

The Philly311 Project: The City of Brotherly Love Turns Problems into Opportunities

CASE STUDY

Philly311 is the City of Philadelphia government's centralized non-emergency contact center that is accessible to all residents, businesses, and visitors. Using Philly311, you can find out how to start a business, contact your local police district, obtain a smoke alarm, and issue requests for services such as fixing

broken traffic signals, repairing potholes, or removing graffiti. You can also use Philly311 to report abandoned vehicles, unsafe/improper housing conditions, and complaints. Philly311 can be contacted by phone, by visiting its website, or by using a mobile app. Philly311 receives more than a million calls each year.

Requests for service through 311 generally have expected time frames for action or resolution. After receiving a request for service, Philly311 will provide a citizen with a reference number to track the status of that request as it moves through different departments by calling the Philly311 Call Center, visiting the Philly311 website, or using the mobile app. Residents can relay photos to city officials for more effective response to service calls and receive real-time updates on their requests. The city is able to mine data from the Philly311 system to identify trends that will help city employees to discover and address the needs of citizens. Philly311 also features a Neighborhood Community portal that allows citizens to engage with fellow residents on shared concerns and interact with each other and city departments and officials directly. The system includes GPS integrative mapping so the public and city government can view service requests by location.

Philly311 has been extremely popular with citizens, earning a customer satisfaction rate of 98 percent. Moreover, Philly311 is much, much more than a traditional government call center. Residents can connect with Philly311 by telephone, e-mail, mail, a walk-in center, or the Philly Mobile App. Philly311 has also extended its service through social media. The Philly311 Facebook and Twitter accounts are managed by an experienced agent who responds to questions and enters service requests based on user interaction. Since the beginning of 2012, Philly311 has seen a 360 percent increase in its social media followers.

Philly311 started out as a traditional 311 call center. (The telephone number 3-1-1 is a special telephone number used by many communities in Canada and the United States to provide access to non-emergency municipal services.) The first version of Philly311 was designed to provide the public with quick, easy phone access to all city services and information.

When Mayor Michael A. Nutter came into office in 2007, he called for a more transparent and efficient government, increasing integrity, more open data practices, and improving government accountability. The Nutter administration wanted to empower Philadelphians and work with them on government-related issues that citizens care most about. According to Rosetta Lue, Philadelphia's Chief Customer Service Officer, the customer may always be right, but that only goes so far if the customer can't be heard. Philadelphia's citizens are its customers, and city government should use the best tools possible to make sure every citizen is connected and can be

heard loud and clear. In the past, when Philadelphians called 311 with a service request, such as a pothole they wanted fixed, they would have no idea when the city would get around to addressing it, which led to frustration for residents and repeated calls to the city.

The project timeline for upgrading Philly311 was ambitious, aiming for making the new center operational by the end of 2008. Managers Jeffrey Friedman and Patrick Morgan engaged an external consulting group to develop a plan and scope for the 311 system. In June 2008, Mayor Nutter and City Managing Director and Executive Sponsor Camille Barnett approved the implementation strategy. Lue joined the Philly311 project team in May 2008. The team worked collectively to develop civil service testing requirements for contact center agents. Thirty representatives from various city departments helped populate the Philly311 knowledge base with more than 2,000 articles about city services and municipal information.

In September 2008, the national financial crisis caused a drastic cut in Philly311's budget, affecting the Philly311 implementation. At the same time, however, the crisis created an opportunity to improvise creatively by developing a fairly low-cost solution using established city services and technologies. Instead of implementing new software for a customer relationship management (CRM) system, the Philly311 project team worked with the city's Department of Technology to implement a less expensive web-based solution with CRM functions. This web-based system was integrated with other systems so, for example, agents were able to look up municipal information and directly enter service requests into the integrated work systems of servicing departments. Philly311's new budget constraints also put a brake on hiring and head count. Instead of hiring experienced contact center agents, Philly311 hired internal transfers and employees who would have been laid off due to budget cutbacks. Delays in the implementation timetable gave Lue and her team more time to study the problem and develop a sound solution.

Lue wanted to make sure that the system would be easy for customers to use, so local citizens were involved in the new Philly311 design from the beginning. Bringing users in early in the process also saved time during system implementation and roll-out. They were able to bring together about 100 people from different city departments to say what they liked and what they didn't like about the technology and new business processes. They had a chance to

see how data were coming in, how they would be used, and how Philadelphia could be more efficient and effective.

The Philly311 project had full executive support from Mayor Nutter and the city's managing director. The upgraded call center opened on December 31, 2008, and the new Philly311 website went online in January 2009. The website had many of the same functions as the call center: customers could connect with 311, report an issue, or ask about public services through e-mail. To make Philly311 even more accessible to citizens through multiple channels, the city launched a social media campaign and expanded its public reach through social media in October 2009. Philly311 established a Twitter account that provided citizens a new way to receive information.

