

*The Innovation Groups  
Innovation and Excellence Awards Submission*

# CITY OF TAMPA, FLORIDA INTERNET-BASED CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER

**Customer Service Center: How may we help you?**

Citizen Action Request	TampaGov Services	Submit an Opinion or Question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abandoned or Inoperative Vehicle</li> <li>Accumulated Junk or Trash</li> <li>Building / Structural Violation</li> <li>High Utility Bill</li> <li>Police Records Section</li> <li>Recycling Box Replacement</li> <li>Utility Service Start Request</li> <li>Utility Service Stop Service</li> <li>Water Usage Violation</li> <li>...more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A to Z List</li> <li>Frequently Asked Questions</li> <li>Grouped by Category</li> <li>Grouped by Department</li> <li>Most Requested Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code Enforcement</li> <li>Land Development and Zoning</li> <li>Parking</li> <li>Parks and Recreation</li> <li>Police</li> <li>Police Records</li> <li>Solid Waste</li> <li>Utility Accounting</li> <li>Water</li> <li>...more</li> </ul>
Make a Payment or Purchase	Obtain a Form or Application	Self Service Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Tax Renewal Payments</li> <li>Construction Permits</li> <li>Monthly Parking Permit Payments</li> <li>Museum of Art Membership Applications and Renewals</li> <li>Museum of Art Online Store</li> <li>Parking Ticket Payments</li> <li>Utility Bill Inquiries and Payments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction Services</li> <li>Employment / Job Applications</li> <li>Land Development Variance Petition Application</li> <li>Police Delayed Crimes Information Unit Forms</li> <li>Small Business Enterprises</li> <li>Start Utility Service</li> <li>Utility Bill Automatic Electronic Payment Application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Tax Record Inquiries</li> <li>Boards and Commissions</li> <li>City Charter and Ordinances (Municipal Code Corp)</li> <li>Crime Activity Maps</li> <li>Fire Rescue Calls for Service</li> <li>Parks (Ball Fields &amp; Tennis Courts)</li> </ul>

**Emergency?**  
Dial 9-1-1

**Where to Start?**  
Enter a Keyword  
Find Services

**Track or update a prior request:**  
Tracking Number:   
Access Key:   
Check Status

Watch our Customer Service Center instruction video and learn how to take advantage of the services we offer in three easy steps.

**Bandwidth:**  
 Low  High  
Watch Video

**Track your City business.**  
MyTampaGov  
Already a member? Please log in!  
Not a member, sign up now; it's free!

**Efficiencies Derived from the use of T**  
Using TampaGov provides significant sav...  
hours for city staff.

We based this information on 11,999 self government services.

Learn more about the [TampaGov Savings](#)

**Public Records Awareness**  
Information we receive may be considere

[About the City of Tampa](#)

**TAMPA, FLORIDA**  
Official Site of the City of Tampa, Florida  
Living in Tampa | Doing Business | Visiting Tampa | Inside City Gov't

**News & Notices**  
News Descriptions: Hide Show  

- City Seeks Volunteers to Serve on Enterprise Zone Development Agency Board
- Creative City Newsletter
- Tampa Riverwalk Community Meeting -- Opening the River to the People
- City of Tampa Names Deputy Director For Business And Housing Development
- Tampa Bay Boulevard and Lois Avenue Roundabout Project Completed - Intersection Improvement Project Opened for Traffic
- The Old New Thing - Adult Kickball Leagues Forming Now
- Funding Availability For Community Development Block Grant Program & Home Investment Partnerships Program
- City of Tampa Supports the Prosperity Campaign of Hillsborough & Pinellas Counties

**TampaGov Spotlight**  
TPD Releases 2005 Crime Statistics  
Police Chief Stephen Hogue released Tampa's 2005 crime statistics. Tampa's crime rate is down 29.4% over the last three years, falling to 1970s level. [View the Tampa Police Department 2005 Crime Rate Report.](#)

**Stay Informed**  

- Learn about the Prosperity Campaign of Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.
- The hurricane season is from June 1st to November 30th; to help you prepare, view our emergency planning guide.
- Have emails sent to you by subscribing to our electronic newsletters, event notices, and other announcements.
- Check out our Media Library and more in the TampaGov Online Newsroom.
- Track your city business with MyTampaGov, your personal connection to the city.
- TampaGov resources for Kids, for Teens, for Seniors.

**City Council**  
Meeting Agendas  
Meeting Calendar

**Customer Service Center**  
Report a problem  
request a service  
and more using  
the Customer Service Center.

Track or update a prior request:  
Tracking Number:   
Access Key:   
Check Status

**Tampa Maps and Directions**  
Find parks, public schools, police or fire stations and other points of interest near your address.  
- or -  
Select a destination  Go

Copyright 1996-2006 City of Tampa. All rights reserved.

