



Office of the Mayor

City of Seattle

Bruce A. Harrell, Mayor

Executive Order 2023-05: Creating a More Livable One Seattle by Increasing Access to City of Seattle Benefit and Discount Programs

*An Executive Order directing all City departments offering public benefit and discount programs to join 'Affordable Seattle,' a coordinated, **One Seattle** program designed as a one-stop-shop for residents and community workers to find and apply to City of Seattle programs. This unified approach will decrease the time and effort to apply for programs, offer supported and self-serve options, leverage limited marketing dollars, and increase enrollment in City programs that help lower the cost to live and thrive in Seattle.*

WHEREAS, the Mayor desires all Seattle residents realize the opportunity to access City services, benefit, and discount programs with ease to create a more livable, **One Seattle**; and

WHEREAS, the cost to live in Seattle has increased 53 percent in the past six years¹; and

WHEREAS, a recent analysis found that a family of four with two children requires \$115,000 to cover basic living expenses²; and

WHEREAS, the City of Seattle offers approximately 30 benefit and discount programs that help to decrease the cost to live in Seattle, administered separately by ten City departments; and

WHEREAS, the City's benefit and discount programs could save an eligible household up to \$35,000³ annually; and

WHEREAS, many of these programs are underutilized with only 40 percent of eligible households enrolled⁴; and

WHEREAS, research shows residents may be unaware of programs that exist or that they may be eligible for multiple programs, unable to access programs due to lack of internet access, digital literacy, or English proficiency, experience general exhaustion with the disjointed process, or be unwilling to access programs due to government distrust, particularly in relation to immigration status, and may prefer a person over an online portal for support through the process; and

¹ "Consumer Price Index, Seattle Area - February 2023: Western Information Office." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 14 Mar. 2023, https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_seattle.htm.

² "Self Sufficiency Calculator." Self Sufficiency Calculator, <https://www.thecalculator.org/calculator.php>.

³ Example of a family with a preschooler and school-aged child who lives in Seattle Housing Authority owned and managed home and is enrolled in several City of Seattle-administered programs including Seattle Preschool Program (\$21,480), Parks Before/After School (\$6,000), Summer Camps (\$3,000), utility discount program (\$1,200), fresh bucks (\$480), 2 SHA ORCA cards (\$2,496), Emergency Bill Assistance (\$1000).

⁴ Per Utility Discount Program estimates from 2019 (30% of eligible households enrolled in UDP) and 2022 (40% of eligibility households enrolled in UDP).

WHEREAS, the Mayor established the 'Affordable Seattle Team' in 2022 as a part of Innovation and Performance to improve the resident experience to find and apply for benefits and discounts; and

WHEREAS, Innovation and Performance and Seattle IT collaborated with Google.org (the philanthropic arm of Google), community-based organizations, and residents to co-design CiviForm, an online tool that allows residents to apply for multiple programs by reusing information across applications, in their preferred language, and on their preferred device; and

WHEREAS, CiviForm was created using the latest Seattle IT-supported technology to meet or exceed privacy and security requirements for storing resident data within the City of Seattle's firewall for exclusive use of program management and Google.org does not have permission to access resident data; and

WHEREAS, online tools serve those who are comfortable using digital services, creating logins, accessing mobile apps, and receiving digital communications; and

WHEREAS, CiviForm has a purpose-built portal for community-based organizations to enable social workers and other trusted community workers a secure way of applying for programs on behalf of their clients, application status tracking across multiple programs, and client support in meeting program qualifications; and

WHEREAS, CiviForm provides an additional front door for residents to improve awareness and access programs, and does not replace existing systems or software applications; and

WHEREAS, starting in 2021, CiviForm was piloted across nine affordability programs and over 10,000 applicants and resulted in a decreased time to apply by 80 percent, with 20percent of applicants applying to multiple programs without reentering their basic information;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bruce A. Harrell, Mayor of Seattle, hereby direct all City of Seattle administered and funded benefit and discount programs to join the Affordable Seattle Program by December 31, 2024, to: 1) reduce barriers for eligible applicants accessing City programs, and 2) increase program utilization citywide. This will be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. An Affordable Seattle Working Group shall be created to include all departments that administer benefit and discount programs or provide strategic direction, including but not limited to the City Attorney's Office, Department of Education and Early Learning, Human Services Department, Office of Housing, Office of Sustainability and Environment, Seattle City Light, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Fire Department, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Municipal Court, Seattle Parks and Recreation, and Seattle Public Utilities.**
- 2. By August 31, 2023, Innovation and Performance's Affordable Seattle Team, with support from Seattle IT, shall present to the Mayor a report that provides a current state assessment, estimated timeline for programs adopting or integrating with CiviForm, and the resources needed to meet the timeline.** Specific elements of the report shall include:

