



Office of the Chief  
Administrative Officer

# Modernizing Philadelphia Municipal Government

2016 - 2023



Office of the  
Chief Administrative Officer

December 2023



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## Introduction to the CAO

The Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) works to modernize city government and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of City services. The CAO oversees six City departments and offices: the Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT), Records, Procurement, the Office of Administrative Review, the Office of Talent & Employee Success (OTES), and the Service Design Studio (SDS). The CAO also works closely with the Office of Human Resources (OHR).

## History of the CAO

The Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) was formed in 2016 by [Executive Order](#) to promote efficiency and effectiveness within City government. Specifically, CAO was responsible for supervising internal administrative departments such as the Procurement Department and the Office of Innovation and Technology. More broadly, CAO was tasked with considering the inner workings of government to ensure the departments providing services to the public are properly supported – including hiring, procurement of goods and services, technology, data analytics, and work process improvements. Three people have served as Philadelphia's Chief Administrative Officer: Rebecca Rhynhart (2016), Christine Derenick-Lopez (2016-2019), and Stephanie Tipton (2019-present).

During the Kenney Administration, the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer has demonstrated how a central office focused on internal administrative functions can improve the outward performance of government to better serve residents.

Over the past 8 years, CAO's leadership has made a mark on the City of Philadelphia as an organization in 3 big ways:

**1**

Driving enhancements to HR practices and employee-focused policy

**2**

Partnering with City departments to implement business process improvements and projects that transform operations

**3**

Strengthening internal administration



**PILLAR 1:  
Investing in Our Workforce, HR  
Practices and Employee-Focused  
Policy**

## THE OFFICE OF TALENT & EMPLOYEE SUCCESS: **Exempt Recruitment, Hiring, and Professional Development**

In 2016, CAO created a special team called Human Resources & Talent (HR&T) to build out recruitment, hiring, and professional development practices for exempt staff citywide. That office has since grown the size of its team, and in 2023 was renamed the Office of Talent & Employee Success (OTES).

INCREASED REPRESENTATION FROM  
NON-WHITE COMMUNITIES BY

**6%**  
in the exempt workforce and

**7%**  
in the executive exempt  
workforce

(exempt employees earning a salary of \$90,000  
or more a year)

### **Diversifying the Exempt Workforce:**

CAO was responsible for developing and implementing a set of guidelines for the exempt hiring process, including requiring diverse interview panels and managing the public posting of exempt positions online. This work was critical to supporting the City's overall workforce diversity strategy, including the focus on diversifying the exempt workforce, which is where the City can exercise the most discretion within the hiring process. According to the City's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, year-to-year there has been a definitive increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of the exempt workforce. In Fiscal Year 2016, the City's exempt workforce was 50% White, 37% Black or African American, 6% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Asian, and 2% Two Races or More. By Fiscal Year 2021, exempt employees were 44% White, 37% Black or African American, 8% Hispanic or Latino, 7% Asian, and 3% Two or More Races.<sup>1</sup> Representation from non-White communities in the executive exempt workforce (exempt employees earning a salary of \$90,000 or more a year) increased by 7% between 2016 and 2022.

Other significant accomplishments of OTES since its formation include:

**Hosted the first-ever City government career fair**, which was attended by over 2,500 people.

**Implemented the citywide Learning Management System (LMS)**, which provides City employees with online access to eLearning materials, enables them to register in instructor-led training classes, and makes it possible to seamlessly track all training events for each employee.

**Managed the Mayor's Internship Program**, which aims to inspire more college graduates to select a career in City government. 250 students have participated since 2016.

**Created exempt employee on-boarding and off-boarding processes**, as well as a special onboarding process for executive hires.

**Launched LEAD Academy**, a six-month emerging leaders program that provides monthly programming to 30-40 participants annually, and **Elevate Leadership Excellence**, a turn-key program which targets first-line managers and incorporates DEI principles throughout the training to assist managers in building a diverse and inclusive culture as part of their leadership goals to create an inclusive workforce.

<sup>1</sup>Workforce Diversity Profile & Annual Report, City of Philadelphia Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, December 2022. Available Online.

