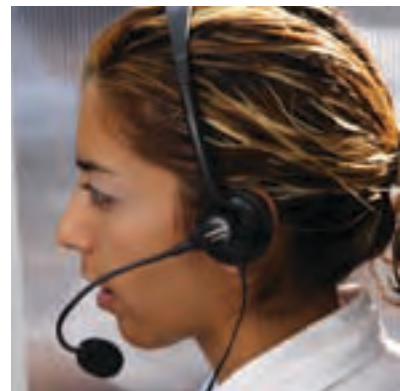


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Call 311:

Connecting Citizens to Local Government
Case Study Series



Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center

By Cory Fleming

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

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Community and System Profile

Los Alamos County, New Mexico KanDu/311 Contact Center

Form of Government

Council-administrator

Councilors at Large

7

Population

18,343 (U.S. Census 2000 Demographic Profile)

Annual Budget (countywide)

\$215.8 million (7/1/07 - 6/30/08)

KanDu/311 Contact Center Budget

\$309,000 (7/1/07 - 6/30/08)

Major Components

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

Number of Staff

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

Location within County Government

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

Type of System

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

Unique System Features and Management Tools

- RightNow™ knowledge base and tracking software
- Arc Console Connect™ Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system

Citizen Feedback Mechanisms

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



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311 Service

Non-emergency 311 service is a local telephone exchange communications system that allows telephone customers (and cell phone customers, depending on the community) to access non-emergency local government information and services by dialing an abbreviated telephone number. A public switched network routes 311 traffic to a call center designated by the local government customer. In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserved the number “311” nationwide for non-emergency access to local government services in all U.S. jurisdictions.

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 of the above to whom authority has been lawfully delegated. 311 service is subject to the availability of facilities in the jurisdiction.

Brief History of Los Alamos County's KanDu/311 Contact Center

In May 2000, Los Alamos County experienced one of the largest and most destructive wildfires in the history of New Mexico. The fire, which started as a prescribed burn at the Cerro Grande summit in the Jemez Mountains north of the community, eventually spread out of control and destroyed 350 homes and 47,650 acres of forested land. The entire community had to be evacuated for a week.

After the fire, Los Alamos County citizens turned to their local government in record numbers for information on the rebuilding effort. What would happen when? What assistance was available? How were permits being issued? The increased number of calls they received in the wake of the fire disrupted the county's overall work flow as councilors and employees alike struggled to answer citizens' questions.

Just after the fire, the county council and senior local government managers held a joint retreat to set goals for the coming year. According to Max Baker, the county administrator, one of the goals set by the group was “to improve our customer service and interactions with the public...the idea was to make it very easy for our customers, our citizens, to contact the county, resolve problems, and get answers to questions.” Jim West, chair of the Los Alamos County Council, reiterated this idea: “Communication was the main emphasis and motivation—just community communications.”

As a result, the county formed a team—the Customer Service

Commandos—to look at how they could improve customer service. The group comprised representatives from every county department that had a customer service interface, such as finance, public works, and utilities. They determined that the county needed a one-stop shop for customer service. Their concept was to build a central knowledge base that was readily accessible for answering the public's questions.

One way to help achieve this customer service goal, they realized, was via a 311 system. “We had read up on some other 311 systems in other communities, but had some trepidation because we hadn't seen anything on 311 systems in a community as small as ours,” said Julie Habiger, the county's communications and public relations administrator. One of the key questions about implementing a 311 system the group struggled to answer was whether the 311 system should simply be a call center, or if a walk-in location

was also needed. With a resident population of a little over 18,000, Los Alamos is a small community and, according to government employees, many citizens like to have face-to-face contact with their local government. “It made sense for us to have both,” said Habiger.

After the group decided that a 311 system with a walk-in location was needed, they developed a three-year plan for implementing the program: (1) year one would be the start-up year, with most of the time allocated for planning and preparing the system; (2) year two would involve full implementation of the system and merging it with the county's cashiering function; and (3) year three would be devoted to maturing



KanDu is the mascot for the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center and reflects the staff's desire to answer residents' questions.

the system and refining it on an as-needed basis.

The Commandos presented the plan and estimated budget to the county council in February 2002. “My expectation was that the council would take it under consideration, and within a year or so, get back to us with an idea of whether they wanted to support this. But they agreed right away to at least get it started,” explained Mary Pat Kraemer, who lead the Commandos at the

We really wanted to start off completely ready to provide good service, because reputation is everything.

Mary Pat Kraemer, county clerk

time. The county began hiring for the new program in September 2002, and planning started in November 2002. Initially, the center employed one manager and one-and-a-half customer service representatives (one full-time and one part-time representative).

Before the program kick-off, the staff wanted to find a name for the program that clearly expressed their willingness to provide exceptional customer service to county citizens. They brainstormed and ultimately

Summary of Key Findings

System Functionality and Major Features

Finding 1 – Small communities (under 100,000 in population) may need to consider broadening the job responsibilities of their customer service representative(s) to make a centralized customer service system cost effective and to maximize employee productivity.

Finding 2. – A centralized customer service system must be more than a phone book or switchboard for local government services and programs; it must provide actual information, such as how signage permits are issued or the date and location of a public hearing.

Finding 3 – Full integration of a centralized customer service system for a local government occurs in stages.

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

Finding 4 – When designing a centralized customer service system, the local government needs to consider its “market,” or how it has historically interacted with its citizens.

