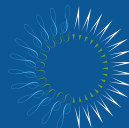




## A WORK IN PROGRESS: Philadelphia's 311 System After One Year

March 2, 2010



THE  
**PEW**  
CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Philadelphia  
Research  
Initiative

### KEY FINDINGS

In its first year of operation, Philadelphia's municipal information and service-request system, Philly311, took a significant step toward Mayor Michael Nutter's reform goal of giving all residents and businesses easier access to services and basic city information. Now anyone seeking non-emergency help is assured of reaching a receptive voice by calling 311 on the telephone, visiting the Philly311 Web site or stepping up to its City Hall counter. And all of this has cost taxpayers less than similar operations in other major cities—\$2.20 per call compared with a median of \$3.39 for all 15 cities Pew's Philadelphia Research Initiative reviewed for this report.

The administration made less progress, however, toward its related goals of delivering better services and improved government responsiveness and accountability, partly because a budget crisis prompted city officials to sharply reduce start-up funding for Philly311. The handoff of thousands of service requests—between Philly311 and the city agencies that carry out the actual tasks—was fumbled during the first year, with nearly one in four of those requests listed as overdue at year's end. For there to be marked improvement in service delivery, the city will have to improve the integration between consumer requests for service and the work-order systems of key city departments. Major cost-saving efficiencies at city agencies remain years away and require a major technological upgrade, something the administration has acknowledged.

Philadelphians who have used the service are generally happy with it. In a poll conducted in January by the Philadelphia Research Initiative, 68 percent of those who had called the number simply to get information expressed satisfaction. So did 60 percent of those who called to lodge a complaint or request a service. In addition, 77 percent said they were satisfied with the call agent with whom they spoke. Outside experts say the satisfaction numbers are good but not great for a first-year 311 system. City officials

report 89 percent satisfaction in their own calls back to 311 users.

In addition, a majority of Philadelphians like the idea of 311. Of the 1,602 individuals surveyed by the Philadelphia Research Initiative, 53 percent said they considered the 311 service "a real step forward for the city" while 28 percent said it "will not make much of a difference." On the other hand, only 15 percent of those 1,602 people said they had used the year-old service. When everyone in the survey was asked to name the city's new customer-service number, only 28 percent volunteered "311." When the number was provided, another 25 percent said they had heard of it.

The findings in this report are based on the survey as well as a review of 311 systems in Philadelphia and 14 other large localities plus interviews with experts.

A 311 contact center is sometimes called the "tip of the iceberg" of municipal-service delivery. It is a front line of customer-service agents reachable through a toll-free phone line (and often a Web site) by any resident or visitor, whether registering a complaint or looking for library hours, directory assistance, snow removal—any municipal function other than emergencies needing 911. The iceberg below the surface is the rest of the service-delivery system—the computer system integrating 311 with key city agencies, the work crews that carry out the services

**15%**

of Philadelphians  
have dialed 311

**68%**

of 311 callers were  
satisfied with the  
information they  
received

### COMPARISON CITIES

In addition to Philadelphia, 14 other localities with 311 systems serving large population areas were reviewed: Baltimore; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC; Chicago; Columbus, OH; Dallas; Denver; Detroit; Houston; Los Angeles; Miami-Dade, FL; Pittsburgh; New York; San Antonio; and San Francisco.

requested, and a mechanism for reporting what is being done back to callers, managers and elected officials. In some cases including Philadelphia, the contact center also quantifies the agencies' performance for city managers through a separate statistical analysis or "stat" process, such as PhillyStat in Philadelphia, CitiStat in Baltimore and SFStat in San Francisco.

While Philly311's goal is improving services for residents, its launch was driven largely by a backlash against perceived corruption, favoritism and bureaucratic inertia in City Hall. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter says having Philly311 means that Philadelphians no longer "need to know anybody" to get things done.

These motivations helped drive Philly311's development at a lower cost and faster pace than almost every system that the Philadelphia Research Initiative reviewed. Nutter had promised to get 311 up and running after his first year in office. And he kept that promise. But as the result of recession-driven budget cuts, the system's anticipated budget was cut by at least 60 percent before it started. The budget cuts meant scaling back or postponing key elements: Philly311 did not hire experienced call-center agents initially, and did not install the kind of software that was best able to integrate 311 with city agencies' computers and generate data for the public and city leaders to analyze. These factors contributed to some glitches, including a period when the system mishandled whole batches of housing-inspection requests. The early limitations, while perhaps inevitable in a startup, helped create a gap between expectations and reality and in turn fed criticism from users and members of City Council.

At the same time, however, Philly311 and the Managing Director's Office did appear to get their money's worth, and then some, from the available resources. Managers of the system leveraged assistance from private firms. Over time, they patched together software to emulate aspects of a full-blown 311 system. They created an easy-to-use Web site and searchable "knowledgebase" with answers

to thousands of questions, from how to report a stray dog to how to appeal a property tax bill. And the contact center had several shining moments in 2009, providing fast and easy updates for thousands of extra callers during the World Series and a transit strike in October, and snowstorms in December 2009 and February 2010. In the words of one 311 consultant for the city, Philadelphia succeeded in "getting six cents from a nickel."

Across the nation, existing 311 systems were coping with recession-related budget cuts as well. Many contact centers scaled back, including New York City's enormous operation and Detroit's small one, as did other municipal agencies on which 311 relies to change streetlights, inspect buildings and do countless other tasks. The median budget cut in the 311 contact centers the Philadelphia Research Initiative examined was 5 percent and median staff reduction was 7 percent for 2009 compared to 2008. Many contact centers eliminated Sunday and overnight hours; Philadelphia, which began as a 24/7 operation, was one of those centers. In several other cases, these changes meant higher rates of dropped, missed or lost calls, including hang-ups by frustrated customers.

On performance of the 311 contact center—the tip of the iceberg, not the whole iceberg—Philly311 started low in 2009 relative to other centers but improved significantly:

- Philly311 handled 1.1 million calls during 2009, nearly the same as the volume in 2008 to departmental phone banks that Philly311 had absorbed or supplemented. Philly311's call volume equated to 72 calls for every 100 residents, below the group median but still within the range of the other systems reviewed. Philly311 had less success than officials had hoped on diverting calls from the 911 emergency call center, which reported a reduction of just 1.4 percent in call volume in 2009, below the impact seen in other cities.
- For the year as whole, Philly311's performance was poor compared to other cities; the system ranked next-to-last among the cities studied in percentage of calls abandoned before an agent answered and next-to-last in average time waiting to speak with an agent. Much of that performance can be attributed to start-up problems. As the year progressed, the numbers improved dramatically. For example, while Philadelphia's abandoned-call rate was one in four for the year as a whole, it dropped to just one in 17 by year's end.

- Launched during a budget crisis, Philly311 initially was restricted to hiring city workers who were facing layoffs from other city departments, a situation that most other systems reviewed were not facing. The contact center replaced 53 percent of its agents in 2009.
- Philly311's fiscal year 2010 operating budget of \$2.8 million amounted to 0.08 percent of the city's general fund expenditures, one of the smallest proportions among the cities studied. The cost of outfitting City Hall office space and installing computer and telephone hardware was roughly \$4

million, less than the median capital costs in other places' startup years (adjusted for inflation).

Unquestionably, Philly311 has made it easier for residents to contact City Hall. At first, it did not reward those callers with superior or consistent service, although performance improved dramatically by the end of 2009. The system's biggest challenge still lies ahead: upgrading and better integrating the city's service-request and work-order system, as city officials initially wanted and experts recommend. The administration has acknowledged Philly311 is a work in progress with room for improvement.

## PHILADELPHIA'S PATH TO 311

On the last day of 2008, Mayor Nutter ceremonially opened Philly311 and hailed it as a concrete step toward the administration's goal of "smarter, faster, better" government through better customer service, government efficiency and accountability.<sup>1</sup>

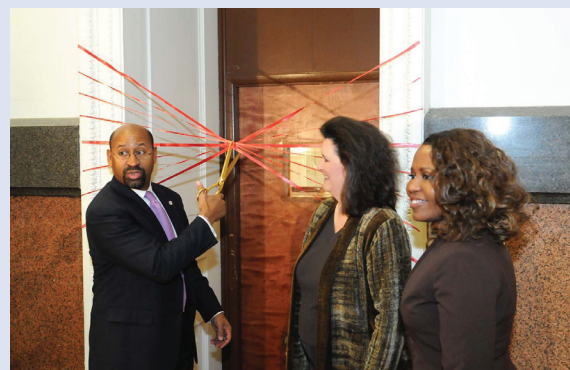
Philly311 and other contact centers around the country have their own strategies and measures of success but most were built with three functions in mind: provide a single, easy way for residents and visitors to request municipal service or information; try to make sure their requests are fulfilled; and quantify the requests and responses for use in the city's management and budget process. Requests generally are categorized as general information (i.e., when does my library branch open?), directory transfers (i.e., can you connect me to my City Council member?) and non-emergency services (i.e., my streetlight burned out).

