



RON GALPERIN
CONTROLLER

March 11, 2021

Honorable Eric Garcetti, Mayor
Honorable Michael Feuer, City Attorney
Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council

Re: The 411 on 311: Calling for a Customer-First Approach

Effectuated by Council motion in the 1990s, the City of Los Angeles established its 311 call center in 2002 to provide residents with easier access to government services and improve civic engagement by bringing City Hall directly to them. Its goal was to be a one-stop shop for non-emergency service requests, removing the need to navigate through dozens of individual departmental directories in order to get graffiti erased, street lights fixed, potholes filled, bulky items removed and much more. As a service organization, City leaders saw the need to take steps to achieve a superior level of customer service. By some measures, those efforts have borne fruit as system usage continues to rise. In 2020, 311 fielded a total of 1.75 million service requests and is getting more information-only requests than ever before.

But over nearly two decades, customer contact methods have matured beyond simple phone calls to multiple, integrated ways of communicating, such as via email, social media, web portal and smartphone app. Charged with operating Los Angeles' 311 call center and its customer relationship management (CRM) system, the Information Technology Agency (ITA) has worked to improve 311 over the years to keep up with industry norms. ITA developed the 311 mobile app and website to help residents submit service requests on the fly, which jointly accounted for 80% of 311's service requests in 2020, a pronounced uptick from 51% in 2016.

Despite the enhancements to 311, my current report illustrates that the program is not working as efficiently as it could; nor is it keeping up with the level of customer service provided by other large cities. Los Angeles should do more to foster collaboration between departments and adopt a forward-thinking model that prioritizes a better overall customer experience.

Customer-first approach

Undercutting its billing as a one-stop shop for neighborhood services is the City's fragmented approach to service requests. Many departments still utilize their own contact channels to accept and resolve basic service requests. For example, the Bureau of Sanitation's own call center received more than 700,000 bulky item pickup, dead animal removal and other requests in 2020 — all of

which could have been handled through 311. In some cases, 311 does not include routine service requests that should be available in the system, such as reporting parking violations and filing noise complaints. And 311 gets numerous requests that require specialized assistance beyond the program's scope, which would be better fielded by the departments themselves. All of this causes confusion, increases wait times — a lingering problem — and undermines 311's mission.

In addition, unlike the practice of other large U.S. cities, 311 in Los Angeles does not give customers estimated completion times for most service requests and cannot force departments to work with it to do so, leaving transparency and accountability by the wayside. Chicago employs a map to allow customers to view the status of recent service requests on its 311 website and app — something Los Angeles should consider to better illustrate how the City is serving them. L.A.'s 311 paradigm also fails to proactively seek customer feedback that could help departments address service delivery and request fulfillment problems.

Improvements for the future

Nearly two decades after creating the 311 call center, the City must look ahead to the next 20 years and strive to create a new plan that overhauls how the City engages with Angelenos to meet their evolving communication and customer service needs. Doing so will require overcoming institutional resistance from departments to work cooperatively and closely with 311 and achieve what other cities have. My report recommends that City policy makers should:

- Instruct ITA, with the assistance of other departments, to prepare a **citywide customer contact strategy** that re-evaluates how the City engages with its residents and the role of 311 and other department call centers. This would include a plan to centralize routine service requests with 311, migrate complex requests frequently transferred by 311 back to departments to handle first, communicate estimated service completion times to customers, solicit feedback and increase community engagement efforts to raise awareness of 311.

Additionally, as ITA has acknowledged, it will be necessary to replace the current 311 CRM system with a more flexible, capable and cost-effective system. When the City is financially able and willing to move forward, the department needs to contemplate and incorporate new business practices and technologies to ensure long-term success.

- ITA should **include customer ideas** into the design process, **use new technologies** like artificial intelligence to improve self-service and reduce program costs, and create an omnichannel contact center environment to **integrate all the different ways customers currently use 311**. Such an environment would build customer profiles based on their previous interaction history across various contact methods.

As with other City programs, the COVID-19 pandemic put extra stress on 311 with an increased volume of contacts, further highlighting the need for an improved system. I urge City leaders to adopt a strategy that puts customers first and suits Angelenos' needs now and in the decades to come.

Respectfully submitted,



RON GALPERIN
L.A. Controller

THE 411 ON 311



CALLING FOR A
CUSTOMER-FIRST
APPROACH



RON  **GALPERIN**
LA CONTROLLER

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The 411 on 311: Calling for a Customer-First Approach



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From trash pickup to pothole repairs, residents rely on their local government to provide services that improve their community, and often turn to 311 to find this information and request services. After the 311 call center was established in 2002, the customer contact industry in general has matured from a focus on call centers to a more complex contact center environment offering multiple, integrated contact channels that allow customers to move seamlessly from one contact method to another.

As the City's lead agency for 311, the Information Technology Agency (ITA) operates the 311 call center and its customer relationship management (CRM) system for managing service requests. ITA also developed the 311 mobile app and website as self-service options, which account for 39% of service requests submitted through all departmental contact channels in 2020. Moreover, the mobile app and website account for **80%** service requests received through contact channels operated by 311.

However, 311's ability to improve customer service in Los Angeles has fallen behind similar programs in other cities. **Overall, we found that the City could do more to improve inter-departmental collaboration to adopt a more customer-centric model for providing services.**

311's Incomplete Customer Service Strategy Limits Its Value

Although 311 can process many types of service requests, it competes with several other departments—which continue to maintain their own contact channels—to receive and resolve routine service requests. 311 also receives many calls for the Departments of Building and Safety and Animal Services requiring specialized assistance that it cannot handle, negatively impacting its customer service value. **Los Angeles' fragmented approach for requests impairs 311's model as a one-stop shop for the most common needs coming from its residents.** Going forward, the City should consider migrating call types for complex or specialized requests back to other departments, and moving more routine requests onto 311.

In addition, 311 and other departments do not provide estimated completion times for most service requests types. **By contrast, 311 programs in several other cities consider estimated service times essential to their commitment for transparency and accountability.** 311 could

also enhance services in the City by proactively obtaining end-to-end feedback to help other departments identify and address systemic issues with service fulfillment.

Revamping 311 Going Forward

Nearly 20 years after launching the 311 call center in 2002, the gap between its partial successes and the City's overall ambitions for improving customer service highlight the need to catch up with our peers while planning ahead for the future. Standing in 311's way is the City's culture of autonomous departments, who naturally want to own the processes, data, and resources for the services they provide. **Overcoming this challenge now requires a new plan that re-evaluates and transforms how the City engages with Angelenos to meet their needs.**

Focusing on Requests Where 311 Can Deliver the Most Value – 311 is best suited for processing high volume, low complexity service requests, especially through its mobile app. ITA and other departments should develop a migration plan and customer service strategy to move more routine requests to 311 for processing, create even more types of service requests that are currently not available through 311, and divert callers away from 311 for services that it is not equipped to handle. **In particular, expanding the number of services available through 311 would empower Angelenos with more convenient self-service options.**

Investing in Community Engagement and Expanding Access – The City has taken a sporadic, patchwork approach to marketing and outreach for 311. To match other cities who have dedicated resources to increase public awareness of its services, 311 should develop a community engagement plan to increase its outreach, expand access, and increase usability.

Measuring Service Performance and Collecting Customer Feedback – Bringing the City up to speed with providing estimated completion times for service requests will require 311 and other departments to develop protocols for establishing, communicating, and reviewing time-bound goals for as many service requests as possible. 311 should also proactively survey the City's customers, after a request has been closed, and ask them to rate the quality of services.

Lessons Learned from the 311 CRM System Project– Five years after going live in January 2016, ITA and other departments have already acknowledged the need to replace the 311 CRM system due to a variety of issues. If the City moves forward with a replacement project, ITA should adopt lessons learned from its implementation of the current system to ensure a more successful project delivery. These include a comprehensive evaluation of proposed IT solutions, better project planning and contract management to minimize delays and cost increases, and hiring consultants to provide independent assessments of project deliverables and risks.

