

UNLOCK NYC

ANNUAL IMPACT

REPORT 2024



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Unlock NYC team members and volunteers gather at the FY2024 Quarter One meeting.

LETTER FROM THE TEAM

Dear Friends,

2024 has been a year of incredible transformation. Together, we've expanded our reach beyond New York City, launching our first pilot in Buffalo and empowering even more tenants to fight housing discrimination and unlock the homes they need and deserve.

This year, we shined a spotlight on evolving challenges with the release of the Denial Tactics Report, a collaboration with the Community Service Society of NY that brought new visibility to the barriers voucher holders face. We also welcomed our largest Leadership Collective cohort yet, equipping tenant leaders to amplify their voices, challenge inequities, and drive change in their communities.

None of this would be possible without the trust and partnership of the families we serve, our dedicated supporters, and our resilient team. This report highlights the stories, milestones, and impact that define our shared progress toward a future where fair housing is not just a goal, but a reality for all.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in this mission, and for being part of this movement. Together, we're unlocking more than housing—we're unlocking hope, dignity, and opportunity.

With gratitude,

The Unlock NYC Team

OUR VALUES

At Unlock NYC, housing justice begins with centering those closest to the problem.

Every day, tenants across New York face illegal barriers when trying to secure a home with a voucher. At Unlock NYC, we know that real solutions come from the people experiencing these challenges firsthand. Our work is shaped by their voices, their stories, and their courage.

We don't just document the problem—we listen, respond, and act. When tenants use our Rights Recorder web app to stand up against housing discrimination, our community ensures that no one faces this fight alone. By partnering with advocates, legal service providers, and government agencies, we're holding landlords and brokers accountable and creating the change families in New York deserve.

These values guide everything we do:



LISTENING

Your story matters.

We see you—not just your voucher. We listen fully because your experiences shape solutions that work. Real change starts with hearing you.



RELIABILITY

We show up. Every time.

When it feels like no one else is there, we are. We keep showing up, checking in, and standing with you. Tech is the tool, but we're the people behind it, ready to fight for you.



ADVOCATING

You lead the way.

You know what you need better than anyone. We trust your judgment and give you the tools, resources, and support to advocate for yourself and your family.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Justice through action.

We work with legal experts, advocates, and agencies to hold landlords and brokers responsible for their actions. Housing rights are non-negotiable, and we're here to make sure they're enforced.



BELONGING

We've got each other's backs.

At Unlock NYC, you're not alone. You're part of a community that learns together, grows together, and stands strong—because we're stronger together.



CO-CREATION

Built with you, for you.

Our tools are created alongside tenants who've faced housing discrimination. Half of our team has lived this fight firsthand, so we don't just understand the problem—we're building the solutions together.



“ I just want to thank [Head of Outreach] Leslie Meadows for her above and beyond help. And everyone at Unlock NYC. Thank you for advocating for everyday people. I was feeling very hopeless before I found out about your [organization]. I had my voucher for a long time and little to no progress when I was looking on my own. ”

—**Karimah H.**
Rights Recorder user

WHO WE SERVE

Understanding the Families Behind the Numbers

At Unlock NYC, the people we serve are at the core of everything we do. Our tools and programs are designed for those most impacted by housing discrimination—families and individuals navigating homelessness, systemic barriers, and unfair housing practices.

Facing Housing Injustice in New York City

The majority of New Yorkers who use our tools are experiencing homelessness in one form or another:

35% *are staying in shelters.*

23% *are living doubled up with family or friends.*

4% *are surviving on the street.*

These numbers reflect a grim reality in New York City, where nearly 90,000 people sleep in the Department of Homeless Services (dhs) shelter system every night. Behind this statistic are families—70% of whom are parents and children—desperately searching for safe and stable homes.

New York City Department of Homeless Services. (2024). Daily report [PDF]. NYC.gov. Retrieved January 1, 2025, from <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>.

Serving Families, Supporting Mothers

Our work overwhelmingly serves families, and especially single mothers.