Philly311 consists of a contact center in City Hall staffed by city employees and linked to certain agencies and the latest municipal information. Agents take requests or complaints, give answers if possible, refer to another department if unavoidable, or submit service requests if needed to the appropriate city agencies through a quasi-automated computer system. Agents take most requests by phone, but also handle queries in person and by Internet. For service queries, the system generates a "service request number," which both agents and callers can use to track the request through the bureaucracy. High on a rear wall of the contact center is an electronic board displaying, in red and yellow lights, the real-time number of callers on hold, the seconds they've been waiting, and number of agents in conversation.

Separately, Philly311 segments the thousands of queries

by type, department and City Council district, and feeds data back to agencies, Council members and the Managing Director's Office. The managing director uses the data to scrutinize agency management, a process known as PhillyStat, similar to analytical processes in other cities.<sup>2</sup> The goals of Philly311 and PhillyStat are intertwined, and Philly311 representatives participate in weekly PhillyStat sessions. In this report, however, the Philadelphia Research Initiative examined Philly311 only to the extent it enables PhillyStat, not how PhillyStat uses the data or works as billed.

The concept—give residents a direct way to request service or complain and use their feedback to make government more accountable—is not new. Under its 1951 Home



In a symbol of how he hoped Philly311 would help Philadelphians deal with the city bureaucracy, Mayor Michael Nutter snips through some "red tape" stretched across the doorway of the new contact center on Dec. 28, 2008. With him are Managing Director Camille Barnett (center) and Contact Center Director Rosetta Carrington Lue.

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia

Rule Charter, Philadelphia created the Mayor's Office of Information and Complaints to attempt to respond to individual residents' demands and needs. In 1974, Philadelphia police and fire departments created the 911 dispatch center with new telephone, computer and radio technology.<sup>3</sup> In 1985, the Mayor's Action Center—successor to the Office of Information and Complaints—began using a city-built database named "The Mayor's EAR" to record calls, assign a ticket number, print responses and generate tallies, although the rudimentary system was not fully used and was eventually discarded.<sup>4,5</sup>

In 1997, Baltimore created the nation's first 311 hotline for city government; in Philadelphia, officials under then-Mayor Edward Rendell briefly studied the concept but didn't pursue it.<sup>6</sup> In 2002 following the 9/11 attacks, Mayor John Street's administration picked up the idea again, looking for a less-expensive way to coordinate and track hundreds of tasks and to add a 311 contact center to take public requests and give information. Their plan ultimately was scaled down, and 311 was dropped due to cost. "It wasn't that we didn't care about good government, but that the circumstances just didn't allow it," recalled then-Managing Director Phil Goldsmith.<sup>7</sup>

By the 2007 mayoral election, following several high-profile city corruption cases, government reformers had latched onto 311 as an element essential to the city's future. Activists rated candidates on whether they would create a 311 system, casting it as a counterweight to what they described as the old Philadelphia—a place where getting municipal service seemed to require having the right friends,

calling a ward leader, or making a campaign contribution.<sup>8</sup> City Council members issued their own proposals for 311 in Philadelphia, one of the biggest of many U.S. cities lacking the system.<sup>9,10</sup> Private companies and groups were creating their own Web-based complaint systems, such as Philly.com's "Pothole Tracker." The existence of an unpublished VIP hotline number fueled allegations of favoritism when it was revealed in 2008.<sup>11</sup> Even the technology staff in the outgoing Street administration, sensing a new opportunity, drafted a modernization plan for the next mayor that would lay "a foundation for a complete 3-1-1 system."<sup>12</sup>

So while other localities turned to 311 largely to save money (Charlotte-Mecklenburg), relieve a burden on 911 dispatchers (Baltimore) or improve the quality of city life (New York), Philadelphia was moved largely by a backlash against public corruption—actual and perceived. Putting 311 in place became a political imperative for the administration. One of the system's chief architects, Jeff Friedman, has termed Philly311 a "VIP line for everybody."<sup>13</sup> In a late-2009 radio interview, Nutter defined Philly311 as a kind of antidote to the old ways: "You don't need to know anybody anymore to have service happen. You call 311."<sup>14</sup>

Three weeks after Nutter took office in January 2008, the new managing director, Camille Barnett, announced that Philadelphia's 311 system would be up and running by the end of 2008.<sup>15</sup> Public expectations promptly soared: a *Philadelphia Daily News* blog hailed the coming "revolution" in city services, a neighborhood activist dreamed 311 would end government waste, and a resident with a blocked driveway wrote that "311...would solve everything."<sup>16</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION

### Rough Start, Solid Finish

In January 2009, Philly311's first official month of operation, the average caller waited on hold for 1 minute, 24 seconds before hearing a live person—three times as long as the median in the other cities studied. More than one in four callers hung up before hearing an agent, double the median. For callers who got through, it took six minutes for a typical inquiry to be handled.<sup>17</sup>

Things looked very different at year's end. The average caller was waiting only 18 seconds, below the median of the other cities. Only one in 17 callers was hanging up, half the rate elsewhere. Philly311 was meeting its goal of answering 80 percent of calls within 30 seconds. As indicated

by users and surveys, agents were more knowledgeable and dealt with requests in about five and a half minutes, a little quicker than before.

Improvement at the Philly311 contact center during 2009 was real and substantial, even if the mayor's ultimate goal of making Philadelphia a "national leader in customer service" remained to be achieved.<sup>18</sup> The system had reliably handled a variety of issues including a spike in calls for information about the World Series traffic and the



▶ Listen to Philly311's recorded snowstorm response



transit strike in October. It dealt with thousands of calls during snowstorms in December 2009 and February 2010 and provided updates about snow-removal to thousands of callers with single recordings. In one unusual case, Philly311 even received an e-mail reporting a “decaying human” odor coming from an abandoned house. Its agent promptly relayed the report to police, who found a dead body.

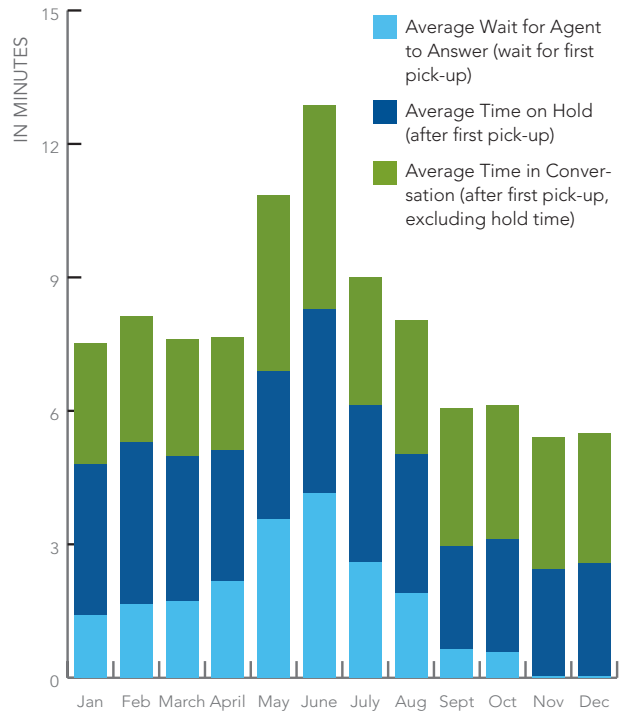
Callers appeared to notice the improvement. “It’s gotten better,” said Danielle Allen, who made dozens of requests to Philly311 as the liaison for the nonprofit organization Center City District.<sup>19</sup> Anecdotally, the *Philadelphia Daily News’* municipal-service review Web site, “City Howl,” found that comments about Philly311 had gone from being mostly negative to more balanced.<sup>20</sup> Some Philly311 users found that the real culprit was a city agency in question, not Philly311: “The woman who answered was courteous and helpful. She tried a number of ways to help me—without success—and then transferred me to a Water Department number that actually worked. At one point when she had me on hold, she actually checked back in with me to let me know that she was still working on the problem. All-in-all, a positive experience outside of the long wait,” a writer on the local blog “Young Philly Politics” wrote in April.<sup>21</sup>

At 1.1 million calls, Philly311 ended 2009 with the equivalent of 72 calls for every 100 residents, a ratio within range of most of the other cities.<sup>22</sup> (See Figure 4.) Nearly 99 percent of all inquiries came by telephone, about 1 percent in person at the Philly311 counter in City Hall Room 167, and a small fraction from e-mails or Web postings.<sup>23</sup> On average during the year, 71 percent of callers asked for general information and 19 percent were transferred or referred to another department. The transfer rate matched the group median rate; Philly311’s goal is to transfer as few calls as possible. Roughly 9 percent of callers wanted an actual service or task to be done. The top three requested services by year’s end were inspection of buildings or property, fixing streetlights and towing abandoned cars.<sup>24</sup>

One of the goals of any 311 system is to take non-emergency calls away from 911, and the Managing Director’s Office had expected a 2-to-3 percent decline in Philadelphia.<sup>25</sup> As it turned out, 911 received 1.4 percent fewer calls in 2009 than in 2008, a drop that was short of expectations. The amount of decline attributable to 311 is hard to discern; 911 volume had declined by more—3.9 percent—the previous year, before 311 existed.<sup>26</sup> Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey said he expects a bigger impact

FIGURE 1

311 CALLERS' TIME ON THE PHONE

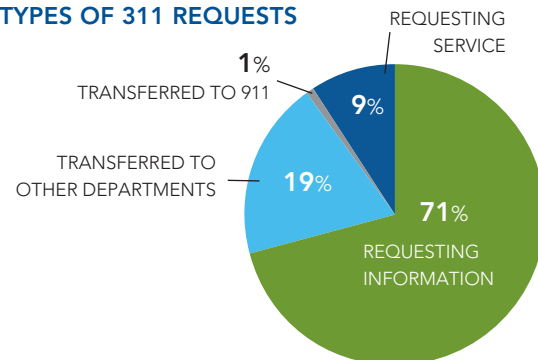


On average in 2009, Philly311 callers waited on hold for 1 minute, 45 seconds before an agent answered, although the time dropped to just 18 seconds by December. The amount of time a typical caller spent speaking with an agent, five minutes for the year as a whole, also fell sharply by year’s end.

