



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
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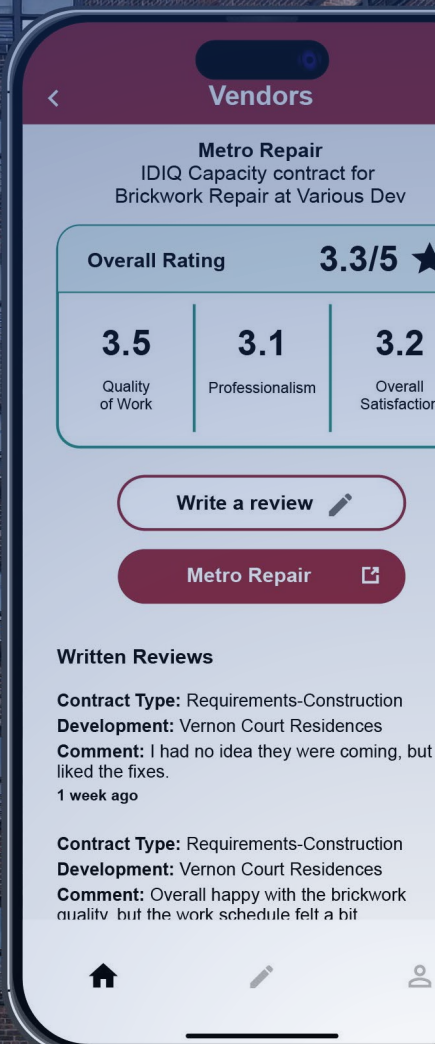
Repairs, Reviews, and Resident Voice

A Tech Tool for NYCHA Resident
Feedback on Repairs to Keep
Contractors Accountable

November 2024

Executive Summary

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is the largest public housing authority in North America. Aging infrastructure and disinvestment have contributed to significant frustration among NYCHA residents regarding unaddressed or inadequate repairs in their homes. A lack of proper oversight mechanisms at NYCHA has also bred the potential for corruption, as most recently evidenced by the high-profile bribery and extortion charges against 70 NYCHA employees who pled guilty to accepting cash payments in exchange for contract approvals.¹



In July 2022, nearly two years before those bribery charges were made public, the New York City Comptroller’s office began a “resident-powered audit process” in which NYCHA residents directed the Office of the Comptroller to focus on NYCHA’s process for selecting and monitoring contractors hired for repairs and maintenance.² The audit found alarming deficiencies, including high levels of dissatisfaction with contractor work, disorganized or incomplete records, insufficient controls to prevent fraud, and a lack of formal feedback mechanisms from residents.

NYCHA’s capital needs have reached \$80 billion.³ It is a difficult task to correct 610,000 open work orders (as of July 2024)⁴ while also working to address longstanding and growing structural problems. Effective vendor oversight would help NYCHA ensure that repairs are delivered to tenants in a timely and satisfactory manner and do not need to be redone, which takes away valuable capacity from the agency to address its underlying capital needs and can further resident dissatisfaction.

NYCHA has taken some steps to improve vendor oversight, many of which are in line with the audit’s recommendations, but NYCHA residents are still missing from the process. Public Housing authorities, non-profit, and for-profit property owners around the globe are increasingly embracing resident engagement and innovative technology tools to more effectively manage their properties. This report offers recommendations for participatory and resident-driven approaches to vendor oversight to:

- **Increase contractor accountability** and ensure poorly performing vendors are not continuously re-hired.
- **Improve resident satisfaction** through higher standards of service and responsiveness to feedback.
- **Promote transparency** and enhance decision-making around contractor selection.
- **Deploy technology** to collect valuable input from residents, improve government operations & increase NYCHA resident satisfaction.

Recommendations:

1. Provide NYCHA residents with an opportunity to rate their vendors with a Yelp-like vendor evaluation tool.
2. Launch a public and accessible, real-time Vendor Scorecard based on those resident ratings of contractor performance to aggregate resident ratings and inform NYCHA’s vendor selection process.
3. Conduct robust resident engagement to ensure NYCHA tenants are aware of and use the vendor feedback system.
4. Implement corrective actions plans and other increased oversight mechanisms for poorly performing contractors.

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5. Train staff to consider resident feedback in their contractor selection process and integrate the scorecard into NYCHA’s operational culture.

