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Customer Service and 311/CRM Technology in Local Governments: Lessons on Connecting with Citizens

Edited by Cory Fleming

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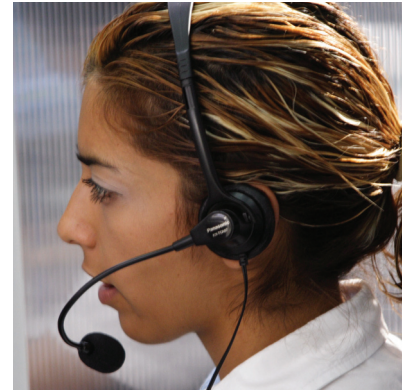
Call 311:

Connecting Citizens to Local Government
Final Report

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Acknowledgements

Terms and Acronyms

For the purposes of this report, 311 and CRM are frequently used in tandem, however, a distinction should be drawn. Citizen relationship management (CRM) systems are software applications that are used to track interactions with citizens on an ongoing basis and allow local governments to manage huge amounts of data and information effectively. 311 systems generally incorporate a CRM system as part of their call center functions. A local government can take advantage of a CRM system to improve customer service without going to a full 311 system.

AGCCE	Association of Government Call Center Employees
ALI	Automatic Location Identification
ANI	Automatic Number Identification
CDOT	Chicago Department of Transportation
COPS	Community-oriented policing services
CRM	Citizen relationship management
CSR	Cave-in Service Request
DWM	Department of Water Management (Chicago)
EMS	Emergency medical services
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office
GIS	Geographic information systems
IVR	Interactive voice response
PIO	Public information office
PUC	Public utilities commission
ROI	Return on investment
SLA	Service level agreement

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

By Cory Fleming, Project Director, ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology

Local governments across the country want to respond efficiently and effectively when their citizens need assistance. Unfortunately, local governments' ability to do so is often hampered by a myriad of access numbers that citizens find difficult to understand and use. Which department is responsible for fixing which problem? Citizens become confused and frustrated when trying to get their local government to work for them. And instead of trying to determine which number to call, citizens often resort to calling 911 with non-emergency matters.—this leaves the 911 system backlogged and overburdened.

In 1996, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserved the use of 311 for national non-emergency use. The 311 non-emergency system allows citizens to access their local government such non-emergency callsissues as loss of water service, stray animals, and potholes. Such a system provides crucial community feedback on the information that citizens most need and want from their local government. The 311 system gives local governments an important opportunity to respond directly to their citizens, but adoption by local governments across the country has been slow. Other related customer service technologies, such as online systems, also offer new potential for local governments to provide improved customer service, but integrating the new technology with existing departmental work-order systems can be troublesome.

With funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) conducted the first-ever national study on 311 and related customer service technology used by local governments in the United States. The study explored how such centralized systems can make it easier and simpler for residents to connect to their local government and thereby improve the local government-citizen relationship. For the purposes of this report, 311 and CRM are frequently used in tandem; however, a distinction should be drawn. Citizen relationship management (CRM) systems are software applications that are used to track interactions with citizens on an ongoing basis and allow local governments to manage huge amounts of data and information effectively. 311 systems generally incorporate a CRM system as part of their call center functions. A local government can take advantage of a CRM system to improve customer service without implementing a full 311 system.

Three major components comprised the study: (1) a national survey of local governments, (2) a series of in-depth case studies of communities with 311 or citizen relationship management (CRM) systems, and (3) a resource list of literature available for researching how to implement a centralized customer service system. Through the national survey of local governments, ICMA collected data on ways that local governments are using 311 systems and other related technologies. The survey explored successful implementation of such systems and how they are being used to respond to citizen needs and build the local government-citizen relationship. Finally, the survey examined potential barriers to implementing the systems.

As noted above, ICMA also undertook a series of in-depth case studies of communities that have adopted 311 systems and related technologies to provide improved customer service. ICMA researchers studied how these technologies have been implemented successfully to respond to citizen needs. ICMA staff and the study's Advisory Committee selected five very different systems in communities large and small across the country:

- City of San Antonio, Texas
- Los Alamos County, New Mexico
- City of Lynwood, California
- City of Minneapolis, Minnesota
- City of Hampton, Virginia

When viewed together, the survey results and findings from the case study research offer a new understanding of the current practices and successful implementation of coordinated systems for customer service. This final report is intended to serve as a reference manual for local governments considering the implementation of a centralized customer service system. Included in the report are recommendations based on findings from both the national survey and the case studies. These recommendations represent what ICMA researchers and study advisors consider critical management practices for obtaining optimum results from a centralized system.

Chapter 2

Study Recommendations

By Cory Fleming, Project Director, ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology; Bryan Barnhouse, Consultant to ICMA; and Tad McGalliard, Senior Project Manager, ICMA

The design and implementation processes for a 311/CRM system are as unique as the communities in which they are located. Based on the ICMA researchers' findings from the national survey on Local Government Customer Service Systems and the in-depth case studies, there is no "one-size-fits-all" design for 311/CRM systems.[1] What works in one local government may not be the best match for the needs of another. Local governments should plan such systems with the needs of the community in mind, based on considerations that include citizen expectations and satisfaction with local government programs and services, organizational structure and culture of the local government, available human expertise and other resources, financial capacity, and local government commitment to customer service and accountability.

ICMA researchers did, however, find a number of commonalities among the 311/CRM systems studied that promote improved operations from both effectiveness and efficiency standpoints. Other local governments can use these study recommendations, detailed below, as a basis for considering how they want their 311/CRM system to operate, what elements or features to include in their system, and what the overall operating philosophy of the system will be.

System Functionality and Major Features

1. The 311/CRM system, when designed with the needs of the community in mind, provides citizens with an easy way to connect with their local government and offers a means to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and services.

Citizens interviewed for the in-depth case studies frequently commented on the ease of using 311 and the time it saved them in getting their questions answered.

The 311 number is easy to remember, simple to use, and generally helps citizens resolve their problems on their first call. Even in technically savvy communities like Los Alamos County, New Mexico, the majority of citizens call (57 percent) or walk into (36 percent) the customer contact center rather than use the online option for contacting local government. The appeal of 311 appears to be the connection to a real person, which serves to reassure citizens that their issues or concerns will be addressed.

For local governments, 311/CRM systems reduce the overall call volume for local government departments, allowing staff to focus on their work with minimal interruptions. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the elections department has found Minneapolis 311 to be especially helpful in reducing incoming calls and easing the overall workload during the hectic times before elections. Minneapolis 311 call center agents take the bulk of the phone calls requesting absentee ballots and other basic questions on voting requirements. This allows the department staff to focus on handling more difficult calls and quickly processing mailings.

Ongoing problems with non-emergency crime issues, such as drugs and prostitution, can erode a community's perception of public safety, especially when the city does not maintain a police department. Although Lynwood, California, contracts with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services, citizens needed a way to report non-emergency, ongoing criminal activity. Since the city established its CRM program, in partnership with a special division of the sheriff's office, citizens have become the eyes and ears on the street to alert law enforcement about community issues. Tracking and investigating criminal activity based on calls and reports from citizens allows local law enforcement to identify patterns in criminal behavior and catch criminals in the act. Lynwood's One Call City Hall program not only brings citizens and their government together to help make the city's streets safer, but allows law enforcement to structure its operations in a timely way that leads to arrests, thus making its services more effective.

2. The foundation of a 311/CRM effort should be a strong desire on the part of local government leadership to make customer satisfaction a priority for their organization.

ICMA's national survey showed that 43 percent of local governments decided to implement such a system as a result of a strong desire to improve local government customer service. This commitment to customer

service needs to be prevalent throughout local government, not just within the 311 call center or department. Several staff members from the Customer Service/311 Department of San Antonio, Texas, observed that for the citizens of San Antonio, 311 does not really work unless their service requests are addressed in a timely manner. However, 311 staff cannot actually go out and fill potholes that citizens report to their center. All local government agencies and departments must be focused on customer service, have the desire to serve their community, and address problems in a prompt and timely manner. In Hampton, Virginia, the city manager's office and the city council are strong supporters and advocates for their 311 call center, because in it they see a manifestation of customer delight, a process of not only meeting but exceeding the citizens' expectations.

Lynwood, a small government with a big desire to take advantage of technology solutions to enhance quality of life, did not originally set out to implement a CRM/service request system. City leadership wanted to increase citizen access in the digital age, which led to rethinking the city's provision of basic services. Pursuing the vision of having every residence wired with interactive cable caused the city to examine new means for delivering on the promise of the city manager's office "...[to] serve the citizens of Lynwood and strive to provide excellent service in an ethical, principled, responsive, and cost-effective manner."[2]

3. Local governments need to first define the goals and objectives of a 311/CRM initiative and then determine what level of investment is necessary for the required features.

In developing its 311 system, San Antonio officials determined that approximately 95 percent of the service requests coming into the city were for one of four major departments: public works, environmental services, code enforcement, and animal control. Consequently, in collaboration with the city's Information Technology and Service Department, the San Antonio Customer Service/311 Department developed an overlay software application and knowledgebase that feeds data from incoming service requests into the existing workorder systems for those four departments. In making this decision, the city saved the expense and staff training time that would have been associated with establishing a new work-order system in those departments. And because the city has the necessary talent in the Information Technology and Service Department, it has

been able to fashion customized reports and develop an executive "dashboard" that provides instant reports with real-time 311 data to elected officials and city executives whenever needed.

In Minneapolis, the city had defined nearly 170 different types of service requests, including non-emergency police reports, for eighteen city departments as of early 2008. Prior to Minneapolis 311, the city did have several small call centers operating within its organization, but there were no links or measurement of the centers at the citywide level. The establishment of a 311 system required the purchase of new telephony hardware and software as well as a CRM system. The city needed better call accounting, call recording, voice mail, skills-based routing, forecasting, and scheduling features to develop the full-service call center it wanted.

When Lynwood began research on a CRM system, city leaders knew the majority of citizens were not then equipped with Internet access. Most used the telephone to contact the city, and some even walked to city hall to make requests and complaints. The city decided that most of its request system investment should involve coordinating back-end, behind-the-scenes functions via e-mail and Web interfaces while promoting to the community a one-call phone number for requests and complaints. The city has also established a Web site to accommodate online requests and hopes that over time more residents will use that method of submitting requests. In 2002, 82 percent of all requests were made by phone, and 0.02 percent were made online. By 2007, 92 percent of requests were by phone, and 5 percent were online. The city intends to track changes in usage over time to help shape future investments in the system.

4. Implementation of a 311/CRM system in the local government organization works best when done in planned phases, with each phase building on work done in earlier phases.

Since San Antonio's 311 call center was first introduced to citizens in 2000, it has continued to add new features and services in planned phases. The department began assisting with situational awareness for the city's Emergency Operations Center in 2001; established service level agreements (SLAs) with partner departments within the local government in 2004; and introduced an executive dashboard to provide real-time data to city council staff, city management, and department employees in 2005. Building the system in phases has ensured that there is

sufficient time to test each new feature and service as it comes online and strengthens the overall program.

The city has made it a practice to carefully study any proposed features and services before beginning implementation. The reason? The San Antonio Customer Service/311 Department has earned high marks for its service among the citizens of San Antonio. These high rankings create an expectation of continued excellence. The city is dedicated to adding new features and services to the system in a way that will maintain or enhance the department's established reputation for high performance.

5. The new 311/CRM system should be viewed as an enterprise being undertaken by the whole local government organization, not a separate department unto itself.

As with any large capital project, coordinating buy-in and participation for a CRM system among different interest groups required Lynwood's leadership to define immediate and long-term benefits for the city, despite some short-term tradeoffs. Reporting to the city manager's office, the assistant city manager and head of the Quality of Life Department introduced the new request management system citywide. They initially encountered resistance from some departments. As part of the system rollout, the city manager challenged departments to deliver the same or a better level of service using the new method. Departmental leaders were tasked with identifying ways to manage staff, resources, communications, and processes within this new system.

In turn, however, the Quality of Life Department promised to relieve each department of the burden of request intake and helped streamline a consistent tracking process for accountability purposes. The department heads came to understand that although requests would be initiated through the Quality of Life Department, each department and its subdivisions were responsible for retooling their service delivery methods and measures using the CRM system. Ultimately, the departments have committed themselves to work with the new system and have adapted their internal processes and procedures so they are integrated with the CRM system.

The start-up of Hampton's 311 call center was led by a project team of staff from different departments. The mandate for the project emerged from the city's organization-wide strategic planning process, which had identified improved customer service as a key out-

come to maintain citizen and business confidence in local government operations and services. To staff the call center, the city decided that the customer advocate positions (call takers) would only be open to current city employees with excellent customer service skills and that the funding for those positions would come from avoided costs, funds that departments would otherwise have spent on call takers inside their division. The buy-in by the departments was not immediate and absolute, but once they were convinced that calls they would normally take were now going to the new call center, their commitment strengthened, and they have remained supportive.

6. To maximize the effectiveness of a 311/CRM initiative, the local government should undergo an extended self-evaluation and re-engineer its processes with an eye toward providing exceptional customer service.

Establishing a 311/CRM system provides local governments an important opportunity to review their processes and procedures in depth, as they need to be documented and recorded in a central knowledgebase for use by customer service agents in responding to citizen calls. This review process can also help with establishing reasonable SLAs, which are a commitment by responding agencies and departments to the length of time they will take to respond to and resolve service requests.

The documentation and review of processes is time consuming, but can help identify duplication of effort, never-ending loops, and potential bottlenecks to achieving SLAs. One of the processes that Minneapolis reengineered was the city's handling of graffiti complaints. Citizens frequently complained about the length of time it took for the city to address graffiti complaints. Under the original process, a complaint would come in and a police report would be filed. The police department would register the complaint and then send it to the appropriate police precinct. From there, an officer would go to the site and take a picture of the graffiti for tracking purposes related to gang activity. The police department would then send the complaint to the department of public works for clean-up. Since graffiti itself is not generally a high priority in police work, a complaint could sit for two to three weeks before an officer photographed the site.

After considerable discussion about the existing process and opportunities for efficiencies, the city opted to send graffiti complaints directly to the

department of public works and provide its employees with digital cameras. Under the new process, when a complaint comes in, the public works employees take pictures of the graffiti and forward the pictures to the appropriate police precinct. The department of public works then cleans up the site. The city has drastically reduced the amount of time it takes to respond to graffiti complaints as a result of the new process.

7. Linking a CRM system to existing work order systems or using it as a work order system itself provides a direct connection between service request and service delivery.

Work-order management systems help manage and organize projects and assignments. Managers use such systems to assign projects to staff members, who use the systems to make notes, report on progress, track hours worked and resources used, and finally close out a project when it is finished. When a link is created between a local government's central CRM system and the work-order management systems that exist in local government departments, the "handshake" between the two systems enables information to be easily shared. When a service request comes in from a citizen, the CRM loads the request into the work-order management system, where a department manager can determine its priority in relationship to other tasks in the system. Likewise, information from the work-order management system feeds back to the CRM, allowing 311 call center agents to respond to citizens when they ask about the status of a service request.

Hampton's 311 call center enables its customer advocates (call takers) to jump-start many non-emergency service requests directly from their computer station. This capability, coupled with a carefully scripted response for many types of requests, enables Hampton's customer advocates to more directly manage the expectations of the caller. For example, if a caller contacts 311 to complain about a missed garbage pickup, he or she receives directions from the advocate about what to do and a timeframe within which to expect resolution. Meanwhile, the Hampton customer advocate is processing the service request. The request goes immediately to the public works department, which will initiate service delivery based on the information provided.

San Antonio opted to create an overlay application that worked with work-order management systems already being used in various city departments rather than install new work-order management systems.

Other CRM systems have a built-in work-order management system in the application; for example, Los Alamos County's RightNow(tm) system. (While as of 2008 Los Alamos County was not actively using this feature, the county wanted the option of instituting it in the future if desired.)

8. Implementation of a 311/CRM system requires careful planning, including the development of scripts and protocols for responding to citizens' information and service. A well-developed knowledgebase with detailed information on local government services and programs should underlay the system.

A 311/CRM system is much more than a traditional switchboard where incoming phone calls are simply transferred to the appropriate department. 311/CRM systems enable local governments to capture and manage huge amounts of data so that they can answer citizen requests for information and service quickly. Constructing a knowledgebase (a type of intelligent database that records correct answers) that captures comprehensive information and forms for a wide range of local government programs and services takes time. In Los Alamos County, staff implementing the 311 contact center spent six months interviewing staff in all the local government departments and collecting the data needed to build the first central database.

The data collected on county programs were first recorded in a temporary and simple Microsoft Access database. Using this temporary database allowed the staff to note what features and functionalities would be desirable in a central knowledgebase before making a significant investment in a new system. The experience allowed staff to do better research on CRM systems, prepare a more comprehensive request for proposals, and complete appropriate due diligence when the county was ready to make a purchase.

Hampton spent a similar amount of time working with departments and staff to identify the most common information and service requests. Further, within two months of the city's start-up of 311 service, Hampton hired an information manager, whose main responsibility was ensuring that the 311 knowledgebase was kept up to date with the most current information.

Centralizing this function in a single person had the effect of creating certainty and simplicity for the maintenance of information and data. Departments know whom to contact when they need to provide

updated information for the system. Similarly, at least once a year, Hampton's information manager sends to the departments the current set of "frequently asked questions" in the knowledgebase, and asks them to make any necessary changes. Hampton's 311 call center is technologically sophisticated; however the city has learned that human resources still play the central role both in providing excellent service to citizens and in ensuring that the back-end administrative functionality of the system is operating at a high level.

9. An internal quality assurance program should be developed to measure and monitor contact center performance.

Minneapolis 311 has developed an internal process for reviewing and measuring its overall quality of service. The process, which results in a quality assurance index, involves reviewing a monthly sample of 311 phone call records, including screen captures that document how agents move through the central knowledgebase to find an answer to a call. Minneapolis's system selects thirty short calls (under nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds) and ten long calls (ten minutes or more) to review. A business analyst and three call center supervisors comprise the review team. Each team member receives the same set of records to review and score independently. By combining the scores for all the phone call records, the team arrives at the quality assurance index for that month, which is shared with upper management as well as the call center agents so the whole call center team knows how it is performing.

Minneapolis also uses an external customer satisfaction survey to solicit feedback from citizens who use Minneapolis 311. The quality assurance index allows the center to measure the quality of its overall program on two fronts rather than just one, helping to verify the accuracy of findings.

10. The 311/CRM system needs to be integrated into emergency management plans for the local government and be included as part of disaster response, especially during post-disaster information dissemination.

During a disaster, citizens and businesses have a multitude of questions and concerns about the status of relief efforts, such as the availability of commodities

(ice, water, baby formula). They are also "boots on the ground" that can tell the local government where there is a need for service, such as for downed trees and power lines, and a backed-up stormwater drainage system. A 311 call system provides citizens the mechanism for accessing as well as providing information.

When Hurricane Isabel came ashore along North Carolina's Outer Banks in 2003 and started on a course that would take it up the Chesapeake Bay, Hampton's 311 call center experienced record call volumes. Damage throughout Hampton, along with much of the Chesapeake region, was severe. The power was out in many places; streets were flooded; and for a time, the only operational source of information for citizens to turn to was 311.

Hampton's 911 service could have been effectively crippled with the volume of calls before, during, and after Hurricane Isabel. However, the 311 service was there to take the non-emergency calls, which if they had gone to 911, would have slowed emergency response at a time of high need.

Hampton's 311 call center employees are considered essential employees and are expected to be ready to perform during emergency situations. In 2008, Tropical Storm Hanna charted a course similar to Hurricane Isabel. While the damage from the storm was far less, Hampton's call center employees were on standby, ready to respond to citizens' inquiries.

11. Assigning tracking numbers to service requests should be a standard practice in order to allow citizens to learn what action was taken to address their requests, as well as local governments to follow the progress on the response and determine where bottlenecks or problems may exist in the delivery of services.

The majority of respondents (71 percent) to ICMA's Local Government Customer Service Systems Survey indicated that they assign a tracking number to incoming calls. Tracking numbers allow citizens to follow the progress of issue resolution and learn what steps the local government has taken on an issue. In San Antonio, this idea has been taken a step further. Anyone who calls 311 can ask to be notified when a service request has been filled. The system has the capacity to generate an automated e-mail response or a written letter. Callers can also request feedback via a personal phone call from a customer service representative. This type of "closing

the loop" action serves to assure the citizen that the city has addressed his/her need.

Likewise, the local government benefits from being able to track how a particular issue was resolved. City council members in San Antonio often use 311 data when meeting with homeowner associations in their districts. The data demonstrate the city's accountability for customer service and help identify municipal service hot spots (where demand for a service is higher than normal) and possible performance issues.

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

12. Multiple means for measuring how citizens view the performance of the contact center as well as local government departments need to be adopted.

Los Alamos County's 311 contact center gathers feedback from citizens through a variety of formal and informal means. One of the chief means of gathering citizens' feedback on county services is through a community survey conducted every two years. Conducted by telephone by outside contractors, the survey reaches 400 random households. It measures the community's satisfaction with county services and programs using a 4-point scale, where 4 equals excellent, 3 equals good, 2 equals fair, and 1 equals poor. In 2005, the county's 311 contact center received the highest ranking among all the county programs and services being measured, a "3."

The county also gathers citizen input through public meetings. In addition to the traditional public hearing, which has prescribed start and end times with formal presentations, Los Alamos County hosts open houses. A general open house is held annually and involves all county departments. Project-specific open houses are also held as needed. At the open houses, appropriate county staff members answer questions directly from the public.

Contact center staff members also function as the eyes and ears of county government, and report back on their interactions with and observations of citizens. For example, contact center staff members notice which brochures citizens take most frequently and which create more questions than they answer. The staff members also note what issues are bothering citizens and what they are talking about when they call or visit the kiosk.

13. Neighborhood associations and block clubs should be engaged to gather information about community needs as well as disseminate information on the 311/CRM system.

In Lynwood, city staff members routinely attend neighborhood block watch meetings which deal with a variety of quality-of-life issues. These meetings are an important source for staff to receive service requests and concerns from residents. Lynwood's neighborhood block watch specialist works with more than fifty block watch groups in the city network and serves as a backup to the customer service agent in the city manager's office. This hands-on, word-of-mouth approach to promoting the 311/CRM system is low cost and may be contributing to increased use of the system over time.

Performance Measurement

14. Data collected from the 311/CRM system need to be integrated into a local government performance measurement program. In particular, service level agreements (SLAs) that define timeframes for when services will be completed need to established and monitored periodically.

The implementation of a 311/CRM system enables local governments to collect a wealth of data on what services citizens request most, which neighborhoods want what services, how long it takes to complete tasks, and more. When integrated with a comprehensive performance measurement program, these data provide important benchmarks to help local government officials assess how well their organization is doing in providing services to citizens in a timely manner. Periodic review of a department's success rate at meeting its SLAs offers managers an opportunity to examine trends in service provision, assess whether existing processes are working, and determine if additional resources are needed, among other considerations. In San Antonio, local government departments are expected to meet their SLAs at least 90 percent of the time. Mitigating circumstances are taken into account, such as severe storms that may make an SLA for debris removal difficult to meet. Under normal operating conditions, however, an SLA that is not being met 90 percent of the time triggers a review by city management to determine what is preventing the delivery of services and why.

15. Local government departments need to be trained on the use of 311/CRM data and how it can assist them in the ongoing management of their resources.

One of the most common themes heard at all case study sites was that the technology involved is the easy part of instituting a 311/CRM system. The hard part is ushering in the cultural change that must occur throughout the local government organization if customer service is to truly be a priority. Once systems have been established, people become accustomed to thinking, working, and reporting in a certain way. Establishing a centralized customer service system for a local government requires a huge shift in the way tasks are accomplished within the larger organization. The new data and reports that are available as result of tracking citizens' contact with the local government can especially cause trepidation for local government departments and agencies if they have not before had to analyze what they do and how they do it.

Los Alamos County's 311 contact center has the ability to produce regular reports on the nature of citizen contact. For example, the center can generate reports to learn how many contacts were made, what programs were involved, and which departments or divisions manage the programs. The county departments could use these data to determine how well their public information campaigns about specific projects are going (does it appear that they are getting the right information out to people based on the inquiries coming in?), or to learn over time what services are most important to people (do more inquiries come in about street repairs or about sidewalks?). The long-term goal is to incorporate 311 data into the county's performance measurement program, LA Scores!, to help the various agencies and departments better manage their day-to-day operations.

16. The integration of 311/CRM data into a local government's geographical information system (GIS) technology is critical to understanding where and what type of service requests are being made in a community.

With local government CRM systems, the emphasis is not on the individual, but rather the location where the service is needed. If a citizen reports a pothole, the city needs to find out where the pothole is located, not the citizen's phone number. Nearly every call received has a spatial relationship to the city. City leaders in Minneapolis are particularly concerned with mapping and the need to understand what is happening within the city by ward. In particular, mapping has been instrumental in highlighting where a reallocation of resources may be needed. A forecasting and reporting analyst with Minneapolis 311 worked with the city's Regulatory Services Department to examine how service requests for exterior nuisance complaints broke down by districts within the city. Using ArcGIS(tm) software, the analyst was able to determine that one out of four districts generated nearly 33 percent of all exterior nuisance service requests, whereas another of the four districts only generated about 16 percent. Yet both districts had one supervisor and approximately the same number of support staff.

Staff Training

17. Contact center agents need to understand the day-to-day functions of different local government departments. Occasional site visits to see local government in operation helps agents better explain processes and procedures to citizens.

In three of the case study sites—San Antonio, Los Alamos County, and Minneapolis—311 staff members went into the "field" to learn more about operations within the various local government agencies and departments they serve. For example, in San Antonio, 311 representatives took a bus trip to the Department of Environmental Services to see the trucks used to pick up trash and those used for recycling. They were also able to see the actual bins brought into neighborhoods for hazardous waste pickup. Presentations explaining how the department's vehicles are assigned and sent out for debris pickup were made at department facilities. Such site tours help contact center employees better understand how operations work within the department and, in turn, explain processes and procedures to citizens calling in with inquiries or service requests.

In Lynwood, the service request system manager came to the new position with a fundamental understanding of the protocol and nuances for the delivery of most city services. Given its small size and the close relationships among staff, the manager learned about other departments while on the job.

18. Knowledge is fluid. As government processes and procedures changes, agents will need routine training through formal and informal means to keep up-to-date. Likewise, the central knowledgebase should be updated regularly.

The 311 contact center employees in Los Alamos County strive to build information into the system's knowledge-base that goes beyond county government programs and services. For example, employees maintain information on many state government programs, such as university extension services, and on local volunteer organizations, such as United Way and the local senior center. The employees have established relationships with these organizations, which routinely alert the employees about new developments or changes in their services.

The employees also take pride in simply paying attention to what is happening in the community and in seeking out new information. Employees report that they read the local newspaper daily, noting articles that may be of interest to citizens. They review meeting agendas and minutes to learn what is being discussed in community meetings. They notice flyers for local concerts or theater productions placed in the local grocery store.

The information manager for Hampton's 311 call center stays attuned to the local media and annual dates of importance—such as the dates that annual assessments are received by local property owners—in order to prepare the center's employees for a potential influx of calls.

19. Diversity training should be mandatory for contact center agents in order to help them understand and be better prepared for dealing with residents of different cultural backgrounds.

Immigration trends in the United States are changing the demographic makeup of cities and towns across the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey, there are 37,547,789 foreign-born individuals in the United States, which represents 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population. (*Foreign-born* refers to people residing in the United States at the time of the census who were not U.S. citizens at birth.) Many of these individuals are not familiar with local government processes and procedures because the governmental structures in their country of origin were vastly different or, in some cases, did not exist.

Minneapolis 311 has a robust diversity training program that helps the customer service agents address issues in working with Minneapolis residents from different cultures. One agent noted that members of the city's local Somali population frequently are unfamiliar with or do not understand government processes. It often takes additional time for agents to help callers understand what information is needed and why. The

diversity training has helped the agents be patient when explaining local government procedures.

20. Organizational and management support of contact center agents and their work is crucial for the delivery of excellent customer service. Programs designed to recognize and reward employees for excellent work are needed.

311 systems are frequently described as providing a "front door" for local governments. If that is the case, then the call takers—customer service representatives or agents or whatever term is adopted for the front-line workers—are the individuals opening that front door. These employees give citizens an immediate impression of their local government and the values it holds. The people responding to citizens must be courteous, concerned, pleasant, knowledgeable, and helpful, and demonstrate a willingness to address citizens' issues.

Citizens, however, are often unhappy or emotional when calling 311. Discussions with unhappy citizens can be intense and draining for call center employees, and job burnout is a very real phenomenon for this type of position. Local governments can help prevent such burnout by offering a variety of reward and recognition programs. Lynwood offers opportunities for professional development and training designed for its customer service personnel. These courses train staff on coping mechanisms and stress-reduction techniques. These courses also offer opportunities for peer networking and a break from the everyday routine. Both San Antonio and Minneapolis offer reward programs for outstanding performance to their agents. Among the rewards range from an extra 15 minutes at lunch to grab-bag gifts such as free movie tickets, employee potlucks, and similar incentives to make the work environment fun and enjoyable.

Endnotes

1 This chapter draws heavily on previous work done for five in-depth case study reports in the *Call 311: Connecting Citizens to Local Government Case Study Series,* including "San Antonio Customer Service/311," "Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center," "Lynwood One Call City Hall," "Minneapolis 311 System," and "Hampton 311 Customer Call Center" produced by International City/County Management Association.

2 City Manager's Office, "Mission Statement" (Lynwood, California: City Manager's Office, undated) http://www.lynwood.ca.us/cityDept/cityDept_manager.htm.

