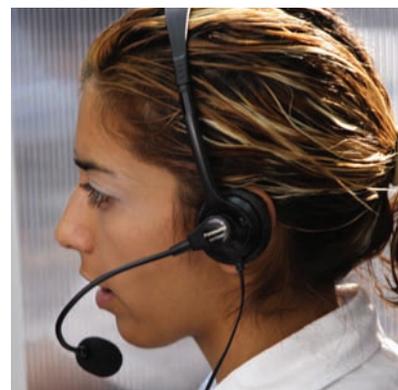


ICMA

Call 311:

Connecting Citizens to Local Government
Case Study Series



Minneapolis 311 System

By Cory Fleming

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

In This Report

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Community and System Profile

Minneapolis, Minnesota—Minneapolis 311

Form of Government

Mayor-council with a city coordinator

Council Districts

13

Population

369,051 (U.S. Census 2006 American Community Survey)

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™ Citizen Relationship Management (CRM) software
- Siemens HiPath™ multifunctional communication system for integrating voice and data
- Siemens HiPath ProCenter™ software for automatic call distribution and reporting
- Aspect E-Workforce Manager™ for scheduling and forecasting
- Higher Ground™ voice and screen capture for quality assurance
- Cognos™ enterprise reporting
- Creston™ integrated TV monitor system for real-time call center information
- Casewise™ 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

Non-emergency 311 Service is a local telephone exchange communications service that allows telephone customers to reach non-emergency local government services by dialing an abbreviated telephone number, 311. 311 traffic is routed over the public switched network to a call center designed by the local government customer. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserved 311 for non-emergency access to public services.

311 service is optional and may be purchased by a local municipality, a council of governments, a communication district, another state or local governmental unit, or an authorized agent of one or more municipalities or other state or local governmental units to whom authority has been lawfully delegated. The customer must be legally authorized to subscribe to the service. 311 is offered subject to the availability of facilities.

Brief History of Minneapolis 311

The city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, has a long tradition of strong civic engagement. City leaders have a tremendous desire to connect with city residents and were frustrated when studies of city services “revealed a lack of consistency, coordination and citizen focus when handling requests for information and service.”¹ After attending several national conferences and learning about how other communities had developed a central contact point for city services, council members and the mayor determined that they wanted to develop a new “front door” for the city. The central goal was to make it easier for citizens to connect with their government by improving service delivery and changing the customer service culture within the city of Minneapolis.

Once city leaders decided to make the change in 2003, staff began to move the issue forward within the organization. The city’s chief information officer led the effort to research citizen relationship management (CRM) systems and other necessary technology. At the time, the city had a sixteen-year-old telecom platform and an automated call distribution (ACD) system, but the ACD did not include technology for a multimedia

call center. There were over twenty small call centers, but no true link or measurement of them at a citywide leadership level, only measurement within the department itself. In addition to purchasing all new telephony hardware and software, Minneapolis needed better call accounting, call recording, voice mail, skills-based routing, forecasting, and scheduling features to support the functions of a full-service call center. “The advent of the 311 call center essentially led to the installation of an entirely new telecom platform across the city,” explained Connie Perila, manager of telecommunications and network services for the city’s Business Information Services.

The city also had to purchase desktop hardware—computers, monitors, and telephones—for the customer service agents (CSAs) who work in the 311 call center. Each CSA workstation has two flat-screen monitors and a central processing unit (CPU) to allow agents to have multiple applications open on their desktops simultaneously.

The purchase and installation of a CRM software system was a major task for Minneapolis 311. (A CRM system allows an organization to centralize the point of access for those it serves or those with whom it

“[The 311 call center] made it easy for anyone to be a part of building our city.”

Steven Bosacker, city coordinator





CSAs have two monitors at their workstations to enable them to more quickly research answers when citizens call with questions.

does business. The software enables a call center to manage the large volume of information and data coming in and going out on a daily basis.) The city went through a very extensive request-for-proposal

process before entering into a contract implementing the system. In its contract, Minneapolis made sure to include a six-month review and out clause. The city enacted the clause when it became apparent the system offered by the vendor would not meet Minneapolis's business needs, which include a more flexible design and better integration with other city systems. In the end, the city selected Lagan Technologies' FrontLink™ CRM system.

One of the major challenges of developing the Minneapolis 311 system was integrating all of systems and getting them to work together seamlessly. The 311 call center uses eight applications from the telephony system alone. Minneapolis 311 also needs to work within the city's larger enterprise telecom system that must be managed behind a firewall for security reasons. "Our engineer at the city ended up fixing a lot of these integration problems because there was no single vendor supporting all applications and hardware in the complex voice and data environment for 311. There are so many vendors working with so many other vendors; there is no way they can all be experts

Summary of Key Findings

System Functionality and Major Features

- Finding 1. Instituting a robust 311 system involves a significant culture change for the local government and should be managed as such.
- Finding 2. Full integration with geographic information system (GIS) technology can help maximize the impact of the 311 system.
- Finding 3. 311 can provide significant relief to 911 and the police department by collecting information for non-emergency police reports, thus allowing patrol officers to focus more time on crime prevention.

