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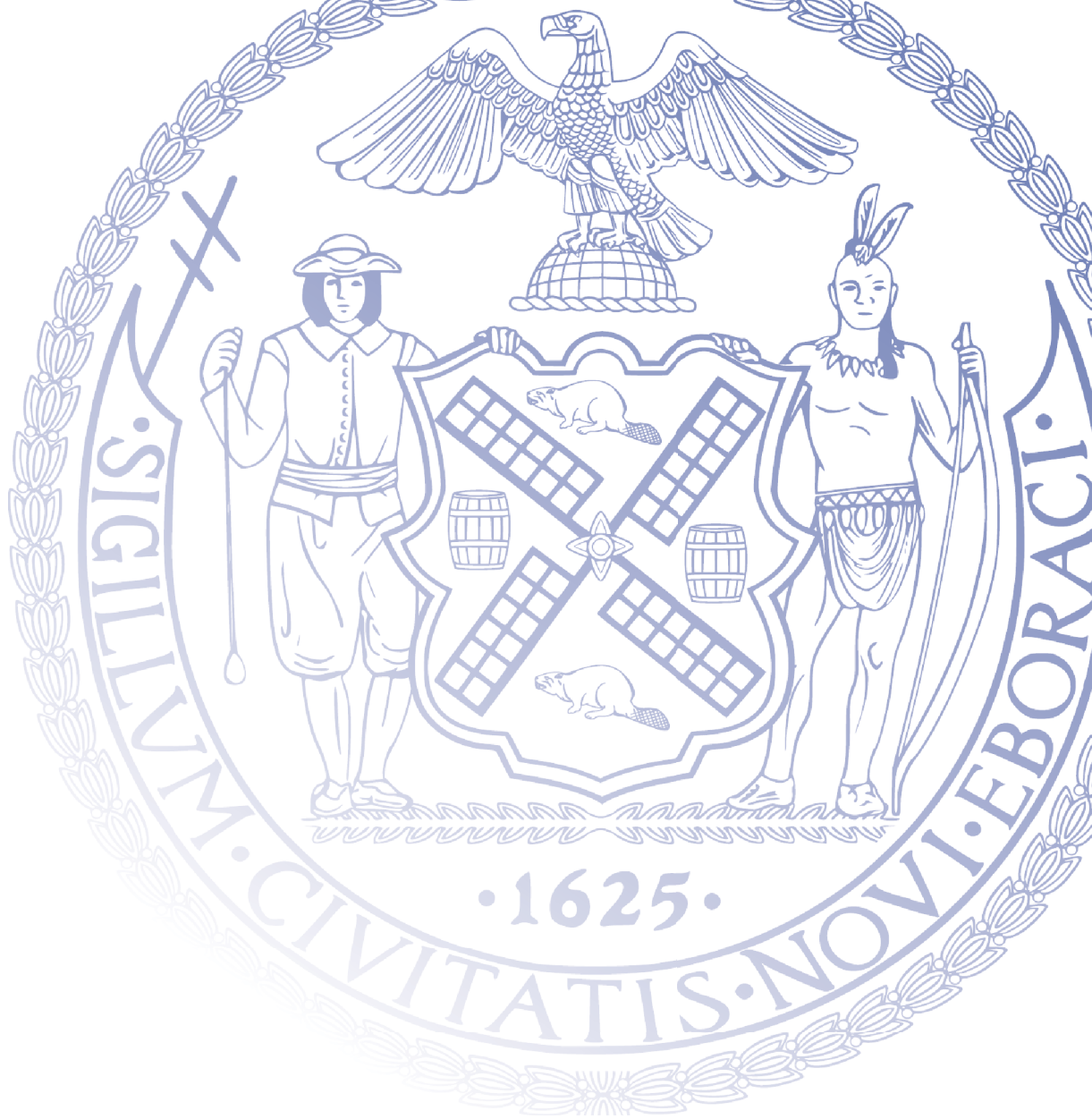
Inside

HRA Centers

A Report on the
State of the Agency's
Technology, Facilities,
& Operations



Oversight And
Investigations
Division



ABOUT THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION

The Oversight and Investigation Division (OID) is an interdisciplinary team of investigators, policy and data analysts, and attorneys dedicated to strengthening the City Council's oversight and legislative work. Through comprehensive, fact-based investigations, OID brings clarity to matters of public significance by identifying issues, presenting findings, and improving transparency in City government.

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Executive Summary

The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) operates Benefits Access Centers (BAC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) sites across New York City, which serve as crucial access points for residents seeking public benefits assistance. In early 2024, the New York City Council's Oversight and Investigations Division (OID) conducted a review of HRA operations across a sample of these centers, focusing on infrastructure, client experience, staff training, and the effectiveness of digital systems. In collaboration with HRA senior leadership, OID arranged site visits to HRA centers in all five boroughs, which included site walkthroughs and interviews with staff. In addition, OID investigators spoke with union representatives and analyzed agency data and training materials.

OID found that while HRA centers are generally well-maintained and demonstrate a strong commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, challenges persist in areas such as information technology (IT) infrastructure, staff training, and software functionality. Many of these issues, some exacerbated by post-pandemic operational changes, appear to have had a direct impact on staff capabilities and application processing efficiency.

Key findings include:

1. Internal software challenges at HRA likely affect application processing times.
2. Physical and technological infrastructure issues affect staff's working experience.
3. HRA facilities demonstrate a strong commitment to accessibility, but site entrances lack automatic doors.
4. HRA effectively responded to training gaps that resulted from pandemic-related policy changes, but still lacks sufficient training for managers.

To address these challenges, OID makes the following recommendations:

1. HRA should study software enhancements to improve the client and staff experience. This could include adding duplicate application prevention tools, enabling edits to applications, and creating real-time case tracking for clients.