Background

NYCHA is home to approximately 1 in 17 New Yorkers and currently serves over 520,000 low- and moderate-income residents across 335 developments.⁵ As austerity from the federal government persists, many NYCHA developments have not had capital improvements in decades. Repairs have become increasingly difficult and expensive as buildings continue to deteriorate. To address repair and maintenance needs across the portfolio, the public authority uses both in-house staff as well as a vast network of contractors that the agency procures for more specialized skillsets.

The procurement process for repair and maintenance contracts falls under three general categories depending on the cost and type of contract: sealed bids, small purchase, and micro-purchase. As per NYCHA’s Procurement Policy Manual, sealed bids and small purchases require a competitive process that go through a centralized approval process, whereas vendors for micro-purchases can be selected by development-level Property Managers and Superintendents for greater speed and flexibility to address minor development needs.⁶

Procurement Method	Contract Cost	Process
Sealed Bids	\$50,000 or more	Must receive bids from multiple vendors to ensure a competitive process and must be awarded to the lowest bidder who is responsible and responsive
Small Purchases	Between \$10,000 and \$50,000	Must receive at least three bids and undergo a selection process to determine the lowest bid
Micro Purchases	Under \$10,000	No bids required; Property managers and superintendents can make independent decisions

In Fiscal Year 2024, the agency spent \$413.5 million on contract services, a third of which (\$135.6 million) was paid to vendors for repair and maintenance work through micro and small purchases – a substantial annual expense that warrants sharper oversight. NYCHA’s independent Federal Monitor report in 2019 cited significant complaints from residents and NYCHA Trade Staff who noted that vendor repair work is often subpar, with little supervision or assessments based on any standardized criteria once the work is complete.⁷ As a result, poorly performing vendors are able to continue a pattern of poor performance without consequence.

Resident trust in NYCHA’s quality and oversight of repairs was further eroded when the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI) uncovered significant corruption through no-bid micro-purchase contracts between 2019 and 2021. In September 2021, DOI issued five

recommendations to prevent further corruption, most of which NYCHA rejected.⁸ However, in February 2024, impropriety over vendor selection came under more intensified scrutiny after the Southern District of New York (SDNY) charged 70 NYCHA employees on bribery and extortion charges for receiving \$2 million in bribes in exchange for \$13 million worth of contracts for repairs on NYCHA buildings. The investigation found that across almost 100 developments, NYCHA supervisors and staff were able to award multiple micro-purchases, which does not require a competitive bidding process, for a cut of the contract value.⁹

In response to the charges, DOI issued 14 recommendations (some of which were the same as those previously rejected by NYCHA) to improve the micro-purchase procurement process. The recommendations include shifting responsibility for micro-purchases from development staff to specialized centralized staff with an expedient approval process, creating a fixed price list for different types of work orders, creating a Pre-Qualified List (PQL) of micro-purchase vendors that must undergo an integrity review, and additional enhancements to anti-corruption training.¹⁰

NYCHA's Improved Vendor Oversight

Over the last eight months, NYCHA has made strides to implement the recommendations issued by DOI in February of 2024. Those specific actions include contracting with Dun and Bradstreet, a private firm that specializes in data analytics, to improve the agency's overall data analytics capacity and to develop a process for integrity screening. NYCHA has also increased training for property managers on micro-purchases and ethics, increased on-site monitoring with newly created Compliance and Quality Assurance teams, created a new performance management unit, and developed a pre-qualified list of vendors. The agency is in the process of implementing a shift in micro-purchase approval processes through a centralized, specialized staff and developing a standard cost schedule to more easily flag deviations.¹¹

NYCHA has also implemented a key organizational change through the Neighborhood Model laid out in the Blueprint for Change.¹² The new operating model created 29 "neighborhoods" of 4,000 – 8,000 units. Each neighborhood has a "Neighborhood Administrator" that has decision-making authority and control of resources to deliver services and ensure compliances across developments alongside Property Managers.¹³ Neighborhood Administrators also oversee Neighborhood Planners and Neighborhood Contract Managers. Neighborhood Planners ensure proper sequencing and scheduling of skilled trades work to address critical repairs as efficiently as possible. Neighborhood Contract Managers review contractor payments, manage communications with vendors when they do not perform adequately, and provide quality assurance oversight and documentation.¹⁴ These newly created positions meet regularly with Property Managers and the Tenant Association to provide closer oversight over day-to-day development operations.