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia Philly311

FIGURE 2

TYPES OF 311 REQUESTS



On average in 2009, seven in ten callers to Philly311 were looking for basic or general information. On average, 19 percent needed to be transferred to another department or line, a rate that Philly311 likes to keep low. Another 9 percent were asking for a service, requiring an agent to submit a formal request to another city department.

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia Philly311

as Philly311 becomes better known.<sup>27</sup> Philly311 transferred 1 percent of its own calls to the police department's 911 call center after deeming them to be emergencies.

Philly311 created the city's first-ever "knowledgebase" of searchable answers to frequently asked questions, with a clear process for updates and corrections. This enables call agents and residents (through a Web site) to look for an answer simply by typing a few keywords. It had approximately 1,800 entries at the launch and 4,000 by the end of 2009.<sup>28</sup> In addition, nine months into its operation, Philly311 instituted a feature enabling callers to push a number for directory assistance or general information without talking to an agent. This so-called "Interactive Voice Response" system improved overall call performance.

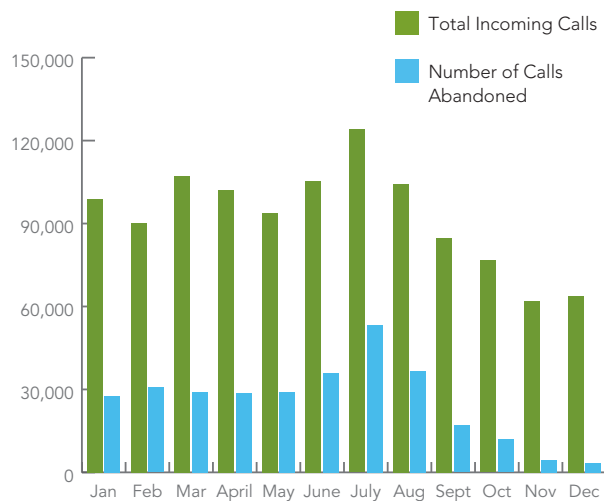
For reasons unknown, fewer people dialed Philly311 in the second half of the year than the first. Contact Center Director Rosetta Carrington Lue speculated that people increasingly were getting information from city Web sites instead of using the phone, saying that Internet traffic had risen steadily at the Philly311 Web site and knowledgebase through the year.<sup>29</sup> She added that new Philly311 agents

were better able to resolve requests without customers having to make second calls. More people also got information by talking in person to agents at Philly311's new walk-in office on the first floor of City Hall (9,900 by year's end) and sent e-mails (1,800). And Philly311 did almost no marketing or community outreach in 2009 to attract new users; as the Philadelphia Research Initiative survey showed, only 28 percent of Philadelphians knew in January 2010 that the city has a new service telephone number and that it is 311.

Philadelphia was not alone in seeing a decrease in 311 calls. Among most of the localities reviewed, the median decrease in calls was about 5 percent from 2008 to 2009, with half of the cities also cutting operating hours. New York was an exception. It added social service requests to its 311 offerings in 2009, helping drive up total calls by 16 percent to 18.7 million. The system with the worst abandoned-call rate was Pittsburgh, where almost one in two calls were dropped before an agent could answer, double its 2008 rate. Pittsburgh's small, six-person operation also had the lightest volume, just 16 calls for every 100 residents. San Francisco had the heaviest usage, 446 calls for every 100 residents.

FIGURE 3

### PHILLY311 CALL VOLUME



Philly311 received 1,113,000 phone calls in 2009, roughly the same number received in 2008 by the several phone banks that it absorbed. Its monthly call volume rose slowly, then fell sharply and ended the year nearly 38 percent below its starting point. Similarly, the number of calls lost before an agent could answer—so-called abandoned calls—rose slightly, then fell sharply.

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia Philly311

For the large majority of callers just looking for information—not service—did Philly311 work better than the tangle of operators, phone lines and Web pages that it replaced? The new contact center absorbed the City Hall Switchboard, the Mayor's Action Center, the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I) customer line, and part of the Department of Streets customer line. Those operations, combined, received between 1.1 million and 1.5 million calls in 2008, roughly equivalent to Philly311 call volume in 2009.<sup>30</sup> One indicator—the rate of hang-ups or dropped calls, known as abandoned calls—shows that Philly311 by year's end did better than its predecessors. In 2008, the abandoned-call rate was around 60 percent for the L&I customer line, 37 percent for Streets and 17 percent for the switchboard. Philly311's abandonment rate for the year was 26 percent, improving from 30 percent in the first quarter of 2009 to 9 percent in the final quarter.<sup>31</sup>

### Struggling on Service

How well did Philly311 deliver on its promise of helping improve the responsiveness and performance of city agencies—the iceberg below the surface? While the onus falls on agencies to do the work and on PhillyStat to compel improvement, Philly311 has become a main conduit for service requests from the public. Philly311 is integrated with

FIGURE 4

## HOW WELL DOES 311 WORK?

Each center performs according to its own service goals and capabilities. For example, a center may opt to have agents spend as much time as needed with callers to resolve issues thoroughly, rather than try to address problems quickly and move to the next caller. In such a case, call duration and wait-time may be longer, but return calls fewer. All averages cover 12 months of 2009 or the fiscal year that ended in 2009. Fuller statistics available at [www.pewtrusts.org/philaresearch](http://www.pewtrusts.org/philaresearch).

City or County	2008 Estimated Population	Total Calls	Average Annual Calls Per 100 Residents*	Average Annual Call-Handling Time (seconds)	Average Wait Time to Speak with Live Agent (seconds)	Average % of Calls Abandoned Before Agent Answers	Average % of Calls Transferred to Another Department	Hours of Operation
Baltimore	636,919	970,937	152	120	5	3%	6%	6a-10p Mon-Sun <sup>□</sup>
Charlotte*	890,515	1,648,087	185	166	17	2.6%	33%	24x7
Chicago	2,853,114	4,136,505	151	70	61	19%	35%	24x7
Columbus, OH	754,885	288,527	38	117	24	1.4%	21%	7a-8p Mon-Fri <sup>□</sup>
Dallas	1,279,910	1,196,957	94	120	231	15%	N/A	6a-8p Mon-Fri <sup>□</sup>
Denver	598,707	443,061	74	189	27	7.7%	42.5%	7a-8p Mon-Fri; 8a-5p Sat-Sun <sup>□</sup>
Detroit	912,062	238,123	26	123	33	11.5%	12%	8a-5:30p Mon-Fri <sup>□</sup>
Houston	2,242,193	2,256,511	101	129	32	3.9%	N/A	6a-12a Mon-Sun
Los Angeles	3,833,995	1,402,656	37	90	60	12.7%	40%	24x7
Miami-Dade	2,398,245	2,650,000	110	268	83	16.5%	6.7%	6a-10p Mon-Fri; 8a-5p Sat <sup>□</sup>
New York	8,363,710	18,707,436	224	228	18	3.6%	36%	24x7
Philadelphia	1,540,351	1,113,159	72	372	105	26%	18.6%	8a-8p Mon-Fri; 9a-5p Sat <sup>□</sup>
Pittsburgh	310,037	49,048	16	180	N/A	45%	0.01%	8a-4:30p Mon-Sun
San Antonio	1,351,305	1,293,372	96	100	N/A	8.4%	13%	7a-11p Mon-Sun <sup>□</sup>
San Francisco	808,976	3,608,824	446	88	30	14.4%	1.9%	24x7
<b>Median</b>			<b>96</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	

\* Charlotte center also covers Mecklenburg County, NC.

† Based on 2009 total call volume and 2008 estimated population.

□ Hours in 2009 were reduced due to budget cuts.

