

Self-Service Mobile Solution Provides System of Engagement for New Yorkers and the Government

Case Study: New York City Department of Social Services

DIONA

Executive Summary

The New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) serves over three million New Yorkers through the administration of more than 12 major public assistance programs. With a large and growing population of applicants and recipients, areas for technological improvement are essential to solving the most common problems faced by clients, employees, and the agency. Specifically, “churning,” when a household exits the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and then re-enters the program within four months, has been identified by the United States Department of Agriculture as a policy concern due to the financial and administrative burden incurred by both SNAP households and State agencies¹.

ACCESS HRA Mobile, a mobile application delivered using the Diona Self Service solution, enables New Yorkers to interact with the DSS in an innovative and convenient way, while improving the efficiency and productivity of DSS employees and operations. ACCESS HRA Mobile features, such as case details, appointments, push notifications, and support services, enhance client support and understanding. The ability to access EBT payment and balance details, upload documents, and edit personal details are incorporated into a user-friendly design that’s quick and easy to use. With ACCESS HRA Mobile, DSS has:

1. Processed 3,000,000 pages of documentation through the app and reduced employee administration time by 4 minutes per case
2. Saved 4,995 days of work to date
3. Contributed to 31% decrease in overall number of in-office visits
4. Lowered rejection rates for failure to provide documentation by 20%

With more than 400,000 App Store downloads, the mobile solution has positively affected the number of people accepted on benefits—and who stay on benefits.

The Challenge

One of the largest social services agencies in the world, the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) is comprised of the administrative units of the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). The agency administers many public assistance programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), SNAP, and a large complex shelter system. Cash Assistance through TANF and Safety Net is provided to 352,000 people each month², and SNAP supports 1.6 million recipients and processes more than 30,000 new applicants each month. Providing care to such a large, diverse population presents the agency with many challenges.

Traveling regularly to DSS centers to get information and provide documentation is costly and difficult for clients, especially for those balancing employment and childcare responsibilities. Missed appointments, misplaced documents, or incomplete re-certifications result in the delay or rejection of benefit payments. Benefit lapses not only create hardship and frustration for eligible clients, they also cause redundant processing work for DSS employees. Office visits and phone calls can consume vast amounts of employee time and resources on repetitive administrative tasks. When overwhelmed by administrative processing and paperwork, more complex social services and personalized support suffer. DSS knew they needed a new way to engage with clients and deliver a higher level of service to best address their clients’ needs.

“We’ve received about 3 million pages of documentation through the mobile app. The increased communication and insight we provide to clients is making a difference in the number of people accepted on benefits and who stay on benefits.”

Lauren Aaronson,
NYC Human Resources Administration

1. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/understanding-rates-causes-and-costs-churning-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

2. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/facts/charts/ca_recipients.pdf

