infrastructure and aligning with ongoing employee initiatives could mitigate financial pressure.

Implementation Plan:

1-6 Months:
- Highlight and support existing employee recognition and engagement programs.
- Assist the development of more NYCHA associations.
- Create more opportunities for staff across developments and roles to network.

6-12 Months:
- Establish more periodic meetings between property managers.
- Review organizational budget to identify funding opportunities for holiday celebrations
- Develop more team-building activities during training.

1-3 Years:
- Integrate team culture and bonding into the muster curriculum.
- Establish annual holiday celebrations.

Recommendation 2: Improve supervisor instruction and ensure more in-person training for staff to create space for open feedback and a supportive work environment.

With the current communication process, caretakers are reliant on their supervisors for daily information about their work tasks. These directives from supervisors to caretakers are unidirectional, and there is very little room for caretakers to get support from their supervisors beyond their work responsibilities. Often, the focus for supervisors is on what caretakers are doing wrong rather than right, which can hinder motivation and engagement. To shift this pattern, NYCHA should invest in supervisor training that promotes a two-way, supportive communication culture grounded in trust, empathy, and shared accountability.

Therefore, we recommend that NYCHA develop training materials for supervisors on how to provide feedback. Supervisor training should not only focus on procedural knowledge but also on building core interpersonal skills. Learning and Development produces various materials through the NYCHA University portal, but there could be specific training to support supervisors in topics such as tone, language, and feedback. This would help create a more reciprocal system of communication as opposed to the current unidirectional process. Caretakers should also have more one-on-one sessions with supervisors, so feedback can be provided and questions about directives can be asked outside of muster meetings.

In best practice research, the project team found that the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) outlines five core aims of supervisor training: developing feedback skills, practicing various supervisory interventions, fostering personal reflection, integrating ethical standards, and cultivating an informed, supportive supervision style (Henderson, 2018). These types of training could be implemented at NYCHA.

NYCHA should also require more in-person training, which would help reduce the digital divide issues and help caretakers understand more about what is most relevant to them. While in-person training options are available, and Learning and Development is hiring more staff, most trainings happen virtually. Many staff face technological barriers that limit their participation. This requires staff to log in to the NYCHA system, which has been highlighted above as a significant challenge in the digital divide. In-person training not only resolves these access issues but also enhances learning through real-time engagement and fosters a stronger sense of value and inclusion.

Lastly, improved training can focus on the disconnect that property-based staff feel in relation to the Central Office. These trainings could focus on ensuring that property staff understand the different roles at NYCHA and some of the responsibilities at various departments. This would help property staff better understand the life of the Central Office, and would help build trust and understanding of new procedures and directives.

Cost and Implementation Considerations:

Implementing this plan would require minimal costs in developing training materials and could be integrated into current Learning and Development processes. The biggest challenge of implementation is getting buy-in from supervisor staff, some of whom may be resistant to training they perceive as intrusive or critical of their management style. Addressing this requires framing supervisor development as a professional growth opportunity that enhances rather than restricts leadership autonomy. In-person training may require additional space to host sessions or require training staff to travel to different developments.

Implementation Plan:

1-6 Months:
- Workshop feedback process.
- Develop training materials.
- Plan space for in-person training.

6-12 Months:
- Pilot training materials.
- Determine feedback process.
- Schedule in-person training sessions.

1-3 Years:
- Dedicate a period of time for feedback between caretakers and supervisors.
- Embed feedback communication in supervisor training and NYCHA University.
- Developed a list of in-person training requirements.

Alternative 1: Enforce stronger accountability mechanisms.

Current accountability mechanisms pose significant challenges to a work environment of trust and safety. Supervisors often express concern that staff may not consistently fulfill their responsibilities and want more support from upper management in enforcing rules and holding staff accountable. However, property-based staff also perceive a lack of empathy from supervisors who do not know and/or share similar experiences in their home life or on the job. At site visits, several caretakers voiced concerns about conflict with residents, noting there are no real consequences for resident misconduct. They feel they're expected to "hold things down" without authority or protection, especially in situations involving disrespect or personal safety risks. Many feel disrespected despite doing most of the work, and they associate this with low pay and lack of institutional support. The absence of consistent follow-through only reinforces feelings of mistrust, resentment, and being undervalued.

As a potential model, Columbia University Facilities incorporates employee management and accountability into supervisors' performance evaluations, creating a system where frontline staff support is directly tied to leadership performance. NYCHA could consider a similar approach as it examines opportunities to build a more supportive supervisory structure.

Despite the importance of accountability in establishing trust, this recommendation involves staff disciplinary processes and resident behavior, which is far beyond the scope of the project. The project team recommends that senior leadership further examine accountability mechanisms in the future, as these unresolved issues continue to strain communication and undermine workplace cohesion.

Alternative 2: Offer greater incentives to increase retention.

NYCHA has high employee turnover and challenges retaining staff. New staff may be unfamiliar with current procedures and policies, leading to breakdowns in communication. This is compounded by the ongoing new procedures introduced by the federal monitor.

To increase employee retention, NYCHA should consider adding more incentives for staff. This could include implementing structured performance reviews for property managers, expanding professional development opportunities through NYCHA University, and offering competitive pay for frontline workers.

Furthermore, NYCHA could expand upon service awards to showcase staff's dedication to the organization and public service. Currently, NYCHA awards service pins to people for every five years of service at the Authority, and employees who have served for 30-plus years will be featured on NYCHA Connect and NYCHA (NYCHA Now).

While these incentives would go a long way to improve retention and support better communication, they would require significant financial investment and could involve labor union negotiations, which is beyond the scope of this project. The project team recommends that NYCHA further investigate the incentive structure for staff.

6. Roadmap

As NYCHA reviews the recommendations above, systems need to be in place to determine if these recommendations are working. Therefore, the project team outlined performance indicators that can be reached within the next five years to determine success for improving communications between the Central Office and properties in the three areas of technology, communications, and culture .

Indicators: Technology

Key Indicator	Goal	Yearly Projections
Number of Caretaker Computers Per Development	3 Caretaker Computers Per Development	• Year 1: One caretaker computer per development • Year 3: Three caretaker computers per development
Percent of Developments with Computers for Caretakers	100% of Developments with Computers	• Year 1: 30% • Year 2: 50% • Year 3: 75% • Year 4: 100%
Number of Smart Screens at Developments In Use	2 Smart Screens at Developments In Use	• Year 1: One smart screen per development • Year 3: Two smart screens per development
Percent of Developments with Smart Screens	100% of Developments with Smart Screens	• Year 1: 10% • Year 2: 30% • Year 3: 50% • Year 4: 75% • Year 5: 100%
Percent of Supervisors Using Smart Screens Weekly	100% of Supervisors Using Smart Screens Weekly	• Year 1: 20% • Year 2: 50% • Year 3: 60% • Year 4: 80% • Year 5: 100%

Indicators: Communications

Key Indicator	Goal	Yearly Projections
Percent of Developments with Updated Postings	100% of Developments with Updated Postings	• Year 1: 50% • Year 2: 75% • Year 3: 100%
Percent of Staff Using Standardized Communication Tools/ Processes	100% of of Staff Using Standardized Communication Tools/ Processes	• Year 1: 30% • Year 2: 60% • Year 3: 80% • Year 4: 90% • Year 5: 100%
Percent of Staff Who Feel Adequately Informed (Based on Internal Survey)	80% of Staff Who Feel Adequately Informed (Based on Internal Survey)	• Year 1: 40% • Year 2: 50% • Year 3: 60% • Year 4: 70% • Year 5: 80%

Indicators: Culture

Key Indicator	Goal	Yearly Projections
Percent of Property Staff Completing Trainings	100% of Property Staff Completing Trainings	• Year 1: 75% • Year 2: 80% • Year 3: 85% • Year 4: 90% • Year 5: 100%
Percent of In-Person Training	50% of In-Person Training	• Year 1: 10% • Year 2: 20% • Year 3: 30% • Year 4: 40% • Year 5: 50%
Number of Annual Employee Events	4 Annual Employee Events	• Year 1: Two Annual Events • Year 2 Three Annual Events • Year 3: Three Annual Events
Number of Networking Events for Staff Per Year	10 Networking Events for Staff Per Year	• Year 1: One Event • Year 2: Three Events • Year 3: Five Events • Year 4: Seven Events • Year 5: Ten Events
Percent of Supervisors Trained on Positive Culture	100% of Supervisors Trained on Positive Culture	• Year 1: 10% • Year 2: 50% • Year 3: 70% • Year 4: 90% • Year 5: 100%

7. Conclusion

NYCHA stands at a pivotal moment to reimagine how it communicates, connects, and supports the thousands of employees who make its mission possible. This project set out to investigate and address the communication challenges faced by NYCHA's Central Office and its property-based staff, particularly caretakers who often serve as the frontline of service delivery but lack consistent access to organizational updates, digital systems, and professional development. This project not only revealed the significant structural barriers faced by staff but also highlighted the opportunities for a meaningful and lasting transformation.

What emerged from this project was a clear and urgent need to address the complexity of NYCHA's internal communication system. Persistent gaps, such as the digital divide between property-based and Central Office staff, inconsistent communication processes, and a workplace culture marked by low trust and limited recognition, hinder staff from feeling informed, supported, and valued in their roles. These challenges were not only identified through structural analysis but were also deeply reinforced by the experiences of employees across the agency. Grounded in months of fieldwork and best practice research, the recommendations outlined in this report offer a path forward. By acting on these proposals, NYCHA can foster a more connected and empowered workforce, rebuild trust, and ultimately enhance the quality of life for the nearly half a million New Yorkers it serves.

Looking ahead, the recommendations presented in this report are intended to guide NYCHA's internal communication transformation while offering insights that may inform broader efforts across other public housing authorities and government agencies. As the largest and one of the most complex housing systems in the United States, NYCHA has a unique opportunity and responsibility to lead with innovation and compassion.

By embracing a more inclusive, transparent, and people-centered approach to communication, NYCHA can set a new standard for how public institutions support their workforce, promote organizational resilience, and deliver services more effectively to the communities they serve.

8. Appendix

A. Work Cited

About NYCHA. New York City Housing Authority. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://www.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/about-nycha.page.

About. NYCHA Monitorship. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://www.nychamonitor.com/about.

Diacu, Mariana. Effective Communication Strategies in a Complex Public Sector Organization. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 2023. https://www.proquest.com/docview/305158957.

Employee Recognition Program. NYCHA Now. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://nychanow.nyc/employee-engagement/employee-recognition-programs/.

Henderson, Penny. Supervisor Training: Issues and Approaches. London: Routledge, 2018. https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9780429480546

Jethwaney, Jaishri. Corporate Communication: Concepts and Practice. London: Routledge, 2024. https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/books/mono/10.4324/9781032694702/corporate-communication-jaishri-jethwaney.

Lower East Side. New York City Housing Authority, November 2023. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/PestAndWaste/Manhattan/Lower%20East%20Side%20II_IAPv2.pdf.

New York City Housing Authority. 2024. NYCHA Fact Sheet 2024. March. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/NYCHA_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

NYCHA Change Ambassadors. NYCHA Now. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://nychanow.nyc/employee-engagement/nycha-change-ambassadors/.

NYCHA Development Interactive Map. ArcGIS. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=f650b453d2d74f27a9874fd3610ea264.

NYCHA Fact Sheet 2024. New York City Housing Authority, March 2024. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/NYCHA_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

NYCHA's Blueprint for Change: Transformation Plan. New York City Housing Authority, March 2, 2021. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/NYCHA_Transformation_Plan_Final.pdf.

Physical Needs Assessment FAQs. New York City Housing Authority. Accessed April 17, 2025. https://www.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/physical-needs-assessment-faqs.page#:~:text=What%20were%20the%20overall%20results,estimated%20needs%20of%20$45.3%20billion.

Plain Language Guide. New York City Conflict of Interest Board, February 2017.
https://www.nyc.gov/assets/coib/downloads/pdf2/books/orange_bk.pdf.

Revamped Muster Brings Consistency Across NYCHA Developments and Inspires Poetry.
NYCHA Now, April 2024.
https://nychanow.nyc/revamped-muster-brings-consistency-across-nycha-developments-and-inspires-poetry/.

STV, and AECOM. New York City Housing Authority 2023 Physical Needs Assessment Final
Report. NYC.GOV, June 22, 2023.
https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/2023-PNA-Report-Physical-Needs-Assessment-NYCHA.pdf.

B. NYCHA Documents

B1. Managed By Budgeted Headcount

Budgeted_HC	Current_Modified	Actuals_HC		Actuals	Variance_Amount	Variance_HC		
EVP		Department					RC Name	Budgeted_HC
Property Management Operations		Bronx Property Management					1010 East 178th Street Consolidated	28.
							Adams	30.
							Bronx River Consolidated	49.
							Butler	47.
							Castle Hill	65.
							Claremont Consolidated	32.
							Forest Consolidation	63.
							Fort Independence Consolidated	25.
							Gun Hill	28.
							Highbridge Gardens	26.
							Justice Sonia Sotomayor Consolidated	54.
							Marble Hill	52.
							Melrose Consolidated	39.
							Mill Brook Consolidated	45.
							Mitchel Consolidated	54.
							Monroe Consolidated	50.
							Morris Consolidated	57.
							Morrisania Consolidated	53.
							Mott Haven	33.
							Parkside	31.
							Patterson	57.
							Pelham Parkway Consolidated	43.
							Saint Mary's Park Consolidated	47.
							Sedgwick Consolidated	31.
							Soundview	43.
							Throggs Neck Consolidated	62.
							Webster Consolidated	29.
		Bronx Property Management Total						1173.
		Brooklyn Property Management					Albany Consolidated	39.
							Bay View	55.
							Borinquen Plaza Consolidated	34.
							Breukelen	57.

		Brevoort	35.
		Brownsville	46.
		Bushwick Consolidated	47.
		Carey Gardens Consolidated	39.
		Cooper Park	26.
		Cypress Hills Consolidated	49.
		Farragut	44.
		Garvey Consolidated	27.
		Glenwood	45.
		Gowanus	37.
		Howard	30.
		Hughes Apts	25.
		Ingersoll	58.
		Kingsborough Consolidated	43.
		Lafayette	30.
		Marcy	59.
		Marlboro	58.
		Ocean Hill Consolidated	26.
		O'dwyer Gardens Consolidated	44.
		Pink	49.
		Red Hook East	51.
		Red Hook West	51.
		Roosevelt Consolidated	37.
		Seth Low Consolidation	32.
		Sheepshead Bay Consolidated	71.
		Stuyvesant Gardens Consolidated	25.
		Sumner Consolidated	49.
		Surfside Gardens Consolidated	48.
		Taylor / Wythe Consolidation	23.
		Tilden	34.
		Tompkins Consolidated	35.
		Unity Plaza Consolidated	35.
		Van Dyke I	54.
		Vandalia Avenue	21.
		Whitman	52.
		Woodson Consolidated	25.
		Wyckoff Gardens Consolidated	29.

	Brooklyn Property Management Total		1674.
	Manhattan Property Management	Amsterdam Consolidated	52.
		Baruch Consolidated	75.
		Carver	40.
		Chelsea Consolidated	37.
		Clinton	28.
		De Hostos Apartments Consolidated	46.
		Douglass Consolidated	76.
		Drew - Hamilton	42.
		Dyckman	38.
		East River	41.
		Fulton	31.
		Gompers Consolidated	49.
		Grant	57.
		Isaacs Consolidated	40.
		Jackie Robinson Consolidated	25.
		Jefferson Consolidated	54.
		Johnson	40.
		Kings Tower Consolidated	46.
		La Guardia Consolidated	45.
		Lehman	25.
		Lincoln	44.
		Lower East Side Consolidated	32.
		Polo Grounds Tower	52.
		Rangel	34.
		Riis Consolidated	54.
		Rutgers	27.
		Saint Nicholas	46.
		Smith	59.
		Straus Consolidated	22.
		Taft Consolidated	48.
		Vladeck Consolidated	56.
		Wagner Consolidated	68.
		Wald	58.
		Washington Consolidated	60.
		Wilson Consolidated	30.
	Manhattan Property Management Total		1577.
	Queens\Staten Island Property Management	Astoria	39.
		Baisley Park Consolidated	38.

		Beach 41st Street Consolidation	39.
		Berry	26.
		Hammel Consolidated	30.
		Latimer Gardens Consolidated	32.
		Mariner's Harbor	33.
		Pomonok	68.
		Queensbridge North	52.
		Queensbridge South	54.
		Ravenswood	68.
		Redfern	26.
		Richmond Terrace Consolidated	30.
		South Beach Consolidated	28.
		South Jamaica Consolidated	40.
		Stapleton	26.
		Todt Hill	25.
		Woodside	49.
	Queens\Staten Island Property Management Total		703.
Property Management Operations Total			5127.

B2. PPMO NYCHA Operations Overview

Operation's Hierarchy

- VP of Boroughs
- Neighborhood Administrators

Property Management Office
- Property Manager

Office Staff
- Assistant Property Manager
- Housing Assistant
- Secretary

Maintenance Staff
- Superintendent
- Assistant Super
- Maintenance Worker
- Supervisor of Caretakers
- Supervisors of Grounds
- Caretakers X
- Caretaker G
- Caretaker J
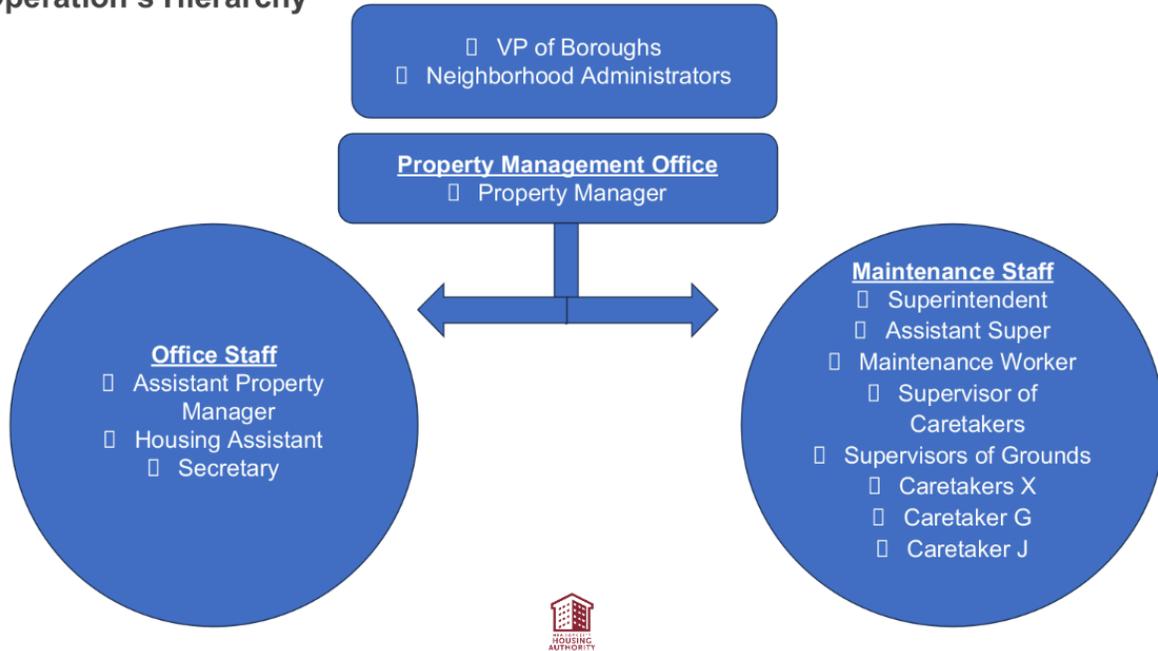
Operation Job Description & Title – Maintenance Staff

Maintenance: Responsible for he safety, cleanliness, and functionality of buildings, grounds, and equipment, responding to resident needs and proactively addressing maintenance issues.

- **Superintendent** – Oversees all maintenance, janitorial, and capital improvement work at the development. This includes supervising staff, managing repairs and work orders (including vacant apartment turnovers), and procuring necessary materials/services.

- **Assistant Superintendent** – Assists the Superintendent in managing daily maintenance operations. This involves supervising repairs, maintaining building systems, conducting inspections, monitoring work orders, and overseeing move-out preparations.

- **Maintenance Worker** – Performs hands-on maintenance tasks, including residential and general building repairs.

- **Supervisor of Caretakers** – Manages a team of caretakers, ensuring cleaning and maintenance tasks are performed efficiently , perform inspections, and meeting quality standards.

- **Supervisors of Grounds** – Oversees outdoor property maintenance, ensuring lawns, pathways, and public spaces are clean, well-kept, and safe.

- **Caretaker X** – Performs cleaning, trash removal, mold cleaning and minor maintenance duties within residential buildings.

