



**Human Resources Administration**  
Department of Social Services  
Steven Banks, *Commissioner*

## **HRA Awarded USDA Grant to Improve Staff Skills and Help Them Serve Clients Better**

HRA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly called Food Stamps) was recently awarded a USDA Process and Technology Improvement grant to help staff acquire the skills they need to serve clients better using the latest technology. HRA is dramatically expanding the ways clients can interact with the Agency, and the grant, for \$720,239 over three years, will be used to identify necessary skills for staff in this new approach and design a training curriculum to ensure all staff have the tools they need to help New Yorkers overcome poverty and income inequality.

Big changes are already underway in the way clients can access benefits, especially with Food Stamps. Applications for Food Stamps can be submitted online, by mail or fax, through a local Community Based Organization, and now at self-service computer terminals inside HRA SNAP Centers, in addition to traditional in-person applications. Clients can conduct the interview portion of the application by phone in addition to in-person, and even more improvements are coming to the application and recertification process. HRA is also using the latest technology to streamline back-end processes which will ease the burden on staff.

Like any new processes, these improvements will require new skills, and HRA will use the USDA grant to work with professional consultants to determine what is needed most, and identify gaps in knowledge, skills and behaviors. HRA will work with consultants to design a curriculum of the new skill set, then passing the knowledge on to HRA trainers and Center staff.

The changes HRA is making are already popular with clients. Online applications have increased from 27 percent to 69 percent of total applications and telephone interviews vs. in-person interviews have increased from 30 percent to 65 percent of all interviews. The Agency's ongoing efforts will mean faster service and more convenience for clients, less of a burden for staff, and savings for city taxpayers. Through all of the coming changes, HRA is committed to using initiatives like this to ensure staff have the skills and support they need to fight poverty and income inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.