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

- Finding 4. A 311 system provides equal access and opportunity for *all* citizens, regardless of socioeconomic status, to engage local government and request services.
- Finding 5. The more citizens trust their local government to respond to their calls, the more likely they are to get involved and report problems to the city.
- Finding 6. Neighborhood associations and virtual block groups can serve as effective intermediaries for local governments and help spread awareness of 311.

Performance Measurements and Service Provision

- Finding 7. Local government departments need to view 311 as a centralized work-order system that also has the ability to help measure their performance.
- Finding 8. Local government needs to devote time and energy to defining what the resolution of a service request involves for any given issue brought forward by a citizen.
- Finding 9. 311 data can serve as a tool to support continuous improvement efforts undertaken by local governments.

Staff Training

- Finding 10. Diversity and cultural awareness training are important in assisting customer service agents (CSAs) in working with citizens from different cultures.
- Finding 11. The 311 internal quality assurance program assists CSAs in improving customer service.
- Finding 12. Knowledge is fluid, especially during an emergency. Establishing a communications plan and internal protocols for getting information to CSAs is critical so that they can respond to the public.

on how these systems are going to be integrated with each other. This was a challenge the city solved in house,” said Connie Perila, manager for telecommunications and network services with the city’s Business Information Services. The city also had to establish links from its FrontLink CRM to three existing work-order systems within city government—one for environmental health, one for animal control, and one for sidewalk repair. The department of public works currently is considering the purchase of a work-order system, which also would need to be connected to the FrontLink CRM.

Minneapolis is committed to coordination between 911 and 311 operations, which share central management and administrative functions. Minneapolis 311 serves as the backup for the city’s 911 call center, which is physically located in Minneapolis City Hall. If a disaster were to shut down operations at city hall, operations would move to the 311 call center. In order to enable such a transition, the 311 center has full UPS battery and generator backup in the event of a power outage. The center also houses twelve 311/911 workstations, six of which function as 911 operator workstations and six that can function as 911 dispatch workstations.

System Costs

Implementation of the 311 call center was designed to be budget neutral (see Tables 1 and 2). City leaders were committed to implementing the system using no new revenues. Instead, all city departments were required to transfer a portion of their budgets to the 311 call center. This one-time reduction of departmental budgets was a difficult and painful step, but the control of how and where to make the cuts was left to the individual departments.

Table 1. Minneapolis 311 Implementation Costs

Budget Item	Expenses
Software	\$3.2 million
Professional Services	\$1.8 million
Facility Build-out	\$1.2 million
Computer Workstations	\$75,000*
Lagan Frontlink CRM Licenses	\$175,000*
Total	\$6.45 million

* Paid for through a one-time grant from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).

Table 2. Minneapolis 311 Funding Sources

Source	Expenses
Business Information Services (BIS) Capital/Infrastructure	\$1.6 million
Department Allocations	\$1.1 million
911 Surcharge	\$300,000
2004 Rollover Funds	\$1.3 million
Internal Short-Term Loans	\$1.7 million
COPS Office Grant	\$250,000
Total	\$6.25 million

Annual operating expenses for the 311 call center are \$2.6 million, which includes personnel, facilities, software licensing, and other administrative expenses. Funding comes from the city’s general fund, with 311 competing in the regular budget process just like other departments.

Minneapolis 311 operates from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The city originally considered two other models of operation and the budgets associated with each as well: twenty-four hours a day/seven days a week; and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. While the city leadership has a strong desire to operate twenty-four hours a day/seven days a week, the city’s budget was not able to support this option. The city council opted to go with the middle option, which provides another six hours a day of coverage over normal business hours. Based on a call analysis conducted by Minneapolis 311, it was determined that commuters started to place calls around 7:00 am and they continued until about 11:00 p.m. A majority of the evening calls included non-emergency police reports and impound lot calls. With this option, it appears that the city is able to answer the highest number of calls with the least cost.

System Functionality and Major Features

Finding 1 – Instituting a robust 311 system involves a significant culture change for the local government and should be managed as such.