Additional Lessons for the Future

While many of the recommendations above would put the City on par with other 311 programs, **policymakers should also consider incorporating new business practices and technologies in its strategic planning process to shape 311 for the next 20 years.**

As part a growing user experience movement to improve digital services in government, the City should incorporate user-centered design to improve the usability and ease-of-use of the 311 mobile app and website. San Antonio, Dallas, and Chicago each developed a customer engagement process to gather public input and improve its 311 digital products.

Although still a nascent technology, the contact center industry has found several applications for artificial intelligence (AI) to improve self-service for customers and reduce costs. From AI-powered recommendations to select the right service request, to chatbots and virtual agents, new contact center technologies are increasingly capable improving self-service options, and should be explored by the City and 311 in the future.

311 already offers multiple contact channels through its call center, website, and mobile app, and in the future may add more options such as virtual agent self-service and chatbots. But to create an effective customer experience, the City should consider how it can integrate these different channels to create an omnichannel environment that allows customers to seamlessly move from one touchpoint to the next.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At its best, 311 offers a “no wrong door” approach to helping residents find the right information and services that they need while improving customer service throughout the City. Realizing 311’s benefits for Los Angeles residents requires sustained leadership and support to ensure the full implementation of its customer-centric approach citywide. **Overcoming the resistance to this change from departments requires City policymakers to weigh in on a revised citywide customer contact strategy.**

City Council Recommendations

To ensure greater inter-departmental collaboration and a more coordinated approach, we recommend that the City Council consider the following:

1. **INSTRUCT ITA, with the assistance of all other related departments, to prepare and present a citywide customer contact strategy that re-evaluates how the City engages with its residents and the role of 311 and other department call centers.** At a minimum, the new strategy should include specific plans to:

- a. Identify routine requests and migrates requesters from department call centers to 311 service channels. In addition, the plan should separately identify frequently transferred requests that should be handled by department call centers instead;
- b. Identify and create more types of routine service requests for 311 that are not currently integrated with the 311 CRM system;
- c. Shift the workload, staffing, training, and funding resources for routine and specialized requests to their appropriate centers at 311 and the departments;
- d. Update service level agreements to establish, communicate, and periodically update estimated completion times for as many service requests as possible;
- e. Update service level agreements to include protocols for how 311 will gather customer feedback for closed service request and share this information with departments;
- f. Increase community engagement efforts and expand access to 311;
- g. Incorporate user-centered design, artificial intelligence, omnichannel integration, and other new technologies and practices as part of the future of 311;
- h. Implement lessons learned from the 311 CRM system project outlined below.

Department Recommendations

ITA should incorporate the lessons learned from its experience implementing the 311 CRM system and improve its practices for project planning and management, and contract management. If the City moves forward with a 311 CRM system replacement, ITA should take the following steps.

1. Conduct a deeper dive to understand stakeholder needs, and develop specific requirements that are used as part of a comprehensive evaluation of proposed IT solutions.
2. Incorporate timelines for departmental business process re-engineering into its IT project timelines.
3. Employ better contract management practices and hold vendors to agreed-upon costs.
4. Apply organizational change management practices to secure active participation and support throughout the project's lifecycle.
5. Consider hiring independent validation and verification (IV&V) and independent project oversight (IPO) services to better ensure a major IT project's successful delivery.

BACKGROUND

Cities and counties provide a vast array of services that residents rely on every day. Beyond public safety services provided by police and fire departments, local governments in general are expected to pick up trash, fill potholes, enforce municipal ordinances, and provide a host of other basic services to maintain and improve the quality of life in their jurisdiction.

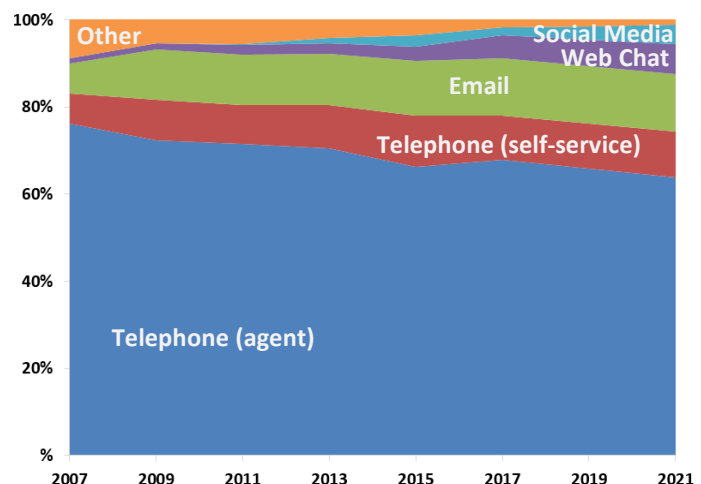
As voters and taxpayers, residents have a right to voice their concerns to local government and influence the types of services provided. By speaking with their elected officials or reporting a specific issue directly to a department, engaged residents help make their communities a better place to live. However, constituents unfamiliar with the maze of bureaucracy may have a difficult time finding the right agency to request a service. Local governments throughout the country created 311 programs to address this problem.

From its inception in the late 1990s, the immediate goal of City policymakers was to establish a 311 call center. However, the widespread adoption of the internet also presented an emerging opportunity. **To ensure that the City could evolve to match constituent preferences and meet residents where they were at, policymakers also made “e-government” a goal for its 311 initiative to make information and services available online.** Later innovations in consumer mobile technologies also paved the way for a 311 smartphone application.

Overall, City policymakers envisioned 311 as a citywide solution for improving customer service. They believed that 311 should provide Angelenos a convenient, prompt, and reliable way to access accurate information about the City, and request non-emergency services, through a single contact center that could handle requests from the public through their channel of choice: be it telephone or online.

Since then, the customer contact industry has matured from a focus on call centers to a more complex contact center environment offering multiple, integrated contact channels that allows customers to move seamlessly from one contact method to another. According to a study by ContactBabel, a consultancy specializing in the contact

Live Calls Are Steadily Being Replaced by Other Channels



Source: ContactBabel's "The Inner Circle Guide to Omnichannel (US)", 2018

center industry, live agent calls in the private sector, as a proportion of all contacts, is projected to decline from 76% in 2007 to 64% in 2021. **In its place, other contact channels have grown, especially self-service, email, web chat, and social media.** Going forward, the ability to handle different channels in an effective and integrated manner will be vital.

The Controller's Office reviewed the performance of the 311 program in 2014 and found that it operated more like a switchboard operator, with a high rate of call transfers, than a streamlined one-stop customer service center. **Although 311 has made progress since then, we found that the City could still do much more to improve inter-departmental collaboration and adopt a more customer-centric model for providing services.**

311 and the Information Technology Agency

Like 311 in other cities, Los Angeles' strategy was to create a central point of contact for the public to access non-emergency services and general information. Policymakers envisioned the City's fragmented departmental interactions with the public giving way to an integrated and convenient constituent experience. The City's plan for realizing that vision comprised of:

1. forming a citywide 311 call center;
2. consolidating all call centers across the city into 311;
3. creating a citywide system for managing service requests; and
4. adding self-service features enabled by new online technologies.

The goal behind each step was to improve customer service in various ways. Forming 311 and consolidating call centers would solve the sometimes confusing task of making routine requests with the correct entity in the City. Creating a citywide service request system with online self-service features would make it easier to submit, track, and monitor the delivery of services.

