

"3-1-1 - putting city government at your fingertips"  
Mayor Lee P. Brown

## **"NEIGHBORHOOD ORIENTED GOVERNMENT"**



### **3-1-1 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE**

#### **Mission**

With every call, we assure easy access to municipal government  
and deliver excellent customer service to  
our citizens

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# CITY of HOUSTON

Post Office Box 1562 Houston, Texas 77251 713-837-0311

OFFICE of the MAYOR

Public Safety and Drug Policy

**3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline**

Fiscal Year 2002 was a year of *firsts* for the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline. Our debut year reflected success in meeting the goals to emphasize neighborhood oriented government, improve customer service to the residents and neighbors of Houston, streamline services provided by city departments, and reduce routine calls to 9-1-1 and police.

3-1-1 launched August 27, 2001, as Mayor Lee P. Brown answered the first official call to the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline. A public announcement herald a theme of "City Hall at your fingertips," which prompted citizens to dial 3-1-1 for much more than requests for city services. In addition to routine daily requests, our 3-1-1 Telecommunicators professionally handled gag calls from local radio disc jockeys, redirected requests to locate absent parents, to find an old schoolmate, and handled numerous other topics outside our intended scope of services.

Thousands of people gave 3-1-1 a try. The people of Houston now need only two numbers to reach city government: 9-1-1 for emergencies and 3-1-1 for non-emergencies.

In FY02, the staff of the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline successfully met the challenge of operating an advanced technological call center that consolidated staff and responsibilities from the Citizens' Assistance Division, City Switchboard, Municipal Courts Administration, Public Works and Engineering and Solid Waste Management departments. During the start-up year, our major endeavor was to centralize the call-intake system and provide accurate status reports to our customers. With the very first call, the 3-1-1 call center became a reality. In May 2002, we expanded and successfully integrated the Parks and Recreation Department into the 3-1-1 Customer Service Request system.

By June 30, 2002, we responded to more than 1.9 million calls and E-mails. More than 96 percent were answered; the average speed of answer was six seconds; 75 percent were resolved during the initial call by providing facts from the 3-1-1 database; 14 percent resulted in service requests created for departments to take further action; and 11 percent were transferred to outside agencies or to a department for a "skill set" not handled by 3-1-1.

As we continue to uphold our commitment to provide excellent customer service to our citizens, we have planned an encore to our performance of FY02. During FY03, the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline will expand services, by integrating additional departments into the 3-1-1 Customer Request system.

Gloria L. Bingham  
Director

### **3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline - Houston's key to city services**

The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline is a service-driven call center that provides the citizens of Houston with easy access to all city services. Our primary goal is to provide a single point for customers to contact the City of Houston for a wide variety of needs: service requests, trouble reports, answers to frequently asked questions and to act as a bridge to department operations. We accomplish this goal with a staff of well-trained call-taking personnel and a management team that proudly works to improve the organization they helped create.

The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline opened the doors with a group of "Certified 3-1-1 Telecommunicators" who successfully completed a 6-week training course that provided knowledge of citywide Houston municipal government operations. These highly trained employees were equipped with a state of the art "customer service request system" that was configured with more than 300 service requests types used by the Public Works and Engineering, Solid Waste Management, and Parks and Recreation departments. Additional customer-service features included an information reference database that enables immediate answers to frequently asked questions about topics related to each of the 19 city departments.

It is important to note the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline is always available to assist our customers, the citizens and businesses of Houston. Our 3-1-1 liaisons, who maintain communications with department staff as well as some outside agencies, keep our informational database current; not only for routine inquiries, but for special situations. We become the front-line spokespersons for "the situation of the moment" such as the West Nile Virus alert (Health and Human Services Environmental Quality Services), the street lighting story (Public Works and Engineering Street Lighting Section) and emerging weather circumstances like a heat emergency (City Emergency Management Offices).

