



TECH TRANSFORMERS

MAKING CITY FORMS A PIECE OF CAKE FOR EVERYONE

By Lori Latimer, for SOWN

When the pandemic turned our world upside down, digital forms became the new normal to keep the City's services running. While some folks loved the techy transformation, others, like older adults, found it tricky to access the essential services they needed.

Thankfully, the Office of Innovation and Technology stepped up and assembled a high-tech Digital Forms team to find a solution. They kicked off a project in March 2023 to make digital forms more user-friendly, consistent, and safe.

The team dug deep, researching the best ways to make digital forms a breeze to use. They came up with a sample form that put their ideas into action. Next, it was time to see if their creation was really as great as they hoped it would be.

To find participants, the team focused on residents who might struggle with digital forms—those with limited tech skills, disabilities, or language barriers.

They reached out to community-based organizations to help recruit and run feedback sessions. Disability Pride PA, IndoChinese American Council, The New Sanctuary Movement, and SOWN

were chosen for their expertise and community connections.

The sessions were a success! Residents tested the prototype form, and some joined a card-sorting activity to pick the most important form topics.

The team made sure everyone could read and understand the form, even providing interpreters for Vietnamese, Spanish, and Haitian Creole speakers.

The team focused on residents who might struggle with digital forms—those with limited tech skills, disabilities, or language barriers.

SOWN's crew of 15 residents brought invaluable insights to the table. Their experiences highlighted the digital divide that affects their lives. Many older adults are hesitant to use online services, even if they have access to technology. They worry about making mistakes and feeling judged by younger people who seem to be tech whizzes.

When the pandemic forced their grandkids into virtual learning, SOWN's participants saw firsthand how fast the world was changing. They noticed that healthcare systems and bill payments were also pushing them to go paperless.

As more services move online, it's essential to consider folks like older adults, who might not be as tech-savvy as their younger counterparts. But don't count them out yet—SOWN's participants are eager to learn and grow their digital skills!

The project also revealed some important lessons about working with older adults. It's crucial to pick accessible locations, adjust the pace of activities, and watch for non-verbal cues to make sure everyone's comfortable. Including research staff from participants' cultural communities helps build trust and create a more inclusive experience.

With feedback from 43 participants, the Digital Forms team is now working

on refining their guidelines to make city forms even better.

Once that's done, they'll share their findings with City departments, kicking off the process of standardizing digital forms to make them accessible and easy to use for everyone.

Through dedication, empathy, and innovation, SOWN is helping to bridge the digital divide and prepare our communities for any future challenges, empowering people of all ages to embrace and benefit from the ever-changing digital landscape.

Website 4 All: DigitalEquityPHL

Technology is everywhere in our daily lives, from job applications to online classes and medical care. However, in Philadelphia, not all residents have equal access to these digital resources. That's where DigitalEquityPHL -- the City's newest "one stop shop" website for all things digital equity -- comes in. (phila.gov/programs/digitalequityphl)

This comprehensive website provides information and resources for residents of all ages and backgrounds, including older adults, students, and low-income families.

Whether you need help accessing the internet, building your digital literacy skills, or finding affordable technology options, DigitalEquityPHL has got you covered.

Lori Latimer (MSW, LCSW) is SOWN's Director of Programs. Her social work background includes housing and homelessness, trauma-informed care, and geriatrics.

SOWN strengthens community support networks of older adults, especially women and their families. For more info – or to join or volunteer – visit sown.org or contact them at 215-487- 3000 or info@sown.org.



Auntie's Apothecarie

SPRING/SUMMER MENU

NEW BLENDS ARRIVING APRIL 24

"IT'S A HUG IN A CUP"

SHOP NOW



@myauntiesapothecarie

