

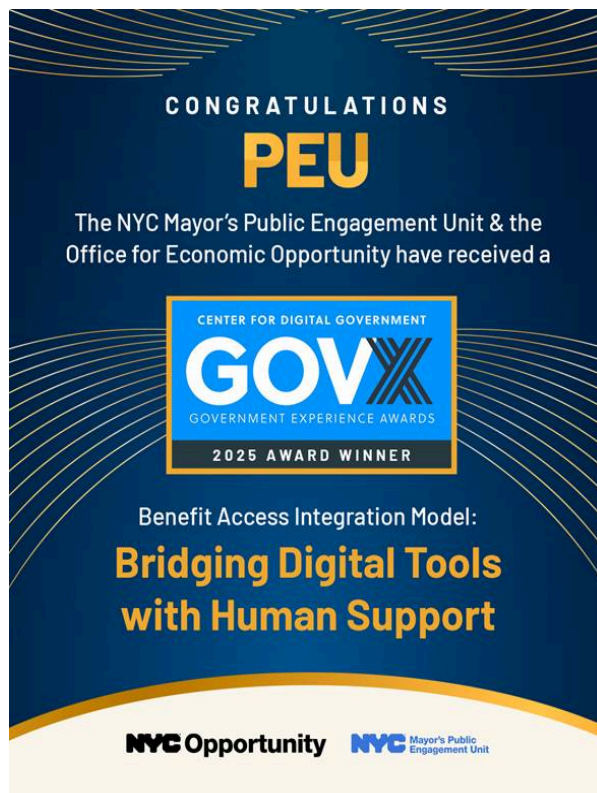


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2025

**NYC Mayor's Public Engagement Unit and NYC Opportunity Win Prestigious
National Government Experience Award**

*City honored in projects category for groundbreaking model that bridges digital tools
and human support to connect New Yorkers to life-changing benefits*



New York, NY — September 25, 2025 —

The NYC Mayor's Public Engagement Unit (PEU) and the NYC Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) have been named national winners of the [2025 Government Experience Award](#) from the [Center for Digital Government](#), one of the nation's highest honors recognizing innovation, accessibility, and excellence in public sector service delivery.

This distinction places New York City at the forefront of constituent-centered innovation nationwide. The City was recognized for its "Benefit Access Integration Model," which bridges digital tools with human support. This first-of-its-kind initiative links powerful digital screening tools with multilingual, hands-on outreach to help New Yorkers access essential benefits.

Launched in November 2023, the model ensures that residents can not only discover what benefits they are eligible for, but also receive personalized assistance from trained PEU Outreach Specialists to apply. It represents a new national standard for digital government rooted in equity, trust, and care.



“We are deeply honored to receive this award, which recognizes our efforts to make government programs more accessible,” said **Adrienne Lever, Executive Director of the Mayor’s Public Engagement Unit**. “To support every New Yorker effectively, government needs to be both high-tech and high-touch. That’s why we are merging digital innovation with proactive in-person community outreach, to make sure every New Yorker gets the support they deserve.”

“By combining technical expertise with on-the-ground knowledge, this collaboration with PEU creates a system built on trust, empathy, and personal relationships,” said **Carson Hicks, Executive Director of NYC Opportunity**. “We know that technology alone can’t solve these challenges. That’s why we’re committed to designing services with New Yorkers and agency partners that rely on both digital tools and human connection - so every New Yorker, regardless of language, income, or digital literacy, can get the support they deserve.”

“Through our collaboration with the Public Engagement Unit and NYC Opportunity, we are connecting underserved communities to critical resources and meeting vulnerable New Yorkers where they are with one-on-one support,” said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Molly Wasow Park**. “This recognition is an acknowledgement of that innovative work and of our continuous commitment to increase access to vital services for individuals in need.”

NYC Opportunity: Building the City’s Digital Front Door for Benefits

A cornerstone of this model is [ACCESS NYC](#), the City’s digital front door for benefits navigation, built and maintained by [NYC Opportunity](#). Through its Service Design Studio and Product Team, NYC Opportunity has transformed how residents explore over 70 City, State, and Federal benefit programs by using plain-language content, mobile-first design, and tools available in 11 languages.

Between May 2024 and April 2025 alone, ACCESS NYC saw more than 290,000 screener starts and 150,000 completions, demonstrating its citywide reach and role as a critical entry point for residents seeking help.



ACCESS NYC plays a distinct but complementary role alongside [ACCESS HRA](#), the online portal operated by the NYC Department of Social Services for submitting and managing benefit applications. While ACCESS HRA is where residents apply for and track benefits like SNAP, Medicaid, Fair Fares, and HEAP, ACCESS NYC helps them take the crucial first step of screening for likely eligibility before applying. This seamless connection between the two platforms ensures that New Yorkers are not only informed about what they may qualify for, but are also guided toward the appropriate application pathways.

NYC Opportunity's human-centered design expertise and commitment to equity were crucial to the project's success. Its collaborative approach allowed the model to rapidly incorporate field feedback, including the March 2024 launch of a new screener filter for "All New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status," which quickly became one of the most-used features on the site.

PEU: Bringing City Services Directly to the People

While NYC Opportunity builds the City's digital infrastructure, PEU brings it to life on the ground. In November 2023, PEU launched its [Google-based Benefit Interest Form](#), a two-minute intake form that allows residents to request help from an Outreach Specialist without logins, documents, or eligibility proof.

PEU's multilingual team of Outreach Specialists then follows up by phone, text, or in person, offering culturally competent support to help residents complete screenings. This outreach-driven model achieves a 79 percent screener completion rate, 27 points higher than the citywide average, and a 45 percent conversion rate from outreach to full screenings.

Working in close collaboration with the City's Department of Social Services, PEU staff provide hands-on support to residents as they move from screening to enrollment. After helping residents identify likely eligibility through ACCESS NYC, Outreach Specialists guide them through submitting applications and required documents on the ACCESS HRA portal. By leveraging a platform nationally recognized for its award-winning, user-centered design, PEU ensures residents receive personalized assistance at every



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step, helping more New Yorkers successfully complete their applications and access the benefits they need.

Every day, PEU's Outreach Specialists meet residents where they are: in their neighborhoods, in their languages, and on their terms. They break down barriers such as language access, digital literacy, and fear of government systems. This unique combination of digital design excellence and PEU's on-the-ground outreach blends the scale and efficiency of digital tools with the trust and care of human connection - setting a new national standard for inclusive public service, and showing how government can be accessible, personal, and innovative.

About the Government Experience Awards

The annual Government Experience Awards, presented by the Center for Digital Government, honor cities, counties, and states that are leading the way in delivering innovative, accessible, and user-centered digital government services.

About the NYC Mayor's Public Engagement Unit

The NYC Public Engagement Unit (PEU) was created to develop a new model for government outreach, using community organizing principles to re-envision how the City provides services to its most vulnerable communities. Rather than expecting constituents to navigate a complex City bureaucracy to get the help they need, PEU adopts grassroots tactics to meet residents where they are – at their doors and on their phones, in their social media feeds, and in their communities. We marry this proactive outreach with comprehensive case management to provide New Yorkers with personalized, passionate care. For more information, visit nyc.gov/PEU and stay connected on Facebook at facebook.com/MayorsPEU or Twitter at [@MayorsPEU](https://twitter.com/MayorsPEU).