## Employee Experience

CAO has consistently led efforts to enhance City policies and practices to protect employees. In 2022, the Service Design Studio led the Employee Protections Project with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI), the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Employee Relations Unit (ERU), and the Office of Human Resources (OHR). The Employee Protections Project aimed to better define the domain of each office, improve collaboration among these offices, and develop a communications plan to clarify their roles with City employees across all levels of government. Building on the success of the Employee Protections Project, the City created a new Office of the Ombudsperson, within the CAO and hired the City's first ever employee Ombudsperson. The Office will provide another resource to employees who may need support from a confidential, impartial party on workplace issues. The Ombudsperson will facilitate a healthy, open, and equitable workplace for all.

In 2023, the CAO piloted the use of a robust surveying tool with exempt employees to understand employee experience and engagement, and trained City leadership to be able to analyze the results. This was the first step toward implementing an annual employee experience survey to the entire workforce. Tools like this enable the City to better gauge employee concerns and sentiments, and enact data-informed actions to improve employee experiences and outcomes. The results of these surveys can help prioritize opportunities to foster a more inclusive organizational culture, improve diversity and representation within the City's workforce, and make hiring, promotion, and retention more equitable.

## Employee Benefits

### SEPTA Key Advantage Public Transit Benefit:

As part of its ongoing efforts to make the City of Philadelphia an employer of choice, in 2023 the City joined other large employers in the region by participating in the SEPTA Key Advantage Program. The Key Advantage program provides free transit to City employees as part of a two-year pilot, and aims to support City employee recruitment and retention efforts, support SEPTA's efforts to improve safety and maintain quality transit services, and further the City's commitment to sustainability. As of December 2023, almost 90% of City departments had at least 50% of eligible employees enrolled in the benefit. A total of 12,629 employees were enrolled, 58% of all eligible employees. **The City of Philadelphia is the first large city in the country to offer a free transit benefit to its workforce and currently has the largest percentage of employees enrolled in the Key Advantage program of any participating employer.**

### Expansion of Paid Parental Leave:

CAO advocated for and helped implement the expansion of paid parental leave to all City employees and subsequently expanding the benefit from 4 to 6 weeks in 2023. Prior to 2021, the parental leave benefit was only available to exempt and non-represented employees.

### Returning to Learning:

The Returning to Learning program empowered CAO to cultivate and expand relationships with various secondary education institutions to offer tuition discounts for City employees and their families. So far, thirteen schools participate in this program.

## SPOTLIGHT: Supporting the City of Philadelphia Through a Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CAO played a critical role in adapting City policies and functions to meet the needs of employees and residents – in particular by developing and standing up policies and resources to support the workforce alongside the implementation of new technology.

First and foremost, in partnership with the Office of Innovation and Technology, the CAO enabled the near overnight transition to virtual work by providing the workforce with equipment, technology, new processes and procedures, and guidance necessary to maintain essential services. This included adopting technology (such as Microsoft Teams) citywide, which allowed for virtual meetings and communication.

The Human Resources & Talent team and PHL Service Design Studio (SDS) created guidance for leaders and staff on remote work and a community engagement coordination tool to align efforts of City agencies to interact with our communities in the context of COVID. Within CAO, SDS also worked with the Tax Review Board and the Office of Innovation and Technology to develop virtual hearings, so petitioners and staff could safely interact with one another, serving as a model for other City agencies responsible for supporting public hearings.

CAO established emergent contracting procedures to be able to quickly procure vital services, supplies, and equipment to support the City's COVID-19 response. In the context of a declaration of emergency, CAO worked with the Procurement and Law Departments to quickly develop processes to get contracts out the door, while still making sure that the City was complying with federal requirements to ensure reimbursement. CAO also protected the City's workforce during an unprecedented crisis by providing resources to promote employee well-being and enacting policies to facilitate social distancing and foster employee health and safety. Finally, CAO supported the COVID-19 recovery and reopening efforts through facilitated cross-departmental needs assessments and service and process re-design.

In 2021, CAO hosted COVID-19 vaccination clinics for employees, through which almost 1,000 employees received the vaccine. CAO also managed the City's vaccine mandate, which went into effect in early 2022. By August 2022, the City had reached nearly 100 percent compliance among the represented workforce of 22,000 employees.





**PILLAR 2:**  
**Providing Transformational  
Technical Assistance to City  
Departments**



Since its formation, the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer has provided direct support and technical assistance to City departments to help them deliver innovative projects with measurable and equitable outcomes.