- **Caretaker G** –Focuses on groundskeeping tasks, including landscaping, snow removal, and outdoor area maintenance.

- **Caretaker J** – Specializes in cleaning common areas, such as hallways, lobbies, and stairwells, ensuring sanitation standards are met.

C. Survey Data
C1. Survey Questions

Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Greetings! We are a team of graduate student consultants working with NYCHA to investigate the best methods and strategies to bridge the connectivity gap between headquarters, supervisors, caretakers, and other property-based staff.We want to hear from you to propose solutions that include and consider staff member's voices across a range of titles!

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. If you decide to no longer participate, you may stop participating at any time by closing the survey browser window to withdraw from the study.

Your responses will be handled as confidentially as possible. To minimize risks of confidentiality, your survey responses will be recorded anonymously.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the team's Interview Coordinator, Zenayah Roaché. They can be reached by email at znr2103@columbia.edu, Thank you for participating in the survey!

* Indicates required question

1. What is your role and/or title?*

   _____

2. Where do you primarily work?*

   Mark only one oval.

   ( ) NYCHA central office/facility

   ( ) NYCHA development/property

   How relevant are the following work topics to your daily responsibilities?

3.   Training information (e.g. classes, manuals, how-to videos):*

Mark only one oval.

◯ Very Relevant

◯ Relevant

◯ Neutral

◯ Somewhat Irrelevant

◯ Irrelevant

4.   Work Task Updates (e.g. timekeeping, standard procedure notices, and compliance   *
     advisories):

Mark only one oval.

◯ Very Relevant

◯ Relevant

◯ Neutral

◯ Somewhat Relevant

◯ Not Relevant

5.   HR Communication (e.g. civil service exams, postings, health benefits, leave,   *
     retirement):

Mark only one oval.

◯ Very Relevant

◯ Relevant

◯ Neutral

◯ Somewhat Relevant

◯ Not Relevant

6.   Employee engagement activities (e.g., staff surveys, ambassador outreach):*

Mark only one oval.

◯ Very Relevant

◯ Relevant

◯ Neutral

◯ Somewhat Relevant

◯ Not Relevant

7.   General information (e.g., agency-wide news, CEO/COO announcements, etc.)*

Mark only one oval.

◯ Very Relevant

◯ Relevant

◯ Neutral

◯ Somewhat Relevant

◯ Not Relevant

Communicating with your supervisor

8.   How do you typically communicate with your supervisor? (If applicable, please select   *
     more than one option).

Check all that apply.

☐ Email

☐ Phone calls

☐ In-person meetings/face-to-face

☐ Other: _____

9.   On average, how long does it take for your supervisors to respond to your inquiries?*

Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Within   a   few   hours

    ◯ Within one business day

    ◯ Within a few days More

    ◯ than a week

10.   Are you a supervisor?*

Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No   *Skip to question 13*

Communicating with staff

11.   How do you typically communicate with your staff? (If applicable, please select more *
      than one option).

Check all that apply.

☐ Email

☐ Phone calls

☐ In-person meetings/face-to-face

☐ Other: _____

12.   On average, how long does it take for your staff to respond to your inquiries?*

Mark only one oval.

⬭ Within   a   few   hours

⬭ Within one business day

⬭ Within a few days More

⬭ than a week

Ideas for improvement

13.   If you could suggest one improvement for communication with your supervisors or   *
staff, what would it be?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thanks for filling out the survey!
If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the team's Interview Coordinator,
Zenayah Roaché. They can be reached by email at znr2103@columbia.edu. Thank you for participating in
the survey!

Google Forms

C2. Central Office Survey Data

Central Office	n = 32				
Response	Not Relevant	Somewhat Relevant	Neutral	Relevant	Very Relevant
Training information	3.13%	0.00%	12.50%	31.25%	53.13%
Work Task Updates	6.25%	6.25%	9.38%	31.25%	46.88%
HR Communication	15.63%	9.38%	15.63%	15.63%	43.75%
Employee engagement activities	9.38%	6.25%	15.63%	28.13%	40.63%
General information	3.13%	3.13%	25.00%	31.25%	37.50%

C3. Property Staff Survey Data

Property Staff	n= 54				
Response	Not Relevant	Somewhat Relevant	Neutral	Relevant	Very Relevant
Training information	5.88%	1.96%	13.73%	31.37%	52.94%
Work Task Updates	1.89%	7.55%	16.98%	28.30%	47.17%
HR Communication	8.00%	6.00%	10.00%	30.00%	54.00%
Employee engagement activities	10.20%	12.24%	18.37%	36.73%	32.65%
General information	10.20%	10.20%	16.33%	28.57%	44.90%

C4. Caretaker Survey Data

Caretakers	n=38				
Response	Not Relevant	Somewhat Relevant	Neutral	Relevant	Very Relevant
Training information	7.89%	2.63%	18.42%	34.21%	36.84%
Work Task Updates	2.63%	13.16%	21.05%	31.58%	31.58%
HR Communication	10.53%	10.53%	13.16%	21.05%	44.74%
Employee engagement activities	13.16%	13.16%	15.79%	31.58%	26.32%
General information	13.16%	13.16%	15.79%	23.68%	34.21%

C5. Communication Relevancy Figure
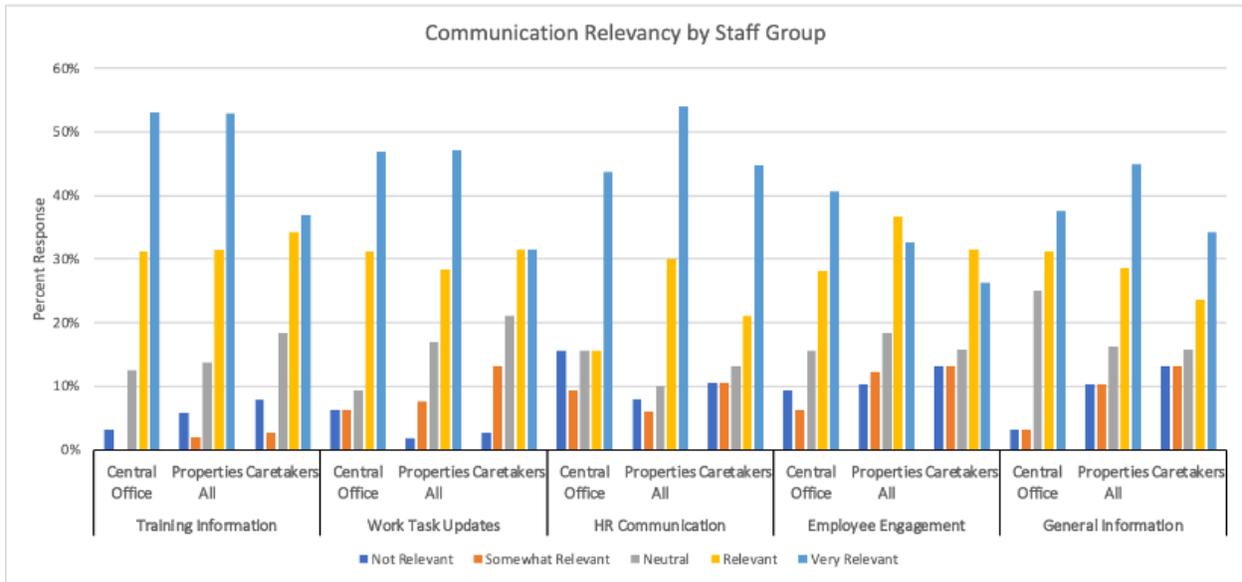
C6. Central Office Figure
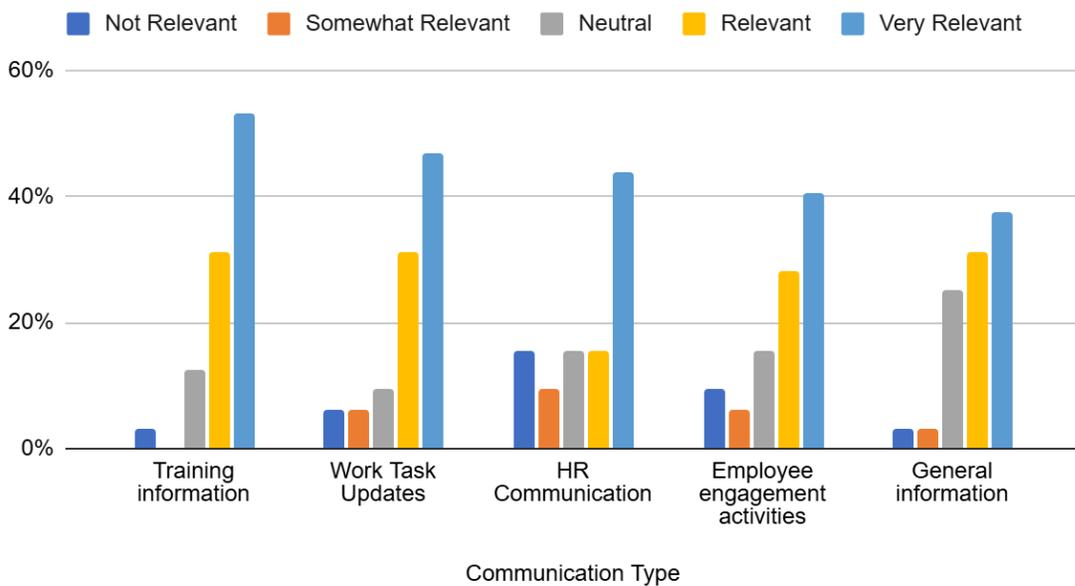
C7. Property Staff Figure

Property Staff
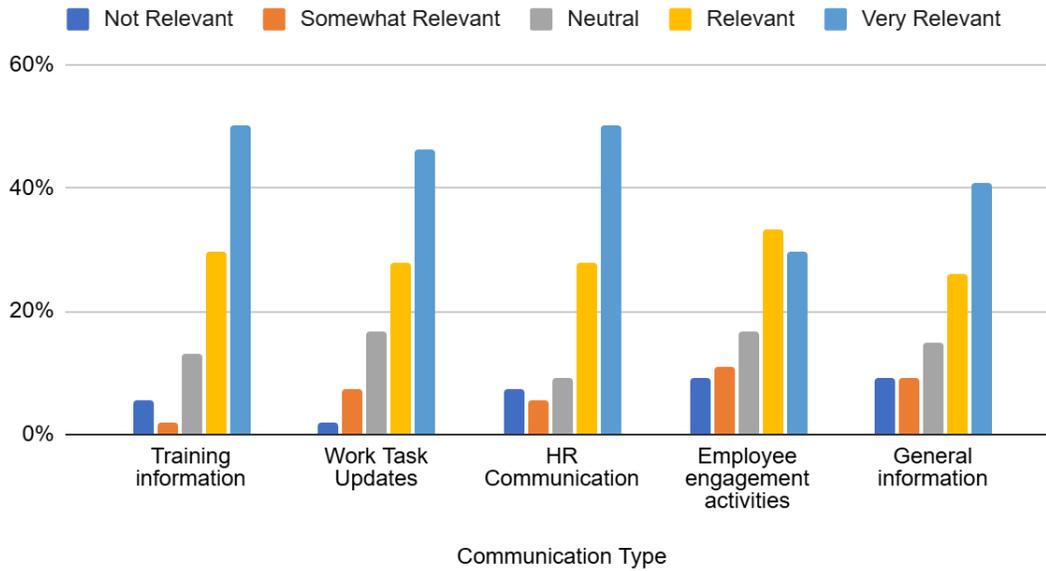
C8. Caretakers Figure

Caretakers
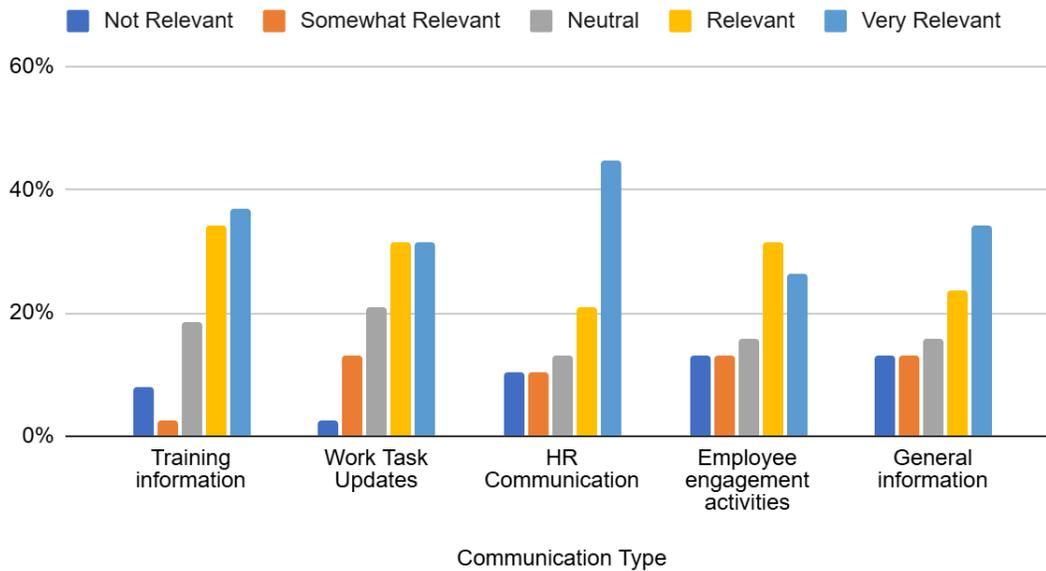
C9. Survey Response Ideas for Improvement

If you could suggest one improvement for communication with your supervisors or staff, what would it be?
active listening
ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS, i took this training when i became a new supervisor and it was very helpful. a lot of supervisors DO NOT actively listen and can be very dismissive.
I have constant communication with my supervisors, I want to be as supportive as possible. TY!
Keep message(s) to the point and as short as possible.
one improvement or suggestion is more of wishful thinking, is for people to be less emotionally triggered when having conversations, sometimes not agreeing or having the same outlook turns into more of personality clash, than a meeting of minds to reach a resolution. everyone should be more self-reflective on this matter. NYCHA as a whole need more transparency, and clearer needs and expectations (realistic expectations) speak on the issues we all face, staff safety concerning residents, Influence of T/A's, lack of funding. NYCHA workers day in and day out preform great work, it should be celebrated, our Brass needs to remind T/A's and Political pundits that if they really want to help. ask what they could be doing to help us help them. not constantly trying to criticize.
brief weekly check-in
Clear, streamline means of communications.
Transparency
I really do not have an issue with this part and my staff
Clarity in communications: the purpose, the action needed, etc. Ease of use (for example, an updated SOP should have new information highlighted so staff doesn't have to read the whole thing and try to determine this on their own.
Effective communication between the staff and supervisors. Sometimes it is difficult to let your voice be heard.
Have more supervisors available in the event one isnt available.

More official training should be done. They don't give good training like before We currently do online training now, and we cannot communicate as much as we do in person. They ask us to wait until the end as they read off a deck, which I can do on my own. then in the end we are given an opportunity to ask questions by that time we forget what the question was. Hands on training way better. I would love for NYCHA to offer training. in other fields within NYCHA, not just training it within their current line of work.

To listen fairly. To make fair decisions and not bias decisions. It would be helpful to have an open mind and understand that all points of views are valuable to make an informed decision.

We have multiple ways its just understanding what is being asked or how its phrased my hinder the response.

I think every supervisor should have mandatory weekly or monthly 1:1 sessions with their staff. I never had these types of meetings early in my career at NYCHA. They started when I transferred to Management Services Department and helped me feel more confident in my work. These sessions weren't always about what I was working on or owed, but discussed how to improve my skillset, new career opportunities, and managing people across departments.

The overall number of communication emails is creating white noise. People do not read the emails in their entirety if at all. Often emailing resources if/when they have questions about the missed communications as it applies to them. I get so many emails, including those that have no impact or relevance to me, I have created rules to move them straight to deleted folder. This includes the necessary # of emails for mandatory training purposes.
It would be nice if there was one repository of all communications, info mapped by category and version dates. This way 1 reminder email (weekly or monthly) to catch up on critical communications. Then I can check Dashboard find topics that are applicable to me.
Categories could include: ALL NYCHA, IT, HR, Trainings, Compliance, Heating. Articles could live in one folder and be linked to another similar folder. Department of Communications <dept.comm@nycha.nyc.gov> almost daily email is a good example of information that if wanted i could go get instead overkill of daily emails.

maintain monthly staff meetings

Consistency across the boroughs and the titles upon hiring, making it their responsibility and understanding the importance of getting the information. Reminding them to ask, but having a number or website accessible to all, that has recorded information for their consumption and digestion. Something as consistent as swiping in to work or receiving their pay, a must do. Making the new information a part of the daily musters for sure. One voice, one NYCHA

More consistent one on one check in meetings

I think communication with my specific supervisor is pretty quick. But in general, across NYCHA, what may help is having staff as a whole have their calendars up to date and have it be clear when someone is available in a virtual space.

One obvious way to improve communication between supervisors and employees is to respond to an email at the very least on the same day that it is sent, and to have more face-to-face conversations. This makes employees feel as though what they're communicating is being taken seriously, and it builds trust and a more cooperative relationship between the parties. Supervisors should make every effort to ensure the concerns and suggestions of their staff are given the requisite consideration that they deserve, and if they can affect positive change and enhancement to the workplace routine, they should be afforded every opportunity for implementation.

The ability to be comfortable speaking about work related issues

Take suggestions into consideration and try implementing changes instead of brushing things to the side.

Provide full information, be concise with what we need to do.

Have regularly scheduled meetings with the team

Familiarize oneself with MS Teams

We do have extensive communication between ourselves withi in person meetings, emails, and phone calls

N/A we have very well communications with our supervisors

To communicate better

That it gets done

More communication with the staffs and supervisors

Communications are fine at the moment we have work phones to communicate.

Better Communication
Computers are extremely slow. Sometimes trying to open a program to communicate can take up to 15 minutes.
Open communication without retaliation
OK for me
Too Come Actually See What I'm Complaining About Rather Then Just Saying OK, I'll Report It
Good
Better training
Getting along
To have a quicker response depending on the situation
Be professional
We can have supervisors work with us for a half hour
Speak to others how you are spoken to
Walkie talkie
Understanding
Job phone
Job phone
Email
Better communication,be honest with each other
Better communication
Respect, everybody follows the same rules
Diversify the morning meeting topics
Aint none they fine with me
definitely more training on proper communication
They could be more understanding when giving us multiple tasks to complete. There is only so much you can complete in the work day
I have great communication and access to my supervisors. No recommendation
Dedicated communications portal - (not outlook.) that could track professional discussions and reply times

Create one set of standard policies/procedures for all staff (management and non-management), to include promotional opportunities (ie. using only civil service regulations and/or interviewing only those that have passed CS exams).

I think my unit would benefit from having regular meetings. Maybe monthly or bi-monthly.

Sit closer to each other as a group instead of scattered all over the floor.

I feel that information and changes that affect the work being done should be shared as soon as possible. I have just spent almost a week trying to get answers to why something that I do monthly is not going thru, just to find out that changes were made to the procedure, but no one bothered to notify me - that is very frustrating and time consuming.