Finding 5 – Feedback from citizens should be gathered continually through a variety of formal and informal data collection activities, including community surveys, local government open houses, and direct customer feedback.

Finding 6 – In smaller rural communities, contact center employees need to be prepared to be the “face” of local government and be engaged by the public outside of normal work hours.

Performance Measurements and Service Provision

Finding 7 – Performance measurements for a centralized customer service system should be developed, in part, based on feedback received through a regular citizen survey.

Finding 8 – Local government departments need instructions on how to use 311 system data to improve their own customer service, and their performance should be tied to customer service.

Finding 9 – A citizen recognition program for local government employees, such as the KanDu Kudos program, promotes the value of customer service throughout the local government organization.

Staff Training

Finding 10 – Rotating staff between “on call” and “off desk” duties keeps customer center employees fresh and engaged when working with citizens.

Finding 11 – Contact center employees need to be aware of broader community concerns, such as social services, education, and recreational opportunities—not just local government services and programs.

Finding 12 – Regular contact center team meetings help develop a sense of camaraderie and provide an opportunity to share new information.

decided they wanted to incorporate their “can do” attitude into the program name and logo. In March 2003, they officially adopted the “KanDu” name and logo, and the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center was off and running.

System Costs

During the first three years of operations (fiscal years 2005–2007), the budget for the KanDu Center was included in the county administrator’s budget. As such, the numbers in the table below are estimates of the center’s expenses and not actual figures. Beginning fiscal year 2008, the KanDu Center has its own budget, and it is monitored by the center’s manager.

KanDu/311 Contact Center (First-Year Expenses)	Fiscal Year 2004 (7/1/03-6/30/04)
Budgeted	\$250,000
Actual	\$205,000
Start-up expenses (one time) ¹	\$50,000
Recurring (including staff salaries for 2.5 FTEs)	\$155,000
1 The majority of the start-up expenses incurred during the first year of operations involved the purchase and installation of the physical kiosk that houses the KanDu/311 Contact Center.	

KanDu 311/ Contact Center	Fiscal Year 2007 (7/1/06-6/30/07)
Budgeted	\$320,000
Actual	\$285,000
One-time system improvement	–
Recurring (including staff salaries for 4 FTEs)	\$285,000

During the development phase, the KanDu Center incurred significant expenses that are not reflected in the tables above, including the purchase of the knowledge base and tracking software RightNow™ and the Arc Console Connect™ Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system. The county’s information technology (IT) department purchased both the software and phone system. Since the IT department uses RightNow to maintain the county’s Web site, it covered the initial system purchase, and the KanDu Center simply bought licenses for its employees— one-time expenses of \$2,500 per license (a total of \$12,500 for five licenses). The IT department purchased the phone system for \$80,000, and the KanDu

Center pays half of a yearly maintenance fee of \$15,000 for the Arc component, which directs incoming calls to open phone lines.

System Functionality and Major Features

Finding 1 – Small communities (under 100,000 in population) may need to consider broadening the job responsibilities of their customer service representative(s) to make a centralized customer service system cost effective and to maximize employee productivity.

The KanDu/311 Contact Center’s potential cost effectiveness and efficiency are the main reasons the county council approved the program. The Customer Service Commandos considered both of these features when they prepared the plan they presented to the council.

To demonstrate the potential efficiency of the center—and the benefit for citizens—the Commandos described typical citizen experiences when interacting with the old local government structure. One particularly memorable example they used centered on whom a citizen might call about an issue with a tree. As one employee noted, there were potentially a dozen different departments or divisions that could have oversight of a tree. The citizen would not know whom to call first, and could potentially be transferred to multiple departments before someone could help them (see “A tree...is a tree...is a tree?” on page 6). A centralized customer service center would eliminate this hassle for the citizen and increase employee productivity.

Four people work at the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The staff answers the phones and responds to citizens who walk into the county office building. In addition to these responsibilities, each employee has other assignments. For example, the center manager teaches customer service skills to county government employees, and another employee provides graphic art, layout, and design services for publications produced for the center.

The center also handles several county government services that did not easily fit into other departments. These other services include:

- Issuing permits for roadway overpasses where people can hang banners about community events. (The county issues such permits in order to control

A tree...is a tree...is a tree?

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

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

how many banners hang on the overpasses, as they have the potential to cause accidents.)

- Issuing permits for the local “lemon lot,” which is a local parking area maintained by the county where citizens can sell their used cars.
- Selling lots and scheduling interments at the county-owned cemetery.
- Providing notary services.
- Cashiering functions (added in 2005), which involve handling walk-in traffic and phone and mail-in payments. (Currently, the county does not process payments through its Web site.)

Maximizing staff time is one of the biggest benefits [of the KanDu Center].

Max H. Baker, county administrator

None of these tasks constitutes enough work to keep an employee fully occupied. However, by combining all of these functions with its customer service responsibilities, the center can more easily handle covering phones and the information kiosk. It also gives the center sufficient staff to cover incoming inquiries should an employee become ill, leave on vacation, or if an emergency situation arises in the community.

Finding 2 – A centralized customer service system must be more than a phone book or switchboard for local government services and programs; it must provide actual information, such as how signage permits are issued or the date and location of a public hearing.

