



Case Study of WCC's Citywide Guide to Services and Resources

BACKGROUND

The Women's City Club of New York (WCC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, multi-issue activist organization that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. WCC works to shape public policy to promote responsive government through education, issue analysis, advocacy and civic participation.

WCC recognized a pressing need for a comprehensive resource guide to New York City's social services that would help indigent families find assistance in essential areas of life. Record numbers of New Yorkers are homeless, with many others on the brink; shelters are filled beyond capacity; unemployment remains stubbornly high; and of the 1.5 million New Yorkers living in poverty, 20 percent are children. Food banks report an increasing demand, and food stamps (now called SNAP) have become a necessity for many families. At the same time, numerous nonprofits and government agencies have suffered severe service and staff cuts, with some closing their doors. Our municipal and state governments have also forecast further cutbacks.

At difficult times such as these, people in dire situations too often lack knowledge about where and how to find critical social services. To help fill that vacuum, the WCC developed an encyclopedic guide to resources in Manhattan for New Yorkers in need.

The WCC found numerous service guides when researching current in researching currently available services listings. Unfortunately many were outdated, too complicated or, in the case of the Green Book of city resources, out of print. Existing print resources weigh several pounds, making them physically difficult to use and transport, and are so all-inclusive that they can't be used efficiently and effectively.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE GUIDE

Phase I: Inception of the Manhattan Guide

In 2011, WCC's Poverty Issues Committee assembled with members, including Liz Krueger (who was in between campaigns) and Ann Sand, a WCC member. Sand observed that many people do not know how or where to get services and there was no concrete method to help individuals

access low- and no- cost services, programs and resources in NYC. WCC used the *Directory of Housing Resources for Homeless Women* (produced in 1992 by WCC) as a starting point and saw the solution: a guide for services, programs, and resources. With the leadership of Joan McAllister (WCC member), the project started with volunteers and an intern. A group of WCC members assembled to review all types of services and researched various booklets for information to compile in the guide. The Guide took about a year to produce and it was translated with assistance from the Chinatown Neighborhood Council, Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Institute for the Puerto Rican Hispanic Elderly, and consisted of organizations in 16 areas of services. Under the leadership of Betty Jones, WCC secured funding for the Guide through the Sy Syms Foundation and the New York Women's Foundation. In 2012, the first version of the guide consisting of only services in Manhattan was produced: *2012 Guide to Services & Resources in Manhattan*.

- Addressing the need: There was no single publication of comprehensive resources available to New Yorkers.
- WCC Leadership:
 - President – Marge Ives
 - Project Leaders- Elizabeth Lubetkin Lipton, Ann Sand, Betty Jones and Joan McAllister.
- Categories: 16
- Organizations Featured: 524
- Funders: New York Women's Foundation and the Sy Syms Foundation

Phase II: Brooklyn & Online Version

Feedback for the Guide was positive and WCC soon contemplated making guides for other boroughs. The Guide undergoes significant changes, it grows in the number of categories, criteria is established to determine what organizations and services will be featured, and how to best partner with external city agencies. In September 2015, the [2015 Citywide Guide to Services and Resources in Brooklyn](#) is produced.

- Addressing the need: Feedback from the Manhattan Guide informs the decision to expand the Guide to the remaining four boroughs.
- WCC leadership:
 - President – Annette Choolfaian
 - Executive Director – Jacqueline Ebanks
- Number Printed: 10,000 copies printed, and distributed, in partnership with Brooklyn Borough President Adams. Within a year all 10,000 copies are shared across the borough.
- Categories: 16 to 21 (31% increase)
- Organizations Featured: 819 (56% increase)
- Funders: Anonymous Foundation and the Sy Syms Foundation
- Events: A launch event is held in partnership with the Brooklyn Borough President at Brooklyn Borough Hall in September 2015 to unveil the new look of the print Guide as well as introducing the [online version](#).

With requests continuing to come in for the Brooklyn Guide, WCC reprints 2,000 copies in March of 2017. In partnership with the Brooklyn Borough President's Office, all 2,000 copies are distributed within 3.5 months.

Phase III: Bronx, Manhattan Queens, Staten Island

Through an internal evaluation of the 2015 Brooklyn Guide, WCC updates and prints the [2016 Citywide Guide to Services and Resources in Manhattan](#) in January 2016. The online Guide is updated in October 2016, including all five boroughs. Initial distribution included providers featured in the Guide, elected officials in New York City, and individuals/agencies that made pre-order requests.