- a) Map of programs and existing internal processes, early recommendations for potential improvements, information regarding the resident experience, opportunities for automation and data integration, key program and technical challenges to overcome, and an onboarding plan with agreed-upon date when residents will be able to apply to benefit and discount programs using CiviForm.
 - b) Plan for data and platform integrations to reduce staff time completing manual data entry and providing data connections between CiviForm and source data systems.
 - c) Plan for funding and staff resources needed to implement this proposal and projections for ongoing resource requirements for all City departments.
- 3. Once the current state mapping is complete, departments shall partner with the Affordable Seattle Team to identify and act upon opportunities to streamline program enrollment and reduce processing burden by:**
- a) Reviewing programmatic application processes to identify barriers experienced by residents and work to mitigate those barriers where applicable.
 - b) Identifying where unnecessary information is being requested of residents and work to eliminate such questions from the programmatic application processes.
 - c) Reconsidering the necessity of verification documents and identifying potential alternatives that residents can submit.
 - d) Providing non-digital options for applicants who face barriers with digital tools.
 - e) Evaluating options for centralized or standard eligibility verification to reduce rework by staff and residents across all City-administered benefit and discount programs.
 - f) Ensuring timely communication with applicants as they progress through the application process.
- 4. The design and delivery of programmatic and technical elements of Affordable Seattle shall be informed through the Affordable Seattle Team’s continuous engagement with residents, community-based organizations, and department staff.**
- a) Departments shall participate in the Affordable Seattle Working Group to share feedback, hear from applicants, report progress, and receive latest programmatic and technical updates.
 - b) The Affordable Seattle Team shall consider ongoing feedback to improve the utility and ease of CiviForm.
 - c) Departments shall consider ongoing feedback recommended by residents that make utilization of benefit and discount programs more accessible and impactful.
- 5. Departments shall use standard methods for collecting demographic information on application forms to enable citywide evaluation of program impact and opportunities for community outreach.** This includes aligning with recently standardized formats for common questions such as race, ethnicity, and gender and any information that is necessary to approve residents for programs such as income and household size.
- 6. The Affordable Seattle Team shall leverage funding, grants, and limited marketing dollars to the benefit of all programs on Affordable Seattle.**

7. The Affordable Seattle Team shall surface a package of legislative or policy changes to better align eligibility criteria across programs and explore alternatives to City-initiated income verification.

- a) Affordable Seattle Working Group shall develop recommendations for a self-attestation pilot to test a low-barrier application for program(s) with income eligibility requirements.
- b) Affordable Seattle Working Group shall explore the feasibility of auto-enrolling residents in programs based on their participation in County, State, and Federal programs with aligned income verification requirements.
- c) Affordable Seattle Working Group shall explore opportunities to securely share data with County, State, and Federal programs to streamline the application process for benefit and discount programs not administered by the City of Seattle.

8. The Affordable Seattle Team shall aggregate, evaluate, and report across programs on Affordable Seattle to improve program efficiency, effectiveness, and community reach. Departments shall collect the necessary data to make this analysis possible by:

- a) Tracking time from application submission to benefit approval and receipt.
- b) Collecting data on actual enrollment and money saved per resident per year.
- c) Tracking utilization of enrolled participants versus the number of total funded participant capacity.
- d) Tracking demand such as the number of applicants waitlisted but not enrolled.

9. The Affordable Seattle Team will report to the Mayor's Office on the progress of executing this Executive Order on December 31st, 2023 and December 31st, 2024.

Questions about the implementation of this Executive Order should be directed to Director of Innovation & Performance, Leah Tivoli, City Budget Office at Leah.Tivoli@seattle.gov.

Dated this 12th day of July, 2023.



Bruce A. Harrell
Mayor of Seattle