Call 311:

Citizen Engagement and 311

Case Study

Philly311:
Engaging Citizens,
Serving Customers

By Evelina Moulder, International City/County Management Association

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In This Report

- Citizen Engagement: Important to Customer Service
- Vision for Philadelphia Included a 311 System
- Philly311 Reporting Capabilities
- Moving Forward

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Community and System Profile

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Philly311

Form of Government
Mayor-council

Council Members
17 council members; 10 elected by district and 7 at large.

Population
1,449,634 (2007)

City's Annual Budget
$4.8 billion, including employees from the municipally-owned aviation and water enterprises

Philly311 System Budget
$2,073,000 FY09

Major System Components
- Physical location: Philadelphia city hall
- Square footage of office space: 5,500 square feet
- Number of phones: 47
- Number of agent workstations: 47

Number of Staff for Philly311 System
- Eight management/support staff budgeted, includes contact center director; 7 support staff actual to date, in addition to contact center director
- 57 agents and 7 agent supervisors budgeted; 43 agents and 4 agent supervisors actual to date

Location of Philly311 System within City Government
Managing Director's Office

Type of System
Customer response management (CRM) system and information center accessible by a 311 phone number, email, Website, and walk-up customer service center in city hall.

Unique System Features
Type of CRM: Novo
Type of phone system: Vesta/Plant CML
Type of headsets: Plantronics "Sound Innovation"
Type of reporting tool: Export from SQL server to Excel

Philly311: Engaging Citizens, Serving Customers

By Evelina Moulder

The city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has used numerous approaches to citizen engagement, but perhaps the most ambitious and successful approaches are recent initiatives to involve citizens in decisions about the city's budget.

Like much of the United States, Philadelphia has been hard hit by the economic downturn. The city is required by state law to budget for a five-year period, and in fall 2008, it was projecting a $1 billion deficit for the upcoming five-year period. Then in 2009, a second $1 billion deficit was projected. Because preparation of the FY2010 budget would require tough decisions, Mayor Nutter and other elected and appointed officials, including ICMA member Camille Barnett, the city's managing director, designed a robust program of community education, followed by workshops that generated budget recommendations from residents, businesses, and other stakeholders (refer to calendar of public engagement opportunities).

These officials knew that to provide successful customer service, the needs and wants of the customer have to be clear. By involving the public in decisions about service delivery when confronting a major budget deficit offers decision-making direction to a city. The officials also realized that through participation, citizens are more likely to understand and support final decisions, even though making the decisions may be difficult.

Citizen Engagement: Important to Customer Service

Public engagement initiatives were part of a comprehensive vision for Philadelphia to become a national leader in customer service. The city partnered with the University of Pennsylvania's Project for Civic Engagement and television station WHYY to provide information—called PhillyStat sessions—on the budget challenges facing the city and to manage four budget workshops.

Although the mayor led the PhillyStat sessions, he did not attend the four budget workshops (see Chart 1). To avoid any conflict of interest, the workshops were facilitated by a third–party moderator. In each of the groups, there was also a member of the Nutter administration present who was able to clarify explanations, to answer questions, and to listen to the priorities and concerns of citizens.

At the workshops, attendees broke into small groups that included two moderators who walked them through "budget games." During the games, participants had to put both revenue and expenditure items into "buckets," which were based on feasibility and tolerability and ranged from "low-hanging fruit" to "no way, no how."

In addition to the budget workshops, Mayor Nutter met individually with residents to discuss budget

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311: The First Step in Citizen Engagement?

The concept of providing excellent customer service is key to the implementation of 311/CRM systems, and these systems can be instrumental in engaging citizens and increasing their involvement in their community. They make it easy for citizens to become involved in their community by simply picking up the phone to report a problem they see. Once citizens see how reporting a problem can impact the neighborhood, for example, removing graffiti from a local park or cleaning up a vacant property, they might be inspired to become involved in a neighborhood improvement association. And from there perhaps serve on a citizen advisory committee or even one day chose to run for city council. With 311, citizens can see how they make a difference in the quality of life in their community, and who knows what that knowledge might inspire?

challenges. He visited people in their homes, in barber shops, in coffee shops, and other places where people gather. Deputy mayors and staff also held meetings with small groups of stakeholders so they could voice concerns. Philadelphia used 311 as the main customer feedback number. A log was kept of all calls that came in with a description of the comments.