Chapter 3

The Use of Centralized Customer Service Systems by Local Governments: A Look at the Practice

By Evelina Moulder, Director of Survey Research, ICMA

Because local governments provide so many of the services that community members depend on each day, local governments may have more interaction with residents and businesses than other levels of government do. A good relationship with community members is key to successful service delivery. One way to facilitate such a relationship is to provide an easy way for community members to access local government services without spending time calling different departments to report a problem and learn about its resolution.

Typically, local government services are provided as residents expect—trash is picked up, streetlights function, and residents have no interaction related

to these services. But if something goes wrong—streetlights are out or potholes need repairs—residents contact the local government. Customer service systems offer an opportunity for residents to make their specific needs known to the local government through a centralized system, usually at a time convenient to them, and to receive information back about the status of their request.

Customer service systems also offer local governments the opportunity to use the centralized information to inform their performance management, identify problems specific to a neighborhood, and provide direction for the capital budget. More and more local governments are implementing customer service systems to benefit from these features.

ICMA conducted a national survey of local government customer service systems (311) to explore successful implementation of these systems and how they are being used to respond to citizen needs and strengthen local government-citizen relationships. The survey was mailed to city managers and chief administrative officers in all U.S. municipalities with a population 25,000 and over and to all U.S. counties with a chief administrative officer or a chief elected executive, regardless of population size—a total of 2,287 local governments. The survey was also available for completion online. The survey response rate was 31 percent (see page 16 for a detailed survey methodology; for the survey results, visit http://www.icma.org/upload/bc/attach/%7BA367D7A7-2C2B-4466-8A80-B031AECE7009%7D311surveyweb.pdf).

Table 3-1 Local Government Use of a Centralized Customer Service System

Classification	No. reporting (A)	Have System		Do Not Have System	
		No.	% of (A)	No.	% of (A)
Total	710	104	14.6%	606	85.4%
Population group					
500,000 and over	24	2	8.3%	22	91.7%
100,000-499,999	160	37	23.1%	123	76.9%
25,000-99,999	456	63	13.8%	393	86.2%
2,500-24,999	70	2	2.9%	68	97.1%
Geographic region					
Northeast	88	12	13.6%	76	86.4%
North Central	165	22	13.3%	143	86.7%
South	242	41	16.9%	201	83.1%
West	215	29	13.5%	186	86.5%

Use of Centralized Customer Service Systems

Although only 104 of the 710 respondents reported use of a centralized system (Table 3-1), the results show that 27 percent are considering implementing one. All of these local governments are 25,000 and over in population. A somewhat higher percentage of local governments in the West indicate plans to implement a system than do those in other regions, with 37 California local governments indicating that they plan to implement one.

Figure 3-1 shows the reasons local governments give for not implementing a centralized system. These results point to several areas in which local governments need assistance: completing the application process and finding alternatives to 311 designations, demonstrating the benefits to elected officials, and demonstrating necessity. Cost is clearly a major concern, but there are demonstrable savings from implementation, such as reduction in calls to 911 and improved customer service, information, reporting, and management. An interesting question raised by one of the Advisory Committee members was whether there is any state-by-state pattern in the difficulty in obtaining a 311 designation. The results show that difficulty in obtaining 311 designations is reported across the board and not limited to a few states.

Is There a Typical System?

Although we think of a centralized system as having one access number, close to 44 percent of the 92 local governments reporting do not use a single access number, including the two largest—those with a population 500,000 and over. Nine percent use 311 as the single access number, and 19 percent use a single access, or hotline, number other than 311. Local governments in the Northeast region show the highest percentage reporting use of a single "hotline" number other than 311. Date of implementation does not seem to influence whether there is a single access number. Fifteen percent reported a Web-based access system under "other," so those responses were recoded as a distinct answer. Some local governments that reported "other" (14 percent) described a system with multiple access points, such as telephone, in person, and Web.

Call Intake Software

A slight majority of local governments (52.2 percent) use some form of off-the-shelf call intake software. Available systems can provide extensive functionality,

including distributed as well as centralized call intake software that is linked to reporting programs, so users can see where a concentration of burned-out street-lights occurs, for example. Most users have modified or customized the off-the-shelf software package. Of the local governments reporting, 17.8 percent have systems developed by in-house staff without the use of consultants.

Who Handles the Calls?

The survey data show that "centralized customer service system" means different things to people. For some, the customer service system software is "central." It is available to and used by staff in many departments, but staff handling the calls may not be located in a central call center. Central call staff are trained to handle the calls in 38 percent of local governments reporting, and 28 percent report that central call staff make a record of the call and then put the caller in touch with the responsible department. Thirty-five percent report "other" descriptions of a "centralized customer service system," which includes customers entering their "call" into a Web-based system with information routed to the responsible department, or departments taking calls and then entering them into a centralized system. The responses in the

Figure 3–1 Reasons for Not Implementing a Centralized Customer Service System

Note: Percentages exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

"other" category reflect the fact that not all systems are centralized with call center staff.

Departmental Integration into the Centralized System

More than 80 percent of local governments that specified which departments are integrated into the system identified the following (Table 3-2):

- Public works (95 percent)
- Code enforcement (88 percent)
- City/county management/administration (84 percent)
- Parks and recreation (81 percent).

These departments are obvious candidates for inclusion because they handle problems that usually require a repair (public works and code enforcement) or specific information about programs, locations, and services (parks and recreation). The city or county administrative offices are often the point of entry for these calls, like calls for general information.

Of those local governments that report integrating non-emergency calls into the system, 28 local governments have measured the number of non-emergency calls to 911 since the centralized system was implemented. Of the 28 that have measured calls, 43 percent report a decrease in calls to 911.

Reducing the number of non-emergency calls to police dispatchers is often touted as a benefit of a centralized customer service system, so it may seem somewhat surprising that a higher percentage of local governments have not integrated non-emergency police calls into the system. Anecdotal information suggests that the need for specially trained dispatch staff who can distinguish an emergency from a non-emergency makes integration of emergency services challenging.

Table 3-2   Departmental Integration into the Centralized System

Department	Number Answering the Question	Number Reporting Integration into Centralized System	Percent Reporting Integration
City/county management/administration	82	69	84%
Elected officials' offices	79	46	58%
Parks and recreation	78	63	81%
Code enforcement	80	70	88%
Refuse collection and disposal	76	59	78%
Public works	81	77	95%
Animal control	78	42	54%
Health/social services	71	19	27%
Water	75	50	67%
Non-emergency police	74	42	57%

Note: Not all respondents answered each question about integration, so the base used to calculate the percentages is different for each department.

Table 3-3   Types of Requests for Service

Type of Request	Number Answering the Question	Number Reporting Request	Percent Reporting Request
Requests for service such as pothole repair, burned-out street lights	85	84	99%
Requests for information about local government services, schedules, etc.	85	72	85%
Complaints about graffiti, vacant lots	82	75	92%
Suggestions, general feedback, or comments on a specific issue	75	61	81%

Note: Not all respondents answered each question about types of requests, so the base used to calculate the percentages is different for each type.

Requests for Service Received by the Centralized Customer Service System

The survey included a question about the types of requests received by the centralized system. The objective of the question was to determine the proportion of calls that are for service, information, other issues, or general comments.

Requests for service top the list (Table 3-3). It may be that requests for service are the highest percentage of calls that local governments receive in general, or, because centralized customer service systems are designed to manage service calls, the high percentage of service calls may suggest a strong intersection between design and use. In addition, local governments often post lots of information and "frequently asked questions" (FAQ) on their Web sites, which may reduce the number of calls for information that they receive.

Methods of Contacting the Centralized Service System

Customers often have different needs or preferences when it comes to communicating with a service provider. Each local government provides access methods in addition to telephone access, with e-mail and Web access reported by the highest percentages (Figure 3-2). None of the local governments indicated use of voice recognition systems, which are used by many private companies.

Tracking Methods

Quality customer service involves not only taking a call for service, but providing feedback to the customer about the status of the request. Customers can be tracked in several ways (Figure 3-3).

The survey included a question asking whether the local government's centralized customer service system uses geographic information systems (GIS). The question did not specifically relate the use of GIS to tracking, so some local governments may have answered yes without relating the question to their customer service tracking capability. Forty-four percent report that the centralized customer service system uses GIS. GIS can be used to array on a map the number of potholes or amount of graffiti in a particular neighborhood, which can be helpful in identifying patterns of problems.

Customer Response Mechanism

One of the best features of a centralized customer service system is the ability to provide updates to customers. In addition to sending a customer an e-mail with the update

or telephoning the customer, the system typically provides a tracking number for the customer to use anytime to find out the status of a request. Eighty-two local governments reported that their system includes a customer response mechanism, such as estimated repair time or notification that the repair has been made. Of those, 62 reported the type of response mechanism (Figure 3-4). A

Figure 3-2   Methods of Contacting the Centralized Customer Service System

Methods
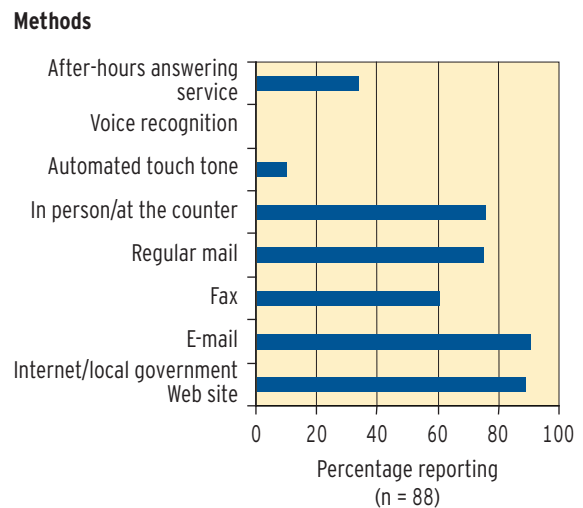
Note: Percentages exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

Figure 3-3   Customer Tracking Capability

Tracking capability
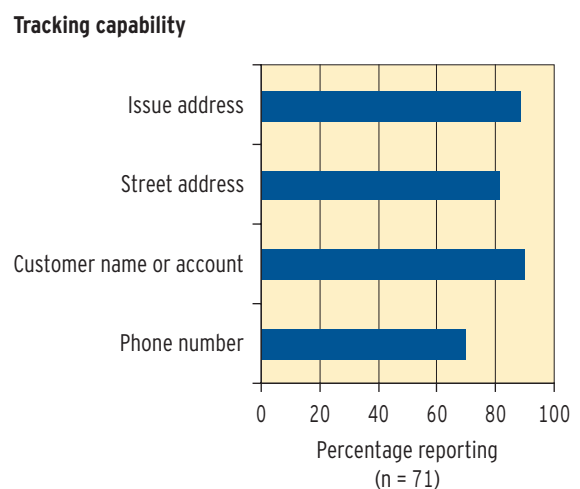
Note: Percentages exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

majority give the caller a tracking number (71 percent), which enables the customer to follow the progress of the issue resolution. Several local governments use multiple response mechanisms, such as providing an estimate of the date of resolution, sending an automated e-mail documenting the request and providing additional information, and sending an automated e-mail out at different stages of resolution.

The highest percentage of respondents report e-mail as the method of communicating a response

Figure 3-4 Response Mechanism

Reason

Percentage reporting
(n = 562)

Note: Based on 82 answering this question.

Figure 3-5 Reporting Capability

Reporting capability
By

Percentage reporting
(n = 84)

Note: Percentages exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

to a user request. Close to 43 percent of local governments answering the question indicate that the response is communicated based on the preference the caller indicates, and 42 percent communicate the response in the same manner in which the request is received. Responses by phone and postal mail are reported by the fewest local governments.

Routing and Tracking Requests Internally

Routing and tracking of requests is handled within the centralized system according to 89 percent of local governments, and the vast majority of those report that departments are alerted when a request is submitted. Centralized systems are updated to reflect job status according to 92 percent of respondents. There is, however, some variation in the method of updating the systems. In 67 percent of local governments the system is updated directly. At least one local government reports both direct system updates and updates to work orders, which are then updated in the centralized system.

Ten local governments reported that routing and tracking is handled by department-specific work-order systems. Of those, six update the central customer service system with job status information.

Reporting Capabilities and Use

Centralized customer service systems can support management decisions, policies, and strategies. Reports generated from the system are a starting point for this support. If managers are able to receive information about service requests by geographic area within their jurisdiction, for example, they can identify patterns in problems that seem concentrated in a particular location and take steps to address them. Reporting on the time it takes to complete service requests is useful to establish benchmarks and to evaluate processes and procedures involved in the response. Being able to access information on repeat requests allows a manager to consider why that problem reoccurs.

Figure 3-5 shows the reporting capability identified by local governments with centralized customer service systems. Although 81 of the 84 local governments show the capacity to generate reports on the types of service requests, the reporting functionality seems to be underutilized. Reporting functionality depends on two things: the data necessary for the report must be in the system, and the reporting script must be written to pull the data into a report. It may be that the data are available in the systems, but the reporting scripts have not been written.
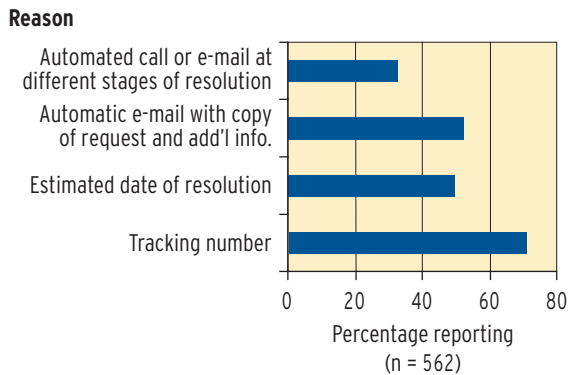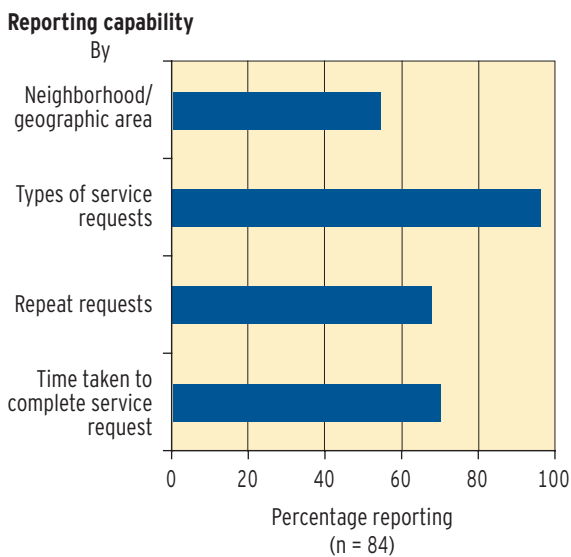
The survey results support the indication that the reporting capability is underutilized (Figure 3-6). Although 79 percent (64) indicate that they use the system report information for performance measurement, only 45 local governments indicated that they have the capability to generate reports on the time it takes to complete a service request and on repeat requests—both of which can be inputs for performance measures. Twenty-six of the local governments that use reports for performance measurement show that they used all four of the reporting capabilities covered in the survey.

The two least-reported uses of the report information are for capital maintenance planning and annual reports. There is probably an opportunity for local governments to gain valuable information from reports that they can use in the capital planning process.

Using the system report information with citizen groups is an essential step in the customer service feedback loop. If, for example, public works staff know that a particular problem occurs with higher frequency in a particular neighborhood and can use the reports to show that the frequency has significantly decreased, it would be a great communication tool. Also, by using data on problems in a particular neighborhood, it may be possible to engage the residents in solving the problem. By identifying problems by neighborhood, local government staff can make comparisons across neighborhoods that may show what is different and what works.

Without information about customer satisfaction, a local government is unable to determine the full value of the centralized customer service system. Only 47 percent of those reporting use customer satisfaction surveys to determine the level of satisfaction with the system. Some of the local governments that do not conduct a customer satisfaction survey indicated that they use other means to evaluate customer satisfaction, but they did not describe these other means. For survey respondents that identified public pressure as the impetus for a centralized system, a good way to measure the public reaction to the implementation is by conducting a citizen satisfaction survey. Yet only 6 of the 16 that reported public pressure also reported conducting a citizen satisfaction survey.

Financial Information

The survey included questions about development, capital, and operating expenditures. Few respondents provided information, and the expenditures in each category vary significantly. For this reason, the information is difficult to use. It will probably be most useful to contact individual local governments that have implemented systems to discuss questions about different types of expenditures.

In addition, Chapter 6 includes a template for estimating costs as well as other useful information about preparing an analysis of return on investment (ROI).

Summary

The survey results show that although implementation of centralized customer service systems so far has been limited, local governments are interested in implementing them. In fact, the number interested in implementation

Figure 3-6   Use of System Reports
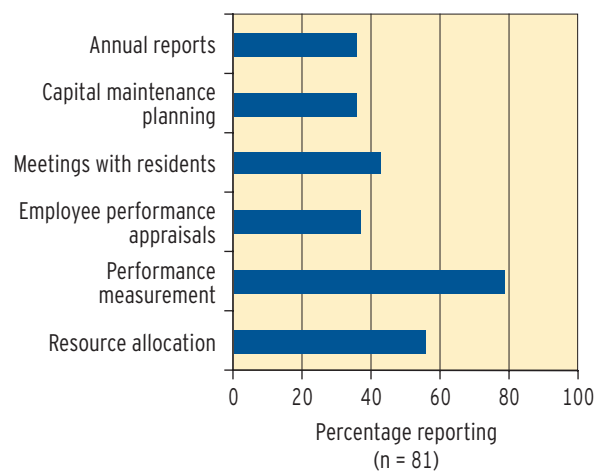
Note: Percentages exceed 100 percent because of multiple responses.

Table 3-4   Survey Response

	No. of Municipalities/ Counties Surveyed (A)	No. Responding	
		No.	% of (A)
Total	2,287	710	31.0%
Population group			
500,000 and over	99	24	24.2%
100,000-499,999	450	160	35.6%
25,000-99,999	1,498	456	30.4%
2,500-24,999	240	70	29.2%
Geographic region			
Northeast	394	88	22.3%
North-Central	556	165	29.7%
South	795	242	30.4%
West	542	215	39.7%

is greater than the number currently reporting systems. In fact, the number considering implementation (206) is almost double the number currently reporting systems (104). As more local governments launch these systems, we can anticipate more robust use of the functionality.

Survey Methodology

The survey was mailed to city managers and chief administrative officers in U.S. municipalities with a population 25,000 and over and to all U.S. counties with a chief administrative officer or a chief elected executive, regardless of population size. The survey was also available for completion online. The survey response rate was 31 percent (Table 3-4).

Chapter 4

311/CRM In-Depth Case Studies

By Cory Fleming, Project Director, ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology

Case Study Sites

To better understand how 311/CRM systems function within the day-to-day operations of local government, ICMA conducted a series of five in-depth case studies as one element of the overall study. The case studies looked at local governments that had successfully implemented 311/CRM systems and the key elements that supported their implementation. The selected sites include (listed in the order the studies were completed):

- San Antonio, Texas
- Los Alamos County, New Mexico
- Lynwood, California
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Hampton, Virginia.

Of the five sites, San Antonio, Texas, serves the largest population base and has one of the most established systems, having introduced its 311 call center to residents in 2000. It is also unique in that it operates with a custom-built system designed by the city's Information Technology Services Department. Los Alamos County, New Mexico, has the smallest population among the sites and is the only county system studied. Lynwood, California, is the only site selected that does not have a true 311 call center, though the city does maintain a CRM system with a dedicated

seven-digit hotline number for requesting city services. It is also the smallest city selected for a case study. Minneapolis, Minnesota, has one of the youngest and most integrated 311 systems in place among the selected sites. It is also the only city selected that does not have a council-manager form of government. Finally, Hampton, Virginia, has the oldest and most established 311 call center among the selected sites, having begun operations in 1999. Table 4-1 summarizes characteristics of the case study sites.

Commonalities among Systems

While each system studied was unique, one common bond existed among the local governments maintaining a centralized customer service system; namely, a strong desire on the part of elected officials and other community leaders to make customer service a priority for the local government organization. The notion of 311 being the "front door" to local government was mentioned frequently during interviews at nearly all of the sites. Often, 311 was described as the way the local government took responsibility for understanding its own operations rather than asking its citizens to pore through the "blue pages" of government departments in the local phonebook. No longer was it necessary for citizens to guess which department they needed to call to report their problems or ask a question. With 311, all it took was one phone call, and the local government handled the matter from there.

The citizens interviewed as part of the case studies had very favorable views of 311/CRM systems and appreciated the ease with which they could connect with their local government through the systems. Many commented on how much time it saved them personally to call a single central number. Others pointed out that getting involved is a tradition in the United States, and they felt citizens had a responsibility to report problems when they see them; a 311/CRM system made it easier to get involved.

Table 4-1   Community Characteristics

Community	Population (2006)[1]	Region of the Country	Location within Government
San Antonio, Texas	1,296,682	South/Southwest	Department reporting to Assistant City Manager
Minneapolis, Minnesota	372,833	Midwest	Within 911/311 Department reporting to City Coordinator
Hampton, Virginia	145,017	East	Division within the City Manager's Office
Lynwood, California	71,061	West	Within Quality of Life Department reporting to Assistant City Manager
Los Alamos County, New Mexico	19,022	Southwest	Within Public Information Office reporting to County Administrator

1 2006 population estimates come from the U.S. Census Bureau.

All of the systems studied used data collected through the 311/CRM system to measure not only the performance of the call center, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of local government programs and services. The degree to which local governments used these data for performance measurement did vary considerably, and all struggled with deciding how to best use the data. Similarly, the ability to configure data reports and the ease of their configuration was a concern expressed by some of the sites. This concern was viewed as particularly important in terms of helping other local government departments better use 311/CRM data for managing their programs and services.

No one 311/CRM system studied represents an "ideal" system. Rather, each system was designed based on the needs of and resources available to the community. Local governments have introduced system improvements in planned phases as time, work loads, and resources permit. The goal of providing excellent customer service simply requires continuous improvement and systematic updates over time.

Table 4-2 captures some general statistics about each community's system, but using this table to compare systems requires a fair degree of caution. These snapshots provide only a cursory overview of each

system and leave out many details that make each unique. Consider, for example:

- In addition to operating the 311 call center, the San Antonio Customer Service/311 Department manages five Community Link Customer Service Centers in neighborhoods throughout the city. These centers serve as mini-city halls where citizens can drop by to conduct business or obtain information on city services and programs. These centers are not part of the 311 call center per se, but certainly handle many information requests that citizens have. The actual number of citizen contacts with the city may, therefore, be much higher than the call volume for the 311 call center indicates.

- Minneapolis 311 takes non-emergency police reports, which enables citizens to file reports on vandalism or other criminal events that are neither life threatening nor in progress. These reports are generally filed for insurance purposes. While taking these calls saves the Minneapolis Police Department valuable officer time, Minneapolis 311 agents also spend a fair amount of time, up to 15 or 20 minutes, to complete these reports, which generally increases the call center's average call handling time.

- Approximately 40 percent of the contacts in Los Alamos County come from walk-in traffic. Face-to-face responses to requests for either information or service take considerably more time than phone calls do. As a result, average call handling time is not a particularly useful performance measurement for the Los Alamos County 311 Customer Care Center.

- Lynwood has focused much of its promotion efforts on encouraging citizens to use the city's online service request system. As Internet connectivity increases among its residents, city officials antici-pate increased usage of the online request feature, which provides access to city government 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Greater use of this feature could conceivably increase the number of citizen contacts made in a year while at the same time reducing the volume of phone calls and face-to-face traffic.

- From 11:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. the city of Hampton's police communications department handles the minimal number of 311 calls during the overnight hours, with typical calls being reports

of nuisance wildlife, blinking stoplights, and other non-emergency information or service requests.

Opportunities for Promoting Change

The introduction and implementation of a 311/CRM system offers an important opportunity for promoting change within the local government organization. The study recommendations covered in Chapter 2 address many of these opportunities, but a few bear repeating because the nature of a 311/CRM system is such that it can lead to a major culture shift in the way a local government operates.

Making it Easy to Connect with Local Government

Even in small communities with populations less than 10,000, it is not unusual to find eight to ten depart-ments operating within the local government. For citizens trying to determine which department or divi-sion they should call with their specific questions or requests for service, the complexity of the organization

Table 4-2   System "Snapshots"

Community	Total FTEs[a]	Program Budget, FY 06	Hours of Operation	Approximate Number of Contacts, FY 06	Types of Contact	Average Call Handling Time[b]	Number of Departments	Number of Service Request Types	Non-Emergency Police Reports
San Antonio, Texas	34 full-time 3 part-time	$1.6 million	24 hours a day/ 7 days a week	1,080,000 calls & e-mails	73% - information (NOTE: 13% of information requests require transfers) 27%–service requests	2 minutes	4–service requests	254	
Minneapolis, Minnesota	34	$2.6 million	7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Monday–Friday	343,000 calls 15,000 e-mails	61.1% - knowledge-base questions 15.2%–service requests 23.7%–transfers	2 minutes 47 seconds	18	170	Yes
Hampton, Virginia	11 full-time 2.5 part-time	$575,000	24 hours a day/ 7 days a week	295,660 calls 1,549 e-mails	67%–information 21%–service requests	2 minutes	30	247	
Lynwood, California	1.25	$56,300	8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday	4,699 calls 398 online/e-mails 456 walk-ins/ conversations	NA	NA	8	NA	
Los Alamos County, New Mexico	4	$309,000	8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday–Friday	12,000 contacts (calls, walk-ins, e-mails)	NA	NA	9	NA	

a   Includes management, call agents, and support positions.

b   For all types of calls.

can be confusing and time-consuming to unravel. And often, local government employees are not sure themselves where to direct a particular phone call. They can end up misdirecting people and possibly leading to multiple transfers before the citizen reaches the right staff member. The team working on implementing 311 service in Los Alamos County, New Mexico, for example, identified a dozen different ways a phone call could be directed if a citizen had a question about a tree (see sidebar).

Los Alamos County, New Mexico, adopted 311 service in large part to make it easier for citizens to communicate with their local government. Following a large and destructive wildfire in May 2000 that destroyed 350 homes, citizens had numerous questions about rebuilding efforts. The development of a central one-stop shop—that citizens could contact either in person, via phone, or by sending an e-mail—made it simple for citizens to know where to go when they needed a service or information. Deciphering the complexity of the local government is now the responsibility of customer service representatives who have an intimate and detailed knowledge of how the local government functions as well as access to a detailed knowledgebase that documents local government processes and procedures.

Practicing "Customer Delight"

In a global economy, local governments have to compete in many of the same ways as the private sector. Providing excellent customer service leads to happier citizens and enhances a community's overall reputation as a great place to live and work.

The city of Hampton, Virginia, adopted an overarching strategic approach of "customer delight" in the late 1990s. Citizen satisfaction levels with government services reached record lows at that time, and city leaders were determined to turn the situation around. The central premise of "customer delight" focuses on first managing customer expectations and then striving to exceed those expectations. The goal of the effort goes beyond merely satisfying the customer, but actually delighting him or her by providing more than was expected. For example, a citizen might call one morning about a damaged street sign in the neighborhood and would be told the general timeframe for such repairs is two to three days. If the sign can be repaired that afternoon and the customer sees that it was repaired sooner than expected, the result is "customer delight" and greatly improved citizen satisfaction ratings.

A Tree...Is a Tree...Is a Tree?

1. For a tree impacting a utility line, contact the Utilities Department.
2. For a tree associated with fire mitigation, contact the Fire Department.
3. For a tree related to "defensible space," contact the Defensible Space Program.
4. For a tree infested with or at risk of being infected with bark beetles, contact the Cooperative Extension Service.
5. For a permit to sell or information on where to buy a Christmas tree, contact the Community Development Department.
6. For a tree on U.S. Forest Service property, contact the U.S. Forest Service.
7. For a tree impeding traffic or traffic visibility, contact the Traffic Division of the Engineering and Project Management Department.
8. For a tree obstructing a sidewalk, contact the Pavement Division of Public Works.
9. For a tree on the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)/U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) land, contact LANL/DOE.
10. For recycling of trees, contact the Solid Waste Division of Public Works.
11. For a tree in a county park, including a request to plant a memorial tree, contact the Parks Division of Public Works.
12. For a tree on state land, contact the New Mexico Environment Department.

Source: Los Alamos County Customer Service Commandos, "Centralized Customer Service Report and Recommendations," 2003.

Implementation of the 311 customer call center was one of many steps the city took.

Through Hampton's new 311 service, the plan was to fulfill three simple desires expressed by citizens:

- Provide a single point of entry to local government information and services with an easy–to-remember phone number

- Resolve the needs of the customer on the first call to local government with as few forwarded phone calls as possible

- Offer 24 hour a day/7 day a week access to local government and its services that is more in line with personal lives, work schedules, and emergencies that are not life threatening (e.g., sewer backups).

While 311 service was an important step in implementing the new practice of "customer delight," without the buy-in from and support of other local government departments, the effort would have been largely meaningless. Considerable credit for Hampton's long-term success in practicing "customer delight" must go to the 311 project team, which consisted of representatives from seven different city departments. These partners dedicated themselves to spreading the concept of "customer delight" to all city staff and saw to it that the back end of 311 service—actually fulfilling the citizens' requests for service and reporting on progress made—was completed as soon as feasible. At times, it meant departments had to reorient themselves on work priorities, but the city's citizen satisfaction ratings in recent years have demonstrated that the citywide effort has paid off.