The structure of municipal government in Minneapolis allows for tremendous autonomy among departments. Of the eighteen departments that compose the organization,

only half report to the city coordinator. The other nine departments operate with independent boards providing governance and oversight. As a result, while city leadership mandated that all eighteen departments participate in the 311 call center, that end goal has not been achieved to date. “We are chipping away at those places [within city government] that maybe weren’t fully bought in at the beginning, but they’re getting brought in because of the success of the center,” reported Steven Bosacker, city coordinator for the city of Minneapolis.

At the heart of the issue is the need for departments to give up a certain amount of control over the work they do. As Lynn Willenbring, chief information officer for the city’s Business Information Services, observed, “To get the most benefit out of 311, [a local government] really needs to look at its business processes and re-engineer them at the same time [as the implementation of the 311 system].” It is this re-engineering requirement—taking a hard look at how business processes could be improved—that involves a shift in thinking and in the culture of an organization.

In Minneapolis, business analysts sat down with department staff to work through how service requests were handled by each business unit. Using the software program Casewise™, business processes were mapped out in “as is” scenarios and then re-engineered to “to be” scenarios. By documenting all the processes involved and creating new models, cities can begin to see where interactions between processes occur as well as never-ending loops or points in the process where bottlenecks might occur.

One of the most dramatic examples of how this effort impacted Minneapolis came through a review of how the city handled 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 out to the appropriate police precinct. From there, an officer would go out to the site and take a picture of the graffiti for tracking purposes related to gang activity. They would then send the complaint to the department of public works for cleanup. Since graffiti itself is not generally a high priority in police work, a complaint

“What you battle is a sense that someone else is going to become the expert in what your department knows best.”

Steven Bosacker, city coordinator

could sit for two to three weeks before an officer was sent out to photograph the site.

After considerable discussion about the existing process and where efficiencies could be realized, 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 length of time it takes to respond to graffiti complaints as a result of the new process.

Finding 2 – Full integration with geographic information system (GIS) technology can help maximize the impact the 311 system.

In the private sector, CRM systems typically use customer information as the primary field for tracking purposes. For example, if an individual calls the local pizza parlor and gives his or her name, a page will pop up on the system that shows what the person ordered in a previous call. The information taken during that phone call is readily available for completing the current order.

With local government CRM systems, the emphasis is not on the individual, but rather where the service is needed. If a citizen calls in to report a pothole, the city needs to find out where the pothole is located, not the citizen’s phone number. “We can’t think of any service request that doesn’t have some spatial relationship...customer information is not the driver of our CRM, the physical location of the service request is,” said Willenbring.

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. David Moore, a forecasting and reporting analyst with Minneapolis 311, reports that the city’s Regulatory Services Department was interested in how service requests for exterior nuisance complaints broke down

by districts within the city. Using ARC GIS™, Moore was able to determine that one out of four supervisor districts generated nearly 33 percent of all exterior nuisance service requests, whereas another of the four districts only generated about 16 percent (see Figure 1). Yet both districts had one supervisor and approximately the same number of support staff. “Not surprisingly, we had a hard time reaching the one supervisor. Why? Because the demand was so high,” said Moore.

The mapping process Minneapolis uses has yielded important operational benefits for the city as a whole. “Our departments have more time to focus on being creative about service delivery...they know where things need to be fixed and they’ve got more time to address those things,” said Bosacker.

“Spatial relationships are huge...[service requests are] virtually all related to space.”

Lynn Willenbring, chief information officer, Business Information Services

Finding 3 – 311 can provide significant relief to 911 and the police department by collecting information for non-emergency police reports, thus allowing patrol officers to focus more time on crime prevention.