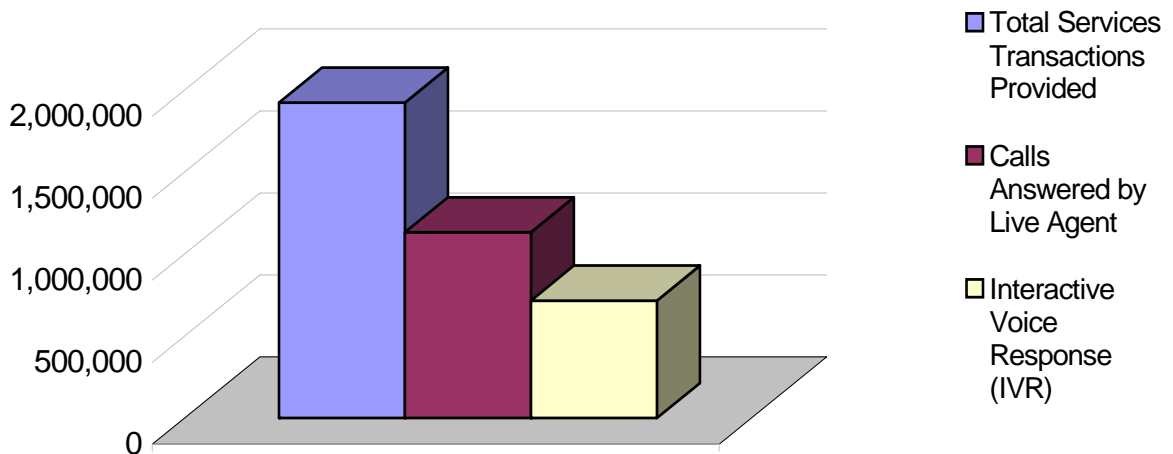
#### **FY 02 STAFFING LEVELS**

Assistant Director	1	3-1-1 Telecommunicator Supervisors	7
Division Manager	1	Customer Service Representative	1
Management Analyst IV	1	Customer Service Representatives III	2
Administrative Manager	1	3-1-1 Senior Telecommunicators	12
3-1-1 Liaisons	2	3-1-1 Telecommunicators	48
Administrative Assistant	1	3-1-1 Senior Trainer	1

### 3-1-1 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE FY02 PERFORMANCE STATISTICS

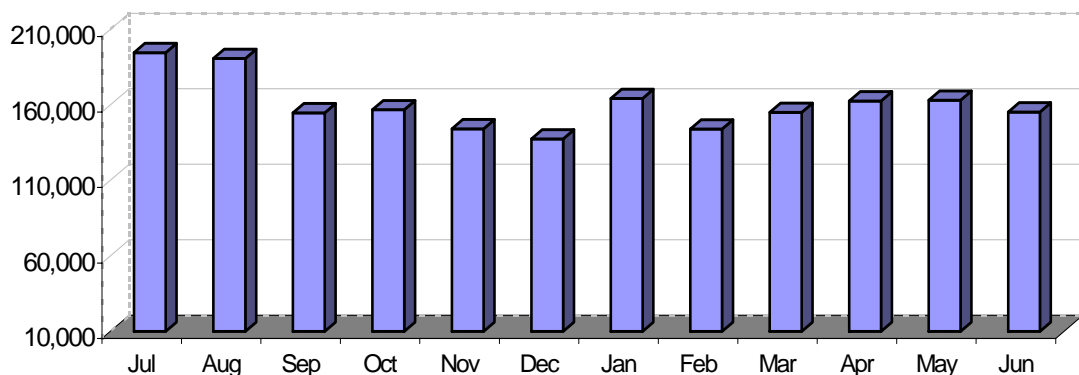
The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline processed 1,920,094 service transactions in FY 02, slightly below the projected target of two million.

