



Call 311:

Citizen Engagement and 311
Case Study

Access Cupertino: Citizen Engagement for the 21st Century

By Anne Phelan, Consultant



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

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Community and System Profile

Cupertino, California Access Cupertino

Form of Government

Council-Manager

Council Members

Five council members, all elected at large

Population

54,000 (2009)

City's Annual Budget

\$64 million (FY 2010)

CRM System Budget

\$14,000 (FY 2010)

Major System Components

- Physical location: Web-based
- Square footage of office space: None
- Number of phones: None
- Number of agent workstations: None

Number of Staff for CRM System

Two staff members manage the system, the City Web Specialist and the Public and Environmental Affairs Director.

Location of CRM System within City Government

Access Cupertino is a program within the City Manager's Office; the Public and Environmental Affairs Director oversees the operation.

Type of System

Constituent relationship management (CRM) system and information center accessible by a dedicated phone number (777-CITY), website, email, iPhone app, and reception desk in City Hall.

Unique System Features

Type of CRM: Proprietary web-based software-as-a-service (SaaS) paid for by the city via a multi-year agreement with Comcate, Inc. Service requests are routed to the appropriate individual staff member based on topic assignments managed by city staff and negotiated with each department in advance. Alerts are sent to staff, supervisors, and/or management based on criteria types of delays to the resolution or completion of a request. The system also has a GIS Module, Outlook Module, and a Code Enforcement Module.

Type of phone system: Not applicable

Type of reporting tool: Preprogrammed and custom reports are included in the application and either use HTML view or export to Excel for further manipulation.

311/CRM: The First Step in Citizen Engagement?

The concept of providing excellent customer service is key to the implementation of 311/CRM systems, but such systems can also be instrumental in engaging citizens and increasing their involvement in their community. 311/CRM systems make it easy for citizens to become involved in their community by simply picking up the phone to report a problem they see. Once a person sees how reporting a problem can impact the neighborhood, for example, removing graffiti from a local park or cleaning up a vacant property, he or she 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/CRM, citizens can see how they make a difference in the quality of life in their community and who knows what that knowledge might inspire.

Citizen Engagement in Cupertino

What does citizen engagement look like, or aspire to be, in a 21st-century community? In Cupertino, California, a city of 54,000 in the heart of Silicon Valley, city officials strive to combine the benefits of digital communication with old-fashioned neighborliness in meeting the needs of their citizens. Even as citizens routinely turn to Cupertino's website for information or to conduct city business, Cupertino officials want to make sure that residents feel comfortable walking into City Hall with their questions and that they hear the live voice of a receptionist when they call the city's main number. Although computers may be the economic lifeblood of the community, an innovative Block Leaders Program encourages residents to engage in the type of routine, face-to-face communication that creates a more tangible sense of neighborhood.

High-quality schools and closeness to high-tech jobs make Cupertino a desirable Silicon Valley address for a well-educated and culturally diverse population. Cupertino is famous as the home of Apple Inc. and Symantec Corp., and more than 60 other high-tech companies also have offices in the city. The high-tech industry has been a major contributor to the city's relative prosperity; median household income is \$118,635.¹

The city is well-positioned in other respects. More than 60 percent of residents aged 25 years or older hold a bachelor's degree or higher degree. It is highly diverse, with more than 40 percent of its residents born outside the United States. Quality of life is an important factor for both residents and officials, and a dozen commissions help guide the city toward high



CUPERTINO

standards for economic development, telecommunications, planning, the environment, and other issues. The most recent citizen satisfaction survey indicated that an impressive 94 percent of residents are either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their city government; of these, 70 percent are extremely satisfied.

Despite its many advantages, there are some hurdles to creating a deeper sense of community in Cupertino. The city lacks a central downtown area that could physically draw people together and be a base for regular interaction. The nature of the Silicon Valley business cycle means that population turnover is fairly frequent, with people moving in during boom years and away during downturns. Longer-term Cupertino residents are selling their homes to move to less costly areas.

Brief History of Access Cupertino

Delivering information to citizens is a high priority for Cupertino officials, and in this high-tech community, it is not surprising that many residents first look to the city website, www.cupertino.org, for information. Yet Rick Kitson, the city's public and environmental affairs director, is quick to point out that it's people, not technology, that are foremost in the minds of city officials when considering ways to deliver information. Their goal, he said, is "to get the right information to the right people in the right amount."