2. HRA should consider upgrading IT and physical infrastructure to better support staff needs, including the replacement of outdated equipment and improving staff break rooms.
3. HRA should assess the feasibility and cost of installing automatic doorways at sites that do not currently have them to ensure equitable access.
4. HRA should consider key improvements to its staff training programs, including an expanded curriculum to cover Access HRA usage and core managerial competencies, such as communication and team leadership.

HRA's role in delivering essential services to the city's most vulnerable residents is critically important. By addressing operational inefficiencies and modernizing key systems and training programs, the agency can strengthen service delivery, improve the staff and client experience, and further advance its mission of equitable support for all New Yorkers.

Introduction

This report, prepared by the New York City Council's Oversight and Investigations Division (OID), presents findings from a wide-ranging investigation into the operations, facilities, and staff training programs at Human Resources Administration (HRA) Benefits Access Centers (BAC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) sites across New York City. These centers serve as vital lifelines for some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, assisting individuals and families in accessing essential programs, including SNAP benefits and emergency cash assistance.¹ Over a six-week period in March and April of 2024, OID investigators conducted site visits and interviews with staff and union representatives at centers in each of the five boroughs. Subsequently, OID staff analyzed data and records provided by HRA. The primary focus of this investigation was to identify underlying issues affecting the effectiveness and timeliness of HRA's service delivery as well as the overall client experience, especially in the wake of changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, OID found that while HRA centers are generally well-maintained and demonstrate a strong commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, challenges persist in areas such as IT infrastructure, staff training, and software functionality. These factors appear to have contributed to gaps in staff preparedness, inefficiencies in application processing, and disruptions to daily operations. This report details these findings and offers actionable recommendations to strengthen the operational efficiency of HRA centers, improve staff readiness and the workplace experience, and ensure clients receive timely, effective assistance.

¹ *Need Help*, N.Y.C. HUM. RES. ADMIN., <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/i-need-help.page> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025).

Methodology

A. Site Visits

Investigators from OID conducted site visits at one HRA location in each of the five boroughs over a six-week period in March and April 2024.² Sites were visited on Wednesday mornings, and site locations were chosen by OID. All five locations were both BAC and SNAP Centers:

- HRA Benefits Access Center Concourse/Hunts Point SNAP Center, 845 Barretto Street, Bronx, NY 10474 (the “Bronx Site”);
- HRA Benefits Access Center Bushwick/Williamsburg SNAP Center, 2 George Street, Brooklyn, NY 11206 (the “Brooklyn Site”);
- HRA Benefits Access Center East End/East End SNAP Center, 2322 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10035 (the “Manhattan Site”);
- HRA Benefits Access Center Queens/Queens SNAP Center, 32-20 Northern Boulevard, Long Island City, NY 11101 (the “Queens Site”); and
- HRA Benefits Access Center Richmond/Richmond SNAP Center, 201 Bay Street, Staten Island, NY 10301 (the “Staten Island Site”).

In the early morning, OID informed HRA which site they planned to visit that day, allowing a representative from HRA central administration to meet OID at the site while also ensuring that it was operating as it usually does.

1. Tours:

OID drafted a standardized set of questions that investigators used to assess each site.³ Questions were organized into six sections: (1) accessibility; (2) signage; (3) language access; (4) wait times; (5) staff training and conduct; and (6) facility conditions. Representatives from HRA central staff and supervisors at each site gave investigators a tour of the facility and answered questions.

² HRA has a total of 17 BAC sites throughout the city, some of which serve both BAC and SNAP clients. See *Benefits Access Centers*, N.Y.C. Hum. Res. Admin., <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/locations/job-locations-and-service-centers.page> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025). It also operates a singular SNAP only location. See *HRA Ctr. Locations*, Hum. Res. Admin., <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/locations/locations.page> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025).

³ See Appendix for a list of questions used by OID staff to evaluate each site.

2. Interviews:

At four of the five sites visited, OID investigators interviewed staff about their experiences processing BAC and SNAP applications. Interviews were with small groups of two or three staff members, including at least one supervisor and one front line staff member (usually an eligibility specialist). At three sites, OID interviewed separate groups of employees for SNAP and BAC. Investigators asked staff about factors affecting processing times and rejection rates, their training, and any concerns related to their workplace and workflow. Interviews followed a flexible structure to verify statements from other sites, identify root causes, and uncover additional issues.

B. Interview with Union Representatives

After completing the site visits, OID met with representatives from DC37's Local 1549, whose members include eligibility specialists at HRA sites. OID investigators asked union representatives questions about training, staffing, and software issues, as well as about general feedback the union hears from members about working conditions, management, and related matters.

C. Review of Supplemental Information from Agency

OID also requested additional information from HRA to further understand observations made during the site visits and information learned from interviews with HRA staff and union representatives. Specifically, OID requested information regarding: training plans for eligibility specialists prior to and since the COVID-19 pandemic; data regarding processing errors, application rejections, and duplicate applications; information about document review for the application process; and the process for ensuring facilities maintain ADA compliance and software is up to date. OID also met with HRA executive leadership to ask clarifying questions about the documents received.

FINDINGS

Finding 1

Internal Software Challenges at HRA Likely Affect Application Processing Times

a. Access HRA's handling of duplicate applications may have contributed to higher rejection rates.

Access HRA, now available as both a mobile application and a website, launched first as Access NYC in 2015 as a web-based portal. It was renamed Access HRA in March 2017, when HRA rolled out the Access HRA mobile application.⁴ It allows users to apply and recertify for several HRA benefits online,⁵ including Cash Assistance, SNAP, Medicaid, Fair Fares, the Home Energy Assistance Program, and the Medicare Savings Program. Users can also renew their CityFHEPS applications through the platform.