The engagement process took into account the various ways that people prefer to participate and provided different opportunities to meet those preferences. In the end, the mayor had volumes of data and information on which to base final budget decisions. All in all, 10,055 people participated through one or more of the venues offered.

Vision for Philadelphia Included a 311 System

With a vision that the city could be a national leader in customer service, the mayor and the managing director recognized that a 311 system was an essential component in reaching that goal. The system is not seen as being independent but as part of a larger performance management initiative. From the announcement in February 2008 that Philadelphia would have a 311 system, to the launch on December 31, 2008, endless hours were devoted to the development of a Web-based citizen request management (CRM) system that would be integrated with the 311 and work-order systems.

Working with an international consulting group, the Philly311 project team developed and finalized an implementation plan that addressed administration, staffing, technology, budget, and facilities. As the economic downturn became more severe, Philly311 project leaders decided to hire only city staff to work

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Chart 1. February 2009: Calendar of Public Engagement Opportunities

In addition to events listed here and others that will be added in the coming days and weeks, Mayor Nutter will visit groups across the city to talk with Philadelphians about the challenges being faced, the common priorities that are in place. He will also gather input for the FY2010 budget. The managing director, deputy mayors, and administration officials will be convening briefing sessions for stakeholders and citizens to review and discuss budget challenges and options in detail. The calendar of events will be updated regularly and posted online at http://www.phila.gov/budgetupdate/.

This unprecedented level of public engagement in the budget process is a demonstration of the Nutter administration's commitment to dialogue, education, and moving forward together as one city.

Philly Stat Sessions:

Thursday, February 12	Municipal Services Building	Mayor Nutter will lead three PhillyStat sessions. The mayor will be talking with city
1:30 p.m.	Room 1450	officials about the budget tradeoffs and options that they have developed. These ses-
Tuesday, February 17	1401 JFK Blvd.	sions are an opportunity for the public to learn more about the tradeoffs that the city
1:30 p.m.		is facing and the decisions that will have to be made in order to balance the budget.
Wednesday, February 18		
1:30 p.m.		All sessions will be taped and rebroadcast on Channel 64. A limited number of
		seats will be available and open to the public on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Budget Workshops:

Thursday, February 12	**NORTHEAST**	"Tight Times, Tough Choices": workshops on Philadelphia's budget. The University
Registration 6 p.m.	St. Dominic's School	of Pennsylvania Project for Civic Engagement, in partnership with the city of
Workshop 7 p.m.	8510 Frankford Avenue	Philadelphia, is hosting a series of four community budget workshops designed to
Wednesday, February 18	**NORTHWEST**	gather citizen input that will be used by Mayor Nutter and city officials in develop-
Registration 6 p.m.	Master Charter School	ing the proposed FY10 budget and FY10-14 five-year plan.
Workshop 7 p.m.	Pickett Campus	
	5700 Wayne Avenue	For more information, visit http://whyy.org/city or call 215-746-3130.
Thursday, February 19	**SOUTH**	
Registration 6 p.m.	St. Monica's Catholic School	
Workshop 7 p.m.	16th and Porter Streets	
Monday, February 23	**WEST**	
Registration 6 p.m.	Pinn Memorial Baptist Church	
Workshop 7 p.m.	2251 N. 54th Street	

Youth Forum:

Wednesday, February 18	City Hall, Room 202	Cosponsored by the mayor's office and the youth commission. Mayor Nutter will
5 to 6 p.m.		lead a conversation with Philadelphia youth about their experiences, priorities,
		and concerns. Young Philadelphians are invited to attend.

on the project, including those who would otherwise have lost their jobs in the emergency budget process. Project team members worked with the division of technology staff to develop the CRM system. They selected the Novo customer support suite, which is an integrated help desk and knowledge-based solution that tracks calls, locates information using keyword searches, and sends service alerts to the appropriate department.

The Novo CRM system[1] is completely Web based, so only a browser is required to use and administer it. The city chose this option because the timeline for implementation was aggressive, and the hosted solution provided information technology (IT) support and capacity to allow city staff to implement within the tight timeframe. These efforts paid off in a number of ways but proved especially important as the mayor and administrative staff began their intensive citizen engagement project around budget shortfalls. The Philly311 system provided a data collection method that contributed to the process.