Measuring What Is Being Done

The establishment of service level agreement (SLAs) that define specific timeframes for local government departments' completion of tasks involves a huge cultural shift for most communities that have not had a tradition of tracking performance. Having SLAs enables call takers to inform citizens when they can expect work to be completed or service requests fulfilled. While SLAs help the local government manage citizens' expectations, they also place a new pressure on local government departments to document what they do and when they do it. Often, such changes cause great trepidation and concern that jobs are on the line if the "numbers aren't right."

In San Antonio, the city adopted SLAs four years after the 311 call center was established. The push to implement SLAs came from the new Customer Service/311 Department, which determined there was a critical need for such information in its work with citizens. When citizens did not have an idea of when a request would be fulfilled, they often called back multiple times in an attempt to make sure the work was done.

The local government departments set targets for their SLAs based on their past experience with delivering particular services and can adjust them if circumstances dictate it. For example, after a large storm, the environmental services department may need to adjust its SLA for the pickup of debris due to the increased volume of material that needs to be picked up.

Department heads have come to rely on the new 311 data to let them know what percentage of the time they are meeting their target levels and, as a result, better manage day-to-day operations. Failure to achieve a given SLA 90 percent of the time automatically triggers a review to determine why the target is not being met. Do department personnel need to be reallocated? Are there equipment problems? Is an unusual circumstance preventing the work from being completed on time? The SLA reports essentially function as a type of early warning system that something may be amiss and allow department management to adjust workloads and resources to respond quickly before problems can escalate.

Reengineering Government Processes

Minneapolis opted to take full advantage of its decision to implement 311 service. As part of system implementation, business analysts for Minneapolis 311 devoted considerable time to mapping the business processes and procedures used by the various local government departments to complete their work orders. This information had be collected and documented in order to develop scripts for the customer service agents to follow when talking to citizens as well as create forms for service requests. Since the information was already being gathered for this purpose, the timing lent itself well to undergoing a more thorough review and, when necessary, reengineering processes to make them work better. A software application, Casewise™, allowed the analysts to map out the processes in "as is" scenarios—what is currently done—and then reengineer them by creating "to be" scenarios.

Local governments are by nature complex organizations. Mapping processes allows staff to identify where interactions occur and analyze the potential for never-ending loops or bottlenecks. Most local governments are also dynamic in nature. It is not unusual for changes in processes to occur over time as technology, policies, and resources change. Having processes mapped out enables staff to consider how changes will impact service delivery. As a result, departments can manage their workflows more efficiently and thus save money for the city. Mapping processes has also enabled Minneapolis to create dozens of self-service forms that allow citizens to submit many of their own service requests online.

Improving Efficiency and Automating Work Flow

Prior to the implementation of the One Call City Hall system, the city of Lynwood tracked customer service requests and complaints using a labor-intensive pro-

cess. Staff recorded incoming service requests and citizen complaints on standard paper forms in triplicate that were routed to the city's Management Information Services (MIS) division. The MIS division entered the data into the central database and then manually sent the forms out—one to the resident, one to a central file, and one through city hall to the appropriate staff member.

The new system has streamlined internal processing by routing requests using e-mail and Internet technologies. Under the new process, a citizen calls the city and reaches the customer service manager at the One Call City Hall desk. Once the customer service manager has enough information about the issue and enters it into the tracking database, an e-mail alert is

instantly forwarded to the liaison in the department or division responsible for the issue who pushes the issue to the field. The field staff investigates the issue, takes necessary action, and notifies the liaison of investigation findings and the resolution or next steps.

The city's previous system required almost three days of interoffice mail and data entry to respond to inquiries and complaints. One staff member spent approximately four hours a day processing complaints and entering data under the old paper-intensive system. Under the new system, it takes the same person approximately two hours a day to process and close requests. Theoretically, the total number of service requests processed could double and still not take more time to process than the old system.

Appendix
Community and System Profiles

City of San Antonio, Texas, Customer Service/311 Call Center

Form of Government
Council-manager

Council Districts
11 (10 by district, 1 at-large)

Annual Budget (citywide)
$1.7 billion

Call Center Budget
$1.6 million

Call Center Major Components
- Physical Location: Downtown San Antonio, City Hall Annex
- Square Footage: 3,400
- T-1 Lines: 2
- Number of phones: 33
- Number of computers: 33

Number of Staff
38 Full-time equivalents

Location within City Government
Independent city department reporting directly to assistant city manager

Type of System
311 city service system (not a 911 backup)

Unique System Features and Management Tools
- Information Request Retrieval System (IRRS)
- Business Warehouse (Executive Dashboard and performance measures)
- Call management system

Citizen Feedback Mechanisms
- Customer satisfaction survey
- E-mail, written letter, or phone call to department directors
- Monthly meetings with city council members

Source: City of San Antonio, Texas, Customer Service/311 Department, 2006.

Los Alamos County, New Mexico
311 Customer Care Center (formerly KanDu/311 Contact Center)

Form of Government
Council-administrator

Councilors at Large
7

Annual Budget (countywide)
$215.8 million (7/1/07 – 6/30/08)

KanDu/311 Contact Center Budget
$309,000 (7/1/07 – 6/30/08)

Major Components
- Physical location: Kiosk in lobby of Los Alamos municipal building
- Size: 128 square feet
- Number of phones: 2 in kiosk
- Number of computers: 2 in kiosk

Number of Staff
Four full-time equivalents (FTEs), including the center manager and three customer service representatives. Each employee has additional duties beyond those of the contact center.

Location within County Government
Under the Los Alamos County Communications and Public Relations Office, reporting to the Communications and Public Relations Administrator.

Type of System
Centralized customer service system, which includes call center, information kiosk, cashiering and bill payments, some permitting, and notary services.

Unique System Features and Management Tools
- RightNow(tm) knowledgebase and tracking software
- Arc Console Connect(tm) Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system

Citizen Feedback Mechanisms
- Biennial citizen survey
- County government open houses
- Direct customer contact with KanDu/311 employees

City of Lynwood, California
One Call City Hall

Form of Government
Council-manager

Council Members
Five at-large

City's Annual Budget
$92.3 million (FY 2006–2007, adopted June 20, 2006)

One Call City Hall Request for Services System Budget
$56,300 (FY 2006–07, adopted June 20, 2006)

Major Components
- Physical Location: City Hall, City Manager's Office
- Square Footage: 144 square feet office
- Number of phones: Two (one for service requests and one for the hotline)
- Number of computers: One

Number of Staff
1.25 Full-time equivalent (FTEs), including a customer service manager to coordinate the system and a blockwatch coordination specialist who provides backup support.

Location within City Government
Under the Quality of Life Department, reporting to the City Manager's Office.

Type of System
Centralized, online customer service request management system with a dedicated seven-digit phone number and voicemail.

Unique System Features and Management Tools
- Request*Partner*™ Citizen Relationship Management (CRM) software
- Operated as a hosted solution from GovPartner central data center
- Citizen Feedback Mechanisms
- Monthly block watch meetings
- Direct customer contact with service request systemmanager
- City council meetings

Minneapolis, Minnesota
Minneapolis 311

Form of Government
Mayor-council with a city coordinator

Council Districts
13

Annual Budget (citywide)
$1.3 billion (FY 2007)

Minneapolis 311 Budget
$2,583,546 (Actual FY 2007)

Major Components
- Physical Location: Third floor of the Minneapolis Police Department Third Precinct Headquarters
- Square Footage: 5,000 square feet
- Number of 311 agent phones: 26 dual monitor workstations
- Number of 311 call center phones: 26
- Number of dual 911/311 workstations: 12
- Number of 911 phones: 12
- Number of computers: 49

Number of Staff
34 full-time equivalent (FTE), comprising 17 customer service agents I, 9 customer service agents II, 3 supervisors, 3 analysts, 1 administrative assistant, and 1 assistant director

Location within City Government
A division of the Minneapolis 911/311 department, reporting to the city coordinator, who reports to the mayor

Type of System
Centralized customer service system includes 311 call center, e-mail, self-service online request forms, Web chat, and TTY

Unique System Features and Management Tools
- Lagan Technologies' Frontlink(tm) Citizen Relationship Management (CRM) software
- Siemens HiPath(tm) multifunctional communication system for integrating voice and data
- Siemens HiPath ProCenter(tm) software for automatic call distribution and reporting
- Aspect E-Workforce Manager™ for scheduling and forecasting
- Higher Ground(tm) voice and screen capture for quality assurance
- Cognos(tm) enterprise reporting
- Creston(tm) integrated TV monitor system for real-time call center information
- Casewise(tm) process flow documentation
- Siemens XPressions unified messaging system

Citizen Feedback Mechanisms
- Biennial Resident Survey
- Monthly Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Citizen Feedback Form on Web site
- Community Engagement feedback card

City of Hampton, Virginia
Hampton 311 Customer Care Center

Form of Government
Council-manager

City Councilors
Seven, including a mayor and vice mayor

Annual Budget—Citywide
$443 million

Hampton 311 Call Center Budget
$578,170 (2008 Budget)

Major Components
- Physical location in retrofitted facility adjacent to city hall
- One trunk, 23 phone lines
- 22 computers; three used for training; two used for management

Number of Staff
Eleven full time equivalents (FTEs) including nine customer advocates, a call center manager, and an information manager. Two and one half part-time FTEs help cover weekend, holiday, and evening shifts.

Location with City Government
Reports to the city manager's office through an assistant city manager

Type of System
Centralized customer contact center that includes call center, web and e-mail features, and work order processing for various departments

Unique System Feature and Management Tools
- Lagan 311 system
- Frontlink GBA Master Series work order management system

Citizen Feedback Mechanisms
- Four-question survey offered to customers after each call that generates monthly report to city manager and city council
- Annual citizen satisfaction survey
- Direct contact with customer advocates

Chapter 5

311 Service: Where to Begin

By Debra Cohen, PhD,[1] Senior Social Science Analyst, U.S. Department of Justice-COPS Office, and Bryan Barnhouse, Consultant to ICMA

Local governments are increasingly seeking to establish centralized service request systems that embody a citizen-centric approach.[2] Motivations stem from a variety of needs, such as the need to:

- Provide more efficient customer service
- Develop a streamlined approach to service delivery that results in cost savings
- Increase the ability to track service department performance and improve accountability
- Improve citizen access to municipal services and information during emergencies.

The availability of "311" as an easy-to-remember phone number for non-emergency calls has provided the opportunity for local governments to retool their service delivery systems and meet these needs, through the establishment of 311 call systems.

This chapter provides a brief overview of 311[3] and common elements in 311 system planning.

What Is 311?

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserved a set of abbreviated dialing arrangements,

Beyond 911

An abbreviated dialing arrangement is a telephone number of less than the standard seven or ten digits. Among abbreviated dialing arrangements, "N11 codes" are three-digit telephone numbers where the first digit may be any number other than zero or one, but the last two digits are both one. Since N11 codes were released, various parties have asked that the FCC designate N11 codes for a variety of applications, such as (1) facilitating network access for individuals with hearing or speech disabilities; (2) providing information services; (3) reaching federal and state government agencies; and (4) accessing non-emergency police services. Source: FCC, First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making, *In the Matter of the Use of N11 Codes and Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements*, CC Docket No 92-105, February 19, 1997, http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Orders/1997/fcc97051.pdf

known as N11 codes, in 1992. (See Table 5-1.) The eight N11 codes serve a variety of purposes, the most well-known code (911) being used nationwide for emergency services. Because the number is simple and easy to remember, 911 receives a tremendous number of calls nationwide. Often, however, the public misuses the number, calling with issues that are not life-threatening, which results in overburdening 911 circuits.

In 1997, the FCC specifically set aside 311, another N11 code, as an abbreviated dialing arrangement for non-emergency police and other governmental services. The optional 311 service allows local and state governments to provide citizens in their jurisdiction access to publicly administered services and community infor-

Table 5-1 N11 Codes Designated by the FCC

N11 CODE	DESCRIPTION
211	Community Information and Referral Services
311	Non-Emergency Police and Other Governmental Services
411	Local Directory Assistance
511	Traffic and Transportation Information (U.S.); Provision of Weather and Traveller Information Services (Canada)
611	Telephone Repair Service
711	Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS)
811	Access to One Call Services to Protect Pipeline and Utilities from Excavation Damage (U.S.); Non-Urgent Health Teletriage Services (Canada)
911	Emergency

mation. The primary goals are to alleviate congestion on 911 circuits, improve the effectiveness of emergency services, and stop the cycle of reactive policing. Local governments receive priority from the FCC when seeking 311 designations; however, local governments are not required to provide 311 service as they are 911 service. If a local government chooses to use the number and discovers that it has already been assigned for other purposes, the FCC has directed that the other use will be allowed to continue until the local government is prepared to activate its 311 service. But the previous holders of the 311 designation are ultimately required to relinquish the number.

The FCC requires telecommunications service providers to ensure 311 activation within six months of a local government request. Service providers must take all of the steps necessary for activation, such as reprogramming switch software.

Terms and Conditions for 311 Applications: Regulation of Telecommunications Service

There is much more to setting up a 311 system than simply petitioning for a designation from the FCC and activating a 311 number. Local governments must be prepared to examine their business operations in depth.[4] There are technology, service delivery, staffing, interdepartmental communication, and organizational culture considerations. There are also front-line and back-end aspects to setting up a 311 system. Other chapters in this report offer a treatment of these additional considerations; this chapter deals only with the steps in applying for a 311 designation from the FCC and the appropriate state public utilities commission (PUC) and offers tips for the initial planning of the centralized customer service system.

The FCC authorized state PUCs to oversee the implementation of N11 codes. The states' administration may continue so long as that oversight does not conflict with the FCC's national assignments.

"We (the FCC) do not at this time decide what role, if any, state commissions may play once we make a national assignment. That role will necessarily be determined on a case by case basis as we make national assignments. We clarify, however, that states will be allowed to continue to make local assignments that do not conflict with our national assignments."[5]

In FCC Order 97-51, the FCC addresses the role of state commissions concerning the 311 code. In paragraph 37, the FCC finds that in the case of any conflicting requests for the 311 code between local jurisdictions:

"...state public utilities commissions, in conjunction with state and local governments, can address any conflicting requests for use of 311 (for example, situations in which city and county law enforcement agencies both request 311 implementation in the same geographic area) better than us."[6]

The application of the FCC's rules varies by state based on the rules and regulations adopted by each state's public utility commission.

311 Project Planning: Common Elements

As with any technology project, planning is critical to maximizing resources and ensuring success of the 311 system. Since the introduction of 311 more than ten years ago, common planning elements have emerged among jurisdictions that have established 311 systems. These common planning elements include the following (not necessarily in a step-by-step order):

a. Determine if the 311 number is available for your jurisdiction.[7] If the 311 number has already been assigned to another user, you can submit a formal request (petition) to the state's PUC, public service commission, or similar entity to have the number assigned locally in accordance with FCC Order 97-51.[8] It may take as long as six months after the entity submits the request to the telecommunications provider(s) for the number to be relinquished from its current user and switched to the local jurisdiction.[9]

In cases where delay in obtaining a 311 number might impede progress on system implementation, one option chosen by some jurisdictions is to use a seven or ten-digit number as a placeholder until "311" becomes available. However, this option may subsequently result in needing to develop two public education campaigns—one for the placeholder number and another for the eventual transition to 311. Therefore, some jurisdictions may choose to conduct a preliminary short-term marketing campaign to market the placeholder number to a targeted group of callers, such as government employees. This initial action can give jurisdictions the opportunity to identify bugs and gaps in the system prior to unveiling it to the public at large.

b. Find out which staff member has responsibility for 311 in your state's PUC. Meet early on with the appropriate staff person to discuss all requirements for securing 311 service; for example, the need to hold a public hearing.

c. Apply for 311 status with the state's PUC or public service commission. As noted earlier, each state has

authority for establishing the processes and procedures for securing 311 service. The staff member responsible for 311 service in your state's PUC should be able to brief you on the requirements defined by your state.

d. Meet with the primary telecommunications provider in your geographical area to begin preliminary discussions. Among the items that you should discuss are:

- The cost to switch the 311 designation
- Call routing and tracking technology
- Access to local phone directories, availability of Automatic Number Identification (ANI) and/or Automatic Location Identification (ALI)[10]
- Availability of toll-free calling to 311
- Estimated recurring costs.

e. Contact the cellular phone service providers operating in your geographical area, assuming you want cell phone users to be able to call 311. Due to geographical coverage and roaming issues, cellular phone providers may be challenged in their ability to provide 311 service. Many jurisdictions have worked around these issues by dedicating a seven-digit phone number for cell phone users.

f. Identify project stakeholders and the level of intra- and interagency buy-in. To avoid delays in 311 system implementation, ensure that project stakeholders are identified at the outset of the 311 project and that their support for the project is secured. Stakeholders can include persons whose agency or department will be affected by the establishment of a 311 system in terms of:

- Financial and personnel resources needed to support the system
- Benefits to be received from the system's implementation
- Changes in business processes that will be needed in order to support and maximize efficiency of the system.

Examples of 311 project stakeholders include 311 system project managers, 911 system managers, dispatch supervisors, agency/department managers, information technology managers, elected officials, and community representatives.

Interview persons identified as key to project success and conduct intra- and interagency focus groups to determine interest in the system and identify needs and concerns.[11] It may also be useful to conduct a survey of personnel in potential participating service agencies (e.g., police, fire, emergency medical services (EMS), animal

control, streets, sanitation, utilities) to determine their interest. These activities can help develop an efficient, collaborative decision-making structure for the 311 project. They can also help uncover reluctance or flat-out resistance to implementing the system for reasons such as financial or political concerns.[12] Conducting interviews, focus groups, and surveys can also unearth other obstacles, such as an inadequate technological infrastructure, which, may prove to be formidable hurdles later on in the project if left unaddressed.

g. Determine who will provide short- and long-term governance for the system.

- Where will the new system be located within the local government organization, and how will the reporting relationship be structured?
- Do the stakeholders generally understand how the 311 service will interact with participating agencies and departments, and have roles and responsibilities of each entity been delineated to ensure project success?
- Have service level agreements been established with participating service agencies and regions?[13]
- Who will own the system?
- Who will pay for recurring costs?[14]
- Who will devote personnel and funding to maintain the system?[15]

h. Conduct a needs analysis. A needs analysis can help the local government define the scope of the 311 system.[16] The system should be established based on current and anticipated needs, such as the need to:

- Reserve 911 for emergency services.
- Reduce the number of non-emergency calls to 911.
- Reduce police dispatches to non-emergency 911 calls.
- Decrease police response time to emergencies.
- Increase time available for the police to engage in community policing activities.[17]
- Improve citizen access to local government programs and services by providing an easy-to-remember phone number; reducing the average citizen's confusion about "who to call."
- Provide a backup system to 911 services.
- Consolidate municipal service call centers and centralize call intake.
- Reduce misdirected service calls, transfers, and lost/unanswered calls.

- Improve service delivery quality, timeliness, and accountability; reduce redundancy of municipal service delivery.
- Provide an easy-to-use mechanism for citizens to report potential precursors to crime (e.g., abandoned cars and housing, nonworking street lights, loitering, disturbances), empowering citizens to improve the quality of life in their own communities.
- Improve citizen access to up-to-date information during emergencies, such as road and building closures, and shelter and supply locations. To date, 311 systems have been used by jurisdictions in response to a variety of emergencies, including hurricanes, snowstorms, infrastructure failure, and homeland security concerns.[18]
- Decrease the call volume of local government service agencies.

Agencies may find it fruitful to conduct surveys of their resident and business communities to assess current attitudes and perceptions regarding local government service, identify areas where improvement may be needed, and determine interest in the proposed 311 system.[19] Conducting these surveys would help local government officials:

- Identify and prioritize community needs and concerns
- Inform development of 311 system and resource allocation strategies
- Establish baseline data to use in evaluations of 311 system impact.

i. Conduct an analysis of 911 call data. Collecting and analyzing 911 call data, particularly non-emergency 911 calls, has multiple benefits, helping agencies to:

- Identify patterns in the type and frequency of non-emergency 911 calls.[20]
- Identify service agencies that should be incorporated into the 311 system.[21] For example, a large number of 911 non-emergency calls concerning stray animals would suggest that the 311 system should include the service department responsible for animal control.
- Determine the proportion of resources being used on non-emergency 911 calls. Agencies may be surprised to find out that they have long been underestimating both the actual number of non-emergency calls being answered, but not reported, by 911 call takers, and the time it takes to answer those calls.[22]

- Obtain baseline 911 call data for use in 311 impact evaluations.[23]

j. Conduct a risk analysis.[24] Avoid project stalls and wrong turns by anticipating threats to success. For example, what sources of project funding are available for start-up *and* long-term system maintenance? Is the project dependent on one or two project champion(s), and, if so, what is the contingency plan should those individuals leave the project?

The personnel involved in implementing a 311/CRM system are critical to its long-term success. Consider instances where the original project managers leave their department, either voluntarily or due to changes in administration, without leaving detailed documentation on the status of the 311 project. When new project managers are unaware of ongoing back-end political, administrative, and technological challenges, unnecessary delays in planning and implementation can result. Making critical documentation, such as decision-making processes, e-mail messages, project files, and grant paperwork, available in a shared work environment at the project's start can mitigate information loss and enable incoming project managers to transition into the project without compromising the project's goals or timeline.

k. Research available literature. Technology planning guidebooks and 311-specific knowledge resources, such as those referenced in this chapter, are freely available. For example, ideas on project timelines can be found in case studies published on Austin, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Orange County, Florida.[25] Additional resources can be found on the ICMA and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Web sites.[26]

l. Conduct site visits to other jurisdictions with 311 systems. While a host of reports, articles, and legislative materials exist on 311 systems, jurisdictions seeking to establish a 311 system can benefit a great deal from conducting site visits of jurisdictions that have already established them. Drawing on the lessons learned by these jurisdictions, newcomers to 311 systems can glean ideas on issues such as call center workspaces and features, call systems, hardware and software, and performance reporting tools. These visits can help form peer-to-peer working relationships. Also, seeing a fully operational 311 system in person can provide inspiration during challenging times with the project.

No central registry for 311 service in the United States currently exists. A non-exhaustive list of fifty-

seven jurisdictions with operational 311 systems appears in Table 5-2.

Conclusion

While the chief reason for the federal inception of the 311 dialing arrangement in 1992 was to alleviate the demand on the 911 systems, 311 service has proven to be a versatile management tool that helps local governments deliver more effective, efficient, and accountable public services. Almost 60 local governments in the United States have adopted 311 call systems; many more

have instituted a one-call centralized customer service system. Each community is driven by different motivations to discern the most appropriate application of 311 systems for their needs, but the end result appears to be better customer service for citizens.

Unlike 911 service, 311 service is not federally mandated. The federal government, through the FCC, defers to the state PUCs on the oversight of 311 implementation. The state regulations that govern a local government securing 311 service are not uniform, which means local governments in different states

Table 5-2   Local Jurisdictions in the United States with 311 Service

City/County	State	Population	City/County	State	Population
Akron	OH	209,704	Las Vegas	NV	552,539
Albuquerque	NM	504,949	Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government	KY	279,044
Anaheim	CA	334,425	Little Rock	AR	184,422
Austin	TX	709,893	Los Alamos County	NM	18,558
Baltimore	MD	637,455	Los Angeles	CA	3,849,378
Berkeley	CA	101,555	Louisville	KY	554,496
Bethel	AK	6,356	Miami City/Miami-Dade County	FL	2,387,170
Birmingham	AL	229,424	Minneapolis	MN	372,833
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	NC	867,067	Mobile	AL	192,830
Chattanooga	TN	155,190	Nashville/Davidson County	TN	619,626
Chicago	IL	2,833,321	New Orleans	LA	223,388
Columbia	SC	119,961	New York City	NY	8,214,426
Columbia County	GA	109,100	North Hempstead	NY	221,907
Columbus	OH	733,103	Orange County	FL	1,066,113
Columbus Consolidated Government	GA	188,660	Pueblo	CO	103,730
Dallas	TX	1,232,940	Riverside	CA	293,761
Danbury	CT	79,285	Rochester	NY	208,123
DeKalb County	GA	737,093	Sacramento	CA	453,781
Denver, City/County of	CO	588,349	Saginaw	MI	57,523
Detroit	MI	871,121	San Antonio	TX	1,296,682
Dukes County	MA	15,485	San Francisco	CA	749,041
Fort Wayne	IN	248,637	San Jose	CA	929,936
Hampton	VA	145,017	Savannah	GA	127,889
Harford County	MD	239,993	Somerville	MA	74,554
Hartford	CT	124,512	Tuscaloosa	AL	83,052
Henderson	NV	240,614	Virginia Beach	VA	435,619
Houston	TX	2,144,491	Washington	DC	581,530
Kansas City	MO	447,306	Winston-Salem	NC	196,990
Knoxville	TN	182,337			

Source: Debra Cohen, PhD, of the COPS Office, with 2006 and 2007 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

must navigate a slightly different set of procedures. However, there are a number of common elements for planning the implementation of 311 service, which this chapter has outlined. Ultimately, though, each local government will have to determine how to best to implement 311 service in its locality.

Endnotes

1 The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement of a product by the author or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues. The Internet references cited in this chapter were valid as of the date of this publication. Given that URLs and Web sites are in constant flux, neither the author nor the COPS Office can vouch for their current validity.

2 In 2002, a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report focused on the President's stated goal: to "champion citizen-centered electronic government that will result in a major improvement in the federal government's value to the citizen." U.S. GAO, Report to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Selection and Implementation of the Office of Management and Budget's 24 Initiatives*, page 2, November 2002. http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03229.pdf.

3 U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *311 for Non-emergencies: Helping Communities One Call at a Time* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2007), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 2.

4 The City of Minneapolis and The Macro Group, *Building a 311 System: A Study of the City of Minneapolis.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, forthcoming 2008), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 408.

5 FCC, Third Report and Order on Reconsideration on "The Use of N11 Codes and Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements," Paragraph 43. CC Docket No 92-105, Adapted July 21, 2000.

6 FCC, First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making, *In the Matter of The Use of N11 Codes and Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements*, CC Docket No 92-105, February 19, 1997.

7 For example, prior to the city of Rochester establishing a 311 system, the three-digit number had been designated as a deaf-relay number by the New York State Police (Rochester Police Department, presentation at *COPS Office 311 Cluster Conference*, Washington, D.C., 2001).

8 FCC, N11 Codes and Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements.

9 Shelly Solomon and Craig Uchida, *Building a 311 System for Non-Emergency Calls: A Case Study of the Austin Police Department*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2003), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 234.

10 Since 311 systems are not required to have ANI/ALI, 311 systems can be an appealing option for citizens who wish to anonymously report incidents such as gang activity, vandalism, and disorderly behavior. See National Institute of Justice, *Managing Calls to the Police With 911/311 Systems*, Research for Practice, February 2005, http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 412 and National Institute of Justice, *Calling 311: Guidelines for Policymakers*, Research for Policy, February 2005, http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 413. Both publications are based on Lorraine Mazerolle, Dennis Rogan, James Frank, Christine Famega, and John E. Eck, *Managing Citizen Calls to the Police: An Assessment of Non-Emergency Call Systems*, final report to the National Institute of Justice, October 2001, NCJ 199060, www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/199060.pdf.

11 For technology project planning guidance, and ideas on identifying project stakeholders and how to conduct focus groups and interview stakeholders, see Kelly J. Harris and William H. Romesburg, *Law Enforcement Tech Guide: How to plan, purchase and panage technology (successfully!)*, A Guide for Executives, Managers and Technologists (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2002) http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 243.

12 Dan Hawkins, *Law Enforcement Tech Guide for Communications Interoperability: A Guide for Interagency Communications Projects* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2006), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 238; Stephen T. Holmes, University of Central Florida, *Building a 311 System: A Case Study of the Orange County, Florida, Government Service Center* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2007), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 447.

13 Holmes, *Building a 311 System: Orange County*.

14 The COPS Office programs that awarded funding for the establishment of 311 non-emergency systems in Fiscal Years 1999, 2000, and 2003 did not fund recurring costs.

15 Harris and Romesburg, *Plan, Purchase and Manage Technology*.

16 Ibid.

17 Gayle Fisher-Stewart, ICMA, *Community Policing Explained: A Guide for Local Governments* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2007), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 430; Tom McEwen, Deborah Spence, Russell Wolff, Julie Wartell, and Barbara Webster, Institute for Law and Justice, *Call Management and Community Policing* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2003), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 22.

18 COPS Office, *Local Law Enforcement Responds to Terrorism: Lessons in Prevention and Preparedness* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2002), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 125; COPS Office, *311 for Non-Emergencies: Helping Communities One Call at a Time*; Solomon and Uchida, *Building a 311 System: Austin*; Holmes, *Building a 311 System: Orange County;* The City of Minneapolis and The Macro Group, *Building a 311 System: Minneapolis.*

19 The Macro Group, *Building a 311 System: Minneapolis*.

20 Rana Sampson, *Misuse and Abuse of 911* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2002), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 141.

21 This exercise can help some agencies plan a phased-in approach to 311, initially incorporating agencies that provide services for the most frequently received non-emergency 911 calls. Other priorities can include agencies deemed amenable to consolidation and those providing immediate benefits to the community. Holmes, *Building a 311 System: Orange County*.

22 Lorraine Mazerolle, Dennis Rogan, James Frank, Christine Famega, and John E. Eck, University of Cincinnati, *Managing Citizen Calls to the Police: An Assessment of Non-Emergency Call Systems* Report to U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office and National Institute of Justice, 2001, http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/199060.pdf.

23 David J. Roberts, *Law Enforcement Tech Guide for Creating Performance Measures That Work: A Guide for Executives and Managers* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2006), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/ric/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID = 275.

