

# NYC Customer Service Newsletter

## Table of Contents:

NYCertified	1
DOF Employee Services Helpline	2
Parks Bulletin Boards and Newsletter	3
Language Gateway	3
FDNY Queuing System	4
We Are New York	5
Business Integrity Commission	6
DEP Outreach	7
311 Accreditation	8
NYCHA supports MWSBE firms	9

## NYCertified Enlists Volunteer Interpreters and Translators for Language Assessment and Training

In order to serve New York City's diverse population, it is important that City staff speak the language of our 1.8 million limited English proficient (LEP) residents. For this reason, the Mayor's Office is inviting all bilingual and multilingual City employees to participate in the **NYCertified** program.

As a **NYCertified** volunteer, City employees will be able to: 1) Participate in a language proficiency assessment and attend a training in interpretation and/or translation; 2) Prove that they are proficient in a foreign language; 3) Enhance their ability to interpret and/or translate

between two languages; 4) Develop the necessary skills to provide quality voluntary interpretation and/or translation for LEP customers; 5) Engage and network with an emerging community of language bank volunteers; and, 6) Make a difference within New York City agencies by offering language skills as a volunteer interpreter and/or translator

In the spirit of *NYC Service*, staff proficient in speaking, reading, or writing in a language other than English, should consider volunteering time to give back to the New York

City community. By doing so, LEP New Yorkers can have access to the essential services they need to participate in the civic, social, and economic life of New York City.

To participate in the **NYCertified** program, interested employees should send an email to [NYCertified@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:NYCertified@cityhall.nyc.gov) and include the following information: name; agency; foreign language skills; and, whether interested in volunteering as an interpreter, a translator, or both.

Translation and interpretation are two different ways of meeting LEP needs. **NYCertified** accounts for that and provides training tailored to each:

**Interpreter:** An interpreter deals with spoken words and provides oral interpretation from one language into another. An interpreter is needed during phone or in-person conversations between an LEP customer and a City employee.

**Translator:** A translator transfers the meaning of written text from one language into another. Translation can occur on any form of written work, including brochures, notices, letters, and other documents.

### NYCertified Interpretation training includes:

- Modes of interpretation
- Interpreter code of ethics and standards of practice
- Analytic listening skills
- Cultural mediation skills
- Memory retention
- Note-taking

### NYCertified Translation training includes:

- Basic components of translation
- Translation techniques and strategies
- Translation quality, ethics, and standards
- The translation process
- Accuracy and ethics
- Tools and online resources

**DOF Employee Services Helpline Stats and Facts**

**Volume**

Helpline averages about 380-400 inquiries a month.

**Top Inquiries**

- 1) Employee benefits
- 2) Civil service questions
- 3) Time and leave questions
- 4) Facilities related inquiries

**Customer Base**

The total population at Finance is about 2,000 employees.

**Staffing**

- 4 Customer Care Representatives
- 1 Deputy Director
- 1 Director

## DOF's Employee Services Helpline

The Department of Finance's Employee Services Helpline – which was launched on July 7, 2009 – is an internal telephone information center where employees can find answers to nearly any work-related administrative inquiry.

The Helpline connects Finance employees with the Employee Services Division, making it a little easier for everyone to perform their daily work. The Helpline also sends emails regularly with important information that may affect Finance employees, reaching the entire agency all at once.

"The Helpline is a one-stop shop for Finance employees," said Helpline Director Eva Gambino. "We'll trouble-shoot any administrative problem employees have." In the last year and a half of

operation, the Helpline has received over 7,500 inquiries. On an average, 92% of inquiries are answered within 24 hours.

The range of questions the Helpline has been receiving reveal how much it is benefiting employees. Questions include topics such as Payroll, CityTime, Training, Facilities, and Security, to name a few.

"The staff has a lot of questions about retirement," said Gail Gist, a member of the Helpline Team. "Sometimes they have payroll questions or need to know what to do if their telephone line isn't working."