SOURCE: Call centers in each locality

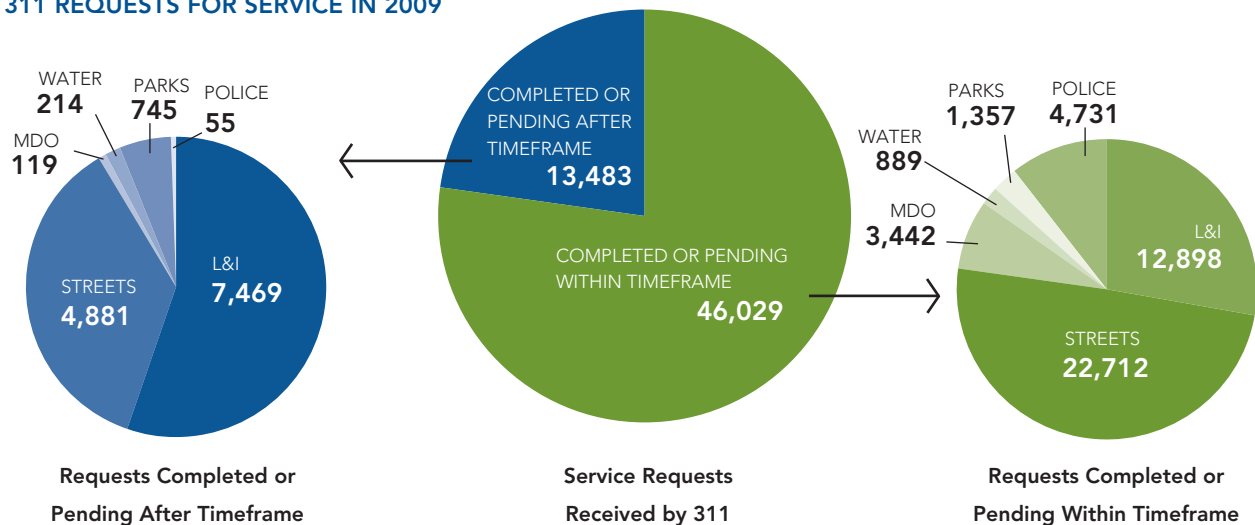
agencies through written “service level agreements” which codify each function with a timeframe for completion, such as the Streets Department filling a pothole within three days, or the Police Department towing an abandoned car within 30 days. City agencies perform hundreds of tasks, but 311 in theory only handles the ones it can hold an agency accountable for performing on time. Philly311 in 2009 started with agreements with six agencies performing

26 functions. It ended the year with seven agencies performing 63 functions, a manageable growth rate. By way of comparison, New York 311 offered 800 service functions at its launch in 2003, rising to 3,000 by 2008.<sup>32</sup>

During 2009, Philly311 agents on behalf of callers submitted 64,102 service requests to the seven departments, the biggest among them being Streets, L&I and the Police

FIGURE 5

## 311 REQUESTS FOR SERVICE IN 2009



In 2009, Philly311 submitted 64,102 service requests from callers to city departments. The departments were supposed to fulfill those requests within a prescribed period of time. Out of 59,512 requests whose status could be determined, about one-fourth were not done on time and became listed as overdue; more than half of those were housing-inspection requests from the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I). The rest were on time, completed or pending by the end of the year. In the graphic, "MDO" stands for Managing Director's Office.

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia Philly311

Department. Out of those requests, the combined departments completed 77 percent within the promised timeframes. But they were overdue on 23 percent, according to city statistics.<sup>33</sup> Most of the overdue service requests were attributed to the fumbled handoff of roughly 13,000 housing-inspection requests between the Philly311 and L&I computer systems between January and November 2009. In some cases the requests were not received; in many others they were received but not reported back to Philly311 as completed or not. Officials blamed the lack of an automated link between the two computer systems, a problem which the technology staff had been struggling to fix for months. In late spring, support staff manually re-entered some uncompleted requests, resulting in batches of "a couple hundred service requests" being left on L&I inspectors' desks.<sup>34</sup> L&I officials later discovered thousands more requests whose status was uncertain, and some of them were still being rechecked manually at year's end. On November 19, the technology staff appeared to fix the problem with a new patch between the databases.<sup>35</sup>

For the year, L&I reported completing 63 percent of service requests from Philly311 within the timeframe promised, although the actual status of many L&I requests was still uncertain at year's end. On-time rates at other departments ranged from 82 percent at the Streets Department

to 99 percent at the Police Department. It was unclear whether the individual departmental rates, or the overall 77 percent on-time rate, were higher or lower in prior years.

### The Impact of Launching Quickly

Decisions and conditions in 2008 during the setup of Philly311 dictated the system's capabilities and performance in 2009. Foremost among them was the administration's determination to launch the system within 11 months—more quickly than outside experts advised, previous plans envisioned and most other cities' systems had done. Even Philly311's October-December "soft" launch, a dry-run for new agents and technology, was shorter than others typically take.<sup>36</sup>

The administration's lead 311 consultant, Gartner Inc., drafted a fast-launch plan that called for contracting with an outside firm to provide modifiable "help desk" software remotely over the Internet on a temporary basis. Simultaneously the city would shop for a genuine customer-relationship management software application to be installed within two years, capable of creating a "seamless," automated connection with departmental systems.<sup>37</sup> This sequence—starting with the front-end contact center and building the back-end coordination with city agencies



along the way, if feasible—was the opposite from what was generally recommended. But the administration concluded the plan would work with sufficient funding. Early estimates put the startup cost between \$5 million and \$8 million.<sup>38</sup>

But by October 2008, the recession-related decrease in tax revenues forced the Nutter administration to slash the city's budget. Spending envisioned for Philly311 fell to \$2 million.<sup>39</sup> The powerful new software application was axed, and the plan to hire contact center agents from outside city government was postponed. But the administration insisted on a ribbon-cutting by year's end. Nutter considered but rejected a delay, skeptical that the economy—and the opportunity to better fund the system—would improve any time soon.<sup>40</sup>

The budget and timetable decisions reverberated through the project. The temporary software with short-term patches became the permanent system. Hopes to make 311 data widely available and visible to the public were delayed. Only half of Philly311's agents had customer-service experience and none had outside call-center experience by the launch. Those agents and departmental staffs had to learn complicated work routines and keep using them indefinitely to fill service requests. "Is it seamless on the back-end? Absolutely not. It's held together by duct tape and fishing line. But for the customer, it is seamless," Patrick Morgan, a project leader, said a year later.<sup>41</sup> Nutter, on the first-year anniversary, acknowledged that new software is badly needed but declined to say what he would request in 2010.<sup>42</sup>

Several current and former city officials, as well as outside technology experts, said extending the launch deadline by six months would have enabled Philly311 to provide better service upon launch, although they differed on how much better.<sup>43</sup> The city's then-chief information officer, Terry Phillis, stridently opposed the timetable; he was a hold-over from the previous administration and was replaced in mid-2008.<sup>44</sup> Camille Barnett defended her deadline as justifiable to overcome the city's history of deferring 311. "I didn't want more time. The issue was total disbelief that we could get it done. ... It was important to deliver a quality system regardless of the (budget) changes."<sup>45</sup>

Rather than buy a new system, the city has added extra features to the low-cost software and created its own technological patches. Its improvements included a Web-based tool added in April 2009 that enables callers themselves to type the service request number and see its status.

### PHILADELPHIANS ON 311

"311 impressed me every time. ... I have called 311 at least ten or twelve times to report various issues in the neighborhood, including illegal dumping, graffiti, a broken street light, and abandoned houses that needed to be cleaned and sealed. Each time, I have spoken to a courteous and helpful operator who has explained the process he/she would take to follow up with my request. I knew what to expect and I was able to track the ticket online. 311 has helped get a number of quality of life issues fixed rapidly."

—Posted by *Imanni Wilkes*, November 2, 2009, *Philly.com*

"If anyone thinks 311 works they must never have called 311. They give you an incident number and do nothing. Council people's constituent service staff are in no danger of losing their jobs because of 311"

—Posted by *Lou Agre*, May 29, 2009, *YoungPhillyPolitics.com*

However, only two departmental computer systems—those of the Streets Department and L&I—could be connected to the Philly311 system using the custom-coded patches, known as interfaces. (The 311 application provided by Novo Solutions Inc. is physically located 1,500 miles away in San Antonio, Texas, and agents in Philadelphia use secure Internet pages to enter and retrieve data.) For both Streets and L&I, initially 311 agents had to perform two manual maneuvers, one of which required retyping customer information, to make each interface work. Work-order computer systems at the Water Department, the Police Department, Fairmount Park, Department of Parks and Recreation and others have not been connected, meaning staff in those agencies must tap into the Philly311 system to retrieve service requests.

Commenting on the impact of the technology decisions, Frances Burns, the L&I commissioner, said the episode with the 13,000 requests highlighted the challenge of "being able to staff (311) and have the right software. So I wonder, if we knew that we'd have to be at a negotiated place with a less-than-perfect system, would we have proceeded? I wonder if we would have pushed from the beginning if it was known from the beginning what it would look like."