24 Harris and Romesburg, *Plan, Purchase and Manage Technology;* Hawkins, *Tech Guide for Communications Interoperability.*

25 Solomon and Uchida, *Building a 311 System*: *Austin*; Holmes, *Building a 311 System: Orange County;* The City of Minneapolis and The Macro Group, *Building a 311 System: Minneapolis.*

26 www.icma.org; www.cops.usdoj.gov.

Chapter 6

Investing in CRM: Building the Business Case and Cost-Benefit Model

By Shayne Kavanagh, Research Manager, Government Finance Officers Association, and Spencer Stern, Executive Consultant, Government Finance Officers Association

It is no secret that local government finances are under pressure. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) indicates that "large and growing fiscal challenges for [state and local government] will begin to emerge within the next few years."[1] The GAO's analysis shows that rising health care costs and flat revenues will send local government net revenues into a long-term decline. In this environment, a strong rationale for major projects such as implementing a CRM system—including a clear sense of the benefits available and the resource expenditures necessary to realize them—takes on a renewed importance.

A business case and an associated cost-benefit model anchor the justification for a CRM project. Because a business case formally describes costs and benefits, it enables decision makers to assess the value of a CRM project and, if a standard business case format is applied to all projects, it also allows a potential CRM investment to be compared against other projects.

Not only does a business case help local governments decide if they should undertake a CRM project in the first place, it dramatically increases the odds of a successful implementation. The business case explicitly defines the objectives of the project, thereby focusing the implementation on the benefits of greatest interest to the organization. Clarity of objectives and expected outcomes of the project make it easier to assign accountability for results to individual managers.

This chapter describes how to build a business case for CRM, with particular emphasis on the cost-benefit analysis, which is often also known as a "return on investment" or "ROI" analysis.

Return on the CRM Investment

The crux of the business case is the ROI analysis, for it describes whether CRM is a worthy investment of the public's tax dollars. The most straightforward element of the ROI analysis is the cost analysis, including the out-of-pocket expenses paid to outside vendors and internal costs, such as staff time spent on the project. While most public managers are familiar with estimating costs for projects, they may be less practiced at articulating the benefits. The ROI analysis compares the project's benefits to its costs in order to arrive at an estimated return.

The first type of benefits to consider is "tangible" benefits—or those that are expected to deliver hard dollar savings or revenue enhancements. More challenging to analyze are "intangible" benefits, which describe softer sources of public value that will be created by the project, such as improved government accountability or improved public access and input to government. It is crucial that a project's intangible benefits be made clear in the business case: public sector investments are rarely based entirely on an expected hard dollar return; they are based, at least in part, on these more intangible values. Hence, the challenge of a business case is to transform these intangible benefits into measurable criteria that can be used to compare the CRM project against other possible investments of public funds. Also, should the CRM project go forward, measurable criteria will allow the project's expected benefits to be validated against actual experience. The following sections describe in more detail how to assess the potential costs and benefits of a CRM project. The chapter concludes with advice on compiling this information as a business case and moving forward with a CRM project.

Are You Ready for CRM? Here Is a Practical Tool to Find Out.

Prior to launching a CRM initiative, it is important to assess your organization's readiness. A better understanding of your readiness enables you to budget more accurately because areas that may need extra help can be identified up front. Appendix 1 provides a CRM Readiness Assessment Tool to help you grade your state of operations for a CRM initiative. This tool can identify areas of concern and lead to the adoption of risk mitigation strategies to address them.

Costs

It is crucial to understand and accurately forecast the costs of a CRM project. Many CRM projects fail to meet their stated objectives or timelines because the government runs out of money or resources to push the project forward. Fortunately, the costs associated with a CRM project can be accurately estimated by deconstructing costs into categories of major expenditures and defining critical assumptions related to each category. Appendix 2 of this chapter provides a worksheet that helps deconstruct, define, and estimate the costs of deploying a CRM solution. The worksheet describes the following cost categories:

- Facility for call taking/citizen service agents
- Infrastructure, including hardware, storage, server, and related equipment
- Government project personnel
  - Discovery team—Sets the groundwork for CRM by assessing needs and developing a business case
  - Launch team—Begins engaging external vendors and consultants to review the business case and provide insights; focuses on securing funding and understanding legal issues arising from 311
  - Implementation and Post Go-Live team—Focuses on identifying pilot departments and creating internal infrastructure to help launch the CRM/311 project

  - Ongoing maintenance team—Includes contact center personnel and related support
- CRM software applications and related licensing fees
- Integration interfaces to connect other systems (e.g., existing work-order or e-mail systems) to CRM
- Middleware software to "glue" together the different systems involved in the government's citizen service strategy; middleware is a more sophisticated alternative to traditional interfacing
- Legacy applications and data that need to be converted to the CRM environment

Table 6-1   Suggested Budget Percentages for Local Government CRM Systems

Category	Percentage
Personnel	57%
Software applications	15%
Contact center build-out[a]	10%
Network infrastructure	8%
Overhead	5%
Training	3%
Education and outreach	2%

a   Assumes existing space is available.

Table 6-2   Estimated Costs for Pilot CRM Launch

Pilot Description	Year 1 Estimated Base Cost	Year 2 Estimated Cost Based on a Percentage of Year 1 Base Cost	Year 3 Estimated Cost Based on a Percentage of Year 1 Base Cost
• Ten single site licenses[a] • Deployed in a single department • FAQ database • Simple service request • Limited Web-enablement functionality • Training	$125,000	10%–15%	10%
• Twenty-five enterprise-wide licenses[b] • Deployed in four departments • FAQ database • Simple-moderate service requests • Web-enablement • Training	$450,000	15%–18%	15%

a   This scenario represents ten users within a single municipal department using the CRM application.

b   This scenario represents twenty-five users within four municipal departments using the CRM application and sharing departmental information via the CRM application.

- Voice and data telecommunications equipment (e.g., automatic call distributor, interactive voice response [IVR], and computer telephony integration)

- Training of staff in the new technology and citizen service procedures

- Advertising/outreach/marketing communications to make citizens aware of new ways to work with government, such as a 311 telephone number or Web portal.

Based on interviews with industry vendors and consultants, as well as local government CRM program managers, Table 6-1 provides a guideline on the budget percentage that should be allocated to each cost category.

To better understand the potential dollar cost of an actual project, Table 6-2 provides an estimate for launching a small-scale CRM pilot initiative based on two projects of differing scope and functionality. These estimates were derived from interviews with CRM vendors. Please note that these estimates do not include internal resources and effort such as staff time.

The foregoing resources should provide a solid base for estimating the cost of a CRM project. The following practices help to maximize the accuracy of cost forecasts.

- Consider both internal and external costs.

- Segregate one-time project costs from ongoing maintenance costs.

- Document the assumptions used in the estimates.

- Capture accurate internal pricing information for project personnel.

- Seek bids from multiple vendors.

- Work with an outside expert who has been involved in previous CRM business case and ROI assessments, especially to verify the cost estimate.

- Compare your budget estimate to the project costs of other local governments that have completed a CRM project.

- Consider a phased implementation approach to spread the costs over time and reduce implementation risk.

Benefits

For a CRM project to create the most value possible, it must strive to resolve the most pressing community issues, not simply the conception of the generic benefits thought to be available from CRM technol-

ogy. Therefore, public managers should place tangible and intangible benefits in the context of the community's priority concerns. One way to do this is to consider the "critical business issues" and "visionary opportunities" driving the CRM project.[2] Visionary opportunities describe big-picture, strategic benefits—and engage elected officials in the CRM project. For example, Mayor Michael Bloomberg's goal of reducing the twelve-page phone book directory of city phone numbers to just one number, 311, drove the city of New York's CRM project.

Visionary opportunities also provide long-term direction. To continue the New York example, Mayor Bloomberg put forth the vision that citizens could eventually upload digital images and videos to the 311 call center. As he stated, this would "allow New Yorkers to step forward and document non-emergency quality of life concerns holding city agencies accountable for correcting them quickly and efficiently."[3] This innovation, which would be the first of its kind in the world, recognizes the increasing availability and importance of video images as a means of communication and the opportunity for the city's 311 system to take advantage of this trend to improve quality of life in the community.

As a complement to visionary opportunities, critical business issues are problems that, if not resolved in the near future, threaten the day-to-day operation of government. Common examples of critical business issues include:

- *Unsustainable legacy technology environment.* The current citizen contact system may be reaching a breaking point. A vendor may be discontinuing support on an obsolete technology, or internal staff may not have the skill set to keep an aging system in one piece. Another possibility is that citizen data may be spread among many unintegrated systems, resulting in information fragmentation and inflated data and technology maintenance costs.

- *Overburdened 911 system.* The emergency call center may be deluged with service calls that are more appropriate to a general government hotline. For example, in DeKalb County, Georgia, 911 operators received 1.16 million calls in 2004. Of those calls, 40 percent were non-emergency, informational, and customer-service related calls that could have been handled by a 311 system.[4]

- *Underperforming service.* Failure to meet citizen expectations can provide a powerful impetus for a CRM initiative. A persuasive example comes from

the Southwark Council in the United Kingdom (a municipality in the London metropolitan area of about 250,000) and its way of dealing with disabled people. A young man who had lost both his legs in a motorcycle accident met the leader of the council government and explained to the leader that everyone in the world seemed to accept that he was now disabled, except for the council. Each time he interacted with the council, he had to retell the story and, even worse, prove again that he was disabled. The reason was that each council service had its own data repository, and some services required re-verification of a disability after a fixed time period. So, in an average year, the young man might have to provide the information to three different people. This was an unacceptable level of service and helped convince the council of the need to reexamine its citizen service systems and practices.

Critical business issues help to engage operational staff in the CRM project because resolution of these issues will make notable improvements in day-to-day work. Also, critical business issues are usually readily measured, providing a clear basis for determining if the CRM project is delivering benefits. For example, the local government could maintain a "shut-off" list of old systems to be replaced by the new CRM system, with success indicated by the actual decommissioning of each system on the list. Reduction in non-emergency calls to 911 and citizens' satisfaction with their service experience can also be easily gauged.

Tangible Benefits

While keeping in mind the critical business issues and visionary opportunities that will inspire an organization to undertake a CRM project, you can define the benefits that the CRM project will deliver. Tangible benefits are a good place to start, as they describe the more direct advantages of a CRM project—the kind the reader of the business case will most easily appreciate. Further, tangible benefits are often expressed in financial terms, or at least have direct financial implications. This is important for justifying CRM expenditures in the fiscally austere environment in which many governments find themselves. This section considers tangible benefits in the form of cost savings and avoidance and revenue enhancements.

Cost Savings and Avoidance.   The primary tangible benefit of a CRM system occurs in the form of direct cost savings or avoidance of future costs. This sec-

Phasing the Business Case

When constructing the business case, consider how to address critical business issues and visionary opportunities over a multi-year timeframe. This will make for a more realistic business case, create focus at each phase of the project, and provide long-term direction to the project. Usually, the earlier phases of a project focus more on critical business issues, and the later phases focus more on visionary opportunities. This phasing occurs because critical business issues provide the impetus to get the project off the ground, are typically easier to resolve (providing an "early win"), and could result in significant degradation to service or exposure to risk if not addressed soon. Visionary opportunities are typically longer-term in nature. The graphic below summarizes:

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase n
Critical Issues	More	→		Less
Vision Opportunities	Less	→		More

Notwithstanding, you should be aware that because visionary opportunities are of great interest to elected officials, they should not always be put off until later phases of the project—the viability of the business case may hinge on achieving certain visionary opportunities during an official's current term in office.

tion describes a number of potential cost savings and avoidance areas. You can use these ideas to identify your own opportunities for cost reductions.

Technology Cost Reductions.   The first and most straightforward opportunity is technology cost reductions, such as the elimination of maintenance costs for legacy technologies. These types of cost reductions are often considerable. To illustrate, Southwark maintained approximately 250 databases of citizen names and addresses, many of which had their own server and maintenance costs. Consolidating these databases into a CRM system has generated approximately $250,000 in cost reductions for Southwark in just the first year of operation.

Reduced Absenteeism and Turnover.   CRM systems can reduce absenteeism and turnover among contact center agents, thereby avoiding the cost of recruiting and training new workers. There are a number of ways to realize this benefit. One approach is to provide cross-training

between 911 and 311 operators. This enables 911 operators to decompress from the more stressful 911 call center by working in the 311 call center, while 311 operators can realize a temporary boost in pay by filling in at the 911 center. CRM initiatives often result in the consolidation of citizen service functions across the government. This provides greater opportunities for advancement, in terms of horizontal expansion of job skills and, for larger CRM contact centers, vertical advancement into supervisory positions.
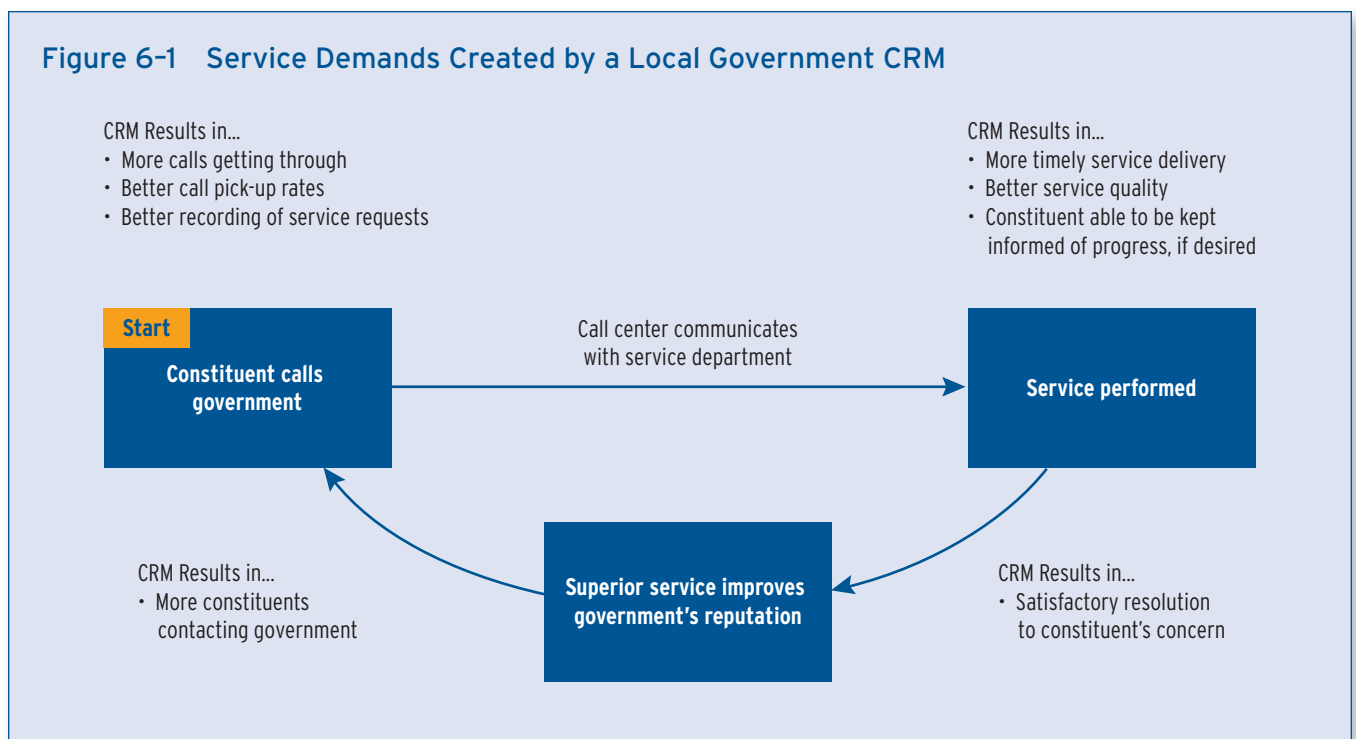
Help in Coping with Increasing Service Demands.   One of CRM's most compelling cost advantages is its ability to help government cope with increasing demands for service without necessarily hiring additional staff. The phenomenon of ever-increasing citizen demand for public services is a truism in public management. What may not be as widely appreciated is that CRM can actually release "pent-up" demand for services, as Figure 6-1 illustrates.

DeKalb County's sanitation department experienced the above cycle. After migrating call intake for sanitation service requests to its CRM call center, the county discovered that many requests for service had not been getting through to the department before the migration. This was because the five positions taking incoming calls were simply not able to answer all the of the service requests—some calls were not

picked up due to call volume, some rang busy due to inadequate telephony infrastructure, and those that did get through were sometimes not properly serviced due to the lack of optimized call-taking habits. After migration to the CRM call center, there were many more agents available to take calls, a much improved telephony infrastructure, and a redesigned system for taking calls and documenting service requests. As a result, the sanitation department experienced a 30 percent increase in service request volume. As the department began to more successfully respond to requests, the success had the effect of encouraging additional callers.

However, the increase in call volume does not necessarily create an increase in costs. At the point of initial citizen contact, a CRM system focuses on providing "first-call resolution"—completing a service request or inquiry correctly on the first contact. This eliminates callbacks for the same issue. Also, in a consolidated contact center, agents' time can be used more efficiently—they can handle a stream of different citizen service contacts and tasks. By comparison, when a contact center is housed within a single department, its work is limited to tasks within that department only, leading to downtime and lulls in productivity from uneven work flows. For instance, Los Alamos County, New Mexico (population of 18,343)

Figure 6-1   Service Demands Created by a Local Government CRM

CRM Results in…
- More calls getting through
- Better call pick-up rates
- Better recording of service requests

CRM Results in…
- More timely service delivery
- Better service quality
- Constituent able to be kept informed of progress, if desired

Start
Constituent calls government

Call center communicates with service department

Service performed

CRM Results in…
- More constituents contacting government

Superior service improves government's reputation

CRM Results in…
- Satisfactory resolution to constituent's concern

runs a four-person contact center, where the agents have significant responsibilities in addition to citizen contact intake, including cashiering, issuing certain types of permits, and providing notary services. This keeps the agents busy, even if call volume temporarily wanes.

CRM also mitigates cost escalation of actual service delivery. First, the contact center handles citizen contacts on behalf of the operating department, thereby freeing up the operating department to concentrate on service delivery efficiencies. CRM also provides greater visibility over all service requests, thereby helping to eliminate multiple work orders or dispatches for the same issue. When coupled with geographic information systems (GIS) capabilities, CRM can help more efficiently schedule and track service provision. For example, as a result of much improved front-end citizen request intake, Kingston-Upon-Hull, a local authority in the United Kingdom with a population of just under 250,000, witnessed a fourfold increase in requests for bulky refuse item pickups—47,000 requests up from 11,000. The Hull officials quickly realized that unless they improved management of the service, costs would spiral out of control. The Hull used GIS integration capabilities to strategically plan pickup routes (rather than the first-come, first-served system used previously). Along with close management of per-unit costs, the Hull realized a 36 percent reduction in the per-pickup cost.

As shown in the examples above, CRM has real potential to generate additional demand. Expectations for cost savings through CRM have to be tempered by the understanding that CRM may not be able to help the organization reduce its budget, but rather that it can help the organization better meet citizen demand while holding cost increases in check.

Call Center Consolidation.   One of the more widely publicized areas of savings in both the private and public sectors is call center consolidation—grouping together citizen service agents from across the government into a single contact center. This realizes economies of scale without sacrificing service quality, as CRM technology imparts to the all-purpose citizen service agent a substantive command of the inquiries and requests that citizens commonly make. Technologies such as a comprehensive knowledgebase and conversation scripting provide the tools to respond quickly, accurately, and consistently to a variety of inquiries and requests. Call escalation procedures and automated work flow allow the citizen service agent to seamlessly involve departmental experts in cases where the agent cannot handle the call alone.

Research by Computer Sciences Corporation, based primarily on its work with large, private-sector firms, suggests that call center consolidation can produce savings ranging from 25 to 50 percent.[5] While no broad data on potential consolidation savings in the public sector are available, case study research suggests that significant savings may also be available to governments, especially larger ones, which can more easily amass the volume of personnel and work needed to realize economies of scale. To illustrate, DeKalb County is consolidating its twenty-two-person water and sewer billing call center staff into the county's 311 call center. Based on research the county conducted on the type of calls the water and sewer contact center receives and how many of these can be successfully handled by a generalist 311 citizen service agent rather than a utility specialist, the county expects that the call volume to the water and sewer call center will decrease by about 50 percent. Further, county research has shown that 311 agents spend about 70 percent of their work time on phone calls, compared to only 40 percent for water and sewer specialists. This means that the 311 center is realizing economies of scale by making more complete use of agents' time. As a result, the county has initially reallocated seven of the water and sewer call center's twenty-two positions to the 311 call center, and may reallocate more in the future as the county's CRM implementation stabilizes and optimizes.

In another illustration, Waukesha County, Wisconsin (population of approximately 380,000), has identified a number of specific sources of savings due to consolidation. Consolidation allows a centralized contact center to use specialized address tracking and data cleansing technology to maintain a more accurate database of citizen mailing addresses, leading to more accurate mailings. The county expects savings from reduced return mailings and reductions in duplicate effort to verify addresses and resend documents, as well as no longer having to manage redundant citizen data on an ongoing basis. The county's CRM consultant estimates that these savings could be equal to about half the cost of implementing the CRM system during the first phase of the county's three-phase project. Reduction in misrouted calls and citizen callbacks due to more effective initial call handling through a consolidated call center are expected to achieve savings equal to about another 10 percent of the county's phase-one costs.

Reduction in 911 Call Volume. Another widely recognized cost benefit of CRM to the public sector is the potential to reduce 911 call volume by redirecting non-emergency calls to an easily accessible and well-known alternative communication channel, such as a 311 telephone number. Typically, 911 operators receive a higher salary than non-emergency citizen service agents. Further, a 911 call center is typically not optimized to handle non-emergency calls, so their response to those types of calls is less efficient than that of a dedicated non-emergency contact center. Hence, by establishing a convenient, easy-to-remember alternative to 911 and publicizing its availability, local governments can redirect the often substantial number of non-emergency calls 911 receives to a less expensive and more efficient channel.

DeKalb County, Georgia, anticipates reducing non-emergency call volume by 20 percent in the first year as a result of its 311 system, and expects to be able to reduce the staffing costs of its 911 call center accordingly. For example, DeKalb County expects that a reduced 911 call volume will enable it to reduce overtime expenses in its 911 center. The city of Chicago, which has almost a decade of 311 experience, has witnessed benefits such as 125,000 fewer dispatches of squad cars in 2007 as a result of 311 handling non-emergency calls. The city's 311 system is also able to process 20 percent of the police department's case reports each year.

Redirection of Citizens to Less Expensive Channels. Under a CRM philosophy, citizens can choose to interact with government via a variety of channels, including telephone, walk-in, e-mail, a Web site, or postal mail. However, each channel has different cost-per-interaction implications—so a CRM cost-reduction strategy can focus on encouraging citizens to use the least costly communication channel.

The Internet is the least expensive channel, but it can be difficult to steer citizens away from the telephone and toward the Web. The city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, found that citizens were most willing to consult a Web site to find answers to basic inquiries, such as the hours of a recreation center. However, for more in-depth service requests, the city's call center was favored because service requests allow for more human interaction to get to the heart of an issue. The Chattanooga experience teaches two lessons. First, Web-based service probably has the most potential in governments where a high proportion of contacts are basic inquiries. Second, citizens currently dis-

play a limited appetite for engaging in more complex transactions over the Internet. Therefore, in the initial stages of their CRM system development, governments should probably restrict their Web-based efforts to basic inquiry resolution and less involved transactions, such as online bill payment.

While the Internet is generally the least expensive channel, the telephone is the most popular and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, a CRM strategy must seek to reduce or limit the average cost-per-call to maintain CRM's viability as a cost containment tool. A popular means for limiting the cost-per-call in the private sector is interactive voice response (IVR) menus that precede contact with a live operator. However, many CRM implementations in the public sector are sponsored by, and closely associated with, the mayor or other high-profile official, who often prefers that citizens immediately reach a live operator.

If IVR is not a tenable cost-control strategy, governments must place increased emphasis on managing the efficiency of human call takers. Fortunately, CRM systems track a variety of metrics on contact handling performance that can be used to drive efficiencies. The performance of individual call center agents can be monitored against the following criteria:

- Number of calls handled
- Average time required to handle a call
- First-call resolution rate (i.e., is the call transferred or does the have to call back?)
- Customer satisfaction ratings.

By looking for call center agents who deviate from established standards and/or performance averages for the entire call center, the center's management can take remedial action such as training, counseling, or replacement of under-performing agents.

Governments can also use metrics to monitor the performance of call centers as a whole. This applies when a particular type of service request is vexing the entire call center. Armed with this information, call center management can determine if the call center needs to improve its ability to handle that type of call or if it would be more cost-effective to divest responsibility by involving a subject matter expert from the appropriate operating department in the call sooner.

The telephone can become a less expensive channel to direct citizens toward, compared to walk-ins or direct departmental contact numbers, if governments take the above steps to maximize the efficiency of a centralized CRM call center.

Finally, CRM has implications for the walk-in channel, traditionally one of the more expensive channels to operate. For Waukesha County, as for many government institutions, increasing security concerns around walk-ins are making an already expensive channel even more so. Hence, the county is planning to use CRM to reduce the cost of the walk-in channel by creating a "one-stop shop" desk, which will consolidate reception personnel and limit the need for the public to visit service departments, thereby mitigating the cost of securing county facilities. A contact center agent at the reception desk will be able to handle a variety of walk-in requests with the same ease as he or she would a variety of telephone calls. Of course, Waukesha also expects that CRM-enabled telephony and Internet services will provide an attractive alternative to visiting the county offices in person, thereby further reducing the resources the county will need to devote to maintaining the walk-in channel.

Process Efficiencies.   CRM captures and makes available for analysis a wealth of data on citizen services and service performance. Paired with attentive management and a dedication to improving performance, CRM data can drive important cost benefits. For example, the city of Chicago receives more than 100,000 street defect complaints a year. The largest potholes (called pavement or sewer cave-ins) are real hazards, causing vehicle damage and potentially unsafe streets. However, it was taking city workers as long as a month to fix these cave-ins, and, in the meantime, more residents were calling in about the same issue. Analysis of the CRM data revealed two main causes of these delays. First, when the call first came

in, the street defect was sometimes misdiagnosed as a regular pothole, rather than an urgent cave-in. Second, the division of responsibility for addressing service requests was not clearly defined between the Department of Water Management and the Department of Transportation. Some service requests even "ping-ponged" back and forth between the two departments before a work crew was assigned. Figure 6-2 shows how service requests were processed in a very isolated fashion with no communication between the two departments until the fourth step, at which point the request could go back to the first step within the other department's process.

A team including these two departments, the Office of Budget and Management, the Mayor's Office, the 311 call center, and the Civic Consulting Alliance (a pro-bono service of the Chicago business community) developed a simple and effective remedy. First, the call center developed better questions to ask the caller in order to identify the cave-ins; for instance, asking if the hole was located near a sewer structure such as a sewer grate. With more detailed information about the road problem, dispatchers were better able to determine the appropriate department and crew needed to repair the street. Second, the city officials made a number of improvements to the handling of work requests after the 311 center took the initial call—they improved interdepartmental communication and eliminated unnecessary steps from the process. For example, they eliminated the requirement for a second inspection in order to complete an interdepartmental transfer. The city realized that, in the vast majority of cases, the transportation department work crews respond-

Figure 6-2   High Level Cave-in Service Request (CSR) Process
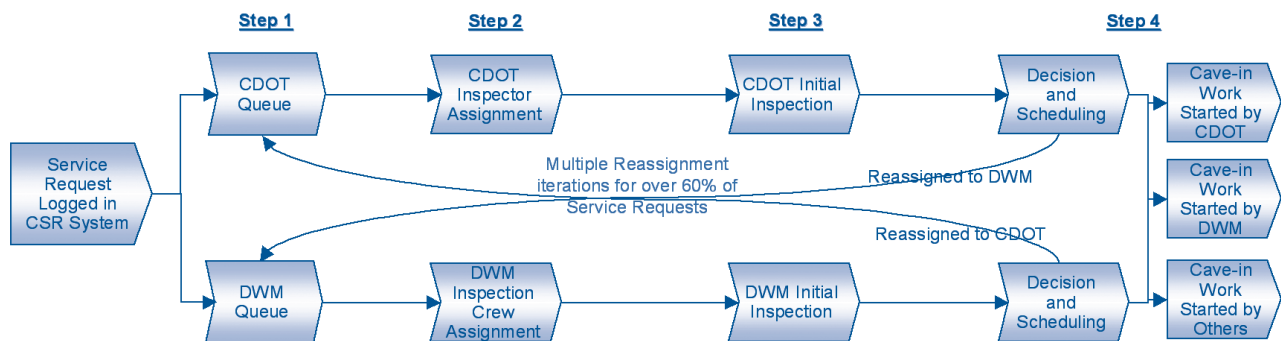
Key: DWM: Dept. of Water Management. CDOT: Dept. of Transportation. CSR: The 311 System.

ing to the initial 311 complaint had sufficient experi-
ence to correctly identify a sewer cave-in, such that a
Department of Water Management repair crew could
be dispatched directly without a secondary inspection.
As a result, the response time for pavement cave-ins is
down dramatically—from 11.6 days in 2005 to 2.4 days
in 2006—as there are fewer misdirected work orders
taking time and attention from the pavement cave-in
work crews. In addition, the time for repairing sewer
cave-ins is down from 23.1 to 19.1 days, even though
the workload has grown for these crews.[6] This decrease
in repair time has allowed the city to handle more ser-
vice requests while keeping costs constant.