The Helpline staff consists of Eva, Deputy Director Dawn Williams, Customer Care Specialists Gail Gist, Maria Bonanni, Sheila Dallas Williams, and

Starling Williams.

"I think it's one of the best things we've done for the staff," said Sheila.

"Depending on the nature of the question, we'll answer it right away or consult the particular area of expertise," said Dawn.

"We do all of the research. We try to go that extra mile for the employee and tell them about their options," said Maria.

Starling said: "We're gratified when employees tell us they're happy that we're here for them."

"Internally, we are the frontline people," said Eva. "We are the 'Voice of Employee Services.'"

For more information contact Eva Gambino at [gambinoe@finance.nyc.gov](mailto:gambinoe@finance.nyc.gov).



Back row left to right: Dawn Williams, Eva Gambino, and Sheila Dallas Williams  
Middle row left to right: Maria Bonanni, Gail Gist; Front and center: Starling Williams

## Parks Reaches Customers with Bulletin Boards and Newsletter

The Department of Parks and Recreation offers many ways to involve and engage the public, whether it's a volunteer opportunity, a park survey, a special event or a chance to be a New York City lifeguard. In 2007, Parks implemented a new initiative for communicating with the public at local parks by installing over 700 bulletin boards at local parks and playgrounds citywide. Parks offers maps of the park and area on each bulletin board, as well as important safety information.

Parks also introduced a newsletter for the public called the Parks Post. The Parks Post is prepared every two months in each borough, and discusses local capital projects, upcoming youth programming and concerts, and encourages volunteerism. In January 2010, Parks introduced the first Spanish version of the Parks Post citywide. The Parks Post initiative keeps people in touch with their friendly neighborhood parks departments and improves our service to the public.

For more information on Parks' post boards or the parks Post newsletter contact Keith Kerman at [Keith.Kerman@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Keith.Kerman@parks.nyc.gov)



Parks Bulletin Board



Parks Post Newsletter

## New NYC.gov Language Gateway Will Launch in April

The Language Gateway, a collection of essential City resources translated in the city's most frequently spoken languages, will be launched in April 2010. The website serves as a "one-stop-shop" for the most immediate needs of limited English proficient (LEP) New Yorkers and the organizations that serve them.

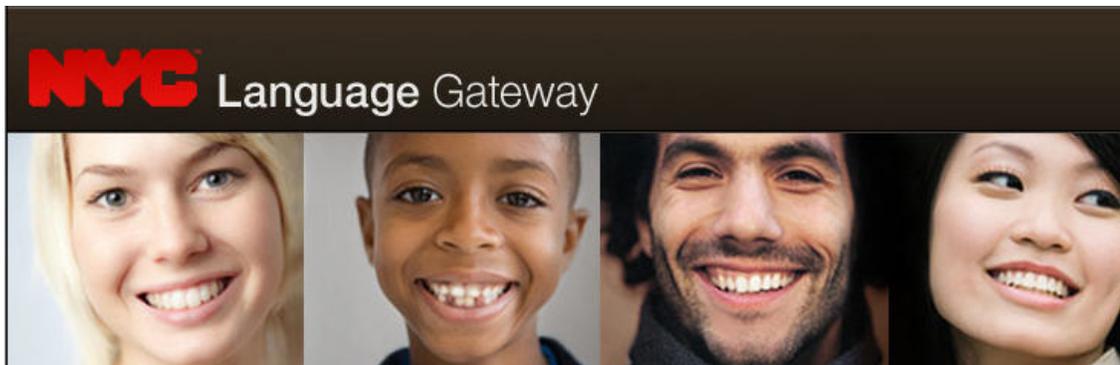
While these documents are housed by individual city agency websites, the web portal will facilitate access to these forms for those New Yorkers who do not read English well. The site provides City resources in many areas of City life including business, employment, education, child care, health, safety, and housing. For its launch, the portal will

include documents in the top four languages read by LEP New Yorkers in NYC: English, Spanish, Chinese and Russian. The Language Gateway helps to ensure that the City of New York and NYC.gov are more accessible to all New Yorkers.