One of the Customer Service Commandos’ chief concerns with their former structure was the lack of information tools that government employees could use to answer citizens’ questions. “We didn’t have a consistent database of information that was readily accessible so that [employees] could figure out where to start [finding answers],” explains Mary Pat Kraemer, county clerk. Consequently, the staff devoted most of the first six months of the KanDu Center’s implementation to gathering information. KanDu team members developed a questionnaire and interviewed three people in each of fourteen county departments, and then input this information into a homegrown Microsoft® Access database.

The database allowed team members to look up answers to citizens’ questions quickly and efficiently. It also allowed them to track incoming information and service requests from citizens via phone calls, walk-in visits, and online inquiries, essentially creating a second database. This second database helped

team members determine citizens’ most frequently asked questions and allowed them to build a knowledge base of county government operations.

However, the Access database was not an optimal solution to the KanDu team’s needs, especially as the center’s popularity grew. “Our focus is always on responding to the customer and his or her needs; it is our top priority. Data entry in the system at that point was a lower priority because

of time limits and processes adopted. Our accuracy rate was probably somewhere between 50 and 75 percent,” reported Leslie Bucklin, a former customer service representative at the KanDu/311 Contact Center. Nevertheless, the KanDu team’s experience with using the Access database allowed them to develop a better understanding of what exactly they needed from a software system. “Oftentimes, people buy software before they know what their requirements are. We wanted to know what our requirements were going to be before looking at different software,” said Todd Rodencal, former manager of the KanDu/311 Contact Center.

After researching available software solutions, the KanDu team worked with the county’s information technology (IT) department to purchase RightNow™ Technologies’ customer relationship management software. The software combines a knowledge base with an issue-tracking and request system. The system allows users to look for an existing question in the knowledge base or to ask a new question. If a new question is submitted, the system records it along with the answer and adds it to the knowledge base. This feature enables the KanDu team members to be consistent in their responses to citizens since they can see how questions were previously answered. Additionally, the KanDu team and the public use the same database when they look up information online, which allows all of the knowledge to be tracked in one area so that data is not duplicated.

Try before You Buy

“By using a cheaper system for a short period of time, cities have learned that customer relationship management (CRM) was capable of providing the functionality and benefits they needed. It was a crucial step before making a larger investment in a full-scale system. In addition, cities have been able to identify opportunities for improvement prior to the implementation of a larger, more expensive system. The increasing availability of hosted, on-demand CRM solutions makes a “test system” an increasingly viable strategy, as on-demand systems do not incur the sunk costs of perpetual software licenses and in-house hardware—rather, the CRM solution is “rented” only for as long as the government requires its use.”

Source: Shayne C. Kavanagh, ed., *Revolutionizing Constituent Relationships: The Promise of CRM Systems for the Public Sector* (Chicago: Government Finance Officers Association, 2007).

The human element of the KanDu Center is equally as critical to its success as the software. When the KanDu Center was still in the planning stages, some of the county councilors anticipated that the KanDu team’s job would be similar to that of a switchboard operator. Once the council learned what its function was and could be, they found the center did much more than they initially thought it would. As Frances M. Berting, a county councilor, commented, “As the people who started KanDu got better and better acquainted with the answers, they definitely met our expectations for the system. It really is a phenomenal feat because there are an awful lot of things going on in the county.” Employees at the KanDu Center frequently handle unexpected or unusual calls, and cannot always rely on information in a database to find answers or solutions to citizens’ inquiries. For instance, Bernadette Lauritzen, a Los Alamos County citizen, reported that when she took weekend guests out sightseeing in the area, they came across debris from a colostomy bag, which essentially is medical waste. Not knowing where else to call, she opted to call the KanDu Center, and the employees made arrangements to get the appropriate personnel out to clean up the site immediately.

Finding 3 – Full integration of a centralized customer service system for a local government occurs in stages.

The Customer Service Commandos recognized that they would need to manage expectations about the KanDu Center early on. Part of their planning included making a list of assumptions about customer service in Los Alamos County and what a centralized system

Assumptions about Customer Wants, Needs, and Desires in Los Alamos County

1. The typical customer seeks information, products, or services that are conveniently and consistently delivered.
2. Customer expectations may exceed county resources.
3. Customer service excellence is a culture, not a task or one-time project.

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

needed to become as it grew (see Assumptions on page 7). The assumptions were tested for accuracy as the system was implemented, and adjustments were made as needed.

The written, three-year plan for implementing the KanDu Center proved to be a useful guide for the KanDu team when working with the county council. After the council members approved the project, their general desire was to get the system up and running as soon as possible. The team repeatedly referred back to the plan—and had the council do so, too—which helped keep everyone focused on the long-term goal of the project. Rather than prematurely opening the doors and the phone lines, the KanDu team took the time to research the county government, build internal relationships, and gather the necessary information for a central knowledge base in order to respond to phone calls from the public. Julie Habiger, the county’s communications and public relations administrator, said, “That’s hard, because it’s an up-front investment of

taxpayer dollars that are going toward research and training—with no immediate results being visible to the public—it’s lots of behind the scenes work when you begin a call center like KanDu.”

After the original Access database was operational and negotiations for 311 usage with the local telephone company were complete in March 2003, KanDu employees began taking phone calls. (Because of the nature of cell coverage in the area, the KanDu Center has not been able to negotiate 311 usage for cell phones but is continuing to look into the matter.)