#### 3-1-1 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE FY 02 TOTAL TRANSACTION VOLUME

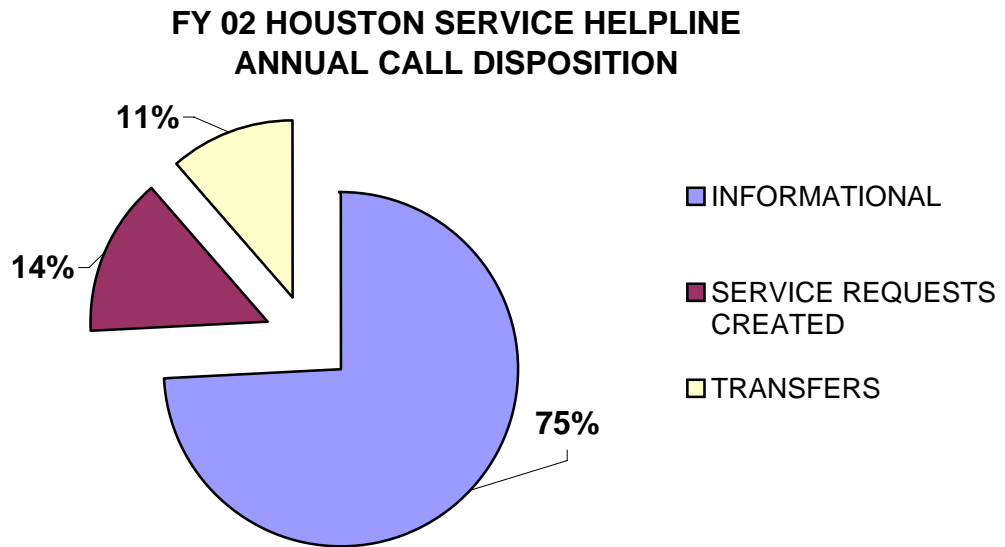


The high volume in July (194,764) and August (190,703) 2001 were due to the continued flow of requests related to Tropical Storm Allison and many repeat calls regarding Public Works and Engineering requests that were past due.

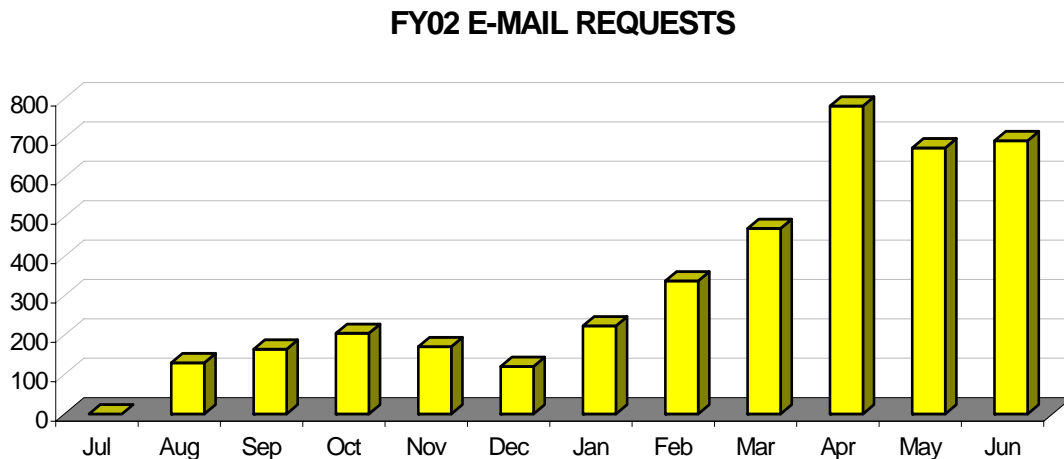
#### FY02 TOTAL MONTHLY TRANSACTIONS PROVIDED



The graph below reflects the disposition of all requests processed by the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline: 75 percent were for general information (i.e. Municipal Courts inquiries, status checks for water, sewer, garbage/heavy trash, traffic maintenance and outside agencies). Service Requests created using the SunTRACK application constituted 14 percent, while 11 percent of the calls were transferred to the appropriate person / department for service, or referred to an external agency.



In FY 02 the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline received 3,977 E-mail requests. As reflected below, the monthly volume notably increased from January, 2002 to June 2002. A large portion of the increase is due to the promotion of the City of Houston's website that now offers customers another option to report city related problems to the 3-1-1 call center.



### 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline Telecommunicators Answered 1,133,355 Telephone Calls During FY02

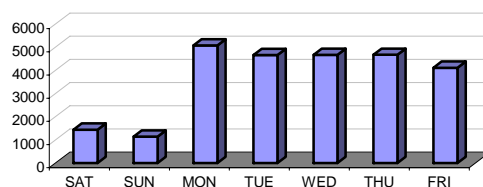
Percentage of calls answered	96.7
Percentage of calls abandoned	3.3
Average speed of answer	6 seconds
Average time customer abandoned line	21 seconds
Average time to create a service request	4:09 minutes
Average time to process information calls	1:49 minutes
Average time to process a transfer call	1:20 minutes
Overall average time to process a call	2:06 minutes

While industry standards have established an average speed of 80 percent of calls answered within 20 seconds (80/20), the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline management team set a goal of 85 percent of calls answered within 15 seconds (85/15). We are proud to disclose that 85 percent of the calls were answered within 6 seconds for FY02.