As the lead department for 311, the Information Technology Agency (ITA) operates the City's 311 call center. ITA also works with a contractor to oversee the implementation, maintenance, and support of 311's customer relationship management (CRM) system, which is used to manage service requests, host a database of general information articles about the City, and support the 311 website and mobile app for the general public.

| 311 Program Cost Categories | FY 2021 Adopted Budget (Direct Costs) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Salaries | \$3,422,396 |
| Overtime | \$59,000 |
| Contractual Services | \$460,683 |
| Communication Services | \$165,900 |
| Total | \$4,107,979 |

According to its strategic plan for 2019 to 2021, 311 factors heavily in ITA's desire to pivot towards services that directly impact the public. Given technology's pervasiveness in society,





ITA believed that it had the opportunity to extend its reach and benefit the public directly in a wider variety of areas. **As an external customer-facing organization, 311 and ITA's success therefore relies on its ability to understand and give voice to the needs and evolving preferences of Angelenos.**








But beyond 311 and other services that it operates directly for the public, ITA's main focus as an internal service organization is to support the IT needs of other departments in the City. Under this organizational framework, and without direct instructions and oversight from City policymakers, other departments can choose whether or not to work with ITA. **311's success therefore also relies on ITA's ability to influence other departments to work collaboratively with 311 to manage and fulfill service requests to meet the needs of the public.**

Information and Services Available through 311

ITA maintains the 311 website and mobile app as alternative contact channels to the 311 telephone number. Angelenos can use the 311 website and app to access a directory of over 1,200 articles to learn more about City services. In addition, residents can use the website and mobile app to submit service requests on their own. Alternatively, Angelenos can also call 311 to speak with a live agent and request the same information and services that are available online.

Requests submitted to 311 are entered into the 311 CRM system and automatically forwarded to the appropriate department for fulfillment. Departments with work order management systems integrated with the 311 CRM system also provide updates on the status of service requests. Over 60 types of services are currently available for request through 311.

| Service Categories Available for Request Through 311 | | Department Responsible for Fulfillment |
|---|---|--|
|  | Animal Related Services , such as reports of loose animals, or dead animal removals | Department of Animal Services, or the Bureau of Sanitation |
|  | Graffiti removal or issues with street lights | Office of Community Beautification or the Bureau of Street Lighting |
|  | Public Right-of-Way Issues , such as homeless encampments, illegal food vendors, and other obstructions to public spaces | The Bureaus of Sanitation, Street Services, or the Department of Water and Power |
|  | Parks , such as requests for facility and field maintenance, cleanliness issues, and others | Department of Recreation and Parks |

| Service Categories Available for Request Through 311 | | Department Responsible for Fulfillment |
|---|--|--|
|  | Private property violations , except for multi-family buildings, for code enforcement | Department of Building and Safety (LADBS) |
|  | Refuse and pickups , such as scheduling bulky item pickups or reporting illegal dumping | Bureau of Sanitation |
|  | Sanitation billing issues | Bureau of Sanitation |
|  | Schedule building permit inspections | LADBS |
|  | Street problems/repairs , such as potholes, street sweeping, and sidewalk repair | Bureau of Street Services or Bureau of Engineering |
|  | Transportation issues , such as reporting dockless electric scooters or taxicabs | Department of Transportation (LADOT) |
|  | Trees and vegetation , such as tree emergencies, or palm fronds down | Bureau of Street Services |

For certain requests not yet integrated with the 311 CRM system, such as abandoned vehicle reports for LADOT, 311 agents can also help callers submit a request through the department's website. **However, not all types of service requests in the City can be requested through 311.** Instead, 311 agents will transfer callers to other parts of the City for services that other departments have not made available online, or are not integrated with the 311 CRM system. For example, 311 must transfer callers to the Housing and Community Investment Department to handle complaints against landlords for substandard living conditions.

Further, referrals for health, housing, food, employment assistance, and other social services are generally not available through 311. Instead, residents can call 211 to get information and referrals for these services provided by Los Angeles County and other organizations within the County. 211 in Los Angeles is operated by an independent nonprofit organization and funded by grants and contracts from the County and other entities.

The Importance of Online and Mobile Contact Channels Has Grown

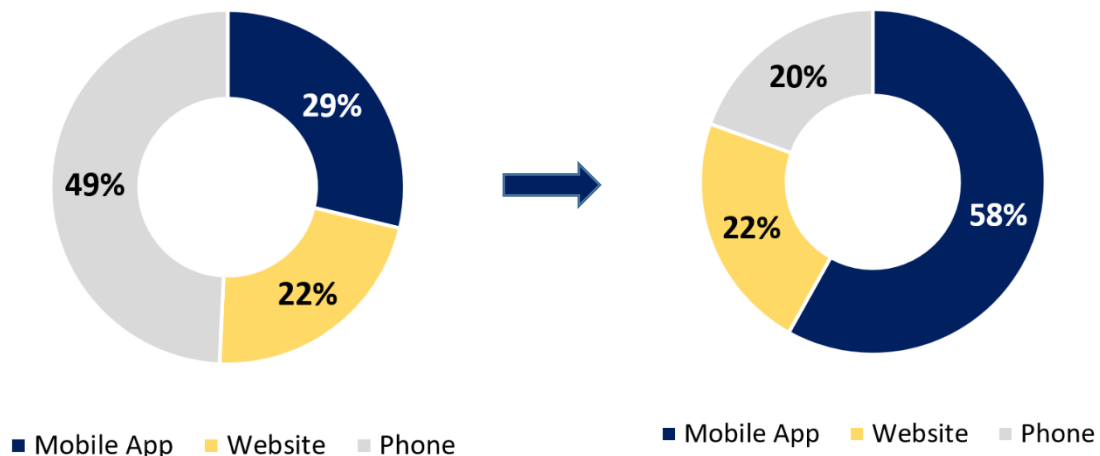
In 2020, 1.75 million service requests were created in the 311 CRM system. Call centers across the City, including those separately operated by 311 and the Bureau of Sanitation, generated half of these service requests. At the same time, the number of information only requests from callers to 311 has also increased significantly.

However, service requests submitted online, particularly through 311's self-service mobile app and website, have increased significantly between 2016 and 2020. When compared to all contact channels operated by different departments across the City, the 311 mobile app and website alone accounted for 39% of requests submitted in 2020. **When focusing on just contact channels operated by 311, requests through the mobile app and website make up 80% of requests submitted.**

Users can take advantage of their smartphone to take and upload photographs of the issue they are reporting. They can also determine the location through their phone's GPS instead of having to type an address. In addition, the 311 mobile app and website can notify users about potentially duplicate service requests that have already been submitted at the same or nearby locations. By creating a MyLA311 account, users can also receive notifications and track the progress of requests they have submitted.

Service Requests Through the 311 Mobile App Have Increased Significantly

Service Requests Created through 311 Contact Channels (Call Center, Website, and Mobile App)



311 also processes service requests it receives through email, voicemail, and other mediums. Although not significant in number, service requests through Twitter represent 311's attempt to expand its contact channels to include social media platforms.

311 during the COVID-19 Pandemic Response

As with other parts of the City, COVID-19 has presented a number of challenges for 311. Most notably, calls to 311 increased in conjunction with several surges of reported COVID-19 cases in Los Angeles. To address the pandemic information gap, the City deployed disaster service

workers to assist with COVID-19 calls. However, average wait times for 311 still increased significantly in March, June, and December 2020.

Although 311 faced staff shortages throughout the pandemic, they were relatively prepared to work from home when the Mayor issued the Safer-At-Home order in March 2020. Beginning in 2019, ITA piloted telework as a mobile workforce management strategy for 311 call agents, replacing desktop computers with laptops, and telephone lines with smartphones. 311's call center management system was also available in the cloud, allowing agents to connect with callers and managers to monitor staff from anywhere, as long as they had an internet connection.