In May 2003, the county installed an information kiosk in the county municipal building lobby. The kiosk allows the team to respond to walk-in traffic, and it serves as a central source for brochures and other printed material available from the county. After the kiosk was installed, the KanDu team took over other services, such as cashiering and issuing permits for the county’s lemon lot. Figure 1 is a timeline of KanDu Center’s implementation.

County employees have had very tentative discussions about adding more features to—and, consequently, more development phases of—the KanDu Center, including (1) adding the customer service for the utilities department and (2) integrating a work order system for tracking responses to service requests. Both of these proposed phases require considerable study before they can be implemented, in part because they would require new and different skills from the KanDu team.

For example, among other responsibilities, the utilities department’s customer service representatives handle collections work, which is different from the customer service work currently performed by KanDu representatives. Likewise, Los Alamos County has a work order feature in its current financial software, Cayenta™, which makes it especially useful for budgeting purposes since the cost of fulfilling the work order can be tracked in the system. While a software interface could be developed by the county’s IT department that would allow a citizen’s service request made through the RightNow system to be turned into an internal work order in Cayenta, converting a reverse exchange between the two software programs to note when a request has been processed and fulfilled is problematic for security reasons. The expense involved in developing a secure exchange makes it cost-prohibitive for the county.

It’s all about start-up, roll out, training, positioning, and marketing of the service.

Mary Pat Kraemer, county clerk

Do you have a question about County Government?



**Just
Call
311!**

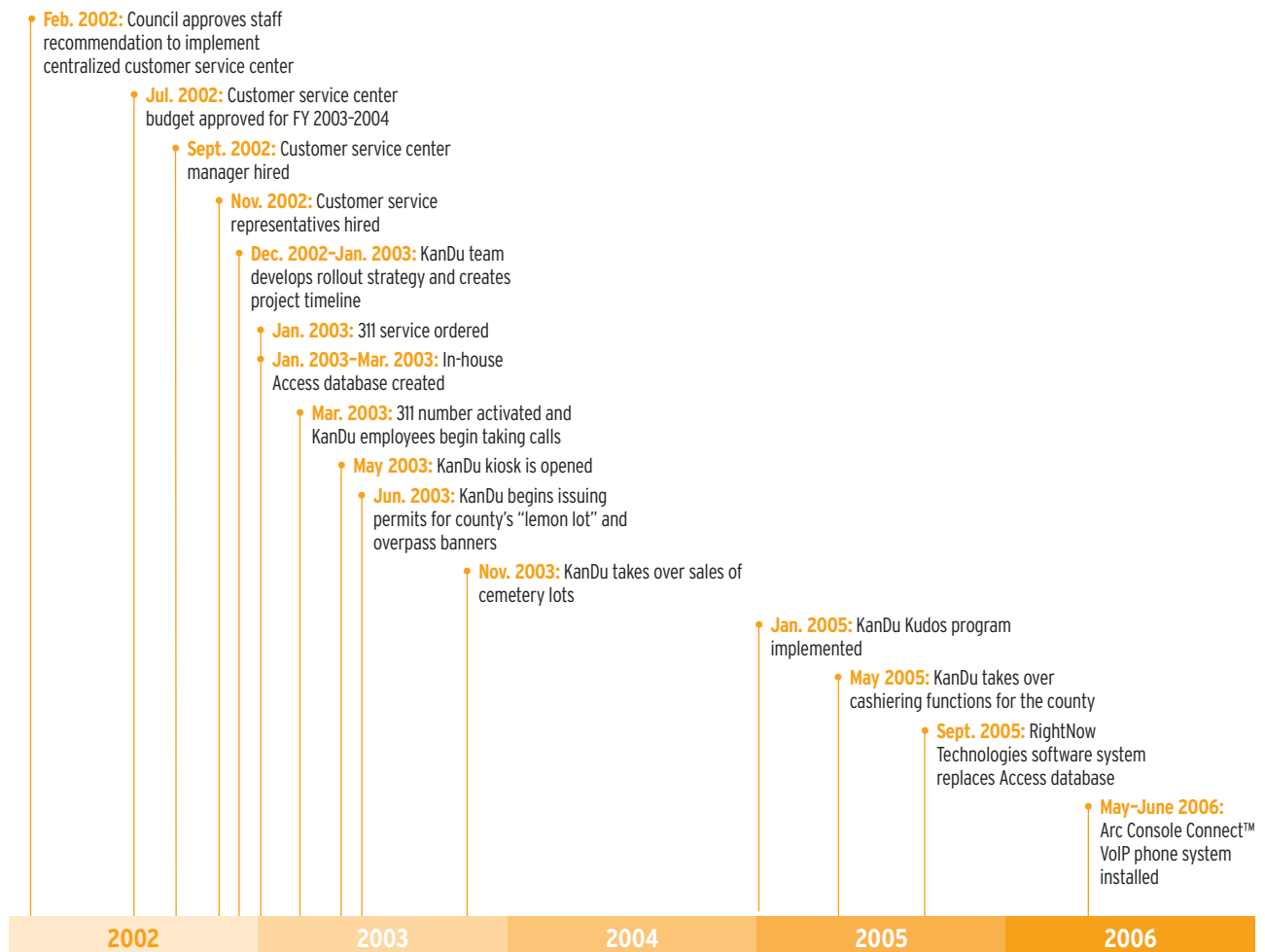
Los Alamos County KanDu Center

“Your Connection to County Government”

Cell phones call 662-8075

E-mail us at lacinfo@lac.losalamos.nm.us or visit us anytime at **[www.losalamosnm.us!](http://www.losalamosnm.us)**

Figure 1. Implementation of the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center



Source: Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center, 2007.