According to data provided by HRA, as of March 2024, the vast majority of applications for both Cash Assistance and SNAP were submitted through Access HRA. That month, 93% of Cash Assistance applications and 90% of SNAP applications were submitted through Access HRA. While that is an overall increase over the past five years, use of the mobile app and/or website to submit SNAP applications is down since the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, when 99% of applications were submitted through Access HRA, likely due to limited in-person services during the pandemic.⁶

While Access HRA has increased the ease of applying for benefits and has been praised as a model for its language accessibility,⁷ certain aspects of the program's functionality may have contributed to higher rejection rates and, relatedly, additional work for staff. In interviews, staff frequently noted that clients using the Access HRA mobile app had submitted multiple applications for the same program. HRA acknowledged this issue in a policy bulletin issued in

⁴ ACCESS HRA Release History, N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV., <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/ACCESSHRA/pdf/release-notes/ACCESS-HRA-Release-History-2015-2025.pdf> (last visited Oct. 8, 2025).

⁵ Andrea Leonhardt, *City Launches Access HRA Mobile App to Simplify Food Stamp Application*, BKREADER (Jul. 26, 2017, 12:51 PM), <https://www.bkreader.com/business-innovation/city-launches-access-hra-mobile-app-simplify-food-stamp-application-6542125>.

⁶ N.Y.C. HUM. RES. ADMIN., SNAP Applications (AccessHRA vs. Non AccessHRA) Data, Mar. 2019 through Mar. 2024 (on file with N.Y.C. Council).

⁷ See, e.g., Press Release, N.Y.C. Comptroller, NYC Agencies Can Learn from Human Resources Administration's Language Accessibility, Finds Comptroller Lander Audit (May 19, 2023), <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/nyc-agencies-can-learn-from-human-resources-administrations-language-accessibility-finds-comptroller-lander-audit/>.

August 2023, stating that there had been an uptick in clients submitting duplicate applications.⁸ Staff suggested to OID investigators that clients might apply repeatedly because they worry their application is not being processed quickly enough or because they want to make a change to their application.⁹

Some of these concerns may be mitigated by the Records Ensuring Clarity, Equity, and Integrity in Public Transactions and Services (R.E.C.E.I.P.T.S.) Act recently passed by the City Council and enacted into law in June 2025.¹⁰ The Act requires that the Department of Social Services provide timely acknowledgements and receipts for every application for cash assistance and SNAP benefits.¹¹ This is particularly important because, as HRA staff explained to investigators, each duplicate application needs to be reviewed and rejected. This adds an additional, unnecessary burden to HRA staff, who are already facing high caseloads due to a 13% increase in the number of SNAP and cash assistance cases between 2020 and 2022 and diminished staffing levels that are still recovering from a 9% decrease during that same time period.¹²

Figure 1 (on page 8) illustrates the rapid increase in the usage of Access HRA for Cash Assistance applications and the rise in the rate of applications rejected due to duplication during the same period. Between the first and second quarters of 2020, the percentage of applications submitted through Access HRA went from 34% of applications to 90% of applications. During that time, the percentage of applications rejected due to duplication rose from 1% to 5%. However, this was not due to an overall increase in applications; between the first and second quarters of 2020, the number of applications decreased by nearly 10,000, while the number of applications rejected due to duplication increased by nearly 3,000.

In response to “a significant number of duplicate applications and applications that require substantial follow-up for needed documentation and eligibility interview to complete applications,” HRA updated the Access HRA app in August 2023 to prompt applicants who

⁸ NYC. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV., HUM. RES. ADMIN., POL’Y BULL. #23-50-OPE – ACCESS HRA CASH ASSISTANCE APPLICATION CALL CTR. ASSISTANCE 1 (Aug. 28, 2023) (on file with N.Y.C. Council).

⁹ With the exception of updating their email, mailing address, or phone number, applicants are required to call HRA or go to a benefits center to make more substantial changes. See *ACCESS HRA Frequently Asked Questions*, HUM. RES. ADMIN., <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/access-hra-frequently-asked-questions.page> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025).

¹⁰ NYC. Local L. No. 88 (2025) <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7075824&GUID=44E03EE8-7660-41A4-91F9-51E87385EE80>.

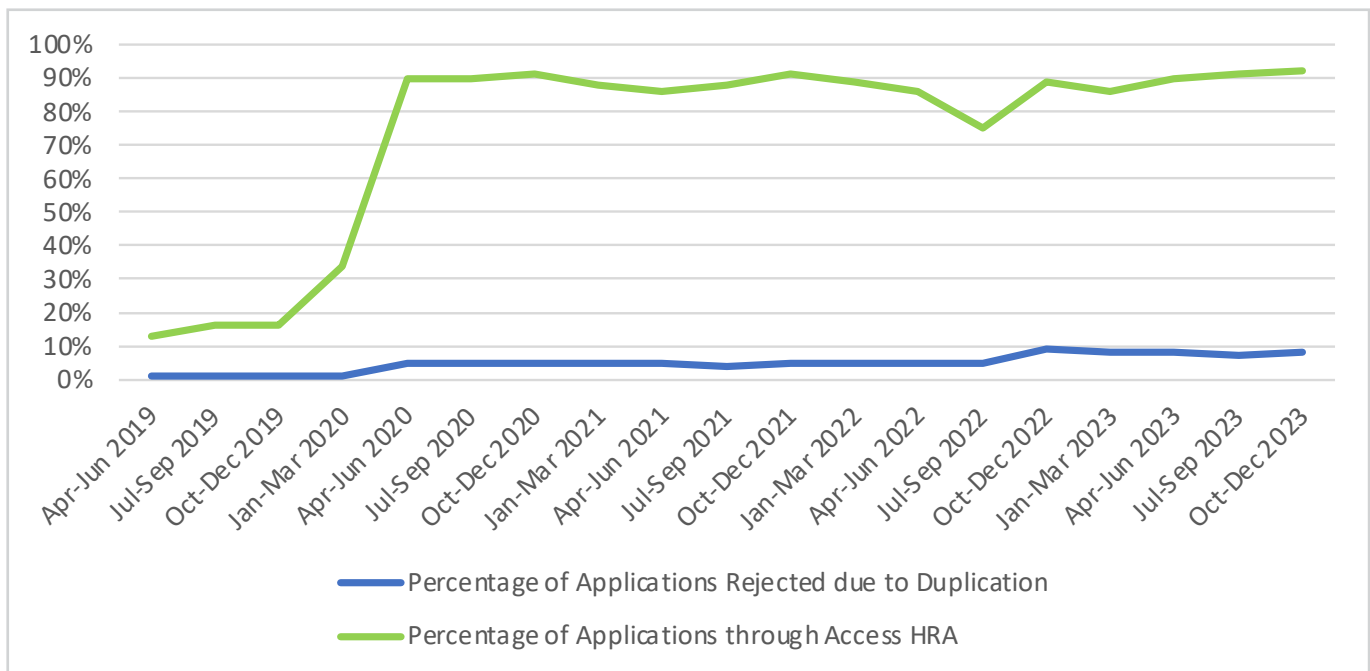
¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Reduced Staff and Increased Caseloads Negatively Impact Delivery of Essential Benefits to Low-Income New Yorkers*, N.Y.C. INDEP. BUDGET OFF. 11 (Oct. 2024) <https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/reduced-staff-and-increased-caseloads-negatively-impact-delivery-of-essential-benefits-to-low-income-new-yorkers-october-2024.html>.