## Service Design

Early on, CAO's Office of Open Data and Digital Transformation (ODDT)<sup>2</sup> collaborated with GovLabPHL and the University of the Arts to organize a year-long speaker series on how human-centered design could be used to improve City service delivery. In 2017, CAO won a Knight Cities Challenge grant to launch the PHL Participatory Design Lab and two projects to experiment with behavioral science and service design. In 2019, ODDT wrapped up the PHL Participatory Design Lab project with the Office of Homeless Services that designed and implemented trauma-responsive changes to intake services. In 2019, ODDT was dissolved and reorganized into the City's open data, human-centered design, and application development teams to better support and sustain the work in the long-term.

In 2020, CAO created the PHL Service Design Studio (SDS) to support service improvement efforts across City government. Since then, SDS has worked on many projects to improve how the City works. Some examples include:

### **Juvenile Assessment Center and Youth Arrest Reform.**

In 2020, SDS partnered with the Office of Criminal Justice, the Office of the District Attorney, the Philadelphia Police Department, the Mayor's Policy Office, and Dr. Meagan Corrado, a trauma-informed care consultant to document operational decision-making, uncover gaps in the planning process, and propose changes to the youth arrest process.

**Mail-in Ballot Voter Guide:** In preparation for the 2020 general election, SDS collaborated with a coalition of City agencies and community partners to test and develop mail-in voter guides in multiple languages. SDS designed and facilitated usability testing of translated guides in Chinese (simplified), French, Spanish, and Vietnamese in community. Based on the field testing, the team then created an informational ecosystem comprised of both print and digital materials to drive awareness of the guide across multiple communities in Philadelphia.

### **Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit (ECE Toolkit):**

Over the course of three years, SDS collaborated with more than 80 community members and more than 80 City staff from 35 agencies. With the support of the Innovation Fund and the Operations Transformation Fund (OTF), SDS facilitated the process to build and launch the ECE Toolkit website, a repository of guidance, stories, tools, and training on how to center equity in engagement work.

### **Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) Project:**

SDS collaborated with ZBA staff, City leaders, developers, community groups, applicants, and lawyers to improve ZBA staff and applicants' service experiences, help the ZBA better manage the impact of ongoing legislative changes, and improve ZBA's communication with the public and collaborating organizations.

<sup>2</sup>ODDT has since dissolved and reorganized as teams in the Office of Innovation & Technology and the PHL Service Design Studio.

## Operations Transformation Fund

The Operations Transformation Fund (OTF) is a \$10 million investment created in 2021 to fund City projects that reimagine and transform processes to improve government efficiency and better serve Philadelphia residents. To date, the OTF has funded 29 diverse initiatives led by 28 City departments, each working to make City services measurably more efficient and equitable. The first projects began in January of 2022. collectively, 85% of the initial OTF investment was spent by June 30, 2023, the original end date for the program. Many OTF projects have reached full implementation, resulting in transformative outcomes for how the City works and serves the community.

Guided by a commitment to accountability through transparency, CAO created and maintained the OTF Project Dashboard. This public website displays completion status and monthly updates directly from each project team and key performance metrics (to the extent that public metrics are available).

### Bringing Transformative Ideas to

**Life:** CAO provided City departments with project management, budget management, and technical assistance to facilitate a wide range of operational improvements through the OTF projects. Throughout the OTF grant cycles, CAO prioritized projects driven by employees, and offered intensive implementation support for project teams. These two approaches led to transformative, high-impact projects with sustainable outcomes and greater capacity to get things done in City government.

### Examples of OTF Project Impact

**The Office of Emergency Management** pre-translated 468 emergency messages for ReadyPhiladelphia in 10 languages, including American Sign Language. (Alert and Warning Enhancement Project)

**The Free Library** reduced the daily count of backlogged totes at the Regional Operations Center (used to transport library materials between locations) from six hundred to zero. (Library Materials Transit Efficiency Project)

**Philadelphia Parks & Recreation** equipped 20 recreation centers with new computers and internet access, serving a daily average of 255 visitors. (Digital Equity Bridges)

**The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities** completed 666 corrective actions from the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan in 68 City of Philadelphia locations. (ADA Unit)