67% *of our program participants identify as women.*

60% *have at least one child in their household.*

These figures align with the landscape of homelessness in New York City, where families—led largely by women of color—bear the brunt of housing instability and source of income (soi) discrimination.



Ashley Eberhart, Head of Product, and Hunter Rivera, son of Unlock NYC's Head of Communications, during a team meeting.

Why It Matters

Families experiencing homelessness and housing discrimination are not invisible—they are at the center of the housing crisis. Through our programs, we're helping parents find stability, children thrive, and communities rebuild.

Because when we unlock housing for one family, we're opening doors for many more.

The Disproportionate Burden of Eviction on Black Women," Center for American Progress, accessed February 5, 2025, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-disproportionate-burden-of-eviction-on-black-women/>.

2024 FISCAL YEAR MILESTONE TIMELINE

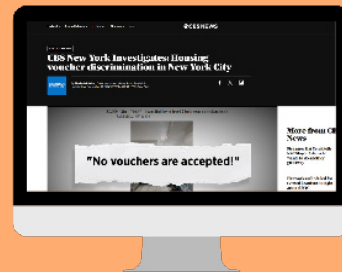
OCTOBER 2023

Serial Discriminators List:
Launched the Serial Discriminators Report to equip tenants with critical information about landlords who repeatedly violate fair housing practices.



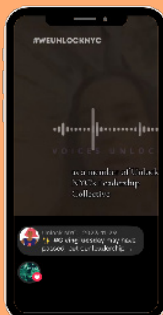
NOVEMBER 2023

CBS News Segment: Featured
featured in a CBS News investigation highlighting our efforts to expose and combat housing voucher discrimination in New York City.



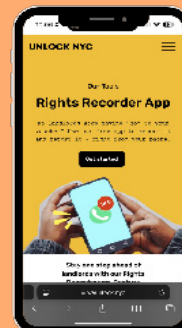
DECEMBER 2023

Voices Unlocked Campaign:
Launched a social media campaign to highlight stories from our Leadership Collective alumni.



JANUARY 2024

Rights Recorder Updates:
Released new features based on user feedback to improve accessibility and usability.



FEBRUARY

Leadership Collective Cohort 5:
Completed our largest cohort yet,
adding five new members to the
alumni network.



MARCH

CCHR Budget Rally: Advocated
for more SOI funding—
secured \$1M annually to triple
the unit's size.



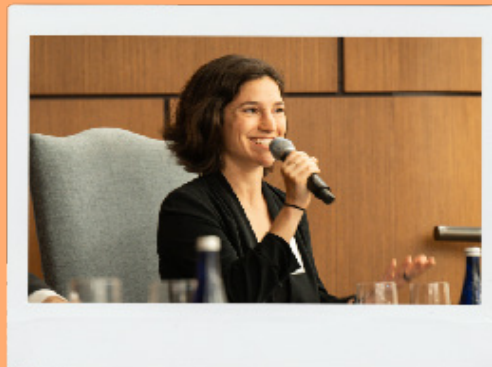
APRIL

DHR Fair Housing Panel: Our Head of
Product, Ashley Eberhart, spoke at the
Division of Human Rights Fair Housing
Panel at the Bronx Zoo: Beyond Brick
and Mortar: Housing Equity & Inclusion.



MAY

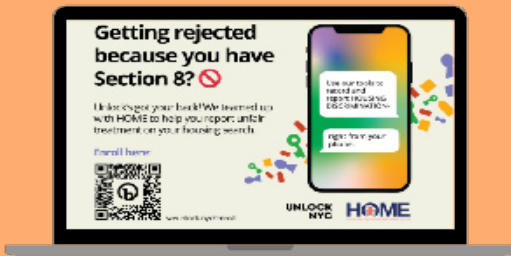
NYU Furman Center Panel: Head of
Data & Advocacy, Manon Vergerio, was
a guest speaker at the NYU Furman
Center's State of New York City's Housing
and Neighborhoods event and panel
discussion.