For more information contact Amina Masood at [amasood@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:amasood@cityhall.nyc.gov)

**Agency Documents on Language Gateway can be found for the following City Agencies:**

ACS	HRA
CCHR	MOIA
City Clerk	NYCHA
DCA	OCDEV
DOE	OEM
DOF	OFE
DOHMH	SBS
DOT	TLC
DYCD	
HPD	



**FDNY Walk-In Center  
9 Metrotech Center  
Brooklyn, New York**

**Customer Service Data**

**Average Daily Volume**

548 (March 2010)

**Annual Volume**

104,195 (Feb 2009- January 2010)

In Fiscal Year 2009, 49,000 customers came to the FDNY Walk-in Center to take exams, a 60 percent increase from five years ago.

**Average Wait Time**

22.42 minutes (March 2010)

## FDNY Unveils Queuing System at Walk-in Center

On the ground floor at FDNY Headquarters at 9 Metrotech Center, FDNY employees serve members of the public who come to submit plans, paperwork, take exams for Certificates of Fitness or request fire reports; when fees are associated with these services, they are paid at the cashier windows.

In early March, the FDNY launched "Q-Matic"-- a customer flow management system -- to improve the customer waiting process. The goal of Q-Matic is to produce a more relaxed environment by creating a controlled and fair waiting process.

The Q-Matic system addresses each phase of waiting by calculating how many people are queuing for a specific exam, and the number of windows that are staffed. This

generates an estimate of waiting time, which is printed on a ticket for each customer. Customers are notified when their number is up by a voice announcement and by visual display on two large monitors. The voice announcement has been particularly helpful in moving customers quickly as fewer customers miss their number when called. This has increased the volume of customers served and tests administered daily.

Transition to the Q-Matic system was seamless, according to Steve Ertrachter, Director of the FDNY Certification and Education Center. Staff welcomed the support provided by the new system. They report not only immediate improvement in their efficiency, but a boost to overall morale.

Q-Matic provides the FDNY with an important planning tool: it produces more precise statistics to better inform decisions about extending hours of operations, introducing Saturday service and implementing more appropriate staffing plans.

The installation of Q-Matic represents another effort by the FDNY in support of the Mayor's many customer service initiatives: last year, the FDNY installed welcome signs in eight languages in the Walk-in Center and made available Language Line translation services in the waiting area. In addition, light-duty Firefighters now serve as greeters in the walk-in center to welcome and assist customers.

For more info contact Steve Ertrachter at [ertracs@fdny.nyc.gov](mailto:ertracs@fdny.nyc.gov)



**Queuing System Displays and Monitors behind Counter at 9 Metrotech**

## DOT and Mayor’s Office Use Soap Opera to Teach English Skills

Can a soap opera improve an agency’s customer service? It can! Especially if it is **We Are New York** the City’s new TV show. **We Are New York** is a new TV show created by the Mayor’s Office of Adult Education and CUNY to improve language access services. The show is intended to help immigrants improve their English skills while learning how to access vital City services and other resources. Each episode takes on an important issue from everyday life and the characters demonstrate how New Yorkers can solve problems and create better lives for themselves.

The Customer Service staff at DOT is promoting the program citywide at its walk in facilities: the five borough offices of Permit Management and the five borough offices of Highway Inspection

Quality Assurance (HIQA). Eleanor DiPalma, Director of DOT’s Organizational Development and Language Access states, “DOT is making sure customers who access our Walk In facilities are aware of **We Are New York** and understand how to access the program for valued resources beyond our Language Access program.”