Based on the size of the call center, new staffing, consolidation, and training requirements, the management staff predicted an abandonment rate at 7 percent. To our delight, only 3.3 percent were abandoned.

Research has shown that some cities experienced as much as 30 to 35 percent of mis-directed non-emergency call volume to 9-1-1, Police and Fire. Unlike other cities, Houston experienced roughly 12 to 15 percent of non-emergency calls to 9-1-1, Police and Fire. Statistics reveal that prior to 3-1-1, Police, Fire and 9-1-1 had a combined average increase of 8 percent in call volume per year. Per the 9-1-1 Director, that organization alone trended a 17 percent increase in call volume each year. However, they had no increase in call volume during FY 02. We believe the positive impact is due to the 3-1-1 call center handling non-emergency calls and should further relieve 9-1-1 calls with citizen awareness.

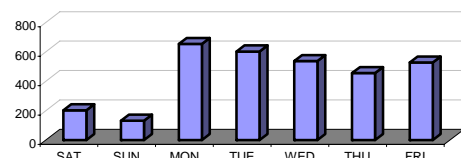
**FY02 AVERAGE DAILY CALLS  
RECEIVED BY 3-1-1 AGENTS**



The graph to the left reflects the average daily calls distributed to 3-1-1 Telecommunicators, in FY 02. Mondays were the busiest day of the week with an average of 5,074 calls. The top producing 3-1-1 Telecommunicator processed 30,586 of the total transactions.

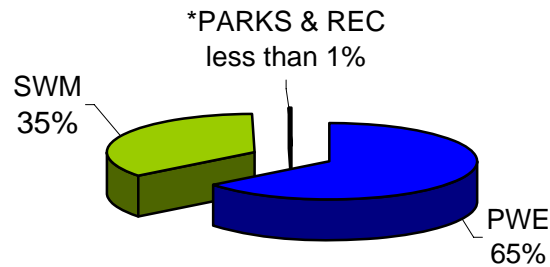
The graph to the right reflects the average daily Service Requests created by 3-1-1 Telecommunicators, in FY 02. Mondays were the busiest day of the week with an average of 652 service requests created using the SunTRACK application.

**FY02 AVERAGE DAILY  
SERVICE REQUESTS CREATED**



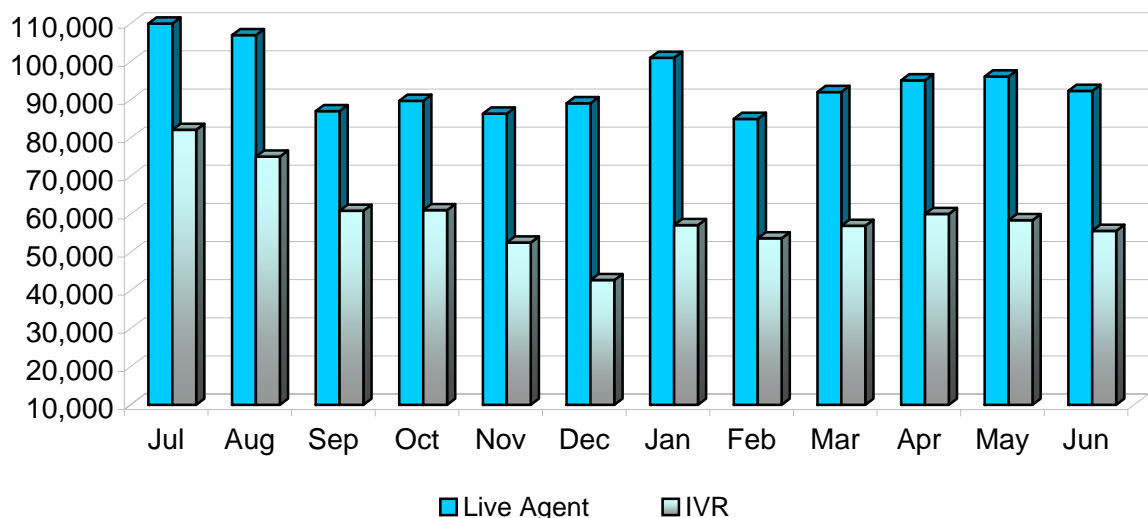
Approximately 90 percent of all Service Requests were created by 3-1-1 Telecommunicators with the remainder created by Department Users. The Parks and Recreation Department came onboard with 3-1-1 in May 2002. Therefore, the evaluation period was not sufficient to accurately represent 3-1-1 productivity for this department in FY02.