2024 FISCAL YEAR MILESTONE TIMELINE CONT'D

JUNE

Buffalo Pilot Launch: With support from Enterprise and PRRAC, we launched a six-month pilot in partnership with Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) to expand the Rights Recorder App in Buffalo, NY.



JULY

HUD Listening Lab: Head of Data & Advocacy, Manon Vergerio, spoke at HUD's Fair Housing Policy Listening Lab.



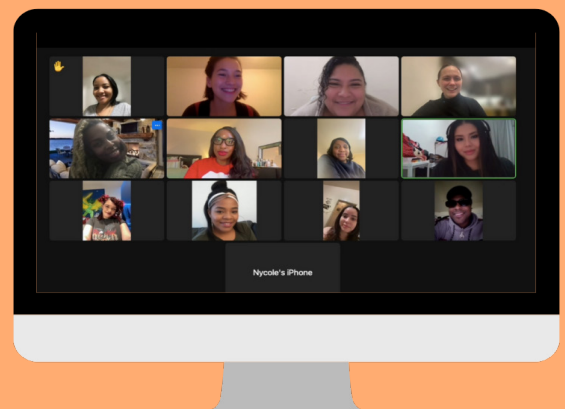
AUGUST

Denial Tactics Report: Released with CSSNY, exposing emerging discriminatory practices in NYC's housing market.



SEPTEMBER

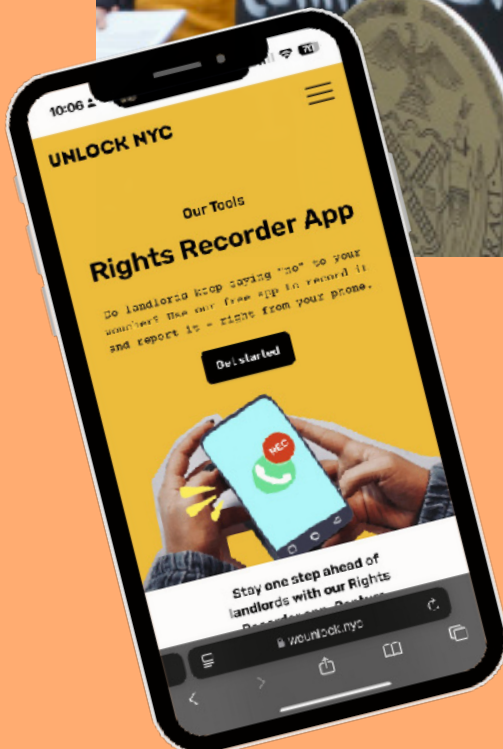
Leadership Collective Cohort 6: Launched Cohort 6 of our Leadership Collective.



UNLOCK NYC



Leadership Collective Cohort 4 Alumni Nailah Abdul-Mudbi speaks at the CCHR Budget Rally, advocating for New York tenants.



“Unlock NYC has improved my understanding of housing rights by showing me that many of the places I was applying to were discriminating against me. They also helped me see that there are other options out there and encouraged me not to give up.”

—**Diara W.,**

Rights Recorder user



INDIVIDUAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

From Discrimination to Keys: Fighting for Fair Housing

In New York City, over 100,000 households—most of them families with children—face the harsh realities of homelessness. For these families, rental assistance vouchers offer more than just housing; they offer hope for stability, safety, and opportunity. Yet, illegal source of income (SOI) discrimination by landlords and brokers undermines this lifeline, keeping families trapped in cycles of homelessness.

- Shelter stays are extended.
- Families are excluded from neighborhoods with better schools and economic opportunities.
- Physical and mental health deteriorates under prolonged housing instability.

This form of discrimination is not just illegal—it's devastating.

"Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City," Coalition for the Homeless, accessed February 5, 2025, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>.