may be submitting duplicate applications to call 311 for application assistance, where they will then be referred to community-based organizations.¹³ According to the below chart, there was no decrease in the percentage of rejections due to duplicate applications in the three months following this update in August 2023.

FIGURE 1

HRA Cash Assistance applications and rejections due to duplication over time (2019-2023)



Source: N.Y.C. Hum. Res. Admin., Cash Assistance Rejections by Quarter Data, Apr. 2019 through Dec. 2023 (on file with N.Y.C. Council).

b. Persistent issues and inefficiencies with HRA software, especially ANGIE, likely contributed to slower processing times for benefits in 2022 and 2023.

Multiple staff members stated during interviews that the computers and software systems they use are slow and prone to errors, contributing to longer wait times for applicants. Staff specifically stated that the Streamlined Paperless Office System (SPOS), proprietary software used for the application and recertification process,¹⁴ is outdated and needs to be updated.

¹³ POL’Y BULL. #23-50-OPE, *supra* note 8, at 1.

¹⁴ See OFF. OF THE NYC. PUB. ADVOC., PAPER(LESS) JAM: A SURVEY OF NEW YORK CITY HUMAN RESOURCES ADMIN. ELIGIBILITY SPECIALISTS 2 (Mar. 2009) https://www.nyc.gov/html/records/pdf/govpub/4749hraworkerreport_webfinal.pdf.

Staff also criticized the Self-Sufficiency, Employment, Assessment and Management System (SEAMS), a program utilized for employee management, as “tedious.”

One program in particular was brought up multiple times by staff members as posing a frequent challenge to their daily workflows. ANGIE, a software program implemented in July 2021¹⁵ and used for most SNAP case management, was described by staff as “very slow.” Union representatives echoed these concerns, noting that ANGIE did not function properly and that there were glitches every day. With the introduction of ANGIE, HRA transitioned from keeping cases at their original intake location with a single staff member to a more flexible system that distributes work across multiple sites and staff members, regardless of where the client was initially seen, distributing tasks by priority and due dates to SNAP staff. While HRA claimed this system would allow “operations to run more efficiently and remotely when necessary,” staff members—both in interviews with OID and in testimony before the Council—stated that ANGIE had slowed down their work. At a September 2023 hearing before the Council’s Committee on General Welfare, multiple SNAP eligibility specialists testified that ANGIE was a barrier to timely benefit delivery, reducing the number of cases they could complete per day and adding to the backlog of cases.¹⁶

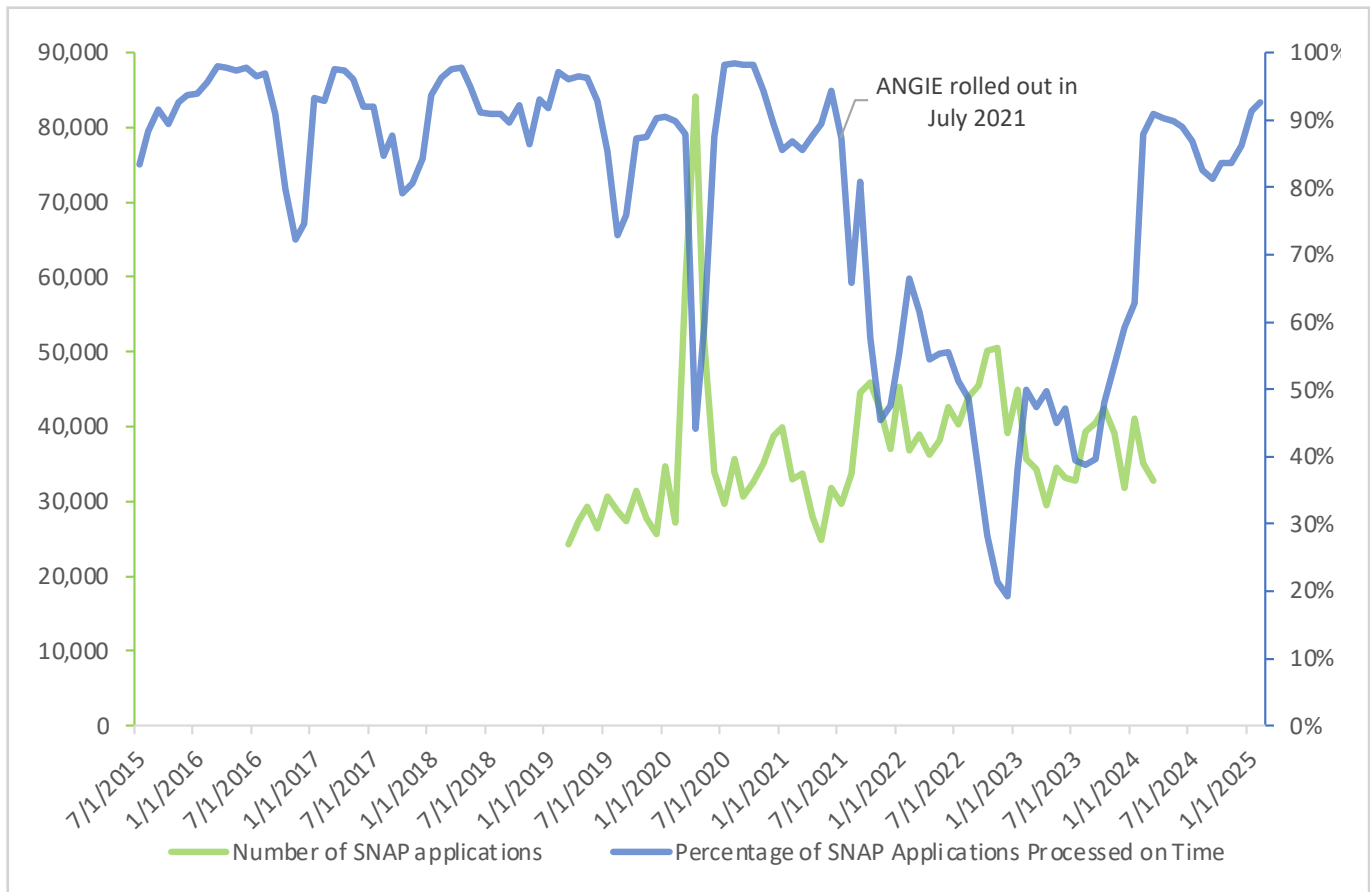
Figure 2 (on page 10) highlights a dip in SNAP on-time processing rates just after ANGIE was released in July of 2021, remaining low through 2023. In 2024 and 2025, on-time processing rates have improved significantly.