Customer Service Programs in other Cities

Beginning in Baltimore in 1996, other local governments throughout the country established 311 call centers, to provide information and receive service requests. Over time, the vision for 311, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, expanded to include measuring performance and collecting constituent feedback on services provided by departments. **By doing so, 311 programs can improve overall customer service by increasing transparency and accountability.**

The following cities were chosen as peers to Los Angeles based on comparable population sizes, scale of operations, and their responsiveness to annual surveys from 2017 to 2020 conducted by CS Week 311, an industry group for 311 programs throughout the country.

| Jurisdiction | Population | Annual Calls Received | Service Requests Received Through: | | |
|------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------|------------|
| | | | Call | Website | Mobile App |
| New York City | 8,336,817 | 20,949,993 | 2,052,033 | 781,953 | 315,485 |
| Los Angeles | 3,979,576 | 1,186,346 | 148,254 | 170,413 | 442,899 |
| Chicago | 2,693,976 | 3,000,000 | 1,071,353 | 557,324 | 114,251 |
| Houston | 2,320,268 | 1,635,940 | 321,176 | 24,122 | 22,606 |
| Philadelphia | 1,584,064 | 989,395 | 144,914 | 135,540 | 79,606 |
| San Antonio | 1,547,253 | 837,084 | 362,014 | 68,370 | 35,697 |
| Dallas | 1,343,573 | 2,818,588 | 311,023 | 51,719 | 52,193 |
| Charlotte/Mecklenberg County | 1,110,356 | 1,600,000 | 409,173 | 638,236 | 1,224 |
| San Francisco | 881,549 | 980,000 | 252,513 | 113,793 | 374,726 |

Source: Population data based on Census Bureau estimates for 2019. Other metrics for cities other than Los Angeles cities are based on the most recently available, unverified responses to the survey by CS Week 311.

The following section details the current condition of the City's 311 program. **Later in this report, we discuss how improvements in these areas should be part of a larger effort to reevaluate 311's role for improving customer service throughout the City.**

I. 311'S INCOMPLETE CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

When compared to the City's original plan for 311, it has achieved some successes. Among those, the City can count establishing the 311 call center, implementing the CRM system for managing service requests, and creating self-service options through the 311 website and mobile app. **Now that 311 offers multiple channels for receiving service requests through its mobile app, call center, and website, the opportunities for increasing resident access and participation are even greater.**

However, after the City did not follow through with call center consolidation, it did not develop an alternative plan to direct the most common requests through 311 to process. Meanwhile, ITA's lack of authority also prevents it from providing estimated time frames to complete a request and collecting customer feedback in ways that would improve the services of other departments. **The combined effects of this incomplete strategy significantly diminish 311's potential benefits.**

Many Common Service Requests in the City Are Not Routed Through 311

311 delivers its greatest value when it effectively and efficiently acts as the service requests entry point for other departments. This is true for issues like reports of street light outages and graffiti, where 96% and 99% of requests flow through 311, of which more than 82% came through the self-service website and mobile app.

However, the City has not effectively routed to 311 as many routine requests as possible that are within its general scope. For example, Sanitation's call center befittingly provides special account services to its billed customers for trash services. **Despite this, Sanitation's call center also received 702,524 requests in 2020 for bulky item pickups, dead animal removal, and others, comprising 52% of the service requests it handled that year.** All of these service request types could have been handled through 311 instead. In 2020, 311 processed 33% of Sanitation's service requests, the majority of which were through its mobile app and website.

In other cases, many services in Los Angeles cannot be requested through the 311 mobile app or website. Instead, Angelenos can try to call 311 for assistance, or use contact channels created by other departments to report issues—such as reports of parking violations and abandoned vehicles, fire safety issues, and noise complaints—because those departments have not integrated their service requests with 311.

Example of Service Requests Not Available through MyLA311 Mobile App or Website

| Service Request Types | Telephone Number | Live Agent Availability | Responsible Department |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Parking violations | 213-485-4184 or | 24/7 | Transportation |
| Traffic signs/signal issues | 818-374-4823 | | |
| Abandoned vehicles | 800-ABANDON | Weekdays, 8-5 | |
| Broken parking meters | 877-215-3958 | Weekdays, 8-5 | Housing |
| Tenant housing complaints | 866-557-RENT | Weekdays, 8:30-4:30 | |
| Noise complaints | 877-ASK-LAPD | 24/7 | |
| Water or power outages | 800-DIAL-DWP | 24/7 | Water and Power |

311 programs in other cities had consolidated more service request types, allowing residents to submit the request types listed above through their channel of choice. **Los Angeles' approach for handling routine requests—overlapping in some cases, while siloed in others—impairs 311's model as a one-stop shop for the most common needs coming from its residents.**

311 Does Not Provide Estimated Completion Times for Most Request Types

The City's original plan for 311 also envisioned providing constituents with the estimated time to complete service requests. However, 311 and other departments still have not implemented what should be a standard approach across all applicable types of service requests. **Although the 311 director agrees that estimated service times should be provided, several departments we spoke to were hesitant to provide estimated completion times, and were concerned that doing so would create unreasonable expectations from the public.**

Many Types of 311 Service Requests Do Not Provide Estimated Completion Times

MyLA
311
HOME
REPORTS
MY SRs
CITY SERVICE DIRECTORY
SEARCH SRs
+ CREATE SR

Dead Animal Removal

Thank you for submitting this service request.
Service Request # **1-1712975531**
The Dead Animal Removal(s) will be removed within 24 hrs of received request.

ADDITIONAL SERVICE REQUEST AT SAME ADDRESS/LOCATION
NEW REQUEST AT NEW ADDRESS/LOCATION

MyLA
311
HOME
REPORTS
MY SRs
CITY SERVICE DIRECTORY
SEARCH SRs
+ CREATE SR

Graffiti Removal

Thank you for submitting this service request.
Service Request # **1-1712978121**

ADDITIONAL SERVICE REQUEST AT SAME ADDRESS/LOCATION
NEW REQUEST AT NEW ADDRESS/LOCATION

By contrast, most 311 programs in other cities considered estimated completion times as an essential component of their city's service commitment. Departments in other cities were responsible for establishing estimated completion times, while 311 was responsible for communicating that to the public. 311 programs in other cities believed that estimated completion times help to set reasonable expectations while creating more accountability.

311 in Other Cities are More Transparent about Estimated Completion Times

New Service Request

Sign Repair Request - Stop Sign

Report damaged or missing "Stop" signs. If "Stop" sign has graffiti, use Sign Repair - All Other Signs.

Service Level Agreement

Typically completed in about 1 days.

Parking Report a Violation

Use this request to report parking violations on the public street. Please use block numbers when entering vehicle location (i.e. 1300 Main). The estimated response time (ERT) for this service request is 4 hours.

Servicing Department:
Transportation

Service Resolution Estimate:
2 Business Days

101004427779 - Closed

Fire Code Complaint

2704 NAVIGATION, HOUSTON TX 77003

DATE ISSUED 12/3/2020, 11:45 AM

LAST UPDATED 12/7/2020, 5:02 PM

DUE DATE 12/9/2020, 5:45 PM

CLOSED DATE 12/4/2020, 5:41 AM

HFD Houston Fire Department

DIVISION Fire Prevention

SERVICE AREA NE

COUNCIL DISTRICT H

KEY MAP 494N

Street or Sidewalk Cleaning

Expected Response Time

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Transit Shelter/Platform | 3 calendar day(s) |
| Electronics/Appliance | 4 business hour(s) |
| Furniture | 4 business hour(s) |

Your Service Request was submitted. If you provided an email address, you will get a confirmation email. The Department of Environmental Protection will respond within 2 days of getting your complaint. Please note your Service Request number for future reference.

SR Number
311-04808703

Problem Detail
Fire Hydrant Running

Time to Next Update
2 Days

Sources—from top left to bottom right: Chicago 311 mobile app, Dallas 311 mobile app, Houston 311 website, San Francisco 311 website, New York City 311 website.