Just as the citizen engagement activities offered different settings and opportunities, Philly311 also provided several access options. It can be accessed by phone, email, Web, or walk-in service. Calls are answered 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; walk-in

hours are Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The vision for customer service representatives is that they are city ambassadors and have a major role to play in the relationship with all who live in or do business with the city.

As with the multiple opportunities and venues for participation in the budget deficit reduction process, city staff members use social networks like Facebook and Twitter to update the community on news about Philly311. Rosetta Carrington Lue, Philly311 contact center director adds, "The connection to the customer that social media sites allow Philly311 is very exciting. These sites provide our customers with current city information while giving them a medium to provide feedback back to the city and Philly311. It's a win-win."

In spite of the fact that the marketing budget was eliminated just two months before the launch, 3,576 calls came to Philly311 on the first day of operation. High-call volume continues with most of the calls for information (71 percent), for referrals to a particular department when the information is not available (14 percent); and approximately 12 percent to place service requests (see Chart 2). The Top 10 Service Request Chart for the week ending June 13, 2009, shows that the most frequently placed service requests were related to abandoned cars, street light outage,

Chart 2

311 Customer Inquiries Resolution Summary

Service Requests Answered 12%

Transfer to 911 2%

Other 1%

Agency Transfer or Referral 14%

General Information 71%
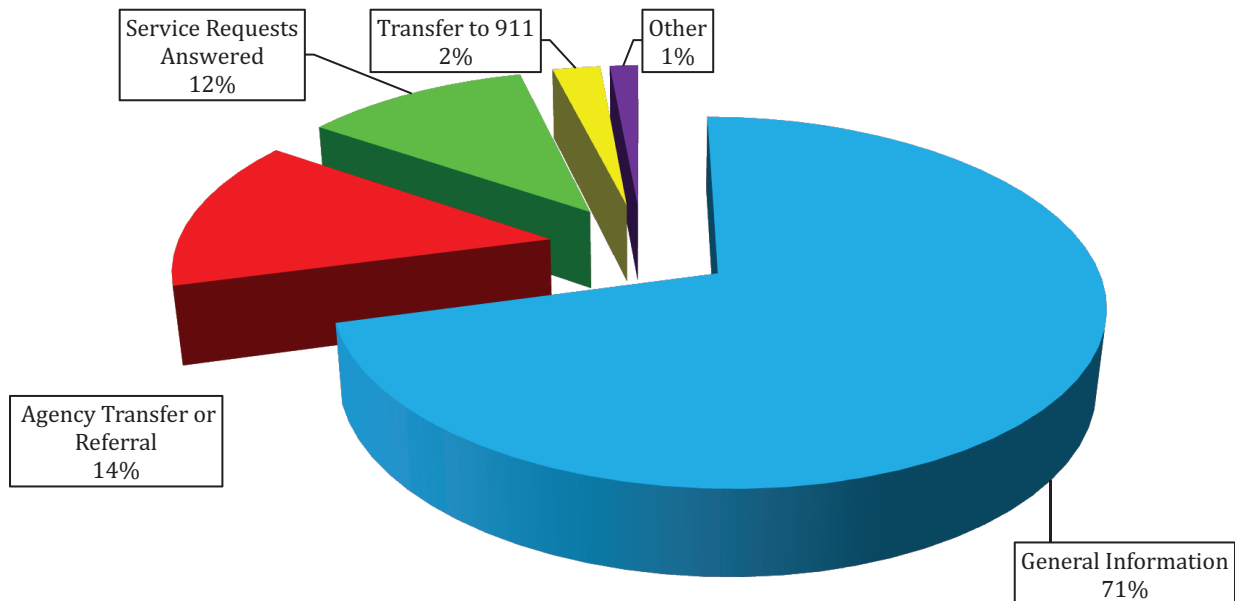
vacant properties, exterior maintenance issues, and trash pick up (see Chart 3).