¹⁵ N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV., HUM. RES. ADMIN., POL’Y BULL. #21-41-SYS – ACTIVITY AND GENERAL EXCHANGE (ANGIE) VERSION 11 (Jun. 14, 2021) (on file with City Council).

¹⁶ *Oversight – Public Benefit Processing Delays at HRA: Hearing Before the N.Y.C. Comm. on Gen. Welfare* (N.Y.C. Sep. 27, 2023) <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6329464&GUID=20B1F94E-DF5F-4AD0-B965-01F0B0E36008>. Luchy Perez, an eligibility specialist and union member, testified that “the current system creates a huge backlog of cases... the ANGIE system hurts the clients and stops me from being able to do the work in a timely manner.” *Id.* (testimony of Luchy Perez). Another eligibility specialist, Helen Chandler, wrote that “I have personally experienced how it slows the processing of cases.” *Id.* (testimony of Helen Chandler). Tyece Grant, also an eligibility specialist, reported that one coworker said “she was completing 20 SNAP cases per day before ANGIE, and now can complete only seven cases.” *Id.* (testimony of Tyece Grant).

FIGURE 2

Timeliness of SNAP application processing over time (2015-2024)



Source: N.Y.C. Hum. Res. Admin., SNAP Applications (AccessHRA vs. Non AccessHRA) Data, Mar. 2019 through Mar. 2024 (on file with N.Y.C. Council); *Mayor’s Mgmt. Report - Agency Performance Indicators*, N.Y.C. OPEN DATA, https://data.cityofn-ewyork.us/City-Government/Mayor-s-Management-Report-Agency-Performance-Indic/rbed-zzin/about_data (last visited Sept. 19, 2025) (showing the percentage of SNAP applications processed “on time” according to the federal standard). Note: “On time” is defined as receipt of SNAP benefits within 30 days of application, or within seven days if eligible for expedited service. See *SNAP Application Processing Timelines*, U.S.D.A. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERV., <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/qc/timeliness> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025).

Error correction in ANGIE emerged as a major concern in OID’s investigation. Staff reported that they are not notified of errors they make in processing; instead, ANGIE only provides aggregate information about errors and points staff to a correction guide.¹⁷ A union representative informed OID that staff members make the same errors repeatedly, and the requirement that errors be corrected by supervisors creates a “chokepoint” that delays case

¹⁷ Pol’y Bull. #21-41-SYS, *supra* note 15, at 28.

processing. In the same September 2023 General Welfare Council Hearing referenced above, Tyece Grant, an eligibility specialist at HRA, provided additional context: “ANGIE was designed so that any supervisor from any SNAP center from across the city can approve a case. I have found that this is ineffective because I don’t know who is signing off on my cases. If I experience an error on the case, the supervisor or the system assigns the case to a completely different worker who must then perform much of the work I have already completed. This delays timely benefit delivery for our clients who need life-saving food assistance.”¹⁸

In response to a follow-up request to HRA pertaining to their handling of software updates and technology issues more broadly, the agency shared that they track enhancement requests and bugs for all agency software.¹⁹ The agency develops and tests enhancements and fixes, then rolls them out in scheduled releases. For severe issues that require immediate resolution, HRA rolls out emergency releases, which do not go through the same development and testing processes but are continually monitored for issues after their implementation.

Since ANGIE’s launch in July of 2021, the system has only been updated once, in June of 2022.²⁰ In contrast, the SNAP and Cash Assistance SPOS systems have been updated seven and eight times, respectively, during the same time period.²¹ In a May 2024 hearing before the Council’s Committee on General Welfare, Jill Berry, the First Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Social Services, HRA’s parent agency, stated that the agency was actively working on solving frequent issues with ANGIE.

Finding 2

Physical and Technological Infrastructure Issues Affect Staff’s Working Experience

a. Staff expressed that IT infrastructure is outdated and that system repairs are slow.

In interviews, staff at one site shared that IT is slow to fix technology and network problems, and staff at a second site highlighted problems with broken printers and old or slow computers, as well as regular system shutdowns sitewide.

¹⁸ Oversight – Public Benefit Processing Delays at HRA, *supra* note 15 (testimony of Tyece Grant).

