

Streamlining access to City affordability programs

"I feel overwhelmed. A client may be eligible for a lot of programs. I have to dig into different eligibility and income requirements. Even with experience and skills, I feel intimidated. It is a big challenge for ordinary people. The City should be able to connect people to help that is available." - Community-based Service Provider

THE NEED

While current City benefit programs might not close the affordability gap entirely, they can help to reduce monthly expenses for Seattle residents. Most benefit programs require documentation to prove identity and income to qualify for programs. Some programs share information between them, many do not. In addition, community-based organizations (CBOs) and other trusted intermediaries need a way to more easily support clients that mitigate the need for paper files, guest accounts, or client log-in credentials. Our research identified these trusted intermediaries as key to reaching the most marginalized, which are typically on the other side of the digital divide.

OUR APPROACH

In 2018, Innovation & Performance (IP) engaged with City staff, CBOs, and residents of Seattle to understand the issue and co-create solutions, resulting in a product roadmap.

In 2019, ten Expedia engineers developed the Affordable Seattle platform and benefits calculator.

In 2020, research was done by Tableau and F5 and the Human Services Department, Department of Education and Early Learning, Seattle Department of Transportation, and Seattle Parks and Recreation to test the feasibility of cross-enrollment across programs. This work was then pulled together into a visual demonstration by [U.S. Digital Response](#).

In 2021, through a Google.org Fellowship, the City of Seattle welcomed 13 full-time Fellows to work pro-bono on the third phase of Affordable Seattle – to design, build, and test a solution to enable those enrolling in programs to submit their information to City of Seattle once and have the option to reuse their information to enroll in multiple programs.

THE RESULTS

Affordable Seattle (www.seattle.gov/affordable) raises awareness of programs for which low-income residents are eligible. Programs are found in a central place and residents can find programs for which they are eligible simply by entering household size, income, and zip code.

Google.org's work resulted in CiviForm, an application tool that integrates with Affordable Seattle and cuts down on the time and paperwork required to sign-up for programs. The tool assists City programs to easily harmonize application data requirements. A universal question bank enables program administrators to incorporate commonly used questions and leverage data across applications with the same fields. CBOs have an account making it easier to serve clients by storing data securely and reducing time filling out multiple applications.

READ MORE

To learn more about the Google.org Fellowship, visit <https://tinyurl.com/SeattleCiviFormRoadshowMar2021>

DEPARTMENT PARTNERS

Dept. of Education and Early Learning
Seattle Dept. of Transportation
Seattle IT
Seattle Parks and Recreation

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

Expedia Group
F5
Tableau
U.S. Digital Response
Google.org

PROJECT DURATION

April 2018 - June 2021

IMPACT

Increased access to programs that reduce cost of living

KEY DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

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