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

Finding 4 – When designing a centralized customer service system, the local government needs to consider its “market,” or how it has historically interacted with its citizens.

Los Alamos County began as a federal government installation during the Manhattan Project, which developed the first nuclear bomb in the 1940s. Today, the county is home to the Los Alamos National Laboratory, a U.S. Department of Energy installation that does classified work on nuclear weapons. Before the area became an incorporated county in 1949, a

private company, Zia Services, provided high-quality government-like services to residents. In many ways, the community functioned like a military base.

When the federal government turned over the county’s infrastructure, housing, and roads to the new local government, the citizen’s expectations regarding customer service did not change, and these high expectations remain today. The county’s current population is highly educated, with approximately 85 percent of its adult population holding at least one PhD degree, and is older and more affluent than most communities of its size.

Employees at the KanDu Center have adopted a policy of providing exceptional customer service—service that goes above and beyond traditional customer service standards. Their goal is to answer

every call in no more than three rings and to provide the answer to the customer the first time. If they have to transfer the call, they only want to transfer it once. As Leslie Bucklin, a former customer service representative with the KanDu Center, explained, “If I hang on to the call, it allows me to control the level of customer service and provide the answer the individual is looking for.... The second you transfer a call, your level of customer service goes down because you’re putting them in touch with more than one person.”

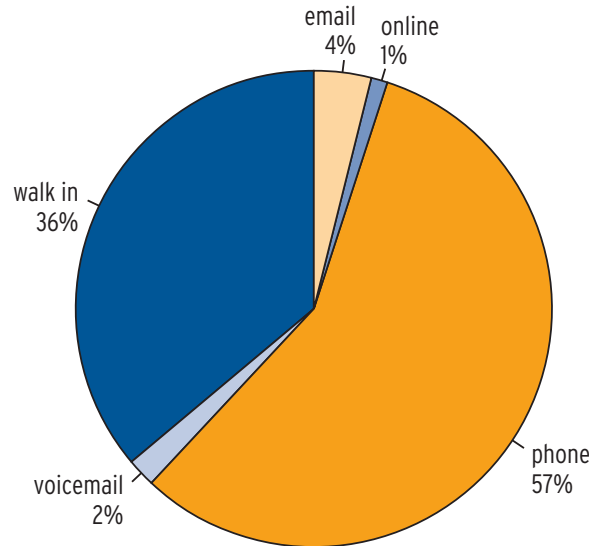
Karen Proicou, a Los Alamos County citizen, offered an example of the type of customer service provided by the KanDu team members: A BMW motorcycle had been featured at the county’s lemon lot, a central location for selling used vehicles. Ms. Proicou was interested in purchasing the motorcycle, but when she went to look at it, the vehicle was no longer on the lot. “I called up the KanDu Center and told them I was interested in purchasing the vehicle, and asked if they could possibly find the name of the gentleman who had had the permit.... I knew it was asking a lot, but she [the KanDu Center customer service representative] hung in there.... The fact that she took that extra time and was willing to stick with it was exceptional service.”

Another unusual characteristic of Los Alamos County residents is that they like to walk into the county’s municipal building to get their information, as opposed to calling or looking up information online. Nearly 40 percent of the KanDu Center’s contact over the course of a year comes from walk in traffic (see Figure 2). “People around here still like to walk in to get their information.... Despite the fact that we’re a highly technical community and most forms are online, people love to walk in and ask for the forms,” reports Todd Rodencal, former manager of the KanDu Center. Only about 1 percent of inquiries come through the county’s Web site and 4 percent come through direct e-mail to the KanDu Center, despite the county’s heavy promotion of the Web site through local advertising and publicity efforts. As Karen Ellensburg, a Los Alamos County resident, explained, “I very seldom go to the county Web site...I really just prefer picking up the phone and talking to someone.”

We may not be able to meet the expectations of our customers to their satisfaction every time, but we need to make every effort to do so.

Mary Pat Kraemer, county clerk

Figure 2. How Contacts Were Received



Contacts received by the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center in 2006. Source: Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center.

Finding 5 – Feedback from citizens should be gathered continually through a variety of formal and informal data collection activities, including community surveys, local government open houses, and direct customer feedback.

Los Alamos County places considerable importance on citizen involvement in local government. One of the chief means of gathering citizens’ feedback on county services is through a community survey conducted every two years. Conducted by telephone by outside contractors, the survey reaches 400 random households. It measures the community’s satisfaction with county services and programs using a 4-point scale, where 4 equals excellent, 3 equals good, 2 equals fair, and 1 equals poor. The county departments use the responses to several of the survey questions as part of their performance measurements under the county’s LA Scores effort (see Finding 7 on page 11).

The county also gathers citizen input through public meetings. In addition to the traditional public hearing,

which has prescribed start and end times with formal presentations, Los Alamos County hosts open houses. A general open house is held annually and involves all county departments. Project-specific open houses are also held on an as-needed basis. At the open houses, appropriate county staff answer questions directly from the public. “We usually have visuals there, handouts for them to take, and comment cards...open houses are designed to gather general information in an informal setting,” said Jane Volz, office manager for the county’s department of public works.