The number of requests for the licenses and inspections department to inspect exterior maintenance issues has increased almost 50 percent since the Philly311 launch. Requests for vacant lot cleanup have also increased by a similar rate. Service requests receive a tracking number so the customer can track progress on the Website. Customers can also go directly to the department's Web page and submit requests. These departments accept online service requests are:

- Licenses and inspection: http://webapps.phila.gov/li/.
- Police (non-emergency): http://www.ppdonline.org/ rpts/rpts_abanauto_frm.php.
- Streets: http://potholes.phila.gov/ (numerous online service requests are offered, including potholes, street lights, alley lights, street signs, and traffic signals).
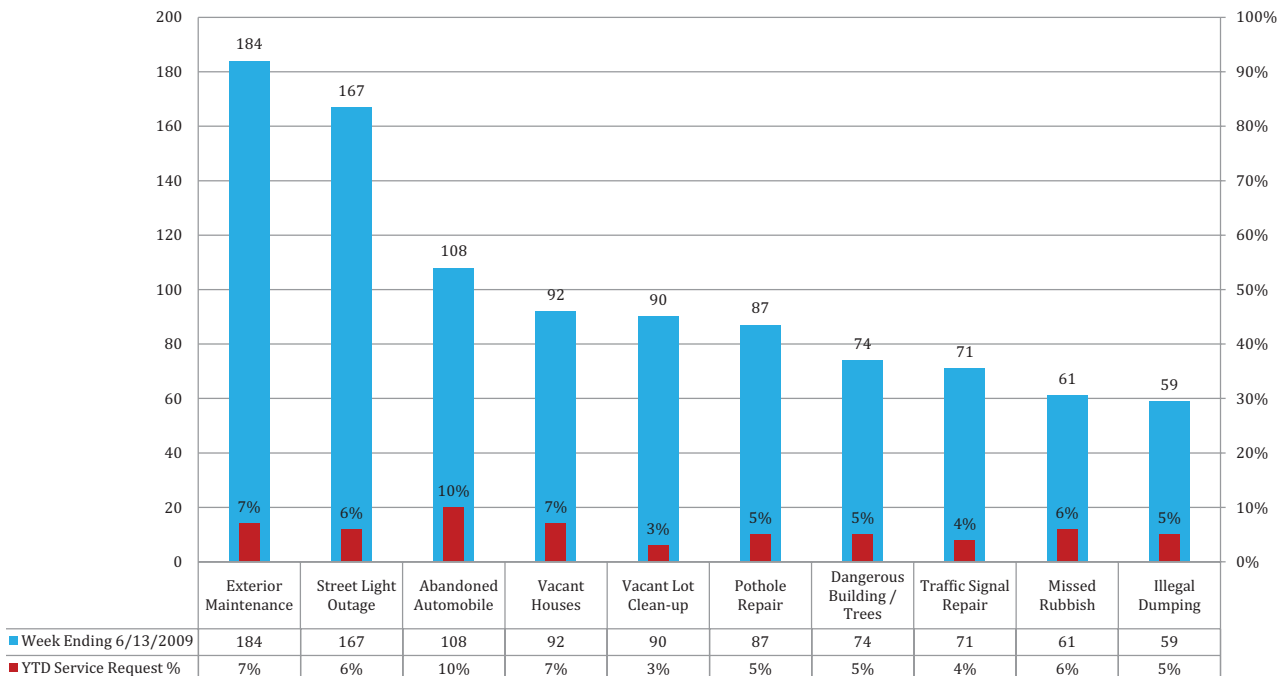- Fairmount Park (the city park system): http://www.fairmountpark.org/.

Because the Philly311 system is part of the larger performance management effort, service level agreements (SLAs) were entered into with various departments. SLAs provide for standards of service and cover response times and other standards that are measurable and can be used to support accountability. Customers are informed of the agreements and updated on progress. Although the city's financial crisis prompted modifications of some SLAs, customers were kept up-to-date so expectations would be in line with capacity. During May 2009, the city reported resolving 2,352 requests for service. The majority were resolved within the time-frame specified in the SLA (see Chart 4).

Philly311 Reporting Capabilities

As Patrick Morgan, deputy director of performance management, describes it, the system's reporting capability has room for improvement because it requires a fair amount of work behind the scenes to create reports. Philly311 staff members pull out data from CRM to generate standard reports that are used by staff and elected officials. These reports include sum-

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Chart 3

Top 10 Service Requests

	Exterior Maintenance	Street Light Outage	Abandoned Automobile	Vacant Houses	Vacant Lot Clean-up	Pothole Repair	Dangerous Building / Trees	Traffic Signal Repair	Missed Rubbish	Illegal Dumping
■ Week Ending 6/13/2009	184	167	108	92	90	87	74	71	61	59
■ YTD Service Request %	7%	6%	10%	7%	3%	5%	5%	4%	6%	5%

mary data and data provided by district. Here are the reports that are generated regularly:

- 311 Customer Inquiries Resolution Summary (see Chart 2).
- Top 10 service requests (see Chart 3).
- Top service requests current status (see Chart 4).
- Call volumes and performance levels (see Chart 5).
- Customer calls logged at 311 by the top 10 departments (see Chart 6).