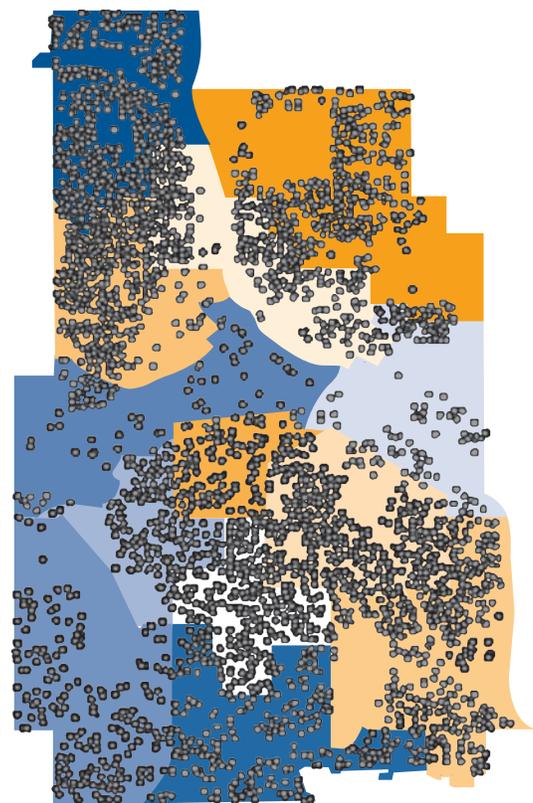
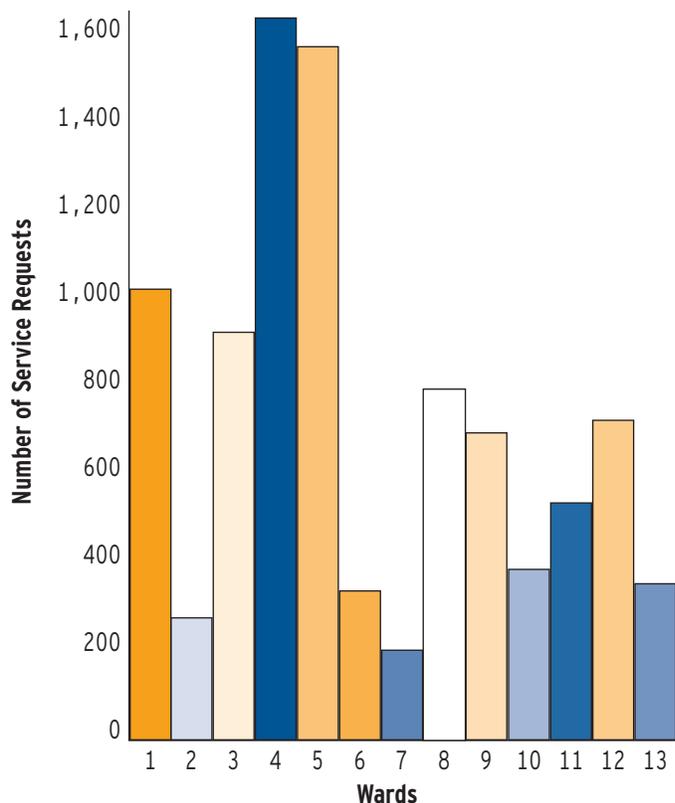
Minneapolis 311 took a phased approach to increasing its workload over time. Once the call center was up and running smoothly, the management team began to look for new ways that the center could assist both residents and other municipal departments. One of the most important new additions to the

311 workload was taking over filing non-emergency police reports.

Scott Gerlicher, deputy chief of police in Minneapolis, notes that the police department is

Figure 1. 311 Housing Inspections Services Complaint Service Requests Exterior Nuisance Complaints by Ward—01/01/2007-12/31/2007

Average Time to Complete: 13.18 days



always looking at ways that it can save time and resources. Minor types of crime, such as damage to property or car vandalism, require that police reports be filed in order for individuals to file insurance claims. Typically, no evidence or suspects exist in such cases and sending an officer out to take such reports represented a significant drain on police resources. Don Stickney, assistant director for 911/311 Communications for the city, reports that the 311 center takes reports on sixteen different crime types, which represents the bulk of non-emergency reports. In 2007, Minneapolis 311 agents took 5,137 police e-reports while the public made 4,377 through the self-service option on the Web.

311 agents are not police officers, and they require some special training in order to take the reports properly. However, Minneapolis citizens can file such reports directly to 311 agents immediately, rather than wait for a police officer to come take a report. This service saves considerable time for the citizen as well as the police department.

The police department also works with the 311 center to train its community service officers, individuals who are not yet eligible to join the department as a sworn police officer, but working toward a law enforcement degree with the goal of eventually becoming an officer. “It’s a training tool for us and helps [the 311 center] with staffing,” says Gerlicher. “Specifically, it has reduced our call load for patrol officers on the street, allowing them more time to be out in the community addressing more serious crime issues.”

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

Finding 4 – A 311 system provides equal access and opportunity for all citizens, regardless of socio-economic status, to engage local government and request services.

Minneapolis residents can submit service requests to their local government in a multitude of ways. In addition to calls received through the 311 call center, city residents can submit requests via e-mail, self-service online request forms, Web chat, and a TTY line for the hearing impaired. Once these requests are received, CSAs enter the requests in the FrontLink CRM system

“A process that used to take days or even weeks now takes minutes. It’s pretty cool.”

**Don Stickney, assistant director,
911/311 Communications**

and the citizens are provided tracking numbers if they want them. The resident can use the tracking number to check back on progress in fulfilling the request either via a phone call to 311 or online via a live chat with a 311 CSA.