KanDu team members also function as the eyes and ears of county government, and they report back on their interactions with and observations of citizens. “They are very approachable. Citizens feel that they are easy to talk to and that KanDu staff will listen to their concerns or suggestions,” observed Julie Habiger, the county’s communications and public relations administrator. For example, the team notices which brochures are taken and which create more questions than they answer. They also note what issues are bothering citizens and what they are visiting about when they call or visit the kiosk. Leslie Bucklin, a former KanDu customer service representative, says “You can just tell by listening if they’re irritated by something.”

Finding 6 – In smaller rural communities, contact center employees need to be prepared to be the “face” of local government and be engaged with the public outside of normal work hours.

Los Alamos County has a population of more than 18,000 adults and children. The KanDu Center receives nearly 12,000 contacts annually from the citizens of Los Alamos, which indicates that a fair amount of the traffic comes from repeat customers. Over its three years in operation, people in the community have become well acquainted with the employees in the KanDu Center and trust them to help resolve issues. As Dave Fox, a Los Alamos County citizen and business owner, put it, “The trust between myself and the people who work over there, who I know personally, is such that I don’t feel the need to check up on anybody.”

In many respects, the employees working in the KanDu Center provide a face to county government. Citizens in the community rely on KanDu employees to provide them with answers to their questions about their county government, and KanDu employees take

their positions very seriously. Leslie Bucklin, a former KanDu customer service representative, explained, “[KanDu] became a way of life for us. We live here. People see us in a store and ask us questions. People see us in the street and ask us questions. People see us at church and ask us questions. We are not just some little department in the county. We’re not anonymous...we become people, individuals who people know and trust.... For those of us who live in the community, it’s 24 hours a day/7 days a week.”

Performance Measurements and Service Provision

Finding 7 – Performance measurements for a centralized customer service system should be developed, in part, based on feedback received through a regular citizen survey.

Los Alamos County began instituting a performance measurement system, called LA Scores, in 2004 with assistance from an outside management consultant. By July 1, 2006, the county had finished the lengthy design process and began collecting performance measurement data in earnest.

Figure 3 provides a model of how the LA Scores system works in Los Alamos County. It begins with a strategic planning process based on the goals and objectives adopted by the county council. Each county program prepares a management action plan designed to produce concrete results, and the county’s budget is based on the strategic goals and objectives defined in the action plans. In the process of managing county programs and services, county employees collect performance measurement data. The actual results, as shown by the data, are then used to refine the strategic planning process in the county.

The county includes both quantitative and qualitative data in its performance measurements, and a considerable amount of data comes from a community survey conducted every two years. According to Steven Lynne, director of finance for the county, “It [the community survey] provides data points that are a little more objective in terms of having some statistical validity.... It was a significant piece of input to the council’s thinking in developing strategic goals.”

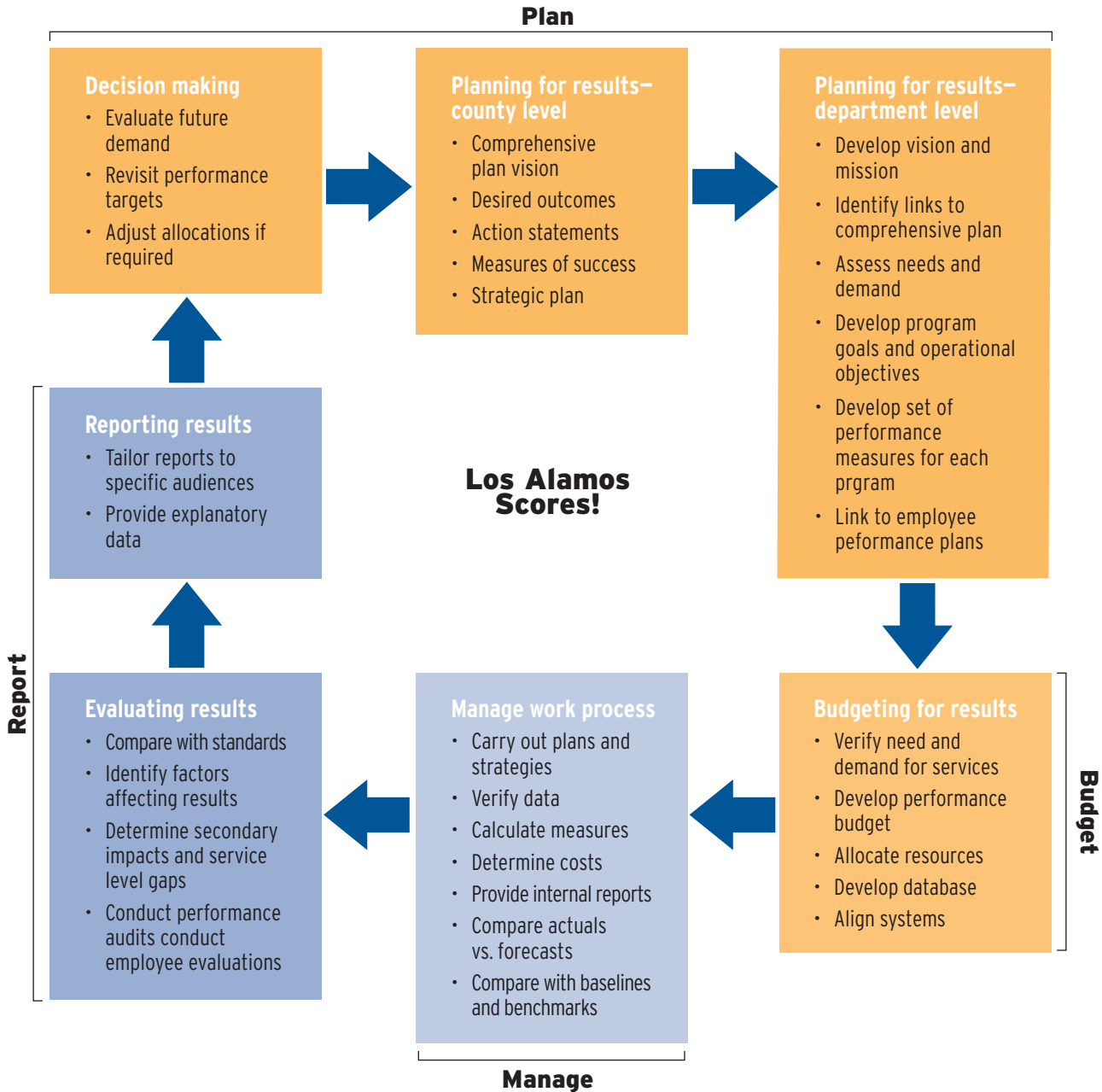
Several of the KanDu Center’s performance measurements are based on questions in the community survey. For example, the community survey measures the number of citizens who report that they have