While these changes are encouraging, as Council Member Althea Stevens flagged in a February 2024 hearing, the voices of NYCHA residents are missing from the process.¹⁵ Many Council Members inquired about how technology can be better used for tracking the work of vendors. This report aims to leverage opportunities for resident participation through technological

innovation. Recent investigations have showed what many NYCHA residents have known to be true for decades – that NYCHA needs greater transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the alarms that residents ring about repair and maintenance issues in their homes.

Participatory Audit Process

In the summer of 2022, the New York City Comptroller’s office began a “resident-powered audit process” to hear directly from NYCHA residents about the most pressing issues in their developments and ensure the NYC Comptroller’s oversight of NYCHA is guided by residents. Staff from the Office of the Comptroller collected nearly 800 surveys across the city in 5 languages from 132 developments.¹⁶ Many questions or comments left on the surveys referenced challenges with repairs, such as:

- “Why aren’t the repairs done on time?”
- “Why is a maintenance ticket closed when work is not completed?”
- “We need a grading scale on the property maintenance to be posted online so the public can see how well the staff is working.”

Across surveys and town halls at multiple developments, a recurring theme was the need to improve the quality of vendor performance and selection. Following the Office of the Comptroller’s formation of a NYCHA Resident Audit Committee, the committee voted to focus on NYCHA’s process for selecting and monitoring contractors hired for repairs and maintenance as one of two audits of the agency after being presented with multiple options.

General Audit Findings

The audit examined the adequacy of NYCHA’s process for selecting and monitoring contractors for repairs and maintenance work through resident surveys and sample-based reviews of purchase orders. The audit identified the following issues and gaps in vendor oversight:

- 30% of residents rated the work performed by contractors as “poor” and less than half rated the work performed as “good” or better (“very good” or “excellent”).
- 27% of a sample of small purchases did not have evidence of work performed either because field observations and resident statements indicated work had not been completed in a satisfactory manner, or documentation from NYCHA was insufficient.
- Inconsistencies in evaluations with some contractors not being evaluated every year as required, or evaluations lacking details supporting the basis for the ratings.
- A lack of independent monitoring and internal controls of micro and small purchases.
- Insufficient opportunities for resident feedback on vendor performance, as detailed in the following section.

Audit Findings on Resident Feedback

NYCHA's procurement policies allow the agency to consider a vendor's record of past performance when making contract determinations, but as the audit highlights, current feedback mechanisms are insufficient. After a work order is complete, a NYCHA employee requests residents to sign a hard copy work order. However, the audit found that NYCHA staff are often not getting resident signatures on completed work orders and do not have a system that tracks resident satisfaction with repairs, beyond an acknowledgment that the work was completed. Only 62% of respondents to the auditors' survey stated they were asked to sign a document certifying that the work was completed and 93% said they were never asked by NYCHA to rate their satisfaction with work performed in their apartments. NYCHA performs general resident satisfaction surveys, but they are not for specific work orders.

NYCHA officials noted that residents can go to the Customer Contact Center (CCC) or Property Management Office for complaints, but it is unclear to both residents and the Office of the Comptroller how these complaints are reviewed or incorporated into the evaluation of vendors. Unlike many other agencies, NYCHA does not enter contractor performance evaluations to be made public through the City's public procurement system called Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (PASSPort), operated by the Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS), so residents cannot easily see the considerations that determined selection. NYCHA has however, recently implemented a process change by which all NYCHA vendors, regardless of the amount of business done with the City, must be enrolled in PASSPort prior to working with NYCHA.

Through this welcomed policy change, NYCHA will have the technology platform to subject its vendors to the filing of certified disclosures that must be considered before awarding of any contract and the ability to work with MOCS so that vendor performance evaluations can be entered and made publicly available. Although NYCHA officials stated that vendors who conduct unsatisfactory work will not be rehired in the future, the agency does not have a formal rating system or repository to collect independent evaluations for micro and small purchase vendors. This is particularly alarming in light of the fact that while individual purchase orders might be at low dollar values, it is conceivable that NYCHA's repetitive use of vendors for these small dollar purchase orders allow for higher amounts to be allocated to the same vendors.