Still, Burns said Philly311 has the potential to improve the quality and reliability of data used by departments to manage their operations. "The information from 311 is more

accurate. I think 311 is definitely an improvement."<sup>46</sup>

Isolated lapses also occurred. In one example, a Philadelphia Research Initiative staff member called 311 on October 24, 2009, to report a pothole. Twelve work days later, the Web site reported the request was "completed." But in reality, the "pothole," which the Streets Department reclassified as a "ditch," was untouched; it was the inspection that was complete, not the repair. Follow-up by the staff member eventually led to a Streets Department inspector, who said he was aware of the ditch, promised to check its repair status, then faulted 311 and the computer systems for conveying incorrect information.<sup>47</sup> Later, in a PhillyStat session, Barnett cited the case in calling for more accurate communication with residents. Philly311 also has instituted its own process of randomly checking on "completed" requests to make sure they were, indeed, completed.<sup>48</sup> The ditch was fixed by December 2.

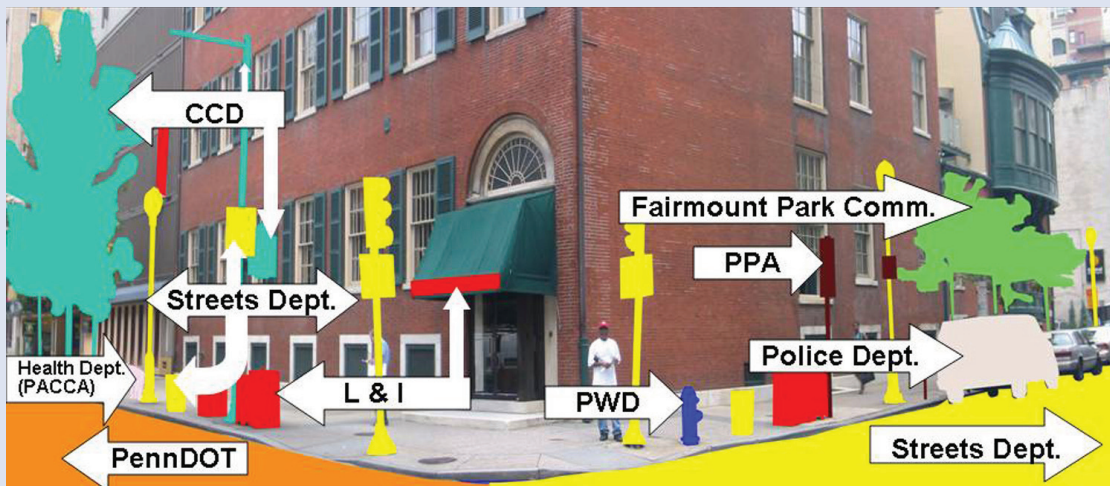
Clarena Tolson, Streets Department commissioner, noted there have been many isolated and unseen technological and human slip-ups in the 311 rollout. "Is 311 working or not? It's a loaded question. As a citizen, I love it," Tolson said. "But on this side of the table, it's challenging. It really shouldn't be changing the way we do business. We have our own work-order system and we can track what's being done. But ultimately having the public able to see requests and report on quality is beneficial."<sup>49</sup>

## Staff and Training

Abrupt, unfriendly, even surly. Whether or not the stereotype of city workers is true, Philly311 set about changing it. Officials wanted a courteous, professional, customer-centric 311 operation, starting with the director, Rosetta Carrington Lue, whom it hired from the private sector.

The positions of "contact-center agent" and "contact-center supervisor" were new in the city government. In 2008, officials drafted the job descriptions with the help of Comcast Corp. with the desire of filling the jobs with experienced call-center agents from outside city government, considering them essential to a new customer-focused approach.<sup>50</sup>

Philly311 contracted with an outside firm to develop a two-week training regimen for agents, shorter sessions for the staff members in key agencies linked to 311, and City Council offices interested in getting access to the data. Agents had to learn how to respond to irate callers (patiently) and when to transfer a call (rarely). With the help of departments inside and out of city government, agents had to learn how to navigate the many agencies and befuddling collection of tasks, such as the difference between a "pothole" and "ditch," and the dividing point between the city Streets Department and state Transportation Department jurisdiction over Market Street.



In Philadelphia, more than two dozen municipal and public agencies are responsible for hundreds of different services, pieces of equipment and physical places. This photograph of a downtown street corner, with items labeled according to the responsible agency, was created by the Center City District and shared with Philly311 agents to help them submit service requests to the appropriate agency. The label PPA refers to the Philadelphia Parking Authority; PWD is the Philadelphia Water Department; CCD is the Center City District.

SOURCE: Center City District

But the 2008 budget crisis upended the strategy. The Managing Director's Office reduced the planned number of agents from 72 to 57. Support staff positions were cut.<sup>51</sup> Most significantly, the administration decided late in the summer of 2008 that Philly311 could only consider candidates from among ranks of city workers whose jobs were being eliminated. Instead of external applicants with contact-center experience, Philly311 was limited to city workers facing layoffs from unrelated jobs. Out of 51 call agents hired by the December launch, about half had no contact-center experience. The rest had been agents for the switchboard, the Mayor's Action Center, the Streets Department and L&I. The Managing Director's Office enlisted donated help from Independence Blue Cross, two of whose contact-center agents worked at Philly311 for seven months; Verizon Communications Inc. also contributed management training.<sup>52</sup>

Philly311 officials braced for high staff turnover, given the pool of involuntary workers they had to pick from.<sup>53</sup> Absenteeism reached 15 percent in the early months. Turnover ended the year at 53 percent, nearly five times higher than citywide staff turnover but roughly in line with expectations.<sup>54</sup>

The internal-hire rule was relaxed in May 2009 and Philly311 began hiring new agents from outside; it ended the year with 25 percent of call agents having outside experience.<sup>55</sup> The new agents, plus internal critiques and experience gained by the veterans, improved Philly311's ability to handle requests more thoroughly on the first call and reduce call backs by residents.<sup>56</sup> A new round of budget cuts in August 2009 resulted in seven layoffs and a reduction in contact center hours, from 24/7 to 12 hours Monday through Friday, eight hours on Saturday and none on Sunday. This actually improved contact-center performance, since it put more agents working the daytime hours when 95 percent of calls come in. Philly311 managers and union representatives have instituted a quality-assurance and grading process, unique in Philadelphia city government, to try to improve the performance of individual agents.<sup>57</sup>

Among administration officials, outside 311 experts and City Council supporters of 311, there is little disagreement that Philly311 staffing remains a problem. "What they should've done is trained people better and picked the right people. And they shouldn't have done it 24/7 off the bat. It was too much," said Councilman James Kenney, who produced a 2007 report calling for creation of 311. Barnett has cited "recruiting" as one of the early problems

and now counts "stabilizing the staff" and returning to 24/7 service as one of her top priorities for Philly311.

### Costs and Savings

Asked to point to any financial savings generated by Philly311, the administration gave this one: Before Philly311, the Streets Department paid a contractor \$1.9 million a year to take the public's calls about burned-out streetlights and to repair each one within a day, along with outages the contractor itself spotted. Starting in August 2009 and armed with outage reports from 311, the department reduced the contract by \$400,000 by eliminating the outsourced call-taker and paying the contractor only for spotting outages and replacing bulbs—although it now gets about five days to do each one.<sup>58</sup>

This 311-related cost reduction was the only concrete example that the Nutter administration offered. In fact, the administration does not expect significant savings from Philly311 for several years, or until the PhillyStat process can make full use of 311 data, Barnett said. The administration has not made cost savings an immediate goal or prime justification for Philly311. And it said it has no intention of pursuing savings by trying to cut back City Council's own budget for fielding constituent calls and providing assistance, which traditionally has consumed between half and two-thirds of Council staff time and now may be handled partly by Philly311.<sup>59</sup>

Do 311 contact centers save money for cities? Maybe not, said a variety of 311 experts, even if the contact centers spur agencies to operate more efficiently. Most localities, including Philadelphia, have not undertaken methodical cost-benefit analyses of 311. "People are worried that it could be negative," said Spencer Stern, a 311 consultant affiliated with the Government Finance Officers Association.<sup>60</sup>

In comparison to other cities, however, Philly311 is a relative bargain. Its budget of \$2.8 million in fiscal year 2010 was lower than those of most other localities on a per-capita basis, per-call basis and as a percentage of cities' total operating budgets. The main reason is that Philadelphia does not have to pay high annual software license and maintenance fees for a full-scale customer relationship management system. The construction budget for Philly311 space in City Hall was roughly \$4 million, near the median startup capital costs reported by other cities over the past decade (adjusted for inflation). And it was paid by city telephone users through a state-collected 911

surcharge, because the center doubles as a 911 backup center.

On average, one 311 call in Philadelphia last year cost taxpayers \$2.20, compared with a median of \$3.39 per call among the cities reviewed. Philly311's per-resident cost

was \$1.59, below the group median. The operating budget of Philly311 grew the most in the group this year, 38 percent, while the group median fell 5 percent. Even then, Philly311's share of the city's general fund was only 0.08 percent, far less than a penny on the dollar and half the group median of 0.16 percent.

