GovGrader Report Card
November 2017

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Background

Nonprofit human services providers across New York are essential partners to government agencies in creating and delivering programs to our communities. Government relies on us to work with individuals and families from all walks of life – providing everything from child care to senior services - and yet a number of critical hurdles make it difficult for human services providers to work in effective partnership with government.

Providers have expressed their frustration with government contracting partners for years, over issues including chronically late payments, lost documents, and misunderstandings about program components. And these issues are not just nuisances; the delays, confusion, and ever-changing expectations contribute to the poor financial health of the human services sector, unnecessarily sucking up precious resources. Nonprofits have to devote considerable time, expertise, and money to navigating their relationships with government agencies.

To help address these challenges, the Human Services Council has created GovGrader, the country's first online scorecard for human services providers to share their feedback on government procurement and contract management processes. This scorecard captures the business experience of nonprofit organizations that hold human services contracts with New York City and New York State agencies and give providers and their Boards insight into the issues involved with working with various government partners so that they can make informed decisions about contracting opportunities. HSC has extensive program, contract management, and financial experience and convened a workgroup of nonprofit contract experts to help create the GovGrader survey, which includes questions like: "How would you rate your experience and satisfaction with the agency's approach to contract management?" It also asks providers to rank an agency's responsiveness, proficiency, information management, and overall user experience on a scale from very poor to exceptional. **You can find the full survey on our website.**

Results

105 nonprofits throughout the State filled out the survey for a total of 572 individual program ratings across New York City and State human services agencies. The overall results can best be summarized as "not great."

> - The State received a C+ overall while the City received a B-
> - Agencies scored grades from C- to B
> - Program areas within agencies ranged from D+ to B+

Looking at the grades as a whole, the results are troubling because they show that no agency excels at working with human services providers. Nonprofits have no alternative but to work with government agencies and these relationships are vital to delivering quality services in communities, and no one is getting it right. In New York, if you see a restaurant with a C rating, you are likely to keep walking until you find an A. The problem for nonprofits is that they cannot take their business elsewhere; government has a monopoly on these services, and most nonprofits are understandably hesitant to challenge the administrative processes of an agency they're hoping to partner with. You would eat at a C restaurant if the other option was to starve.

Key Findings

The key theme that emerged from the survey and accompanying comments is that nonprofits value their government partners and find the individuals they work with helpful. However, confusing instructions, burdensome mandates, and a lack of streamlined processes makes it difficult for even the most helpful of agency staff to ease the process.

Respondents noted the underutilization and inconsistent use of technology, and both the City and State performed particularly poorly in the area of information management. This was echoed by comments from providers about confusing systems, changing requirements, and uneven use of HHS Accelerator and Grants Gateway, online systems meant to streamline the business relationship between providers and agencies.

Nonprofit organizations have expertise in their field and are intimately familiar with the communities they serve. However, government agencies are not properly utilizing this knowledge and agency staff do not have the authority to engage with nonprofits to the degree necessary to improve these programs.

The survey also found that contracts are often registered late, which costs organizations time and money and diverts energy away from the populations they are meant to be serving. Many nonprofits have to take out lines of credit in order to manage delays in registration and therefore delayed payments, which costs money that could be better spent serving the community. Some organizations are owed millions of dollars, and are essentially loaning money to the City and State. Providers often continue programs while waiting for registration so that participants do not have their services disrupted, and they have to hire staff and enter into leases while waiting for contracts to be finalized. This is a huge risk to nonprofits should anything go wrong with their registration, yet government takes this as normal course of business.

Takeaways

Overall, both the City and State received mediocre scores in every area, with a few program areas receiving better than average scores. When the health department delivers a C score to a restaurant, consumers have the option of selecting an A restaurant instead, but nonprofits cannot shop around for better government service; it simply doesn't exist.

The goal of the GovGrader is to pinpoint areas of improvement and find where the system is working so it can be replicated. Nonprofits have pointed out these issues for years, but data is key to taking these issues from complaint to action. The City, through the Nonprofit Resiliency Committee, is tackling some of the areas of concern noted above, and the State's Not-for-Profit Contracting Advisory Committee has also made a commitment to fixing delays in contracting. We hope these results galvanize those efforts and help our agency partners – who are often equally frustrated by burdensome processes – achieve a more streamlined and effective way of contracting services.

The survey is also meant to help nonprofits better understand the risks of contracting with government. Along with our RFP Rater - a procurement evaluation tool designed to aid nonprofit human services organizations and government agencies in understanding the risks and challenges inherent in government funding opportunities - we hope to foster a dialogue among nonprofits and their Boards about the importance of risk assessment so they are better able to achieve financial sustainability and operate from a place of strength. As a sector, we must push back on underfunded contracts, risky program models, and antiquated systems that drain dollars from programs.

We hope this tool will open new avenues for public dialogue, debate, and advocacy, as we must work in partnership with government to find solutions that will guarantee the sustainability of the nonprofit human services sector.

Acknowledgments

STATE - OVERALL GRADE

C+

CATEGORY	GRADE
Responsiveness	B-
Proficiency	B-
Information Management	C
Overall User Experience	C+

CITY - OVERALL GRADE

B-

CATEGORY	GRADE
Responsiveness	B-
Proficiency	B-
Information Management	C+
Overall User Experience	B-

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STATE AGENCIES

NYS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH — C+

PROGRAM	GRADE
Early Intervention	B-
HIV/AIDS	C+
Medicaid Redesign	C
Public Health	B-

NYS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT — C+

PROGRAM	GRADE
After School	C+
Community Schools	C+
Residential Schools	C-
School Meals	D+

NYS OFFICE FOR THE AGING

C+

NYS OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH

B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Children's Services	B-
Family Support	C+
Health and Recovery Plan	C+
Health Homes	C+
Peer Services	C+
Rehab and Recovery	B-
Residential	B-

OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

C-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Children's Services	C+
Employment	C+
Family Support	B-
Residential	C+
Service Coordination	C+

OFFICE OF ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

B

OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

C+

PROGRAM	GRADE
Advantage Schools	B-
Child Care	B-
Child Welfare/Permanency	C+
Domestic Violence	B-
Juvenile Justice	C
Runaway and Homeless Youth	C+

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OFFICE OF TEMPORARY AND DISABILITY ASSISTANCE

B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Employment and Training	**B-**
Housing	**B+**
Homeless Housing and Assistance Program	**B-**
Shelter	**C+**

OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES

C+

CITY AGENCIES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES — B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Child Care	C+
Child Welfare	B-
Juvenile Justice	C+

DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING — B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Case Management	B
Elder Abuse and Legal Assistance	B+
Home Care and Caregiver	B
Meals	B-
Senior Centers and NORCS	C+

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Community Schools	C+
Out of School Time	B-
Universal Pre-Kindergarten	B-

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Developmental Disabilities	B-
Early Intervention	C+
HIV/AIDS	B
Maternal and Child Health	B
Mental Health	C+
Substance Abuse	C
Supportive Housing	B-

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DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION — B

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES — C

PROGRAM	GRADE
Adult Shelter	C
Family Shelter	C
Prevention	C+
Supportive Housing	B-

HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION — B-

PROGRAM	GRADE
Domestic Violence	C
Food	B-
HASA	B
Supportive Housing	B+
Workforce Development	C+

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

B

PROGRAM	GRADE
Afterschool	B
Employment	B-
Fatherhood	B
Immigration	B-
Literacy	B
Runaway and Homeless Youth	B-

MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

B+

NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

C+

SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

B-

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