### FY02 CSR SYSTEM GENERATED SERVICE REQUESTS CREATED PER DEPARTMENT



The graph below reflects the number of service contacts processed by 3-1-1 Telecommunicators versus requests received via the Municipal Courts Interactive Voice Response System (IVR). Sixty percent (1,133,355) of the requests were received by live agents and 40 percent (716,200) were received by the IVR. Prior to consolidating with 3-1-1, the daily abandonment rate for Municipal Courts was 38 percent. That percentage rate dropped to 3.3 percent in FY 02.

### FY 02 LIVE AGENT vs IVR



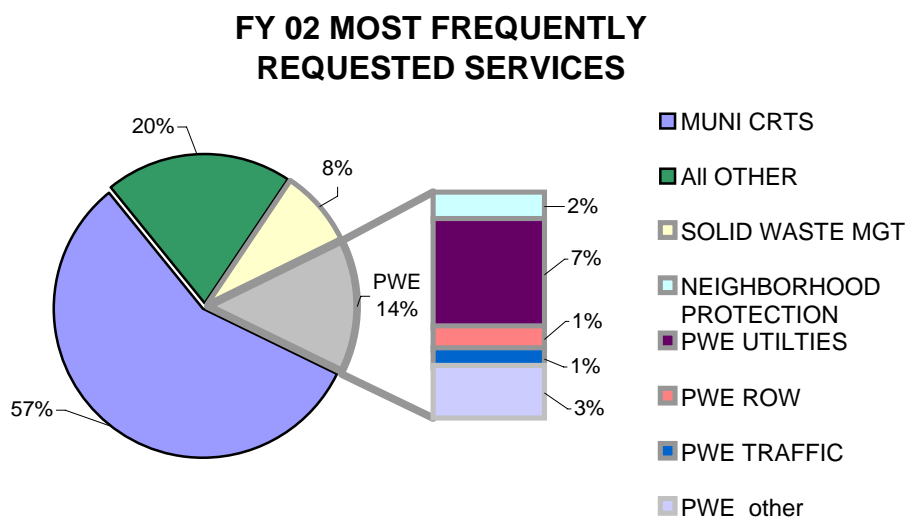
In FY 02 we had a number of callers bypass the IVR to speak with a live agent.



The table below shows the total number of transactions processed via the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline. Municipal Courts Administration received a total of 374,057 (57%). Public Works and Engineering followed in volume with 276,756 (14 %). Solid Waste Management received 162,878 (8%). Police Department received 45,841(2%) non-emergency calls.

Department	Calls	Department	Calls
Affirmative Action	827	Aviation	865
Building Services	1,736	City Council	4,624
City Secretary	4,266	Convention & Entertainment	1,385
Controller's Office	860	Fire Department	3,639
Finance & Administration	41,677	Health & Human Services	11,757
Housing & Community Development	3,589	Human Resources	10,140
Legal Department	2,394	Library	1,557
Municipal Courts—Admin.	374,057	Municipal Courts—Judicial	3,897
Parks & Recreation	5,458	Planning & Development	16,882
Police Department	45,841	Mayor's Office	8,261
Public Works & Engineering	276,756	Solid Waste Management	162,878
Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	716,200	All Other	220,548
Municipal Courts related calls			

As shown below almost 60 percent of the services provided by 3-1-1 are dedicated to Municipal Courts inquiries concerning warrants, rescheduling court dates, traffic ticket fees, and other court inquiries.