## Departmental and Enterprise-Wide Change Management

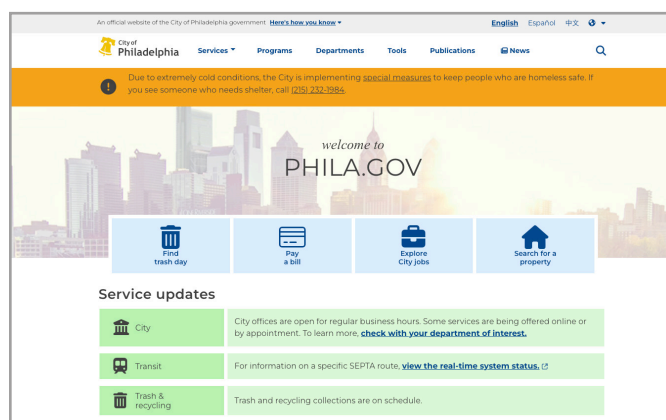
CAO has led numerous business process improvement and change management initiatives within City departments and across the enterprise of City government. For example, CAO launched and led the City's first Parking Amnesty Program in 2018 in partnership with the Philadelphia Parking Authority, City Council, the Sheriff's Office, and the Office of Innovation and Technology. CAO also worked with Fleet, Risk management, the Office of Innovation and Technology, and external vendors to install GPS devices into 702 City vehicles in 2019. Finally, CAO established a Quality Assurance (QA) unit to work with the adjudication offices of the Office of Administrative Review to streamline processes, create quality standards, and provide operational guidance.



**PILLAR 3:**  
**Strengthening Administrative**  
**Functions**

## Phila.gov, the City's Digital Front Door

In 2016, CAO created the Office of Open Data and Digital Transformation (ODDT) to make government data more transparent and to design a more user- and mobile-friendly City website (phila.gov). A beta version of the redesigned site launched that year with a simplified homepage, improved navigation, and an enhanced services section.



### A sustainable modern website for residents:

The new phila.gov website was officially launched in 2018, the result of an internal, multi-year effort to build a modern, accessible website focused on improving the way residents interact with government services. The redesigned site connected residents to more than 300 City services on a single platform, with easy-to-read content and improved usability on mobile devices. The choice to build phila.gov with internal resources made the site more sustainable, with a Digital Services team (previously known as ODDT) available to maintain it and facilitate content updates. This internal capacity model also gave the City the ability to develop other public-facing digital tools in-house rather than through multiple contractor engagements.

**Evolution of the phila.gov team:** In 2019, the teams responsible for building and supporting phila.gov moved into the Office of Innovation and Technology as Digital Services and Software Engineering. These teams consist of content strategists, UX designers, and software developers who work together to ensure the platform is intuitive, reliable, accessible, and secure.

**Digital solutions during COVID-19:** In 2020, with the outbreak of COVID-19, it became even more important that the City had a vehicle for sharing information quickly. Working remotely, the phila.gov team quickly created digital solutions for our department partners, ensuring they could update the public and share COVID data.

**Enhanced translation services:** Throughout 2022 and 2023, the phila.gov team expanded translation services to include nine additional languages on phila.gov, improving the consistency, accuracy, and availability of translated content for multilingual residents. This important work was made possible through support from the Operations Transformation Fund.

As of December 2023, the phila.gov platform has over 150 individual contributors representing more than 100 City departments and agencies that provide over 150 programs and 800 services. The website receives almost 8 million unique pageviews annually.

## The Office of Administrative Review (OAR)

The Office of Administrative Review (OAR), a division of CAO, reviews cases where residents or business owners disagree with a fine, violation notice, tax assessment, or other City of Philadelphia administrative decision. OAR provides an appeal process, administers hearings, and manages the financial aspects of some cases. The Tax Review Board hears taxpayer appeals of all City assessments or bills, except real estate tax assessments and real estate tax principal. The Bureau of Administrative Adjudication handles Philadelphia Parking Authority (PPA) appeals. The Code Violation Unit registers security alarm systems and helps enforce excess false alarm violations, sanitation violations, and other City laws administered with code violation notices (CVNs). The Office of Administrative Review also handles appeal hearings for red light camera violations, speed camera violations, and residential parking spaces for people with disabilities.

**Modernizing Processes:** Since 2016, OAR has modernized its systems to create internal efficiencies, improve the accessibility of hearings, and otherwise enhance residents' experiences engaging with its offices. These efforts resulted in 20-40% reductions in wait times, such as the time between a request for review and the date of a hearing. In 2020, OAR created virtual options for all its hearings, which included updating websites, notices and internal policies to accommodate citizens. Recently, OAR launched ARCS, a new comprehensive and user-friendly case management system to replace a 30-year old system.