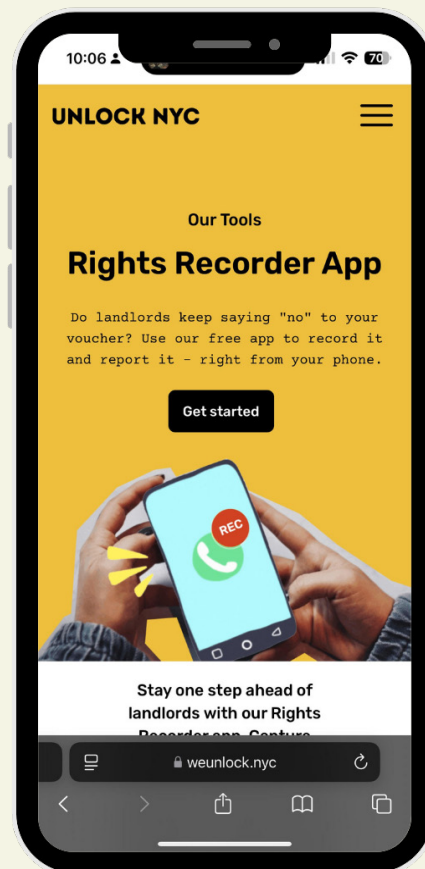
How We Fight Back

The Individual Justice Program equips tenants with the tools to document and address source of income (SOI) discrimination.

At the center of this program is Rights Recorder, a free, mobile-based chatbot launched in 2021. Available 24/7, it supports low-income New Yorkers to:

- Record phone calls and document illegal denials by landlords.
- Connect with legal services and government agencies to assert their rights.
- Access 1-on-1 coaching consultations for personalized support.

Designed for accessibility, Rights Recorder ensures tenants can take action anytime, anywhere, creating a clear path to accountability.



The Rights Recorder chatbot page, where tenants document instances of housing discrimination.

INDIVIDUAL JUSTICE PROGRAM CONT.

2024 Impact

This year, we helped hundreds of tenants take action:

309 new users enrolled in the Rights Recorder platform.

906 reports submitted documenting illegal housing denials.

67% of reports matched to legal service providers for follow-up action.

Buffalo Pilot Launch: Expanded our services to upstate New York, opening pathways to justice in new communities.

7,000+ educational booklets distributed to equip tenants with knowledge of their rights.

“Unlock NYC offers both a reporting option and a recording option, which are essential tools that individuals like myself need to have available.”

—**Brittany M.**
Rights Recorder user

Why This Matters

We design tools to fight housing discrimination and empower tenants.

Through the Individual Justice Program, we:

- Break cycles of homelessness by helping families move from shelters into stable homes.
- Hold landlords accountable with clear, documented evidence that drives enforcement.
- Open doors to opportunity by ensuring access to neighborhoods with better schools, jobs, and resources.



SYSTEMS CHANGE PROGRAM

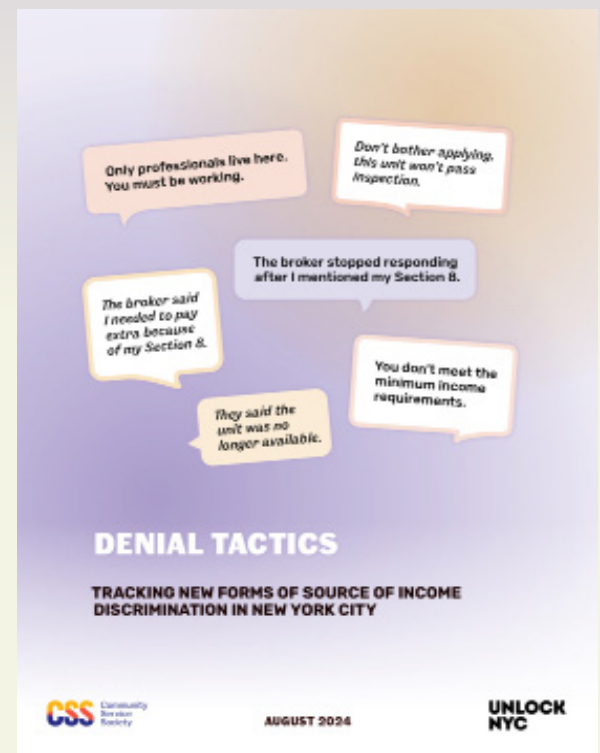
Exposing Housing Injustice: New Tactics That Keep Voucher Holders Locked Out

At Unlock NYC, we use data-driven insights to hold systems accountable and confront housing discrimination that disproportionately harms voucher holders.