## NATIONAL PEER RECOGNITION

Since our opening ceremony, the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline has sparked the interest of other cities considering implementing a 3-1-1 service. We are serving as the model for municipal government non-emergency call-taking services. Our call center has been visited by more than 15 United States cities and from other countries as near as Canada and as far away as Japan. We are frequently contacted via telephone or e-mail for information by individuals who have not visited our facility but have heard of it.

The City of Miami, Florida is planning to implement a 3-1-1 call center using Motorola's CSR software and integrate the CSR with the call center telephony much the same as Houston did. Additionally, the City of Baltimore is modifying its 3-1-1 service to mirror Houston's 3-1-1 call center. Our city has shared our experiences with many other cities to assist in their planning initiatives for implementing an effective 3-1-1 system.

In closing, the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline has become recognized worldwide as a popular resource for fostering neighborhood oriented government and a model of an accountability tool for city government.

### **Some of the cities that have requested Houston to share it's experiences in the implementation and operations of a 3-1-1 call center are:**

City of Oakland, CA  
City of Dayton, OH  
City of Columbus, OH  
City of Austin, TX  
City of Seattle, WA  
City of Miami, FL  
City of El Paso, TX  
City of Chattanooga, TN  
City of New York, NY  
City of Olathe, KS  
City of Kansas City, MO  
City of Grand Rapids, MI  
City of Rockford, IL  
City of Honolulu, HI  
Nashville Government  
Miami Dade County, FL  
Harris County, TX  
Lafayette City-Parish Government  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
City of Vancouver, Canada  
Region of Peel, Ontario Canada  
Regional Municipality of York, New Market Ontario

## OTHER CITIES COMMENTS

Dear Mr. Hollingsworth:

May I take this opportunity to tell you about the Chicago Seminar and most specifically the significant contribution that Gloria Bingham, representing the city of Houston, made at the event. Ms. Bingham shared the Friday morning session with the city of Baltimore, represented by Mr. Elliot Schlanger. Ms. Bingham presented an outstanding overview of the entire scope of the Houston 311 project. Although her discussion centered on the consolidation and implementation of Houston's call center, she was very specific and logical in relaying to the audience the entire project scope.

Her honest and empathetic account of how Houston's success depended on all the elements coming together in an enterprise-wide concept was greatly appreciated by the audience.

My impression is that everyone in attendance left the morning session with a great appreciation of the benefits of doing what Houston has done but with a clear understanding of what it takes to be on the cutting edge of technology. Perhaps the most significant indication of the success of Gloria's presentation was two fold: First, was the general attendance on Friday morning. As we all know, a presentation scheduled on the last day and the last session is not the prime time for any conference; however, the Houston/Baltimore Panel discussion session was full. Secondly, not only was the session attended by 98-99% of all attendees, but for two hours after the session ended people stood in line to talk with Gloria and Elliot.

Beyond my perception of the events success, I would like to share with you the comments that we received as stated on the surveys that were returned to us at the end of the event. Attached to this correspondence you will find pictures of the session, an actual list of attendees, and an overview of the survey results and comments.

On behalf of Motorola, may I express our sincere thank you to Gloria Bingham and the city of Houston for your commitment to make Houston a customer focused city and to extend that commitment to include helping other cities become efficient, customer focused public enterprises.

Sincerely,

Steve Reed

Director Public Service

Motorola Integrated Solutions Division

## OTHER CITIES COMMENTS

From: Veronica Williams  
Sent: Thursday, June 06, 2002 8:05 AM  
To: Bingham, Gloria - 311  
Subject: INFORMATION

I just wanted to again thank you for the time you shared with us during our visit. I also appreciate the information you forwarded via Jeannie Holmes. **The tour of the system that you provided was very informative. If I may be of assistance to you in the future, please don't hesitate to call me.**

Thanks again!  
Veronica Leopaul-Williams  
Assistant Clerk of the Council  
Lafayette City-Parish Government  
(337) 291-8816

From: Smith, Keena [mailto:KMSmith@cmhmetro.net]  
Sent: Wednesday, May 22, 2002 2:36 PM  
To: Bingham, Gloria - 311  
Subject: 311 Conference- Mayor's White Paper  
Gloria,

**First, congratulations on your presentation at the Chicago 311 conference. Your presentation was engaging and informative.** At the conference you passed around a white paper that your committee produced for your Mayor. Would you be so kind as to email me a copy? I would appreciate it. Again, congratulations and thanks for your help!