Revenue Enhancements   While cost savings and
avoidance are the most common form of tangible ben-
efit, CRM also has the potential to increase revenues.
One of the more talked-about (but, so far, scantly
implemented) possibilities is to provide citizen service
agents with a "360 degree" view of citizens, such that
agents would have knowledge of a citizen's outstand-
ing financial obligations to the government when the
citizen requests service. For example, knowing that a
citizen has outstanding parking tickets may be a reason
to withhold a building permit. However, this use of
CRM may be viewed as a violation of privacy, so you
should carefully consider the political feasibility of such
an approach before including it in a business case.

A riper area for revenue enhancement may be to
direct CRM's potential for performance improvement
toward revenue-producing services. For instance, the
city of Chicago uses CRM data to monitor the per-
formance of a range of municipal services, including
vehicle towing. CRM data are used to recognize and
reward the top tow truck drivers—in this case, with the
first pick of the newest trucks from the city's fleet. The
city's system has generated a real interest in job perfor-
mance among employees, with the secondary effect of
improving the revenue potential of the service.

Chicago's top driver and his new truck. *Source: Mayor's Office, City of Chicago.*

Intangible Benefits

CRM can produce a wide range of intangible benefits.
CRM can increase the level of trust citizens have in
their government, make government more accessible
and accountable, and make the community a more
attractive place to work and live.

Intangible benefits are often a major reason for
elected officials' interest in CRM (and, hence, are
strongly associated with visionary opportunities for
CRM). The key is to make intangible benefits as mean-
ingful as possible through the use of key performance
indicators. This makes the business case less esoteric
and provides the basis for judging if the benefits have
been achieved. Mayor Bloomberg's vision to reduce
twelve pages of municipal phone numbers to simply 311
is one very simple, yet effective measure. Other com-
mon measures include citizen or caller surveys and ser-
vice delivery metrics (similar to Chicago's time required
to repair a pavement or sewer cave-in). Measures can
also look at less conventional sources of value. Tampa,
Florida, compares the cost of performing transactions
online versus in-person to demonstrate the savings
accruing *to citizens* from its online citizen service
program. To illustrate, Tampa calculates savings from
paying a parking citation online rather than by visiting
city offices, taking into account factors such as travel to
city offices and time spent waiting in line.

A policy should describe how intangible benefits
will be weighed in the business case. For example,
Oakland County, Michigan, is a technology leader,
having received numerous awards from *CIO Magazine,*
the Center for Digital Government, the National
Association of Counties, and the Government Finance
Officers Association. Oakland County has a relentless

Baltimore's Saving Statistics

The city of Baltimore's Citistat performance management
system is well known in public management circles. Less
well known is that Citistat is supported by a CRM system
called Cititrack. Baltimore used its CRM to save $306,000
by reducing overtime in its solid waste department through
better scheduling and tracking of work requests, including the
elimination of duplicate assignments and invalid requests.

focus on realizing value from its technology projects and, in fact, will only undertake an initiative if the business case shows a positive return on investment. Hence, purely intangible benefits do not figure heavily in a business case in Oakland County—benefits must be expressed in more tangible terms.

Another approach is illustrated by the state of Iowa's award-winning R.O.Iowa technique. R.O.Iowa is intended to capture the financial implications of a conventional ROI approach, while still giving fair consideration to the less tangible benefits that are often so important to the public sector. Under the R.O.Iowa approach, the business case places measurable benefits into one of several categories: citizen benefits, social benefits, internal financial benefits, internal non-financial benefits, and strategic organizational benefits. The internal financial benefits category corresponds to traditional financial ROI measures, while the other categories capture benefits that are harder to articulate in financial terms. The author of the business case must translate proposed intangible benefits into a performance measure (though not necessarily a financially based measure) and place it into one of the categories. An evaluation team scores the benefits proposed in each category (using a predefined scoring system). These scores, combined with predetermined category weights, establish the strength of the business case. Hence, Iowa's approach provides a means for considering benefits that are less financial in nature and a tool for comparing potential projects against each other. To learn more about the R.O.Iowa approach, read "Beyond ROI: A New Framework for Measuring the Value of Technology Investments."[7]

Putting It All Together

Once you have defined costs and benefits, you can finalize the business case. Important components of the final business case document are:

- A narrative of the project's rationale that summarizes the costs and benefits.
- Performance measures that unambiguously describe the anticipated benefits, both tangible and intangible.
- Baseline data for the chosen performance measures, which provide a yardstick against which to measure project performance.
- Identification of a project executive sponsor and designation of the organization members, other than the sponsor, responsible for delivering the benefits.

- A multi-year cost estimate, which should describe both project implementation costs and system maintenance costs after the implementation is complete. The estimate should also reveal both out-of-pocket and internal costs (costs should be deconstructed into major categories, and the assumptions behind the cost estimates should be transparent).

The business case will be most powerful when it is part of a more comprehensive technology investment prioritization and value realization management framework—also known as a technology governance system. A technology governance system creates a place for top decision makers to come together to review business cases for all potential major technology investments and to formally and fully commit the organization's best efforts to those projects with the most potential. Further, the technology governance system provides for sustained executive attention to these projects, as a project's progress toward delivering the benefits promised in the business case should be periodically reviewed by top management as part of the governance system.

Technology governance can be particularly important for a CRM project. CRM requires a commitment from all parts of the organization. Departments must commit to a citizen-oriented service approach and to using CRM data to manage and improve operations. A governance structure brings top decision makers together on a regular basis to discuss if these commitments are occurring and what more needs to be done to get the most out of the CRM investment over the long run and realize the promise described by the business case.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how public managers can estimate the costs and benefits of a CRM project. These estimates should be articulated in a formal business case. A formal business case provides a clear basis for discussion of whether a CRM project is in the best interests of an organization and, if the project moves forward, provides the yardstick against which project cost and benefits can be measured. A CRM business case is most valuable when it is a part of a technology governance system. Technology governance integrates the business case into fundamental decisions and systems for resource allocation, business process change, and accountability for results from technology investments—all crucial for getting the most out of a CRM project.

Endnotes

1 U.S. Government Accountability Office, "State and Local Governments: Persistent Fiscal Challenges Will Likely Emerge within the Next Decade," July 2007, http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d071080sp.pdf.

2 Concept taken from: Barton J. Goldenberg, *CRM Automation* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003).

3 Mayor Bloomberg delivers 2007 state of the city address, "Taking the Next Step," PR-014-07, at New York City College of Technology in Brooklyn, January 17, 2007.

5 Computer Sciences Corporation, "Improved Customer Service through Call Center Consolidation," 2003.

6 Statistics supplied by the City of Chicago Mayor's Office.

7 Original publication information: Huy T. Nguyen, "Beyond ROI: A New Framework for Measuring the Value of Technology Investments," *Government Finance Review*, December 2004. Available at www.gfoa.org.

Appendix 1. CRM Readiness Assessment Tool
(As adapted from eCRM University)

Rate your readiness to measure CRM

An organization's results will make or break any CRM initiative. Take this self-assessment to find out how prepared you are to keep top management informed and committed to your CRM Program.

Rate each of the following key elements of CRM measurement and rate your current CRM measurement systems based on the following response scale:

- **five points** for a high ranking ("We're good at this; I'm confident of our skills here; I agree with this statement");
- **three points** for a medium score ("We're spotty here; we could use improvement or more experience; this statement is only somewhat true");
- and **one point** for a low score ("We've had problems with this; this is new to our CRM Program; I disagree with this statement").

Be honest. Don't trust only your own perspective; ask others in the organization, at all levels, to join you in this self-assessment of your own CRM Program.

If your score is:

186-255: Implementing a CRM Results Measurement System is most likely to succeed. Focus resources on responses that received "ones and twos" to accelerate the implementation process.

115-185: CRM Results Measurement is possible, but may be difficult to implement. Bring your scores up to speed before attempting to implement the ROI Results Measurement System.

51-114: Implementing change will be virtually impossible without great difficulty. Focus instead on (1) building change readiness in the dimensions above and (2) affecting change through pilot or beta programs that are separate from the overall organization.

Questions

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Readiness Scoring

How to score: HIGH = 5 points;   MEDIUM = 3 Points;   LOW = 1 point

Description	Score
We already use CRM performance measures of the sort encouraged by the total quality management approach (order cancellation rates, order fulfillment cycle time, etc.) and these express the economics of the local government.	
Our executives are NOT rigidly turf conscious and are willing to measure critical processes and be accountable for the success of the CRM initiatives.	
We have a continuing program that objectively compares our company's performance with that of competitors and systematically examines competitive trends in our market.	
Everyone involved in the implementation of CRM knows who the customer is, knows their needs, and has direct contact with them.	
Our organization has successfully implemented a Results Measurement Program in the recent past.	
We collect measures linked to organizational improvement goals.	
We define our measures from the customers' "point of view."	
Our measurement system does not focus solely on "bottom-line" financial results.	
This organization uses measurement data to promote continuous improvement and learning.	
Our measurement system does not generate more paperwork than is necessary.	
Our measurement system always gives us the information we need when we need it.	
Our measurement system focuses on continuous improvement rather than compliance and control.	
We are only accountable for measures for which we have control.	
Our measures focus on the "positive" side rather than the "negative" side (e.g., appointments met versus appointments missed).	
Our measurement system contains both objective and subjective measures.	
Everyone understands the measures used to evaluate performance.	
Managers or employees are accountable for measurement accuracy and results.	
We act on measurement results quickly.	
All data collection methods are cost-effective.	
We always communicate measurement results to the appropriate managers and employees.	
Our measures focus on effectiveness (e.g., number of on-time shipments) and efficiency (e.g., response time).	
Measures show change when we make improvement efforts.	
We have a method for screening out measures that we really do not use.	
Our measurement system contains a "well-balanced" blend of key result areas that reflect our mission, vision, and strategic goals.	
Our measurement system provides information that allows us to set clear objectives.	
Objectives are based on a clear understanding of the performance capability of our systems and processes.	
Important work that crosses functions gets measured and does not "slip through the cracks."	
We gather data automatically (e.g., does not require extra manual labor) whenever appropriate.	
Data is gathered close in time to the performance event (e.g., recorded immediately rather than two weeks later).	
We link process measures to citizen's requirements.	
The method to communicate measurement data to employees is very effective.	
We review measurement data at management meetings and we take quality improvement actions.	
Data is presented graphically to help identify important trends.	
We measure citizen satisfaction for each department's performance.	
We measure employee morale and job satisfaction systematically.	
Citizen satisfaction measurements capture key information that accurately reflects their preferences.	
We continually evaluate and improve our measures and the methods used to collect and report performance data.	
We pay as much attention to the "non-financial" measures as we do to the financial measures.	
The organization is committed to a process of continuous improvement.	
Collaboration across internal functions is viewed as a key to effectively serving the market.	
Ability of the organization to adapt to changing market conditions is key to long-term success.	
Incident reports are tracked within the system, shared with other departments, and the metrics are visible to the organization's senior management.	

Appendix 2. CRM Cost Categories

Like most technology-led business improvement projects, the highest costs of a CRM initiative occur in the first few years. Local governments will need capital funds for a facility to house a 311 contact center, for purchasing hardware and software, and for personnel to staff the center. The template below summarizes important cost categories for a project budget, along with important assumptions that local governments must define to accurately estimate costs.

Cost Category	Estimation Method or Assumptions	Description	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Personnel – Implementa-tion and Post Go-Live	• Personnel include team members from the previous phases • Focus is on identifying pilot departments, creating internal infrastructure to help launch the CRM/311 project, and training staff in the new technology and processes	Typical roles include application engineers, network architect, departmental subject matter experts, contact center manager and supervisors, system and database administrator, marketing/outreach coordinator, trainer, and Webmaster			
Personnel – Ongoing Maintenance	• Personnel play an active role in operating the contact center. • Focus is on ensuring the center meets stakeholder's expectations	Typical roles include constituent service representatives, help desk personnel, and system administrator; roles from the implementation may continue, such as the contact center manager and supervisor			
Software Applications	• Number of users of the application • Estimated licensing cost per user • Estimated software installation costs • Estimated ongoing maintenance costs paid to software vendor	Software license fees for the 311 system and CRM applications, knowledge management tools, workforce management tools, business intelligence tools, data warehousing, and legacy system interfaces			
Legacy Applications and Data Conversions	• Number of legacy systems requiring conversion • Number of databases requiring conversion • Types of database applications utilized • Number of active users	A CRM system will likely be Web-based, possibly requiring a transition away from existing (e.g., mainframe) technology; in addition, multiple databases become consolidated and rationalized			
Training	• Number of staff to be trained (includes call-center and department personnel) • Type of training needed (e.g., technology use, customer service training, etc.) • Training mechanisms to be made available (classroom, computer-based, etc.) • Training location • Level of participation of consultants in training (consultant trainers may increase the effectiveness of training, but will increase costs)	Training on customer service standards, internal processes and organizational structure, technology/applications, knowledge management tools, and hardware/software basics			

Cost Category	Key Requirements & Cost Assumptions	Description	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Facility	• Estimated number of total personnel • Square footage requirements • Estimated design and construction costs • Estimated rental and leasing costs • Other building system upgrades to be undertaken	Design, architecture, physical build-out, furniture, security, HVAC, and other subsystems			
Infrastructure, Including Hardware and Server	• Telephony equipment requirements • Computer hardware requirements • Network requirements (both for telecommunications and data)	Telecommunications equipment, cabling, Computer Telephony Integration (CTI), Automatic Call Distributor (ACD), Interactive Voice Response (IVR), switches, Leased Lines/T-1s, other voice systems, data networks, wireless, and other subsystems Also includes computer equipment, such as laptops/desktops, servers, network connections, PDAs or other mobile devices, and storage devices			

Continued from page 44

Cost Category	Estimation Method or Assumptions	Description	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Integration Interfaces	• Systems and applications that require communication with each other • Number of interfaces required	Integration interfaces help connect disparate systems so they can communicate with each other and share/transfer content			
Middleware Applications	• Number of users of the application • Estimated licensing cost per user • Estimated installation costs • Estimated ongoing maintenance costs paid to external vendor(s)	Middleware is defined as the software layer that lies between the operating system and the applications on each site of the system Governments may need to acquire Middleware in order to "glue" together software and operating systems so they run seamlessly			
Advertising/ Outreach/ Marketing Communications	Scope of the contact center (larger scope may require more intensive outreach) Number and type of different outreach tools to be used	Pre-launch events, awareness building, and supporting marketing tactics, formal launch of the contact center, ongoing public education, and special events			
Project Personnel	• Full cost of an employee (salary plus benefits) • Number of internal employees on the project team • Number of employees needed to staff the live contact center, including managerial and support personnel • Number of "backfill" employees to fill roles vacated by project team members • Level of consulting assistance (typically external vendors or temporary employees) required to implement CRM processes and technology	The internal employees and external consultants required to manage the overall contact center implementation, including full staffing for launch (i.e., "go-live") of the contact center Governments may also need to be cognizant of how Civil Service, bargaining unit agreements, and other laws and regulations might affect project staffing			
Personnel – Discovery Team	• A team of employees will help set the groundwork for CRM by assessing needs and developing a business case	Typical roles include an executive sponsor, project manager, and process owners			
Personnel – Launch Team	• Begins engaging external vendors and consultants to review the business case and provide insights • Works with finance and treasury to secure funding and future budgeting • Works with legal department to understand privacy concerns raised by CRM	Typical roles include procurement, legal, finance, treasury, and program management			

Chapter 7

Connecting Citizens to Local Government through 311: Los Alamos County's Experience

By Julie Habiger, Public Information Officer, Los Alamos County, New Mexico

Background

Los Alamos County, New Mexico (population 18,500) is an incorporated county government that also provides municipal services and is situated at the top of the Pajarito Plateau. Two communities—Los Alamos and White Rock—are wrapped around the boundaries of the county's largest employer, Los Alamos National Laboratory. The county has one of the highest PhD rates per capita, and for the last few years, has consistently been ranked in the top three counties in the United States for personal income. Residents are engaged and affluent, and demand the very best services from local government.

In 2002, the county council (seven elected members at large) expressed their concerns about the number of citizen complaints they were receiving in regard to easy government accessibility. What constitutes "ease" can vary widely from person to person, but in asking citizens and councilors questions to determine problem areas, the staff determined that one of the biggest complaints revolved around citizens' desire to resolve problems and questions with a single call. When citizens tried looking in the phone book under "county government" to find the right department, they were faced with dozens of entries and phone numbers that might not be staffed during business hours (i.e., field operation phones). Callers could be bounced from phone call to voice mail to another phone call redirecting them to another department's voice mail; one citizen described it as "an infinite loop."

The solution? Citizens closed the phone book and called their favorite county councilor. Councilors then found themselves burdened with dozens of requests,

which led to them phoning, e-mailing, or visiting staff on behalf of the citizen, putting a councilor in the middle of the conversation that logistically should have been handled between staff and the citizen. This led to a false sense of obligation on the councilor's part to follow the solution through to the end. A three-way conversation was required for every problem to be resolved, which was inefficient and frustrating.

This triangular scenario was more than anecdotal. A 2002 community survey confirmed that the majority of citizens were seeking information about county services from any source except the local government itself. Two out of three citizens received news about the county from the local newspaper, only 8 percent used the county's Web site, and a mere 5 percent called the county to find the answer. As a result of the survey, the county developed citizen focus groups and found that citizens were not asking the county questions because they found the county government cumbersome to access and hard to navigate. So, the county set out to propose a solution, implement a fix, and measure results in biennial surveys. As with many well-meaning efforts, a task force seemed like the best first step: take representatives from each department, gather them in a room, and brainstorm about the problems and solutions. This was, of course, easier said than done. The task force, dubbed the "Customer Service Commandos," was too large (twelve members) and diversified to be effective. Some members were front-line customer service employees, others were division managers, and others ran the department. The task force members should have focused their early efforts on charter and purpose, and narrowing the options for customer service improvements to the most doable and least expensive. Instead, the task force tended to get bogged down in creating tools for problems that hadn't been identified by the public in an effort to create the perfect system built on tools, not processes. Eventually, this led to the task force's first lesson learned—imperfect progress is better than perfect paralysis.

The county disbanded the task force and then reconstituted it a few months later as a team with far fewer members and a different purpose: To focus on the top area of concern, create a system that works to address that concern, and do it well. The top concern was rather easy to discern: citizens had voiced their displeasure at the difficulties of trying to reach government. Thus, government had to turn that negative perception around and reach out to citizens with one

voice. The team decided a customer service center that could answer questions and help resolve problems was the solution the county needed.

Hiring the Right Staff for the Right Job

The team knew what it needed to accomplish in the short and long terms and now had to make a choice: Hire new employees or move employees internally to the newly created customer service center? There were certainly employees within every department and division that could fit the new job description. And the existing employees would bring a wealth of experience with county government practices and processes, which the team viewed in both positive and negative ways: The "instant" experience the employees would have in handling customer calls was positive, but the fresh perspective on customer service that the county was trying to create could require new employees.

Another perceived negative of hiring internally was that even though this was a new system, these employees would still represent the departments they had just vacated, in the minds of their colleagues. Internal hiring would also remove some top-notch customer service employees from those departments, which would be viewed negatively by colleagues who had come to rely upon these employees. If there was one good thing that had come out of the early days of brainstorming as a larger group, it was that the team had realized half the battle was convincing internal employees that the county needed a one-stop customer service center, and creation of such a center was not meant to reflect poorly upon county employees' ability to serve citizens—a source of pride for any employee who works for local government.

On the flip side, some employees had voiced their desire to leave their department and become part of the new center for various reasons. In fact, the county already had a customer service center with three employees located in the utilities department, with defined call center processes, work flows, and more already in place—the exception being that the employees' experience was for one department only, not countywide. Given all the pros and cons, and the fact that the team members wanted to minimize internal aggravation and angst over the new system, they decided in the end to post internally and externally the job descriptions for two representatives and a supervisor. By the fall of 2003, a combination of internal and external candidates had been hired.

Designing for Community Needs: Now versus Later

The hardest part in setting up the new center, branded "the KanDu Center," was the county's desire for it to be all things to all people. The following excerpt from the presentation to the county council upon the rollout of the KanDu Center summarized the approach:

1. The Vision of the team over the past year has been to identify a list of issues related to customer service, and find ways within the County that will build a culture of customer service excellence "from the inside out"

2. This team believes this Vision can be achieved if we focus on two key areas:

   - We develop values and processes that will create a culture where employees know what is expected when we say the words "customer service", and are held accountable through training and performance reviews, not only as individuals, but at the department level.

   - We create an atmosphere for our customer, the citizens of Los Alamos County, that provides easy and reliable access to information and services.

3. We must recognize that many of our problems are related to process, not people. 4. Adding a customer service center will not eliminate all process issues; but it will allow a core group of customer-focused individuals to concentrate on asking "why" our processes aren't working at a very "big picture" level.

Managing expectations became easier with this kind of framework in place. Having clearly articulated goals and timelines helped, too. During the first year, the KanDu team focused on developing a short-term plan that included a five-year outlook:

1. Year One (first six months): *Establish the vision and goals of the 311 call center*. This began with research into the top questions that citizens had, services most frequently requested at a walk-in counter, and provision of customer service training. It paralleled efforts to establish the name, logo, and vision statement for the customer service staff to guide them. The vision formed was:

   - Provide a connection to Los Alamos County government

   - Provide easy access to information and services

   - Determine needs as defined by the s, and meet or exceed their expectations

   - Champion excellent customer service throughout the organization

- Ensure accuracy in accounting procedures and timely processing

- Be a custodian of citizen and county resources.

1. Year One (second six months): *Rollout of the 311 system*. The phone system went live in March 2004, and the walk-in center opened in May 2004. The walk-in center provided two highly requested services that citizens wanted easy access to: overpass banner permits and permits for the "lemon lot" (a local lot where residents can sell a used car for a minimal fee).

2. Year Two: *Expand services, make customer service training programs available to all county employees, and measure successes/challenges of Year One using the biennial community survey.* The center added the cashiering function for utility billings and property taxes, bringing two cashier positions into the center from the finance division. The center also created public information space around the kiosk, reconfiguring the lobby to add a place where project drawings and renderings could be viewed online, or where posters and documents could be displayed. This public information space encouraged citizens to stop, visit, and ask questions, which meant that the staff had to be trained to answer questions about projects. Weekly division meetings became the place where information could be shared and discussed with later follow-ups to the KanDu Center via e-mails, press releases, and more.

3. Year Three: *Expand services; continue to maintain and enhance systems. Implement benchmarks and measures under the county's performance measurement system implemented in 2006.*

4. Year Four: *Consider moving services that can be automated online; phase out services not being widely used. Evaluate new areas for improved services, add these to the roster of call center services as appropriate. Continue to find ways to make it easier for citizens to access government. Consider adding a branch downtown or in White Rock.* (Note: the county did design a KanDu branch office as part of a new community center/council chambers in White Rock, but funding limitations led to the removal of this KanDu expansion from the final design plans in 2005.)

5. Year Five: *Building on the success of the previous four years' plans, consider consolidation of the Center with the utilities department's customer service unit to address the work-order system deficiencies identified by the team in 2002 as the next biggest area of citizen concern.* Tackling this issue would require experienced staff resources from the utilities department, time from the daily handling of cash transactions. By Year Five, the center would need to find a way to accomplish the timing issues related to combining customer service functions.

As part of the center's focus on providing exceptional customer service, the KanDu representatives make a point of going above and beyond the citizens' expectations. Once the phone lines opened in Year One, the representatives made a practice of interviewing callers not only to better assist citizens, but also to learn from them. They learned that by using questions and follow-up probes to obtain information from citizens, they could drill down through their central database and find the best answers. A typical phone call might go like this:

> KanDu: Los Alamos County KanDu Center, this is Jane at your service. How may I help you? (standard greeting for all phone calls)
>
> Citizen: I'd like to speak to someone about a problem I'm having on my street.
>
> KanDu: Sure. Can I ask you a few questions in order to get you to the appropriate division?
>
> Citizen: OK. But I think I really just want the phone number for the division in charge of roads.
>
> KanDu: Are you having some kind of an issue or concern about road maintenance?
>
> Citizen: No, not exactly. My neighbor has a large bush on the corner that keeps me from seeing safely around the corner when I'm leaving in the morning for work.
>
> KanDu: Actually, that sounds a little bit more like a sight distance issue, so the proper division to address your question would be the traffic division. If you'll give me your name and address, I can contact them to follow up with a site visit. If the bush needs to be trimmed or cut back, they'll help you in getting the situation addressed with your neighbor.

In this simplified example, the citizen called 311 expecting to get the phone number for the pavement (roads) division. With just a few simple questions, the KanDu representative (1) determined the correct division that could respond to the citizen's concern, saving the aggravation caused by a misrouted call, and (2) handled the request on behalf of the citizen, saving the citizen from making a second call to the traffic division and keeping the division's phone traffic to a minimum. The intangible element here is also impor-

tant: the KanDu representative is learning on the job about the kinds of questions that will come up, and tracking them in a database on the spot.

Why is the tracking process so important for customer service? First, when the KanDu Center receives a high percentage of related calls on the *same day,* the KanDu staff will alert the division receiving the queries that there could be a process issue within their department. Alternatively, if a number of related calls occur *over time,* the KanDu Center can alert the public information office (PIO) that a different strategy might be needed to address public concerns. Let's look at examples of how tracking might affect customer service in both of these scenarios.

> Increased related calls to the KanDu Center on the *same day.* One common example that might trigger a high rate of related phone calls, and thus a call to an internal county division, is a lack of trash pickup on a route that is typically served in the early morning hours. In listening to each other's calls, KanDu Center representatives will begin comparing notes, watching for common addresses and neighborhoods, and watching for an increase in calls within a geographical area on a county map. After an hour of receiving such phone calls, a representative would call the solid waste division to report the apparent problem. The division would check with the shift supervisor and return a call to the KanDu Center to report that a truck has broken down and, as a result, trash will be picked up later in the day by another truck. KanDu staff would then call citizens back to relay the news and give the news to future callers at the time of their call. Over time, the shift supervisor would learn the benefits of being proactive and calling KanDu when a delay is first identified so that KanDu staff are able to respond to calls. Now, the KanDu Center can give callers the information with no further referral or callback needed, which leads to higher public confidence rates and helps keep phone calls to the solid waste division to a minimum.

> Increased related calls to the KanDu Center *over time.* When multiple related phone calls come in over time, the KanDu Center can help supplement the activities of the PIO. One example is when a new roadway reconstruction project begins. Despite a public information campaign in the weeks preceding the start of a project, the first morning finds commuters frantically calling KanDu about road signage issues and delays. Checking with the traffic division, the KanDu Center monitors the situation and starts to track incoming phone calls. Employees from the traffic division investigate the situation on-site, and determine if traffic control is adequate

and as planned. If calls continue to come in at a high volume, KanDu staff pay particular attention to the chief concerns cited by the public, such as growing frustration about the slowness of traffic or children's safety near an elementary school on the construction route. The KanDu Center reports the situation to the PIO along with the anecdotal information received from callers about their frustration.

At that point, the public information officer meets with the traffic division to review the situation and launches a second public information campaign with more targeted information. Earlier advance notice is given to drivers, well before lane shifts occur near the school. Flyers for the elementary schoolchildren's backpacks are sent out about the roadway project, highlighting area maps that show the safest routes to school and highlight safety tips. The traffic division representatives hold a public meeting on-site at the school and meet with concerned teachers and parents to address problematic spots near the front entranceway to the school. Representatives are on-site during the morning and afternoon start and end times at the school. The local newspaper is invited to cover the public meeting and runs an article on the front page about the meeting with a sidebar story highlighting some of the public information being provided to students and parents. As a result, calls to the KanDu Center decrease dramatically.

Without a centralized 311 center, where would the calls mentioned in this example have gone? Some would have gone to the paving division (roads) and some to the traffic division. Citizens unsure of whom to call probably would have tried the main public works office. Many more would have gone to the county councilors or the county administrator's office. Absent more concrete information, citizens tend to contact the top officials. In isolation, the situation with the roadway project and school issues might have passed unnoticed until calls began going to the local newspaper. Each division might have received a handful, but not dozens, of calls and failed to recognize the severity of the situation. Or the PIO might have eventually received information from four different divisions and seven county councilors, and probably would have received direct calls from the public as well. By that time, public frustration would be at its highest point, and a negative story in the local newspaper would most likely occur.

Instead, centralized 311 calls allowed the county to see the situation as it was unfolding and respond quickly and directly to the citizens' concerns. While there was nothing wrong with the first public informa-

tion campaign or its execution, the second campaign was targeted at the citizens—parents and school officials—who expressed the most concern. This saved taxpayer dollars from being spent on an expensive countywide campaign, and addressed specific concerns that might have become diluted if the calls had gone to a variety of divisions over several days.

Selecting a Location

The physical location of the KanDu Center was the subject of considerable discussion. Once the county determined that a walk-in center was highly desirable given the needs and preferences of Los Alamos County citizens, the next challenge was to determine the optimum location. Easy access for citizens was important, but budget was also a consideration. For instance, renting space outside of county facilities was cost-prohibitive.

The county decided to house the original KanDu Center in the lobby of the county's municipal building. The large lobby offered some great options for displaying materials that the public might find interesting. The county purchased an attractive, open kiosk that had a circular, walk-around display space for a variety of county forms, such as building permits and voter registration forms. With additional literature racks and a bookshelf nearby, along with chairs to sit in while reading materials, the lobby offered a place for citizens to either grab county literature on-the-go or sit and read for awhile. Citizens who stayed to read information had an opportunity to speak with a KanDu representative about what they had just learned. KanDu representatives quickly learned what kinds of questions the citizens had about county government, projects, ordinances, processes, and much more. This information was collected and fed back to the PIO, which enabled them to customize forms and processes, and display information more meaningfully.