With a city as large as Philadelphia, which has an above-average percentage of residents living below the poverty line, city leaders realized they needed to work on establishing trust within individual communities to educate and provide access to Philly311. The city hired a community engagement coordinator to address community concerns and to oversee the Neighborhood Liaison Program (NLP), which trains volunteers to record items discussed during community meetings and encourages standout community leaders to bring their neighbors' public service concerns straight to Philly311. In the program's first year, 600 neighborhood liaisons were trained, and two years after the program's launch, the number of neighborhood liaisons had doubled.

Philly311 launched its mobile application in 2012. The app provides another way for residents to connect to Philly311, and it also allows customers to add on-site and real-time images to their service requests. The app is free to the public and can be downloaded onto a smartphone. Add-on widgets, such as a widget for election days and after-school programs, can be incorporated when needed. The mobile Philly311 app was the first 311 app to be offered in 16 different languages. This app now accounts for 18 percent of the requests Philly311 receives.

Philly311's traffic volume steadily increased, and by the end of 2012, Philly311 had taken its 5 millionth call. The popularity of the service demonstrates the tremendous benefit and popularity of the system, but it also created operational strain. In 2011, an independent gap analysis found that the existing system did not have the capacity to continue supporting Philadelphia's growing service requirements. The system was not built to handle very large volumes of data, nor could it easily archive data about citizen calls, complaints, and follow-ups.

These technology limitations prevented the city from crunching data or from changing business processes to improve workforce efficiency.

The time had come to invest in new technology to keep pace with current demands and to position the city for future technology and business developments. After months of planning, a solution was finalized: The project planning process took special care to define a detailed set of business and technical requirements for the new system. The solution selected contained several modules, allowing city management to pick and choose which features were most critical. One called the Neighborhood Community portal allows citizens to communicate with neighbors and like-minded residents about concerns and issues relevant to them. Mayor Nutter finally obtained \$120 million in funding for capital investment projects to upgrade technology infrastructure and chose Philly311 as one of those investments.

After a rigorous RFP selection process, Unisys was chosen to lead the IT implementation for this project, and Salesforce's cloud computing platform was selected as the underlying technology for the system. Unisys had implemented similar 311 systems on the Salesforce platform for Hampton, Virginia, and Elgin, Illinois. The city chose Salesforce.com in part because of its capabilities as a platform. In addition to full-featured CRM functionality, Salesforce.com has its own app store and cloud platform for building and running apps. That way, the city can leverage its investment to take advantage of other apps that work on the Salesforce platform.

The new CRM system, released in December 2014, is much more robust, integrating the city's knowledge base, service departments' work order systems, and community engagement programs in a single customer portal. The system improves the city's ability to share knowledge and work interdepartmentally and creates a social platform that facilitates conversations between neighbors and stakeholders who want to collaborate, share best practices, and organize events to improve their community. The new Philly311 helps the city capitalize on a variety of communications, including social media data, to better understand the needs of its citizen customers.

Philly311 has been widely embraced by Philadelphia residents, and has received numerous accolades. It was selected as a winner of the 2015 Government Computer News Awards for IT excellence. In 2015, Philly311 became a finalist for the United Nations' Public Service Award for demonstrating attention to its international audience, and in

2013 Philly311 was named an ICMI Global Call Center award finalist. The system has expanded its reach and has even become a resource and example for those outside of Philadelphia. Philly311 has helped build a more reliable city government and make Philadelphia a welcoming and connected city.

Sources: Rosetta Carrington Lue and Cory Fleming with Amanda V. Wagner, "Creating a Welcoming and Connected City: The Philadelphia Experience," www.phila.gov, accessed January 11, 2016; Derek Major, "Philly 311: Innovation That Was Worth the Wait," *Government Computer News*, October 15, 2015; Jake Williams, "Philadelphia Rolls Out Innovation Blueprint, 311 Upgrade," statescoop.com, February 19, 2015; City of Philadelphia, "Mayor Nutter Announces Successful Launch of New Philly 311 System,"

February 18, 2015; and Lauren Hertzler, "Philadelphia Unveils Enhanced 311 System at Innovation Summit," bizjournals.com, February 19, 2015.

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

- 14-12** Assess the importance of the Philly311 project for the city of Philadelphia and its citizens.
- 14-13** Why was the Philly311 project so successful? What management, organization, and technology factors contributed to its success?
- 14-14** What risk mitigation strategies did Philadelphia use for its Philly311 project? How did they help?