FIGURE 6

### HOW MUCH DOES 311 COST?

Personnel and technology costs vary widely among 311 systems because each locality sets its own distinctive service goals, meaning that city-to-city comparison should be made with caution. Most localities in the study reduced their budgets in 2009 due to the recession. The goal of many 311 systems is to help city departments operate more efficiently and responsively, although few have documented any actual savings. Fuller statistics available at [www.pewtrusts.org/philaresearch](http://www.pewtrusts.org/philaresearch).

City or County	Number of Employees at Year End <sup>†</sup>	Change in Employees from Previous Year	311 Budget <sup>‡</sup>	% Change in Budget from Previous Year	% of City Budget Spent on 311 <sup>*</sup>	Average Cost Per Call <sup>•</sup>	First-Year Operating Cost <sup>†</sup>	Startup Capital Costs
Baltimore	82	-13.7%	\$4,700,000	-19%	0.35%	\$5.41	\$4,700,000	N/A
Charlotte*	134	0.8%	\$7,278,861	2.3%	0.40%	\$4.37	\$2,500,000	\$4,600,000
Chicago	81	-12.9%	\$4,965,897	N/A	0.16%	\$1.15	N/A	\$5,300,000
Columbus, OH	16	-27.3%	\$1,583,158	4.8%	0.24%	\$5.49	\$900,000	N/A
Dallas	89	-4.3%	\$3,700,000	-17%	0.36%	\$3.72	N/A	N/A
Denver	27	-6.9%	\$1,500,000	0%	0.16%	\$3.39	\$1,200,000	\$3,700,000
Detroit	9	-60.9%	\$1,548,421	-28.2%	0.10%	\$7.78	N/A	N/A
Houston	92	-2.1%	\$5,000,000	N/A	0.26%	\$2.22	\$5,300,000	\$4,500,000
Los Angeles	52	-28.8%	\$3,128,980	-29.3%	0.07%	\$2.69	\$6,800,000	\$4,900,000
Miami-Dade	133	9.9%	\$10,971,000	-5%	0.22%	\$4.30	\$9,800,000	\$6,100,000
New York	545	-6.8%	\$46,000,000	-8%	0.08%	\$2.57	\$19,700,000	\$29,800,000
Philadelphia	63	-10%	\$2,830,914	37.5%	0.08%	\$2.20	\$2,100,000	\$4,000,000
Pittsburgh	6	0%	\$199,951	31.1%	0.05%	\$4.08	\$120,000	(donated)
San Antonio	31	-6.1%	\$1,700,000	-5.3%	0.07%	\$1.39	N/A	N/A
San Francisco	95	-15.2%	\$10,952,000	-7.1%	0.38%	\$3.15	\$6,700,000	\$9,200,000
Median		-6.9%	\$3,700,000	-5.3%	0.16%	\$3.39	\$4,700,000	\$4,600,000

\* Charlotte center also covers Mecklenburg County, NC.

† Full-time equivalents, as authorized in local budget.

‡ All figures for latest fiscal year, except San Antonio, where numbers are for 2008 - 2009.

\* As percent of general fund or operating budgets, as reported at locality's Web site.

• For purposes of comparison, per-call costs are based on budget figures adjusted to match the period of the last available call volume.

† Launch-year spending figures are inflation-adjusted to 2009 dollars.

SOURCE: Call Centers in each locality

Most other 311 contact centers had their budgets cut in 2009, led by Los Angeles with a 29 percent reduction. The most expensive 311 system as a proportion of a city's general operating budget was Charlotte-Mecklenburg's at 0.4

percent, still less than half a penny on the dollar. Among all 311 systems reviewed, Detroit had the highest per-call cost of \$7.78. Chicago had the lowest cost at \$1.15 per call.<sup>61</sup>

## THE PUBLIC REACTION

In a promotional video, Nutter describes Philly311 as being all things to all callers, where "everything is coordinated, saving you and the city time and money." Philly311 callers on hold are likely to hear him in a recording repeat the promise: "You can use 311 to access any city service because everything is now coordinated."



▶ [Watch Mayor Nutter's Philly311 promotional video](#)

In reality, Philly311 can directly handle only a fraction of hundreds of municipal services and tasks, and Philly311 is not expected or designed to save money in its early years.

The gap between 311's promise and its actual performance has helped stoke criticism from users, some reform activists, City Council members and other elected officials, despite careful advance briefings by the Philly311 team and appointment of a liaison to Council in mid-2009. Testy relations with Council have accompanied 311 systems in every major city, partly the result of the tug-of-war between branches of government over constituent service.<sup>62</sup> In Philadelphia, Council members initially reported a flurry of complaints from residents. By late 2009, Philly311 defused some of their complaints by creating a Web tool for Council members to more easily see 311 data in their districts, although the data was still not publicly available. Longtime 311 proponents questioned the administration's strategy. "It's all sizzle and no steak. ... They're a glorified call center," Councilman Bill Green said.<sup>63</sup>

### PHILADELPHIANS ON 311

"Of the three times I called 311, I only received the info I needed one of the three times called. The other two times I got the wrong info."

—Posted by "Dadair1," *Philly.com*, September 28, 2009

"I only had to talk to one person, I didn't have to wait on hold or get transferred around, and the number was easy to remember. I was able to report my problem from directly outside the affected location; I didn't have to look up a phone number on the city's website. If they actually do follow through on solving the problem and getting back to me, I'll give them ten out of ten."

—Posted by "DavidCl," *YoungPhillyPolitics.com*, January 27, 2009

"Great if all you want is information about an event or to report a pothole or get the number to call about another issue. But as far as a tool to revolutionize customer service—not so much."

—Posted by Dan Pohlig, *YoungPhillyPolitics.com*, January 27, 2009

Carrington Lue, the contact center director, said in November 2009 that she wished in retrospect that the Philly311 team had "communicated expectations appropriately." Morgan, a project startup leader, agreed that Philly311 did not meet its own performance goals consistently until late spring or summer 2009. Kenney, the Council member, said: "It's not that the administration didn't do the right thing given the (budget) conditions, but that they didn't scale back expectations." Nutter acknowledged Philly311's shortcomings and technological problems on the one-year anniversary.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike other cities, Philadelphia has done little to market its 311 contact center. New York has posted its 311 logo



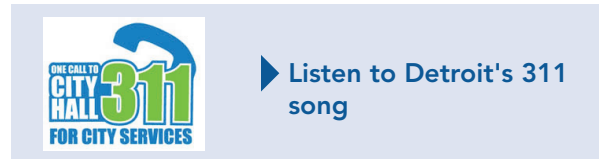
FIGURE 7

## THE PUBLIC VIEW OF 311

Among All Philadelphians		Among 311 Callers	
<b>Awareness of 311</b>		<b>Usage of 311</b>	
Know that the number is 311	28%	Satisfied with agent	77%
Heard about a new city phone line	25%	Dissatisfied with agent	19%
Haven't heard of it at all	45%	Satisfied with response for information	68%
<b>Among Those Who Know About 311</b>		Dissatisfied with response for information	29%
<b>Potential Value of 311</b>		Satisfied with response for service	60%
A real step forward	53%	Dissatisfied with response for service	33%
Won't make much of a difference	28%		
Don't know or can't say	15%		

SOURCE: Philadelphia Research Initiative poll, January 2010

throughout the city; Detroit created a 311 song. Philly311 did paint "Dial 311" on a vehicle used for promotional events and service checks. But it did no paid promotion and held no press events until its one-year anniversary, in part intentionally to keep call volume manageable.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps as a result, just 28 percent of Philadelphians in the Philadelphia Research Initiative survey said they had even heard about the 311 line a year after it launched.<sup>66</sup>



Of 1,602 Philadelphians surveyed, only 15 percent said they had called 311 at least once during 2009. Among the callers just seeking information, 68 percent said they were satisfied and 29 percent dissatisfied—an acceptable result for a first-year operation, according to experts in 311 satisfaction surveys.<sup>67</sup> Among people submitting a service

request or complaint, 60 percent were satisfied and 33 percent dissatisfied with the result. Three-quarters expressed satisfaction with their call agent. Philly311's own random call-back survey put user satisfaction at 89 percent.

More than half the respondents seemed to share the mayor's view of Philly311 as a significant tool for improving city government; 53 percent said Philly311 constituted a big step forward in the city's relationship with residents needing service, compared with 28 percent who said it wouldn't make much difference.