Other cities also use estimated completion times as way to monitor performance. Routing requests through 311 means that its receipt and closure are recorded in one system, rather than many systems belonging to different departments. **Comparing estimated to actual completion times using the 311 CRM system's database of requests would offer a powerful performance measurement tool for managers and policymakers alike.** 311 in New York City, San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, Chicago, and Philadelphia all reported using estimated service times as a benchmark for measuring the timeliness of service performance.

In a customer-driven business world of real-time status updates and 2-day delivery promises, providing estimated service times should be a common practice for services requested through 311 in Los Angeles. However, managing the reluctance by some departments to provide estimated service times is outside of 311's authority and is a cause that requires support and sponsorship from City policymakers.

311 Could Do More to Obtain Customer Feedback and Improve Service

Vital to 311's success as a customer-facing organization is its ability to solicit, gather, and evaluate customer feedback to improve the City's services. Although 311's telephone survey shows that respondents are generally satisfied with the service provided by 311 call agents, it should take additional steps to obtain more feedback on how well service fulfillment departments are completing requests.

Currently, 311 passively receives written feedback on service requests through the website and mobile app or as caller comments, which it forwards to the appropriate department to respond. However, 311 only received 3,187 feedback comments between 2016 and 2020, a relatively low response rate for the 3.3 million requests it received through the call center, website, and mobile app. According to the 311 Director, the most common complaints that agents receive are about incomplete or incorrectly closed service requests.

Proactively obtaining end-to-end feedback on the customer's journey—from service intake to service closure—would greatly enhance the City's ability to improve service fulfillment.

However, without explicit authority from City policymakers, the 311 Director believed that other departments would resist allowing 311 to take on this expanded role.

311 Answers Many Calls That It Is Not Equipped to Handle

Although no longer reflective of its multichannel operations, 311's previous branding as "One Call to City Hall" encapsulates its goal to address as many routine requests as possible, without the need to transfer callers. However, 311 receives many calls that it is not equipped to handle, negatively impacting its ability to resolve customer needs the first time they call. **Acting as the first tier call center for issues it cannot resolve forces 311 to transfer over 40% of calls answered to other parts of Los Angeles city government.** This stands in sharp contrast to other cities in our comparison that only transfer between 5% and 20% of their 311 calls.

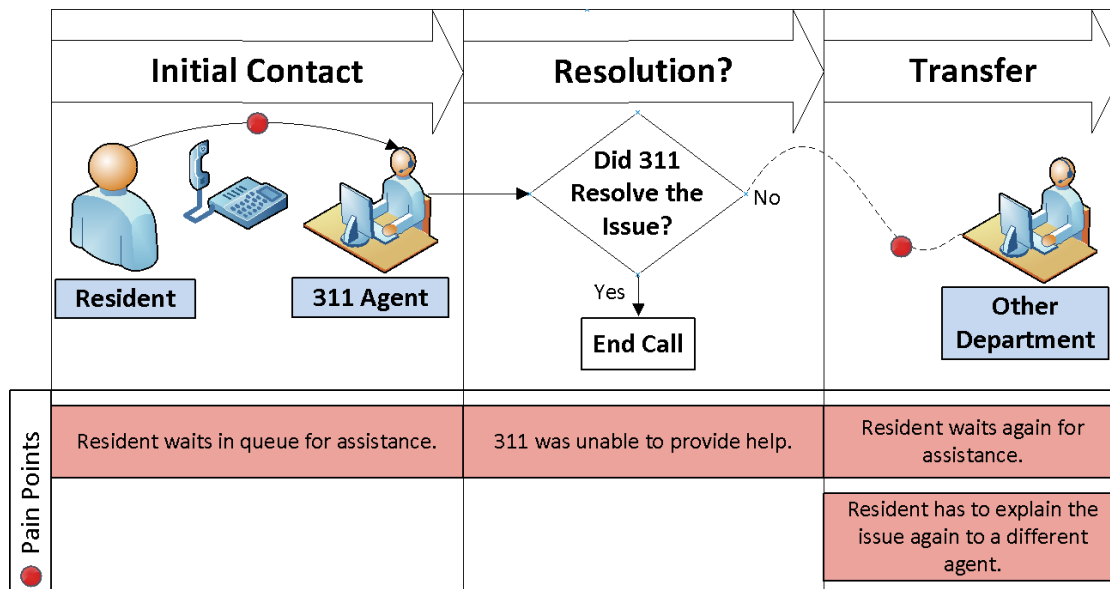
311's inability to assist many callers stems largely from the way City departments direct their call volume. All public calls for LADBS and non-emergency calls for the Department of Animal Services are first routed through 311, even though it is unable to provide specialized assistance. **For example, 311 agents receive and transfer over 70% of calls related to questions about zoning, building codes, and permits that only LADBS staff can answer.**

311 also receives calls for issues that it is not empowered to resolve. For instance, many Angelenos naturally call 311 for non-emergency matters, including for issues that do not require an immediate public safety response. However, LAPD maintains its own separate telephone line to handle its non-emergency requests, including for noise complaints and other

routine requests. If noise complaints and other routine requests throughout the City were available through 311, Angelenos and 311 agents alike would be empowered to submit these for departments for handling.

Compounding the issue is the fact that callers waiting to speak with a 311 agent may face additional holds if they are transferred to another department to resolve their issue. Because callers must often wait before speaking with an agent, every call that 311 transfers is an unnecessary call that also increases average wait times. In 2019, wait times for 311 in Los Angeles averaged 3.3 minutes, including time callers spent waiting for a call back. By comparison, this is higher than many of its peers whose average wait time ranges between 10 seconds and 2.8 minutes.

Extended Wait Times and Transfers are Significant Pain Points for Callers to 311



II. REVAMPING 311 GOING FORWARD

Although City policymakers in the late 1990's could not have predicted all of the internet's present-day impacts, they had the foresight to incorporate "e-government" concepts as part of their goals for a more forward-thinking and customer-centric 311 initiative. That vision eventually led to the implementation of the 311 CRM system, mobile app, and website.

Yet, nearly 20 years after launching the 311 call center in 2002, the gap between its partial successes and the City's overall ambitions for improving customer service highlight the need to catch up with our peers while planning ahead for the future. This is especially true with

evolving expectations from constituents, and with the advent of nascent technologies that once again hold the potential to transform how we interact.

But even if 311 were to implement new technologies, it cannot act alone. 311's success is closely tied with its ability to garner support and participation across the City. **However, fully implementing 311 or any other cross-departmental endeavor in the City is difficult in an environment of autonomous departments, who naturally want to own the processes, data, and resources for the services they provide, from beginning to end.** Realizing 311's benefits as a shared-services model requires deep inter-departmental collaboration, and a strong commitment to follow through with its implementation across the City.

Resolving the challenge of improving the City's customer service for the next 20 years requires a new plan that re-evaluates and transforms how the City engages with Angelenos to meet their needs. Moreover, the new plan should also emphasize the ease-of-use, transparency, and accountability that is gained by treating 311 as not just a call center, but as a common customer service platform for disseminating information, taking in requests, and evaluating services provided by the City.

Focusing on Requests Where 311 Can Deliver the Most Value

311 is best suited for processing high volume, low complexity requests: offering access to many services that are relevant for most residents. However, 311 still competes with the Bureau of Sanitation and other departments to take in requests from the public.

| Responsible Department | Number of Requests in 2020 | Percentage of Requests Received Through: | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|-------|-------------------------------|
| | | Own Department | 311 | Council and Other Departments |
| Bureau of Sanitation | 1,355,436 | 67.1% | 32.6% | 0.3% |
| Bureau of Street Services | 126,740 | 29.1% | 68.9% | 2.0% |
| Office of Community Beautification (Graffiti) | 125,682 | 0.4% | 99.4% | 0.2% |
| Bureau of Street Lighting | 16,785 | 2.7% | 96.3% | 1.1% |

ITA, Sanitation, and other departments should develop a migration plan to move more requests to 311 for processing, especially to self-service options like the mobile app. The migration plan should cover changes to public messaging, education, and outreach that encourages residents to use 311 and its mobile app. Doing so would result in more reports from residents being processed efficiently, and would allow the call centers operated by Sanitation and Street Services to focus on more specialized requests.