DOT’s walk in facility staff were happy to distribute postcards and flyers that point customers in the right direction to learn and gain necessary English comprehension and speaking skills. Shamonda Graham, a staff member at one of the HIQA locations in Queens commented on the impact of **We Are New York** on employees’ personal lives: “In addition to our day-to-day interactions with non-English speaking clients many of us have realized

this program can also affect our personal and private lives. I take great pride in disseminating information regarding **We Are New York** even outside of the office. I have distributed flyers to my beautician and her colleagues all speak Spanish and know very little English. I have also given the information to my manicurist. Nothing makes me feel better than to see the look of surprise on their faces when I explain they can learn English on television – for free! Lastly, I too have watched the program and believe it is absolutely wonderful that each episode is based on real life stories and struggles.”

To learn how you can use **We Are New York** at your site, contact us at [www.nyc.gov/LearnEnglish](http://www.nyc.gov/LearnEnglish) or at (212) 676-0226.

### **We Are New York** Schedule:

#### **Tuesdays**

11:00 pm on Ch 34 (RCN Ch 92 or Verizon Ch 33)

#### **Saturdays**

4:00 pm on Ch 25 (Cablevision Ch 22)

#### **Sundays**

7:30 am on Ch 25 (Cablevision Ch 22)

#### **NYC LEP Facts**

More than 150 languages spoken

Almost half of NYC residents speak a language other than English at home

Approximately 1.8 million New Yorkers are classified as limited English proficient (LEP) – making up almost 25% of the City’s population

**Learn English on TV with our stories**

Success, Community, Hope, Love, Friendship, Family

**WE ARE NEW YORK**  
A NEW TV SHOW



The BIC Licensing Center is located on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor at 100 Church Street New York, N.Y. 10007.

The Licensing Center is open to the public from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday – Friday

For information call: (212)-676-6219

Visit our website at: [www.nyc.gov/bic](http://www.nyc.gov/bic).

**BIC Stats and Facts**

1,150 applications processed in calendar 2009

2,814 Business Integrity Commission trade waste conveyance plates issued in Calendar 2009

Collected 534 NYC Customer Feedback comment cards in 2009

## Business Integrity Commission Licensing Center



We not only offer personal assistance with applications but also take time to handle phone calls to assist customers with a variety of issues. For example, some businesses may need to visit a few other agencies before becoming legitimate operators. BIC strives to make their visit at the Business Integrity Commission (“BIC”) a painless and quick process.

Comment cards are distributed and collected daily to help staff to identify areas in need of improvement, and service metrics are constantly reviewed to ensure that all customers are served by knowledgeable and professional staff.

BIC is a small agency with a large mission: to regulate, license and register businesses in the private carting industry and the public wholesale markets. BIC’s Licensing Center staff is dedicated to providing quality service to all persons applying for licenses and registrations. Licensing Center staff checks to see that all applications are complete and all required documents are in order to help save the applicants’ time and help them get their businesses off the ground.



Assistant Director Yvonne Babb performs final reviews on approvals before issuing registrations and licenses.



Alexis Torres assists in Spanish to explain application process to LEP customer.

BIC also takes great pride in assisting customers with limited English proficiency (LEP) to make sure they are understood and get all the necessary help to complete their application. Staff is trained in identifying LEP customers and assisting them in the application process. BIC also has a language bank of staff members throughout the agency who volunteer to assist LEP customers in their native language.

The public’s satisfaction with the quality of our service inspires us to work harder, and this is reflected in BIC receiving 97 out of a total possible 100 points from the Mayor’s CORE inspection program, giving BIC staff a sense of satisfaction that the agency is moving in the right direction.

Through the leadership of Commissioner Michael J. Mansfield, BIC will continue to improve services to the businesses that the agency regulates, and BIC employees will continue to seek ways to improve service that the agency provides to customers doing business in New York City.



License Specialist Shivani Harrinandan issues a Trade Waste plate to a satisfied customer.