¹ American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–07.

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For more than 30 years, the city of Cupertino has had a newsletter, which included a postage-paid postcard that residents could use to send their comments and concerns to the city. This program, known as Access Cupertino, has subsequently been expanded to include the city's constituent relationship management (CRM) system. For a community in which more than 90 percent of residents have Internet access at home, the web-based CRM solution is an important means to meet citizens' expectations of access and responsiveness at City Hall. Since 2003, Comcate has been the city's CRM provider. Officials chose Comcate's CRM software because they wanted an off-the-shelf product that would be intuitive for both staff and citizens to use. They have been pleased with the product and the company's willingness to offer enhancements to meet citizens' needs. For example, as might be expected in Apple's hometown, residents are interested in an iPhone app for city information; Cupertino officials and Comcate released an app in April 2010 that makes it easier to view Cupertino.org on an iPhone or other smart phone.

Cupertino's well-designed website is a primary portal to city services and information. Citizens can use the website to check the schedule for city council meetings or other events, apply for a permit, report a code violation, renew a business license, or apply for a city government job. Website visitors can watch videos from council meetings or other hearings; often, in the days following a council meeting, there will be 1,000 to 1,300 unique hits on the page with the video. In April 2010, the site had 83,765 visits, generating more than 3 million page views. The most popular destina-

tions on the site are city jobs, followed by parks and recreation programs and service requests.

The Access Cupertino system enables citizens to submit a request for service, complaint, or question to city officials and to track its resolution via the web. Citizens choose a category from the predefined menu—such as traffic, parks and recreation facilities, or garbage—and then type their comment or question. Through the CRM software, the message is directed to the appropriate city department. Citizens can go online to track the progress of their request, and city officials monitor the time needed to address the issue (or the Service Level Agreements), gauging whether that process matches with departmental goals. At City Hall, staff uses the CRM system to track the number and types of requests that are received and to proactively identify issues where more public education or outreach may be needed.

Residents call 777-CITY to reach the city by phone, and the receptionist directs the caller to the appropriate department. Staff taking requests by phone then input the information into the CRM system for action and tracking. The receptionist also greets and directs people who come to City Hall with questions. Even in an era of greater reliance on electronic communication, City Manager Dave Knapp says residents want contact with a "real person" when they call the city, making this position a significant one for connecting with citizens.

The receptionist is one of six people who work in Cupertino's communication department. In addition to their roles in providing information through the website and by phone, they also support the city's public

Table 1: Year-to-Date Service Requests, January 1-June 17, 2010

Departments	Total	Completed	Not completed	Percent completed
Code enforcement	78	78	0	100
Communication	25	25	0	100
City manager's office	72	67	5	93
Administrative services	30	27	3	90
Parks and Recreation Department	24	21	3	88
Public Works Department	156	152	4	97
Community Development Department	54	53	1	98
Sheriff's office	12	12	0	100
Grand total	451	435	16	96

Table 2: Types of constituent relationship management contacts

Type	Count	Percentage
Question	2,522	47
Suggestion	496	9
Compliment	137	3
Complaint	2,124	39
Register	108	2
Total	5,387	100

access television station and radio programming and prepare a newsletter ten times per year, which is mailed to every address in Cupertino.

Diversity in Cupertino

Among the changes the high-tech industry has brought to Cupertino over the years is a more diverse population. Today Cupertino has a majority-minority population, with Asian Americans constituting 55.7 percent of residents. This transition has not always been a smooth one, and initially some of the longer-term residents were uncomfortable with the changes that were taking place in their community. In fact, the diversity issue spurred Cupertino's more focused efforts on citizen engagement in the late 1990s.

In 1996, the Public Dialogue Consortium, a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization, asked if it might conduct a study of Cupertino's residents and their top concerns. A surprising outcome of the study was that diversity ranked high as a concern among citizens, on a par with public safety. To help alleviate some of the growing pains associated with diversity, the city offered a two-day leadership training session for residents who wanted to tackle the diversity issue.