¹⁹ Videocall Interview with Rebecca Chew, Scott French, & Christopher Gonzalez, et al., Mgrs., Hum. Res. Admin. (Jun. 26, 2024).

²⁰ See HRA Documents (Bulletins, Directives, etc.), WNYLC & EMPIRE JUST. CTR. ONLINE RESOURCE CTR., (on file with N.Y.C. Council) (archived Jan. 14, 2025).

²¹ *Id.*

b. Some sites lacked adequate spaces for staff break times and meals.

Staff frequently cited issues with kitchens and break rooms during interviews with OID. For example, at the Queens Site, staff expressed that there was not sufficient refrigerator space in the kitchen to store their food. Additionally, at that site, there was no dedicated area for employees to eat meals, which presented a particular problem since staff informed OID that they were instructed not to eat at their desks. At the Staten Island Site, there was plenty of seating for staff breaks, but there were no doors at the entrance to the kitchen or break room, meaning that staff are sometimes distracted by noises and smells while they work.

c. While there were differences in the general conditions of buildings between the newer and older facilities, all buildings appeared to be maintained in a clean and good working order.

All sites were clean and appeared well-maintained, but some older buildings, particularly Manhattan Site and the Staten Island Site, appeared to be in worse condition than newer or more recently updated ones, like the Brooklyn site. The older buildings appeared less inviting, with slightly more disjointed layouts and noticeable wear and tear on walls, floors, and ceilings.

Finding 3

HRA Facilities Demonstrate a Strong Commitment to Accessibility, but Site Entrances Lacked Automatic Doors

HRA sites serve a large and diverse clientele of New Yorkers. To provide the best possible experience for clients, facilities should be comfortable, clean, and easy to navigate. To ensure full access to services for all New Yorkers, facilities also need to have the resources to address the needs of all clients, including those who speak languages other than English and those with disabilities.

a. Facilities were easy to navigate and had clear signage.

OID investigators observed that each site had clear signage on the outside of the building, which identified it as an HRA site and provided key information to the public, including the operating hours of offices found within the facility (SNAP, Benefits Access Center, etc.). At each facility, clients checked in at electronic kiosks, which gave them further instructions on where to go within the facility to proceed with their case. A staff person was also present near the kiosks to assist clients.

b. Multilingual signs and access to Language Line in all facilities enable effective communication with clients and show a commitment to inclusivity.

Clients were able to select their preferred language from 12 options while checking in at the kiosks, and all HRA sites visited by investigators displayed signage in multiple languages. Sites also offered Language Line, which provides free telephonic translation services in over 250 languages.²² Staff generally reported that they were satisfied with Language Line. The Queens Site also had an in-person interpreter stationed near the computer and phone banks.²³ Given that one-third of HRA's clients have limited English proficiency,²⁴ these resources are essential for ensuring access to services.

c. Sites had kiosks, computers, printers, and phones for clients to apply for benefits and conduct eligibility interviews.

Per investigators' observations, each site appeared to have a sufficient number of check-in kiosks, computers, printers, and phones available for client use.²⁵ At all sites, computers were in a room or separate area called a "PC bank" where clients could fill out the requisite paperwork on a computer with assistance from an HRA staff member, if needed. Sites also had phone banks where clients could complete their benefits eligibility interviews, though these areas lacked privacy. Investigators observed many clients using the PC banks during site visits, but phone banks were less utilized. Though clients can also apply for benefits and complete eligibility interviews at home, these facilities are important for clients who may not have access to a computer or phone, or who need additional help with their applications.

d. Sites were equipped with lower counters, accessible check-in kiosks and bathrooms, elevators, and ramps, but site entrances lacked automatic doors.

All sites visited had accessibility features such as lower counters and kiosks, elevators, ramps with handrails, and accessible bathrooms. However, none of the five sites had automatic front doors.²⁶ While staff stated that the security guard posted at the entrance would assist individuals with the

²² N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV., LANGUAGE ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 4 (Jun. 7, 2024), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/language/accessplan/DSS-2024-LAIP.pdf> (hereinafter Language Plan).

²³ Sites varied in the number of staff that were multilingual, although all sites had at least one bilingual staffer.

²⁴ LANGUAGE PLAN, *supra* note 22, at 9.

²⁵ Of note, at the Staten Island location, multiple check-in kiosks were out of order at the time of investigators' visit, but site staff were actively working to fix the machines.

²⁶ While not required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, New York City's 2022 Building Code requires many public buildings to have automatic doors at entrances. See, e.g., ADMIN. CODE OF THE CITY OF N.Y. § 1105.1.8. While the buildings OIG visited were built prior to the passage of the current code and are thus not subject to the automatic doors requirement, based on the facilities' occupancy and use, they would each be subject to the requirement if they were built today. ADMIN. CODE OF THE CITY OF N.Y. § 101.2.

door if necessary, the Manhattan Site's entrance had a set of opaque double doors with small glass port windows placed high on the doors, which could prevent staff from noticing a person outside in need of assistance. Additionally, if the security guard at any of these sites is busy engaging with other clients or personnel, they may not be available to assist individuals trying to enter.

Finding 4

HRA Effectively Responded to Training Gaps That Resulted from Pandemic-Related Changes, but Still Lacks Sufficient Training for Managers

Effective training ensures that HRA client-facing staff are equipped to provide timely and accurate assistance to clients. The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to HRA's training programs, including a shortened onboarding period for new eligibility specialists and a shift to online continuing education. While these adjustments were intended to address immediate operational needs, they introduced new challenges for staff preparedness and professional development. Interviews with both frontline staff and supervisors indicated that these changes had lasting effects, impacting daily workflows, client interactions, and managerial effectiveness.

a. The HRA training curriculum lacks coverage of the Access HRA app, limiting eligibility specialists' ability to assist clients with technical issues.