## NYC Environmental Protection Commissioner Reaches Out to Customers

In February, NYC Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway began a five-borough community outreach tour to speak to residents about the work DEP is doing in their borough, and to discuss how water payments are being invested to supply and deliver more than a billion gallons of safe, clean water every day to 9 million people in New York State, and to treat more than a billion gallons of wastewater each day before it is released into local waterways. "I look forward to discussing the important work that the 6,000 men and women of DEP do each day to design, build, maintain, and manage New York City's water and wastewater systems," said Commissioner Holloway. "We initiated these meetings to give New Yorkers an opportunity to hear more about the work DEP is doing in neighborhoods throughout the City and in the upstate watersheds."

The meetings were also a

chance for DEP to hear directly from customers and to address their questions and concerns. During the meetings, DEP representatives from the Bureau of Customer Services (BCS) set up work stations to assist customers with billing issues and to answer specific questions about individual accounts.

To improve customer services for its approximately 834,000 billed customers, DEP is automating its meter reading capabilities with the installation of its Automated Meter Reading (AMR) Technology. This new technology will help customers manage their accounts while providing daily consumption data to DEP and its customers and will largely eliminate the need for estimated bills. To date, 274,788 properties have had AMR devices installed. The installation of AMR technology for all DEP customers is to be completed by 2012. For more information on AMR visit DEP's website at:

[http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/water\\_and\\_sewer\\_bills/amr\\_about.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/water_and_sewer_bills/amr_about.shtml)

BCS is responsible for all functions related to water and sewer billing. Customers with questions about their bill may contact the Call Center and speak with a representative, or come to any of DEP's five Borough Offices. A customer may also request an 'In Person' review of their account and billing as part of the Customer Dispute Process; a BCS representative will set up an appointment to address any issues the customer has regarding their bill. In Person Reviews have resolved and collected approximately \$3 million dollars in outstanding charges since its inception in 2008.

In 2009 BCS introduced Language Line interpretive services in its Call Center and Borough Offices to assist its LEP customers. When it comes to customer service, BCS is one bureau that speaks everyone's language!

### DEP Facts

- Customer complaints have decreased in volume more than 30% between 2006 and 2009.
  - Current response across all inquiry types has decreased to an average of 53 days from 80-90 days in 2006.
  - There has been a 50% reduction for the time refunds are processed and a check issued since 2006.
  - Electronic payment systems were added in 2007 with an online website and a Pay by Phone feature in 2008.
  - In Calendar year 2009 the Call Center answered almost 388,000 phone calls.
  - There are 38 representatives working in the Call Center
  - The average phone call lasts about 6 minutes.
  - In 2009 the Bureau's Borough offices assisted 130,450 walk in customers.
- Some of the most frequently asked questions from customers are:
1. Why is my bill so high?
  2. Did you receive my check?
  3. Can I pay on-line?
  4. Why is my bill estimated?
  5. Why don't we bill monthly?



Bureau of Customer Services Representative Chandra Persaud assists customers with their bill.

**Historic Volumes in February, 2010**

Snow, cold, schools, and more contributed to historic call volumes at 311 during the month of February. In partnership with City agencies 311 was prepared and able to provide New Yorkers with the most current information on topics ranging from school closures to snow laborers to sleigh rides in the park. Records set in February included:

Most Calls in a Month  
2,401,803

Most Calls in a Day  
269,001  
(Thursday, Feb 25<sup>th</sup>)

Most Calls in an Hour  
37,759 (6am Friday, Feb 26<sup>th</sup>)

The busiest day and hour surpassed records set in 2005 during the Transit Strike.

## 311 Receives National AIRS Accreditation

In February, 2010 New York City's Enhanced 311 program was successfully accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). This recognition is an important milestone in the expansion of NYC 311 under the guidance of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health & Human Services.

AIRS accreditation is recognized by human services organizations nationwide as the premier benchmark for excellence in information & referral programs. The mission of AIRS is "to advance the profession of information and referral as a vital means of bringing people and services together." The full accreditation of

Enhanced 311 (E311) by AIRS was a multi-phase process that began nearly four years ago, assessed more than 200 distinct operational components, and included a detailed onsite audit.