Participants seized the opportunity and launched the Citizens of Cupertino Cross-Cultural Consortium (5Cs). With training from the Public Dialogue Consortium, 5Cs members served as table facilitators during city discussions on diversity. The city learned that neighborhood block parties could break down barriers. The simple act of bringing residents from different backgrounds together for a social event helped reduce some of the misunderstandings people held about other cultures. Previously, organizing a block party meant working with several city departments. The city streamlined the process: Residents needed only to

Table 3: City of Cupertino constituent relationship management expenditures

Item	Cost
Initial development (includes licensing, design modification, and on-site training)	\$11,700
Annual maintenance and support (FY10)	\$13,735
Service enhancement (iPhone application, Google snippet, and version updates)	\$5,500

submit their request and the city government would coordinate arrangements with the fire, police, and park and recreation departments and provide liability insurance. Access Cupertino enables citizens to make their request online, choosing the predefined block party option on the menu.

From Block Parties to Block Leaders

Cupertino's diverse population was one of the principal attractions for Dave Knapp, who became city manager in 2000. He was particularly interested in the fact that residents had flagged diversity as an issue of concern. "Real civic engagement means the public gets involved in defining the problem as well as creating solutions," he said. He recognized the value of the block parties and, from his experience in other communities, saw a way to enhance their value with a block leaders program.

How do you get people in a community to feel responsible for each other? In Knapp's opinion, it starts at the very local level, with neighbors. The Block Leader Program represents community organizing at the neighborhood level. It offers the potential for breaking down barriers within neighborhoods, improving residents' quality of life, and creating a channel of communication between the city and neighborhoods.

In the wake of 9/11, Cupertino residents were keenly aware of the need to be proactive about emergency preparedness. At a town hall meeting after 9/11, people asked how they could get to know their neighbors better, so that they would know who to contact for help in the case of an emergency. This interest in emergency preparedness was a natural fit for the block leader concept, so the city asked people to step forward for cross-training as block leaders and for Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) preparedness. The Block Leaders Program was launched

Recruiting block leaders

The most effective means of generating interest in Cupertino's Block Leaders Program has been through current block leaders. Laura Lee, the community relations coordinator, said this applies to recruiting new block leaders as well. "People first hear about it from a block leader, and then go to the website to learn more." A section of the Cupertino website is dedicated to the program, providing a program overview and video interviews with block leaders about what prompted them to become involved in the program, the types of activities they typically arrange, how they maintain contact with their neighbors, and the changes they have seen in their neighborhood since the program was introduced. Supplementary materials include a block leader binder with information on how to introduce and manage neighborhood activities.

The Access Cupertino feature on the website, linked to the CRM program, also offers the option for sending a query about the Block Leaders Program. While the website on its own will yield only a few new leaders each year, the city recognizes that the program can't grow much more relying solely on word of mouth. Some preliminary ideas are being considered on ways to recruit more people to the program.

in 1996 with 27 citizens; it has subsequently grown to 340 people.

A block leader serves, on average, 20 to 25 homes. But there are no strict limitations about the size of the block, and so they might be as small as 5 homes or as many as 90. The city's Community Relations Department manages the Block Leaders Program, providing leaders with training, coordinating the involvement of other city departments, and letting residents know who their block leader is.

The first step a block leader might take could be as simple as compiling and distributing a list of residents' names and phone numbers, so that neighbors know how to contact each other in case of an emergency. Wearing their block leader t-shirts and name badges, block leaders go door to door in their defined community, introducing themselves and dropping off flyers. Laura Lee, Cupertino's community relations coordinator, recommends that block leaders start with a social activity they are comfortable organizing, such as a block party or a dessert party. The goal is to break the ice and bring people together for conversation.

"Your first responder is the person next door," Dave Knapp says, meaning that neighbors are on the

scene before emergency personnel can get there. Block leaders can take the lead in identifying which skills and training their neighbors have, so people can be assigned neighborhood responsibilities in the event of an earthquake, blackout, or other emergency. Block leaders also have arranged opportunities for Cupertino emergency personnel to train residents in how to conduct neighborhood drills and work through the process of contacting each other. Likewise, if a residence is burglarized, law enforcement can only show up after the fact, so preventing burglaries from taking place is primarily a neighborhood issue. As neighbors get to know each other and their normal routines, they are more likely to notice and report suspicious activity.