ITA and other departments should also create more types of routine service requests that are not currently integrated with the 311 CRM system. This is especially true for requests fulfilled by the LA Department of Transportation. Residents frequently report parking violations, abandoned vehicles, and issues with traffic signs and signals through the 311 mobile app's uncategorized "Other" service request, which must be manually reviewed and forwarded to the correct department. **Expanding the number of services available through 311 would empower Angelenos with more convenient self-service options and automatically route requests to the appropriate department.**

To focus on better assisting Los Angeles residents, ITA and other departments should identify the types of requests currently flowing through 311 that require specialized technical assistance. This is especially true for LADBS and Animal Services, for whom 311 acts as a first tier call center for all their calls. The inability to distinguish appropriate requests that are within its scope, from inquiries where it does not add value, results in the need for 311 agents to triage and transfer over 40% of its calls to other parts of the City.

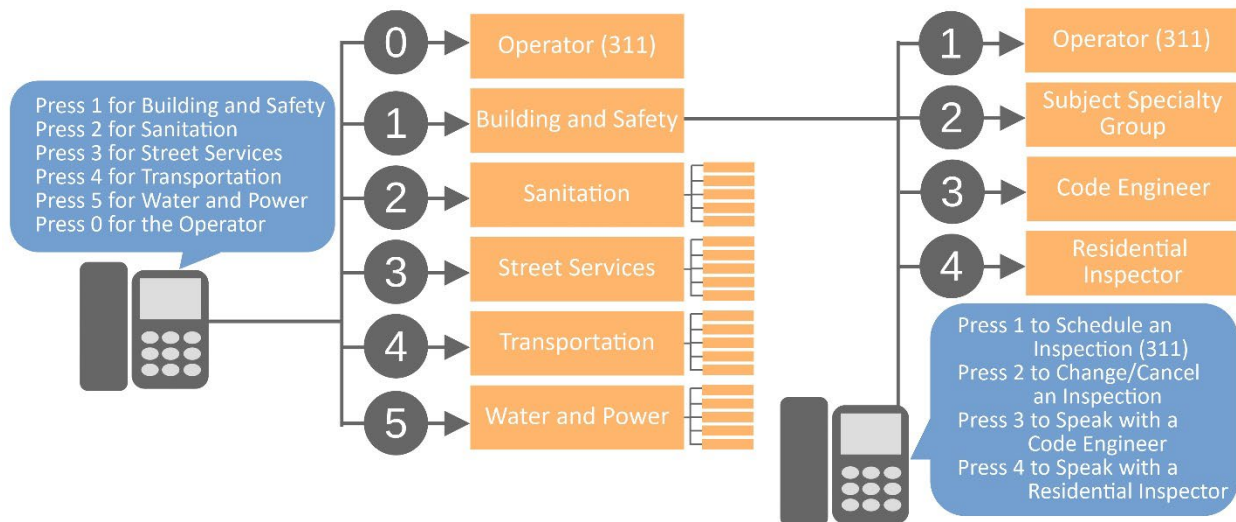
Once these frequently transferred calls are identified, 311 and other departments should develop a customer care strategy that (1) provides call handling protocols and enhanced training to empower 311 agents to assist callers, or (2) diverts callers away from 311 and directly to their ultimate destination. **Giving callers the option to speak directly with the department for issues that 311 cannot resolve would significantly reduce 311's call volume.** For example, while it currently transfers about 40% of its calls handled, 311 could reduce its call volume by 21% if it focused on the top five most frequently transferred call types and found ways to more quickly route callers to their main destination.

Top 5 Destinations For Callers Transferred by 311 in 2019 and 2020

| Destination | Main Reasons for Calling | Calls Transferred |
|--|---|-------------------|
| Animal Services Shelter | Pet adoption inquiries | 8.1% |
| Subject Specialty Group (LADBS) | Reschedule or cancel an inspection, obtain the inspector's arrival time, or check on an application | 7.9% |
| Code Engineer (LADBS) | Technical inquiries for code engineers at LADBS, such as zoning issues | 2.5% |
| Residential Code Inspector (LADBS) | Technical inquiries for residential code inspectors, such as code and permit issues | 1.5% |
| 877-ASK-LAPD | To request non-emergency police services, such as reporting a stolen vehicle or noise | 1.2% |
| Calls Transferred, as a Percentage of All Calls Handled | | 21.2% |

One option 311 should explore is expanding its touch-tone telephone menu. Callers to 311 already have several self-service options to transfer themselves to other departments. Adding more self-service transfer options for calls that are frequently transferred by 311 agents would reduce the number of calls for 311 to answer, wait times for other 311 callers, and the number of transfers and wait times experienced by callers waiting to speak with other departments.

311 Should Consider Giving Callers More Self-Service Options to Route Themselves



City policymakers should also consider a better way to fund 311's operations, which currently relies on allocations from special funds used mainly by LADBS and the Bureau of Sanitation. The allocation amount from each fund based on the proportion of calls that 311 answers on their behalf, including transferred calls.

| Funding Source | Funding Allocated From | FY 2021 Adopted Budget for 311's Direct Costs |
|--|------------------------|---|
| Telecommunication Development Account | ITA | \$1,859,647 |
| Building and Safety Building Permit Fund | LADBS | \$1,459,530 |
| Solid Waste Resources Revenue Fund | Bureau of Sanitation | \$753,594 |
| Sewer Construction and Maintenance Fund | Bureau of Sanitation | \$35,208 |
| Total | | \$4,107,979 |

The current funding model is especially challenging for issues handled by LADBS, for which all calls are first routed through 311 as the first tier call center. **The City should not fund 311 as a first tier call center to screen calls for LADBS or other departments, particularly for issues where it cannot add value.**

As 311 progressively takes on more routine requests for other departments, while diverting away calls that it cannot resolve, City policymakers will need to consider realigning funding staffing needs, and other resources to match 311's new workload.

Investing in Community Engagement and Expanding Access

Although users submit more requests through the mobile app than through 311's other channels, 311 still suffers from a lack of public awareness of its available services. To ensure that more Angelenos are aware its services and engage with the City to report issues, 311 should develop a community engagement plan.

Currently, the City has taken a sporadic, patchwork approach to advertising for 311. ITA uses social media and the City's public access television channel to reach out to residents about 311, and goes to several community events when requested. In addition, the City has recently done the following:

- 311 street banner campaign in Council District 9 from October 2019 to October 2020;
- proposed a public awareness campaign in Council District 6 to encourage residents to call 311 or use the mobile app to request bulky item pickups and report illegal dumping;
- proposed translation of the 311 mobile app into Spanish and other languages, pending Council action on ITA's proposal;
- \$30,000 in one-time funding from the Board of Public Works in FY 2018 for marketing and outreach for the 311 call center and mobile app.

Other cities in our review have dedicated resources for marketing and outreach within 311. For example, Charlotte's 311 program has a speaker's bureau program that rotates call agents to go out to the community and provide information and answer questions about 311. According to Charlotte's 311 Division Manager, the speaker's bureau attended 53 events in 2019 including a variety of events organized by the community and the city. Although Los Angeles' 311 Director estimates that they attended a dozen or so public and community-requested events in 2019, the vast majority of their time and resources are dedicated to the call center's operations.

Dallas' 311 program also sends speakers out into the community but takes it one step further. It also operates a specially equipped van, called "City Hall on the Go," to bring 311 services into the city's neighborhoods. Dallas' mobile van provides a variety of services in-person, giving residents the ability to pay water bills or parking violations, request city services through 311, obtain garage sale permits, and more.