Data from the Philly311 system is used in conjunction with PhillyStat, which is a regular meeting of the mayor, the managing director, and the relevant deputy mayors, along with representatives from the department of personnel and city agencies. Using statistical reports, each participating agency reports on its success in meeting the performance standards that have been set for each agency. Where there are problems, collective analysis and problem solving take place. The PhillyStat meetings are designed to draw upon the expertise of staff in agencies that have related responsibilities. This collective effort helps to ensure that the right questions are asked and all of the possibilities are covered.

Moving Forward

In both Philadelphia's citizen engagement initiatives involving the budget and the Philly311 system implementation, the city has used as many resources as possible to ensure participation and identify action steps for improvement. Specifically, using input received during the citizen engagement effort and through Philly311 as the city's customer feedback tool, the mayor was able to make decisions that are reflected in the recently released budget and five-year plan. City leaders and staff are committed to ongoing evaluation and modification of the Philly311 system, and such efforts will include the ability for customers to send service requests to Philly311 by mobile device.

The city is also planning to equip workers who spend most of their time in the field with hand-held mobile devices so they can send service requests on the spot to Philly311. With this technology, the city can also partner with such organizations as business improvement districts or town watches. Allowing field staff to send service requests in this way supports the vision for Philadelphia to become a national leader in customer service.

Chart 4

Top Service Requests Current Status'
*All Citizen Requests **received** during week ending 6/13/2009*

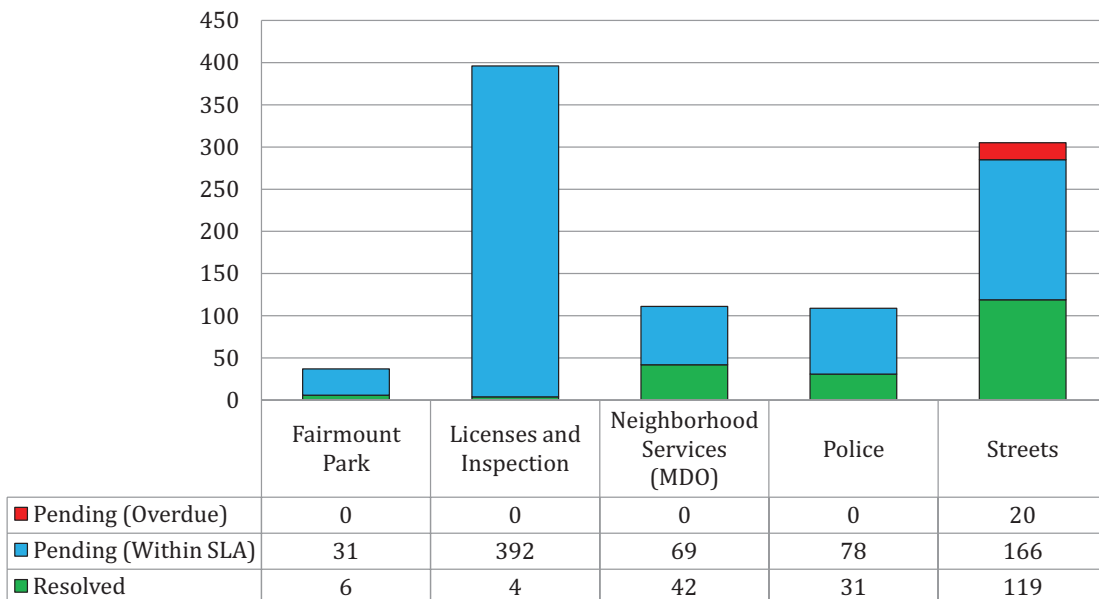|	Fairmount Park	Licenses and Inspection	Neighborhood Services (MDO)	Police	Streets
Pending (Overdue)	0	0	0	0	20
Pending (Within SLA)	31	392	69	78	166
Resolved	6	4	42	31	119