A city grant program offers block leaders up to \$200 for ideas that will help strengthen their communities. Block leaders have used these funds for neighborhood beautification projects and to buy tents that can serve dual purposes of providing shade during block parties and serving as a command center in an emergency.

Enhancing Communication

The city's relationship with block leaders becomes a platform for collaboration as it builds social capital and a sense of participation. Over time this interaction increases trust, access, and credibility and facilitates a more iterative dialogue than is generally possible through more formal channels. The practical benefits can be seen in frank and constructive discussions on politically charged issues, such as how to work with different cultural norms within neighborhoods or on emergency preparedness priorities.

The foundation of the relationship with block leaders is built on face-to-face interaction. For instance, the city hosts the block leaders for dinner several times a year. These gatherings primarily are an opportunity for block leaders to share ideas and techniques. But as block leaders know what is on the minds of people in their communities, these dinners also become a forum for city officials to learn more about residents' priorities. As block leaders get more familiar with City Hall, they also become more comfortable bringing issues of concern to the attention of city officials.

The Block Leaders Program also becomes a natural way for leaders to share city information with their neighbors. The city is committed to giving block leaders pertinent information about their neighborhoods, so they can let their neighbors know about building permits that have been issued, pilot programs underway, or other issues. When block leader Lola Kashyap

**Figure 1: Constituent relationship management:
The first step to greater citizen engagement**



sends out an announcement about a city issue to her block's Yahoo! group, she includes a link to the city website, so that a click gives interested citizens more information.

City officials find that the Block Leaders Program is often a stepping stone for more active engagement in civic life. Kashyap said prior to her experience in the Block Leaders Program, she had only attended one city council meeting; now she pays more attention to what is on the agenda for council and other meetings, in case it affects her neighborhood. Another block leader, Debbie Stauffer Stephens, finds that the comfort neighbors develop with each other during social gatherings makes it easier to bring them together to discuss issues related to civic life. For instance, when some community groups were developing plans for affordable housing for senior citizens, people on her block had questions. Stauffer Stephens hosted a meeting in her home that gave neighbors a chance to talk about plans with representatives of the community groups; without the relationships established through block parties and other neighborhood events, people might have been hesitant to attend a meeting among relative strangers.

About 60 percent of block leaders are also involved in the Neighborhood Watch Program. Block leaders often serve on city commissions. Some have been cooperating with the De Anza College Leadership Program, providing input in the community college's classrooms about the civic issues students are focusing on.

A Model for Other Communities

While it is not surprising that other cities are interested in Cupertino's success with the Block Leaders Program, Laura Lee notes it is more often big cities,

rather than small ones, that have come to Cupertino to learn more about it. She speculates that big cities may see a greater need to regenerate a spirit of community by investing in the basics of neighbor-to-neighbor relations.

For City Manager Knapp, the Block Leaders Program reflects his fundamental belief that people have responsibility for each other. Rather than turning to government first, many problems can be solved quickly and easily—or even prevented—by neighbors working together. When Cupertino citizens do turn to the city government for help, officials find they can be most responsive by combining the advantages of electronic tools with the benefits of person-to-person contact.

Study Methodology

The author conducted interviews with representatives of Cupertino's government between December 2009 and May 2010. A conversational interviewing technique was used to fully explore the participants' experiences and perceptions of Cupertino's CRM system citizen engagement initiatives. Interviewees reviewed the final report before publication.

ICMA thanks all the study participants for taking the time to discuss the Cupertino CRM system and citizen engagement efforts. Their contributions to the study were invaluable.

Lola Kashyap, Block Leader

Rick Kitson, Public and Environmental Affairs Director

David Knapp, City Manager

Laura Lee, Community Relations Coordinator

Debbie Stephens Stauffer, Block Leader

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.

Local governments exist to serve the needs and wants of their citizens, but determining what those needs and wants are requires engaging the community. Centralized customer service systems, such as 311 call centers or CRM systems, support community engagement efforts by giving citizens multiple, easy means for contacting their local government and providing officials with qualitative and quantitative measures of what services citizens are requesting. This report is the third case study in series that looks at and how communities are linking their 311/CRM systems to their citizen engagement efforts.

For more information about the study, contact...

(Ms.) Cory Fleming, project director
Phone: 207-854-1083
E-mail: cfleming@icma.org



777 North Capitol Street, NE
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002-4201

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