I have no problem with communication with my supervisor or the staff

C10. Survey Response Ideas for Improvement (Categorized)

Categorized: If you could suggest one improvement for communication with your supervisors or staff, what would it be?
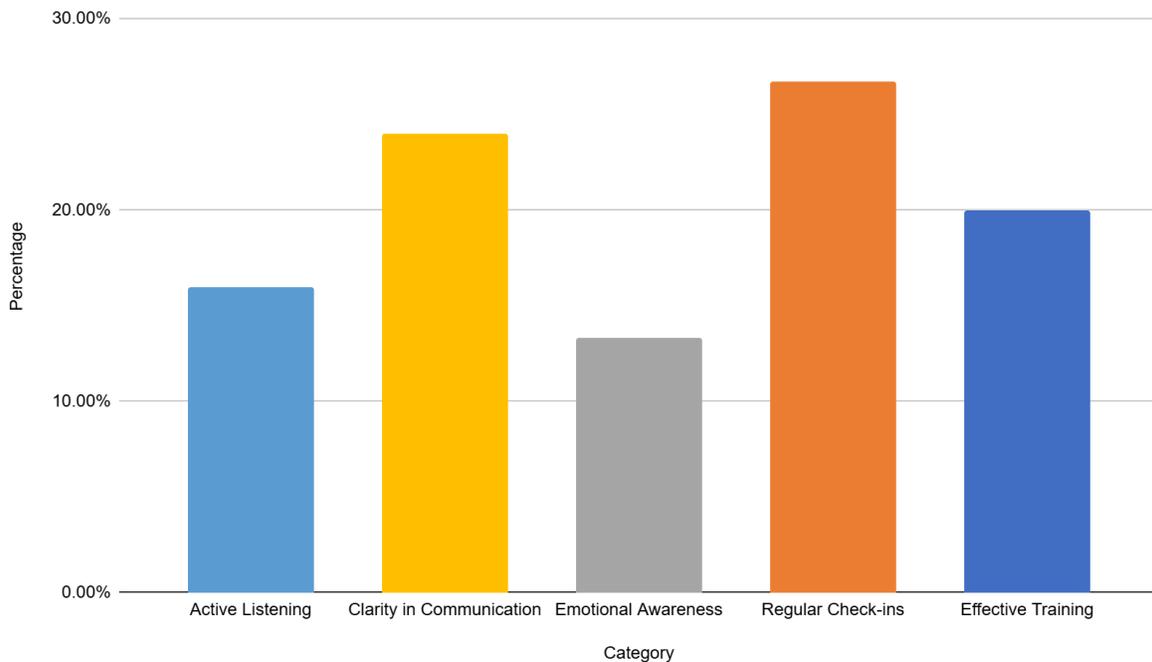
D. Key Informant Interviews Notes

D1. Bartolome Reyes Interview

NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview
Date: Monday, March 31, 2025
Time: 10:00 - 11:00 am
Location: Virtual
SIPA Attendees: Noam Brenner (chair)
                          Will Frolich
NYCHA Attendee: Bartolome Reyes, Client Service Manager with Information Technology

Interview Questions
1. **Q. What is your role at NYCHA?**
   a. Been at NYCHA for 19 years, started at the entry level in the lease housing department. Supervisor recognized skilled with customers/tenants, worked on helping resolving issues. Moved onto to CCC and helped build out the KPIs they use. Then moved to Resident Services helping with PACT conversions.
   b. Currently the client service manager in IT. Department is only a little over 2 years old. Big gap between IT and the user. Some aren't tech savvy, others the communication with what is coming out and what is going on isn't user friendly. Tended to be a standard format that people ignored. This created a gap because people didn't know what was coming out. Uphill battle with new initiatives and fighting things that don't stick and then are scrapped. Sense that any new initiatives will be scrapped. Needed to build up trust over time to get buy-in.
2. **Q. How do you build buy-in?**
   a. Results. Usually when there are issues people just push through them and are beholden to the metrics they are measured by. So there is little patience. It is best to provide constant communication and updates to people to engage with people and then provide results to the user.
3. **Q. What are some of the initiatives that you and your team are working on?**
   a. Currently an end to end migration is going on. Mobile device software update is needed and is currently going on. Big lift to get every mobile device updated. There is a hard stop on the project, which needs to be done in July. Started to hear that people weren't coming in to update the device. Requires that technicians handle the device to update it. Wasn't making progress. Sat down to figure out how to make progress and who to talk with.

b. Letting the user know how it impacts them is very effective. Helps to get buy-in on why the phones need to be updated.

4. **Q. We've heard a lot about how there is hesitation when it comes to using technology among the property staff because of a fear of being monitored. How much does your department think about this issue?**

   a. That stems from outside of NYCHA. The idea that "big brother" is always watching. This is hard to combat as much as you tell people. No one is watching anyone else. They track some things but they aren't watching.

   b. One of the biggest gaps is the lack of access to electronic devices. Many people don't use their email and don't have access to a lot of resources. Bartolome works with the NAs to help establish a request for at least one computer that will allow the Caretakers to log into the desktop to look at emails and notifications at NYCHA. OUtside of work many people don't have a computer or tablet. Allowing for 10-15 minutes per month to use the computer. If the caretaker doesn't log in, their license is deactivated at which point the supervisors have to submit a request to get it reactivated. The best way to combat this is to allow people to log in to check emails, see if they have training, see if there are updates, allow them to update their HR information.

   c. Should be something that helps supervisors to not have to do as much work but also a way for caretakers to check their information. Caretakers don't feel like they have a voice and part of this is the lack of access to technology.

   d. Before, whenever there was training they would send people downtown to train and it was mandatory in person. There are still some training that are in person but many are over video and are being asked to do it at the property or at home which reduces the amount of attention people pay to the training. Reduced the amount of employees that do training. This hurts the employee experience.

5. **Q. One of our solutions is the creation of an informational app – something that could be used by caretakers to find basic information about their development and about their job. How feasible do you think this is? What challenges would you expect? Caveat that people are mixed on using phones.**

   a. A lot of what is described is the NYCHA connect page. Understanding that it is moving to being cloud based instead of being only through the intranet. Should have access to HR and maps and information. A lot of the information is on NYCHA connect but people aren't familiar with it. Caretakers are not given time to look at the website and understand it.

   b. Surprised that people say they don't want a phone. Might have to do with the dead zones, working with both Verizon and Tmobile to fix the dead zones.

   c. Big Apple Connect project - a few of the developments are doing this. This provided free wifi to residents. Network running through building. NYCHA is

hoping to partner to use the wifi for employees. The concrete makes it hard for the wifi to move around.

   d. Would be good to have the NYCHA mobile team look into why they are not interested in a mobile device. Some people who don't have mobile devices personally don't rely on NYCHA's device. Would be good to do a deeper dive to understand why.

6. **Q. What is the situation with the smart screens at the developments?**
   a. Screen usage - one of the things that was mentioned with the NAs when discussing how to get a working space for the caretakers. The screens being in the break room isn't ideal for people to use personally with others working but would be good to use to cycle information. Group information is likely a better use for the smart screen. The message should also be looked at, as in, how this impacts you as a caretaker. Instead of 'this is coming' … 'this is coming and this is how it impacts you'.
   b. NA's are going to have their own office. Requesting smart boards and 2-3 computers. In the process of establishing this. The tech would be for meetings and training.
   c. NAs who say 'there are computers' won't specify that it's someone else's, which defeats the purpose.
   d. One thing that isn't used much is the mobile lab that NYCHA has. They are limited and starting to be used more. Must come from the NAs who have a lot on their plate so it's hard for them to think of how to empower their staff.

7. **Q. Thoughts on HR reps more connected to properties?**
   a. Love this idea. At one point Bartolome suggested a small service desk/call center for HR that would be front line for the issues that come up frequently. HR doesn't have enough employees to handle the workload. There has been some talk of something like this in the past. Would be a helpful way to provide a direct point of contact. Requires buy-in.

8. **Q. How do you build culture to make people feel connected to the bigger picture? Building collaboration and helping morale?**
   a. There are conversations about what works but it's more about connecting individuals. Would be positive to bring people together. The pressure is the amount of work - tickets are scheduled in advance. It's very hard to help them find time to meet. Coming in on a Monday there is everything from the weekend. Do you have time after hours and budget for it?
   b. Need buy-in at all levels to build connections in the Neighborhood. Often the meetings are just "here's what you have to do" instead of "what's not working or what is working" and "oh here's how we fixed this at another development"... has to come from the top because right now people are just focused on the

SLAs and not getting called out in the meetings or penalized. Going to take time to get the buy-in.

    c. Have to allow people to talk without getting penalized.

9. Q. Is there anyone else you recommend we speak with?

    a. Suggested the Borough Meeting.

D2. Daniel Greene Interview

NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Monday, February 24, 2025
Time: 2:00 - 2:30 pm
Location: Virtual
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich (chair)
                              Noam Brenner
                              Zenayah Roaché
NYCHA Attendee: Daniel Greene, Executive Vice President for Property Management

Interview Questions

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA? What has your journey been like leading up to working at NYCHA?**
   a. A: Daniel is the Executive Vice President for Property Management. He oversees all developments and the staff that work within them including skill trades. He also oversees the healthy homes department as well as responds to HUD inspections. Daniel has been a city employee since 2003. A lawyer by trade he focused on environmental law, then disaster recovery with New York State. He came to NYCHA in 2019 to run the compliance department and got promoted to his current job in May of 2023.
2. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
   a. A: Daniel acknowledged that communication at NYCHA can be imperfect. He described how there are a lot of different departments at NYCHA and many developments so there is a massive flow of information to the property management staff but little to no coordination. Furthermore, he noted that often the information does not get to the property-based on time or they do not fully understand what they are being told. Daniel also described some skepticism that is present on the part of much of the staff because NYCHA has undergone a lot of changes recently. It can be hard to keep track of the changes and as a result much of it is not digested fully. The most important information is being understood and delivered, but not the secondary level information.
3. **Q: What kind of communication is being sent around to NYCHA staff?**
   a. A: Daniel described how communication can be grouped into three different categories.

b. Compliance: These kinds of communications are things such as "we found deficiencies at your property". Many different entities control this kind of information so there is a lot of correspondence, however, there is very little to no coordination from the Central Office and very little empathy for the amount of work that property staff is responsible for. The result is that the Central Office is sending compliance issues from multiple departments and property staff are unable to balance the work that is being asked of them.

c. Procedure/Work-Related: These kinds of communications include theses like training, job opportunities, procedural changes, etc. Things that impact the day-to-day. Generally, staff have a good understanding of these kinds of notices because they are distributed via muster meetings and postings.

d. Agency News: These kinds of communications are related to the agency overall. What the agency is doing or changing on a macro level. Often, this information is very confusing and concerning to staff and they are not getting the information from trusted sources in a timely manner. The result is that rumors tend to spread around the staff and tenants about what is going on and misconceptions pop up over how changes will impact the properties. Things like "is NYCHA privatizing their properties?" or "will I lose my job?". A good example of this is the PACT program changes that are going on at Fulton/Chelsea Houses. How much was the staff aware or understanding of these changes?

e. Daniel also mentioned that information retention is another aspect of the communication environment that is not very strong. There are gaps in what staff is retaining, for example with the lead paint program. The causes for this could be the wide varieties of educational background, social background, etc. and the fact that staff is frequently transferring from property to property. It could also be partial due to staff apathy and a lack of trust. Either way, the Central Office is not communicating in a way that resonates with the property staff.

4. **Q: How would you improve communications for your role and/or what supports would you like to see?**

   a. Daniel offered several suggestions for how to improve communication. He suggested starting with being more positive and focusing on what the property based staff will find most relevant. Some other suggestions included creating or updating an employee handbook and transitional material that can be provided to staff when they are moving locations. Daniel mentioned that often staff just don't know where to look for information so updating the NYCHA journal might also help for addressing issues with the agency-wide news. Lastly, he emphasized that the Central Office staff should really try to build up their trust and face-to-face experience at properties, it goes a long way to building empathy in both directions.

5. **Q: What strategies do you recommend for getting out to developments (muster meetings, connecting with the right people, etc.)?**
    a. Daniel offered to help connect us to staff at properties and point us in the right direction. He will be on site most days and will be at Red Hook on Monday where we can meet him to interview some staff. He agreed to help connect us to Fulton/Chelsea developments to learn more about their transition process and also connect us to some muster meetings.

D3. Department of Communications Interview

NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject:　　**SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date:　　Thursday, March 13, 2025
Time:　　1:00 - 2:00 pm
Location:　　Virtual
SIPA Attendees:　　Noam Brenner (chair)
　　　　　　　　Will Frolich
NYCHA Attendee:

　　　　Michael Corwin, Director of Editorial Strategy & Content Development
　　　　Latoya Jordan, Deputy Director of Editorial Content & Senior Writer

Interview Questions

1. **Introductions**
   a. The interview began with introductions by both groups. <u>Michael Corwin</u> is the Director of Editorial Strategy & Content Development. He has been at NYCHA for a long time. He previously served the federal government with Booz Allen Hamilton and was also part of the NYC teaching fellowship.<u>Latoya Jordan</u> is the Deputy Director of Editorial Content & Senior Writer. She works on Michael's team and has been at NYCHA for 10 years. Prior to NYCHA she worked in other PR and communications roles.
2. **Q: What does the Department of Communications do? What are you currently working on?**
   a. A: Michael and Latoya detailed that the Department of Communications (DOC) at NYCHA manages the 'written word' for the agency. This includes any website, remarks made by agency leadership and staff, emails, robocalls, fliers, op-eds, fact sheets, etc. DOC is the steward for anything that goes out in an official capacity from the agency. This doesn't mean that DOC controls every email that is sent to staff or tenants by the various agency departments but is responsible for any official communications. One example is the written testimony that NYCHA's CEO Lisa Bova-Hiatt delivered to the City Council regarding the agency's budget. Other examples include working on monthly newsletter updates from the CEO, NYCHA Journal (the tenant newsletter), NYCHA Connect (staff intranet) and NYCHA Now (the staff newsletter).

3. **Q: How are stories being sent and given out to staff once they are posted on NYCHA Connect or NYCHA Now?**
   a. A: DOC acknowledged that not all staff have a computer and that a lot of the content is only accessible if you have a computer. Staff with a computer would see the information on NYCHA Connect when they open a new web browser.
   b. When discussing potential solutions, Michael noted that in the past there was talk about purchasing digital screens to have rotating news pulled from the intranet accessible for property based staff. News and other communications are sent out via links to the press releases and other top stories but without email access or a handheld device, it's unclear you would get the information. In the past, the staff bulletin was printed, but that has gone away since NYCHA digitized many processes. That's where digital screens would have come into play and been a potential good investment. The idea was to purchase something like a smartboard, that way DOC in partnership with Operations would be able to cycle through information that would appear at the properties, share stories with staff relevant to the big picture but also specific news and information and be able to be reprogram the boards weekly, monthly, etc.

4. **Q: What do you think of NYCHA communication in general?**
   a. A: Michael said that while DOC does draft some content for staff musters, the department doesn't really deal with specifics of operational communication like HR or other departments. DOC focuses on the big picture for the agency. As far as departmental communications goes, the flow of information is generally unidirectional, although opportunities like the Change Ambassadors does help with this.
   b. Latoya added that there is a lot going on at NYCHA at any one time and DOC is fairly small. Even with the work they are doing to capture stories about tenants and staff, there is a lot that gets missed.

5. **Q: How are postings handled? Are you involved in determining the procedures for property postings?**
   a. A: DOC noted that many of the postings that go out to the property staff are controlled by the departments who are responsible for them. They will have a directive to post the message for the relevant staff but generally these are handled on a case by case basis. DOC might be involved in editing the content of the postings but in general the responsibility falls on the department itself. Having a general policy would be useful to making the most of the postings that are put up.

6. **Q: What are some challenges your department faces?**
   a. Both Michael and Latoya mentioned the difficulty of getting any kind of messaging out to staff that doesn't have access to their email. For Latoya, who tries to connect with staff to write articles about them. Contacting people can be

tricky so she mainly relies on text messaging which has been a lot more effective than emailing.

7. **The SIPA team discussed some of their initial proposals to understand how DOC could benefit or improve on the ideas.**

   a. Standardization of communication process - this would include protocols for how to send certain kinds of operational information. Mainly this would be information from Central Office departments out to property based staff and would include guidelines for who to include on the distribution list, what the content should look like or say etc based on the topic.

   b. DOC noted that this idea would work best if there was a liaison from the property management side that works with DOC and the Central Office to help craft the content for the properties. There are liaisons for each operation department, but not for the property based staff. Doing this would inherently help standardize the communication and dissemination process. DOC also highlighted that they don't really get involved in the neighborhood or borough level communication so it's difficult to know what is missing.

   c. Employee Guidebooks and updating NYCHA Connect - this would include updates to NYCHA connect to make it more job specific. A place for staff to go and see what is relevant for their job role or their development.

   d. DOC explained that Connect was recently overhauled which asked each department to review the content that was on Connect, remove anything that wasn't needed, and update the site with new content. The site had been quite old and updates were made through last summer with each department now responsible for fixing content moving forward.

   e. They agreed that a digital handbook would be helpful, something that is relevant for each department or staff level. Something along the lines of a more targeted Connect page that is flexible based on the audience. The crux of the issue again is the technology access to it so if you don't have a device with access to the intranet, there isn't a lot you can do with Connect. Making it a website that is accessible to everyone would be an interesting idea and could be helpful to staff.

8. **Q: How do you tackle differences in language proficiency and native languages?**

   a. A: DOC adheres to New York City's plain language guide. The department does translate resident text to Spanish, Chinese, and Russian, which are the covered languages but this is not the case for employees. DOC tries to do it for employees, but finds it difficult to manage all the content that is being sent out. As far as language proficiency is concerned, a lot of the work at DOC is 'translating' content that is overly jargony or full of acronyms into understandable information.

D4. Ella Santos Interview

NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Wednesday, March 5, 2025
Time: 1:30 - 2:00 pm
Location: Virtual
SIPA Attendees: Noam Brenner
Will Frolich
NYCHA Attendee: Ella Santos, Deputy Director Planning and Project Management

Interview Questions

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA? What has your journey been like leading up to working at NYCHA?**
   a. First started four years ago, started as a project manager. Hired to develop, design, create a newborn hazard prevention program. Part of the lead paint initiative. Have to test homes with children under the age of six. Part of that population were pregnant families. Created a program to capture pregnant families. Came over to PMU to manage more than just the one project. Now has 18 projects. Five project managers she manages. Now doing projects that have a variety of scopes/sizes.

2. **Q: How do you communicate these changes to the staff?**
   a. We announce it, then we send an email, then we roll out a training, then we roll out the program, sometimes go to the borough meetings and announce them. We recognize that people are busy and that email use can be spotty, so we try to lean on the NAs. Emails get sent to the group that is impacted
   b. Example: annual parapet inspection is a new inspection, the only people it impacts are the SOCs (not the other caretakers)

3. **Q: Where do you think the disconnect comes from? Example the lead paint training that people seem to forget?**
   a. Transparently, it depends on how they feel about the work they are doing, whether they feel comfortable with the work, doing new things, or don't want added work to their responsibilities. Don't feel like we integrate the new responsibilities well into their job description.
   b. Example: some people weren't doing the inspections because they were afraid of heights. Some people don't understand how serious some of this work can

be to people's lives. Need HR to step in to ease the staff into the new responsibilities and say, hey this is going to be part of your job description

4. **Q: Where have you been successful in communicating new processes?**
   a. There is a fear of retribution, that people won't be upfront. They could have easily just told people that they were afraid of heights over email but the approach is really important. Dan Greene does have a good relationship with the developments. Ultimately, I had to go to a roof to see for myself.
   b. For the properties, the way you approach them is really important. They are approached by every department and there are a lot of competing priorities.The approach should be to work with the properties: how much work do you have? Other departments' strategy is to tell the property staff that they need to get this done by Friday. Need to not accuse people right away. Often you hear something from the resident/another department and then you ask why did you do this? But often the property says, "we didn't do this!" Best thing to do is go into it like an investigator.
   c. Working with them. Having everything in writing is super important. This helps with accountability for both sides

5. **Q: What would you do in our shoes?**
   a. Needs to be a cultural shift. The Central Office needs to understand the property workload and vice versa. There's more to it on both sides and often the Central Office is getting told to do something by the Dept of Buildings, or Dept of Investigations, or HUD. Central office needs to provide the details of why this is happening
   b. Culture shift to provide the why and give property staff the full picture. Tone that supervisors use with their staff is not the nicest, and would not want to work in that environment. It is really important to understand how people communicate. Really important to show people why they are doing something and why it's important

D5. Emma Barash Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Thursday, February 20, 2025
Time: 1:15 - 1:45 pm
Location: Virtual (Zoom)
SIPA Attendees: Noam Brenner
 Will Frolich
 Zenayah Roaché
NYCHA Attendees: Emma Barash

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
   a. There is a divide between downtown corporate HQ and the field which is the vast majority of employees. There is also a perception that the edicts that come from "on high" are disconnected from the reality and experience on the ground is overlooked. There is not enough information flowing up and coming down. There are bulletin boards full of things going back to the 90s, and people don't know what they can or cannot take down.
2. **Q: How would the various roles view this?**
   a. There is resentment and many view that the central office is an ivory tower. The news saying NYCHA is always doing something bad also defines the culture. People are afraid of getting arrested at work and they feel like there's no change possible - 'things will never change.
   b. However, Eva and Lisa are really invested in fixing things. They want people to know that they are invested in culture in change and that things can improve. The Transformation Plan came as a result of NYCHA being under federal scrutiny for lead.
3. **Q: Describe how you disseminate new information from your supervisors and/or NYCHA superiors to your staff.**
   a. Emma would send emails as the COO and make sure that everyone relevant was cc-ed and then follow up with them about why it's important to send it out. Then I would go out to the developments to see if the changes were being

disseminated or not. Operations people are going to the properties by HR and IT aren't going often if ever.

4. **Q: How receptive do you believe property based staff were to your communication?**
   a. Emmas experience was that they really appreciated Eva's presence at the properties and remembered them and that made a difference

5. **Q: How would you improve communications for your role and/or what supports would you like to see?**
   a. Central office probably doesn't need extra support

6. **Q: Why would someone not forward the message?**
   a. The property staff is often way over burdened by the amount of work. Also a feeling that the central office always changes their mind. Paralysis in taking up the directives, no ability to critical think around the changes and adjust

7. **Q: Insights on different ways things are disseminated based on topic (HR v something else)**
   a. Dept of communications can send staff wide emails, a lot of departments will do this but communications will be prickly and say "this isn't the best use of this." Depts have set up their own systems. In muster meetings the EvP of property management, made a muster curriculum. If things are important the team can put things into the muster meetings

8. **Q: How would you approach the project?**
   a. Get a really broad look at the change ambassadors with anecdotes and a broad picture.