311 should also consider partnering with 211 in Los Angeles to coordinate their public messaging. Both share similar telephone numbers but act as central points of contact for different sets of services—311 for municipal services and 211 for social services. Banners on the

website and mobile app, and as part of future public awareness campaigns can help residents make the right call by distinguishing between the services offered by 311 and 211.

Measuring Service Performance and Collecting Customer Feedback

Transparency and accountability should be hallmarks of a new citywide customer service strategy, with 311's role as a coordinator for improving how the City provides services. In line with these values, the first steps in this new multi-pronged approach should be to (1) develop estimated completion times for service requests; and (2) create a plan to proactively collect customer feedback.

311 in other cities often refer to estimated completion times as service level agreements (SLA) with their partnering fulfillment departments. Although Los Angeles' 311 has signed SLAs with most departments, the agreements are of minor consequence because they do not include time-bound goals for service requests. Instead, 311's current SLAs asks signatory departments to assign content writers and editors to publish information articles for the citywide services directory, which 311's call agents reference when providing information to the public.

More concerning is the fact that the Bureaus of Sanitation and Street Services have not signed an SLA, even though they fulfill 72% of service requests that were submitted through the 311 call center, website, and mobile app. While the lack of a signed SLA does not prohibit 311 from working with Sanitation or others, it reflects the reluctance from departments for joining the 311 platform and its customer-oriented way of managing service requests.

Bringing the City up to speed on this standard approach for communicating and managing service requests will require departments to work with 311 to develop a new framework that includes protocols for:

- establishing time-bound goals for as many service requests as possible;
- communicating these goals as estimated completion times to requesters; and
- periodically reviewing service performance against these benchmarks, and decreasing the estimated time it takes to complete a service request if warranted.

To establish estimated completion times, 311 and its partnering fulfillment departments could start with time-bound performance metrics that are already available internally or in the City's budgeting process. Another way to create reasonable estimates for services times is to use existing 311 service data. For each service request type, 311 and other departments can determine the amount of time required to close a request ticket, rank them from quickest to slowest to close, and calculate the number of days it takes to close 80% of the quickest request tickets.

| Selected Service Request Types from 311 | No. of Requests Opened from 2016 to 2019 | No. of Days to Close 80% of Service Requests |
|---|--|--|
| Bulky Item Pickup | 2,086,202 | 5.8 |
| Graffiti Removal | 1,286,974 | 6.9 |
| Illegal Dumping | 356,463 | 6.9 |
| Homeless Encampment | 135,857 | 68.5 |
| Pothole Repair | 109,952 | 7.7 |
| Dead Animal Removal | 99,921 | 0.8 |
| Tree Emergency | 55,568 | 3.1 |
| Single Streetlight Issue | 44,823 | 19.5 |
| Animals Loose | 1,343 | 1.0 |
| Park Fields/Buildings/Repairs | 1,052 | 239.0 |
| Dockless Mobility Enforcement | 11,213 | 0.1 |

The new SLAs with departments should also create a framework that describes 311's role to proactively seek direct input from the City's customers. 311 could start by following San Antonio and others and emailing a survey to customers at request closure. Doing so could generate a higher response rate than 311's currently passive method for collecting feedback.

The survey sent by 311 could ask customers to rate the quality of the service provided, their satisfaction with how the City handled their request, and allow for open comments to explain their ratings such as an issue that persists even after the request was closed. **By using surveys and other research methods to listen to the experiences, information, and insights offered by residents, the City could vastly improve its operations.**

Lessons Learned from the Implementation of the 311 CRM System

Five years after its public go-live in January 2016, ITA and other departments using the 311 CRM system have already acknowledged the need for a replacement, and have cited the following as some of their greatest frustrations:

- significant system slowdowns and downtimes that impact the system's usability;
- limited reporting capabilities;
- server hardware that has already reached the end of its useful life;
- complex system customizations resulting in high development costs; and
- high ongoing costs for maintenance and system support.

However, the City's presently dire fiscal situation makes it difficult to envision paying for a replacement system at this time. **Still, problems with the current system's procurement and project management provide important lessons to learn before the City begins to search for a new IT system to manage service requests.**

| Lesson Learned | Issues during the 311 CRM System Project |
|---|--|
| Comprehensively evaluate proposed IT solutions as part of the procurement process | The CRM software and system integration vendor used for the project were driven by lawsuits against the City, instead of an evaluation of the product's features or the contractor's ability. |
| Conduct a deeper dive to understand stakeholder needs and ensure that vendors can meet City requirements | The project moved forward without a deep understanding of stakeholder needs for the new 311 CRM system. Under normal circumstances, these needs would have been translated into specific functional, technical, and performance requirements against which potential suppliers would be evaluated. |
| Incorporate business process re-engineering for more realistic project timelines | The project plan did not account for business process changes that would be needed to integrate service requests with 311. Initially conceived with two-year timeline, the project is still pending integration with many of LADOT's service requests. |
| Employ better contract management practices and hold vendors accountable to agreed costs | The integration vendor's contract was structured around fixed payments for specific milestone deliverables, giving the City a powerful tool to manage its contractor. However, ITA still agreed to a contract amendment that resulted in paying more for some of the same milestone deliverables from the original contract. |
| Consider hiring independent validation and verification (IV&V) services | The project incurred additional costs to add some features and functionality that should have been included during the project's development. IV&V consultants can assist by providing independent technical oversight to ensure that a project will deliver the functionality required. |
| Apply organizational change management practices to secure active participation and support throughout the project's lifecycle | Project delays were also exacerbated by a lack of motivation, will, and interest among other departments to prioritize their participation in the project. However, managing the business and organizational changes that result from integrating service requests with 311 requires buy-in from all stakeholders. |
| Consider hiring independent project oversight (IPO) services | Without mitigating measures, ITA's reliance on departmental participation was a substantial liability to the project's timely completion. IPO consultants can assist by evaluating project management and project health, and warn project sponsors about significant risks so that they can take early action. |

III. ADDITIONAL LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

While many of the recommendations above to revamp 311 would put the City on par with other 311 programs, policymakers also have the opportunity to plan for the future. Incorporating new business practices and technologies, some of which are discussed below, should be part of the City's strategic planning process to influence 311 and customer engagement for the next 20 years.

Incorporating User-Centered Design to Improve 311's Constituent Experience

If the City moves forward with a CRM system replacement project, it would also benefit by incorporating input from 311's most important stakeholders: the residents of Los Angeles. User-centered design is part of a growing user experience movement to improve digital services in government by incorporating user input. **User experience best practices involves evaluating user interactions with the design and content of a digital product to improve its usability, including how easily new users can learn to use a service, and how quickly and efficiently experienced users can accomplish tasks.**

ITA reported some efforts to incorporate user-centered design into the current 311 website and mobile phone app. However, ITA also reported some resistance from the departments because of the impact that simplifying service request intake could have on how they fulfilled services.

As part of their recent CRM system replacements and upgrades, San Antonio, Dallas, and Chicago each hired consultants to develop a customer engagement process that gathered the public's input on how to improve 311. **As a result, each city made changes to their 311 programs to better meet the needs of their constituents.** For example, key findings from San Antonio's user design study resulted in changes to its 311 service request forms, such as visual aids, to make them easier to use.

San Antonio Redesigned 311 Request Forms to Incorporate User-Friendly Visual Aids

The image shows a screenshot of a web form for reporting aggressive or stray animals. It is divided into two main sections: 'Animal Description' and 'Estimating Animal Size'.

Animal Description:

- Type of animal:** Radio buttons for Cat, Dog (selected), Fowl, Livestock, and Other.
- Size:** Radio buttons for Small, Medium (selected), Large, and XL.

