311: IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY FOR SAN FRANCISCO

San Franciscans should expect city government to respond quickly and effectively to their needs. They have a right to outstanding customer service that allows them to easily access city services, track the city's progress on their requests, and get their needs met quickly. Unfortunately, in the year 2003 San Francisco lags well behind other cities in providing easy access to city government through a single point of contact: a 311 phone number for non-emergency city services. Building on my record for improving customer service in San Francisco, I have already begun work to bring 311 to our city, and pledge to have it up and running during my term as mayor.

WHY SAN FRANCISCO NEEDS 311

Confusing Bureaucracy: Today, San Franciscans in need of city services face a confusing array of 140 different city departments and agencies listed on the city's website that have thousands of phone numbers and employees. Moreover, there are 77 general information numbers that operate only during business hours, and 32 Teletype lines. The unfortunate result is that access to city services is all too often limited to the savvy and the persistent. Citizens' problems often go unresolved and their questions go unanswered. Those most in need of city services, such as the elderly, those living at or below the poverty line, and new arrivals to San Francisco, are least likely to find their way through this confusing bureaucratic maze.

"Those most in need of city services, such as the elderly, those living at or below the poverty line, and new arrivals to San Francisco, are least likely to find their way through this confusing bureaucratic maze."

Misuse of 911: Lack of a non-emergency 311 number causes extensive misuse of 911, which threatens public safety in San Francisco. 911 dispatchers answering non-emergency calls can result in dropped 911 calls and unacceptable wait times for the public. Of the estimated 1.5 million phone calls made to San Francisco's 911 center every year, almost 70% are for non-emergencies.

Lack of Coordination Between Departments: San Francisco city agencies lack a shared database that allows for problem resolution when a citizen's request involves more than one city department. Complex problems often require the attention of multiple agencies. Without a database accessible to all city agencies, work conducted or begun by one department can languish because another department has not been notified about the need for their service. When the Fire Department changes the location of a fire hydrant, months can pass before the Public Utilities Commission is notified of the need to connect the main water supply. The Department of Public Works can tear up, repair, and repave a street, only to have PG&E dig trenches on the same street a month later.

Lack of Citywide Performance Evaluation: There is no citywide program for Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). CQI has long been the standard in service-based industries. Establishing performance benchmarks, tracking performance, and assessing customer satisfaction are long–established practices in private industry and certain areas within the public sector. While some San Francisco departments such as MUNI track their own performance, there is no mechanism in place to assess citywide agency performance.

HOW 311 WILL WORK IN SAN FRANCISCO

When fully operational, San Francisco's 311 call center will be staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Like 911 or 411, dialing 311 will connect citizens to a call center staffed with trained call takers who have access to translation services. 311 call takers will be more than just operators – they will function as customer service representatives for all city departments. San Franciscans will also be able to access 311 through the Internet. This two-pronged solution will vastly improve the exchange and sharing of information between city government and the citizens it serves, as well as between city departments. Additionally, the 311 call center can backup San Francisco's 911 call center in the event critical systems fail during an earthquake, terrorist attack, or other disaster.

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system will allow all public inquiries to 311 to be managed by a single database. City residents, workers, and even anonymous callers can check the progress of service requests with a follow-up call to 311, or by visiting the city's website. The CRM system will allow the city to evaluate and improve its performance in responding to all service calls. It will also enable better coordination between multiple agencies addressing the same citizen request.

Providing San Franciscans with a single point of contact for all city services will dramatically improve access to those services, especially for those most in need. 311 could provide information about health clinics, drug treatment programs, elderly and adult nutrition programs, and educational information and enrollment from both the unified school district and the Community College District. Health care services ranging from inoculations for school age children to information about sexually transmitted disease prevention can be delivered with a phone call or an email. Access to cultural events, free performances, and arts classes for children, adults and the elderly could be reached in real time and in a myriad of languages. Citizens would be able to help the city protect public health by easily reporting sewer backups, water main breaks, potholes, or potential health violations in stores and restaurants.