## Improving City Contracting and Procurement

CAO has actively pursued a project, legislative and policy agenda to drive improvements in City contracting and procurement processes, to enable Departments to procure what they need more efficiently and to result in better outcomes.

Significant projects and policies advanced by CAO include:

**Launched PHLContracts**, a web-based e-procurement system, that modernized a manual and paper-based bidding process. PHL Contracts created process flow improvements and increased responses to Public Works bids by over 50% in the first year.

**Through the introduction of an e-signature tool** that eliminated paper contracts, as well as improved training and outreach, reduced the average number of days to execute professional services contracts from over 130 days in Fiscal Year 2016 to 88 days in Fiscal Year 2023.

**Participated by invitation in the Living Cities City Accelerator** Cohort on Inclusive Procurement, as well as the Harvard Kennedy School's Government Performance Lab Procurement Excellence Cohort.

**Best Value:** Worked with City Council to pass "Best Value" legislation which allows the City to award contracts based on additional factors besides cost, including past performance, budget, and schedule—ensuring the most value for every dollar spent.

**Released guidelines for contracts over \$1 million** to standardize and improve the requirements related to advertising and awarding the City's largest contract opportunities, including establishing standards for selection committees, and the consideration of minority participation and the impact of a contract on the local economy.

**Partnered with City Council** to pass a change to the Home Rule charter that modernized the City's outdated bidding thresholds and incentivized contracting with local businesses through the Local Business Purchasing Initiative (LBPI). These changes encourage departments to reinvest locally, make contracting more efficient, and improve access to opportunities.

**Launched the Contracts Hub**, which compiles information about contracting and procurement opportunities from multiple websites and displays them in one convenient, searchable list.

**Implemented the Walter P. Lomax Transparency in Business legislation**, first by developing the manual disclosure forms, and later by developing the Contracting Disclosure Portal to streamline the disclosure process, reduce redundancies, and make it easier for vendors and departments to access disclosure information.

**Issued a series of regulations and legislative changes** to Philadelphia Code Section 17-1400 to make it easier for vendors to do business with the City.

## Other City Administrative Functions

**CAO recently launched the Resident Engagement Fund** to enable City departments to compensate residents for their expertise informing City projects, a key equitable community engagement practice.

**Recognizing the potential and risks associated with Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, in partnership with the Office of Innovation and Technology, the CAO drafted the City's first AI Guidelines.

### 2020 Primary and General Elections:

CAO collaborated with City Commissioners to purchase new electronic voting equipment in 2018-2019, which enabled the City Commissioners to roll out the new equipment in the election cycle(s) prior to the 2020 presidential election. CAO also participated in the Election System Steering Committee and provided critical support to the 2020 Primary and General Elections, including supporting a City Commissioners grant to increase capacity for printing mail-in ballots, drop boxes, equipment to count ballots, and developing the mail-In Ballot Voter Guide.

### OPAL:

Sponsored and supported the Optimizing Procurement and Accounting Logistics (OPAL) project to redesign the City's financial, grants, procurement, and supply chain systems and business processes.

OPAL began in 2019 and is scheduled to be deployed the fall of 2025. Primary goals include simplifying and standardizing how the City works, making it easier for vendors to do business with the City; improving financial reporting and regulatory compliance; and delivering an inclusive culture for City employees by providing equal access to data, reports, & systems. An Organizational Change Management team embedded into the project has been carrying out both personnel and operational activities to prepare for this transition.