Based on early results from its customer satisfaction survey, Minneapolis 311 has helped the city earn the trust of its residents. Marc Dronen, a business analyst with Minneapolis 311, notes, “What we’re hearing from our customers is a very high level of satisfaction on

Figure 2. 2007 Service Requests

**Total Number of Service Requests: 83,600,
Total Number of Service Requests by Ward: 72,465***

Rank	Ward Reference	Case Count
13	13	3,547
12	11	3,828
11	2	4,342
10	7	4,512
9	6	5,027
8	10	5,215
7	12	5,314
6	1	6,370
5	3	6,615
4	5	6,641
3	9	6,654
2	8	6,771
1	4	7,629

Summary 72,465

* Number of Service Requests by Ward are less than the total number of service requests. Some service requests are not associated by address and therefore are not associated by ward.

their interaction with Minneapolis 311.” The call center receives 31,000 to 46,000 calls every month from all neighborhoods throughout the city.

This citywide use of 311 is a pleasing development. Don Samuels, councilor for the city’s Ward 5, explained that his community, Minneapolis’s North Side, traditionally votes in low numbers. “We might have 2,000 people voting, whereas the 11th and 13th wards have 10,000 and 13,000 people voting. It’s just a less engaged community.” This general lack of engagement was of concern to him when 311 was first beginning: Would the people in his community trust the city to provide them with services? “People in my community felt they had to know somebody to get things done,” said Samuels.

“It’s an equal opportunity number.”

Don Samuels, Councilor, Ward 5

Reports from Minneapolis 311 show that residents of Councilor Samuels’s community actually use the system the most. (See Figure 2) “That was very heartening to me,” said Samuels. “What 311 has done has made the city accessible to every citizen. I think people are feeling more comfortable connecting with the city.”

Finding 5 – The more citizens trust their local government to respond to their calls, the more likely they are to get involved and report problems to the city.

The city of Minneapolis has a very strong tradition of community engagement, with many independent



The city of Minneapolis opted to push 311 out to the public in a major campaign just after the system went live. Among the strategies used was a train “wrap” announcing Minneapolis 311 on cars of the city’s new light rail transit system.

commissions and boards established to provide oversight for government programs and services. Sara Dietrich, director of communications for Minneapolis, explained, “Our government is set up in such a way to ensure that people have a really a strong voice in city government.”

Despite this tradition, many residents complained that they could not talk to a live person when they called city hall. Biennial citizen satisfaction surveys showed that first call resolution—where a concern is handled with just one phone call—was a problem. Nearly one in four residents reported they were very dissatisfied. “They never felt as though they could get their answer in the same day,” said Nancy McGrath, a customer service agent with Minneapolis 311.

For many, Minneapolis 311 offers a new outlet to connect with their government. “People are astonished that government is working,” said Dietrich. She went on to explain that many people did not think about contacting the city before 311 was implemented simply because there was not an easy means to do so. Shonda Allen, a city resident and community organizer for Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association, agreed, “I think it helps, and I do like it because it makes the citizens become engaged and not just sit back. I think they feel very safe calling 311.” And while there are some residents who might be classified as “frequent fliers” because they use the system on such a regular basis, Councilor Cam Gordon for Minneapolis’s Ward 2 commented, “They’re doing a service for us by finding [and reporting] the problems.”

Finding 6 – Neighborhood associations and virtual block groups can serve as effective intermediaries for local governments and help spread awareness of 311.

Minneapolis has eighty-one formally registered neighborhood groups. These groups convene for a variety of reasons, from improving quality of life for residents to promoting greater public safety and crime prevention. Prior to system implementation, 311 staff attended neighborhood group meetings to talk about

hopes for the system as well as solicit information on what the groups needed from the city.

Bosacker explains that conversation with residents has changed the nature of local government’s relationship with the greater community: “The degree to which our 311 people have been out talking to neighborhood groups and taking them that kind of data—it has totally changed the conversation for these groups. Not only has it given them something more than anecdotal information to analyze the city and its responsiveness in providing service to their community, but it has changed the whole expectation

about what government can and should do with the resources it has,” said Bosacker. Shonda Allen commented that one of things neighborhood residents like is the confirmation number they receive when they report a problem, so they can track what’s going on with the issue and

find out about progress. “They are able to say, ‘On this day I called about this housing issue,’ and they report things out to the neighborhood group.”

Neighborhood associations also facilitate word-of-mouth advertising regarding Minneapolis 311 as a resource. Council members, in particular, frequently work with the neighborhood organizations in their wards to get word out about 311, including stories in newsletters and reminding people about the service at community meetings.

Performance Measurements and Service Provision

Finding 7 – Local government departments need to view 311 as a centralized work-order system that also has the ability to help measure their performance.

A 311 system generates substantial new data on the provision of local government services, but as David Moore, a forecasting and reporting analyst with Minneapolis 311, notes many local government departments have never had such data nor had to work with them before. Oftentimes, the departments are not happy with what the new data show. “Sometimes we have to say, ‘We’re sorry if this is embarrassing, but from when you open your case to

“We’ve found that numbers alone don’t really tell much...it’s the numbers along with the story of how we resolved the issues that tell whether we’re doing the job that needs to be done.”