In 2015, NYCHA made notable technological advancements by launching the MyNYCHA mobile app, which allows residents to digitally request and track the status of work orders. While this is a helpful innovation, the app does not allow the agency to track or aggregate residents' comments on individual work orders for the purpose of evaluating vendors. In an audit of NYCHA's repair practices conducted that year, officials noted that a goal of the app was to include features such as resident satisfaction surveys for "streamlined, real-time insight into customer satisfaction at higher response rates than previous surveys."¹⁷ While NYCHA has upgraded and improved the app since its initial launch, residents are still unable to provide meaningful feedback on specific contractors. One of the key recommendations of the audit is that NYCHA should

develop a mechanism for soliciting and tracking resident feedback on maintenance work performed.

Role and Impact of Resident Voice

No one knows or cares about their home more than the individual or family that lives there. Incorporating feedback from residents on the quality of repairs is invaluable data that can help a property management company make more informed decisions on vendor selection and ultimately save money by hiring only high performing companies with proven track records. Growing research has also shown that an individual's sense of control over their circumstances allows them to mitigate stress in adversarial situations and is critical to economic mobility and a tenant's overall well-being.¹⁸ Resident engagement is especially critical in the context of racial equity, as communities of color have historically been disenfranchised and excluded from positions of power and decision-making. In 2022, 88% of NYCHA households were Black or Hispanic.¹⁹

Public Housing authorities, non-profit, and for-profit property owners around the globe are increasingly embracing resident engagement as a central tenet of effective property management. Public housing authorities in the United Kingdom have a well-established culture of resident scrutiny "as a way for residents to participate in the continuous improvement of property management."²⁰ The Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF), a collaborative of nonprofits dedicated to creating affordable, healthy, and connected homes, highlight the importance of residents exercising agency and voicing their opinions in their overall well-being. In the private market, property owners are also embracing minimum standards for creating user-friendly processes for reporting and tracking maintenance and repair issues.²¹ NYCHA's infrastructure must be strengthened to amplify resident voices and power imbalances must be shifted so that residents can work with the agency toward meaningful change.

Technology and Resident Engagement

Technology plays a critical role in enhancing government operations and is increasingly used by governments to reach and empower broader populations, strengthen community engagement practices, and deliver services more effectively. By applying civic technology tools to participatory property management, NYCHA can strengthen the feedback loop between residents and City agencies. Many multifamily affordable housing providers are integrating resident feedback into their management practices in innovative ways that leverage the power of digital technology:

- **WhoseYourLandlord:** The platform "WhoseYourLandlord" (WYL) is a mechanism for tenants to provide public, online feedback to their property manager. WYL's goal is to provide greater accountability and transparency in building management by turning public insights into action plans for property owners. WYL uses multilingual communications to send emails, texts, QR codes, and paper surveys to residents to identify challenges and communicate them to property managers. The platform then uses

machine learning to analyze feedback and produce insights for housing providers to improve property conditions and services.²²

- **Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc:** In New York City, a common challenge for tenants facing chronic underheating during the heat season (October 1– May 31) is having clear data providing inadequate conditions to hold the landlord accountable. To confront this issue, Heat Seek and JustFix.nyc developed a web-connected temperature sensor that helps tenants and organizers collect actionable data. To accompany the sensors, JustFix.nyc developed an SMS-based tool that tenants can use to connect with additional housing resources.²³ These tools and real-time data enables residents to clearly demonstrate the issue to the building’s management, use the data to initiate a Housing Part action in housing court, or file for a rent reduction.
- **Hyde Housing Association:** The Hyde Housing Association is a UK-based affordable housing operator that manages the homes of over 100,000 residents. Hyde residents play a role in influencing which contractors are selected for work in their homes and how the work is done as part of a broader “Customer Involvement Strategy.”²⁴ Some strategies rely on technology such as the use of surveys, polls, online trainings and webinars that empower residents to have voice in the contractor selection process. Residents are then provided the opportunity to engage in site visits with a potential contractor, shape interview questions, and directly score bids.²⁵

In addition to the MyNYCHA app, NYCHA has made some improvements to its technological capacity to both connect with residents and track repair issues. The Performance Tracking and Analytics Department (PTAD) within NYCHA maintains comprehensive data to support strategic decision-making and facilitate monthly “NYCHA STAT” meetings to conduct data-driven reviews.²⁶ In partnership with the Federal Monitor, NYCHA created improved dashboards that Quality Assurance teams can use for quick, simple, and organized data including the frequency of repairs that don’t meet applicable standards.²⁷ Though NYCHA is building out significant infrastructure for analytics that presents opportunities for resident engagement, the agency has not yet integrated opportunities for residents to provide direct feedback in that infrastructure.