A year into its existence, Philly311 is a work in progress. It made great strides in making information more accessible to the public and assembling a cadre of capable call agents. But the city has a lot more work to do in delivering better services through 311. As its work proceeds, the administration can feel comfortable that many Philadelphians like the idea and are on its side. ■

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> City of Philadelphia 2010 Budget, p. iii. [http://www.phila.gov/finance/pdfs/Budget\\_FY10.pdf](http://www.phila.gov/finance/pdfs/Budget_FY10.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> Perlman, Ellen, "Stat Fever: The practice of collecting data to monitor and improve government performance continues to gain momentum and evolve," *Governing Magazine*, Jan. 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> The growth of 911 contact centers from 1968 through the 1970s was also contentious and spotty across the country, although for different reasons than 311. See Donald Janson, "Dial-911 Plan Calls Forth Opposition in Big Cities," *New York Times*, March 30, 1970; and Pranay Gupte, "Despite Successes in 2 Big Cities, 911 Phone System Lags," *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1978.
- <sup>4</sup> City of Philadelphia Department of Records, Agency History, found at <http://www.phila.gov/PHILS/Docs/Inventor/graphics/agencies/M014.htm>.
- <sup>5</sup> Interviews with Renee Grundy, director of the Mayor's Action Center from 1989 to 2009, Nov. 27, 2009; Karl Bortnick, retired veteran city technology director who designed the Mayor's EAR, Dec. 18, 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> From interview with Bortnick. In 1998, the Federal Communications Commission approved the use of "311" as a hotline for municipal information services.
- <sup>7</sup> Interviews with Pedro Ramos, former managing director, Nov. 9, 2009; Phil Goldsmith, former managing director, Nov. 13, 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> One group called the Reformers Roundtable issued a manifesto with 311 as a core proposal. Found at [www.reformballot.org](http://www.reformballot.org).
- <sup>9</sup> Report by the Hon. James F. Kenney, "3-1-1 for Philly," April 18, 2007; Report by the Hon. Bill Green, "Paperless Government," Sept. 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> *Dispatch Magazine* survey. As of Sept. 2008, fewer than 100 localities operated modern 311 contact centers reachable by only about 18 percent of the U.S. population. In comparison, mandatory 911 service existed in approximately 3,100 localities and was reachable by 99 percent of the population.
- <sup>11</sup> Philly.com "Heard In the Hall" blog, "311 to put an end to city's VIP help line," Dec. 29, 2008. This unpublished, unpublicized phone line was set up for top officials to reach other officials quickly through the Switchboard, which had a process for handling high-priority calls. The line's existence and alleged abuse for routine calls briefly became a symbol of the reforms associated with Philly311. In fact, Philly311 still has a special process for handling so-called VIP calls.
- <sup>12</sup> Interviews with former Street administration officials; reports of technology consultant CDM Inc.; final report of City of Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Information Systems "Enterprise and Work Order Management Program," July 31, 2007. Street's technology division even contracted with a creator of the Baltimore 311 system, Elliot H. Schlanger, to spend two weeks in Nov. 2007 advising Philadelphia on a 311 implementation strategy.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with author, Oct. 2009.
- <sup>14</sup> KYW Radio "Ask the Mayor" program, Dec. 23, 2009.
- <sup>15</sup> Associated Press, "Philadelphia to set up 311 system for non-emergency calls," Jan. 29, 2008.
- <sup>16</sup> *Philadelphia Daily News* "Next Mayor" blog, "What's the 3-1-1?" Jan. 29, 2008, found at <http://blogs.phillynews.com/dailynews/nextmayor/2008/01>; PhillyBlocks.org listserv posting by neighborhood block captain Tracey Gordon, Jan. 5, 2009, found at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/phillyblocks/message/11726>; WHYY "It's Our City," "Nearly a month in, let's see what we know about 3-1-1," Jan. 28, 2009, found at <http://whyy.org/blogs/itsourcity/2009/01/28/nearly-a-month-in-lets-see-what-we-know-about-3-1-1>.
- <sup>17</sup> All figures based on unaudited monthly performance statistics provided by Philly311 and annual averages provided by other contact centers.
- <sup>18</sup> From text of Michael Nutter's comments at senior management retreat, Aug. 2008.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with author, Jan. 4, 2010.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Sandy Shea, editorial page editor of the *Daily News*, which runs City Howl, [www.thecityhowl.com](http://www.thecityhowl.com), Nov. 2009.

- <sup>21</sup> Found at [www.youngphillypolitics.com/update\\_311](http://www.youngphillypolitics.com/update_311).
- <sup>22</sup> Based on U.S. Census Bureau 2008 final revised population estimates, which listed Philadelphia at 1,540,351.
- <sup>23</sup> Philly311 data. Its agents responded to 1,800 direct e-mails and 127 complaints or service requests posted on third-party community Internet sites powered by [www.SeeClickFix.com](http://www.SeeClickFix.com) during 2009.
- <sup>24</sup> Philly311 data.
- <sup>25</sup> Based on interviews with Managing Director Camille Barnett and 311 consultants.
- <sup>26</sup> Based on 911 call data from the Philadelphia Police Department for calendar year 2007, 2008 and 2008.
- <sup>27</sup> Ramsey comments at news conference, Jan. 5, 2010.
- <sup>28</sup> Philly311 data.
- <sup>29</sup> Carrington Lue said monthly and weekly Internet traffic reports showed steady increases, although Philly311 and the Department of Technology were unable, by the deadline for this study, to provide total annual traffic figures.
- <sup>30</sup> Based on departmental figures for their own customer lines or staff that were transferred to Philly311. All figures for calendar year 2008 except Switchboard, which is FY2008. Other departments that kept their own lines and agents, such as 911 and the Department of Human Services, also may have felt an impact but could not be quantified.
- <sup>31</sup> Data from Philly311, L&I and Streets departments. Switchboard data from "City of Philadelphia Quarterly City Managers Report, Period Ending June 30, 2008," Table S-1.
- <sup>32</sup> Service-level data from Philly311. New York data from Institute for Citizen-Centered Service, "Case Study #17: New York City 311," Jan. 2008. Found at [http://www.iccs-isac.org/en/isd/cs\\_new\\_york\\_311.htm](http://www.iccs-isac.org/en/isd/cs_new_york_311.htm).
- <sup>33</sup> All figures based on submissions only through Philly311. Numbers exclude 4,590 requests whose status was undetermined as of Jan. 2010. The total does not include substantial numbers of requests submitted by residents to departments directly by phone, in person at the City Hall Concourse or by work crews in the course of their duties.
- <sup>34</sup> Frances Burns, commissioner of Department of Licenses & Inspections, at PhillyStat session Dec. 4, 2009.
- <sup>35</sup> Carrington Lue and Burns, in interviews and comments at PhillyStat session Dec. 4, 2009 and Jan. 25, 2010.
- <sup>36</sup> Interviews with current and former technologists in Philadelphia; interview with Spencer Stern, consultant and 311 financial analyst affiliated with the Government Finance Officers Association, Nov. 5, 2009.
- <sup>37</sup> Interviews with Barnett, Nov. 23, 2009; Frank Petrus, Gartner consultant, interview Nov. 30, 2009; text of Philadelphia Request for Proposals for CRM system, Oct. 15, 2008; on advice of Gartner, Philadelphia contracted for Novo Solutions Inc.'s Citizen Request Management software.
- <sup>38</sup> Interviews with administration officials including Barnett, Assistant Managing Director Jeff Friedman, former Assistant Managing Director Patrick Morgan, Nov. 2009 - Jan. 2010.
- <sup>39</sup> Interviews with Camille Barnett and Dave Wilson, deputy managing director, Nov. 23, 2009. The city also ended discussions with local foundations to help foot the bill. Among them was The Pew Charitable Trusts, parent of the Philadelphia Research Initiative. The discussions ended before the Philadelphia Research Initiative was created.
- <sup>40</sup> Interview with Morgan, Jan. 8, 2010.
- <sup>41</sup> Interview with author.
- <sup>42</sup> Comments of Nutter at news conference, Jan. 5, 2010.
- <sup>43</sup> Interviews with author. Some people spoke on condition they not be identified in this report.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with author, Nov. 17, 2009.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with author, Nov. 23, 2009.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with author. Before serving as L&I commissioner, Burns had worked on implementing departmental software systems as Mayor John Street's deputy commissioner for administration.
- <sup>47</sup> Interview with Rick Johansson, Streets Department District 2 inspector, Nov. 17, 2009.
- <sup>48</sup> PhillyStat session, Dec. 2, 2009. Video transcript found at <http://www.phila.gov/performance/flash/MediaPlayerPhillyStat.html>