During the site visit the AIRS Commission commended 311 staff, facilities and systems. After listening to calls and monitoring representatives, they highlighted the "very professional and caring" staff" while noting the complexity of calls and in-depth resources offered to customers. AIRS was so impressed with 311's training and quality they cited the Quality

Assurance guidelines and Coaching and Development materials as "Best Practices" and requested to share these best practices with other accredited organizations nationwide.

Congratulations to all of the team members throughout 311 and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health & Human Services who contributed to this achievement and whose daily commitment to fellow New Yorkers has helped NYC 311 become a standard for public service.

**Certificate of Accreditation  
Awarded to**

***New York City Enhanced 3-1-1  
Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications***

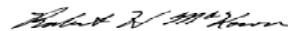
***New York, New York***

In recognition of the successful completion of the Alliance of Information & Referral Systems Accreditation and acknowledgement of demonstrated competencies in applying the Standards for Professional Information & Referral.

**Effective December of 2009 to November of 2014**



Tim Sylvia  
President, AIRS Board of Directors



Robert H. Mckown  
Chair, AIRS Accreditation Commission

**Customer Service Group  
Mayor's Office of Operations**

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**www.nyc.gov**

Elizabeth Weinstein  
Director of Agency Services

Jeff Kay  
Director  
Mayor's Office of Operations

## **NYCHA Maximizes Minority-owned, Women-Owned and Small Business Opportunities**

NYCHA has a long-standing commitment to ensure that minority-owned, women-owned, and small business enterprise (MWSBE) firms are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the procurement process. NYCHA's Department of Equal Opportunity's Office of Business Opportunities maximizes MWSBE contracting for goods and services through outreach, technical support, and customer service. In 2009, the NYCHA Board approved awards of 35 contracts to MWSBEs totaling \$60.8 million. NYCHA reached out to and provided technical assistance to many of these MWSBEs.

Recently, NYCHA's Office of Business Opportunities hosted an open house, in collaboration with STV Construction, Inc., to provide information to MWSBE firms regarding subcontracting opportunities available for a modernization project at Walt Whitman and the Raymond V. Ingersoll

Houses (Whitman-Ingersoll) public housing development project. The modernization project, totaling \$108 million, was initiated in 2009 and entails the expansion of apartments, upgrade of kitchen areas, and installation of new elevators, and heating and electrical systems. The project, like all capital projects, provides subcontracting opportunities for MWSBE firms.

The open house was attended by 69 MWSBE firms who learned how to become a pre-qualified bidder for available subcontracting jobs in the various construction trades up for bid on the modernization project. The firms were also informed that the Whitman-Ingersoll modernization project requires that 15 percent of the subcontract labor cost must consist of NYCHA resident hires to provide jobs for NYCHA residents in accordance with federal requirements.

In addition to the Whitman-Ingersoll construction management subcontracting opportunities, MWSBE firms were encouraged to register in NYCHA's new iSupplier Portal for prime contracting opportunities. The portal was launched in December 2009 as part of NYCHA's Advanced Procurement initiative to streamline and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of NYCHA's procurement process. Firms who register can download bid packages at no cost, receive Requests for Quotations (RFQs) via e-mail, and submit bids online. Registered firms can also track account information and payments online. The Supplier Portal enables NYCHA to better engage MWSBE firms and encourage their participation in NYCHA's contracting process.

For more information about upcoming NYCHA MWSBE outreach initiatives and events, contact the Department of Equal Opportunity, Office of Business Opportunities, at 212-306-4646 or e-mail [paul.sawyer@nycha.nyc.gov](mailto:paul.sawyer@nycha.nyc.gov) or [evelyn.diana@nycha.nyc.gov](mailto:evelyn.diana@nycha.nyc.gov)

### **About the Customer Service Group**

The Customer Service Group (CSG) was established by Mayor Bloomberg's Executive Order 115 to support and implement the mandates of the order. CSG is part of the Mayor's Office of Operations.



**Equal Opportunity Director Celeste Thomas Segure speaks with MWBE vendors at the open house about subcontracting opportunities**