Estimating Animal Size:

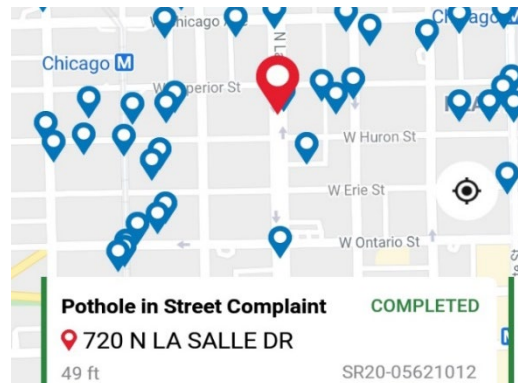
This section features a height chart with a scale from 30cm (12") to 183cm (72"). To the right of the scale are illustrations of four dog breeds (Small, Medium, Large, XLarge) and two human figures (a woman and a man) for size comparison. The dog breeds are labeled 'Small', 'Medium', 'Large', and 'XLarge' at the bottom.

Source: San Antonio's 311 Website for Reporting Aggressive/Stray Animals

Through focus groups, online forums, and discussions, Chicago's 311 Department learned that its residents wanted to see how quickly the city was completing the service requests submitted in their neighborhood. As a result, Chicago implemented a map explorer feature as part of its 311 CRM replacement project that completed in 2020. **The map explorer allows residents to view live, updated statuses of recent service requests across Chicago on their 311 website and mobile phone app.** Although Los Angeles' 311

website and mobile app can detect potentially duplicate services when users submit a report, a live map of recently submitted requests would give Angelenos better insight on how the City is working for them.

Chicago Residents Can Easily View the Status of Recent Service Requests



Source: Chicago 311 Mobile App

Implementing Artificial Intelligence Can Enhance 311

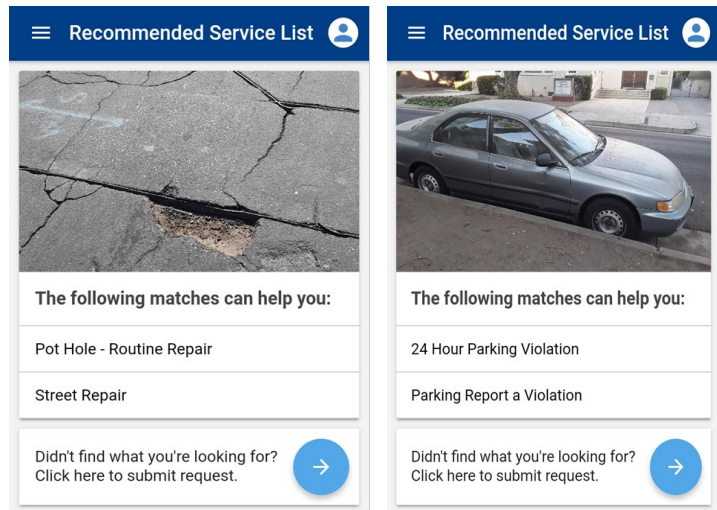
Although still a nascent technology, the contact center industry has found several applications for artificial intelligence (AI) to improve self-service for customers and reduce costs. Other cities have adopted these industry practices in various ways to improve 311's operations and ease of use for constituents.

New York City's 311 program employs an interactive voice response (IVR) system with speech recognition to capture the caller's spoken request and determine their intent to provide information or route the caller to the appropriate agency. **By using its IVR system with speech recognition to handle many types of simple requests, NYC 311 was able improve agent availability by 25%.** Dallas 311 has also deployed a similar IVR system with natural language understanding. According to the Los Angeles' 311 Director, ITA also plans to add virtual agent capabilities in the near future as part of its telephone greeting system and website chatbot.

Artificial intelligence (AI) promises to improve natural language understanding technology even further. In Illinois, a deluge of COVID-19 related phone calls and web inquiries unemployment benefits flooded its Department of Employment Security. To address this problem, Illinois deployed AI-powered conversational virtual agents to answer questions and help residents file unemployment claims by phone and web chat. AI-powered contact center technologies are increasingly capable of handling self-service requests with low complexity and urgency and should be explored by the City and 311.

AI's use cases also extend to making 311 more user friendly. Although San Francisco's 311 mobile app and website are most popular way for residents to submit service requests, user error caused many requests to be routed to the wrong agency. To improve 311 request routing, San Francisco used its Startup in Resident program to identify a vendor that developed an AI-based solution to identify the correct service fulfillment department. Dallas' 311 mobile app also uses AI to power an image recognition feature that recommends types of service requests based only on photos taken on a user's smartphone.

Dallas Residents Can Select from Recommended Service Request Types Based on Photos Taken With Their Phone



Source: Dallas 311 Mobile App

Evolving from a Multichannel to an Omnichannel Contact Center

311 already offers multiple contact channels through its call center, website, and mobile app, and in the future may choose to add more options such as web chat, virtual agent telephone self-service and chatbots. But to create a more effective customer experience, the City should consider how it can integrate these different channels to create an omnichannel environment that allows customers to seamlessly move from one touchpoint to the next.

Omnichannel contact center environments integrate their different contact channels to build customer profiles based on their previous interaction history across various contact methods. Using this data to create a single, unified view of the customer, agents can pull up a history of issues before connecting with the caller and provide the status of previously requested services. Integrating between contact channels also helps to ensure that customers can choose their preferred self-service contact channel, as well as escalating to a live agent if needed.

Relevant information would follow the customer across different contact methods, allowing agents to push issue histories and other information to the next agent during transfers. Having many departments across the City on the same contact center platform also creates unifying experience that would resolve many of the pain points experienced by residents that are currently being transferred between departments, such as the need to provide the issue's history and context again to the next agent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At its best, 311 is more than an easy-to-remember telephone number; it offers a “no wrong door” approach to helping residents find the right information and services that they need from their local government. Realizing 311’s benefits for the residents of Los Angeles requires sustained leadership and support to ensure its full implementation throughout the City.

Before embarking on its implementation of the 311 call center, City policymakers were warned about the “apathy and opposition” that 311 would face from other departments because of its customer-centric approach to managing service requests. **Overcoming that resistance to change then, as now, requires City policymakers to weigh in on a revised citywide customer contact strategy.**

City Council Recommendations

To ensure greater inter-departmental collaboration and a more coordinated approach, we recommend that the City Council should consider the following:

1. **INSTRUCT ITA, with the assistance of all other related departments, to prepare and present a citywide customer contact strategy that re-evaluates how the City engages with its residents and the role of 311 and other department call centers.** At a minimum, the new strategy should include specific plans to:
 - a. Identify routine requests and migrates requesters from department call centers to 311 service channels. In addition, the plan should separately identify frequently transferred requests that should be handled by department call centers instead;
 - b. Identify and create more types of routine service requests for 311 that are not currently integrated with the 311 CRM system;
 - c. Shift the workload, staffing, training, and funding resources for routine and specialized requests to their appropriate centers at 311 and the departments;
 - d. Update service level agreements to establish, communicate, and periodically update estimated completion times for as many service requests as possible;
 - e. Update service level agreements to include protocols for how 311 will gather customer feedback for closed service request and share this information with departments;
 - f. Increase community engagement efforts and expand access to 311;
 - g. Incorporate user-centered design, artificial intelligence, omnichannel integration, and other new technologies and practices as part of the future of 311;
 - h. Implement lessons learned from the 311 CRM system project outlined below.

Department Recommendations

ITA should incorporate the lessons learned from its experience implementing the 311 CRM system and improve its practices for project planning and management, and contract management. If the City moves forward with a 311 CRM system replacement, ITA should:

1. Conduct a deeper dive to understand stakeholder needs, and develop specific requirements that are used as part of a comprehensive evaluation of proposed IT solutions;
2. Incorporate timelines for departmental business process re-engineering into its IT project timelines;
3. Employ better contract management practices and hold vendors to agreed-upon costs;
4. Apply organizational change management practices to secure active participation and support throughout the project's lifecycle;
5. Consider hiring independent validation and verification (IV&V) and independent project oversight (IPO) services to better ensure a major IT project's successful delivery.