used the county’s Web site (63 percent in 2006) or the KanDu/311 Center (49 percent in 2006) at least once during the past twelve months. Also, 11 percent of the survey respondents reported using KanDu/311 as their primary information resource on county government

and another 35 percent reported using it as a secondary source of information.

Most important, the KanDu/311 Center received the highest mean rating of good (a 3.0 on a 4.0 point scale) for all county government programs evaluated.

Figure 3. LA Scores! Los Alamos County’s Performance Measurement System



LA Scores is a new performance measurement system adopted by Los Alamos County that ties program management to results in order to achieve county goals and objectives. Ultimately, data from the KanDu/311 Contact Center will be incorporated into the system.

Source: Los Alamos County Finance Department, 2006.

Finding 8 – Local government departments need instructions on how to use 311 system data to improve their own customer service, and their performance measurements should be tied to customer service.

The use of performance measurement data is still in its infancy in Los Alamos County and everyone is learning as they go along. Steven Lynne, the county's finance director, reported, "One of the things we've been struggling with all along is the balance between too much information and not enough." County departments originally identified over 1,000 performance measurement standards that could be tracked. This included countywide measures that were designed to meet the county's strategic goals and objectives; department measures used for budgeting purposes; and program measures adopted for day-to-day management purposes. After a thorough review of the measures, the county is down to 500 measures, with about half being used as department measures (how effective the department is in achieving results) and the other half being used as internal management measurements (how efficiently a department manages its programs).

As part of their own performance measurements, the KanDu staff look at four primary data elements:

- total number of contacts,
- abandon rates (or callers that hang up after 20 seconds or more) for calls,
- average call length, and
- top ten reasons people call.

Beyond this, the KanDu Center has the ability to produce regular reports on the nature of citizen contact. For example, reports can be generated to learn how many contacts were made, what programs were involved, and which departments or divisions manage the programs. These data could be used by the county departments to determine how well their public information campaigns about specific projects are going (does it appear that they are getting the right information out to people based on the inquiries coming in?), or to learn over time what services are most important to people (do more inquiries come in about street repairs or about sidewalks?).

In the long term, Max Baker, the county administrator, is particularly interested in using KanDu data to learn whether citizens' concerns are being resolved, how long it takes to get issues resolved, and how citizens rate county staff on courtesy and

professionalism. "I can see at some point we will use KanDu data to help us with our performance measurements and then plug them into our annual budgeting and strategic goals. It'll become an integral part of the whole system," he said. Likewise, as the LA Scores program matures, Frances Berting, a county councilor, hopes to coordinate KanDu data with answers from the community survey as a means for confirming community concerns.

Finding 9 – A citizen recognition program for local government employees, such as the KanDu Kudos program, promotes the value of customer service throughout the local government organization.

Excellent customer service is considered a core value at Los Alamos County. The Customer Service Commandos sought to build that value into the culture of the county government organization through a variety of means, including incorporating customer service standards into every job description in the county. These standards include:

- demonstrating regular and reliable attendance,
- working well with others and participating fully in a team-oriented environment,
- interfacing with other employees and customers in a courteous and respectful manner,
- projecting positive support of their department and all county organizations at all times, and
- maintaining and enhancing the county's commitment to customer service excellence.

As a result, customer service is not seen as the sole domain of the KanDu Center, though the KanDu employees are considered customer service leaders within county government and show by example what excellent customer service is.

Another way the KanDu Center encourages customer service throughout the county government is through their KanDu Kudos program: if a citizen sends a handwritten note or e-mail recognizing the work of a county employee, that individual is presented a certificate and coffee mug, and acknowledged for his or her work at a department or division meeting. A short article on the employee's work is also featured in the county's employee newsletter. The program is low cost and provides citizens a way to recognize excellent customer service within the county government. It also motivates the county employees to provide excellent customer service.