"In Baltimore, non-emergency calls to 911 dropped by one third and 311 callers enjoyed a 78 percent decrease in busy signals when calling city agencies."

San Franciscans can expect to reap the tremendous benefits of 311 enjoyed by other cities. In Chicago, the response time for providing garbage cans to residents fell from 17 days to 2 days after implementation of 311. In Baltimore, non-emergency calls to 911 dropped by one third and 311 callers enjoyed a 78 percent decrease in busy signals when calling city agencies. The cities of Los Angeles, San Jose, New Orleans, and others have also enjoyed improved customer service and delivery of city services after implementing 311.

WE ARE ALREADY MOVING FORWARD I have established a strong record for improving customer service in San Francisco government. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I passed an ordinance in the year 2000 requiring city departments to establish annual plans for customer service and performance reviews. As chair of the Neighborhood Services Committee I convened an October 2001hearing to develop a strategy for creating a 311 call center. In November 2001, I passed legislation directing the Emergency Communications Department (ECD) to initiate the process to establish 311 in San Francisco. Per my request, the Department of Telecommunications and Information Services (DTIS) and the ECD have begun a preliminary planning process for 311.

"I have established a strong record for improving customer service in San Francisco government."

Because of the current budget constraints facing San Francisco, my administration will implement 311 in a fiscally responsible way that phases in the program over several years. We will first focus our resources developing a web-based request system attached to the city's existing www.sfgov.org website. We will then phase in 311 for essential city services, which may include: Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, Parking and Traffic, Public Works, Recreation and Parks, Building Inspections, and Planning. We may begin renovation of space for the new 311 call center as early as 2005, and go live with the call center for all city services in early 2006. By executing a phased, department–by–department roll-out, project development costs can be distributed across multiple fiscal years.

We will also conduct an aggressive public education campaign using billboards, public service announcements and community outreach to prepare the public for the appropriate use of 311 as the gateway to information and services. San Franciscans will be instructed to call 911 for a burning building, and 311 for a burning question.

We will be able to significantly reduce the cost of creating a 311 call center by utilizing the building that previously housed the Emergency Medical Services ambulance dispatch center. Much of the infrastructure required for a call center is already in place there, including fiber optic cable, microwave uplink, telecommunications trunk lines, etc. The building is already owned by the city, and has recently undergone an extensive seismic retrofit that will enable the building to withstand a 7.0 magnitude earthquake.

In conducting research for the project, ECD and DTIS found that other large cities invested between $3 million and $10 million for a comprehensive 311 system. We expect to spend a similar amount in San Francisco on equipment, software, personnel, training and building renovation to give our citizens the 311 system that they deserve. ECD has already applied for $700,000 in federal funding to begin the process of building a backup 911 call center, which would be the foundation of a 311 center. My administration will aggressively pursue opportunities for additional federal and state funding, as well as foundation grants and local public finance initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The development and deployment of 311 will be an enormous stride forward in the use of technology to provide better services to San Franciscans. 311 will eliminate the confusion of trying to find the right phone number to access city government. It will improve public safety and customer service. By bringing 311 to San Francisco, my administration will promote the increased accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness San Franciscans deserve from their city government.

SOURCES

"Legislative Analyst Report – Call Center." San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Office of the Legislative Analyst. *October 8, 2002.*

"Calling 311: Creating a Central Point of Contact." American City and County. Special Report. *January 28, 2003.*

Emergency Communications Department and Department of Telecommunications and Information Services. "Government Service Center, 311, and Customer Relationship Management Proposal." *March 25, 2002.*

Department of Telecommunications and Information Services and Emergency Communications Department Memorandum to Gloria Young, Clerk of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. *February 14, 2003.*

Department of Telecommunications and Information Services memorandum to Lewis Loeven, DTIS, and Dan Sullivan, ECD. *January 29, 2003.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION To receive policy updates or for more information, please contact the Newsom for Mayor campaign at newsom4mayor@yahoo.com.

Printed in–house with volunteer labor. Paid for by Newsom for Mayor. FPPC ID #1250905