Steven M. Cantler, Project Manager  
City of Tampa, Information Technology Services  
200 West Tyler Street  
Tampa, FL 33602

Steve.Cantler@TampaGov.net  
813-274-8155  
fax 813-274-7302

The City of Tampa Florida developed and implemented an innovative web-enabled enterprise wide solution, addressing basic requests for services with centralized citizen access to four major areas: submission of requests, opinions, recommendations, and inquiries; online payments; public records research; and automatic redirection to non-City agency services. The TampaGov Customer Service Center resulted from a need to effectively track and manage the wide variety of service requests and communication exchanges between citizens and the City staff who serve them. Three primary issues were addressed: 1. Citizens are confronted with daily life events and do not know which government agencies to contact. 2. Citizens want access to government services at their convenience (24/7). 3. Citizens want to know what is happening to their request. To be successful, the project needed to provide a flexible, comprehensive method of communication and collaboration with citizens. This objective was met.

### ***City of Tampa Government and Business Problem Trigger***

The City of Tampa has a Mayor-Council form of government. The Mayor and seven Council members are elected by the voters of Tampa to serve for terms of four years. The Mayor's Office renders services required of the executive branch of city government including administrative functions and public relations. The Mayor provides direction to department heads, administers City ordinances and Council resolutions, meets with the public, and provides information on matters of community concern. Tampa's government delivers a full range of municipal services as provided by state statute and city charter. These include public safety, water, wastewater, solid waste, parking, public improvements, cultural, recreational and general administrative services.

In the mid-1980's, the City Administration undertook its first Strategic Information Planning effort to identify and assess projects that could leverage information technologies. This endeavor identified "Action Orders" as the initiative with the greatest potential benefits. The Action Orders concept was to provide a method of routing and redirecting the multitude of service requests from citizens, to ensure each request reached the appropriate service provider. This initiative was to aid in promoting government transparency, specifically an operating environment in which citizens would not need to know how government is organized to address daily life event issues. Unfortunately the Action Orders project was not scheduled, as the funding to establish an enterprise communication network was not available.

The City of Tampa web site was officially launched on September 18, 1996 with the delivery of static content primarily from six departments. Since its inception, the City has taken incremental steps in maturing its web site service offerings. In the four-year span from 1999 through 2002, the Tampa web site emerged as a major avenue for citizens to acquire information and conduct business. By the end of 2002, more than ten million page requests had occurred during the year. More than one million dollars in revenue had been collected via the site. And approximately ten thousand emails were originating from TampaGov each year.

As citizen use of the Tampa web site increased, the nature of electronic communication to City officials began to change. Via the mailto links on the site, citizens were sending service requests to operational departments and in many instances a timely response was expected. Due to this cultural change, a significant operational problem emerged. ITS web support staff started receiving follow-up requests from citizens indicating their original web based communication had been unanswered. And with the mailto link strategy, it was not possible to determine if the target employee(s) had received, read, and responded to the incoming messages. Additionally, research identified that numerous emails were being sent to the wrong agency, as citizens either guessed which department would handle their concern or would merely pick the most convenient mailto link they could find. As a result, ITS management initiated a project to address these issues.

### ***TampaGov Customer Service Center Solution Overview***

From the detailed problem analysis, it was evident that a solution could not merely provide simple message status tracking, but also needed to incorporate message redirecting and routing. Specifically, with the TampaGov web site serving as an enterprise communication network hub, the 1980's concept of Action Orders could be incorporated.

Thus the TampaGov Customer Service Center arose from a need to effectively track and manage the wide variety of service requests and communication exchanges between citizens and the City of Tampa staff who serve them. Three primary issues were targeted. 1. Citizens are confronted with daily life events and do not know which government agencies to contact to address their service needs. 2. Citizens want access to government services at their convenience 24/7, not merely when government agencies are staffed during typical business hours. 3. Citizens want to know what is happening to their request -- "What is the status?" -- and want to provide feedback

during the service assessment/delivery. More specifically: Did the agency receive the request? Once received, was the request read? Once read, were actions taken? Was the request completed? Etc.

The TampaGov Customer Service Center provides centralized citizen access to four major areas: submission of service requests, opinions, recommendations, and inquiries; self-service payments; self-service public records research; and automatic redirection to non-City agency services. The Customer Service Center presents the citizen with choices based on life event issues vs. having to know which department or agency is responsible for handling their needs. The system accomplishes this by providing flexible methods of finding a desired service, including keyword searches, popular categories, and organizational structure. The purpose of enabling a multitude of pathways is to deliver access as quickly as practical using the citizen's perspective.