Citizens could place comment cards in a box in the lobby or hand them directly to a KanDu representative. The PIO also began using the KanDu Center as a centralized location for customer comments to enter county government. Not sure who should receive your comment? Send it to the KanDu inbox and they'll route it to the appropriate office and tell you where they sent it. That was useful via e-mail or for handwritten cards. Don't have time to write it down? Don't have access to a computer? Call 311 and give your comments to a KanDu representative. He or she will send the comments to the correct county department

or official. Again, the goal was to give the public one place to call or walk in, and to keep the KanDu representatives learning, constantly engaged, and in touch with the happenings of local government.

As time went on, the KanDu Center added a computer monitor and keyboard with Internet access for the public to use. The center began playing DVDs or other materials produced about county projects. The center purchased a programmable sign for the front of the kiosk that could display current events. The layout of the kiosk was designed, then redesigned, as KanDu learned how the citizens most frequently approached the kiosk. Most traffic entered from the west side where the parking lot was located. The center of the kiosk displayed the most frequently requested information and forms, along with event flyers or news releases. Special displays with the highest public interest appeared at that end of the kiosk as well.

Adding Services: Discerning Public Needs from Wants and Calculating Costs

Since it first opened in 2004, the KanDu Center has been asked to take on more tasks and increase its workload. Many of these requests have come from citizens, and some have come from internal sources within the county. In evaluating requests, the center has had to take a critical look at each request and ask:

1. Does it fit our vision and mission?

2. Would it free up internal county resources to allow them to develop other public services? And where would be the best location within county government to locate these services?

3. Would increased staff be necessary to meet this request?

4. Would meeting this request involve taking staff away from the kiosk, and thus away from the phones or walk-in service?

5. Do the citizens desire this type of service? Have we received this request before? How often?

6. What would it cost to provide the service in staff hours? What could we eliminate to make up the difference or be cost neutral?

The last question is very important. One of the goals of the KanDu Center has been to be vigilant about the services that they believe truly need citizen interaction and engagement, and those that could be moved online for easier access twenty-four hours a

day/seven days a week (24/7) from the comfort of a citizen's personal computer. More than 90 percent of the citizens in Los Alamos have access to a computer and the Internet—but that doesn't mean all of them wish to use it to contact local government. The older citizens in the county tend to be frequent visitors to the KanDu Center. They like to pay their bills in person; they generally have more time to visit with KanDu representatives about projects and issues; and they generally have a higher interest in local government and civic matters. On the other hand, the younger citizens tend to want 24/7 Web access. They pay their bills online and are comfortable doing business via the Web at any time of the day, night, or weekend.

Los Alamos has discovered that some processes can be moved online more easily than others. Some can be offered both in person and online. The KanDu Center has weighed requests from citizens in the last few years and attempted to find a happy medium to meet the needs of the widest range of citizens. In 2008, the center will move forward with a new system to pay bills online after receiving a great deal of public interest in the service. Will everyone in the county change their behavior and stop walking into the KanDu Center to pay a bill? Not likely. In projections for FY '09, the KanDu Center does expect a 10 to 15 percent drop in walk-in traffic. But the truly important consideration is the need to keep listening to, and keep learning, what citizens want, how local government can effectively meet the request, and whether or not it makes sense to do so in the overall picture.

For example, early on in the KanDu Center's creation, citizens would ask KanDu to post a photo and description of their car in the lemon lot on the county's Web page. Did the county have the ability and resources to do that? Yes. The Web page would have supported a photo and brief description of the vehicle that could be easily accessed, and the entry/upload process would have been fairly minimal. Did the county think it should be in the business of displaying information about used cars on its Web page? Not really. Those kinds of needs could be addressed by individuals or the private sector—not a good use of the KanDu Center's resources even though the capability existed.

In short, in the pursuit of providing exceptional customer service and responding to the needs of its citizens, local governments still need to avoid mission creep and seriously weigh benefits versus costs (see Chapter 6) when deciding what services to add.

Communicating with the Public

The rollout of the KanDu Center was a huge success. Banners, flyers, ads in the local newspaper, refrigerator magnets, and appearances of the KanDu staff at many local events helped with the successful name placement of "Ask KanDu" in the community. After the rollout period ended, the KanDu Center continued its communication efforts with monthly ads in the newspaper and on the local radio station, coupled with appearance of the KanDu Center staff at local events with high traffic volume, such as the county fair and rodeo. These efforts all worked in concert to keep the KanDu Center at the forefront of public information channels in the next few years.

As more citizens began to call 311, the county changed its informational fact sheets about projects and listed the 311 call number as a source for more information. Project posters and reports were displayed at the KanDu kiosk, with KanDu staff trained to answer frequently asked questions. Likewise, ads for county events, project meetings, or open houses also feature KanDu icon and encourage people to call the 311 center. Traffic signs were designed with the KanDu logo and the "Just call 311" tagline. Motorists sitting in traffic during the county's busy summer months could call 311 to report problems with construction signage, ask why construction was taking place, or just to vent their frustration about delays. In every citizen encounter, the message of KanDu's advertising matched its mission: no question was too small or insignificant to be answered; the staff were approachable, friendly, and easy to talk to; and their attitude in finding solutions was inquisitive, helpful, and proactive.

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Not all conversations between a citizen and a KanDu representative are benign. Citizens who feel passionately about a project, topic, or some other issue or concern can become quite outspoken and upset. Any call center that has walk-in traffic should have some way to address this situation. The county's KanDu Center has always situated the supervisor near the kiosk, with a glass window to observe the processes and customer interactions taking place and be ready to intervene. KanDu representatives at the kiosk have even worked out a code to use when they feel that a situation is becoming too volatile or is outside their comfort level. Another representative at the kiosk or the supervisor then knows to intervene in the situation. As a last resort, the supervisor can ask the citizen

to step into his/her office to carry on the conversation offline and away from the kiosk and general public. The supervisor's office should also be easily visible (again, use of glass windows or even an open door is adequate). Because of the kiosk/walk-in presence, all KanDu representatives should have some training in how to deal with difficult customers and how to respond to situations that could become an emergency. Given the walk-in traffic at kiosks, the number of employees in any public building, and recent news events, it is better to have processes and systems in place and discuss what to do in advance, rather than wondering what to do once a situation has escalated.

Likewise, the county quickly learned in the first year of KanDu that citizens find it easy to call 311 when they perceive there might be an emergency in their area. Power outages, violent storms with flash-flooding potential, prescribed burns to thin the neighboring forests, snowstorms, and accidents and delays on main thoroughfares in this mountainous community result in an extreme jump in calls to 311. The good news about such scenarios is that the PIO can be tuned in to the situation and react quickly when the number of calls begins to escalate.

A 311 center is an excellent source for rumor control. Citizens used to calling 311 and gaining answers from the county have no problem alerting the KanDu Center to "here's what my neighbor said she just heard on TV" in an emergency situation. Again, the benefit is one stop/one call and the ability to isolate information coming into local government in one place in an emergency, address the rumors quickly by issuing a press release or calling local radio/TV stations, and generally coordinate responses quickly, whether or not the emergency operations center has been activated.

Maintaining Public Interest in 311

In the years since KanDu was created, public confidence regarding the ability to access timely and accurate information has risen, as shown by the results from the community surveys conducted in 2004 and 2006. Forty percent of citizens stated in 2004 that they had contacted KanDu at least once in the last year. By 2006, the same survey question revealed that the percentage of citizens calling KanDu had increased to 49 percent. Better yet, when asked in the 2006 survey how they gain information about county government and services, 46 percent of citizens reported using KanDu as a primary or secondary source of informa-

tion about county government—what a big difference from the 5 percent of citizens contacting the county government back in 2002!

Why is KanDu still successful after four years? The county's use of a consistent message (Just Call 311); the short, easy-to-remember name (KanDu); the center's motto (KanDu... At Your Service); and the KanDu logo are certainly to be credited with some of the success. Executing a yearly, written marketing plan to keep KanDu's name constantly and prominently displayed in every written communication and in advertising in the community has helped tremendously. Marketing didn't end with the rollout period, but rather it continued with advertising and promotional funds in the county's budget. The marketing plan would still fail, however, without the great care taken to keep KanDu staff trained and focused on their mission and long-range goals. In the four years since its inception, KanDu staff have continued taking advantage of training related to improving customer service skills, monitoring data and making modifications as needed, and documenting processes to provide consistent customer service.

In 2007, the total number of contacts (calls and walk-ins) received in KanDu reached almost 16,000. The greatest success continues to be the 311 one-call concept, although there has been some success with the county's RightNow(tm) Web portal for 24/7 answers, as well as ability to accept e-mails with requests. In 2004, the percentage of citizens using the Web site as a primary source of information was 24 percent. In 2006, there was a slight increase to 26 percent. In general, customers want to quickly talk to someone, not surf the Web looking for the right answer. Their questions are often fairly unique and require some querying in the county's central database in order to be answered correctly. On an interesting note, the percentage of citizens reading the county's brochures or mailed information went from 28 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2006. The type and frequency of information mailed to citizens did not increase significantly in that two-year span—possibly suggesting that after KanDu opened, citizens were beginning to "tune in" more to local government activities because they now felt that KanDu had made government more accessible to them. While there is no way to validate this assumption, it is plausible that citizens began feeling that local government valued their participation because the KanDu staff in every transaction with citizens consistently delivered the message that "your opinion counts and I'm here to listen." It will

be interesting to see if this trend continues in the 2008 citizen survey and can be tied back to KanDu in any way through use of different or open-ended survey questions.

Beyond phone calls and walk-in traffic for bill payments, one of the challenges identified in the five-year plan was to keep the services growing while keeping the center effective and manageable. KanDu's walk-in contact center was initially able to issue lemon lot permits (a fee for selling a used car) and banner permits (for local signs about events on county overpasses). Within the first year, the two cashiers for utility and property tax payment were added into the center. Shortly thereafter, the KanDu Center added cemetery and burial lot booking to their list of services. These are services that might be unique or might seem out of place in other communities. The point is *to be creative*. The KanDu Center looked at what services the county offered and how they could provide the service more effectively than the division in which it was housed. The key words here are "more effectively," not "better." The KanDu Center is not in competition with the county government departments and divisions; rather, the goal is to remove services from divisions. The divisions could then reapply the talents of their staff to respond to newly identified needs without adding a full-time equivalent (FTE) position, expand their services more meaningfully, or even improve the level of service because of a lighter workload.

Every municipal or county government faces similar issues that develop over time. Services must meet the needs of citizens, yet must be housed somewhere within the organization for financing and accountability. Some services could logically reside in multiple divisions, but one location must be chosen in order for the service to be provided at all. A 311 call center with staff who are flexible and open to learning, and have broad customer service skills and overall county knowledge can be a valuable asset for just these kinds of services. These rules apply to nearly every community no matter what their situation. Los Alamos County is different in that (1) it is an incorporated city and county with the powers of each, and (2) it is under a Home Rule charter, which means some county services or type of government structure could be different from that of other communities. These two variations can lead to more complex processes and more combined services than citizens might find in their own city or county when designing their 311 center. However, while the items mentioned above may seem a bit of a potpourri, if citizens have to

make only one stop to find them, or one phone call to access them, the effect is better customer service, and citizens are truly less interested in where the service is housed in the end.

The Evolution of 311

In the first months of 2008, the KanDu Center evaluated its resources and plans against present needs and the five-year plan for expansion and combined services. One remaining task for the KanDu Center is to improve the county's work flow process for customer service, which the utilities department has successfully executed for many years. In addition, the county had planned to build a new municipal building by year five. The building project with all its required office moves presented an opportunity to combine the utilities cashiering function that exists inside KanDu with the utilities customer service and work-order systems (for example, establishing new service hookups for water/gas/electric/sewer when someone moves to Los Alamos) and improve cross-training options that would allow greater flexibility for the long term.

The new municipal building project has been on hold for various reasons, but like many other KanDu ventures, the staff considered space needs, resources, challenges, and opportunities, and decided that the minimal cost of remodeling existing space in the utilities department would make proceeding with the merger worthwhile. The move occurred in January 2008, with a public information campaign and name change planned for later in the year (the KanDu Center will be renamed the Customer Care Center). The move has been transparent and seamless. 311 phone lines were moved overnight, and all other services remain the same, with the added benefit of providing "one-stop shopping" for utilities customers. Cross-training for KanDu and utilities customer service representatives is planned. The main 2008/2009 goal is to achieve the final step in implementing a work-order process that will take the place of declining walk-in traffic for payment of utility bills (citizens should see an increase in services without a need for new staff resources). These steps will accomplish the final goals of the KanDu Center as originally envisioned. The center will continue to monitor citizen feedback (internal and external); analyze results from the county's biennial customer satisfaction survey; and continue to listen to the daily feedback they receive from citizens about what does, and doesn't, work to meet their needs.

Chapter 8

Using 311 and CRM Data for Performance Measurement

By Gabriela Dow, Vice President, GovPartner

Introduction

Delivering promised results is key to the success of any organization, and performance measurements help determine what the results are. For local governments, performance measurements include input from, and often assessment by, the community at large. The importance of performance measurements is underscored by the fact that citizens' quality of life is affected in a very real manner by local government programs and services.

Performance by local government ranges from the health of the municipal budget, to its assets, facilities, or programs in the community. Ultimately, and more typically, citizens measure and evaluate performance based on the level of service provided and the results experienced: Is the trash no longer in front of my house? Is the stop sign in front of my child's school no longer blocked by a tree limb? Was the pothole on my street fixed in a timely manner?

Data collected through 311/CRM systems offer an important means for analyzing how citizens are using local government services and evaluating performance. While the terms 311 and CRM will be used together throughout this chapter, it is important to clarify that 311 is one method for *receiving* requests for service, while a CRM is a centralized database tool for *tracking* the request information, regardless of the method of receipt.

311 call centers are powered by supporting CRM systems, but local governments do not need a dedicated 311 telephone number to operate a CRM system for capturing, managing, and reporting on request service data. Most local governments, in fact, have not invested the finances or legal and jurisdictional effort necessary to establish a 311 system. Nonetheless, local governments that have not yet invested in 311 are still capable of gathering, producing, and assessing the

high-level data required for performance measurement, and they should be expected to do so.

Tracking performance can be as simple as using a clipboard on the front counter or as basic as maintaining a computer spreadsheet to log and check off the fulfillment of service requests. While compiling data using the clipboard process could take hours, this simple method can produce basic analysis, such as "140 complaints for the street maintenance division were received this week." Using a 311/CRM system, local governments can produce an analysis as detailed as "Of the 140 requests made for street maintenance, 20 percent (or twenty-eight requests) were for street light issues, with twenty of the twenty-eight requests reported on Lakewind Boulevard by the same six people listing 'flickering lights' as the specific problem."

With this new expanse of highly detailed data now available, local government organizations need to learn how to understand and use the information. In the example above, a manager would have clarity on the details behind 140 requests and see that a flickering light on one street bothering six people may account in large part for the overall volume of calls on street issues. Such precise and unequivocal data produced from a CRM system can certainly be helpful. But imagine the example above from *one* week's report on *one* issue from *one* department, and then multiply this one example by years of data across all departments. The opportunity to fully analyze and understand local government performance over time becomes clear.

Collecting Data

The data that can be collected through a 311/CRM system are practically endless. Through a strategic planning process, Los Alamos County, New Mexico, initially identified more than 1,000 performance measurement standards. These standards ranged from countywide measures that would assess performance toward meeting strategic objectives, to department-specific metrics used for budgeting and day-to-day, program-specific data points important for measuring actual performance by staff and managers. After an ongoing review of these metrics, the county has narrowed the number to 500 performance measures, with data gathered through the county's KanDu 311 Contact Center contributing to these measures.

Volume and Type

Whether 500, 50, or 5 metrics are the focus of a department's performance assessment, the most com-

mon data captured by CRM systems are the volume of requests. These data can range from the number of calls coming into a 311 call center, to the total number of requests the local government receives, which can be further subdivided by the source of the request: telephone, in-person, online, mail, fax, or e-mail.

Local governments typically break down volume data to determine what types of calls are received. This is often done by assigning incoming requests to a specific topic or department. For example, of the 100 requests a department received in a day, 20 were for streets or public works, 18 for public safety or police, and so forth. More sophisticated systems include request tracking by both topic and department. Citizens can easily identify topics of concern to them, but the local government may need to tie request topics and specific issues to specific departments for reporting purposes.

With this type of data analysis, a local government can determine, for instance, that although public works received twenty requests and code enforcement received twelve, fifteen of those total requests were for both streets and sidewalks—areas that could include many specific issues and the expertise of different departments. For example, even though potholes, cracked sidewalks, broken streetlights, vehicles blocking sidewalks, and blocked street signs all have to do with streets and sidewalks, these issues are handled by multiple departments. Such information can help a local government determine which general service areas are needed in a community, not just what departments are performing the bulk of the work.

Further analysis of the data could reveal that the majority of requests received in the streets category were for cracked sidewalks (which are assigned to public works) and blocked street signs (which are assigned to police). Taken a step further, the analysis could reveal that the real issue is aging trees in a given neighborhood. The solution to these requests could potentially lie in an entirely different department— code enforcement—which would need to work with homeowners to remove overgrown trees that are sagging and blocking street signs and whose roots are damaging public sidewalks.

Field personnel, who actually provide local government services, often observe a situation the data are pointing to, and can determine the true cause of multiple requests for service in a given neighborhood. But having the data to back up decision making, or as an added unbiased source of information, is helpful to verify needs. And when a local government has thou-

sands of requests to review, it is helpful to be able to quickly review the numbers and data through different types of filters.

Contact Data

Capturing basic data (such as name and contact information) from calls for service requests seems fairly straightforward. But a local government must decide whether to (1) request the basic contact information by having the operator ask for it; (2) require some or all contact data; or (3) not collect any contact data. Most basic CRM systems currently do not allow for this flexibility, but as systems grow more sophisticated, they can apply rules to determine what contact data should be requested or required by topic or department.

Local governments should determine what data to request or require—like so many elements of 311/CRM systems—on a case-by-case basis, which is ideal when the flexibility of modern technology allows for this. If a citizen requests a meeting with the mayor, it makes sense to require the citizen's contact information, as well as perhaps other identifying information. If the request is for a copy of the city budget or for trash pickup on private property, then the citizen must provide address information. Local governments can create forms for these types of requests in a CRM system and set them up so that the request cannot be submitted without certain contact or location information.

If a request is for a general location rather than a specific address (for example, pickup of bulk items or hazardous materials), some flexibility is possible. The contact center agent might ask for the closest cross streets or other location information. For issues of safety or requests dealing with sensitive information, such as reporting gang activity, complaints against the sheriff, or suggestions for improvement, the local government may opt to process the request without asking for identifying contact or location information. By removing contact fields from certain highly sensitive request forms, departments protect themselves against anyone (even managers or staff) finding out who reported certain issues.

Location Data

The majority of requests for service involve an address. If a citizen has a question, requests a document, or wants to express an opinion on an issue, the customer service agent may record his/her home address as a part of processing the request. More typi-

cal are the requests to address a problem such as a barking dog, pothole, graffiti, or missed trash pickup. These requests also involve a location for service.

Tracking location information is vital to the effectiveness of a 311/CRM system. Many systems will not accept certain kinds of requests if some location information is not provided. For example, staff cannot do much about an abandoned vehicle without some information on where the vehicle is located.

Using location data for performance measurement entails various facets. It can be helpful to know if there is a geographic location or zone where a particular issue is increasing or more prevalent. As for tracking management of performance by location, this is similar to the data available by employee: it is critical that managers have the ability to dig into the details of location data to understand the nuances and truly assess the success or failure of an effort.

Tracking and analyzing location data is particularly desirable for elected officials who want to know what is happening in their specific jurisdiction. Local government managers and administrators, however, are responsible for the entire jurisdiction and must work to ensure that the overall information on needs, performance, and results is not narrowly focused on

one zone versus another, but on the overall efforts of the departments to adequately deliver service to the community.

Figures 8-1a and 8-1b show examples of common contact and location information requested through CRM systems. There are various options in the location portion of the request form that include closest cross streets, detailed street name, and type, as well as multiple text fields for descriptive information. All fields could be included, removed, or required for any given issue depending on a department's business rules.

GIS, Asset-Specific, and IVR Data

Location data are enhanced by advanced GIS capabilities, whether built into or integrated with a CRM system, which provide a visual analysis of the data. In addition to helping validate addresses for service requests within a jurisdiction, a GIS can present the data mapped out in a manner that allows for analysis at a glance. A map with points for specific request types, by completion status or other descriptors, allows highly complicated data to be simply displayed and easily understood.

With address databases built into CRM systems (whether the addresses come from the GIS or some

Figure 8-1a

other address/parcel-centric database), request data can be reported based on zones, village boundaries, or council districts within a local government's jurisdiction.

Asset-specific data can be built into CRM systems to track work-order management, recording time and materials used to fulfill a service request. Tracking data on a department's assets used for delivering the service helps present the overall big picture. Analysis of asset-specific data or time values added to the metrics expand the performance assessments that can be made on individual request types or staff handling the requests (by adding cost figures to metrics, such as what percentage of the work a given staff member is handling or how long on average it took to resolve the requests). Also, by tying the day-to-day operation of equipment or use of other assets and materials to an overall tracking system, a department can better prepare for capital expenditures and be proactive on maintenance and replacement schedules.

Many phone-based CRM systems use interactive voice response, which can track additional data beyond call volume. IVR systems can measure the length of a phone conversation, number of calls dropped, and number of attempts to reach a correct menu if the system uses touch-tone phone technology. The systems also track data on number of calls transferred, as well as successful transfers to determine if callers are ultimately being sent to the correct extension for assistance.

Integrating IVR with a CRM is essential for 311 solutions. It is used less with traditional CRM programs, though there are local governments operating a CRM with a traditional seven-digit phone number, using the IVR component for touch-tone phone entry of requests or to check the status of an existing request. The city of Gardena, California, operates a CRM system that ties in location data to an IVR system, allowing citizens to validate the service address via an operator or Web site, or through self-service on a touch-tone phone.

Gardena's level of service goes a step further than just determining if a request address is in its jurisdiction. Their system includes addresses from neighboring jurisdictions commonly believed to belong to Gardena. When a request is made using one of these addresses, either the contact center agent, the

Figure 8-1b

Web page, or the IVR system will identify the correct department—including a map with the correct department's phone number—that should be contacted with the service request. (see Figure 8-2)

Using the Data

Once a local government has established a centralized 311/CRM data repository, information received from a variety of sources can be put to use. New challenges will arise as the local government determines what to do with the available information, and how to analyze, interpret, and apply it.

A larger challenge comes with maturing 311/CRM programs. Week after week, month after month, and year after year, the data accumulate. The 25 requests received the first day become an average of 500 requests per month, and then tens of thousands of individual request records and unique personal profiles with their history are available for review.

Careful planning is required to take advantage the new data and determine how the information can be of greatest use in years to come. But even the best-prepared and most proactive 311/CRM programs can leave managers wondering how to approach the mountains of data as they become available. How often should I look at this information? In what format should I review it? With whom should I share this data? How trustworthy is this information? What kinds of decisions can I make with this data?

While the level at which data can be captured and reported has grown tremendously, the types of core services requested by citizens have not changed much. Residents are typically concerned with services that are most prevalent and visual on a daily basis (e.g., trash pickup) and may be secondarily concerned about and appreciate value-added services (e.g., a recycling program offered in addition to trash pickup).

When assessing performance, local governments must first determine what cadre of capabilities and services to assess, along with determining how to gather the applicable data and somehow working them into metrics that can produce measurable conclusions. This can be difficult, as it is easy to measure the number of instances that trash was picked up on time, but more complicated to weigh in the quality of value-added services provided, such as recycling.

Likewise, it is fairly straightforward to measure the number of instances in which graffiti was removed (e.g., twenty-eight times in one month) or the speed with which it was removed (e.g., within forty-eight hours). More difficult, and perhaps impossible, would be to measure how many instances of graffiti were prevented either by proactive community outreach, more aggressive community policing, or a combination of both.

Such preventive measures and interpersonal programs would be an example of true performance in a local government. As local governments use more sophisticated 311/CRM systems over years, the detailed data trends such systems can produce will begin making it easier to measure, justify, and continually modify such qualitative community programs that are the ultimate measurement of performance.

As the process of data mining (analyzing data from different perspectives and summarizing them into useful information) becomes more prevalent, local governments achieve more expansive and precise performance measurements. This is possible based on capabilities such as self-configuration for tailored 311/CRM systems, which allow departments to capture very specific request and service data, allowing for reporting on specific issues that can point to trends.

Figure 8-3 demonstrates how data pulled from a CRM system can be easily analyzed in a program such as Microsoft Excel where values can be sorted and converted into graphic reports, and, more importantly, where detailed information provided as answers to the specific questions asked on a request form can be analyzed. A combination of set-value answers (e.g., from pulldown lists and radio buttons) is recommended for easy grouping and reporting, while added multiple-text free-form fields are recommended for citizens or staff to enter details that ultimately allow for the deepest levels of data mining, problem solving, and trend identification.

Day-to-Day Analysis in Real Time

Assessment of performance measures requires serious examination of an organization's processes, analysis of the results achieved, and understanding of gaps that might exist. A quick glance will not produce such an assessment; rather, it comes through dedicating time to compile and prepare the data in the desired format and then reviewing, analyzing, and discussing the reported results.

Nonetheless, there is value to being exposed to data in the CRM system on a daily basis. Managers serious about the value of CRM should use the system daily to respond to items that have been escalated to their level, to oversee staff work, and to observe the general flow of requests and the citizens' needs. Routine review of a basic year-to-date or other sum-

mary report keeps managers current with the ongoing concerns of citizens.

Even more helpful are CRM systems that have advanced dashboards tailored for the person logging in that provide a continually updated snapshot of information. This brand of proactive reporting does not depend on the manager setting up, searching for, or even running a report. The CRM system simply presents the data in a running update every time the manager accesses the system.

Daily exposure to the information builds a breadth of knowledge about local government activities. Seeing issues questioned, addressed, and dealt with

through use of the 311/CRM system, underscores for staff and managers the importance of a central data repository and the local government leaders' commitment to establishing the system as a long-term tool.
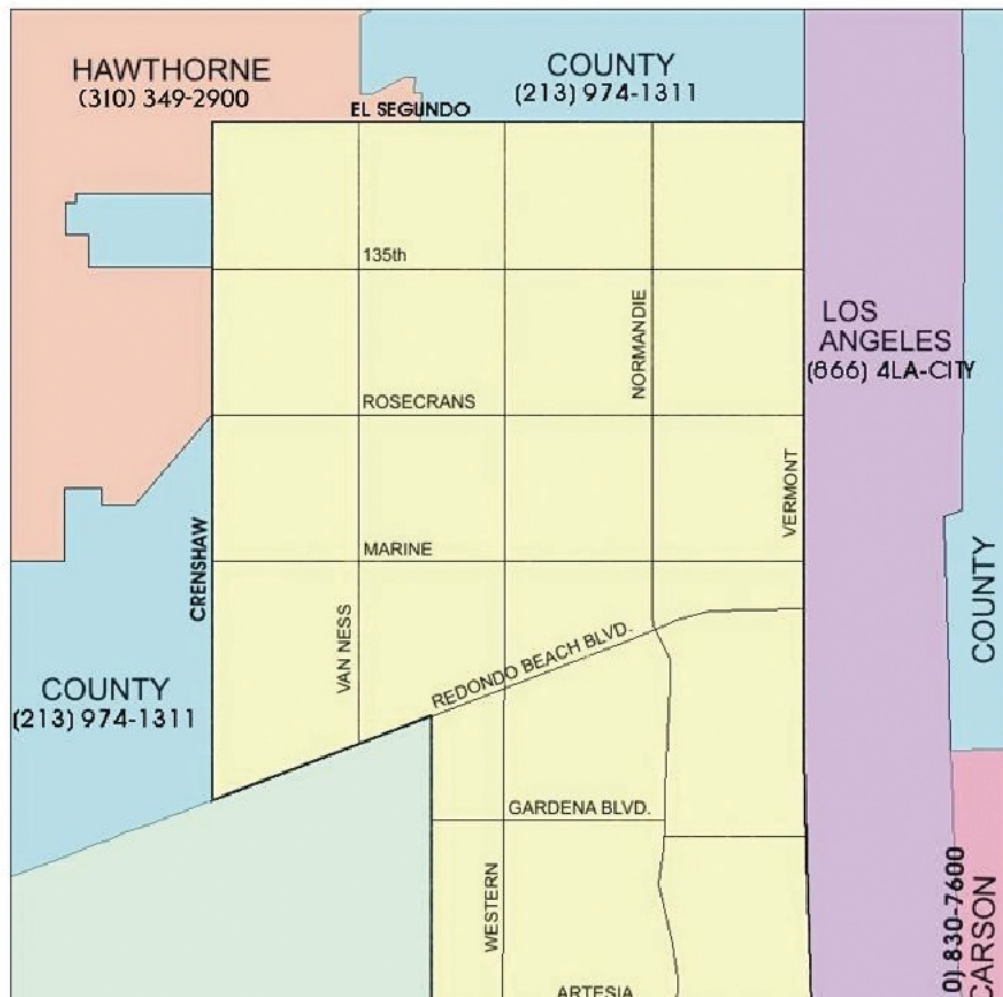
Periodic Analysis

Review of data from a 311/CRM system can greatly enhance weekly staff meetings, monthly department gatherings, or annual strategic planning retreats. Whenever possible, managers should use a computer accessing the live system with real-time information in order to develop a true understanding of the data behind a report summary.