9. **Q: Is there anyone else you recommend we speak with?**
   ○ Try to get to talk to Eva and Patti. Try to connect with the Emma's replacement

D6. Eva Trimble Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Wednesday, March 12, 2025
Time: 4:00-4:30 pm
Location: Virtual (Teams Meeting)

SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich
                        Noam Brenner
                        Evelyn Jian
NYCHA Attendees: Eva Trimble, Chief Operating Officer
                        Jana Pohorelsky, Chief of Staff

<u>NOTES</u>:

1. **Introductions:**
   a. We began our interview with introductions of both the NYCHA and SIPA teams.

2. **Midpoint Presentation**
   a. The SIPA team shared an abbreviated version of their midpoint report, receiving feedback from Eva throughout the session.
   b. Eva suggested enhancing the team's collaboration with the Strategy and Innovation Team, mentioning contacts such as Daniel Townsend and Andrea Asprelli. She highlighted that Strategy and Innovation is currently testing a beta version of a new communication tool on NYCHA Connect, NYCHA's intranet. This tool aims to improve connections between property-based staff and their central office counterparts across various departments. Eva also noted that part of the organizational restructuring includes the creation of liaison roles within the central office for each borough or neighborhood, facilitating better communication and support. This pilot program is part of that initiative.
   c. She drew a parallel between NYCHA and NYC Parks. NYCHA often uses the Parks Department as a benchmark because there are similar staff roles. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Parks Department's Employee Engagement team implemented a program allowing their intranet to be accessed via mobile devices. It's beneficial for frontline staff responsible for park maintenance.
   d. Eva also confirmed she would provide contact details from the Parks Department.

3. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA? How do you view this issue?**
    a. **A:** Eva described the problem as a two-part issue. The first part is the content of the communication itself. The second part is the mechanism for communication, how the communication is delivered. Eva acknowledged that while this project is focused on the communication methods at NYCHA, the content does play a role and that the departments that generally manage the content can be territorial.
    b. In Eva's view, the key is that caretakers do not have handhelds. Additionally, it has been difficult to even understand what the caretakers think, what they want to know, and what they already know. Even something like a survey can be difficult to disseminate because of the technology divide.
    c. Generally, Eva noted, that based on going to muster meetings, the sense is that people do not know where to go to find help, where to look for professional development, learning and development, or agency information. In addition, because they're on the front lines, residents frequently ask caretakers about things that the caretakers might not be aware of which can cause frustration for both sides. The important thing is to figure out how to make caretakers feel like they're part of the bigger picture at NYCHA.

4. **Q: How do you think about solutions to the problem? Would something like an improved employee handbook make sense? Or executive staff making phone calls to staff members?**
    a. **A:** Eva discussed various solutions that they have considered. She emphasized that the agency is always looking at ways to improve that are cost-effective. One example was whether screens could be placed where muster meetings take place so that, instead of handhelds or having staff going out to a handful of muster meetings, executives could join all musters at the same time virtually. This raises questions about how feasible it would be and whether staff would want that.
    b. Something like a centralized guidebook or handbook for a given role/development doesn't currently exist, so that could be an interesting idea. This might work on a mobile device in the form of an app but that raises the question of whether caretakers would be willing to use their personal devices for work to receive notifications or information. It's not something that has been explored but would require free public wifi access so caretakers don't have to use their own data plans.
    c. Eva also mentioned her own experience to show the importance of in-person engagement, where high-level executives, like Senior VP and Executive VP, attend new employee orientations to greet new hires personally. This practice is

highlighted as a method to make new employees feel welcomed and connected from their first day.

D7. Frank Cavaleri Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Monday, March 24, 2025
Time: 12:30 - 1:00 pm
Location: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich (chair)
                Zenayah Roaché (secretary)
NYCHA Attendees: Frank Cavaleri

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA?**
   a. A: Frank is the Director of Desktop and Computer Management, meaning they manage a range of technology, such as printers, time clocks, desktops, laptops, etc.
2. **Q: How responsive are people when they hear about new technologies? How do they respond when they hear about new technologies?**
   a. A: People are mostly positive, but the challenge is getting the phone to them. Phones need to be signed into for them to work and staff have to be present to pick them up from the NYCHA office. Oftentimes, people don't show up because they are busy.
3. **Q: How long does it take to complete the process of getting a phone?**
   a. A: NYCHA can not give an employee a device without an email and account provision. This comes from the network team, which is out of the desktop management team's purview. Frank can't really speak to their process and how long that takes but often the issue arises when someone shows up for a phone without an email provisioned. We know there's supposed to be a workflow, however, it's broken. Right now, the workflow just goes to everyone. For example, someone will request a device, but the process can't be completed because they don't have an account.
4. **Q: How are people informed about new technology?**
   a. A: Recently, NYCHA was in the process of a complete desktop refresh. Frank's team sent out emails notifying them of the refresh via a 'coming soon' email, followed by a two-week and one-week reminder before the refresh takes place.

On top of that, vendors reach out a day before via phone. The issue is that people do not read their emails.

5. **Q: Why don't people use the smart screens?**
   a. A: Screens are meant to be on at developments. They are expensive, industrial-grade equipment equipped to run nonstop without burning out. Yet, only about 30 to 60 screens are ever on. This is partially in part because caretakers worry about surveillance from screens' cameras and microphones.
   b. Things have gotten better, however. NYCHA has a Neighborhood Tech Team composed of 5 desktop technicians who are tenants and 1 manager. It started a couple of years ago. They visit developments in 5 to 6 weeks and repeat the rotation. The team is well-known and they educate users on technology. They've been successful in reducing service tickets and call volume.

6. **Q: What are some factors that determine the technology that is used? What costs go into the tech that is considered?**
   a. A: Budgeting is the number one factor. For example, after using their old desktops for 7 to 8 years, NYCHA's desktop refresh cost over $6 million. Frank typically provides the quote and the budget team will allocate the funds. Once the budget is secured, then tech is purchased.
   b. In terms of phones, NYCHA gets the device itself essentially for free (they only pay a service fee and sometimes for the case). Despite this deal, many NYCHA employees do not pick up their phones. After 30 days, the phone is suspended, and after 90 days it is disconnected. Currently, about 600 to 800 phones are disconnected a month between Verizon and T-Mobile. About 20% of disconnected phones belong to caretakers.

7. **Q: Does NYCHA have a way of retrieving phones once disconnected?**
   a. A: There is no process for retrieving phones once disconnected. The only way they may get it back is if a supervisor has it or requests it. This is an unlikely occurrence, however.

8. **Q: Is there anything else we should consider?**
   a. A: Rolling out technology to the entire caretaker population is a struggle because only 2-3 technicians distribute it. You also can't get NYCHA personnel to the developments to distribute technology because NYCHA currently does not have the staff to do that.
   b. Also, if the SIPA team plans to add a large block of phones to its proposals, the budget is going to be big. For example, 2,000 phones cost $28/month per phone. Adjusted for annual costs, that's a significant amount. Put into context with other difficulties, such as NYCHA's current amount of broken, lost, and/or stolen phones, we should think about investment costs vs. utility and outcome.

D8. Kofi Amoh-Tonto Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Monday, March 24, 2025
Time: 11:30-12:00 pm
Location: Virtual (Teams Meeting)
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich
                      Evelyn Jiang
NYCHA Attendees: Kofi Amoh-Tonto, Neighborhood Administrator Brooklyn #9

NOTES:

1. **Q. What is your role at NYCHA?**
    a. Kofi is a Neighborhood Administrator for Brooklyn Neighborhood 9. Kofi oversees property managers and superintendents, guiding them on operational planning, budgeting, unit turnover, and overall site readiness. His responsibilities involve ensuring managers and supers have clear plans of action and are executing daily activities efficiently.
    b. He plays a key role in relocation and hospitality efforts, ensuring residents are moved out and back into developments on time. Kofi's focus is on maintaining clean and presentable grounds and buildings, managing incident reports, and responding to emergencies such as service outages.
    c. Kofi's schedule is packed with meetings and operational oversight. He meets with his team two to three times a week to review move-outs, apartment and building inspections, rent collection, and annual reviews.
2. **Q. Describe the flow of information from your office to property-based staff.**
    a. Kofi described a structured and inclusive process for communicating updates and changes from the central office, such as new compliance procedures or HR initiatives. When such information comes down from 90 Church Street, he schedules a team meeting—typically between 9:00 AM and 10:30 AM—with his staff.
    b. During these meetings, Kofi shares his screen to walk through the new materials, reads the content aloud, and opens the floor for discussion. He emphasizes a participatory environment where everyone, regardless of their position or tenure, is encouraged to contribute thoughts or ask questions. If there are details he cannot address on the spot, he follows up with the relevant departments or his supervisor to clarify.

3. **Q. How communication is delivered and received by property-based staff?**
    a. Kofi acknowledged that although he regularly meets with managers and supers, the messages often do not trickle down effectively to assistant supers, supervisors, or caretakers. To address this, he expressed a desire to hold more frequent and inclusive meetings, possibly weekly, that would involve not only managers and supers but also supervisors and caretakers.
    b. He also suggested attending muster meetings himself and bringing printed materials to ensure messages are directly delivered to staff on the ground. Kofi emphasized that one of the key barriers to effective communication is the declining morale among staff. He noted that the current culture is more defensive, with many employees displaying an "I don't care" attitude, and supervisors feeling reluctant to address issues due to fear of complaints or HR repercussions. He reflected on how things have changed over the past 20 years, with a noticeable shift away from a sense of ownership and accountability among some employees.
4. **Q. What suggestions do you have to improve communication and staff development across NYCHA, particularly between central office and property-based staff?**
    a. Kofi emphasized that clear and consistent communication is essential, both in terms of how procedures are shared and how individuals are treated. He pointed out that supervisors often handle situations inconsistently and that there needs to be more behavioral training, not just procedural instruction. He also noted the importance of better vetting during hiring, as some new hires may not be a good fit despite meeting basic qualifications.
    b. He strongly supported the idea of designating specific central office contacts—ideally one per neighborhood or two neighborhoods—who staff can reach out to for questions about HR, payroll, or compliance. He explained that currently, there is a significant disconnect: staff from central office will show up at developments unannounced, without introducing themselves or notifying the property managers or supers, causing confusion and even safety concerns.
    c. Additionally, Kofi shared that while digital tools like staff room TVs or internal job postings exist, they are severely underutilized. Many caretakers lack computer literacy, and he suggested basic training such as helping staff learn how to log in and access information. He believes this would support career advancement and foster a culture where staff can grow into higher-level roles like supervisors or administrators.

D9. Neagia Drew Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Monday, March 24, 2025
Time: 10:30-11:00 am
Location: Virtual (Teams Meeting)
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich
                        Evelyn Jiang
NYCHA Attendees: Neagia Drew

NOTES:

1. **Q. What is your role at NYCHA?**
    a. Drew has been with NYCHA for nearly 30 years. She began her career as a trainee, progressing from a caretaker to her current executive position.
    b. Drew's daily activities vary significantly. Her day often includes addressing urgent issues such as employee altercations at developments. For instance, she prioritized speaking to employees involved in altercations and a new employee transferring due to hardship to clarify expectations around attendance. Her day also includes routine meetings and report management. She visits developments to personally handle situations that her staff finds challenging to de-escalate. Additionally, she works with her Operations Administrator and skilled trade supervisors to strategize on reducing the backlog of work orders by calling residents to verify the necessity of pending work or to confirm completions, aiming to clear outdated or resolved tickets.
2. **Q. How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
    a. Drew emphasized that while technology is evolving rapidly, NYCHA must strike a balance between old-school and modern methods of communication. For example, many long-time residents—some in their 80s—are used to receiving information through traditional means like paper notices slipped under their doors or mailed letters.
    b. Younger residents and staff are much more digitally oriented and expect communication via email, text, or even social media. Drew noted that NYCHA is still catching up in this area and, although there are many great ideas circulating, there aren't enough strategies that bridge the gap between different age groups and technological comfort levels.

c. She also highlighted a technological divide, noting that while some people are adept with smartphones, others—like certain residents and even caretakers—are not, which makes communication more difficult.

d. Drew brought attention to language and cultural challenges within the workforce. Many Housing Assistants come from similar backgrounds, such as Bangladesh, and often speak with strong accents. This sometimes creates communication issues between them and residents, who may not fully understand what the HAs are trying to convey. Drew stressed that NYCHA needs to ensure all employees understand the demographics they serve and are trained to communicate clearly and effectively across those lines.

3. **Q. Do you have any training on this?**
   a. Drew expressed the need for NYCHA to reintroduce and expand training sessions that help staff navigate communication challenges with residents from diverse backgrounds. She recalled that in the 1990s and early 2000s, there were courses such as those with communication coaches that provided essential skills for interacting with different demographic groups. However, those trainings no longer exist, and she emphasized that their absence leaves staff underprepared for the complexities of the job.

   b. She stressed that staff cannot simply be placed in front-line roles and be expected to perform effectively without proper preparation. NYCHA employees interact with residents from a wide spectrum of life experiences—ranging from those with jobs to the unemployed, and from individuals struggling with substance use to others living in more stable conditions. Drew believes that training equips staff with the tools to manage a wide range of human behaviors and situations, which can vary dramatically from apartment to apartment and person to person.

4. **Q. Describe the flow of information from your office to property-based staff.**
   a. Drew described the flow of information from the office to property-based staff as complex and sometimes overwhelming, with critical distinctions needed in how messages are crafted for different audiences. She emphasized that while many staff members—particularly caretakers and some office staff—are also NYCHA residents, the messaging they receive often fails to distinguish between their dual roles. For example, someone may receive a communication encouraging them to keep the building clean, but the context differs depending on whether they are being addressed as a staff member or a resident.

   b. She also shared that email is the primary method of communication, but the volume is excessive. Drew regularly receives over 300 emails a day, and despite reading through them, she finds herself constantly back at the same count. This, combined with her packed schedule of back-to-back Teams meetings, makes it very challenging to manage information effectively.

5. **Q. How receptive do you believe property-based staff are to your communication?**
    a. Because Drew has lived in NYCHA housing and raised a family there, she feels a strong sense of empathy and connection with the residents, allowing her to approach communication through an empathetic lens.
    b. Drew pointed out that many of her employees also come from similar backgrounds, which shapes how they perceive and respond to communication. She uses her personal story intentionally to inspire and motivate, though she acknowledges that not everyone may be impacted in the same way. Still, she shares her story with the goal of making a difference and reminding people that she once stood in their shoes.
    c. She also underscored the importance of respecting all staff regardless of their position. Whether someone works in the basement or the management office, Drew makes a conscious effort to highlight that no role is superior to another. She believes in motivating staff by validating their experiences and emphasizing equality, which she sees as crucial in fostering a culture of receptivity and mutual respect.

6. **Q. How do the caretakers deliver their message to the Central Office?**
    a. Drew expressed that there is currently no clearly defined or accessible direct line of communication for caretakers to voice opinions, offer suggestions, or raise concerns.
    b. She recalled a time when there used to be a suggestion box, and she recommended revisiting that idea—modernizing it to suit today's communication channels. Drew suggested that a dedicated internal social media-style platform or private page could allow caretakers to submit feedback directly to executive leadership. She stressed that such a tool shouldn't just be used for complaints, but also to surface good ideas that could improve safety, operations, and efficiency.

7. **Q. Do you think property-based staff at NYCHA receive enough direct support from departments like HR or compliance?**
    a. Drew strongly supports the idea of having dedicated personnel from these departments assigned to neighborhoods or boroughs to alleviate the burden on development leadership. Currently, VPs and property managers are expected to address every question and concern—even those outside their scope—and often must find the answers themselves or risk disappointing staff. This lack of support adds significant pressure and inefficiency.
    b. She also reflected on the broader organizational changes she has witnessed over her 30-year career at NYCHA, noting a dramatic decline in the availability of social services. Previously, when a tenant situation arose that required support—such as behavioral issues or unsanitary living conditions—staff had

more accessible channels for help. Today, such services are significantly reduced.

    c. She also recommended that central office staff come to developments and sit in the lunchrooms to gain a real understanding of conditions on the ground. Without that exposure,many well-intentioned ideas created by central office staff may not be feasible in practice.

8. **Q. How do you approach balancing accountability with maintaining a positive culture for caretakers, and what changes would you like to see in that area?**

    a. Drew acknowledges the current tension between enforcing accountability and avoiding a culture of fear. She observed that many caretakers operate in a mindset of self-preservation, doing the bare minimum to keep their jobs without going above and beyond.

    b. To address this, Drew plans to propose an "in-house probation" system with support from the union. She believes that structure is essential, particularly for staff in frontline positions like caretakers. She noted that people tend to perform better when expectations are clear, routines are established, and work is rewarded with consistency. In contrast, the lack of accountability and structure causes frustration among reliable staff, who end up covering for absentee colleagues, resulting in burnout and declining morale.

    c. She emphasized that this absence of enforcement has a "trickle effect": if early infractions were addressed, they wouldn't snowball into larger problems. Drew expressed frustration with the idea that NYCHA avoids enforcing consequences because of understaffing, arguing that it's more damaging to have a full staff of unaccountable workers than a smaller team of committed employees.

9. **Q. How would you improve communications for your role and/or what supports would you like to see?**

    a. Drew emphasized the importance of visual messaging, pointing out that large screen TVs already installed in lunchrooms and common spaces are not being used to their full potential. She proposed displaying motivational messages from NYCHA leadership, updates from the CEO or VPs, and content that reflects appreciation and encouragement. These messages could help staff feel seen and valued, especially those who work in isolated or challenging conditions like building basements. Drew also noted that many staff members at NYCHA look like her and come from similar backgrounds, and seeing someone like her in a leadership role on-screen could be empowering.

    b. She emphasized that people need to feel connected, inspired, and reminded of their worth, especially when their day-to-day work can be physically and emotionally taxing. Drew also suggested adding lighthearted content such as a "joke of the day" to internal systems or screen displays—something to uplift staff at the start of their shift.

c. Drew further highlighted the missed opportunity in past initiatives, such as appreciation luncheons. Staff were asked to send photos from these events, but they never saw those pictures shared. She suggested using internal screens to showcase these photos across boroughs to foster a stronger sense of community and cross-location connection.

D10. Pati Bayross Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Thursday, March 13, 2025
Time: 3:30pm-4:00pm
Location: Virtual (Zoom)
SIPA Attendees: Zenayah Roaché (chair)
Noam Brenner (secretary)
NYCHA Attendees: Patti Bayross

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q. What is your role at NYCHA? What is your journey?**
   a. Patti Bayross is NYCHA's current CIO. They have worked at the city level for over 25 years.
2. **Q. Have you been briefed on our project?**
   a. The project was their idea. NYCHA wants to help people feel valued and connected to the organization.
3. **Q. What sorts of technological programs have been initiated for caretakers?**
   a. Expressed that there are not a ton of programs. Part of this is due to a lack of funding. Costs are more than just devices. NYCHA has to pay for licensing, email accounts, and authentication. They have done cost estimates, and ultimately, there is not enough funding.
   b. However, there are shared workstations at the developments for caretakers to take training. In general, people do not want to use their personal devices.
   c. There is also NYCAPS Employee Self-Service. It's helpful for people to manage their own HR, health insurance, and benefits. People usually use it during their work time. Still, the odds that they do it on a shared computer are unlikely. Additionally, there are some security concerns with many people sharing devices.
4. **Q. How does the LAN ID work?**
   a. The LAN ID is used to access information on NYCHA's network. It has security and permission settings for an extra layer of security. Sometimes, authentication occurs multiple times. NYCHA makes the expiration as long as possible.
5. **Q. What other technology do property-based staff have access to?**

a. There is a budget for the LAN ID, active directory to get authenticated, a OneDrive account, and Teams. There is also a special licence with Microsoft for care workers that is watered down, kind of a lite version.

6. **Q. What screens are being used at developments?**
   a. There are smart screens in most conference rooms, but the total number is unknown. NYCHA did not expand this effort because it was too costly. There are also kiosks at the property management office intended for residents.

7. **Q. What are some things we should consider when building out a NYCHA app that centralizes the intranet?**
   a. SharePoint 365 was recommended, as were other services such as Employee Service Connect, a portal for employees to request services from departments. Currently, NYCHA is migrating SharePoint to the cloud, which will house systems like NYCHA Connect. This depends on licensing, however. NYCHA is also setting up Workday.