Recommendations

The average NYCHA public housing resident’s tenure is 25.4 years, so many public housing residents have years of first-hand insight into the deficiencies of NYCHA’s maintenance processes over the last several decades. While that information may anecdotally influence decisions that the agency is making, no data is being created or tracked from that rich experience to systematically affect decision-making. The following recommendations would provide residents with voice in the vendor oversight and selection process to improve accountability, increase resident satisfaction, promote transparency, and deploy technology to increase participation and improve resident trust.

Provide NYCHA Residents with an Opportunity to Rate their Vendors

The audit found that just 7% of survey respondents were asked by NYCHA to rate their satisfaction with work performed in their apartments. NYCHA's failure to ask residents directly about the quality of work being performed in their unit represents a huge missed opportunity for the kind of vendor oversight the authority desperately needs. To help rein in corruption, improve vendor oversight and performance, and increase resident satisfaction, NYCHA should immediately:

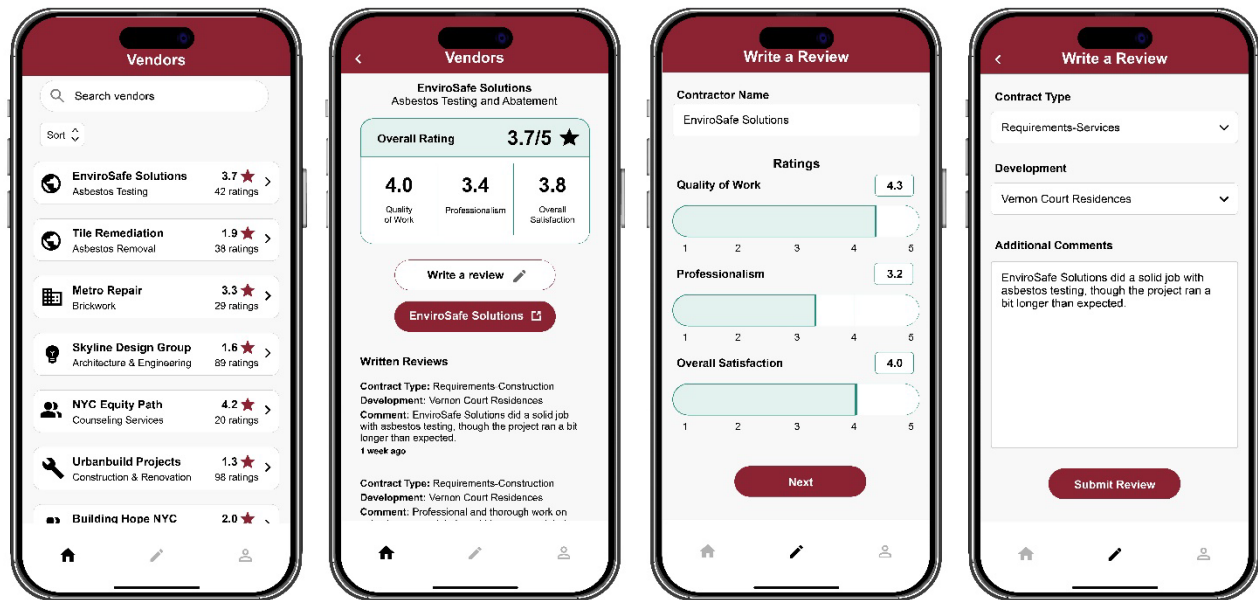
- Create an easy-to-use, accessible, and multi-lingual Yelp-like contractor evaluation tool that provides NYCHA residents with the opportunity to rate vendors at the completion of every work order and before the vendor gets paid.
- Enable residents to see all contractor reviews for individual work orders to increase transparency around the vendor's performance history.
- Integrate evaluations with the work order certification process so that residents are immediately prompted to answer multi-lingual evaluation questions on specific work orders once it is certified.
- Provide vendors with the opportunity to respond to individual evaluations (similar to Yelp), to enable the vendor to redeploy teams to complete unfinished or unsatisfactory work and request updated evaluations from residents where contractors provided satisfactory repairs.