- <sup>49</sup> Interview with author, Dec. 9, 2009.
- <sup>50</sup> Interviews with James P. Sullivan, Senior Manager, Winbourne & Costas Inc., the city's consultant for 311 staffing, and David Eichenthal, 311 expert and president of the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies. Eichenthal commented: "It would be easier to teach customer-service people (about) public service, then it would be to teach people with knowledge about city government how to be great about customer service agents."
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Barnett, Nov. 23, 2009.
- <sup>52</sup> Interviews with Carrington Lue and Barnett..
- <sup>53</sup> Interview with Carrington Lue, Oct. 2009; interview with Sullivan, Nov. 30, 2009. Sullivan's research for Philly311 showed other first-year centers experienced staff turnover rates between 20 percent and 75 percent.
- <sup>54</sup> Figures from Philly311 and City of Philadelphia Personnel Department. Turnover among all civil-service employees was 11.4 percent in 2009.
- <sup>55</sup> Philly311 data.
- <sup>56</sup> Philly311, in addition to directly monitoring agents' work, enlists volunteers to call 311 to pretend to be residents making genuine requests. Findings of these "secret shoppers" are used to improve individual and system performance.
- <sup>57</sup> City of Philadelphia 311 Contact Center Management Manual.
- <sup>58</sup> Interviews with Friedman, Oct. 2009, and Stephen Buckley, deputy commissioner of Streets Department, Jan. 29, 2010.
- <sup>59</sup> Estimates based on interviews with Council members and staff; The Committee of Seventy, in its report "Tackling True Reform," Sept. 2009, called on city leaders to "realize the full potential of the city's 3-1-1 customer service system, including elimination of redundant" spending by City Council and other government offices.
- <sup>60</sup> Interview with author, Nov. 5, 2009.
- <sup>61</sup> Based on call data and budgets as reported by each 311 system and on official budgets found at city Web sites.
- <sup>62</sup> Interviews with Eichenthal, Stern and Matthew O'Callahan, Chicago 311; see also Young Philly Politics blog, "Have You Called 311?", Jan. 27, 2009, found at [http://youngphillypolitics.com/have\\_you\\_called\\_311](http://youngphillypolitics.com/have_you_called_311); *Philadelphia Daily News*, "3-1-1 has the answer, sometimes," Jan. 2009. At one point, internal criticism flared after the Licenses and Inspections commissioner asked Council members in a memo to submit their L&I requests to Philly311 in addition to phoning L&I officials or inspectors directly, as some members had been doing.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview with author, Dec. 14, 2009.
- <sup>64</sup> Nutter press conference, Jan. 5, 2010.
- <sup>65</sup> News release archive, [www.phila.gov](http://www.phila.gov). Interviews with Friedman and Carrington Lue.
- <sup>66</sup> Philadelphia Research Initiative survey, Jan. 8-19, 2010, was conducted among a citywide random sample of 1,302 landline telephone users and 300 cell phone users, age 18 and older. Margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points for the entire sample and higher for subgroups.
- <sup>67</sup> Interviews with Eichenthal and Cory Fleming, senior project manager, International City/County Management Association, Jan. 2010.

**PHILADLEPHIA RESEARCH INITIATIVE / ABT SRBI  
TOPLINE FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS  
JANUARY 8 - JANUARY 19, 2010—ANNUAL BENCHMARK SURVEY**

BASE= 1,602 Philadelphia Residents Except Where Noted

\* = less than 1%

- = question not asked/zero respondents

Q. LAST YEAR PHILADELPHIA SET UP A NEW PHONE NUMBER FOR RESIDENTS WHEN THEY WANT INFORMATION ABOUT CITY SERVICES OR GOVERNMENT. CAN YOU RECALL THE PHONE NUMBER?

ALL RESPONDENTS

=====

YES--311	28%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	72%

Q. THE PHONE NUMBER IS 311. HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS BEFORE OR NOT?

ALL RESPONDENTS

=====

KNEW 311, SEE PREVIOUS QUESTION	28%
YES, HEARD OF IT	25%
NO, NOT HEARD OF	45%
MAYBE/DON'T REMEMBER	2%

Q. HAVE YOU CALLED THIS NUMBER IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

ALL RESPONDENTS

=====

YES	15%
NO	37%
NOT HEARD OF/DON'T REMEMBER	47%
CAN'T RECALL	*

Q. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU CALLED THIS NUMBER IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

ALL RESPONDENTS

=====

1	5%
2	3%
3	3%
4	2%
5	1%
6	1%
7	1%
NOT HEARD OF/NOT CALLED	85%
DON'T KNOW / REFUSED	*



## Philadelphia's 311 System After One Year

Q. DID YOU CALL TO GET GENERAL INFORMATION, CALL TO COMPLAIN OR GET A SERVICE THE CITY PROVIDES, OR BOTH?  
BASE: HAVE CALLED 311 IN LAST 12 MONTHS (258)

ALL RESPONDENTS	
=====	
GENERAL INFORMATION	41%
SPECIFIC SERVICE/COMPLAINT	39%
BOTH	17%
OTHER	1%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	2%

Q. WERE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO YOUR REQUEST FOR INFORMATION?  
BASE: CALLED 311 FOR GENERAL INFORMATION (140)

ALL RESPONDENTS	
=====	
SATISFIED	68%
DISSATISFIED	29%
OTHER	3%
DON'T KNOW/NOT RESOLVED YET	1%

Q. WERE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO YOUR COMPLAINT OR REQUEST FOR SERVICE?  
BASE: CALLED 311 TO COMPLAIN OR REQUEST SERVICE (158)

ALL RESPONDENTS	
=====	
SATISFIED	60%
DISSATISFIED	33%
OTHER	1%
DON'T KNOW/NOT RESOLVED YET	6%

Q. WERE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH THE AGENT WITH WHOM YOU SPOKE?  
BASE: SPECIFIED REASON CALLED 311 (252)

ALL RESPONDENTS	
=====	
SATISFIED	77%
DISSATISFIED	19%
OTHER	1%
DON'T KNOW/NOT RESOLVED YET	3%

Q. DO YOU THINK THREE-ONE-ONE IS A REAL STEP FORWARD IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THOSE NEEDING SERVICES AND CITY GOVERNMENT, OR DON'T YOU THINK IT WILL MAKE MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE?  
BASE: AWARE OF 311 (938)

ALL RESPONDENTS	
=====	
STEP FORWARD	53%
NOT MAKE MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE	28%
DEPENDS	3%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	15%

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Philadelphia Research Initiative gratefully acknowledges the following current and former Philadelphia city officials for their time and cooperation: Camille Barnett, Dave Wilson, Jeff Friedman, Patrick Morgan and John Farrell, Managing Director's Office; Rosetta Carrington Lue, Elyn Avila, Robert W. Henderson Jr. and Robin Aluko, Philly311; Allan Frank, Joseph James, Karl Bortnick and James L. Querry Jr., Department of Technology; Clarena Tolson, June Cantor, Marion Storey, Stephen Buckley and Rick Johansson, Streets Department; Frances Burns and Thomas McDade, Department of Licenses and Inspections; Renee Grundy, retired, Mayor's Action Center; Lance Haver, Office of Consumer Affairs; Celia O'Leary, Department of Human Resources; William M. Johnson, Police Advisory Commissions; Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey, Sgt. Greg Masi and Insp. Thomas Lippo, Police Department; Pedro Ramos and Phil Goldsmith, former managing directors. The following elected officials and staff gave their time and insights: City Council members William K. Greenlee, Bill Green, Jim Kenney and his legislative assistant Sarah Sachdev, and Rep. Mark Cohen.*

*We extend special thanks to the following officials in other cities who made our survey possible: Lisa Allen and Julie Torres, Baltimore; Kimberly Laney and Mark Maliszewski, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, NC; Matthew O'Callahan, Chicago; Lois Bruce, Columbus, OH; Eva Liggins, Dallas; Karen Kelley, Denver; Barbara Lewis, Detroit; Ray Taylor, Houston; Michael Honen, Los Angeles; Becky Jo Glover, Miami-Dade County, FL; Tom DiGiulio and Nick Sbordone, New York; Wendy Urbanic, Pittsburgh; Jesse Alvarado, San Antonio; Kevin Dyer, San Francisco; Yvonne McManus, Washington, DC.*

*We also would like to thank Nancy A. Goldenberg, Bill Hughes, Blake Lehmann, Andrew Hart and Danielle Allen, Center City District; Sheila Janes, AFSCME District Council 33; David Eichenthal, Ochs Center; Robert D. Behn, Harvard University; Ben Berkowitz and Rob Stuart, SeeClickFix.com; Spencer Stern and Shayne Kavanagh, Government Finance Officers Association; James Sullivan, Winbourne & Costas Inc.; Elliot H. Schlanger, Chief Information Officer, State of Maryland; Frank Petrus, Gartner Inc.; Robert A. Shick, Rutgers University Newark; Robert Cheetham, Avencia Inc.; Cory Fleming, International City /County Management Association; and Kathleen Noonan.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This report was written by Thomas Ginsberg, project manager of The Pew Charitable Trusts' Philadelphia Research Initiative, with assistance from Timothy J. Durkin. It was edited by project director Larry Eichel.

## ABOUT THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS AND THE PHILADELPHIA RESEARCH INITIATIVE

The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life.

The Philadelphia Research Initiative at Pew provides timely, impartial research and analysis that helps Philadelphia's citizens and leaders understand and address key issues facing the city. The initiative conducts public opinion polling; tracks trends on a wide array of key indicators of the city's vitality; produces in-depth reports with facts and analysis, often comparing Philadelphia to other cities; and publishes briefs that illuminate front-and-center issues.