Doug Gregerson, management analyst, Public Works

when you close it, this is how long it is taking.’ It’s not a report people ask for,” said Moore.

Doug Gregerson, a management analyst with the city’s Public Works Department, points out that all employees want to look good at their jobs. The introduction of service level agreements (SLAs)—under which departments commit to completing specific tasks within a set time period—and performance measurements cause a certain amount of trepidation because they create tracking mechanisms for work being done. Employees fear that if work is not completed in the newly prescribed manner, they will be reprimanded or worse.

Compounded with this fear are numerous cultural issues involved in implementing new systems and processes within the local government. Employees are comfortable working with existing systems and know what their responsibilities are within that system. Introducing new processes or re-engineering existing systems mixes things up and can create confusion and uncertainty during the transition. Are employees following and implementing the new procedures appropriately? How do the new processes impact the employee’s ability to do his/her job? Have the employees been adequately trained or have the necessary skills to do their jobs using the new processes? Is there sufficient equipment—for example, laptop computers or PDAs—for employees working in the field?

Bosacker notes the critical importance of departmental and employee buy-in and support of 311 service within local government. “If you come too fast with demands for improvement, you can doom the system before it has got roots that are deep enough to sustain that rigor....In the end, if you’re not doing good improvement around the system and delivery of services, you’re missing the boat,” he said.

Finding 8 – Local government needs to devote time and energy to defining what the resolution of a service request involves for any given issue brought forward by a citizen.

Service requests vary by nature and type. Some are simple and straightforward, such as a request to have an absentee ballot form sent out. Other requests are

more complex, such as asking for repairs to be made to a vacant building in the neighborhood. For more complex requests, defining the resolution of the request can be difficult. According to Moore, this is an ongoing issue for the city.

Moore offered exterior nuisance complaints as one example. If a citizen calls in with a complaint, an inspector from the city’s Department of Regulatory Services is sent out. Assuming a violation is found, a letter goes to the offending property owner. If the owner responds to the letter and makes an appeal, there are a series of steps within the regulatory

process that must be followed in order to get the property cleaned up. But when is the issue actually resolved? When an inspector first goes out to investigate the problem? When a

violation letter is sent? Or when the owner takes remedial measures on a property? For the citizen who calls back to 311 about his/her request and wants to know why nothing has been done to clean up the property, there is no resolution.

Without a firm definition of resolution, tracking data for SLAs offers little support for managing local government processes and resources. Initially, establishing SLAs must be viewed as a learning process to determine if benchmarks are realistic and tracking data actually correspond with departmental goals.

Finding 9 – 311 data can serve as a tool to support continuous improvement efforts undertaken by local governments.

Minneapolis implemented Results Minneapolis as its enterprise-wide performance measurement program in 2006. Results Minneapolis endeavors to set objective measures for establishing better accountability in all city departments. Results Minneapolis is a management tool the city uses to systematically track performance toward achieving the city’s five-year goals and “2020 vision.”

A review panel of city leaders meets with a different department head each week to track progress and discuss key performance measures. By regularly tracking performance data at these progress confer-

“The diversity training helps you understand that there is more to the city than just the neighborhood you live in.”

Marnna Anderson, customer service agent, Minneapolis 311

ences, city leaders identify areas where the city is excelling, as well as opportunities for improvement.

Gordon explained that 311 data comprise an important subset of the larger Results Minneapolis data that city departments are gathering now to better understand and improve their performance. While 311 data is not yet completely integrated into Results Minneapolis, Councilor Gordon believes the new data are critical. “We’re developing some clear objectives because we do have centralized data now through 311. We can find out how things are going, what gets results, and what doesn’t,” he said.

Don Samuels, Councilor for Minneapolis Ward 5, echoed this sentiment: “For me, the key benefit [of 311] is the ability to have better accountability, which helps every department to improve its own efficiencies...we can track the path and development of the service and see where snags are...and it’s very objective.” Gregerson observed that often citizens do not feel as though government is doing the things that they want done. “If we make sure that we’re doing those services extremely well, then the perception of us should be better and citizens feel like they’re getting something for their taxes,” he said.

“We had a big party to kick it [the QSI] off; it’s important to be able to show whether we as the 311 center are succeeding with our goals.”

Marc Dronen, business analyst, Minneapolis 311

Minneapolis 311, said, “The city not only makes sure that they are staffing a diverse group of folks who are a reflection of the community, but also that the people here understand about different cultures.” During the training, Nancy McGrath, a customer service agent, said, “We learned about all the different populations within the city of Minneapolis, and we also went on a tour of all these different neighborhoods.”