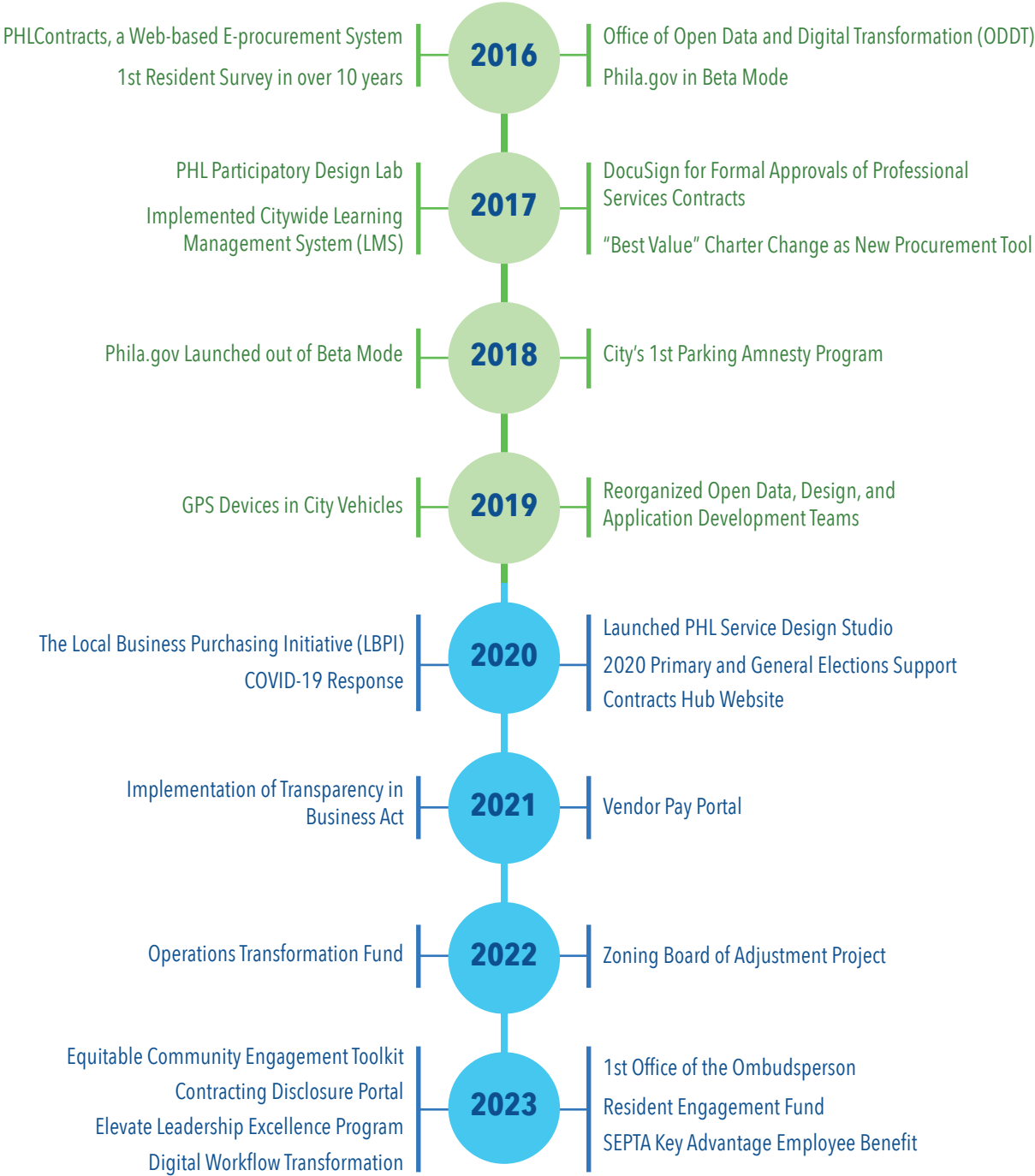
**Piloted the City's first RFP writing tool** to streamline the RFP drafting process which led to a full redesign the Professional Services RFP template to be more user-friendly for City departments and prospective vendors, and drive better outcomes from City contracts.

### Streamlining and Tracking Invoice Payments:

CAO developed and launched the Vendor Pay Portal, which streamlines invoice processing and allows vendors to track payments as well as enroll in or change direct deposits. As of November 2023, the portal had received 35,559 invoice submissions from 3,666 registered vendor accounts since its launch in 2021. As of November 2023, 85% of invoices submitted through the portal were paid within 30 days.

**CAO procured QuickBase software** to develop digital workflows that could transform manual or otherwise inefficient administrative processes by simplifying data collection and introducing a user-friendly backend system to manage and monitor the data inputs. Recently, CAO scaled up this work by formally introducing Digital Workflow Transformation as a tool for City departments, and opening an intake process for requests to develop new applications.

# Chronology of Some of CAO'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2016-2023



# Conclusion

This report is a snapshot of the dozens of initiatives that the City's Office of the Chief Administrative Officer spearheaded between 2016 and 2023, that modernized how the City operates in order to benefit the municipal workforce, residents, and businesses. Many opportunities remain for Philadelphia's city government to continue to improve internal and administrative functions and further scale the impact of the Office of the CAO.