Keena M. Smith, MPA  
Executive Officer  
Department of Technology  
City of Columbus  
614.645.0774 (p) 614.645.2400 (f)  
[www.cityofcolumbus.org](http://www.cityofcolumbus.org)

From: Oldenburg Britt-y17205 [mailto:B.Oldenburg@motorola.com]  
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 2:46 PM  
To: Holmes, Jeannie - 311  
Cc: Bingham, Gloria - 311  
Subject: RE: Request for City of Houston 3-1-1 Documents  
Dear Gloria,

Thank you ever so much for getting me this information so quickly!  
I cannot say how valuable your presentation was for my customers. **While everyone thinks 311 is a great idea, it's very hard for people to get their head around how they can make it happen. Not only did you speak to this, but you provided supporting materials that will help lend structure to their strategy.**

Thanks!  
Britt

## OTHER CITIES COMMENTS

From: Herder, Michelle [mailto:Michelle.Herder@region.york.on.ca]

Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2002 1:30 PM

To: Bingham, Gloria - 311; Holmes, Jeannie - 311

Subject: RE: Request for City of Houston 3-1-1 Documents

Thanks ever so much for your quick response. I really appreciate it.

Once again the presentation was fantastic and went a long way in assisting us in our customer service call center journey. It is evident that Houston really values Customer Service! Kudos!

Thanks again,

Michelle

From: Mike Coffey [mailto:mike.coffey@ci.rockford.il.us]

Sent: Monday, May 20, 2002 5:06 PM

To: Bingham, Gloria - 311

Subject: Material from 311 Chicago Training Session

Gloria,

It was nice of you to pass around the information that you had in Chicago.

We are in the process of implementing a system and we found your information to be very interesting. We are particularly interested in the

Packet of training material and the "White Paper" that you sent around.

Would it be possible for you to send me an email copy of that information.

Thanks for your help.

Mike Coffey

Sr. Rehab Specialist

City of Rockford, IL

815.987.5721

815.967.6933 fax

From: Grange, Alrick [mailto:GrangeA@Region.Peel.ON.CA]

Sent: Monday, May 20, 2002 9:40 AM

To: Bingham, Gloria - 311

Subject: Thank You

Hi Gloria,

I don't know if you remember me my name is Alrick Grange from the Region of Peel, Ontario Canada. I was delighted by your presentation on Friday morning and would like to know more about your call center management experience within Public Works.

To be honest I would like to know where your call center was situated within the Public Works department, who did you report to etc. There were a few documents you mentioned that you forward to me electronically. I believe one was the spreadsheet with that captured the requirements of each department concerning your centralization to 311. I don't remember what you called it.

I currently manage the Public Works Customer Service Center and I was originally told that the department wanted to move towards a centralized center for Water, Waste, Roads, Sewer. Any documentation that would support the impetus of cenralization would be helpful.

I look forward to hearing from you. Alrick Grange

## OTHER CITIES COMMENTS

**From:** Foreman, Dan (Finance) [mailto:dan.foreman@nashville.gov]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 11, 2002 11:12 AM  
**To:** Hollingsworth, Donald - MYR  
**Cc:** Bingham, Gloria - 311  
**Subject:** Thank You!

Mr. Hollingsworth,

I wanted to thank you for allowing me to tour your 3-1-1 facility on January 30<sup>th</sup>. **I am very impressed with the 3-1-1 Center and with the staff. Mrs. Bingham shared a wealth of knowledge and emphasized the importance of training.** Mr. Baker took some time to show me some of the call takers in action along with some of the tools being used to gather and manage data. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Nix also shared a great deal of information in the presentation regarding implementation. I truly appreciate everyone taking their time to share in their areas of expertise and I also appreciate being received in such a warm and respectful manner

**I left Houston with a great deal of knowledge and a sense of what it will take to bring 3-1-1 to Nashville. Thank you again for sharing with me the steps needed in making a successful operation.**

Regards,

Dan Foreman

Customer Service Manager

Metro Finance Department