Figure 8-2

Elected officials and personnel who have offices outside of the local government city hall or county administrative building will appreciate that Web-based CRM systems allow them to securely access the same real-time request information as if they were working in the contact center themselves. This can save tremendous time, as staff members do not have to prepare update reports for the municipal leaders in remote locations. It also fosters greater understanding in the process and nuances of service delivery, as even elected officials can delve into the data and track the process for meeting the needs of their citizens.

An example of a popular CRM report that managers and elected officials use in real time is the "Summary of Performance" report which gives a total number of requests for any given criterion (e.g., within a specific department, timeframe, topic, or issue). The report details how many of the requests are still open, have been completed, or were canceled; the percentage of the overall total given the parameters of the report; and an analysis of the average number of days that the completed requests took to

close out and since the open requests were received (see Figure 8-4).

Public Access

Analysis of the data by citizens is also possible through Web-based CRM systems. Certainly, security and protection of private information is at the forefront of any decision to share request information with citizens. Such information sharing must be carefully considered and meet a specific outcome. It is common to allow citizens to check the status of a request for service, and possibly to even see the process through which their request is managed to resolution. But without a secure process for citizens to access their own service requests and not the requests of others, what was a great benefit for citizens could turn into a risky effort if not handled correctly.

One CRM system that allowed citizen access only required that a request ID number be entered, and with a simple tweaking of numbers from a legitimate request ID, many other requests could be seen, including sensitive contact and issue information. It only takes one

Figure 8-3

What would you like to report?	If Other, please describe.	Please provide specific details on the activity, including details on the work or people involved.
Room Addition	possible addition of a guest house with 3/4 bath	No permits were found for a guest house or bathroom at either address. Two houses on lot-16953 is front
Garage Conversion	VIOLATION HAS NOT BEEN ABATED.	There are people living in the garage and a bathroom has been added
Garage Conversion		Shed is falling apart.
Other	Tenant has electrical problems - Owner has been	A fire has already happened there, though not reported to the fire dpt or police
Other	Someone living in an RV to the rear of the property.	The people living in the RV are the sons of the property owner and have exposed themselves to neighbors.
Other	PLUMBING AND DRYWALL WITHOUT PERMIT	Portion of carport was converted into an unit. The current tenant has occupied the bachelor unit for 5 years
Garage Conversion	SOMEONE LIVING IN GARAGE	
Garage Conversion	GARAGE CONVERSION WITH BATHROOM	ORIGINALLY SEND OVER GARDENA DIRECT ON ID #206 - BUT COMPLIANT GAVE WRONG ADDRESS - THIS IS
Other	Recieved complaint of code violation for this	
Other	remodeling front house	possible remodel of kitchen without permits.
Other	illegal construction at back of property-no permits	
Other	Signage was put up without permits. Banners	Work looks to be completed.
Other	Homeowner is sandblasting home, and lettind	
Fence Construction		Iron fence and motorized gate in front of property installed without permits. Must come in to planning
Patio	PATIO WITH OUT PERMIT - DUMPING WATER INTO	reported by neighbors, want to remain anonymous
Garage Conversion	UNIT #B & #C GARAGES HAVE BEEN CONVERTED	Complainant says that there are at least 6 vehicles and many adults that enter the rear and garage via the gate.
Other	Temporary fence put up without permits. No	Garage conversion case was closed March this year. Permits have been taken out, but people are allegedly
Other	PLUMBING WORK ETC....	THE CONCRETE IS NOT SETTING CORRECTLY
Other	building onto garage	permits issued for construction only to single-family dwelling. No permits issued include garage.
Garage Conversion	12 PEOPLE LIVING IN 2 BEDROOM APT.#1 - PATIO	Window on attached single-car garage while doing other inspections around site. No permits for conversion
Garage Conversion	Construction of second floor without permits.	Citizen requested inspection of property. He gave 1224 135th and the owner's name. Name matched to 1226
Other	Trailers parked in driveway and street, being used	
Room Addition	Un permitted construction at rear of property -	Actual Address 16922 S. Hobart Blvd - System would not take - Thanks
Garage Conversion		Neighbor/s complained that too many cars on the street, too many people living there over the garage and
Other	building a house in the back, building a 10-foot	Construction activity occuring while on a TIS inspection.
Other	TENANT CLAIMS THERE IS MOLD ON OUT SIDE OF	
Roof Construction	TENANT CALLED TO INFORM REROOF WAS DONE	razor wire installed on top of block wall at alley side. wire is about 2' tall. on E & N walls
Other	Construction without permits.	
Other	RESIDENT CLAIMS HOUSE HAS CONSTRUCTION	Violation by the city was issued 9/7/06, nothing else has been done, please advise
Other	dumpster parked on street without PW permit	DISTURBING NEIGHBORS WITH CONSTRUCTION NOISE & DEBRIS
Other	Occupant has constructed a large canvas "Tent"	Staff received a call from Dr. Joseph Azizi who states a complaint at the Van Ness Courtyard about this
Roof Construction		Reroof w/o permits.
Other	Complaint that property to the north has built an	Property to the south dogs are a noise nuisance. Both dogs Property owner has dug trench along their fence
Fence Construction		Has a shed with the roof on neighboring fence. Also put up plywood on neighboring fence.

security slip like this for citizens to lose confidence in an entire program, rendering a department's efforts to track information in a central database obsolete if no one is willing to provide information for fear it can later be viewed by non-department personnel. A standard security process for any best-practice CRM system is to simply require a secure username and password for any access of request data via the Web or telephone.

Other departments have posted a running tally of requests for service to show citizens how many other similar requests are being handled, or to provide a view of the types/number of requests being received. Not all information-sharing necessarily meets a beneficial goal. Local governments should seriously weigh the value to be gained from publishing available data and take steps to share only information that will be most useful to the community.

Public Communication

Tracking the method of receipt is a straightforward data capture by almost any CRM system and extremely helpful for managing communication with citizens. Rather than providing public access to CRM data, departments can use the data in the CRM systems to determine how best to communicate with citizens.

Systems with a Web component automatically tags a request as being submitted via the Internet, just as call centers' requests received by telephone are automatically tagged as such. For 311 systems, almost all requests are made by telephone. And even among traditional request management programs that stress use of the Internet and all other methods of communication, the telephone continues to be the most common source of requests. But even small variations of

Figure 8-4   Using its One Hall City Hall system, the city of Lynwood can easily generate reports to track the types of service requests it is receiving as part of its performance measurement program.
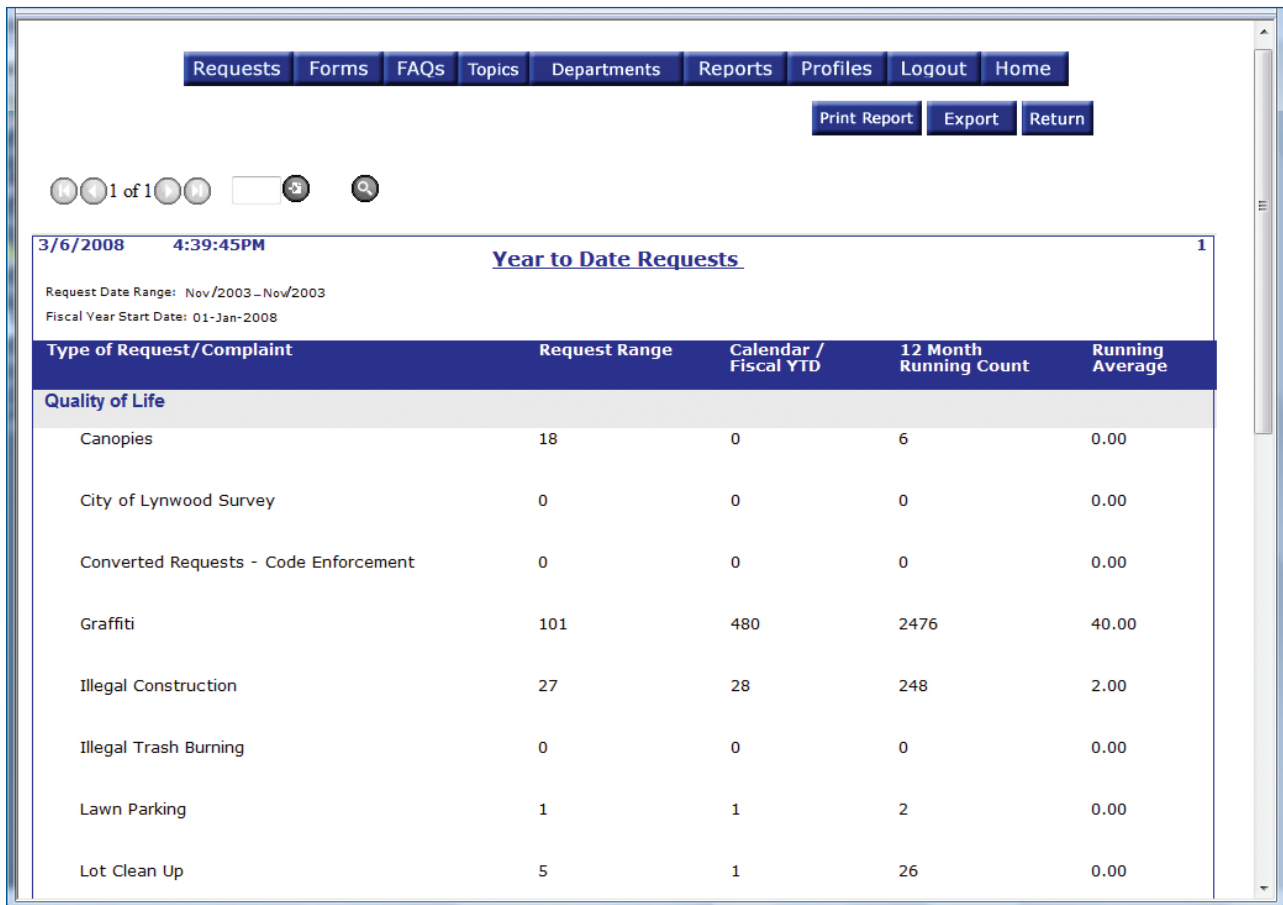
the data can help municipalities address their outreach programs and determine the best areas for outreach.

For example, one department saw a decrease in requests received via its Web site when department staff redesigned the Web site and removed the link to the online request program from the home page. Citizens eventually found the link on the new section designed for citizens on the site, but for a period of time, online requests decreased.

It is interesting that in some communities in-person requests are of high frequency, while in others e-mailed requests are more popular. This can provide information to help departments determine how much effort to spend producing material to have at the public counter; for departments with demonstrated foot traffic, it would make sense to increase the amount or quality of material at the counter.

And while the purpose of online CRM systems is to move requests away from personal e-mail systems where the data and request management process cannot be tracked, it is still noteworthy for local governments to review data on the amount of traffic received via e-mail. While the local government may redirect the public to submit their request via the CRM system, it is still helpful to note the level of e-mail use by citizens for a sense of how appropriate and effective this communication method would be for citizen outreach.

By analyzing these data, departments can determine how those members of the community who are clearly involved in the delivery of service prefer to be communicated with. Managers can then use this information in decision making on public outreach and educational campaigns.

Setting Goals and Budgeting

Most city and county governments have goals associated with their performance measures, ranging from a commitment to return all calls within one business day, to avoiding long lines at the public counter, removing graffiti within twenty-four hours, or reducing the instances of some type of complaint.

A 311/CRM system is key to setting realistic departmental goals because it provides a benchmark for managing expectations and analyzing problems. Departments with no real tracking mechanism for their employees' work often establish new goals— such as returning all calls within one business day— without realizing that staff receive forty-five calls per day on average and it would be close to impossible to return all calls in that time period.

Similarly, if a trusted tracking mechanism demonstrates that an average of seven days pass from the time a request for graffiti removal is submitted to the time the graffiti is removed, managers should be prepared to do serious investigation, adding resources and planning for process re-engineering, if they are promising removal in twenty-four hours.

For some local governments, tracking goals they have set is the impetus for deploying a 311/CRM system. For others, goals are established as the result of a new 311/CRM system's capabilities to track them. In either scenario, the most important element is the integrity of the data being entered into the system for later analysis.

From the moment that a staff member enters a request from a caller, or a member of the public enters a request via a Web site, it is crucial that the information entered be clear and pertinent for resolution. Requesting unnecessary data or being unclear about the data format—for example, asking *when* something happened rather than the *date* of the incident—will drastically lower the quality of the data collected. Spending time to design processes for collecting good-quality data will allow for effective analysis months or years later as performance assessment is taking place.

In order to start setting performance goals and targets, local government agencies will need to determine what questions staff should ask, what performance will be asked of them, and the commitments that can be made to the community. Goal setting often begins with broad goals set by elected officials based on input from the community and the long-range vision for the department, with local government managers, department managers, and key staff assisting in the fine-tuning of such goals.

Whether goal setting is a specifically planned, long-term process or a less structured effort, it is key that each goal be tied to measurable metrics. There are so many different measurements for determining effective request management that deciding what goals and metrics to set and how best to define them department-wide is often one of the most challenging aspects of performance management goal setting.

The speed of request resolution, for example, is one of the most popular performance measures used in CRM systems, but even a simple measure like this involves many factors. Speed of completion, for instance, can vary based on factors such as workload in the department at any given time, the number of total staff and other resources such as equipment and support, the specific details of the request (such as

time of day work is conducted, particular challenges at the location where the work is being performed, weather, special events, or other mitigating factors), and the overall complexity of the issue.

With all of these factors affecting the time it takes to complete a request, determining when a request is actually completed can also be a challenge, and this challenge is even more pronounced when data from many departments are compared. For an issue such as missed trash pickup when trash service is contracted by the local government, the request may be considered complete in some CRM systems when the staff member notifies the trash pickup provider. In others, the request would not be completed until the staff member checked back with the citizen or the trash company to ensure that the trash was collected.

Department-Specific Goals

Establishing performance measures for service requests, also known as service level agreements (SLAs), allows each department to understand what is expected. Sharing these SLAs with the community helps manage expectations about when work will be done. Such measures can be programmed into CRM systems for the system to send auto-reminders if performance begins to slip.

The city of San Antonio, Texas, has established an expectation for its departments to meet stated SLAs 90 percent of the time. This expectation allows for mitigating circumstances in 10 percent of the situations, but makes very clear that the SLAs must be met. In the case of San Antonio, when an SLA is not met 90 percent of the time, city management reviews why it has not been met. For example, if potholes are not being repaired within 72 hours at least ninety percent of the time, management would want to why.

Employee-Specific Goals

Setting employee-specific goals helps local governments meet department-wide goals. However, the notion that a computer system will be tracking employees' every move or that the rigid database measures will spit out results that do not take mitigating circumstances into account can make setting employee-specific goals a difficult issue for local governments.

Most CRM systems collect two employee-specific metrics:

- Of the requests received by a specific employee/all employees, how many are completed?

- Of the completed requests by a specific employee/all employees, how long did it take on average for the requests to be completed?

This type of department- and employee-specific data is central to the performance measurement process but must be used carefully. A CRM system can show that of the twenty employees managing requests in one department, eighteen are completing requests in an average of four days, but one employee is completing requests in an average of just one day and another in an average of ten days. On the surface, it might appear that one employee excels at the job, while another needs help. However, a closer examination might reveal a different story.

After looking at the data more deeply, a manager might find that the employee with the one-day completion rate is simply marking requests complete as soon as s/he makes a call or sends an e-mail. This person would need additional training to follow the process of only marking the request complete once the issue is resolved, not just acted upon. Likewise, the manager could find that the department has grown accustomed to assigning all difficult issues to the other employee, who works diligently on sensitive matters and complex requests for the average completion rate of ten days. This employee would thus not be considered a drag for the department due to the slower completion rate, but rather a leader in the department for taking on the most complex assignments.

Call center agents are often rated on measures such as average number of calls handled; length of calls/average call rate; length of time to take in data, transfer to the correct department, or resolve the question; answer rates; and abandonment or lost-call rates. Call centers also track the call topics and the most frequently answered questions. Follow-up phone calls can be made to inquire about the effectiveness of the agent handling the call, as well as other factors such as how clearly her or she provided the information, about his or her thoroughness, whether the agent reminded the caller that the same service is available twenty-four hours a day/seven days a week via the Web site, and whether the agent managed expectations by clarifying the follow-up service that could be performed.

Because these types of performance measures can be intimidating to customer service agents, it is important that managers work with them to explain how the data will be used. Managers should also assure agents that the system has the capability for deep data analysis and management is willing to take the time

to review the information underlying a report to gain a true understanding of the work performed in the department.

Managers can provide examples of the positive uses of the data: improved resource allocation, more proactive planning and community outreach, and easy access to the data so that each employee can better answer questions or provide details on their work. A favorite example of managers using these CRM tools is in responding to the phone calls they receive from a citizen who says he or she has not received any assistance from the department staff. With a CRM system, the manager can view the information in real time as they have the caller on the line, and determine whether the citizen has called three different staff members, and determine whether each staff member has given the caller the same answer. The citizen may in fact have been assisted with his or her request but did not like the answer he or she received.

Supervisor Role

In the city of Lynwood, California, the CRM system includes an automatic checks–and-balance feature built into the software that can notify supervisors if a request passes its completion due date. This feature allows for the expected performance to be set by issue (the expected amount of time for issue resolution). In addition, a specific staff member responsible for a given issue is preset in the CRM system. Specifying who is responsible for requests received eliminates confusion about expectations (the request can be reassigned, but the CRM system will keep a detailed audit trail of staff members responsible over time and their actions).

This performance measurement method allows staff members and supervisors to work as a team as the service is provided. So if some mitigating circumstance is delaying a request past the targeted completion date, the supervisor is automatically notified by the system. He or she can then discuss the issue with the staff member and determine the best solution— or will have a clear understanding of the issue if a routine report shows a drop in the rate of meeting a stated SLA.

When evaluating employee-specific goals, it is important to consider not only the details of any variance in performance, but also quality versus quantity. Local governments must determine if they want to measure their success based on the speed with which they deliver service, or on courteous and thorough service that seeks not only to resolve the current

request but also to avoid future problems. Managers can assess quantity versus quality when they review performance reports in conjunction with customer satisfaction survey results, also administered through CRM systems tied to specific request topics and described later in this chapter.

Also helpful, but subjective, is the categorization and reporting of data based on urgency. It can be helpful to list a request as highly important or urgent so that the staff member managing the request will have a sense of its priority among the many requests received. But unless all staff members (and the managers making the urgent assignments) clearly understand exactly what each term means and the action that it warrants, such capabilities in a CRM system can cause as much havoc as efficiency.

Budgeting

One of the most powerful uses of CRM systems is the reconciliation of the data with financial decision-making. Resource allocation can be based on activity levels, assessed need, or importance as reflected in the data produced by the CRM system.

It is especially important to determine a method of interpreting CRM data when these data are tied to the budgeting process. For example, a system could report an increase of 20 percent in *requests* for streetlight repairs, but that may not necessarily lead to 20 percent more streetlight repair work (there could be multiple requests that turn out to be for a single repair, or there could be requests that turn out to be for an address in another jurisdiction).

Many local governments consider whether they should budget for an increased volume of requests after a CRM system is implemented. In most cases, local governments will find that while implementing a CRM may increase the number of requests captured, the amount of work to fulfill them is not necessarily greater. It is likely that citizens were already reporting, or attempting to report, the requests—but without a central CRM system, there was no way to track and measure all requests in one place.

Departments also have to consider budgeting to meet performance measurement goals. If a department provides performance goals to the public, it should be prepared to meet those performance measures with the necessary resources. Establishing a baseline of current performance can be difficult if some type of central system was not used prior to the CRM implementation. It is therefore highly recommended that

local governments operate CRM systems for a set period to establish a baseline for performance before establishing performance measures.

While staff members often view a CRM's performance-tracking capabilities with some trepidation, the ability to use the same tracking system for establishing concrete evidence of an increase in workload is often welcomed. When introducing a new 311/CRM system, management needs to explain the ways the captured data will be used, particularly for budgeting purposes, as the system will help to validate claims that an increase in resources is necessary.

Staff members may have previously found it difficult to explain or substantiate why they just could not keep up with a perceived increase in calls or service requests. With a CRM system, the staff would have detailed data to clearly demonstrate a "30 percent increase in received calls" this year versus last year, or "200 more cases already year to date as compared to last year at this time."

311/CRM systems help to equalize the community's influence in the budgeting process. If one group of citizens is very vocal at a public meeting about one specific issue—for example, graffiti removal—the budgeting process could be swayed toward allocating extra resources toward that one need. Without quantifiable information to analyze the issue, though, it is left to the discretion of managers and staff whether the issue is as important as the community insists it is.

Running a simple report in the CRM system would show, for example, that graffiti requests make up only 8 percent of the total requests managed by a department, whereas "cracked sidewalks," which might have a quieter constituency, actually make up 22 percent of the requests. Thus, increased resources to repair cracked sidewalks would be more justifiable. (Additional reports to detail, for example, how widespread the incident locations are and how many individuals are making the requests could provide further analysis for decision-making.)

In addition to considering budgeting to meet performance measurement goals, another aspect of 311/CRM systems to consider is balancing the ongoing cost of operating the system versus the actual cost of delivering service. Beyond the initial costs of establishing a 311/CRM system, it is a serious matter to consider the ongoing capital costs of staffing and operating a call center, support and maintenance for software, and the impact such a program can have on the actual service that will be expected as a result of the requests being logged. When evaluating a 311/CRM system as a whole, this aspect has a large effect on assessing overall performance and success of the solution.

While the community will appreciate advanced processes and programs for managing requests, the sentiment could change based on the amount of money spent on the method for tracking requests as compared to the money available for the resources required to deliver the services. Using lower-cost ways to receive the request for service can be helpful in creating this important balance. For example, it may cost 10 cents to receive an online request and as much as $1 or $10 (depending on salary, benefits, and other factors) for a live operator to receive a request in a call center building that operates beyond business hours.

The city of Gardena, California, serves as a fascinating case study with regard to balancing the cost of establishing and operating a CRM solution with the funds available for delivering the actual service. The city had considered implementing a CRM system, but in 2005 faced a $26 million debt and prepared for staff layoffs and reduction in services, if not bankruptcy.

While many agencies would have rejected outright implementing any new technology in those financial circumstances, the forward-thinking managers at Gardena determined that because of the reduction in staff and the anticipated increase in contact from the community given the reduction in service, a centralized and streamlined request management system was needed. In fact, Gardena went so far as to expand its CRM system by integrating it with the city's phone system so that the public could submit and track requests for service online via the city Web site and also via a touch-tone phone. These elements of "self-service" via the Internet and touch-tone phone helped to reduce the overall cost of receiving and managing requests for service.

To ensure that there would still be a personal component, Gardena combined two staff positions into a new "concierge," who is a primary of the CRM system and a public face at city hall. This person greets citizens who wish to submit requests in person and answers calls from citizens who press "zero" from the touch-tone system. The concierge also oversees the hundreds of requests that citizens self-enter into the CRM system online. While the concierge is handling a request received in person, the same CRM system into which he/she enters the data receives online requests. Because the CRM system was preconfigured to automatically assign each request to the correct department and the correct staff member overseen by a specific supervisor, neither the concierge nor citizens

online need to know to which department to assign their issue—they simply fill in the issue, and the system automatically handles the assignment with performance management measures to which staff adhere.

Years after the budget deficit was resolved, Gardena has been touted as a success story for its courage and vision to apply technology in a way that truly served the community despite reduced budgets.

The case study of Gardena and other examples in this chapter demonstrate that budgeting with a CRM system, budgeting for the actual system, and allocating resources from the budget to operate a system are crucial for the long-term success of any 311/CRM system.

Conducting Surveys and Sharing Data

While the most basic information entered into 311/CRM systems centers on data for a service request, these systems can also be used for conducting surveys, gathering additional information, and then sharing compiled information with citizens.

Some systems include a process for creating custom surveys and linking them to specific service request templates or Web forms for very tight integration with the service component of the 311/CRM system. For example, upon completion of a phone call request, the agent can be prompted to ask the caller for feedback on the process for receiving and handling the request.

Surveys to Establish Performance Measures

Los Alamos County, New Mexico, determined as a best practice for its 311 system that performance measurements should be based on the ongoing feedback received through regular citizen surveys. The county's performance measurement program, called LA Scores, begins with a strategic planning process based on goals and objectives adopted by the county council. Through a series of predetermined steps, each county department prepares a management action plan with performance measures for its specific jurisdiction and the county budget aligned based on strategic goals and objectives defined in the action plans. Each plan is adjusted as needed based on the citizen responses collected throughout service delivery.

Because these types of surveys include both quantitative and qualitative data, local governments must take a careful and balanced approach when determining which data points to use for performance measurement. The number of days to complete a request is a straightforward, quantitative way to measure perfor-

mance—except when the mitigating factors listed such as heavy storms or other unplanned interruptions to work flow come into play. Even with an unusually long completion time, it is straightforward to assess if a given issue, such as graffiti removal, is being handled within a set timeframe (for example, twenty-four hours or four days).

Local governments can use more qualitative questions to rate staff performance and ask if staff was courteous, discourteous, or other. And even these data can be measured against the citizen's level of experience with a 311/CRM system or with interacting with the local government. Los Alamos County, for example, tracks the level of exposure the citizen has had with the county, tracking if the citizen has used the county Web site or its 311 contact center at least once in the past twelve months. Even further, the county asks if the KanDu 311 Contact Center is the primary or secondary information resource for the citizen.

Request-Specific Surveys

Since almost all CRM systems capture the requester's phone number and other details regarding the request, another method for compiling survey information is to place survey calls to citizens based on requests that are currently active, have had some attention, or have been completed. A sample of citizens to call can be selected by culling the system or pulling a report that randomly selects citizens who have made requests.

The city of Lynwood, California, conducts periodic community-wide surveys, and periodically calls citizens who have made requests through the CRM system to gather more information and find out the perception of service once all steps have been completed. It is recommended that local governments make such phone calls after enough time for some activity to have taken place (so that the citizens can provide feedback on the work performed or their interface with staff resolving the issue), but not so much time that the citizens will not easily remember details.

CRM systems with a Web component can present an online survey immediately after a request has been made to capture information about the intake process, but this method does not enable departments to gather valuable information about the request management process or overall service delivered. A preferred method is for the survey link to be presented in the citizen's online profile account, where they are likely to return to check status of a submitted request, to check history on other activity, or to submit new requests.

Ideally, Web-based systems also have a process for sending an automatic message to the citizen upon request completion, notifying him/her of the final resolution and asking the citizen to rate various local government services. This limits the number of communications with the citizen and provides a valuable status update at the same time that it requests feedback.

This last point of sensitivity to the number of messages citizens receive from a 311/CRM system is in line with another best practice for CRM systems: to enable citizens to indicate if they prefer to be contacted by phone, e-mail, or postal mail, or not contacted at all. This choice in itself provides a high level of service as it shows that the department is sensitive to the preferences of its citizens.

Communication with the Public

The local government's need for gathering information must be balanced against the citizens' preference for limited contact and on the terms that they prefer. Because communication needs can vary based on the issue, it is best if the preferred method of contact can be set on a case-by-case basis. For example, citizens may prefer phone communication regarding their complaint about the neighbor's barking dog, e-mail communication about broken streetlight requests, and no communication about the pothole across town that they reported.

By working with the needs of the citizens and their preferences regarding communication, a local government will receive clearer and more honest communication and more information with more detail, all of

Figure 8-5

which represents better data for use in assessment of performance and management for improved customer service. Figure 8-5 presents the welcome screen of a city's CRM tool that is used to gather feedback and requests from the community.

Beyond communicating back to a citizen on his/her specific service request, a local government should be prepared to use the data captured in a 311/CRM system to report back to the community on its overall performance. This will help to build accountability, establish trust, and reinforce how each department strives to meet the community's needs.

Reporting back to the community can be as simple as posting an updated report on the departmental Web site or in a community newsletter. Reporting on one service aspect as part of an annual report or routine address to the community can be helpful and focuses the citizens and the department on one or more of the most important performance metrics. The media can be helpful in disseminating the message of a local government's service "report card." Reporting can be as elaborate as staging a "state of the city" event or can involve holding smaller-scale open houses or community forums.

Whatever communication process and medium is selected, such reports should become routine (monthly, quarterly, or even annually) and cover topics that the community can relate to and cares about. Simply establishing a 311 call center or CRM system with adequately trained staff allows local government to report that every incoming request received is tracked through a centralized system to its completion so that no request can fall through the cracks. This is an important report card item, but more detail will be required beyond this accomplishment.

The details for reporting back to the community can be assessed based on survey responses, specific established performance measures, directives from elected officials, SLAs, or other items for which the community is asking for accountability. While it is important that at least some of the same measures be reported over time in order to establish ongoing rapport with the community, local governments are encouraged to include additional items based on their emerging importance or specific community events and issues that arise year to year.

With a 311/CRM system in place, the method for easy retrieval and analysis of information is established, freeing up time and effort for departments to focus on their most important work—delivering quality service.

Chapter 9

Staff Training

By Kristin Howlett, Director of Process Improvement, with Claudette Leak, 311 Call Center Manager, DeKalb County, Georgia

During the past thirty years, hundreds of call centers have been established around the world, both in the private and public sectors. The individuals who staff these centers are critical to their success—they are on the front line every day and make a lasting impression with customers and citizens. Given the number of existing call centers and the importance of staffing those centers, staffing techniques and training programs should be fairly well established, standardized, and comparable. However, we have learned that there is no consistency in the definition of government call centers, and of 311 in particular (i.e., what it represents and the services it provides); this results in a wide variation of training styles, training content, and outcome. So, how should communities approach staff training for a 311 department?