Through over 2,800 reports submitted via our Rights Recorder tool, we've built a unique dataset that uncovers patterns of source of income (SOI) discrimination across New York City. This evidence fuels fair housing investigations, shapes policy reforms, and powers campaigns that demand systemic change.

In 2024, we partnered with the Community Service Society of New York (CSSNY) to publish "Denial Tactics: Tracking New Forms of Source of Income Discrimination in New York City."

This report revealed the sophisticated tactics landlords and brokers use to deny housing to voucher holders, underscoring the urgent need for stronger enforcement.



In collaboration with CSS, we launched the Denial Tactics report, highlighting emerging discriminatory practices in NYC.

Report Highlights:

– Corporate Landlords as Key Offenders:

Corporate landlords—those managing portfolios of 20 to 60 buildings, and especially those with 61+ properties—emerged as the primary drivers of SOI discrimination.

– Diversified Discriminatory Tactics:

We cataloged over 20 different tactics used to deny voucher holders housing. The most alarming include:

- Exclusionary Credit Requirements: Setting high credit score barriers to exclude tenants unfairly.
- Scams Preying on Desperation: Exploiting the urgency and vulnerability of tenants.
- Steering Voucher Holders: Directing them away from desirable neighborhoods.

– Layers of Discrimination:

SOI discrimination doesn't stand alone—it often intersects with race, gender, and other protected characteristics, worsening housing inequities.

SYSTEMS CHANGE PROGRAMS CONT.

Impact in 2024:

9,300+ views and downloads of our research, signaling widespread engagement.

11,900+ social media impressions from the Denial Tactics launch, amplifying tenant voices.

9 press features, including CBS New York and Brick Underground, pushing this issue into the spotlight.

We use data to catalyze change. By collaborating with researchers, journalists, organizers, and policymakers, we:

- Shift the narrative around homelessness from stigma to systemic accountability.
- Turn discrimination trends into actionable fair housing enforcement and policy solutions.
- Amplify tenant stories to drive real, measurable change in the fight for housing justice.

“ Thank you @weunlocknyc and @CSSNYorg for shedding light on the rampant discrimination that denies housing to voucher holders. ”

—Brad Lander
NYC Comptroller



Unlock NYC supporters rallying for more SOI funding at the CCHR Budget Rally

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Empowering Leaders, Amplifying Voices, Unlocking Futures

For many voucher holders, housing insecurity creates impossible choices. The search for stable housing often takes priority over their careers, resulting in job loss and significant gaps in professional experience. These challenges make it harder to achieve long-term stability, limiting opportunities for growth and leadership.

Unlock NYC's Leadership Development Program bridges these gaps by transforming lived experience into leadership opportunities. At its core is the Leadership Collective (LC), a six-month cohort designed for New Yorkers who have faced housing discrimination, eviction, or homelessness. The program provides:

- **Workforce Development:** Practical skills to prepare participants for job reentry.
- **Hands-On Nonprofit Experience:** Opportunities to gain real-world skills and confidence.
- **Advocacy Training:** Tools to amplify tenant voices and fight for fair housing.

By equipping participants with skills, confidence, and opportunities, the program unlocks pathways to housing stability, leadership, and financial independence.



Leadership Collective Cohort 5 members Sterling Cash, Enilda Castillo, and Julian Jorge at their graduation.

2024 Impact

This year, Unlock NYC's Leadership Development Program achieved its biggest milestones yet.