Multiple HRA staff members informed OID that they had not received training on the Access HRA app, forcing them to refer clients to other customer support resources at HRA for basic application questions. This may lead to longer processing times and a more unpleasant customer service experience for the client. Eligibility specialists expressed that training on the Access HRA app would enable them to better assist clients while processing their applications.

b. The shortened training period offered in 2023 negatively impacted staff preparedness, but HRA has worked to correct this issue.

From July to September 2023, HRA reduced the duration of its formal training program from six weeks to approximately three weeks, due to the need for rapid onboarding of additional eligibility specialists post-pandemic.²⁷ According to interviews with site supervisors, the

²⁷ Chew et al., *supra* note 19.

shortened training resulted in newly trained staff arriving at their assigned sites with noticeable gaps in their knowledge and skills. Staff consistently reported that these staff members were less prepared compared to those trained pre-pandemic, necessitating substantial remedial work once they returned to their assigned sites, which resulted in ongoing disruptions in daily workflows.

Aware of the condensed trainings' shortcomings, HRA has since addressed this issue by reverting to its original six-week duration training program in late 2023.²⁸ In addition, all 144 eligibility specialists who went through the condensed training were required to receive additional training to address knowledge gaps.²⁹

c. Online training sessions cause unique challenges for staff.

Before 2020, monthly training sessions addressing a variety of topics, including updates to software, new laws, and new agency policies, were conducted in-person. During the pandemic, these sessions were moved online and HRA has maintained this format post-pandemic, according to information gathered during staff interviews.

In interviews, several staff expressed a strong preference for the in-person training format, citing its interactive nature and the immediacy of support as key benefits. Staff reported that the inability to ask questions in real time and the absence of direct interaction during online sessions have diminished the overall quality of monthly trainings.

d. Mandatory training for new managers focuses narrowly on technical and administrative skills.

According to information provided by HRA, new supervisors are required to take four days of training covering the following topics: managing employee schedules, the supervisory side of various computer systems, quality assurance, approving cases, and employability.³⁰ HRA also offers two optional trainings for supervisors: "Stepping into Supervision" and "Supervisory Time and Leave."³¹ HRA stated that "Stepping into Supervision" — a two-day workshop which is offered each month except for December — "guides participants on how to use organizational policies and practices to supervise staff in a consistent, equitable, and logical manner."³² In

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ E-mail from Christopher Gonzalez to OID staff members (Jul. 31, 2024) (on file with N.Y.C. Council).

³¹ E-mail from Christopher Gonzalez to OID staff members (Feb. 9, 2025) (on file with N.Y.C. Council).

³² *Id.*

2023–24, only 32 supervisors opted to take this optional training³³ out of the current 566 SNAP and Cash Assistance supervisors.³⁴

When discussing interactions between staff and managers, some staff members indicated to OID investigators that managers lack sensitivity in their communication and speak with staff in a disrespectful manner. Staff also described a broader absence of unity and collaboration between staff and managers. While the technical and administrative skills covered in the current mandated management trainings are vital for HRA supervisors, the lack of required training in soft skills—such as effective communication and conflict resolution—may leave supervisors underprepared to navigate interpersonal dynamics and foster a supportive work environment.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ E-mail from Christopher Gonzalez to OID staff members (Mar. 25, 2025) (on file with N.Y.C. Council).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

HRA should consider enhancements to software to improve the client and staff experience, including:

a. Improvements for staff

1. Modifying ANGIE/SPOS to allow staff to be notified when they make an error and to understand how it was corrected.

Staff generally agreed that seeing what errors they make and how they are corrected would help them make fewer errors, which could improve case processing times. HRA should consider updating ANGIE/SPOS to allow staff to be notified when they make an error and understand how it was corrected.

2. Evaluating other ways to modify ANGIE/SPOS to improve efficiency.

HRA should work to identify and correct the ways that ANGIE/SPOS has slowed down processing. The agency should evaluate whether ANGIE/SPOS contributed to slower processing times in 2022 and 2023 and investigate whether structural changes to the system are necessary. Specifically, HRA should seek to understand whether supervisors needing to correct errors creates a bottleneck in case processing, and whether the system is creating duplicative work.

b. Improvements for clients

1. Implementing software updates to prevent the entry of duplicate applications in Access HRA, reducing processing delays and rejections. In addition, modifying Access HRA to allow users to revise existing applications, thereby decreasing the need for re-submissions and streamlining the application process.

Given reports that duplicate applications cost significant staff time and contribute to longer processing times, HRA should consider implementing a software update to Access HRA that only allows one application per email or social security number. Additionally, according to staff

members, one likely reason users submit duplicate applications is because they want to make a change to their original application. To alleviate this issue, HRA should consider modifying the Access HRA app and website to allow users to edit their applications online. Another reason that staff members said clients might submit duplicate applications is due to concern that their application is taking a long time to be processed. To alleviate these issues, HRA should explore modifying Access HRA to show users additional details and more frequent updates on the status of their case beyond those changes required by the R.E.C.E.I.P.T.S. Act.

c. Improvements for all users

1. Implementing a way for staff and clients to flag technical issues within Access HRA and other software.

HRA should consider adding a feature to Access HRA, ANGIE, and SPOS that would allow users to flag issues they encounter within the app. This could aid in future software updates.

Recommendation 2

HRA should consider upgrading IT and physical infrastructure to better support staff needs, including:

- a. Identifying and addressing network and IT infrastructure issues at problematic sites to minimize downtime and support efficient operation.**

HRA should regularly conduct technology and infrastructure assessments to determine whether all sites have the technology needed for operations to run efficiently. Where sites lack the necessary IT infrastructure, HRA should consider updating or replacing equipment. HRA should also ensure that IT responds to all work tickets in a timely fashion and should consider implementing further tracking or oversight of work tickets.

- b. Upgrading staff facilities, including kitchens and rest areas, at each site to improve working conditions and staff satisfaction.**

HRA should ensure that each site has adequate space and seating for staff to use during breaks. They should also ensure that kitchen facilities are clean with properly functioning appliances suitable for the number of staff at the site.