The approach and methodology local governments choose for staffing and training a 311 call center depend on multiple factors, including:

- The population of the local government
- The size of the 311 budget
- The level of importance placed on customer service within a community
- The pay scale of the call takers and contact center agents
- The availability of training facilities and equipment
- Whether training will be outsourced
- Whether it is a "right to work" or unionized jurisdiction
- The ability to provide continuous training
- The ability to refresh established skill sets in an efficient and effective manner.

This chapter will start with a review of 311 implementations and then discuss some of the more common training styles and practices.

Framework for Handling Citizen Calls

There are three distinct variables to assess before making a decision about training requirements for an individual jurisdiction. The first is the level of customer service a community wishes to provide. The second is the extent to which the knowledgebase (KB)[1] (if there is one) will respond to citizen inquiries and calls for service. The third variable is the call takers or contact center agents, whose job classification and hiring skill set requirements will help determine the degree and type of training necessary.

Once a jurisdiction decides to commit to a 311 initiative, the next question is, "How should we define 311 and what are the customer expectations for that service?" As mentioned earlier, there are many definitions of 311. To illustrate, there are 311 citizen contact centers that function as a central information line or switchboard, transferring the caller to the department of inquiry without providing any further service to the customer. Others have databases that function as repositories to answer frequently asked questions, with requests for service being transferred to the handling department. Yet another variation provides customers with the "one-stop shopping" experience they have come to expect in the private sector, answering informational calls and taking requests for service. There are also other implementations that strictly handle non-emergency police calls.
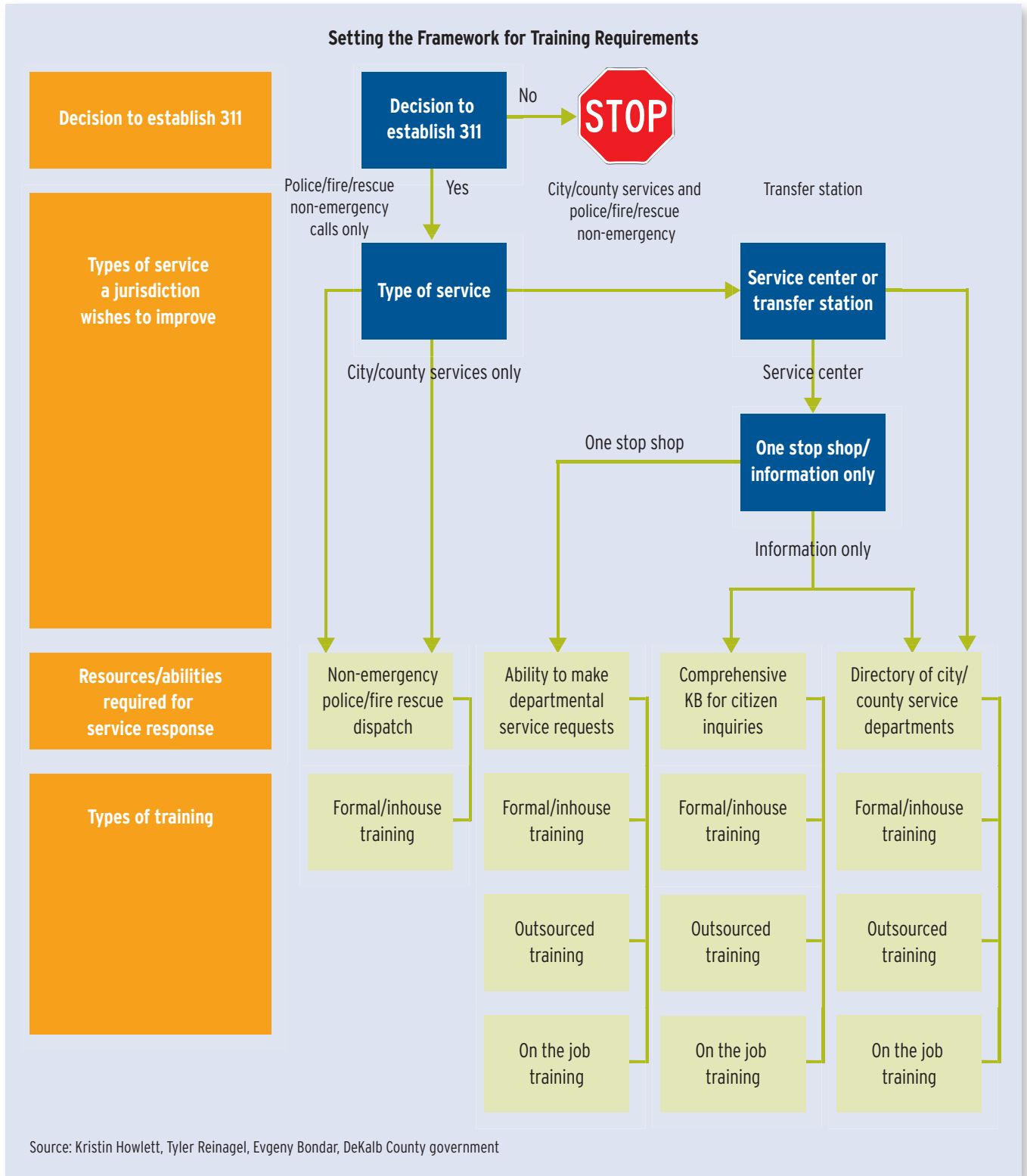
Therefore, elected officials and administrators should determine early in the planning phase how they wish to define 311. They should be mindful, though, that the depth of services provided by 311 is directly correlated with the cost of implementation, training, and staffing. However, since the functionality of 311 can be implemented in a modular manner, expansion or enhancement of services in future years is a plausible consideration.

The second variable of the framework for handling citizen calls is whether or not there will be a KB as part of the implementation and what it will comprise. This variable speaks to both the number of staff needed as well as to staff training requirements. For instance, jurisdictions that have a comprehensive KB are able to respond to a majority of calls coming into the center without requiring a transfer. Research has indicated that 311 jurisdictions with a comprehensive KB are able to respond to as many as 75 percent of all incoming calls without a transfer to individual departments. The remaining 25 percent of incoming calls are considered "customer specific" and require a transfer to the affected department.[2] The KB significantly reduces call volume to departments, but will necessitate more personnel in the contact center to answer phones as well as increased training requirements for contact center agents.

By contrast, a contact center operating as a call transfer station (i.e., no KB or ability to take requests

for service) will require fewer agents while also being able to handle more calls. A transfer operator might be able to handle as many as two or three calls in one minute, whereas a contact center agent (using a KB and having the ability to create service requests) may on average take up to three minutes to respond to one similar call. This difference in call volume per agent affects both training and overall staffing levels.

Setting the Framework for Training Requirements

Source: Kristin Howlett, Tyler Reinagel, Evgeny Bondar, DeKalb County government

The third and most important consideration in laying the framework for staffing and training in the contact center are the types of skills that will be required for incoming personnel. The tendency is to think that there is only one definition for a contact center agent, and this misunderstanding can cause problems in hiring and training.

Hiring the appropriate personnel (or transferring positions from existing departments) can make or break a 311 operation. Operating a call transfer station requires a completely different skill set from a customer care center. As a result, minimum skill requirements for the contact center agent position may vary widely from those of a transfer call taker. Typical, entry-level requirements for contact center agents include good people skills, computer competency, time management skills, patience, and negotiating skills. Call transfer operators might not be required to have the same entry-level skills as their contact center agent counterparts, which in turn also affects incoming pay scales for each group.

Because most jurisdictions do have defined skill requirements and a formal training program, municipalities generally set their pay scale for 311 operators in conjunction with an assessment of 911 operator pay scales, training, and skill prerequisites. Jurisdictions typically create a tiered pay scale, with 911 operators being paid at one to three pay grades higher than their 311 equivalent, indicating that 911 operators require more training and certification than their 311 counterparts.[3] In addition, the 311 service delivery model

Formal training is effective in a group setting, but should also allow for individual counseling when needed. *Photo by Evgeny Bondar, DeKalb County Government*

chosen may affect pay differential between 311 and 911 operators. Examples of service models include a police-only, non-emergency services; city services, not including police; and all city services, including police non-emergency. See Table 9-1 for an illustration of salary differentials by service model in some individual cities/counties.

Qualifications of 311 Staff

What kind of experience and expertise should 311 staff have? Depending on whom you ask, you may receive a different response. Interestingly enough, research and experience have shown that prior call center experience is not necessary and may not even be desirable in hiring call center agents. However, as call centers hire and promote supervisors, team leaders, trainers, and managers, call center experience becomes more necessary to the position and the department.

It seems to defy logic that call center experience may not be preferable in hiring call center agents. But as with any job, people bring with them habits, quirks, and attitudes from past experiences. For instance, it may be more beneficial to hire an individual from retail who considers herself a real "people person" over someone who was laid off from the phone company call center and who may accept a lower-paying government job until something better comes along.[4]

Research also notes that call takers with little or no call center experience do not require any more

Photo by Evgeny Bondar, DeKalb County Government
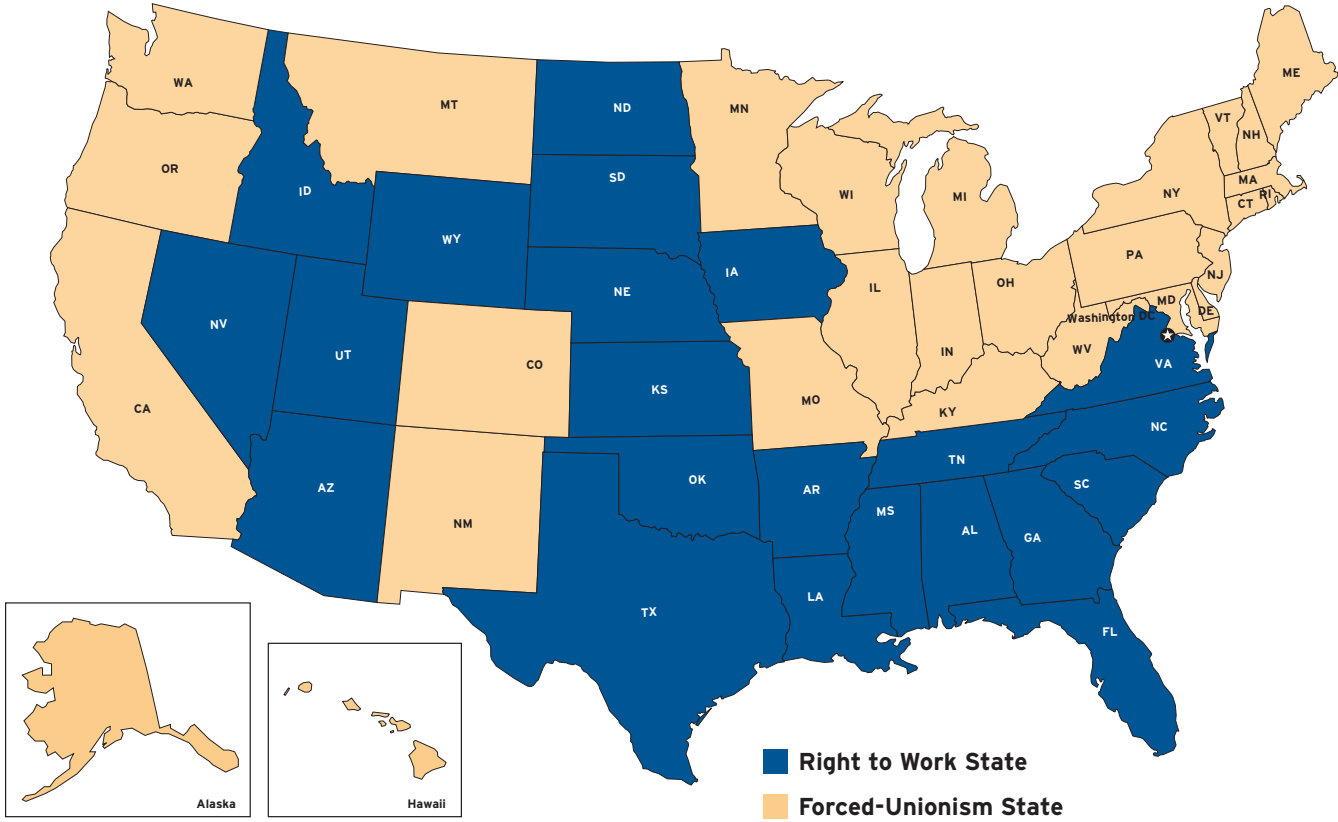
Source: National Right to Work Committee, "U.S. Map," Right to Work State and Forced-Unionism State Map, 2001, http://www.nrtwc.org/i/usmap.png.

training than those with a call center background. This is evident in a recent case study of DeKalb County, Georgia. In order to work at DeKalb County's call center, all applicants must pass a basic computer skills assessment. As a result, all new hires have relatively similar entry-level computer skills. This permits the training curriculum to focus on "soft" skills in customer service and on the 311 citizen relationship management (CRM) tool. More than 60 percent of new-hire training is geared toward customer service and internal protocols as opposed to the establishment of basic skill sets.[5]

In addition, the use of a KB further mitigates differences between personnel with and without prior government experience. The KB enables all personnel to speak with authority on topics covering virtually all service delivery areas in the government, thereby allowing the county to hire from a much broader applicant pool. DeKalb County's current call center agents include a former military trainer, administrative assistants, and students in the process of completing bachelor's and/or master's degree programs.[6]

DeKalb County's formal training program also includes pre- and post-training assessments. Results of

these assessments indicate that there is no difference in the learning curve between staff with previous call center and government experience and those with no call center or government experience.[7]

Local governments in "right to work" states may follow the general guidelines mentioned above for hiring. However, for local governments in unionized states, job classification and responsibilities may be defined differently, which may may influence entry-level skill requirements or eligibility. This difference is particularly important when a local government wishes to transfer positions from an outside department to a 311 center. Transferring similar pay grade classifications to a 311 center may also impact training (e.g., the local government may have to consider more than one definition of skill requirements) and must be considered when attempting to make lateral transfers.

In two of these centers, the average length of time since the 311 call center began operating was fifteen months.

In a study on the feasibility of a call center, the city and county of San Francisco conducted surveys in four cities: New Orleans, Chicago, Baltimore, and San Jose. In two of these centers, the average age was fifteen

months. Thus, training was fresh on their minds. When asked "What problems have you encountered since going live?", three of the cities focused on internal concerns, such as departmental transitions and technological problems. Baltimore, however, referenced complexities involving *how* "human resources identified professional customer service personnel..." and how the qualifications related to training new hires.[8] This concern is particularly important to jurisdictions affected by union mandates.

Benefits of Institutionalizing a Formal Training Program

Generally speaking, call centers have high turnover rates. Therefore, it is advisable to devise a training plan, which can mitigate this common problem. There exists strong academic evidence that workers who receive formal training are likely to have longer job tenures.[9] Trained workers also believe that their employers see them as important and valuable members of an organization, further developing loyalty.[10] In addition, research indicates that the more extensive a training program is, the stronger the employee's

relationship with the organization will be.[11] Thus, there appears to be a significant relationship between formal training (or how much the employer vests in the employee) and lower employee turnover rates.

In addition, among the eight cities interviewed for this chapter, the positive public reaction to the 311 call center was most apparent in jurisdictions that placed emphasis on the provision of customer service training to 311 call center personnel. The professionalism of the staff had an impact on the perceived success of the call center.[12] Therefore, training also plays an important role in how citizens perceive the 311 call center and its ability to provide appropriate levels of customer service.

Here we identify three of the more common approaches to training in a 311 environment. The best match will depend on jurisdictional needs, vision, and budgetary constraints.

Formal, Institutionalized Training

Like most large jurisdictions with 311 call centers, DeKalb County, Georgia, has developed a formal, in-house 311 certification program and has a dedicated

Table 9-1   311 and 911 Salary Comparison Depending on 311 Service Model

City	Service Model	311 Starting Salary Range	911 Starting Salary Range	% Variation 311/911
Rochester, New York[a]	Model 1	$24,861.00–$38,388.00/year	$24,861.00–$38,388.00/year	0%
Miami-Dade County, Florida[b]	Model 2	$32,729.32–$53,204.58/year	$33,743.06–$58,540.04/year	3%-10%
Denver, Colorado[c]	Model 2	$28,000.00–$41,000.00/year	$31,000.00–$45,000.00/year	9%
Los Alamos County, New Mexico[d]	Model 2	$30,269.00–$45,403.00/year	$30,097.60–$46,508.00/year	-0.5%-3%
Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina[e]	Model 3	$29,120.00/year	$30,476.00/year	4%

a   City of Rochester, New York, "Job Listings," City of Rochester, https://www.cityofrochester.gov/bhrm/sigma_csapp/joblistings.aspx. December 2007

b   Miami-Dade County, Florida, "Job Descriptions/Pay Plans" Database, Miami-Dade County Human Resources, https://exterd.miamidade.gov/psp/GUEST/EMPLOYEE/HRMS/c/
MDC_CUSTOM.MDC_PAYPLAN_WEB.GBL?FolderPath=PORTAL_ROOT_OBJECT.MDC_CUSTOM.MDC_PAYPLAN_WEB_GBL. December 2007

c   Kimberly Genereux, "Denver, Colorado 311 Training," Office Communication, January 2008.

d   Los Alamos County, New Mexico, "Dispatcher I and II," Los Alamos County Human Resources, January 2008; Todd Rodencal, "Los Alamos County 311 Training," Office Communication, January 2008.

e   City of Charlotte, North Carolina, "Job Opportunity Bulletin," City of Charlotte Human Resources, http://www.charmeck.org. December 2007

Key:

Model 1: Basic Police	311 as police-only, non-emergency
Model 2: Basic City	311 as city services, not including police
Model 3: Integrated	311 as total city, including police non-emergency

training facility with two full-time trainers. In addition to more than sixty 311 call center staff, scores of other county personnel are required to take training on the interface between their department and the 311 call center.

The full-time trainers are responsible for training new hires in the 311 call center, conducting refresher courses, providing updates when outside departmental policy or procedures change. The trainers also provide training to all county personnel who are responsible for either responding to service requests or accepting "warm" transfers (when the agent stays live with the caller until he/she reaches a real person as opposed to a voice mail system).[13]

Since DeKalb County's 311 department reports to the chief executive officer, good customer service is not only a priority, but the expectation of each department. The availability of trainers and a dedicated facility allows for flexible training schedules and enables the county to keep personnel current by delivering consistent levels of customer service training and support.

Different service models in 311 centers also warrant different training styles. Even formal, in-house training

Table 9–2   Comparison by Type of Training in Different Jurisdictions

City/County	Type of 311 Service	Type of Training	Jurisdiction Population	Staff Size	Length of Training
DeKalb County, Georgia	County services	Formal, institutionalized	723,602[a]	60 FTEs (1 manager, 1 department liaison, 1 QA analyst, 2 training analysts, 55 contact center agents)	3 weeks
Durham, North Carolina[b]	City services; "Durham One Call"	Formal, institutionalized	201,204[c]	11 FTEs (1 manager, 1 call center supervisor, 9 contact center agents)	3 weeks, can be extended if necessary
Los Alamos County, New Mexico[d]	County services	2-day orientation and process review followed by on-the-job training with senior contact center agent	19,022[e]	4 FTEs (1 manager, 3 contact center agents)	2–3 weeks
Louisville, Kentucky[f]	City services	In-house training using mechanisms from contracted/ outsourced trainers at annual AGCCE conference	554,496[g]	15 FTEs (1 director, 1 supervisor, 13 contact center agents)	3–10 weeks (6–8 weeks average)
Miami-Dade County, Florida[c]	City/county services	Formal, institutionalized	2,402,208[i]	137 FTEs (10 supervisors, 7 trainers, 120 contact center agents)	6–7 weeks

a   United States Census Bureau, "DeKalb County, Georgia," American FactFinder Fact Sheet for DeKalb County, Georgia, 2006 American Community Survey. United States Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

b   Lenitra Rochelle, "311 Training," Durham, North Carolina, Office Communication, January 2008. "Durham One Call Staff," Durham One Call, Durham, NC - City of Medicine, https://www.durhamnc.gov/departments/onecall/staff.cfm, January 2008.

c   United States Census Bureau, "Durham city, North Carolina," American FactFinder Fact Sheet for Durham, North Carolina, 2006 American Community Survey.

d   Todd Rodencal, "Los Alamos County 311 Training," Office Communication, January 2008.

e   United States Census Bureau, "Los Alamos County, New Mexico," American FactFinder 2006 Population Estimate for Los Alamos County, New Mexico, 2006 American Community Survey.

f   Marilyn Givan, "311 Training," Louisville, Kentucky, Office Communication, January 2008.

g   United States Census Bureau, "Louisville City, Kentucky," American FactFinder 2006 Population Estimate for Louisville City, Kentucky, 2006 American Community Survey, 2006.

h   Becky Jo Glover, Miami-Dade County, Personal Statement, January 2008.

i   United States Census Bureau, "Miami-Dade County, Florida," American Fact Finder 2006 Population Estimate for Miami-Dade County, Florida, 2006 American Community Survey.

can vary based upon the types of service a particular call center provides. This is evident in the 311 center in Austin, Texas, which has used a formal training program since its inception.

When it was established in 2001, the 311 system in Austin was a division of the Austin Police Department. The original mission of the call center was to provide an alternative number for residents to call "when faced with a non-emergency issue requiring police assistance." To reflect this initial mission, 911 and 311 were both staffed by Emergency Communications personnel from the Austin Police Department. The addition of the 311 call center garnered ten new 311-specific positions, but call takers in both call centers were "cross-trained to work in [both] 911 and 311." As a result, 311 call takers participated in a formal training program that prepared them to serve "as 911 operators capable of handling potential emergencies"[14] or in non-emergency police matters.

In 2004, Austin 311 began taking calls for three additional city departments and has since evolved to an integrated system for both non-emergency police calls and city service calls. This transition from a division within the Austin Police Department to an independent city department also brought about a change in training. Rather than 311 training being comparable to 911 training for the purpose of non-emergency police matters, training for 311 contact center agents focuses on the computer interface, customer service, and KB content, while scaling back emergency and non-emergency police training to simple awareness of where calls should be transferred.[15]

Networking and Outsourced Training

The Association of Government Call Center Employees (AGCCE) was founded in 2003 with the principal objective to share call center best practices between member agencies. Through roundtable meetings, Internet forums, and annual conferences, members are able to network with one another, share training techniques, and further define departmental needs based upon call center objectives.

Originally conceived by administrators in Lexington, Kentucky, LexCall (the city's government call center) wanted to formalize customer service training, but struggled with the options for delivering that training. The center received many solicitations from customer service training providers, which were expensive and did not necessarily address the issues that 311 handles on a daily basis.[16] Recently,

at its annual conference, AGCCE sponsored a third-party call-center trainer to lead discussions on customer service training, best practices, and protocols. Participants heard about various training techniques and styles and then returned home to report and implement what they learned. This creative approach helped bridge the gap between high training costs and the need to have professional training practices in place.

On-the-Job Training

Some jurisdictions have chosen a more informal, yet equally effective, approach to training. Los Alamos County, New Mexico, uses what it considers on-the-job training. Newly hired contact center agents spend two days reading and reviewing the call center's procedure manual with the call center manager. Following this, the new hires sit in the call center with an experienced contact center agent, listening to customer calls and observing techniques. After completing the orientation and observation phases, the new contact center agent and the senior agent switch roles. The senior agent coaches and gives feedback to the new agent during the following one to two weeks of support training.[17]

In smaller communities with 311 systems, on-the-job training is a viable alternative that is both cost-effective and successful. Table 9-2 illustrates some of the different types and lengths of training.

National Survey Findings and Other Revelant Research

In early 2007, ICMA distributed a survey on Local Government Customer Service Systems to cities and counties throughout the country. (More information on the survey is available in Chapter 3.) Among local governments reporting having a call center, 38 percent claim that their call center staff is trained to handle calls without further departmental interface. Under this model, call takers respond to the initial call, answering informational calls and taking service requests; callers are transferred to another department if necessary.[18] This one-stop shop concept tends to have a more standardized or formal training approach and most likely involves the use of a KB.

An additional 28 percent of the centers surveyed "help callers navigate the government structure," rather than address the problem on the spot. The primary responsibility of the contact center agent in this type of center is to make a record of the call and pass

the call on to the appropriate department. Training in this model does not need to be as extensive as in the prior example because the contact center agent is only responsible for knowing which department addresses a particular problem, rather than addressing the problem directly. Because knowledge and problem solving are much less of a focus in these centers, outsourced training for specialized needs may be a good option.

The remaining 34 percent of those surveyed classified themselves as "other," and did not specify a training structure.

Consistent with academic evidence, most large local governments (those with populations over 400,000) chose to establish and institutionalize formal, in-house training as a division within the 311 unit. Cost effectiveness, access to a training facility, and availability of a trainer when needed are the most significant considerations for doing so.[19]

Another option for in-house training is maintaining a training center or facility on-site while outsourcing the training function itself. Smaller local governments may not require full-time staff to support training and may find this a feasible and cost-effective alternative in a mid-size local government (populations of 80,000 to 400,000).

A third option is to conduct on-the-job training, where new hires are trained by experienced staff. This option often includes the use of training manuals and testing on policy and/or equipment. Local governments can also combine the training options. Customizing a training option that fits budgetary needs and a service delivery model has become the standard approach to most 311 training.

Conclusion

As we have found, most 311 implementations are unique in their definition as well as in the execution of their service model. Having a clear vision for a local government's definition of 311 and its anticipated benefits assists in determining the type of training personnel need to accomplish those objectives. As local governments continue to become more citizen friendly, 311 is becomes a natural progression for such a result.

Whatever training option is chosen, the approach should include the following best-practice training criteria and goals:

- Consistency in service delivery
- Ability to provide reliable information to the customer
- Central location for citizens to call
- Call center SLAs (e.g., answering 80 percent of calls in 30 seconds) and tools to measure performance against established criteria.[20]

The apparent correlation between training and an employer and employee's degree of commitment to a position is worth noting. A benefit of training may be lower turnover rates in a typically high-turnover environment. At times when budgets are tight and discretionary spending is nominal, training may be an important tool in establishing and maintaining both citizen and staff expectations, commanding consistency in service delivery among all staff members, and providing citizens with a positive customer experience.

Research assistance for this chapter provided by Evgeny Bondar and Tyler Reinagel.

Endnotes

1   A knowledgebase is a part search engine and part database, an intelligent system that records whether the information provided to the user was what was sought. It is particularly useful for managing vast amounts of information and data that must be retrieved on an ongoing basis.

2   Kristin M. Howlett, Unisys Corporation, et al., "Research Analysis and Assessment, 2003-2004" (DeKalb County, Georgia: January 2008).

3   Howlett, "Research Analysis and Assessment, 2003-2004."

4   Claudette Leak, Personal Statement, January 2008.

5   DeKalb County, Georgia, 311 Call Center, *311 Training Manual,* 2007.

6   Leak, Personal Statement.

7   *DC Training Assessment Test Results,* Washington, D.C., 2007.

8   City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *Legislative Analyst Report - Call Center, 2002* (San Francisco, California: City and County of San Francisco, October 2002).

9   Adam J. Grossberg, "The Effect of Formal Training on Employment Duration," *Industrial Relations* 39-4 (2000): 578-599.

10 Inge Sieben, "Does Training Trigger turnover-or Not? The Impact of Formal Training on Graduates' Job Search Behaviour," *Work, Employment, and Society* 21-3 (2007): 397-416.

11 Ibid.

12 Kristin M. Howlett, et al., Personal interviews with 8 municipalities, January 2008.

13 DeKalb County, Georgia, 311 Call Center, *311 Training Manual*.

14 City of Austin, Texas, *Building a 3-1-1 System for Police Non-Emergency Calls* (Austin, Texas: Austin Police Department, September 2003).

15 City of Austin, Texas, "City of Austin - 311 Info Center," http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/311/index.cfm. January 2008.

16 Association of Government Call Center Employees, "History," AGCCE, http://www.governmentcallcenter.org/history.html. (Accessed October 3, 2008).

17 Rodencal, "Los Alamos County 311 Training," Office Communication.

18 International City/County Management Association, *Local Government Customer Service Systems Survey, 2007* (Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 2007).

19 Howlett, et al., "Interviews with 8 Municipalities."

20 Ibid.

311 Resources

311/CRM Project Coordinating Group

- ICMA—icma.org/311
- The Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies—ochscenter.org
- Public Technology Institute (PTI)—pti.org
- Rutgers University's Public Performance Measurement and Reporting Network
- 311 Community of Practice—ppmrn.rutgers.edu

Other 311/CRM Resources

- COPS Office, U.S. Department of Justice—cops.usdoj.gov
- Governing.com
- Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)—gfoa.org
- Leadership for a Networked World Program at John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University—lnwprogram.org
- Association of Government Call Center Employees (AGCCE)—governmentcallcenter.org
- CSweek 311 Synergy Group—csweek.org/311synergygroup
- National Association of Call Centers—nationalcallcenters.org

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ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology

With funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, ICMA is conducting the first ever national study on 311 and related customer service technology used by local governments in the United States. The study will explore the benefits of and barriers to local governments adopting integrated systems for customer service. A national survey of local governments, together with information collected from a series of in-depth case studies, will help create a portrait of how local governments are using such systems to respond to citizen needs and build the local government-constituent relationship. When viewed together, the survey results and findings from the case study research will present current practices and successful implementation of coordinated systems for customer service.

For more information about the study, contact...

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