Staff Training

Finding 10 – Rotating staff between “on call” and “off desk” duties keeps customer center employees fresh and engaged when working with citizens.

As mentioned earlier, the KanDu Center operates from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and work assignments are divided into “on call” and “off desk” shifts. When a KanDu staff person is on call, he or she works at the information kiosk in the main lobby of the county municipal building and takes 311 calls or responds to walk-in traffic. As time permits, he or she also responds to citizens’ online inquiries. Since on-call duty involves direct contact with the public, it can easily become very hectic when there are phone calls and foot traffic at the same time.

“Off desk” time allows KanDu employees to take a break from the sometimes hectic kiosk and work on different assignments. When off desk, employees work behind the scenes and are not easily accessible to the general public. Off-desk employees, however, do have to provide back up support on 311 phone calls. KanDu’s ArcConsole™ VoIP phone system allows incoming phone calls to be routed to whichever phone numbers are available; so if the on-call employees are busy when a new call comes in, it is automatically sent to an off-desk employee.

Work schedules are also rotated so that all four KanDu employees have an opportunity to work with each other. As Leslie Bucklin, a former KanDu customer service representative, explained, “We want the public to know all of us.... It also gives us an opportunity to learn from each other.... We end up coaching each other since we each have our own strengths.”

Finding 11 – Contact center employees need to be aware of broader community concerns, such as social services, education, and recreational opportunities—not just local government services and programs.

With the KanDu Center’s goal of exceptional customer service in mind, the employees strive to build information into the system’s knowledge base that goes beyond county government programs and services. For example, KanDu employees maintain information on many state government programs, such as University



A customer service representative helps a resident at the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center.

We started with the attitude that if we could help, we would.

Kathy Bjorklund, former customer service representative, KanDu/311 Contact Center

Cooperative Extension Services, and on local volunteer organizations, such as United Way and the local senior center. The KanDu employees have established relationships with these organizations—they routinely alert the employees about new developments or changes in their services. According

to Todd Rodencal, the former KanDu Center manager, “They see [providing us with this information] as a way to reduce their own call volume and avoid transfers from KanDu staff.”

The employees take pride in simply paying attention to what is happening in the community and seeking out new information. “You have to be one of those people who always want to take in as much information as you can to help others,” said Tania Motoya, a customer service representative with the KanDu/311 Contact Center. Employees read the local newspaper daily, noting articles that may be of interest to community residents. They review meeting agendas and minutes to learn what is being discussed in community meetings. They notice flyers for local concerts or theater productions placed in the local grocery store. As Kathy Bjorklund, a former customer service representative at the KanDu/311 Contact Center, put it, “We try to provide that kind of information because it’s hard to access it in our community.”

Finding 12 – Regular contact center team meetings help develop a sense of camaraderie and provide an opportunity to share new information.

KanDu team members meet regularly every two weeks. During the meetings, team members review upcoming projects in the county so they can stay abreast of what's going on countywide. They discuss issues about the KanDu Center, upcoming community events, and each person's work assignments. Two employees from the public works department have been trained to handle the call center while the team meets.

The KanDu team also uses the Character First!™ training program to build camaraderie and shared values. Every month the team picks one character trait, such as enthusiasm or flexibility, and focuses on what that trait means for them as a team. "It reminds us how our character can affect who we are as employees, who we are to the public, and to ourselves," said Leslie Bucklin, a former customer service representative with the KanDu Center.

Methodology and List of Study Participants

The author conducted in-depth interviews with nineteen individuals familiar with the Los Alamos KanDu/311 Contact Center and its operation in March 2007. These individuals represent a diverse group of interests and perspectives, including policy makers, county government upper management, call center staff, and citizens. Four separate interview protocols, each designed with a specific audience in mind, guided the questioning during the interviews. 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. Written permission was sought prior to attributing any quotes to an individual or organization. The author wishes to thank all

of the study participants for taking the time to discuss the Los Alamos County KanDu/311 Contact Center. Their contributions to the study were invaluable.

- Max Baker, county administrator, Los Alamos County
- Frances Berting, councilor, Los Alamos County
- Janet Bettinger, business operations manager, Department of Public Utilities, Los Alamos County
- Leslie Bucklin, former customer service representative, KanDu/311 Contact Center, Los Alamos County
- Kathy Bjorklund, reference librarian, Mesa Public Library, and former customer service representative, KanDu/311 Contact Center, Los Alamos County
- Karen Ellenberg, citizen, Los Alamos County
- David Fox, citizen, Los Alamos County
- Julie Habiger, communications and public relations administrator, Communications and Public Relations Office, Los Alamos County
- Ron Knowlton, information technology staff member, Los Alamos County
- Mary Pat Kraemer, county clerk, Los Alamos County
- Bernadette Lauritzen, citizen, Los Alamos County
- Steven Lynne, chief financial officer, Los Alamos County
- Maxine Motoya, customer service representative, KanDu/311 Contact Center, Los Alamos County
- Tania Motoya, customer service representative, KanDu/311 Contact Center, Los Alamos County
- Karen Proicou, citizen, Los Alamos County
- Thomas Roach, manager, Pavement Division, Los Alamos County
- Todd Rodencal, former manager, KanDu/311 Contact Center, Los Alamos County
- Jane Volz, office manager, Department of Public Works, Los Alamos County
- Jim West, council chair, Los Alamos County



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ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology

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

For more information about the study, contact...

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