The diversity training helps acquaint the CSAs with cultural issues that may arise when working with Minneapolis residents from different cultures.

Marnna Anderson, a customer service agent with Minneapolis 311, gave an example of working with the local Somali population, noting that frequently members of that population group are not familiar with or do not understand government processes. The CSAs have to help callers understand what information is needed and why. “You need to learn to deal with different people regardless,” said Anderson. She continued, “Everyone deserves a nice place to live and a safe environment.”

Staff Training

Finding 10 – Diversity and cultural awareness training are important in assisting customer service agents (CSAs) in working with citizens from different cultures.

Minneapolis has significant populations of Latinos, Somalis, and Hmong, among other cultures and ethnic groups. While the city embraces its rich cultural diversity, such diversity does come with challenges. For instance, immigrant populations often do not have a strong understanding of how local governments work. Language and other communication issues can cause confusion and misunderstanding for these residents. And individual neighborhoods have their own distinct cultures.

The city requires diversity training for all its employees. The CSAs expressed its importance for their work. Lisa Good, shift supervisor with

Finding 11 – The 311 internal quality assurance program assists CSAs in improving customer service.

Minneapolis 311 has developed an internal process for reviewing and measuring its overall quality of service. Known as the quality assurance index (QSI), the process involves reviewing a monthly sample of 311 phone call records, including screen captures of how agents move through the central knowledge base to find an answer to a call. Minneapolis’ 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 compose the review team. Each team member receives the same set of records to review and score independently.

The review team uses the same score sheet for four different types of calls identified by Minneapolis 311: (1) a knowledge base call, (2) a service request call, (3) a transfer call, and (4) a combo call where the CSAs respond to more than one type of call. The

score sheet includes about seventy different questions or criteria that the team reviews. Depending on the type of call being reviewed, the questions may or may not apply.

The questions consist of two types: (1) a scale where the reviewer ranks his/her response as excellent, good, fair, poor, or fail, and (2) yes or no responses. On the scale questions, excellent is 5, good is 4, fair is 3, poor is 2, and fail is 0 points. For the yes/no questions, yes is 5 points and no is 0 points.

The team meets once a month for calibrations, when the team reviews everyone's scores on phone calls. The group has determined a tolerance range—a set of scores into which all calls should fall. The team calculates the average score of each phone call, and that score becomes the official score for the call. If one team member scores a particular phone call outside the accepted tolerance range, the team discusses why the reviewer chose to do that. The team discusses the differences until consensus is reached on what the final score should be. A rating scale is used to determine if the score for the call is considered excellent, good, fair, poor, or fail.

By combining the scores for all the phone call records, the team arrives at the QSI for that month, which is shared with upper management as well as the call center agents so the whole team is aware of how they are performing.

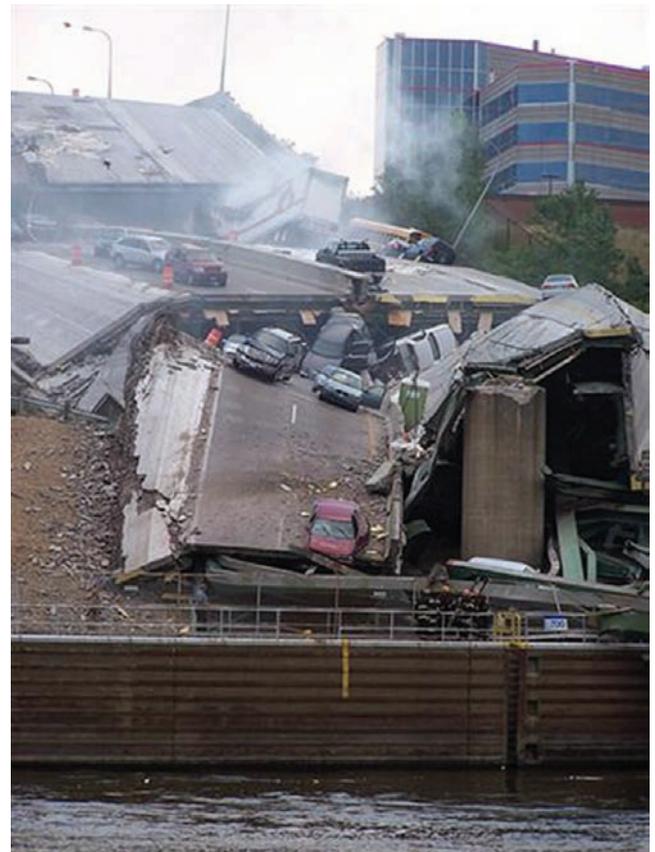
The CSAs had input in reviewing the development of the process as well as the score sheet itself. While the QSI process is designed to review the overall performance of the 311 call center, the records of phone calls can be helpful for CSAs as well. The screen captures can show how an agent is moving through the system to find answers to citizen inquiries. Shift supervisors can use the screen captures to coach CSAs on their search techniques and help improve individual performance. Likewise, if an agent is doing outstanding work, it allows the shift supervisor to congratulate the employee on a job well done.