D11. Renee Taylor Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Friday, February 21, 2025
Time: 10:00am-11:00am
Location: Virtual (Zoom)
SIPA Attendees: Noam Brenner
                       Will Frolich
NYCHA Attendees: Renee Taylor

INTERVIEW NOTES:
1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA? What is your journey?**
   a. Since 1987 at 250 Broadway as an office aid as a temp and came back full time in 1989 at Lease Houses for Section 8 vouchers till 1991, went out from the Central Office to Reed Consolidated as a Superintendent Secretary, 1996 went to Linden Houses, 2000 went to Beach 41st Houses as a Senior Teller, 2003-2004 was brooklyn housing assistant floating, went back to queens to also float, worked in the Bronx as well, 2020 Regional Asset Manager, now the title is Neighborhood Administrator, where she is now.
2. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
   a. Lacking in some areas and in other areas it's too much. For example an email is sent from the central office and then the assistant from the VP and then someone else sends the same thing which becomes overkill. Other times there are things that are rolled out to the tenants and the property staff is the last to know, the tenants will hear at the town hall meetings and Neighborhood Admins don't get invited to the town hall so they don't know.
3. **Q: How would you describe the amount of information you receive from your supervisors and/or NYCHA superiors? Too much information? Too little? Overwhelming?**
   a. Believes communication is key and teamwork is key. Meets with her team every monday at 10:30am to go over what happened over the weekend and after hours, to discuss, change the topic every monday, bring them up to speed with new policies. Any time there is a new policy she will hold impromptu meetings with her team.
4. **Q: How receptive do you believe your supervisor and/or NYCHA superiors' are to your communication?**

a. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink it, what they do with it, at the end of each day I'm responsible for my actions as are they … but can't force them to do anything. There is a progressive discipline model and Individuals who are not compliant are either demoted or let go. Ultimately, we're here for the residents.

5. **Q: How would you improve communications for your role and/or what supports would you like to see?**
   a. Loves the tools with the staff and how accessible the stats are. Many of the maintenance staff aren't computer literate but the stats makes their jobs easier. She gives them a weekly supervisory schedule that gives them the step by step guide on the daily basis on how to be organized. Also stays consistent and organized

6. **Q: Challenges with how far the developments are from each other?**
   a. Emphasized that staff don't have to do everything at every building every day

7. **Q: Certain things people actually care about hearing about?**
   a. Management services dept sends out email blasts to all and it goes to the whole authority. Then the secretary sends it, then someone else sends it
   b. All employees have a LAN ID and an email however unless you reset your password every 30 days you'll be locked out. Caretakers do not go into their emails regularly because of this, but if there is a training like sexual harassment you need access to a computer, everyone gets the information but not everyone reads it

8. **Q: Ideas to improve communication?**
   a. A lot of people retire and there are a lot of new staff, who have difficulty. So something similar to the Genesis system would help. So much going on right now and everyone who calls feels like their call is an emergency. The new staff do not feel comfortable saying that the calls that are coming in aren't top priority
   b. There is a centralized call center in LIC, which creates a work order and gives priority and gives them an estimated time for when they'll get someone to come to the apartment
   c. Daily tasks are assigned during muster meetings based on available staff and the schedule of tasks. Systems like Genesis for the switchboard and Maximo for work orders could help alleviate these challenges, but more training is needed. For example, some employees have been in their roles for months without receiving proper training. As a result, residents feel that their concerns are not being addressed adequately and view their individual issues as the most critical.

D12. Seth Guthartz Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Wednesday, March 26 & Wednesday, April 2 2025
Time: 10:30 - 11:00 am & 9:30-10:30am
Location: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich
                         Zenayah Roaché
                         Noam Brenner
NYCHA Attendees: Seth Guthartz

Interview Questions

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA? What has your journey been like leading up to working at NYCHA?**
   a. A: Seth has been a Senior Advisor to the CIO at NYCHA for 2 years and has been at NYCHA for nearly 5 years. He started by working with the Healthy Homes team building up the quality management organization. He currently works directly with the CIO (Patti Bayross) to harness talent, get programs across the finish line, create reporting, and support the agency's technology stack. Prior to NYCHA he worked at the NYC Department of Health for 15 years in a variety of roles, most recently as Director of Emergency Planning.

2. **Q: What are some of the initiatives that you and your team are working on with the CIO?**
   a. A: Seth noted that the IT department is working on integration management and software improvements. The current projects include transforming and modernizing the resident case management system which is currently a suite of 15 different applications woven together with integrations, updating the work order management system, replatforming the administrative systems, and modernizing the procurement process. Operationally, the team is also working to change the way they do work by moving to project-oriented delivery teams and being able to work on bite-size pieces of a project to update systems more frequently.

3. **We've heard a lot about how there is hesitation when it comes to using technology among the property staff because of a fear of being monitored. This came up**

when asking about phones and when thinking about how to use the smart monitors. How much does your department try to combat this? How much does your department think about this issue?

    a. A: Seth emphasized that this is a good reason to recognize that not every problem has a tech solution to it. IT is often looked at as having a solution to every problem. For example, right now there is a problem with how we do tenancy. DOGE is looking into things, so there are eyes on how we are logging tenancy. Who can occupy an apartment? Yes, there is a problem with the data. However, the problem is operations. Operations have not checked all of the stuff or submitted paperwork. This is not an IT specific problem.

    b. We think about communication, we can solve a lot of problems, but IT is not the root of the problems. If we are going to use phones, it's important to understand how that is going to change workflows and whether or not people will actually use them to improve communication. If there is no emphasis on using the phones in this manner, does it have the intended result? Could information be better communicated by improving muster meetings?

4. **One of our solutions is the creation of an informational app – something that could be used by caretakers to find basic information about their development and about their job. How feasible do you think this is? What challenges would you expect?**

    a. A: Seth noted that something like this could be possible, especially with the use of Workday which is supposed to be available by April 14. Generally, there would be an appetite for this idea but there are questions about how to make this happen securely.

5. **What is the situation with the smart screens at the developments?**

    a. A: Seth mentioned that the smart screens have come up repeatedly as a way to utilize existing technology. They are certainly an untapped resource that can be part of the larger employee engagement strategy and can be utilized as a platform between the Central Office and the Property Based staff provided the commitment is there.

<u>**Beginning of Second Interview**</u>

6. **What are your impressions of the project? What suggestions do you have?**

    a. A: Seth explained that commonly everyone gets into a room and immediately tries to solve the issue by turning to IT. The reality is that the issues are with the business processes. For example, when there are scheduled outages of the work order and complaint system the staff will resort to using paper, sending the paper to various departments/properties etc. Recently, a suggestion was made to update this by allowing the complaints to be entered electronically. The

problem however, is not that we can't digitize the paper submissions, that is easy for IT. The issue is that once it's submitted, then where does the complaint go? Having to address the broader issue is more challenging, takes time, and generally isn't something that everyone is comfortable with. In this case, it will start a deeper conversation and should help in the future but the takeaway is that this wasn't really an IT question. The IT portion of it was the easy part, actualizing the digital workflow and improving the workflow was the challenge. Any solution we provide should be grounded in the understanding that 'lifting and shifting' something to a digital platform won't naturally improve the situation without thinking about it on a broader scale.

7. **Given that there was hesitancy during this short turnaround, what happened during the early part of COVID? Was it similar?**
    a. A: Seth noted that by time he got to NYCHA, most of the COVID issues had been ironed out.
8. **How would you recommend that full scale changes take place instead of just digitize and forget it?**
    a. A: Seth outlined that in the case of the planned outage example, this process will get changed because there is commitment from the EVPs in that area. But even in that case, IT wasn't aware of the scale of the outage – there are about 2 thousand tickets submitted via the call center on the weekend that have to be addressed by staff on Monday.
    b. Looking at the bigger picture for communication, we should use a combination of things. We have tools like screens and phones and Workday sos there may be ways to communicate digitally but most of the properties are undesked and so the face-to-face times should be used to emphasize work updates and also talk about the big picture. Each development will be different but there should be an emphasis on creating space for employee messaging beyond just 'do this task', time for discussion of how to improve and also team building. A big piece of this will be training supervisors and giving people the hard skills of how to run a meeting, how to collect feedback and how to listen for ways to improve. Creating trust and improving requires demonstrating that change is possible but also showing that what people are saying is being listened to.
    c. It will also require a culture shift. The most common metric used at NYCHA is 'mean time to not my problem'. I.e. staff is really just looking to see how quickly they can not be responsible for a solution. It will require a culture change to have people want to be part of a solution, even if they aren't part of the problem.
9. **What do you think about these suggestions from the Department of Environmental Protection?**
    a. Using Microsoft AI to create a chatbot based on NYCHA's documents:

      i. A: Seth mentioned that there have been discussions about using Copilot at the City level but something like this could be helpful in the case where staff are looking for specific questions. Right now if you want to give someone a raise you have to take the time to find the time and leave manual, find the right section and then follow the process. This would be useful for any standardized practices.

b. <u>Creating some sort of competition among properties to build culture and pride in work:</u>

      i. A: Seth said that right now there are many teams and different cultures throughout NYCHA. Each team has its own culture and way of celebrating success. Some teams are very collegial and others are not. At the very least, having monthly team meetings and being able to show that we are taking feedback from these meetings would be helpful.

D13. Yadhira Espinal Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Thursday, February 20, 2025
Time: 10:30-11:00 am
Location: Virtual (Teams Meeting)
SIPA Attendees: Zenayah Roaché
Evelyn Jiang
NYCHA Attendees: Yadhira Espinal

NOTES:

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA?**
    a. Yadhira is currently the Senior Director of Planning and Project Management at NYCHA. Her responsibilities span across two main departments: the Department of Management Planning (DMP) and the Project Management Unit (PMU). The PMU is focused on addressing significant issues identified across NYCHA operations, initiating widespread process changes and implementing new regulations. This unit is vital for managing large-scale initiatives, including maintenance improvements and mass building relocations.
    b. The DMP handles more analytical and short-term project management, which includes overseeing laundry room leases and operators across all NYCHA properties and managing encumbrances. This department ensures that funds are appropriately allocated for services or materials, optimizing budget expenditure significantly.
2. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
    a. Yadhira highlights that despite employing various communication strategies, not all methods achieve the desired resonance with staff, necessitating frequent reiterations. For instance, in response to a recent crisis where some NYCHA staff were arrested, significant new regulations and oversight processes were introduced, particularly concerning micro-purchases in the field. Initial communications via email were less effective, leading to the implementation of training sessions hosted on Microsoft Teams. These sessions still did not completely bridge the communication gap compared to in-person interactions
    b. To further enhance communication effectiveness, a new role was introduced within the department. The Neighborhood Contract Manager (NCM) serves as a direct communicative link to staff, which has significantly improved how

information is received and acted upon. Yadhira observes that direct, one-on-one interactions tend to have the most substantial impact on ensuring that critical information is both understood and integrated into daily operations.

3. **Q: Can you elaborate on the new oversight processes implemented at NYCHA?**
   a. Yadhira explained that the new oversight processes introduced at NYCHA are about ensuring quality and thorough supervision, even though they may slow down operations. Recognizing that developments within NYCHA need substantial support, these processes were designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by staff on the ground who deal with everything from building maintenance to tenant relations and emergency situations
   b. The introduction of the NCM role has been pivotal in this new strategy. Yadhira noted that the field staff often gravitated towards the NCMs organically to seek clarifications and guidance, bypassing traditional email communications which often went unread. The NCMs serve as critical links in the communication chain, providing direct, on-the-ground insights and reiterations of new processes to the field staff. This approach addresses the complexity of their daily challenges by providing them with a reliable source of accurate and timely information.

4. **Q: How would you describe the flow of information from your office to property-based staff**
   a. Yadhira emphasizes that not all information has the same urgency or complexity, which influences how it's communicated within NYCHA. Her approach is strategic and tailored to ensure that communications are appropriate to the gravity and complexity of the information. High-level changes and new initiatives are typically introduced in borough meetings that held monthly and attended by VPs along with property managers and superintendents. This setting allows for direct communication about new policies or tools that need to be implemented across the boroughs.
   b. When it comes to very detailed or critical new regulations, such as the inspection of parapets on rooftops, Yadhira's team uses a combination of email to alert the staff about upcoming changes and on-site training to ensure a thorough understanding of the new requirements. This dual approach helps to ensure that all property-based staff are aware of their responsibilities and understand how to carry them out correctly.

5. **Q: Can you describe the structure of communication processes within NYCHA, particularly concerning outreach and information dissemination**
   a. Yadhira explains that communication processes at NYCHA are predominantly case-specific, adapting to the unique needs of different departments and situations.
   b. For general standards and sensitive communications, NYCHA follows a set protocol that involves coordination with the Department of Communication. This

department plays a critical role in ensuring that all external communications, especially those to tenants or concerning significant operational changes, receive the necessary approvals to align with NYCHA's policies. This process includes vetting emails, public announcements, and any content posted on NYCHA's website

    c. Operational communications often do not require this level of scrutiny unless they involve sensitive issues that could impact tenant relations or NYCHA's compliance with new laws and regulations. In such cases, communications must be cleared through relevant executives to ensure consistency with organizational goals and legal requirements

    d. Moreover, Yadhira mentions the use of memos and guidance documents for more formal communications. Memos are typically employed for enforcing policy or when a direct and authoritative directive is necessary. Guidance documents, on the other hand, provide detailed instructions or protocols for handling specific processes or situations.

6. **Q: Describe how receptive you believe property-based staff are to your communication.**

    a. Yadhira finds that staff at all levels feel comfortable reaching out to her directly with their concerns, whether through calls, emails, or messages on Teams. This open line of communication reflects a culture encouraging a proactive approach to problem-solving.

    b. Yadhira is aware of the challenges faced by property-based staff, who are often overwhelmed with the volume of information and responsibilities. Her strategy involves not just sending emails but also offering optional training sessions to accommodate the busy schedules of the staff. This flexibility allows staff to engage in learning processes when they can, without being overwhelmed by mandatory sessions that might not fit into their already demanding routines.

    c. Moreover, Yadhira emphasizes the importance of follow-ups and personalized support, particularly when new procedures or regulations are introduced. For example, if staff members are struggling with certain tasks, such as inspections or operational changes, her team takes the initiative to reach out, offer assistance, explain processes, or provide additional training as needed.

7. **Q: How would you improve communications for your role and/or what supports would you like to see**

    a. Yadhira emphasizes the need for a more streamlined and focused communication system within NYCHA particularly to enhance support for field staff who often bear the brunt of operational demands. She thinks of communication as a funnel where information should be directed through a clear and narrow channel. Therefore it's better to simplify the process and make it

more manageable for everyone involved, especially those not in office settings who do not have constant email access.

    b. She emphasizes that understanding and prioritizing the needs of NYCHA's residents is not just an optional part of their mission but the core of what they do. The goal is to ensure that all departments align with this funnel system to support the central mission of serving NYCHA's residents.

    c. She further illustrates how NYCHA endeavors to incorporate resident feedback into its operations through initiatives like the monthly roundtable discussions. These discussions are a platform where residents can voice their concerns and impact decision-making directly.

8. **Q: Is there anyone else that you recommend we speak with?**

    a. Yadhira mentioned the round table discussions that occur with residents we might participate in. The Learning and Development Department handles the training and development needs of NYCHA employees. They would help us to understand how policies are communicated internally and how staff are trained on new processes or changes. Also, the Communications Department would be crucial for understanding how information is disseminated both internally and externally.

D14. Yvette Andino Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Thursday, February 20, 2025
Time: 2:00 - 3:00 pm
Location: Virtual
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich (chair)
                       Noam Brenner
NYCHA Attendees: Yvette Andino

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA? What has been your journey leading up to working at NYCHA?**
   a. A: Yvette is a product of public housing on the Upper West Side. She started working at NYCHA in 1993 beginning in Human Resources, hiring property managers, superintendents, and caretakers. After that she worked in a variety of roles modernizing NYCHA operations including, moving off of typewriters, digitizing processes for health insurance benefits, and developing key performance indicators for the Authority. Since 2017 she has been focused on employee engagement efforts and was part of the Transformation Plan to address the communication gaps between staff. Most recently she has worked on a program developing a coaching and mentoring program to engage with staff helping them to understand how to be better managers and leaders. Yvette also runs the employee recognition program as well as the change ambassador program.
2. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
   a. A: Yvette described communication at NYCHA as sometimes being fractured. She felt that any communication between the Central Office and the properties needed to be intentional, with an understanding of the audience, and using a multi-pronged approach because not everyone will use their email. Taking this approach is cumbersome, it can be slow when time is of the essence to create an email, make a flyer and provide muster meeting talking points. The result is that people are not incentivized to make the effort. A lot of it boils down to, how does it impact the employee? People want to know, what's in it for them?

3. **Q: How receptive do you believe property-based staff are to your communication?**
    a. A: Yvette emphasized that it really depends on what the result is for the worker. Take the Transformation Plan for example, mostly the employees want to know, how is this going to change what we do at the property? Are you changing my hours? In that case, the property staff will pay attention. Of course you are going to have a mix of incentives throughout the workforce.
4. **Q: How would you improve communication? What support would you like to see?**
    a. A: Yvette's wish would be to give everyone a cell phone, even if it was a basic one. She felt that there would be significant advantages to allowing staff to communicate, using the ability to take pictures, and treating the staff professionally. Right now, many staff members use their personal cell phones, especially where walkie talkies are inconsistent. Another idea would be to better use the technology that is already available, like the smart screens. Treating those as sources of information and training staff to routinely check them.
5. **Q: Is there anyone else you recommend we speak with?**
    a. A: Yvette recommended speaking with the Change Ambassadors. Change Ambassadors are a group of staff that have improved the environment in which they work, are committed to improving NYCHA, and represent a large group of the workforce in varying roles. We agreed that we would try to coordinate a virtual focus group with the change ambassadors to distribute the survey with them.
6. **Q: If you were in our shoes taking on this project, what would you suggest we do?**
    a. A: Yvette stressed the importance of talking to the staff at the properties. There is a consistent tension between the central office and the properties, they are not really owners of their own time. It can be very hard to be proactive in a reactionary environment. It would be interesting to understand, what is it that the property staff even cares about hearing about?

D15: Anonymous Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Thursday, February 19, 2025
Time: 10:00 - 10:30 am
Location: Virtual (Zoom)
SIPA Attendees: Zenayah Roaché (chair)
Evelyn Jiang
NYCHA Attendees: Anonymous

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q: What is your role at NYCHA?**
   a. A: The interviewee has been working for NYCHA since 1998 and has firsthand experience living in public housing for four years. They started as a caretaker and progressed to an assistant superintendent and neighborhood administrator. In their role, they oversee six developments by themselves, meaning they typically have an abundance of meetings on a day-to-day basis. They are also responsible for compiling reports on compliance processes. In addition to administrative responsibilities, the interviewee communicates with their property managers on a daily basis.

2. **Q: How would you describe the culture of communication at NYCHA?**
   a. A: As someone who's responsible for top-down communication with property-based staff, the culture of communication is excellent. The interviewee uses different modes of communication to reach property-based staff such as emails, site visits, phone calls, virtual meetings via smart TV at each development (with cameras on), and attending muster meetings (which occur in the morning and afternoon. Regarding bottom-up communication, the interviewee described communication with their VP as good.

3. **Q: How would you describe the amount of information you receive from your supervisors and/or NYCHA superiors? Too much information? Too little? Overwhelming?**
   a. A: It is routine for the interview to have six meetings per day at minimum. It is also routine for them to have at least 1,000 emails in their inbox upon returning from a day's worth of holiday. Because of how much information is being shared, it is easy for things to get lost.

b. It also feels as though there is a different directive every day. While the interviewee doesn't want to say that these new directives are out of panic, they do see them as more reactive than proactive. Because of this, daily priorities are constantly changing, sometimes at a whim.

c. The interviewee mentioned that disarray at the administrative level trickles down to property-based staff. They are overwhelmed by their tasks and interactions with residents, which can be hostile sometimes.

4. **Q: Describe how you disseminate new information from your supervisors and/or NYCHA superiors to your staff.**

a. A: The question was answered previously (in question 2).

5. **Q: Describe how you communicate information from your development to your supervisor and/or NYCHA superiors.**

a. A: Typically, communication about operations is via email exchanges. Attached to these emails are Excel spreadsheets that have to be filled out by parties. When communicating these materials to NYCHA superiors, the interviewee consolidates information from developments, reviews it to check for potential mistakes, and takes the responsibility of solely funneling information upward.

6. **Q: How receptive do you believe your supervisor and/or NYCHA superiors' are to your communication?**

a. A: The interviewee described supervisors as very receptive to their communication. They mentioned that supervisors will personally email them about important information relevant to NYCHA and their work. They are also very responsive.

b. The interviewee continued by saying that how one sets themselves up is very important. Knowing this, they make a conscious effort to not operate like other administrators and instead make themselves very visible to property staff through the mediums described in question 2. If conflict between staff occurs at a development, they visit to see what's going on, assess, and advise all while not overstepping.