Chart 5

Call Volumes and Performance Levels

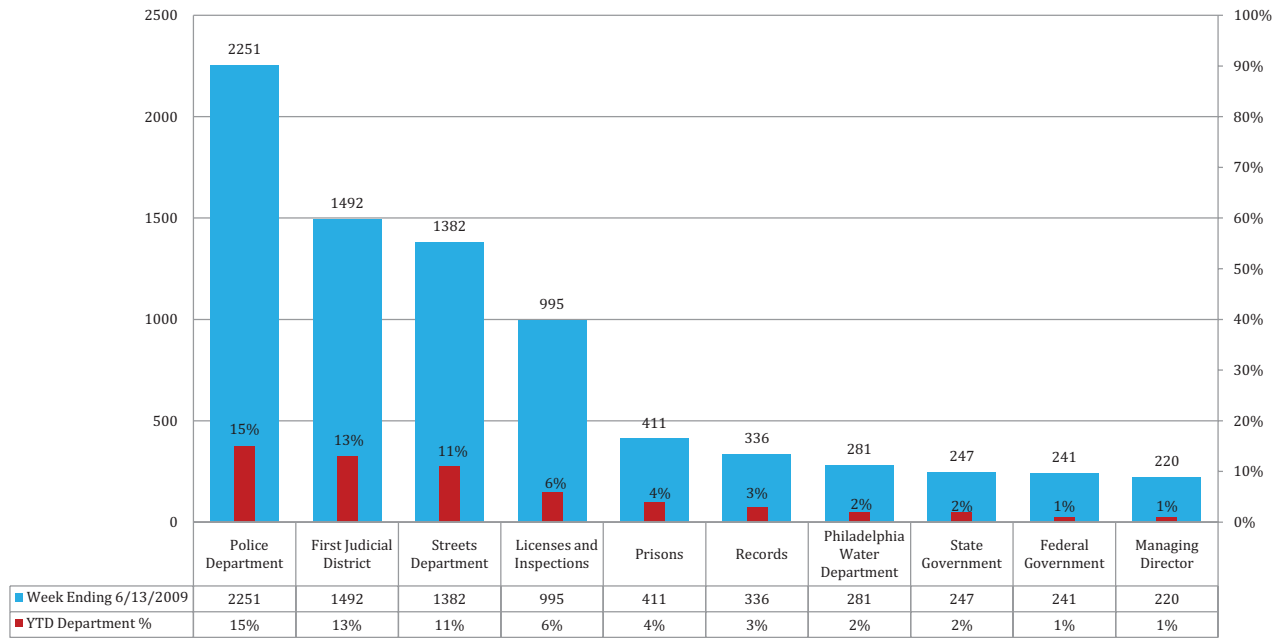| Performance Measure	June 7th – June 13th	May 2009	April 2009	March 2009	February 2009	January 2009	Fiscal 2009 Year-to-Date
Total Incoming Calls	25,190	93,849	102,108	107,204	90,328	98,769	540,451
Average Weekday Call Volume	4,519	3,952	4,231	4,372	4,116	3,963	4,180
Percent of Calls Answered	65%	69%	72%	73%	66%	72%	71%
911/ Emergency Transfers	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%

Endnote

1 http://www.novosolutions.com/customer-relationship-management-software

Chart 6

Customer Calls logged at 311
Top 10 Departments

	Police Department	First Judicial District	Streets Department	Licenses and Inspections	Prisons	Records	Philadelphia Water Department	State Government	Federal Government	Managing Director
■ Week Ending 6/13/2009	2251	1492	1382	995	411	336	281	247	241	220
■ YTD Department %	15%	13%	11%	6%	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Notes

Notes

ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology

In 2006, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) received funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to conduct the first national study of centralized customer service systems for local governments, such as 311 call centers, constituent relationship management (CRM) systems, and online service request forms, among others. Working with The Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies in phase two of the study, ICMA is conducting research and developing new resources and tools for communities considering implementation of 311/CRM systems.

Such systems generate a wealth of information that may be used for a variety of purposes including community engagement, performance measurement, and budgeting. Incorporating these types of data—for example, types and number of citizen requests; compliance with service level agreements, which define when a request will likely be completed; and service request resolution rates, which show how often departments are meeting their goals—into such processes can be challenging. As part of its national study, ICMA brought together a team of researchers and practitioners to research and document approaches communities are using to integrate these processes. This project will produce a series of three case studies dedicated to this issue. This report is the first in that series.

For more information about the study, contact...

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