Launch a Real-Time Vendor Scorecard

In addition to enabling residents to see individual reviews on contractors, NYCHA should systematically aggregate ratings provided by NYCHA residents to develop a real-time Vendor Scorecard system which would:

- Aggregate and automatically update key performance indicators including completion rates of repair and maintenance work, timeliness, and overall resident satisfaction.
- Support NYCHA staff in making data-driven decisions regarding which vendors will be selected for repairs and maintenance and avoid selecting a vendor with a proven history of unsatisfactory performance.

Sample Real-Time Vendor Scorecard



Depending on technological and procurement capacity at NYCHA, this can be either integrated into a relaunch of the MyNYCHA App, integrated into NYCHA's existing Quality Assurance dashboards, or developed through separate website or app.

Conduct Robust Resident Engagement

For an effective digital tool, NYCHA must engage in significant outreach and education to train residents on the Real-Time Vendor Scorecard tool and encourage residents to provide feedback. Recommendations for engaging with residents include:

- Conduct in-person multi-lingual outreach through NYCHA Family Days, Tenant Association meetings, and other development-level events.
- Coordinate with local community partners to support door-knocking efforts.
- Use automatic calls, texts, and mail surveys for residents without digital access.
- Expand the Big Apple Connect program citywide to enable more NYCHA residents to have free and reliable internet access to use online versions of the scorecard."²⁸

Implement Corrective Action Plans and other Increased Oversight for Poorly Performing Vendors

In the participatory audit process, many residents reported that the same contractors are continuously re-hired regardless of lackluster performance. NYCHA's new Pre-Qualified List for

micro-purchases will help ensure higher quality vendors, but does not provide real-time oversight. NYCHA should consistently use resident feedback to trigger corrective action plans to:

- Develop a Vendor Watchlist for contractors that receive consistently poor performance evaluations.
- Require that vendors on the watchlist identify specific steps to remedy issues identified in resident feedback.
- Require the Compliance and Quality Assurance Units to conduct regular audits of poorly performing contractors and post findings publicly.
- Institute a policy that triggers additional inspections and quality assurance checks for contractors that have received consistently poor evaluations.
- Develop a mechanism for vendors to respond to resident feedback to provide context or follow-up support.

Integrate Resident Feedback into NYCHA's Operational Culture to Inform its Planning and Decision-Making

During the procurement process, formal consideration of a contractors' previous work is optional, not mandatory. However, collecting resident feedback, but not having it influence decision-making deepens disengagement and disenfranchises residents. It creates a sense of shouting into a void as comments go into a "black box" and remain unaddressed. The NYCHA Vendor Scorecard is only meaningful to the extent it is used to influence procurement decisions.

Recommendations for integrating the Vendor Scorecard into NYCHA's operations include:

- Require vendor integrity screenings to consider resident feedback when selecting contractors.
- Train NYCHA's Neighborhood Administrators, Neighborhood Planners, and Neighborhood Contract Teams to incorporate the Vendor Scorecard into their regular meetings with Property Managers and Tenant Associations to proactively resolve issues, ensure the development is responsive to resident needs and concerns, and streamline the timely and high-quality completion of work orders.
- Train Quality Assurance and Compliance teams on how to review the Vendor Scorecard to cross-check poorly rated vendors with staff-level evaluations and other resident complaints.
- Integrate the Vendor Scorecard into other data analytics platforms such as NYCHA Stat and Quality Assurance dashboards that are regularly reviewed by NYCHA leadership.

Given the years of deferred maintenance at many NYCHA developments, vendor performance may relate to persistent issues in building systems. Examining the performance of a vendor across developments could help determine if dissatisfaction relates more to the age of the development or additional factors other than the quality of their repairs. NYCHA must develop a process to weigh these various factors and perform analytics that fairly take them into account. NYCHA should do a deeper examination of best survey practices and assessment of key indicators to guide their small purchase selection of contractors.

Conclusion

The New York City Housing Authority must strengthen its oversight mechanisms for residents who have been beleaguered by decades of disinvestment and a lack of oversight. NYCHA residents are the experts of day-to-day life in their development, but do not have systematized ways to translate their concerns about contractors into changes at the policy and procurement levels. Creating and implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, including a Real-Time Vendor Scorecard, would provide greater accountability, transparency, and effectiveness to property management for thousands of New Yorkers across the city.

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