“311 helps 911 by taking the non-emergency calls to free up 911 for true emergencies. It is also the backup to the 911 center in the event of a disaster, as it is the backup city phone system site accepting any urgent city calls redirected in a disaster.”

Connie Perila, manager, Telecommunications and Network Services, Business Information Services

Finding 12 – Knowledge is fluid, especially during an emergency. Establishing a communications plan and internal protocols for getting information to CSAs is critical so that they can respond to the public.

During the evening of August 1, 2007, the Interstate 35W bridge crossing the Mississippi River in the heart of Minneapolis collapsed during the evening rush hour, killing thirteen people and injuring nearly one hundred more. The city's 911 system was immediately overloaded with phone calls from people wanting emergency information on



Minneapolis 311 played a pivotal role in answering citizens' questions and providing information after the Interstate 35W bridge collapse in August 2006.

14 Minneapolis 311 System

the collapse. While Minneapolis 311 was not heavily included in the city's emergency preparedness plan in the event of a disaster, it quickly became apparent the center had an important role to play. 311 emerged as the non-emergency number to call or e-mail in order for people to offer help, find out how to check on a loved one, get street closure information, check on personal property, track eyewitness reports, or find out how they could get a chance to see the collapsed bridge.

As calls started to come in, center staff created a series of protocols for responding to questions and requests for information on the disaster. "People

were literally calling from all over the country and the world," said Lisa Good, a shift supervisor. The group worked fast to develop accurate answers and solid information for a very concerned population. They created responses for questions about what to do if a car was on the bridge; where to call if a person had a question about someone who may be missing; and where to check if someone might have gone to the hospital. Normally the call center is not open on weekends, but, Good said, "We worked the whole weekend after that...It was great because we were open, and we were another place that people could call. "

Methodology and List of Study Participants

The author conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-five individuals familiar with the Minneapolis 311 system and its operation in October and November 2007. These individuals represented a diverse group of interests and perspectives, including policy makers, upper management within the municipal government, call center staff, and citizens. Four separate interview protocols, each designed with a specific audience in mind, guided the questioning. The author used a conversational interviewing technique in order to more fully explore the participants' experiences and perceptions.

All interviews were tape recorded and reviewed in compiling notes for this report. The author sought written permission prior to attributing any quotes to an individual or organization. The author wishes to thank all the study participants for taking the time to discuss the Minneapolis 311 system. Their contributions to the study were invaluable.

Shonda Allen, Citizen and Community Organizer,
Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association

Marnna Anderson, Customer Service Agent I,
Minneapolis 311

Anonymous, Citizen, City of Minneapolis²

Steven Bosacker, City Coordinator, City of Minneapolis

John Dejung, Director, 911/311 Communications, City
of Minneapolis

Sara Dietrich, Director, Communications, City of
Minneapolis

Marc Dronen, Business Analyst, Minneapolis 311

Scott Gerlicher, Deputy Chief of Police, Police
Department, City of Minneapolis

Lisa Good, Shift Supervisor, Minneapolis 311

Cam Gordon, Councilor, Ward 2, City of Minneapolis

Doug Gregerson, Management Analyst, Public Works,
City of Minneapolis

Eric Gustafson, Citizen and Assistant Director/
Community Organizer, Corcoran Neighborhood
Association

Sarah McGinty, Customer Service Agent II,
Minneapolis 311

Nancy McGrath, Customer Service Agent I,
Minneapolis 311

David Moore, Forecasting & Reporting Analyst,
Minneapolis 311

John Murphy, Business Applications Analyst,
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Burt Osborne, Director, Operations, Licenses and
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Tammy Peterson, Business Information Services
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Don Samuels, Councilor, Ward 5, City of Minneapolis

Judy Schwartau, Communications and Training
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Don Stickney, Assistant Director, 911/311
Communications, City of Minneapolis

Ronnie Toledo, Customer Service Agent II,
Minneapolis 311

Lynn Willenbring, Chief Information Officer, Business
Information Services, City of Minneapolis

Cleopatra Young, Customer Service Agent I,
Minneapolis 311

Endnote

- 1 Minneapolis 311 Report to DOJ (COPS Office). February 2007.
- 2 Citizen requested after the interview that name not be published due to privacy concerns.



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The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide.

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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