- Our Largest Cohort Yet:

Six new members completed the Leadership Collective, growing our community of tenant leaders.

- Alumni in Action:

Three graduates applied their skills through summer capstone internships, turning knowledge into real-world advocacy.

- High-Profile Moments:

LC members raised their voices at influential platforms, including:

- NYC City Council Hearings
- Fordham Law School
- Fair Housing Workshops

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CONT.

Why This Matters

Through the Leadership Development Program, we:

- ♦ Elevate leaders: Those closest to the problem are now driving solutions for housing justice.
- ♦ Bridge professional gaps: Participants gain skills and experience to rebuild their careers.
- ♦ Amplify voices: Tenant leaders bring their stories and expertise to the forefront, pushing for systemic change.





“ I know I’ll never forget this stepping stone in my life, and I appreciate you guys for bringing me on, celebrating me, and making me feel seen, heard, but most importantly, loved. ”

— **Enilda Castillo.**
COHORT 5 MEMBER

WHERE YOUR SUPPORT GOES

Your support drives Unlock NYC's mission to combat housing discrimination and create pathways to housing justice. With the generous support of funders such as Trinity Church Wall Street Philanthropies, Robin Hood Foundation, The Oak Foundation, and M&T Bank, we have strengthened our programs and extended our reach across New York.

To ensure long-term sustainability, we are scaling our model to include an earned revenue contract structure, creating new opportunities for growth and deepening our impact in communities statewide.

As we move into our 2025 fiscal year, we have set a fundraising target of \$1 million. This will enable us to pursue an ambitious expansion plan within NYC and statewide, including hiring a fifth full-time staff member, while building a 6-month operating reserve to protect our operations in case of emergency. We are proud to welcome new funders, including the New York Community Trust, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and Brooklyn Org, to our 2025 grant portfolio.

M&TBank

 **AK**
FOUNDATION



Leadership Collective Cohort 5 member Nycole Jacques with Manon Vergerio, Head of Data & Advocacy, at the cohort's graduation celebration.

TRINITY CHURCH
WALL STREET

ROBIN  **HOOD**

UNLOCK HOUSING: WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

How You Can Support

Join Us in Making Fair Housing a Reality

Your support powers Unlock NYC's work to combat housing discrimination and expand fair housing opportunities. Here's how you can get involved:

- ◇ Scan to Donate: Every contribution helps families move from shelters to homes and hold landlords accountable.



“ Unlock NYC is doing essential work to support fair housing and combat source-of-income discrimination. I know firsthand how challenging it is to find and rent an apartment in New York City, and I’m fortunate not to face the same barriers many New Yorkers encounter. I’m proud to support Unlock NYC in challenging this discrimination and helping community members fight back against landlords and brokers who are violating the law. ”

— **Layla O’Kane**
DONOR CIRCLE MEMBER

UNLOCK NYC'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Expanding Reach.
Building Leaders.
Driving Change.

We're setting our sights higher than ever. In 2025, Unlock NYC is scaling our impact, growing our programs, and deepening research to ensure that housing justice becomes a reality for all New Yorkers.



Statewide Expansion: Unlocking Housing Access Across New York

We've proven that Rights Recorder, our 24/7 mobile reporting tool, works for tenants in NYC. Now, we're taking it statewide. By 2026, we will expand our service area to cover 70% of New York State's population, breaking barriers and unlocking housing opportunities for thousands more.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN 2025:

We're building a movement—one that ensures tenants across New York have the power to fight discrimination and secure homes.