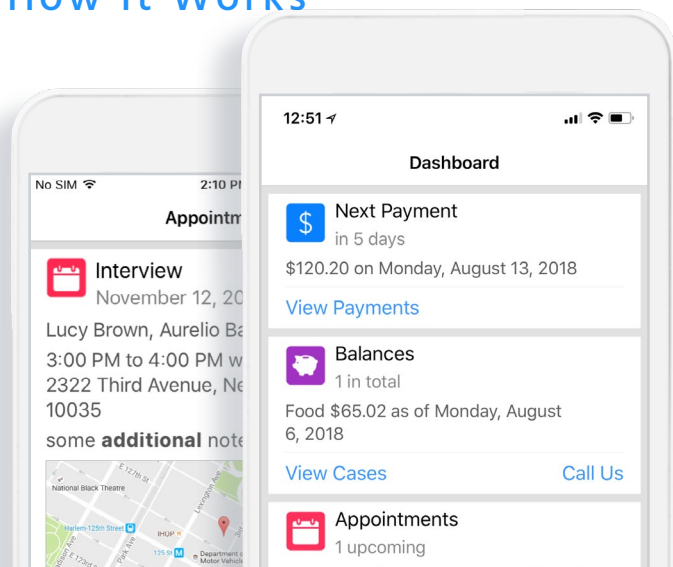


The Innovative Solution

DSS selected Diona to deliver a mobile solution for their clients using Diona Self Service. Diona Self Service is a commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) solution that empowers clients with mobile access to agency services to review case details, check benefits, manage appointments and services, receive notifications, upload documents, and update case and contact information. Diona worked with DSS to configure the enterprise mobility solution according to DSS requirements and integrate with the agency's wide range of back-end systems. The project began in September 2017, and the solution was implemented in only 7 months, with the official launch of ACCESS HRA Mobile in March 2017. A focus was placed on the user experience, with A/B user testing examining the effectiveness of alternative product configurations such as different text and layouts, tested by real users and facilitated by DSS staff at DSS centers.

Prior to implementing the mobile solution, DSS already had a client-facing website that displayed case information. However, smart phone capabilities that support proactive messaging, location-based services, and document capture offered an entirely new set of features that delivered additional business value. The optimal user experience offered by native apps leads to higher user uptake, which in this case means fewer missed touch points between DSS and clients.

How It Works



“The DSS client engagement strategy is informed by private sector best practices – design with your user base, pilot and refine, and leverage web and native mobile where each has distinct strengths and capabilities. There is a reason every bank and insurance company has a mobile app – because they save time and better serve their clients.”

Lauren Aaronson,
NYC Human Resources Administration

Clear communication, access to critical information and deadlines, and the ability to easily update contact information and provide required documentation are key features of the mobile solution—each of these helps improve benefit acceptance and retention rates, as well as benefit delivery. As an important policy concern identified by the USDA, reducing the financial and administrative burdens of churn remains an agency priority, and ACCESS HRA Mobile is enabling DSS to make improvements through a robust set of features.

Features

ACCESS HRA Mobile replaces the need for in-person center visits, telephone, mail, and fax machine-based communications traditionally used between DSS clients and employees. Clients are no longer obligated to visit a center in person or telephone DSS to obtain benefit information or provide documentation. Now through their mobile phone or tablet device, clients can easily engage with the agency, gaining access to services using a rich set of features:

- Access to case, payment, EBT balance, electronic notice, and appointment information.
- Pro-active reminders for appointments, re-certifications, and application next steps via push notifications.



- Document upload feature with simple tap or click actions so required documentation can be uploaded anytime, anywhere and alleviating the need for in-office visits, fax machines, or postal mail.
- Helpful prompts and explanations for required documentation are embedded within the app.
- Contact details can be accessed, reviewed, and updated easily to ensure that lines of communication remain open.
- Tour, Help, and FAQ functionalities are always available when clients need extra guidance.
- Localization into English, Spanish, Russian, Korean, Chinese, Arabic, and French ensures that DSS clients can use the solution in a language that they understand.
- Integration with a New York City-wide account login service allows New Yorkers to use their common NYC account to authenticate with the system.

Usability

For DSS, usability was a core requirement to drive uptake and return on investment. The Diona Self Service apps are developed natively for optimal user experience and stability. Designed to iOS and Google platform UX standards, they leverage standard platform layouts and controls to ensure that they are intuitive to users. The outputs of NYC DSS A/B user testing and behavioral messaging studies were incorporated into the product configurations to ensure that the customer experience was intuitive and favorable. ADA Compliance, a critical requirement, was delivered out-of-the-box. The Diona Self Service apps are also developed natively to integrate with the accessibility features embedded in mobile operating systems such as Android TalkBack and iOS VoiceOver, allowing clients who are blind or low vision to use the system.

Security

Today, security and privacy are critical concerns for everyone. As with all Diona solutions, Diona Self Service features robust security and privacy protection in accordance with the highest data encryption standards. In New York City, system security and client privacy are validated with application scans and penetration testing performed by NYC Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT).