7. **Q: How is NYCHA different from when you started compared to now?**

a. A: In 1998, there was an element of enjoyment to work at NYCHA. The staff were much older and more mature. There was a rotation of specialized workers at their posts 24 hours a day. That way, for example, if the heating went out at night someone was there to handle the issue before morning. Policies, procedures, and HR manuals to easy to refer to and follow. Residents were friendlier.

b. Things are taking a downward turn. Buildings are much older which requires more staff to maintain its deterioration. NYCHA is investing money to make quick fixes that don't address root issues. These quick fixes are abundant; thus, staff can not keep up. It is typical for staff to do work offline, meaning catering to

issues outside of the allotted time frame (8:00 am to 4:30 pm). Other times, something will happen at a different location that is viewed as more important and as a result, staff are pulled from their original assignments.

c. Lastly, there is a shift in worker culture. Workers are now younger and don't have as many responsibilities. They are extremely hostile, resulting in workplace violence. Sometimes, they don't have clean backgrounds. In terms of their job responsibilities, there's a lack of understanding of procedures and policies as well as poor attendance. As a result of inexperience, workers are oftentimes counseled. Ultimately, this impacts supervisors' ability to supervise.

8. **Q: How would you improve communications for your role and/or what supports would you like to see?**

a. A: NYCHA needs to return to employee accountability. They can also provide supervisors with appropriate support for issues with and between employees. Currently, it takes a long time for 1st and 2nd hearings (so forth and so on) to be scheduled. Supervisors needed support in the interim while these are being scheduled.

b. NYCHA should also listen to staff in the field. The interviewee understands things need to be done but property staff's hands are tied. Too many people above are making decisions without them.

c. Finally, the interview mentioned having a lot of people to report to which makes operations hectic. Having a solution to that would be helpful.

9. **Q: Is there anyone else you recommend we speak with?**

a. A: The interviewee agreed to help us coordinate site visits to speak to staff on the ground. They specifically mentioned connecting us with property managers, supers, and more (one for each location).

E. Site Visits Notes

E1. De Hostos Site Visit 3.14.2025

Muster Meeting
- We want more training for safety
  - It's supposed to be twice a year for fire drills safety,but I have not done it once in four years
- We need a personal hotline
- We need more prompts can't connect to people
- Have phones because walkie talkies don't work
  - It is a scattered site
- We know about what goes on here, there is stuff about other developments but we don't really follow that
- We need more tenant accountability. They expect to pick up the trash if we say something we might lose our jobs
- Some sort of hotspot for wifi for our phones
- General apathy
  - Why should I say something, nothing gets done

E2. Fulton Site Visit 3.19.25

Interview with Superintendent and Property Manager
- No one has wifi, so many dead zones
  - You lose half the data you put in
  - Servers make you log back in (Maximo)
- Caretakers don't need phones. It costs more unnecessary money. Currency, people lose them and not tell us because they don't want to be written up
- PM: I think people should have an app that everyone can use. People will not lose their personal phone
  - Give people a Google number to quell privacy concerns
  - Privacy concern if people use their personal devices
  - Then we don't need to go through all these papers that people write up
- A program has a safety person who can send pictures instead of working with the supervisor to make tickets.
  - Automatic ticket. Right now, supervisors need to email the ticket, but it's an extra step
- Takes a month for people to sit and do training. You have to do this by x date.
  - It could be done on an app

- Disconnect because people do not always know their scope of work as a caretaker
    - Training is not enough
    - Need training that physically shows people what to do
    - Most new workers have issues figuring out where they are going. Need to use a map
- Seeing central office more needs to happen
    - People can sit behind their desk and just send emails. There should be some type of event to get to know central office
    - Need more team building in the meetings with other pms in neighborhood meetings
- Employee service week: a need for more visibility so people feel valued
- It is hard to find things on NYCHA Connect, especially forms
- Tenants can make a ticket of an upp, but caretakers can't
- Culture and Accountability:
    - "Housing is a joke right now" - the culture has changed a lot, there isn't a lot of consequences for people breaking policies
    - Many caretakers will not show up to work, the consequence is that they are punished by being sent to a NYCHA court. Unfortunately, this just acts as a slap on the wrist
        - NYCHA tries to reach these people but there isn't much incentive to show up if there isn't punishment
        - Tension: NYCHA is short staffed, the pay and work environment is not good so they can't afford to let people go. Therefore, the agency feels that they can't punish staff. This impacts morale at the developments and means the staff that is present has to pick up the slack
        - There are also low hiring standards, again part of the issue with being short staffed

Muster Meeting
- We get trainings everyday bro
- We don't know how to use emails
- Top is too heavy
- Mixed feelings about using personal device
- Want to no more about pay transparency
- Questions about insurance.
- I want to feel appreciated and be celebrated.
- Rules need to be followed up, enforcement is a problem
- Mental health issues amongst residents and staff
- Central office does not know or care about issues like people doing drugs, sleeping in the buildings, having sex
- People annoyed with password reset

E3. Gowanus Site Visit 4.4.25

Interview with Angela, Property Manager

1. Accountability vs. Humanity
    a. Emphasized the importance of balancing accountability and empathy.
    b. There is pressure to write up employees, but Angela believes it's important to understand the context behind performance issues.
    c. Supervisors vary widely in how they approach discipline and oversight.
    d. Managerial pressure trickles down, affecting how supervisors manage their teams.
2. Infrastructure & Training
    a. Angela supports the idea of creating a shared workstation or central computer for caretakers at each development to access communications and trainings.
    b. Believes training delivery should depend on both the topic and the employee's title—some should be in-person, others can be remote.
    c. Raised concerns about current training setups:
        i. Managers often can't focus during trainings because they're worrying about work responsibilities.
        ii. Time and travel constraints can prevent meaningful learning during off-site classes.
3. Leadership Development
    a. Angela strongly advocates for a mentorship program, especially for newly promoted staff.
    b. Believes there should be leadership training embedded into the promotion process to better prepare employees.

Muster Meeting

1. Communication with NYCHA
    a. Caretakers expressed frustration about not being able to get in touch with NYCHA—communication channels are unclear or unresponsive.
    b. Muster meetings are viewed as helpful, especially when they focus on practical topics like safety.
    c. Screens in lunchrooms are underutilized—currently only used for trainings, not for real-time updates or recognition.
    A central computer for caretakers at each development was suggested as a beneficial resource.

2. Technology & Access
   a. A central computer for caretakers at each development was suggested as a beneficial resource.
   b. Password reset processes are considered long and frustrating
   c. Many caretakers aren't given the tools or guidance to access resources, leading to disengagement with digital systems.
3. Recognition & Morale
   a. Caretakers feel undervalued and underappreciated.
      i. One mentioned: *"We're never told 'good job.'"*
      ii. Appreciation efforts like a day off are not seen as meaningful—caretakers want genuine recognition, not symbolic gestures.
   b. There is a strong sentiment of being overlooked—no one "steps up" for caretakers when issues arise.
   c. Caretakers expressed resentment at being held accountable without support, especially for incidents outside their control (e.g., things happening after 4:30 p.m.).
   d. Staff feel they bear disproportionate pressure for maintaining order and cleanliness, often without backup.

4. Safety & Conflict with Residents
   a. Several caretakers voiced concerns about conflict with residents, noting there are no real consequences for resident misconduct.
   b. They feel they're expected to "hold things down" without authority or protection, especially in dangerous or disrespectful encounters.
   c. Many feel disrespected despite doing most of the work, and they associate this with low pay and lack of institutional support.

E4. LES Site Visit 3.20.25

Interview with Property Manager
- Culture
  - Major differences between 90 Church and the property based staff - the major sentiment at the properties is to do just enough to not get in trouble. "Cover your ass" mentality
  - Overall the culture can be very toxic
- Incentives

- - The pension structure is not competitive compared to other city agencies - the pension is 40 years at NYCHA but 20 years at other agencies like Sanitation (DSNY)
    - Not a lot of incentive to move up to the Neighborhood Administrator or management level because you lose your union and are likely to get paid less
- Centralization
    - The centralization of functions makes it difficult to get access to essentials - for example if a tire is needed, one has to go through the central location in the Bronx
    - Bringing the Central Office closer to the boroughs would be very helpful and break down some of this separation/centralization
- Communication Training
    - Many different backgrounds and styles in the workplace. Some sort of training on how to communicate would be very helpful
- Staff Experience Level
    - Hiring practices are not very strict, there are many staff members coming from difficult situations - makes it hard to build a more positive work environment
- The Reality
    - There's no amount of incentives an employee can get to do their job better if they have nowhere to live, no livable wage, etc.

E5. Riis Site Visit 3.21.25

Interview with Superintendent of Operations
- In charge of maintenance and all caretakers
    - 7 buildings are low rises
- Email for muster goes to SOC
    - Sometimes it would be good if it was not sent 30 minutes before. Short notice. It would be helpful if we got more time. Upper management move up the ranks so they get it, but they get pressured by upper upper management. CEO vice people just walk in and just see graphs. They don't know what it is like to work here. Maybe wishful thinking but it would be nice for them to understand what it is like in the trenches. Not asking for recognition but at least an understanding
- I have worked with my neighborhood administrator since 2016 for so many years, so I understand her. But people above her are more we need this right now

- If you do not login, your ID gets deactivated. There are some dead spots so they use their personal phone. We have login problems all the time. Then it's a whole process to get it back. It makes no sense
- I have to use around 8 programs so I am on top of us. On top of spreadsheets and emails. I also look at NYCHA stat. More centralized from there, so I don't have to open up everything
- If we start giving them rights to do tickets, the system will be over flooded and there will be confusion. Tenants would know better
- It would be better if they gave us centralized people like a for payroll

Muster Meeting
- There is always more to learn. I think my supervisor gives me enough information
- Do not feel appreciated. We don't celebrate here. Maybe buy you lunch. We don't really do anything here. Where is the reward? There is not follow through
- When you call the place about benefits you are put on hold for two hours. People have worked for ten years and do not have a pension
- People have not even heard of NYCHA connect. Some people know about it about but can't use it
- One of the caretakers x did not have a phone
- I don't think it would be that helpful to get a phone. People will lose it, but it is a way
- The job should supply a phone because I don't want to use my personal device and then it does and trying to communicate with my family.
- They need to implement mandatory use of the phones.
- People do not use NYCHA connect. People do not check their emails. New hires do not have their ID. Then they need to call IT. Hard to get on the computers.
- I like meeting new people as long as it doesn't add another layer
- The last time we met anyone was at the armory was many years ago
- Most of us are Js so we would not really need to use a phone.
  - What is the responsibility of having a phone? What happens if you lose it?
- I wish people just answered the phone. It will take you a week just to reach payroll.

F. Working Group Notes

F1. Change Ambassadors Meeting #1

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **Change Ambassadors Town Hall**

Date: Thursday, February 27, 2025

Time: 2:00-3:00 pm

Location: Virtual (Teams Meeting)

SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich
                         Noam Silberman Brenner
                         Evelyn Jiang

NYCHA Attendees: Change Ambassadors

Notes:
1. **Introduction: Why are you a change ambassador?**
   a. Valerie Pepi
      i. Has been with NYCHA for nearly 32 years, shared her approach to communication within the organization. Working in Environment, Health, and Safety, and previously in energy and sustainability, she has established strong relationships with field staff across various levels. Valerie values traditional communication methods, particularly phone calls, as effective ways to connect with colleagues and ensure information is communicated clearly. She asked about the progress of the current project.
   b. Bartolome Reyes
      i. Has been with NYCHA for 19 years, shared his journey across various departments within NYCHA and his current role as a client service manager focusing on field operations. He emphasized the challenge of closing the technology gap, particularly in field operations where the communication of updates often fails due to the routine ignoring of emails by busy staff. Bartolome described his efforts to improve this through regular meetings and support for neighborhood administrators.

        ii.   Bartolome highlighted issues related to the adoption of new technologies, especially among long-tenured staff less familiar with recent software. He pointed out the necessity for ongoing training and refresher courses to help staff stay updated with new tools, contrasting this need against the current practice where initial training may be provided without subsequent support.

   c. Joan Akers

        i.   Shared her experience of 34 years at NYCHA and her motivation for joining the change program, which was driven by her desire to stay informed and share vital information with others. Initially working in Brooklyn and now in Queens, Joan actively disseminates important updates to staff members who may not have direct access to computers by instructing managers and neighborhood administrators to communicate these updates during muster and to office staff. She expressed a strong passion for training and educating her colleagues on effective computer and application usage.

        ii.   Joan also voiced concerns about NYCHA's practice of introducing new programs and applications without sufficient training, highlighting a gap in ensuring staff are adequately prepared to transition to new systems.

   d. Otica Rutledge

        i.   Shared her motivation for joining the NYCHA Change Ambassador program. She was initially introduced to the program during a transition from public to private management at the development she was involved with. Otica was particularly impressed by the clear demonstration of NYCHA's commitment to improvement and growth. Her experience with the leadership team and the opportunity to network with others. Being part of the Change Ambassador program is not only a professional boost but also aligns with her personal mission to help improve housing solutions for residents

   e. Claudia Sierra

        i.   Works with special repair projects at NYCHA, discussed her transition from the private sector to NYCHA. She noted the profound learning experience it has been to see how different teams within the institution learn from one another.

        ii.   Claudia is based in the main office and supports field teams by helping them respond to emergencies and ensure compliance. She highlighted significant challenges faced by frontline staff, including limited access to devices, reliable internet, and adequate training, which hinder their ability to effectively perform their duties.

2. **Cultural Discussion: What is the culture of communication like in your role? How has technology benefited communication in your role, if at all? What is it like when you are trying to get a message across to property based staff?**
   a. Ellisha Robinson
      i. Highlighted how she joined the program to ensure that crucial information reached all levels of staff within her development, noting that previously, information often stopped at the managerial level. Her proactive approach involved distributing printed information to her coworkers directly.
      ii. She also raised concerns about the current challenges due to increased workloads, which have made it difficult for staff to attend important meetings. This situation has impacted the flow of information and reduced the ability of Change Ambassadors to stay updated and disseminate knowledge effectively throughout the development.
      iii. She emphasized the growing strain under the increasing operational demands, noting that the heightened workload makes it nearly impossible to maintain the level of engagement and training necessary for staff development.
   b. Otica Rutledge
      i. Expressed concerns about the delivery and prioritization of information within NYCHA, particularly in relation to the Change Ambassador meetings. She noted that while her development allows her to participate in these meetings, other locations do not prioritize them, leading to inconsistencies and gaps in communication. Otica highlighted the issue of information being "choppy" and emphasized the importance of ensuring that everyone, especially those without computer access such as field staff who are integral to building operations, receives necessary updates.
      ii. She argued that making Change Ambassador activities a higher priority could alleviate pressure on management by democratizing access to information and ensuring that responsibilities for communication are more evenly distributed. Otica also touched on the problem of hierarchy impacting communication efficacy, sharing her personal experiences of being disregarded due to her title despite offering valuable information.
   c. Ayodeji Festus
      i. Manager of Bazely Houses. She mentioned training sessions downtown, describing it as a privilege that enabled her to bring back vital information on agency plans and improvements to her staff. However, Ayodeji noted that it has been almost a year since she last attended such a meeting, leading her to feel somewhat disconnected and less

important. This lack of engagement has diminished her enthusiasm for sharing new developments with his team.

    ii.   She also highlighted the overwhelming workload at his development as a significant barrier to participating in these important meetings, as the workload waits for no one and multiplies in her absence.

d. Rudy Murillo

    i.   Vice President for Emergency Management Services at NYCHA, discussed the diverse communication strategies his team employs to reach both staff and residents effectively, particularly in the context of emergency preparedness and response. He emphasized the importance of meeting the audience where they are, acknowledging that not all staff have easy access to emails and may rely on handheld devices during busy schedules. To accommodate this, his team utilizes a variety of communication methods including tenant association meetings, on-site interactions during family days, robocalls, and the distribution of flyers with the help of development staff.

    ii.   Rudy highlighted their use of weather briefings, situation reports, and activation incident reports. For crucial communications, his approach is to over-communicate, adhering to his rule of repeating information thrice to ensure it is heard.

    iii.   He also noted that reports sent via email were not reaching caretakers, maintenance workers, and other essential field staff because the information flow would stop at the directorial level. To address this issue, his team directly email the entire authority via a NYCHA-wide email account and bypass the need for information to be forwarded through intermediate levels.

    iv.   He also highlighted the significance of timing in communication. Sending emails late in the afternoon, when staff are preparing to leave, results in inadequate time to absorb the information. methodology.

e. Shameeka Feliciano

    i.   Working in pest management at NYCHA, highlighted the communication challenges faced by field staff, particularly caretakers. She pointed out the significant disparity in information access between office workers and field staff.

    ii.   Shameeka emphasized that caretakers, who perform laborious tasks, often miss out on crucial information because they lack access to computers and are not included in meetings like the Change Ambassador meetings. Despite technically being open to caretakers, these meetings are practically inaccessible to them due to their demanding schedules and physical location in the field.

iii. She also pointed out that even if caretakers are technically included in communications and invited to meetings like Change Ambassadors, the lack of available computers at certain developments can prevent them from attending these digital gatherings.

    f. Sharon Kistoo

       i. Special Project Manager in Administration at NYCHA's Central Office, discussed a challenge she encountered while developing an onboarding document for hiring managers. During this project, she learned that some caretakers at NYCHA do not have email addresses. This revelation was due to some caretakers lacking access to computers or their job functions not requiring the use of certain technological applications. Sharon argued that all employees, regardless of their position, should have at least a basic digital presence in the form of a login, password, and an email address to ensure inclusivity and accessibility across the organization.

3. **Solution Discussion: As change ambassadors, what are some examples of proposals you all have introduced in the past to improve communication? Which proposals succeeded? Which are in motion? Which failed and why? How does change happen? What solutions do you have for our project?**

    a. Teri Dawson

       i. Neighborhood administrator in Brooklyn, proposed the solution of installing a big screen TV in the lunchrooms, aligning meeting times with staff lunch hours to facilitate participation. Teri highlighted the challenges faced by staff in managing time effectively due to overlapping meetings and other commitments that often prevent attendance at important sessions like the Change Ambassador meetings.

       ii. He expressed frustration with the current system where inactive email accounts are deactivated. Teri also shared his preference for the older, simpler systems like AS/400, which he finds more user-friendly and efficient compared to newer applications that he feels are overly complex and less effective for real-time tasks.

    b. Joan Akers

       i. Joan emphasized the process of ensuring that every new employee at her NYCHA borough office receives a LAND ID. She described the protocol whereby notifications are sent to managers and superintendents who are responsible for requesting LAND IDs for new hires, both floaters and permanent staff, ensuring HR is copied to track completion. Joan proposed the creation of a dedicated unit within HR to handle not just LAND IDs but also the provisioning of necessary applications and computer access for new employees.

ii. She highlighted the heavy workload faced by operations staff and noted the disconnect between the central office's perception and the reality of the volume of work handled at the operational level.

iii. Joan also pointed out that each location is equipped with computers and small TVs intended for caretaker use during meetings and insisted that any access issues should be promptly reported

c. Ellisha Robinson

i. She believes it would be beneficial to have a dedicated small team, potentially part of the Change Ambassadors, who could visit various developments to conduct on-site staff meetings directly. This team would address issues and provide updates, especially regarding electronic resources which caretakers and skilled tradespeople often miss out on due to their mobile nature of work.

ii. She printed documents for office staff and supervisors but struggled to connect with caretakers and skilled trades workers. She envisions that these on-site meetings would facilitate better communication and ensure that all staff, regardless of their role or location within the building, receive important information directly from central sources.

d. Bartolome Reyes

i. He explained that email accounts require a license which comes with a cost, a significant factor during budget considerations. Bartolome highlighted that the cost of licenses is a barrier to providing universal email access, especially for positions like caretakers who typically do not receive these resources due to their roles not requiring digital communication tools.

ii. With the introduction of Workday, a new platform meant to streamline HR and IT processes, Bartolome is optimistic about improving these administrative disconnects. He mentioned the inefficiencies in the current system where security ID numbers are processed, describing a disjointed flow between HR and IT which Workday aims to resolve by ensuring that once HR and security input data, it directly informs IT setups, making the process more seamless. He also pointed out the existing infrastructure, like smart boards in developments, which could enhance communication if more widely used.

e. Ella Santo

i. Contrary to some beliefs that caretakers are excluded due to lack of resources, Ella clarified that caretakers indeed receive mobile phones to facilitate communication. However, the challenge lies not in the distribution of these devices but in their utilization. She pointed out that

there is data indicating a significant number of caretakers are not using their phones.

       ii. Despite efforts by the administration to encourage usage, including offering training and personally delivering the phones, uptake remains low.