- Addressing the need: An internal evaluation is conducted after the release and distribution of the *2015 Citywide Guide to Services and Resources in Brooklyn*. From the evaluation, WCC creates a strategy for completing the remaining 3 boroughs and incorporates a timeline to ensure a timely release.
- WCC leadership:
 - President – Annette Choolfaian
 - Executive Director – Jacqueline Ebanks
- Number of copies printed: 5,000 copies of The Bronx, Manhattan and Queens are printed; and 4,000 copies of Staten Island are printed.
- Categories: 21
- Number of organizations featured: 2,412 (195% increase)
 - 607 in the Bronx
 - 792 in Manhattan
 - 718 in Queens
 - 295 in Staten Island
- Funders: Anonymous Foundation, The New York Women's Foundation, and the Sy Syms Foundation.
- Events: In September of 2016, with the New York Women's Foundation joining as a funder of the Guide, at WCC's Centennial Conference, [From Inequality to Equality: Policies and Programs that Work](#), the three remainder boroughs are unveiled: [The Bronx](#), [Queens](#) and [Staten Island](#).

FROM IDENTIFYING A NEED TO TAKING ACTION

WCC created a summary to highlight the process in which it identified an issue and sought to address it:

1. **Problem Identification**: Recognized the lack accessibility on information on the resources that are offered at low or no costs for New Yorkers.
2. **Research**: Started the initial stage of researching organizations that fit the criteria set by the WCC that the organizations in the Guide must be free, low-cost or have a sliding fee option. Interns and Fellows used online resources created by other entities as a starting point and did preliminary research on the organizations listed.

3. **Data Verification:** Interns then conducted data verification by calling each organization to further verify its organizational information. Interns were instructed to update the address, phone number, website, alternative contact, and to inquire information on the kinds of services and languages were provided and any other necessary notes.
4. **Borough Partnership:** Partnered with the Brooklyn Borough President's Office for the Brooklyn Guide.
5. **Publication:** Published a version of the Citywide Guide for each Borough. The Manhattan version went through one update.
6. **User Training:** Trained members and external partners on how to properly use the Guide to achieve maximum impact.
7. **Distribution:** Distributed Guides to service providers, elected officials, and other end-users.
8. **Database Expansion Partnership:** Anticipating a partnership with Civic Hall's ReferNYC pilot program to increase access to the Guide to a wider audience.

IMPACT

The following are impact highlights of WCC's Citywide Guide to Services and Resources:

- Total Number of Copies Printed/Distributed: 31,000 copies were printed and 30,804 copies have been distributed a/o April 2018.
- Total Number of Organizations Featured: 3,231 organizations are featured across all five boroughs.
- Partnerships: WCC has developed a number of partnerships, which include—Brooklyn/Manhattan Borough President's Office, CAMBA, Civic Hall, Grace Institute and Hunger Free America.
- Investments: The Guide has been supported by Anonymous Foundation, New York Women's Foundation, and Sy Syms Foundation.
- Analytical Highlights from Online Guide:
 - Users who utilize the online research guide have searched zip codes in Brooklyn at higher levels than any other borough. In fact, out of the top ten most searched zip codes, nine of them are located in Brooklyn.
 - The most popular categories searched are for Health & Mental Health Services, Food & Hunger and Housing & Homelessness.
 - Most users who require services provided in alternative languages search for services in which Spanish is spoken.
 - Largest age group that used the online guide were between the ages of 25 and 34 years old.

In July 2017, WCC's Research and Public Policy Intern initiates a strategy to distribute the remaining Guides of the other four boroughs. By October 2017, only 2 boxes remain of each of the four boroughs. As of April 2018 there are only 196 print copies of The Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island.

With such high distributions numbers and requests, WCC received testimonials on the impact of the print and online version of the *Citywide Guide to Services and Resources*:

“Thank you so very much for the box of Women’s City Club of NY – 2016 Citywide Guide to Services and Resources in Manhattan. We serve over 500 clients a week, for many who have exhausted their Unemployment Benefits and require supplemental services, this guide is priceless. Even though we have the link for the guide, some of our clients are not computer savvy, and we make copies of selected pages for them. Your guide is truly, greatly appreciated. Thank you again.”

–Mirta, Labor Services Representative from the New York State Department of Labor

“We really appreciate Women's City Club of New York guide we found it to be very useful and valued for our organization and community.”

–Michele, Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.

“I received a copy of the Guide from a friend who attended the Community Board 8 meeting. She found it to be very helpful and useful to share among attendees in the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights.”

–Dorothy C.

“I found the Manhattan Resource Guide invaluable. I would so love to have a copy for myself to share with the people I work with.”

–Anonymous