The Results

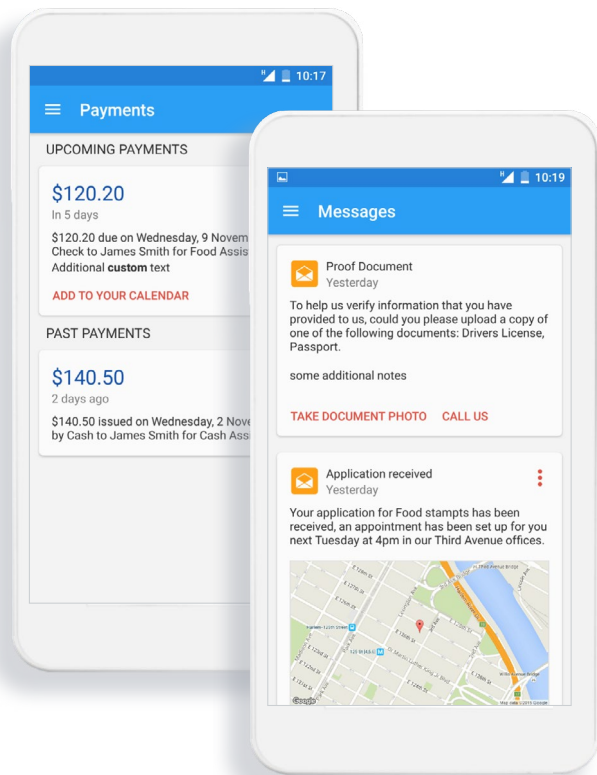
“In this day and age, our clients expect to be able to transact with us from their mobile device, and keeping clients better informed about their cases leads to fewer transactions for us to process. The high app store rating is proof that our mobile app is making a difference.”

Lauren Aaronson,
NYC Human Resources Administration

With ACCESS HRA Mobile, DSS has improved employee efficiency and productivity, as well as client service quality and experience. The results have been dramatic:

1. Mobile document uploads save on average 4 minutes of worker review time per case, delivering an estimated time savings of 4,995 days of work to date.
2. Rejection rates have been reduced, with a 20% reduction in rejections due to failure to provide documentation.
3. Center visits have been reduced, with a 37% decrease in visits undertaken to return documents leading to the avoidance of approximately 600,000 center visits to date.
4. Push notification appointment reminders, along with a re-orientation towards on-demand eligibility interviews, have reduced the missed appointment rates by 10%.
5. High quality document images and well validated data improves document and data quality.

With less administrative work at DSS centers, employees have more time to devote to the people most in need and who require personal support. Additionally, client time and travel costs



clients, ensuring they are well-informed of application next steps, upcoming appointments, review requests, and benefit re-certification deadlines.

With 400,000+ downloads and user ratings of 4.5 and 4.6 out of 5 on the Apple and Android app stores, HRA DSS clients now have an essential tool that gives them critical information and insights to support their service needs. Ultimately, the ACCESS HRA Mobile solution has positively affected the number of people accepted on benefits—and who stay on benefits.

About Diona

Diona provides innovative systems of engagement solutions to government Health and Human Services, Social Care, and Social Security agencies and NGOs around the world. Diona's family of social program engagement solutions, turn mobile devices—such as smartphones and tablets—into tools to achieve better business and social outcomes by helping agencies serve people more effectively, while improving how their employees work and collaborate. Diona solutions extend organizational systems of record and deliver real-time data directly into the field for clients and workers. Diona solutions are secure, robust, scalable, and reliable and feature flexible cloud-based or on-premise deployment options. With deep domain expertise and a user-centered design philosophy, Diona delivers digital solutions that help government agencies and NGOs solve real-world problems for their clients and employees.

associated with in-center visits have also been reduced, and convenience and access have vastly improved, especially for clients with disabilities and schedule restrictions.

User adoption rates of ACCESS HRA Mobile have risen continuously, with mobile app downloads increasing 23% each month. A staggering 3+ million pages of documentation have been uploaded, and 500,000+ applications and re-certifications have been processed since its inception. Envisioned as a complementary channel to the fax machine, mobile document uploads have overtaken fax as the most popular way for clients to provide documentation without visiting HRA DSS offices. Moreover, ACCESS HRA Mobile has quickly become clients' primary source of benefit information. Clients have checked their cases, appointments, and payment information 3.9 million times, reviewed documents 1 million times, and updated contact information 65,000 times. More than 850,000 push notifications have been received by

**Experience The Diona Difference for yourself.
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