4. **Information Shared in the Chat**
   a. I wanted to become a Change Ambassador to be able to network within the NYCHA also to be able to share the information with my colleagues and Tenants. I learn alot in the meetings and always pass the info on to others.
   b. What I would like to see is concise, fast, practical responses in several languages that enable us to effectively take care of our residents especially in emergency responses.
   c. Central office dumps all of their work onto operations. When departments close they should send their staff to us to complete the work that that department used to do. In addition, we are top heavy and need employees out here.
   d. I became a NYCHA Change Ambassador to help affect culture change. I believe it has fostered a more inclusive and supportive community. We have bridged gaps, inspired positive change, and empowered others to contribute in a meaningful way. The connections made with various departments have proven invaluable. The team is forward thinking which has always been what attracted me. I have been with the Authority for 17 years mostly working from Central office, in resident facing roles.
   e. Central office dumps all of their work onto operations. When departments close they should send their staff to us to complete the work that that department used to do. In addition, we are top heavy and need employees out here.
   f. I became a NYCHA Change Ambassador to help affect culture change. I believe it has fostered a more inclusive and supportive community. We have bridged gaps, inspired positive change, and empowered others to contribute in a meaningful way. The connections made with various departments have proven invaluable. The team is forward thinking which has always been what attracted me. I have been with the Authority for 17 years mostly working from Central office, in resident facing roles.
   g. They have the smart screens and should be able to utilize. it.
   h. suggestion: short videos sent via email and/or text to handhelds
   i. could the sessions be recorded for members that miss the monthly?
   j. But not everyone updates AS400 with notes like they should
   k. I think what is difficult for me is that the management office each have their own rules and it should be the same across the board
   l. More Info. Being able to know what's going on in NYCHA is part of the reason I became a change ambassador

m. Caretaker X do get phones
   i. They need it for training also
   ii. There is training on how to use the handheld phone and access iWM for Caretaker X
   iii. A caretaker does not always have a phone but then they are listed in the non compliance list for not completing their trainings. We have to interrupt their work and get them computers
n. Information should be clearly labeled and organized to highlight who the information is pertinent to, what it is about, and the action needed, if any

F2. Change Ambassadors Meeting #2

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **Change Ambassadors Town Hall #2**

Date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Time: 2:30-3:30 pm

Location: Virtual (Teams Meeting)

SIPA Attendees:

> Will Frolich
> Noam Silberman Brenner
> Evelyn Jiang
> Zenayah Roaché

NYCHA Attendees:

> Change Ambassadors (35 Attendees)

Notes:

1. **Introductions** - the SIPA team introduced themselves
2. **Overview of the Project** - what the team was tasked with investigating, what was done to understand the problem and identify solutions
3. **Recommendations/Findings**
   - **Digital Divide** - description of the digital divide findings was provided along with the options for recommendations
     i. Claudia Sierra
        1. A community coordinator for special care projects she works with a lot of caretakers and skilled trades staff
        2. Discussing the use of the cell phones, she noted that what works best is when they train caretakers. She noted that they open individual tickets for the caretakers so they can access training on their phones. It is a long process to get set up but we have set it up now in a way for them to access training on their phones in addition to computers.
     ii. Evon Jones
        1. A training administrator for learning and development
        2. Evon mentioned having a way for caretakers to log in with their own personal requirements. The caretakers do not have their own personal log-ins and in training they have to do surveys and evaluations and there are things required for benefits.

- 3. Getting sign on information would be super helpful
    - iii. Yvette Andino
        1. Vice President for Employee Engagement
        2. Yvette noted that it would be great if we can resurrect the smart screens. One way would be to have digital ambassadors to make sure the screens are working properly so they are kept on and can deliver important information. Every property management office has a smart screen currently.
    - iv. Bartolome Reyes
        1. Client Service Manager from IT Department
        2. Bartolome discussed the field operations staff that have field techs to make sure equipment is up and running. He also noted that unfortunately, the smart boards are in public spaces, so it would be good for training, but not other things so it can't solve all of the issues with the digital divide and serve as computers. The way they are presented is important. People would otherwise walk by it and not use it.
    - v. Yvonne Jones
        1. Yvonne said that staff would definitely use NYCHA Connect on their phones if it was available. That would maybe not require sign up which helps with the login credential issues.
    - vi. Bartolome Reyes
        1. Noted that there is a current project in the pipeline to add NYCHA Connect to the cloud so you can use it through the internet as opposed to the intranet. The rollout is soon.
    - vii. Yvette Andino
        1. Noted that NYCHA Now is a place where staff can see information and where information is posted and this is not a place that is on the intranet.
    - viii. Claudia Sierra
        1. Asked about how the app would work. Would this app be introduced for all phones, would it have to be authenticated?
    - ix. Bartolome Reyes
        1. In discussing the use of cell phones, noted that some people might refuse to use the device. There is a stigma that people can be tracked.
- ○ **Communication Processes** - description of the strained communication process findings was provided along with the options for recommendations
    - i. Bartolome Reyes
        1. Bart discussed the processes for communicating with caretakers and especially the password issues. He has worked with Neighborhood Administrators to make sure that caretakers have at least 15 minutes to log in to emails and see training and keep their account active. Once a caretaker does not log on for an extended period, the license/credential is assigned to someone else, and then the process takes even longer to reset. That is why caretakers did not have a license in the past and why many are stuck recovering access.

  ii. Deputy director of Learning and Development
    1. Discussing training, they are working on improving orientation. There is a layer of information of what the different departments do and we are trying to get better in training to communicate that information to staff

- **Culture** - description of the workplace culture findings was provided along with the options for recommendations
  - **i.** Team Bonding:
    - **1.** Chanda Cole
      - **a.** Would be really nice for when people make milestones of service (5,10,20 years of service) to recognize these efforts monthly, would be nice for breakfasts etc
    - **2.** Claudia Sierra
      - **a.** Something like a personality assessment tool would be beneficial to help teams understand their personalities and how they work best together
    - **3.** Franklin Velez
      - **a.** There are some pretty good options out there already, like affinity groups. For example, the Hispanic Community organization did the Puerto Rican Day parade and have gotten a big turnout for those kinds of events in the city
    - **4.** Yvonne Jones
      - **a.** When we're facilitating trainings a common concern is how to make people feel more appreciated, she recommends employee of the month but also suggests that people write recommendations and have that placed in employee folders, they go a long way but aren't done very often,
    - **5.** Sharon Kistoo
      - **a.** Affinity group association president, trying to come up with different events, but they are not getting any funding for these kinds of things and they are not agency wide events, not even a holiday party. If there was a monthly event for networking that would be helpful, there are family days for the development, nothing agency wide however.
    - **6.** Bartolome Reyes
      - **a.** Meets with a lot of people in the properties through his work, at the end of the day people want to know what's going to be relevant to them. Ideally, NYCHA needs to develop them so people know what's next for them, there used to be more in person training, which were very impactful, people feel stuck now.
  - **ii.** Improve supervisor training:
    - **1.** Elizabeth Diaz
      - **a.** Administrative superintendent

    b. Elizabeth agreed with Bartolome. Elizabeth came in as a caretaker, years ago there were opportunities that the current staff don't have now – used to be caretaker to HPT(heating, plant technicians) program, on the job training with assessment to qualify, if you did you had a 6 month program (2 months in the classroom, 4 month in development with training heating plant techs (3,4,5 times a week) prepared people to take civil service exam — what you pour into our staff and colleagues is what you get out of them; the classes currently are outside of working hours, there's nothing like being there in person;

   iii. Accountability Mechanisms:
    1. Yvonne Jones
     a. Learning and Development is under new administration and redesigned many offerings that can be found in NYCHA University, management have to see the value in the training, trying to map out core curriculum so staff isn't pull out of the properties, also trying to rebrand to be more present to people

4. Information Shared in the Chat
- The LAN IDs/Emails require a license that comes with a cost.
- Suggestion - When HR is onboarding staff, HR should automatically submit an IT request to ensure that employees receive a LAN ID in a timely fashion.
- Desktop is around $800
- Smartboard $3000-$8000
- We sometimes wait 5-10 days for LAN ID's for staff which is sometimes too long especially for office staff.
- Great. And we should not have to wait so many days. I had an HA wait doing nothing at all for 4 days.
- I have heard that there has been resistance from all staff using these smartboards, as they are expensive to use and there was back and forth about which department would manage them overall.
- Authenticate on their personal devices. One of the issues with personal devices is there are a lot of staff that refuse to use their personal devices. We had a mandated training and a lot of employees refused to authenticate using their personal devices
- Staff refused to authenticate on their personal devices for the mandated training class or any other NYCHA work
- We have had recent concerns of staff feeling forced to download work applications to their personal devices in order to complete work related tasks. This was most recently mentioned in the past couple of months because DCAS recently updated their training systems, forcing an authenticator to participate in the training, which many refused to upload to their phone.
- We have had recent concerns of staff feeling forced to download work applications to their personal devices in order to complete work related tasks. This was most recently mentioned in the past couple of months because DCAS recently updated their training

systems, forcing an authenticator to participate in the training, which many refused to upload to their phone.

- ○ Besides the postings at the development staff can utilize NYCAPS to see positions open not only for NYCHA but other city agency's as well.
- ○ "DISC" refers to a personality assessment tool that helps individuals understand their behavioral tendencies and preferences based on four key styles: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. We did by teams improved understanding, bonding and team work
- ○ Management must be invested in their teams/staff and many do not feel that is the current environment. That feeling needs to be genuinely brought back and a good tool for this was making all management take the DCAS course Emotional Intelligence, which shown and reminded us to treat the janitor as you would the CEO.
- ○ Secretaries also had in-person trainings with many different courses
- ○ We did have a graduating class for HPT's from a similar program last week.
- ○ We have a newly approved elevator mechanic apprenticeship and we are looking to bring back Caretaker M or similar program. In addition to many other opportunities through the New and improved Learning & Development
- ○ Suggestion to build support and culture: there is a secretary chat room where old timers support, answer questions for newbies where they feel unafraid to ask
- ○ https://nycha.csod.com/LMS/catalog/Welcome.aspx?tab_page_id=-67&tab_id=-1

Notes Prepared by: SIPA Student Team

F3. Resident Town Hall Neighborhood Services

Resident Round Table Agenda
April 10th 2025, 6 pm | Neighborhood Services | Zoom

Agenda Topics and Time Estimate:
- Introduction of SIPA Capstone Team Members (~2 min)
- Introduction of the Project (~2 min)
  - Review project as outlined in the Terms of Reference (TOR)
  - Goals and expected outcomes of the project
- Discussion Purpose for Joining Call (~1 min)
  - Explanation of the team's engagement to gather diverse perspectives, from headquarters staff to residents, about neighborhood services
  - Emphasize desire to gauge how residents receive services from property staff
- Questions (~15 mins)
  - How often do you interact with NYCHA staff in your building?
    - What are those interactions like?
    - Tiffane:
      - Mix of experiences in Bronx River Development, lived in 2 buildings in the 9 years she's been there,
      - Rejected the first choice she was given because she spoke to the residents about whether it was safe
      - Picked Bronx River because the building was very clean
      - High praise for Christina the caretaker, wished she could celebrate her somehow
      - Cleanliness is not something that is usually talked highly about but it was great, when she left, the cleanliness got worse
      - In her current building, put in some complaints about some of the caretakers who are mostly men … they are not respecting of the woman in the buildings … gave a story of someone who was rejected by a tenant and so the caretaker didn't mop the floor anymore
      - Disconnect with what the caretakers are expected to clean up and how frequently. Would like better training so people are doing a better job and caring for the job. Improved supervisors to hold the caretaker accountable
      - Cleanliness is heartbreaking, not a good place to raise children
      - Misconceptions about how much people make and how much they pay in rent – that shouldn't be a reason why its not kept clean

- - - Acknowledged that its on the tenants as well but at the caretaker level its almost expected that the space will be dirty
    - Ritta
      - Not too much of an issue with the staff/cleaning staff
      - You can see who appreciates the job and who is just there 9-5
      - Not a real sense of going above what is expected
      - The staff tends to be friendly and nice and hasn't had an issue
      - Some people do treat them like hired help and acknowledged that people do need to take responsibility
      - Attitudes are generally good
    - Bernice
      - Had an experience today at the housing office
      - Was trying to explain issues with her recertification process and trying to troubleshoot an issue with her salary … had a difficult time getting her message across to someone with a very thick accent
      - Respect and knowing how to treat others – training on this is wanted
      - Needs to have training on customer service
        - Dylan - NYCHA is rolling out a curriculum for conflict resolution and how to interact with people … working on a train the trainer model
      - Would like to see something like EQ/social skills training
      -
  - How long does it take for your service requests to be met?
    - Rachael:
      - It's not so much about getting addressed. Creating a ticket is fine, follow-ups on these tickets are generally fine and thorough (via email, text, etc.)
        - However, at times, the maintenance worker does not show up (no call/no show).
        - This impacts tenants who have to take off to be home w/o any notice of the maintenance worker not showing up. When they return to work and maintenance workers eventually show up, they receive a note, and the cycle of unresolved issues continues.
          - Furthers the assumption that everyone in NYCHA does not work. Assumes that residents will be there whenever you [maintenance worker] get there.

- It should be simple: You have a job to do, get it done (w/o the assumption that NYCHA residents aren't working and will be there whenever you get to it).
  - Do you think the property team is running efficiently with respect to your residential needs?
    - Bernice
    - Tiffane
      - They dont all the same … maintenance runs a certain way, caretakers run a certain way, management runs a certain way
      - Supervisors seem overwhelmed, cant get out to the buildings to manage the work … impression is that they're not well coordinated or over all three groups, someone who is neutral
    - Rachael
      - Team implies they are working together but there is no 'team'
      - No one is working together
  - Do you think issues at the employee level are affecting you as a tenant? If so, how?
  - Suggestions?
    - Tiffane:
      - Should be someone above everybody in a liaison capacity (AT THE DEVELOPMENTS) when there are issues not being addressed
      - Should be flyers to distinguish whose job is whose
  - Dylan showed a dashboard of service requests that are on-time, late, early, etc. For skilled trades in a month there are about 12,000 requests on time which is 65% of the total (roughly 18000 total). Maintenance requests had many more late, didn't catch the numbers.

F4. Resident Town Hall Technology

Resident Round Table Agenda
April 7th 2025, 6 pm | Technology | Zoom

Agenda Topics and Time Estimate:

1. **Introduction of SIPA Capstone Team Members (~2 min)**
   a. SIPA team introduced themselves individually.
   b. Outlined the scope of the project: examining technology access, communication gaps, and resident experiences at NYCHA properties.

2. **Introduction of the Project (~2 min)**
   a. Brief overview of project objectives aligned with the Terms of Reference (TOR):
      i. Assess NYCHA's technological systems used by residents and frontline staff.
      ii. Identify barriers to technology access.
      iii. Provide recommendations for improving communication and digital equity across NYCHA.

3. **Purpose for Joining Call (~1 min)**
   a. Team explained the goal of gathering insights from NYCHA staff with direct experience supporting resident technology use.
   b. Emphasized focus on understanding the functionality, accessibility, and gaps in resident-facing technology systems.

4. **Questions and Discussion (~15 min)**
   a. **Available Technological Systems and Purpose**
      i. Sharone explained that NYCHA residents primarily have access to a self-service portal and MyNYCHA app for reporting repairs and service needs. Kiosks located at developments mirror the resident webpage.
      ii. Cindy added that the kiosks were upgraded in 2023 to enhance functionality, offering most services available through the app. She noted that residents can access certain NYC webpages via kiosk as well.
      iii. Taurean shared that while the app is available, many residents are expected to simply download it and figure it out without formal guidance or tutorials.
      iv. Daniel mentioned that using a laptop with Chrome browser provided a smoother experience compared to kiosks or mobile apps, although a license is required to fully access NYCHA systems.

b. System Efficiency

    i. Ashley stated that recertification processes have improved but still lack transparency; residents sometimes must physically visit the office to complete paperwork if systems fail.

    ii. Cindy noted there have been notification enhancements over the last year (e.g., alerts for scheduled maintenance) but issues remain, particularly with syncing updates between the app and CCC (Customer Contact Center) systems.

    iii. Wayne reported trouble uploading documents via kiosk, where scans often failed to attach properly, requiring residents to start over.

    iv. Dominica shared difficulties completing the annual review process, noting that kiosks sometimes only function properly with Firefox, which confuses users unfamiliar with specific browsers.

    v. Taurean described issues with portal slowdowns, especially during peak times, leading to system overload and resident frustration.

c. Barriers to Use / Unwillingness

    i. Wayne emphasized that many residents don't know how to use the kiosks and would greatly benefit from on-site tutorials or tech help sessions.

    ii. Taurean observed that although he personally uses the portal at home, it took multiple attempts (four times) to successfully upload documents, which can discourage less tech-savvy residents.

    iii. Sharone confirmed that some residents are discouraged by slow system speeds, especially during busy periods, further widening the digital divide.

d. Resources and Support Provided

    i. Cindy explained that while there is an internal NYCHA intranet for staff, many caretakers and frontline workers lack regular computer access or a NYCHA device. Radio communication is more common than email in many developments.

    ii. She also noted that password reset policies are changing: starting Summer 2024, password changes will move from every 30 days to every 120 days, helping reduce system lockouts.

    iii. Taurean raised a concern that many caretakers do not have NYCHA email addresses, limiting formal communication channels between staff and residents. He emphasized that at least one email address per employee should be a basic expectation.

    iv. Sharone and Cindy both referenced existing external support programs:

1. Microsoft Community Day: Annual $15 event for learning Microsoft tools (registration opened 4/1).
2. OTI (NYC Office of Technology and Innovation) Digital Equity Roundtable: Offers initiatives like Neighborhood Tech Help Lunches (19 sites) and is launching a Tech Help website soon.
3. **Open Data Ambassadors Program**: Residents are trained in data usage and basic technology skills at different sites.

G. Best Practice Research

G1. NYC Parks Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**

Date: Monday, March 31, 2025

Time: 11:30am - 12:30 pm

Location: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

SIPA Attendees: Noam Brenner (chair)

NYC Parks Attendees: Andre Mouzon, Director of Labor Relations & Employee Engagement

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **What is your role and what do you do?**
   a. Andre Mouzan labor director, labor relations and employee engagement
   b. I do contract interpretation. Make sure people follow rules. I do hearings when employees are brought up on charges. Discipline things.
   c. Employee engagement side, I do things to build morale. We have employee of the month events done monthly. There are different categories for different awards. Also an annual award in may. Like the employee of the month, but on a larger scale. Afterwards we host a corporate challenge with JP Morgan, a 5k run across central park and host a bbq with staff and meet people with different divisions. Also host a bring your child to work day. Host softball league that we manage, also a soccer league.
2. **How are things communicated in the field?**
   i. We send broadcast emails. Example, blood drives or flu shots available. My division takes the broadcast email and sends it to field supervisors to post in district headquarters as a pdf. We also do a supervisor update once a month. At muster they read the supervisor update to staff. We reach out to payroll and HR to see if there is anything the field staff

should be aware of. We have a suggestion box. Broadcast emails are posted on the bulletin board.

3. **How are posting handled?**
   a. Most have a lifespan. So if we have a flyer, it is replaced when the event ends. There is not always a timeframe. Supervisors know they are going to be an update the 15th of the month,
   b. Everyone that has an email they have access to the intranet. There is a parks calendar. Every Friday there are job postings.

4. **Technology and communications?**
   a. Each borough has a district headquarters with computers there. They are allowed to use headquarters where they can use the intranet. There is not enough for everyone to have their own, but there is enough access. They do not have the ability to do it at home.
   b. Certain number of employees have phones and some have radios. Those that have the phone have access to the intranet.
   c. We implemented something where we were able to centrally shoot out information in the lobby and it would just loop information. We did it in queens, but not all the sites have internet. Our old screens were going to be used for TV and like a bulletin board.
   d. People have access to the intranet on mobile devices. Park supervisors all have work phones. Employees that report to them have radios.

5. **HR information?**
   a. We have something called a Payroll stuffer. Memorandum is attached to the paystubs. So we can get out information and capture everyone.
   b. How do you operate across different boroughs?
      i. Labor relations, payroll, and HR. There are different emails that people can reach out to. They email to resources and we funnel them out to different departments.
      ii. We have different emails and people know who to contact.

6. **What is the Culture of communications?**
   a. Has gotten much better. People know who to call and who to talk to.
   b. We have a problem getting employees personal emails. It would be better if we could disseminate that way.
      i. The only place we are falling short is their personal emails.
   c. We also have the union disseminate some of the information who are field staff. We meet with the union once a month and go over issues they have to disseminate information.