Each type of request reflects the specific requirements and business language used by the service department responsible. When a request is submitted, the system generates a Tracking Number and an Access Key associated with the request; using these identifiers the citizen can independently follow-up as needed to aid in determining what actions have resulted. The system routes the request to the responsible department and employee(s). Once received, the recipients are presented with a list of processing actions customized to reflect the business responses appropriate for the request type. As actions are taken, system features assist the staff in providing consistent, professional responses including the use of predefined or standard replies. Actions are recorded, and the status of the request is updated as appropriate. The system notifies the citizen when actions occur, keeping them informed as their request is being processed.

The system aids in the accountability objectives of the City administration. It gives citizens the capability to track the progress of their requests. It helps departments to provide consistent customer responses, to assess service response times, and to coordinate actions when multiple agencies are involved. And management gains immediate access to service delivery information, improving communications along with activity monitoring and reporting.

In addition to communications management and tracking, the Customer Service Center also incorporates direct linking of citizens to online payment services, online records access, and to more than 100 services managed by other (county, state, and federal) government agencies.

The Customer Service Center successfully met its intended goals. The pilot program in February 2003 represented only 3 City agencies and less than 20 services. When full implementation occurred in November 2003, the system immediately expanded to include approximately 50 agencies and 200 services. Since its introduction through 2005, more than 700 City employees have been trained, over 82,000 communication exchanges have been tracked, and access to more than 400 services has been provided.

The Customer Service Center activity is evidence of citizens empowered as integral partners in the collaboration process and having direct access to government services. Citizens recognize the utility of the TampaGov Customer Service Center and how it aids in providing quality service delivery. Citizen appreciation for the system is reflected in feedback sent to the City.

*"Well done! The e-mail communication with city departments is just great! I have used it and the response has been almost immediate and completely effective. I am most impressed with this service and wish to say 'Thank you'." ...Scott T (Tampa, Florida)*

*"Enjoyed using the correspondence system, It shows people that you are working on their problems or concerns in a timely manner." ...Wendell D (Little Rock, Arkansas)*

*"Thank you for your quick response. I appreciate your timeliness and attention to my request!" ...Christy A (Tampa, Florida)*

*"I love this new email tool! Great job, City of Tampa! I am getting responses, replies and results! Excellent way to let your citizens communicate and keep track of what's going on! This is fantastic! And, as a neighborhood association president, this new tool will help me streamline my questions of the city on behalf of our residents." ...Emmy R (Tampa, Florida)*

*"I'm ecstatic about the thoroughness of your website. It has good continuity and should be the epitome for other cities to follow." ...Peter D (Bedford Heights, Ohio)*

### ***Who benefited from the innovation?***

Citizens benefit. Citizens can request services without organizational knowledge. They can track City actions. They can provide follow-up information as conditions change. And they can withdraw their request if the service requirement is no longer needed. In many instances, the system allows citizens to remain anonymous yet still provide two-way communication with City officials. This is particularly appealing to those with public safety concerns in fear of reprisals from others.

Employee's benefit. Employee actions are extremely varied, so the system was designed with diverse alternatives including: delegating the request; transferring the request to another department; posting comments and notes; notifying the citizen or other employees of issues; changing the request status; and spawning new requests. In addition to custom specific responses, the system provides employees with standard actions and responses based on the type of request. Employees may choose the method by which they are notified of service requests (email, digital pager, neither). And employees can organize and search requests by different data fields. Independent of the Internet, requests continue to originate using traditional methods. Citizens mail, fax, phone, and walk in to City offices. Regardless of the notification method, employees can proxy on behalf of the citizen to enter requests into the system. Employees can also create requests either for internal business communication purposes or as they encounter a service requirement from the field. Employees may be authorized to not only submit the request but also collaborate in the communication. In these instances, employees may choose to participate in the actions being taken. This provides access to the same business functions available as the (other) employees typically responsible for handling the request.

Management benefits. The system addresses management concerns, such as: "Did the request get to the appropriate employee? Was a response made; was it timely, consistent, and complete? Are there conditions that need attention?" It aids in monitoring, managing, and reporting on the business communications. Real-time summary and detail statistics reports are available for quick insights into what service levels are being delivered. Since actions are tracked, the Customer Service Center reports on status and average response duration. The standard reports can be filtered using desired selection criteria to provide immediate access to conditions of interest. Specifically, requests can be selected and sorted by various dates, service types, and status values. The data repository can also be searched by citizen contact information or by the message and response details. Printer ready reports are dynamically produced when needed. The reports contain all information regarding the tracked communication. Management can also initiate requests or inquiries. Requests can incorporate other management tracking requirements of interest. Due dates may be associated with a specific message instance or automatically generated based on the service type for management follow-up. One or more meetings may also be associated with the request. Management can alter the authorizations of those involved with the collaboration; therefore authorized responders can be added or removed as needed. Further, with respect to system monitoring and management, managers and supervisors have a variety of reports at their disposal. Activity charts and counts are available reflecting citizen and employee use of the system. Executive summary reports separate activity by status and responsibility, and also provide insights into usage variances and trends. Numerous statistics are reported with both numerical and graphical views of the data. More than 20 different reports are provided with levels of detail that can be filtered by date ranges and service types.