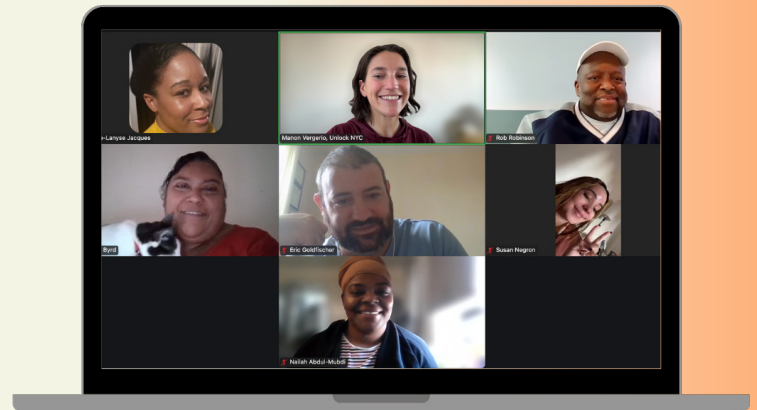
UNLOCK NYC'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE CONT.

Demographics Study: Understanding Who Is Left Behind

In 2025, we're launching a Demographics Study to uncover how source of income (SOI) discrimination intersects with race, gender, and disability.

WHAT WE'RE FOCUSED ON:

- ◇ Black women and women of color
- ◇ Elderly individuals
- ◇ People with disabilities



PAR Committee kicks off community-led research.

HOW WE'RE LEADING WITH COMMUNITY:

We're recruited five Leadership Collective alumni to form a Participatory Research Committee. These alumni will guide the research process, ensuring it reflects the voices and priorities of those most affected. This study will drive deeper understanding and stronger advocacy to address inequities and demand lasting change.

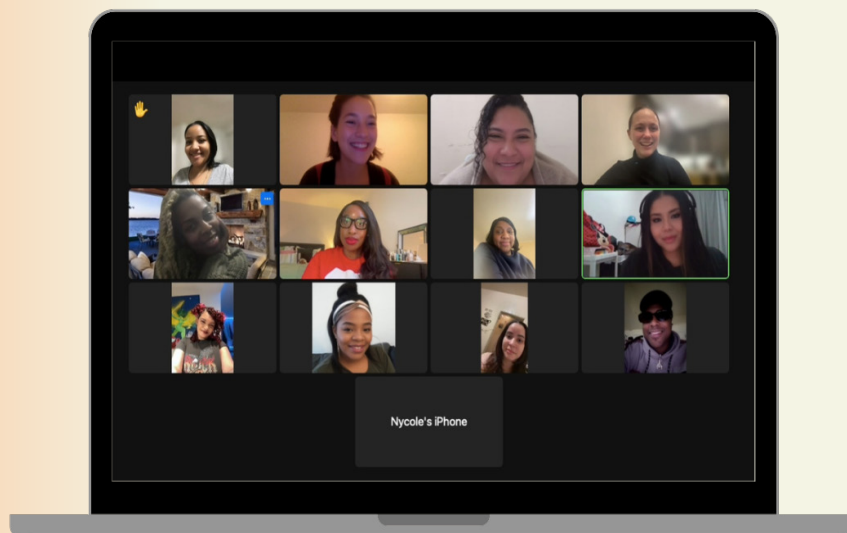
Leadership Development: Building the Next Generation of Advocates

At Unlock NYC, we believe leadership starts with lived experience. Our Leadership Development Program is growing to ensure more voucher holders can step up, share their stories, and lead the fight for fair housing.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2025:

- ◇ 6th Leadership Collective Cohort: Recruit a new group of tenant leaders ready to take action.
- ◇ Summer Internships: Host an 8-week paid internship for graduating cohort members to gain skills, build experience, and amplify their advocacy.
- ◇ Deepen Alumni Engagement:
Offer new paid and unpaid opportunities for alumni to contribute to Unlock NYC's mission and shape our programs.

Leadership Collective Cohort 5 members and Unlock NYC staff during a monthly virtual session.





“ I believe my rental process would be unable to move forward without [Unlock NYC]. They play a key role while I am struggling in searching for a home. Because of their support, I feel much more confident to stand up for my rights. I am so grateful to get their assistance. Thank you Unlock NYC. ”

— **Winnie Tam**

DONOR CIRCLE MEMBER

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