7. **Mustar Meetings, how do they work?**
   a. Supervisors are giving them their assignments for the day. The supervisor update can go over the updates of the month. Employees know that the

supervisor update is posted on the 15th of the month anyway. We have been doing that for two years. Updates also do not change that much anyway.

8. **How is the culture and how do you build morale, get staff connected?**
   a. Employees in the field get to meet upper staff at those employee of the month things.
   b. There are also the events we do. Staff get to talk to other people. That is how we build morale. We have a softball team for each borough. There is a championship at the end. Employees feel connected.
   c. Society meeting someone mentioned soccer. We were able to gauge interest and create a soccer league. We have 100 people across the five boroughs. Having events where people meet the different divisions and we are all one family.
   d. We also have a ranger program. Adventure course in queens to do team building. Take the day and do team bonding.
   e. DIB reflection seminars and can talk about various seminars. Gives people opportunity to share issues they are going through
   f. Bring your kid to works day
      i. Commissioner comes to talk. Field staff, skilled trade, from different divisions in one room in Manhattan get to know each other.
      ii. Ex: Plummer did a plummer event to teach everyone about plumbing. I can learn more as someone who sits in at office
      iii. The events build the bonds and networks and help communication. They feel valued.
   g. We have employee of the month, then we do our annual awards. We have 200 winners. All are invited. Corporate challenges are big. NYCHA partners with us for the corporate challenge. 400 people show up. Dragon boat event in August. It all helps the morale.
   h. We also do surveys. We started doing this thing called stay interviews. It is done where supervisors interview direct reports. Help understand why people stay and build a plan. Instead of an agency wide survey. Individual interview that each supervisor does to help gauge satisfaction and retention. Did it 3 divisions so far. We can see what the supervisor can do and what they need support with.

9. **How does training work?**
   a. We have a parks academy that does mass training. We have something called train the trainers. They go and do training for staff. Parks academy trains staff on training and then I am charged with how many people have logged on. Those that do not I schedule a training class. Bring people out of the field and come to the main headquarters if they missed the ones in person. I would train them in person if we missed people. They can also do virtual training in a conference room. If they do not have a tv we do it in person.

b. Conference room depends on the location. Some will be virtual and some will be in person. Train the trainer can go out and do the training. Normally it is our health and safety coordinators. We rely on them. We have a health and safety division and the coordinators.

c. Benefit unit does benefit seminars and they could out and I go out with them to talk about labor relations

      i. I just did a tour in manhattan and I spoke hot topics in labor relations

G2. Columbia Facilities Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & Columbia Facilities Interview**
Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025
Time: 2:00 - 2:30 pm
Location: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)
SIPA Attendees: Will Frolich (chair)
                    Zenayah Roaché (secretary)
Columbia Facilities Attendees: Annette Lopes

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q: What is your role at CU Facilities?**

    A: Annette Lopes is the Assistant Vice President of Human Resources at Columbia University's Facilities and Operations.

2. **Q: How do you communicate with various roles (employees managing the grounds, residential buildings, etc.) on CU's Morningside and Manhattanville campuses?**

    A: Annette's office is comparable to a local HR for the property staff, meaning they are responsible for things like enhancing onboarding and are a direct point of contact. Employees can not work at their site until onboarding is complete (VPs, department, policies like leave, required training, campus tour, etc.) For example, the department brings in Health & Safety prior to site placement for employees to make sure they are up to the right level before going to work. The department makes sure to pack in this information before employees are on site because they know there's little time to tend to these things otherwise.

    Despite the intention, Annette noticed a lack of participation regarding topics like equity and inclusion. This is in part because frontline staff have no computer or work phone. Thus, Annette's department hired a consultant to find out how to communicate more effectively.

    The takeaways varied. See takeaways below:
    a. Employees have various preferred ways of communication

              i.   Communicative alternatives that were uncovered: Personal outreach via text messages, posting it by the lockers, etc.

       b. Language barriers: Columbia Facilities deals with a wide variety of languages and is working to use methods to translate communications to the relevant stakeholder..

       c. Improving the communication by supervisors is needed and includes:

              i.   Distilling information in a prioritized order through a regular digest.

              ii.   Train supervisors on effective communication (i.e., engaging communication beyond "this needs to be done")

       d. Updating communication branding:

              i.   Being more intentional about the subject line (i.e. URGENT: [followed by the topic])

              ii.   Increase utilization of QR codes (*note: there is a gap between younger employees who know how to use these easily versus veteran, older employees who aren't used to them*)

       e. Acknowledging employees t

3. Q: Do you see a hesitancy to use technology amongst frontline staff?

A: Managing different generations requires different methods. Some employees are wary about tracking. If phones are folks' preferred use of information, they distribute them — granted, not everyone gets a phone due to cost considerations. Otherwise, frontline staff use radios. Ultimately, CU Facilities is more focused on various methods of communication instead of a one-size-fits-all model.

4. Q: When you mention improving communication through supervisors, are you trying to improve the employee experience? If so, what has that been like so far?

A: Improving communication through supervisors, and thus improving the employee experience, is the hardest part of the issue because everyone is so busy. It's hard to get buy-in for this aspect of work because it is often undercut by the need to get tasks done. CU Facilities is working around this by incorporating employee management into supervisors' performance evaluations.

5. Q: How do you deal with technological scarcity for training?

A: CU Facilities has annual training on harassment. They work with the OID department to get reports on the number of completed training sessions. Based on this assessment, they personally reach out to employees to remind them to complete it.

Additional pathways exist as well. For example, they allow frontline staff to come to the office or use their supervisors' technology to get the training done (not during their allotted lunch time). During orientation before the start of each academic year, they bring in the OIE office to present the training slides. This designated time meets state requirements for the training and allows staff that don't have access to computers, like the dining hall staff, to do training in person all at once.. Lastly, CU Facilities make iPads available during annual orientation to reactivate employee passwords.

G3. FDNY Interview

<div align="center">

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

</div>

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**

Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025
Time: 2:00-2:30 pm
Location: Virtual (Zoom Meeting)
SIPA Attendees: Noam Brenner
                   Evelyn Jiang
NYCHA Attendees: Joann Barney

<u>Notes:</u>

1. **Can you describe how communication worked within the agencies you've worked with or consulted for?**
   Joann noted that while she hasn't worked internally at city agencies, she has consulted for many and observed that large organizations like NYCHA struggle with filtering key messages from leadership down to the front line. Messages often become diluted—similar to a game of telephone. While email and chain-of-command messaging are common, face-to-face communication is still the most effective, albeit inefficient and resource-intensive.

2. **What are some effective practices you've seen for bridging the communication divide between executive leadership and frontline staff?**
   Leadership site visits—whether at firehouses or town halls—are impactful. Small group exchanges, when the leader is physically present, build trust and deliver messages more effectively. While it's time-consuming, these efforts are meaningful. Deputizing others to deliver messages helps with scale but can dilute the original intent or tone of communication.

3. **How do you build team cohesion and communication across physically separate buildings or units, like NYCHA's developments?**
   Joann emphasized that building trust across units requires consistent, intentional outreach from leadership. It takes time and effort. She used a family analogy—building culture is about continuous, small reinforcements (e.g., praise, face-to-face interactions), not one-off messages or top-down directives. Trust is built over time and is necessary for effective communication.

4. **How can leaders motivate staff and build a culture of trust in a large organization like NYCHA?**

Leaders need to engage their direct reports, who in turn should do the same down the chain. Trust is built when communication is reinforced by someone employees know and trust. People don't act on messages from unknown authorities. You need buy-in at every level to make communication and motivation effective.

5. **Has technology changed how we communicate and build trust?**
Technology provides new methods of communication, but it doesn't replace the human need for connection. Trust-building still requires human effort—emails and apps can only do so much. For routine or directive messages, frequent and simple communication may suffice, but it doesn't foster culture or deep engagement.

6. **One NYCHA employee mentioned that directives lack a "why." How important is it to explain the reason behind directives?**
Extremely important. Simplified instructions can be effective, but without the "why," people are unlikely to internalize them or share them with others. Understanding the purpose behind an action increases the likelihood of genuine engagement and wider message spread.

7. **Are there any resources or books you recommend for research on communication in organizations?**
Joann recommended *Corporate Communication* by Paul Argenti. She said it's helpful for understanding how to design and scale messaging while maintaining clarity and trust.

8. **What are your thoughts on standardizing communications within a large organization?**
Standardization is helpful, especially for clarity. Use clear formatting—highlighted headers, short summaries, repeated key messages—to ensure the important points stand out. Consistency in message delivery helps reduce confusion and reinforces key ideas.

9. **How can leaders effectively deputize or create liaisons between central office and properties?**
Give people titles or roles that make them feel valued and trusted. Include them in meetings and exchanges, and let them know their input matters. Praising, including, and visibly trusting deputies or liaisons reinforces their importance and motivates them to carry the message forward sincerely.

10. **Do you have any advice or further reading on leading organizational culture change?**
Joann compared culture change to turning an aircraft carrier—slow and deliberate. It requires consistent messaging, honoring the past, and a clear articulation of future goals. She mentioned a book with "culture" in the title (unspecified) and offered to follow up with it via email.

G.4. NYC Department of Environmental Protection Interview

SIPA U8000 (001)
NYCHA/SIPA Capstone Workshop, Spring 2025
Empowering Frontline Property Staff Through Enhanced Connectivity

Subject: **SIPA Capstone & NYCHA Interview**
Date: Tuesday, April 1, 2025
Time: 8:00 pm - 8:30 pm
Location: In-Person
SIPA Attendees:
  Will Frolich (chair)
NYC DEP Attendees:
  Rohit T. Aggarwala, Commissioner, NYC Department of Environmental Protection

INTERVIEW NOTES:

1. **Q: How does DEP deal with communicating with their frontline staff?**
   A: Admittedly, we probably don't do super well at this. It's difficult to connect with the frontline staff and the things we're doing to communicate to staff tend to be areas where the office staff are the ones receiving the messaging. For example, I host quarterly or periodic updates to the whole staff virtually. Of the thousands of people who show up to listen, the overwhelming majority are from the office, so who are we really reaching? I try to introduce myself to staff when I see them in trucks and around the city and something I've noticed is that they're pretty consistently watching videos on their phones. I've been thinking about how to reach people in a form that isn't an hour long presentation. Can we create short form videos like Tik Tok?

2. **Q: What about more specific information about payroll, job responsibilities, or procedure?**
   A: I tend to think that if there is information that people need they will find their way to it, if you really need to find payroll or benefits you're going to go out and find it. That said, we have been thinking about how to leverage the information we have and make it more readily available. Microsoft and their suite is something we're thinking about at the moment. Can we use their AI to create something like a chatbot using our data? That way, when someone does want something, they can find it.

3. **Q: What about the culture at DEP? How do you foster a positive culture among the staff?**
   A: One thing to know about the work at DEP is that there is a lot of pride in the work and a sense of craftsmanship. Part of that comes from the kind of work, there's a lot of pride for the folks who install and maintain water mains and hydrants but we also try to foster that pride. We have created a competition between the "shops" where each

group of workers is timed to install a hydrant for example and the fastest shops are then put head to head at a celebration type event during the summer. The celebration aspect and the hotdogs are fun but the competition and pride from each shop has created a sort of flywheel where each shop wants to get better and better at their work so it compounds over time.

4. **Q: Anything else you recommend?**

A: Try talking to the unions. They're going to be very important to communicating with staff and getting the right message out plus identifying what kind of information is needed.

G5.1. Summary of Library Research

Based on the project's aim to enhance internal communication, bridge technology gaps, and promote organizational culture at NYCHA, the team conducted extensive library-based research to identify relevant best practices from both public and private sectors. The research explored topics including digital inclusion, workplace communication, supervisor-staff relationships, employee engagement, and institutional change. Sources included case studies, dissertations, scholarly articles, and sector-specific reviews. These materials provided critical insight into the systemic communication challenges faced by large organizations and informed the development of practical and evidence-based recommendations for NYCHA. A summary of key sources and annotated notes is included in this appendix.

G5.2. Annotated Bibliography

Berger, Gail, and Liz Livingston Howard. *Cristo Rey St. Martin College Preparatory School: Promoting a Culture of Continuous Improvement.* **Kellogg School of Management, Part One and Two, 2017.**

This case study details the transformation of Cristo Rey St. Martin College Prep through a leadership-driven shift toward accountability, structure, and cultural improvement. Initially plagued by poor teacher performance, resistance to evaluation, and inconsistent disciplinary approaches, the school struggled with student outcomes and staff morale. Teachers viewed observation as intrusive, and the lack of clear systems contributed to a fractured environment. The new administration introduced several reforms to address these challenges, including data-driven interventions, targeted support programs, revised hiring practices, and more robust professional development through peer-led learning walks. The emphasis on recruiting capable teachers fostered alignment with the school's mission, which in turn contributed to improved student experiences and enrollment. A move to a new facility helped build informal communication and a more unified, collaborative workplace. The study illustrates how improvements in supervision, physical environment, and culture can work together to drive organizational performance.

Diacu, Mariana. *Effective Communication Strategies in a Complex Public Sector Organization***. Royal Roads University (Canada). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2009.**

This dissertation investigates communication dynamics within the structure of complex public sector organizations, emphasizing how traditional hierarchical models impact communication efficacy. Diacu identifies three critical communication types: downward (from management to

staff), upward (from staff to management), and horizontal (peer-to-peer or inter-departmental). She argues that public organizations' reliance on vertical accountability often produces silos and departmentalism, obstructing collaborative cross-unit work. Diacu highlights the importance of building trust and relationships. Face-to-face engagement and personal networks are critical for functional communication, especially when formal horizontal structures are lacking.

Heller Consulting and NTEN. *2024 Nonprofit Digital Investments Report.* **NTEN, 2024.**

This report explores how nonprofit organizations in the U.S. and beyond make decisions about digital investments, which reveals systemic challenges and strategic priorities in the sector. Internal general operating funds remain the primary source of technology budgets, with training receiving only 1% of the total allocation—a signal of underinvestment in staff development. Despite rising interest in artificial intelligence, most nonprofits are still focused on foundational improvements in data systems and security. The report also highlights a communication gap: while internal reporting on tech spending is common, external transparency remains rare. Cost, time, and integration were top investment considerations, while scalability and accessibility were less influential. The report offers insights into the persistent digital divide in the nonprofit sector, underscoring the need for intentional budgeting, strategic training, and increased transparency to ensure technology investments translate into meaningful impact.

Henderson, Penny. *Supervisor Training: Issues and Approaches – Guide to Supervision*. **1st ed. London: Routledge, 2018.**

This book offers a comprehensive examination of supervisor training in the UK. It addresses a gap in literature on structured and reflective training approaches for those overseeing professionals in counseling and allied fields. It also emphasizes experiential learning alongside theoretical understanding and outlines key qualities expected of effective supervisors. With contributions from a range of authors experienced in supervisor training, it highlights differing theoretical approaches, explores empathy and ethical practice, and promotes mindfulness and reflective habits.

Holloway, Carl. "Internal/Employee Communication." In *Absolute Essentials of Public Relations,* **1st ed., 11–20. New York: Routledge, 2024.**

This chapter explores internal communication as a historically overlooked yet increasingly central component of organizational performance and culture. Holloway emphasizes that employee communication is vital for fostering engagement, alignment, and productivity, particularly in shaping the organization's culture and reputation. The chapter outlines formal and informal communication channels, the role of communication in employee motivation, and

the importance of two-way communication to elevate the employee voice. The chapter also details planning and delivery strategies for internal communication, stressing its impact on coordination and mutual understanding.

Jacobsen, Christian Bøtcher, and Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen. *Leadership strategies and internal communication in public organizations. The International Journal of Public Sector Management* **34, no. 2 (2021): 137–154.**

This article investigates the link between leadership strategies and internal communication performance in public organizations. Building on earlier work by Pandey and Garnett, the authors argue that internal communication has long been acknowledged as essential yet remains undervalued in public management research. They find that the use of verbal rewards such as praise and recognition is significantly associated with improved communication performance, especially across different organizational types.

Jethwaney, Jaishri. *Corporate Communication: Concepts and Practice*. **1st ed. London: Routledge India, 2024.**

This book explores the evolving field of corporate communication which offers both conceptual understanding and practical strategies for modern organizational settings. Jethwaney emphasizes how corporate communication fosters a company's external identity and internal sense of belonging, especially among employees and investors. Key topics include stakeholder segmentation, internal and external communication channels, brand positioning, crisis and reputation management, and the integration of government policies and industry trends. The book highlights the significance of employee communication in shaping organizational culture and long-term image.

Neufeld, Derrick, and Yasser Rahrovani. *Furniture Bank: Entrepreneurial Growth in the Social Sector.* **Ivey Publishing, 2017.**

This case study presents the challenges and strategic decisions faced by the executive director of Furniture Bank, a Canadian charity providing furniture to people transitioning out of homelessness. Despite a strong social mission, the organization struggled with operational inefficiencies and limited technological infrastructure. To address these gaps, the leadership adopted a multi-pronged strategy focused on internal and external transformation. This included leveraging cloud-based systems, expanding the social enterprise model, and revamping digital communications. Internally, the organization emphasized storytelling and active listening to cultivate a stronger culture, foster engagement among staff and volunteers, and better understand the needs of clients. The case offers critical insights into how digital tools and inclusive management practices can support mission-driven innovation.

NTEN. *NTEN Equity Guide for Nonprofit Technology*. NTEN, 2023.

This guide serves as a facilitation resource for nonprofit organizations to embed equity into their technology practices. Rather than providing a checklist of actions, the guide encourages organizations to use its content as a starting point for internal discussion, reflection, and continuous improvement across strategy, policy, and program design. A core principle is the rejection of assumptions around staff technology expertise and the importance of on-the-job training. It challenges organizations to eliminate gatekeeping hiring practices and instead invest in skill-building for current employees. The guide also outlines the importance of equitable equipment policies, highlighting that access to tools and devices should be determined by job function and accessibility needs, not hierarchy.

Soga, Lebene Richmond, Yemisi Bolade-Ogunfodun, and Anna De Amicis. *Exploring flexible working practices and the digital divide in a post-lockdown era. European Journal of Management and Business Economics* 33, no. 4 (2024): 445–465.

This article presents how flexible working practices adopted during and after COVID-19 have highlighted and exacerbated the digital divide in both organizational and societal contexts. The authors identify three dimensions of the digital divide—geographic, socioeconomic, and user-related—drawing attention to disparities in internet access, digital literacy, and infrastructure availability. They distinguish between enabling and limiting technology environments, showing how inequalities in bandwidth, hardware capability, and spatial arrangements can either empower or inhibit remote workers. Particularly relevant to public sector and nonprofit settings, the study emphasizes how workers lacking adequate digital environments are systematically disadvantaged.

Umpain, S.H., Herachwati, N., Setiadi, Y., and Hanorsian, A.E. "A Systematic Literature Review of Interpersonal Communication Strategies for Optimizing Government Employee Performance in the Digital Era." *F1000Research* 13 (2024): 979.

This systematic literature review explores the role of interpersonal communication in enhancing employee performance in government organizations amid ongoing digital transformation. The study draws from peer-reviewed journals published between 2017 and 2024 using Scopus and Google Scholar databases, applying thematic analysis and quantitative synthesis. It finds that while digital tools increase operational efficiency, challenges like system integration, technology access, and HR capacity persist. The findings emphasize that interpersonal communication remains critical for maintaining cohesion, building trust, and enabling adaptation in digital environments.

H. One Pager

EMPOWERING FRONTLINE STAFF THROUGH ENHANCED CONNECTIVITY
Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs
Spring 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores ways to bridge the technology gap and improve communication between NYCHA's Central Office and frontline staff, who face barriers in accessing tools, information, and updates. A team of Columbia University graduate students investigated this challenge through meetings with NYCHA staff, key informant interviews, site visits, surveys, and best practice research.

KEY FINDINGS

The Digital Divide

Problem
The caretakers lack access to information that NYCHA distributes digitally, either through email or via software tools.

Recommendations
1. Revitalize the smart screens that are located at each development
2. Create a mobile accessible app with basic details specifically tailored to the caretaker staff
3. Increase the number of desktops for caretaker staff and incentivize log ins by frontline staff

Alternative
4. Provide all caretaker staff with hand-held devices

Strained Communication Processes

Problem
Methods of communication are currently ineffective, with unclear and outdated message delivery between the Central Office and property-based staff.

Recommendations
1. Standardize bulletin board posting policies.
2. Standardize communication processes across NYCHA.

Alternative
3. Funnel existing Central Office staff to serve as liaisons for developments.

Unsupportive Work Culture

Problem
The high-pressure environment, coupled with growing workloads and shorter timelines, has fostered impatience and resentment among staff at all levels

Recommendations
1. Create more team bonding and networking opportunities
2. Improve supervisor instruction and ensure more in-person training for staff

Alternative
3. Enforce stronger accountability mechanisms.
4. Offer greater incentives to increase retention