### ***How was the innovation initiated and implemented?***

With the project objectives identified, and no capital funding available, in 2002 ITS web technologies staff began the process of internally designing, coding, and testing this new facility. The system was developed using Microsoft technologies, i.e. Microsoft SQL Server as the data repository and Microsoft Active Server Page (ASP) coding for web page processing. The development effort was accelerated by using design principles that allowed for the flexible implementation of services via dynamically created entry forms and custom City responses. The design was approached primarily from the citizen's perspective. Although some technical challenges were encountered, including email integration and the requirement for multiple administrative views, the major barrier that needed to be breached was in educating the staff on the benefits to be derived. In February 2003, the core design and related programming were completed, and the pilot implementation was launched.

The initial rollout of the Customer Service Center required a full time administrator to educate staff, review service requirements, facilitate the integration of the business needs, and make necessary modifications to services. The administrative activities evolved over a period of time to more of a facilitation and support role on an as needed basis.

As part of the continued administration of the Customer Service Center, an advisory committee was formed with representatives from several departments to monitor activities and to make system enhancement recommendations. Additionally, key employees were identified to forward requirements to the administrator, to enforce standards, and to share new information.

***What risks were associated with planning and developing the innovation?***

As this was an enterprise-wide initiative, it had high political visibility. Further, as customer service is at the core of all citizen requests, an inadequate implementation would have resulted in significant negative public relations.

***What was the environment in which the innovation was created and sustained?***

Mayor Pam Iorio took office on April 1, 2003, and the Customer Service Center initiative became a cornerstone component of the new Administration. The Customer Service Center directly supported one of the Mayor's (five) strategic focus areas specifically, "Efficient City Government Focused on Customer Service" (City of Tampa). As a result, the Mayor fully supported a comprehensive citywide deployment. The pilot duration was extended to ensure the primary functions and features were operational and stable. And, the additional time enabled technical and procedural training along with best practice customer service processes to be provided to all customer service responders. The enterprise wide implementation occurred in November 2003.

Via the TampaGov Customer Service Center, citizens submit opinions, problems, and service requests. Requestors can send follow-up information, change their contact information, or even remain anonymous. Citizens can readily determine what is happening to their request; determine whether it was received and read; and track other actions taken. In 2005, activity included 39,539 service requests, 93,325 follow-up actions, and 1,718,877 sessions of self-service research and payments.

Via the TampaGov Customer Service Center, citizens quickly locate and access services without regard to, or knowledge of, the government agency responsible for the service delivery. TampaGov provides direct access to the areas of its jurisdiction; and also provides efficient redirection to county, state, and federal agencies for government services outside its authority, providing a one-stop service and a seamless environment. In 2005 approximately two-thirds of the service requests (>100,000) were redirected to other agencies. For example, a citizen seeking "tax" related services could use the keyword search to quickly locate business tax services (from the City), property tax services (from Hillsborough County), state tax services (from the State of Florida), and federal income tax services (from the Internal Revenue Service).

Via the TampaGov Customer Service Center, citizens access government services 24/7. At their convenience, citizens submit and track service requests, research public records, and make a variety of payments for government delivered services. In 2005, citizen use of the Customer Service Center occurred 56% of the time during normal business hours and 44% during non-business hours.

***What were the execution costs and savings?***

A small project team was assembled to develop this facility, with the majority of the development activities handled by two employees – one lead analyst that designed the facility and one senior analyst that did all the programming. The development cost was absorbed within existing funded positions in the web support group.

By making access and delivery of services more efficient, the economic benefit from this e-government initiative is evident. Since service activity is logged, management has the capability to quantify the benefit impact. In 2005, an estimated \$4,495,536.34 in benefits occurred. This estimate is based on projected savings of 67,366 hours of citizen's time and 104,068 hours of staff time.

***What lessons were learned that could be shared with other governments?***

Tampa's experience is not unique and the approach taken can be replicated by other organizations. For example, the City of Lincoln Nebraska used the Tampa model to construct a similar online customer service facility. The technology makes it easier for citizens and management to understand what is happening.

***Which department and/or individuals championed the innovation?***

The ITS web technology team initially championed the development effort. When Mayor Iorio took office, with the development work largely completed, the new administration embraced the initiative and fully supported its implementation. The administration actively supports its ongoing use.