Recommendation 3

HRA should assess the feasibility and cost of installing automatic doorways at sites that do not currently have them

HRA should consider the benefits of improving accessibility for all of its clients by updating its building entrances with power-operated automatic doors. Where HRA leases space, it should work with landlords to evaluate the cost and practicality of retrofitting entrances with automatic doors. NYC's current building code, in accordance with international standards,³⁵ requires that many public buildings with high occupancies, like those that HRA facilities are in, be required to have automatic entrances.³⁶ Although the HRA facilities OID visited were built prior to the current building code and are thus not required to have automatic doors,³⁷ HRA should still aim to meet the highest level of accessibility for these facilities.

Recommendation 4

HRA should consider key improvements to its training programs, including:

a. Developing and implementing targeted training sessions on Access HRA.

HRA should develop and implement targeted training sessions specifically focused on the use of Access HRA. Many clients submit their applications for a variety of programs through Access HRA, but staff are currently unaware of how the program works, making it difficult for them to provide support or guidance to clients. These targeted sessions should enhance staff familiarity with the app's features, teach staff how to troubleshoot common issues, and teach them how to guide clients through the application process. Improved staff proficiency with the app and website will lead to better customer service and client satisfaction.

b. Reintroducing regular, practical training sessions conducted in person.

To address the limitations of online training, HRA should re-introduce regular, practical training sessions conducted in person. These sessions should focus on hands-on activities, interactive

³⁵ See Kimberly Paarlberg, *New Automatic Door Requirements for Accessibility*, BLDG. SAFETY J. (Jul. 29, 2022) <https://www.iccsafe.org/building-safety-journal/bsj-technical/new-automatic-door-requirements-for-accessibility/#:~:text=The%202021%20IBC%20has%20incorporated,or%20low%2Denergy%20operated%20door.>

³⁶ See, e.g., N.Y.C. BLDG. CODE (N.Y.C. ADMIN. CODE, TIT. 28, CH. 11) § BC 1105.1.8.

³⁷ See *id.* at § 1105.1.8. While the buildings OID visited were built prior to the passage of the current code and are thus not subject to the automatic doors requirement, based on the facilities' occupancy and use, they would each be subject to the requirement if they were built today. *Id.* at §. 1101.2.

discussions, and real-world scenarios to enhance staff engagement and understanding. In-person training provides an opportunity for immediate feedback and clarification, ensuring that staff can effectively apply their knowledge and skills in their daily roles.

c. Making the existing elective management skills training mandatory for all managers.

Currently, the only management skills training for supervisors offered by HRA is optional. HRA should mandate that this training be taken by all new and current managers and ensure that it covers topics such as communication with staff and conflict resolution.

Conclusion

The findings of this investigation highlight both the strengths and challenges within HRA's Benefits Access Centers and SNAP sites. While HRA has demonstrated a commitment to accessibility, client support, and service delivery to diverse clientele, persistent issues in IT infrastructure, staff training, and case processing have created inefficiencies that impact both employees and clients.

The recommendations outlined in this report can help HRA enhance its operational efficiency, improve staff preparedness, and streamline service delivery. Addressing technological shortcomings, modernizing training programs, and refining case management processes will ultimately lead to a more effective, equitable, and responsive system—one that better serves the needs of New York City's most vulnerable residents. Investing in these improvements will not only support HRA staff in their roles but also ensure that clients receive timely and reliable assistance, reinforcing the agency's mission to provide essential social services to those in need.

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Appendix

Site Assessment Questionnaire

Accessibility

1. Are there ramps or lifts for wheelchair access?
2. Are doors automatic or are manual doors easily operable?
3. Are hallways approximately 3+ feet wide?
4. Are there handrails on both sides of all stairs and ramps?
5. Is signage in Braille?
6. Are there other communication aids?
7. Are there lower sections of service counters for wheelchair users?
8. Evaluate adequacy and accessibility of seating for individuals with disabilities.
9. Additional notes on ADA compliance

Signage

10. Signs are in: English only, 2 languages, or 3 or more languages (multiple choice question)
11. Are universal symbols or pictograms used for key services and facilities?
12. Are signs placed at key decision points (entrances, hallways, elevators) to guide visitors?
13. Evaluate effectiveness of directional signage in leading to different sections or services within the center.
14. Does signage provide essential information such as operating hours, services offered, and instructions for accessing services?

15. Does signage follow a consistent design and branding, contributing to easy recognition and a cohesive experience?
16. Additional notes on signage

Language Access

17. Availability of staff who can communicate in languages other than English, especially those commonly spoken in the community.
18. Are key written materials, like forms and informational brochures, available for non-English speakers?
19. Additional notes on language access

Wait Times

20. Approximately how many people are in line at a given time?
21. Assess if there are periods when staff appear idle versus times when they are overwhelmed, indicating fluctuating service demands.
22. Observe the occupancy level of the waiting area over time to gauge if it remains consistently full, empties quickly, or varies.
23. Additional notes on wait times

Staff Training and Conduct

24. Observe how staff members coordinate with each other, indicating the level of training and teamwork.
25. Monitor how staff handle queries or concerns raised by clients. Look for signs of patience, attentiveness, and helpfulness.
26. Observe staff interactions with clients from a distance. Note the demeanor, professionalism, and efficiency of the staff.
27. Additional notes on staff training and conduct

Facility Conditions

28. Observe the overall cleanliness of the facility, including waiting areas, service counters, and restrooms.
29. Look for signs of wear and tear or damage in the facility that might need repair, such as broken furniture, non-functional equipment, or peeling paint.
30. Assess the adequacy of lighting in the facility, ensuring it provides a comfortable environment.
31. Are there visible safety measures (fire extinguishers, emergency exits, first aid kits)?
32. Observe how space is utilized within the facility, including the layout of waiting areas, service counters, and any special accommodations like children's areas.
33. Additional notes on facility conditions