



# **Management Brief**

NGA Office of Management Consulting & Training

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## **State Government Customer Service Initiatives**

The primary goal of state government is to serve the citizens of the state. To do so, they must constantly innovate and focus on two key efforts: to provide effective customer service and improve service delivery and responsiveness. Fortunately, rapidly changing technology has helped state governments to find new and better ways to reach out to citizens and increase awareness of available government services.

This management brief provides examples of numerous customer service initiatives being developed by state and local governments across the country. The programs outlined below provide ideas on how states can better take advantage of technology to give citizens the targeted information and service they desire.

- **Centralized customer call numbers** help connect people to needed government and community services with greater accuracy and less wasted time.
  - **311 call numbers** are used for government services and non-emergency needs.
  - **211 call numbers** provide a direct link to important community services and volunteer opportunities.
- **Digital government initiatives** provide citizens with 24-hour access to information and resources, as well as encourage them to stay informed and involved in public issues.
  - **Online customer service centers** help make state websites easier to navigate.
  - **Using mobile technology** provides convenient access to state information via personal digital assistants (PDAs) such as wireless phones, Palm Pilots, and Pocket PCs.
  - **One-stop permitting websites** offer a quick, streamlined way to obtain needed state permits.
  - **Online public participation initiatives** allow citizens to stay informed and involved through interactive tools and resources.

The remainder of this management brief provides specific examples from a variety of states and localities. The detailed information included in each section is summarized from the credited source which corresponds to each state or city example.

### **Centralized Customer Call Numbers**

#### ***311: A Call Number for Government Services & Non-Emergencies***

Besides the three-digit 911 emergency number, America's telephone companies and the FCC have adopted other three-digit numbers, including 311. It was first implemented locally by the Baltimore (Md.) Police Department on Oct. 2, 1996 to handle just non-emergency police calls. The 311 number was then approved for nationwide use by the FCC on Feb. 19, 1997.

311 implementation has been slow, and has been focused in one of two areas:

1. Operated by the police department to field non-emergency calls to help reduce the number of non-emergency 911 calls,
2. Operated by the city (public works, independent service agency) to field so-called “city service” calls such as potholes, fallen trees, noise complaints, street or traffic signals not working, etc.

Sources:

Dispatch Monthly: [http://www.911dispatch.com/info/311\\_page.html](http://www.911dispatch.com/info/311_page.html)

Cities with 311 Service: <http://www.911dispatch.com/info/311map.html>

**Specific City Examples**

Cities with established 311 call numbers include: Baltimore, MD; New York City, NY; Boston, MA; Orange County, FL; Chicago, IL; Austin, TX; Houston, TX. Two city examples are included below.

**BALTIMORE**

**Baltimore 311 Service:** <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/news/311.html>

311 is Baltimore's number to call for all city services. All calls to 311 go through a One Call Center, a 75-agent, 24x7x365, in-bound call and dispatch center. It was up to the Mayor's Office of Information Technology (MOIT) to understand and implement Mayor O'Malley's vision of a customer friendly city. MOIT's approach to the challenge was to go out and find a city similar to Baltimore who was doing CRM right and copy it—in short, learn from someone else's mistakes. The city was Chicago and the system was SunTrack from Motorola. To ensure SunTrack was right for Baltimore, with minimum cost liabilities, MOIT worked out a no-risk pilot program at the vendors cost.

**Baltimore 311 Online:** [https://baltimore.customerservicerequest.org/web\\_intake\\_balt/Controller](https://baltimore.customerservicerequest.org/web_intake_balt/Controller)

The City of Baltimore is pleased to present our online CitiTrack Service Request System as an alternative to dialing “311” (use 443-263-2220 outside the City). The online pages guide citizens through the process of requesting a variety of City services.

**NEW YORK CITY**

**New York City's 311 Service:** [http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/about/about\\_311.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/about/about_311.shtml)

311 is New York City's phone number for government information and non-emergency services. 311's mission is to help customers access city services and information and to help city government provide the highest possible levels of customer service. We help other city agencies focus on their core missions, manage their workload efficiently, and gain insight into the demands of their customers. Since going live in March of 2003, 311 has received over 13 million calls.

**Features of 311:**

- 311 allows customers to call one easy-to-remember number in order to receive information and access to City government services.
- All calls to 311 are answered by a live operator, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Immediate access to translation services in over 170 languages is available.
- 311 Call Center Representatives use a state-of-the-art database of information and services about City government. Information can be updated in real time, and 311 works closely with other City agencies to maintain the most current information.
- The 311 call center can quickly scale to meet City demands in an emergency situation.

### **How Accenture helped establish NYC 311 service**

Working closely with the city's Department of Information Technology and Telecommunication (DoITT), Accenture mobilized four teams of professionals from both Accenture and the DoITT to quickly and efficiently build and launch the new Citizen Service Center and the 311 hotline. The teams were assigned to business reengineering, technology infrastructure and telephony, and application software and training.

The city has shown leadership in managing change; they are winding down other contact numbers and methods, fully supporting the move toward the one stop shop of 311. The city has already saved money from the consolidation of agency call centers. Accenture was able to help launch this ambitious citizen service program within just nine months.

*\*\*Original article is no longer available on the Accenture website*

#### Updated Links:

Featured Client Story: New York City 311

[http://www.accenture.com/Global/About\\_Accenture/Investor\\_Relations/Annual\\_Report/Featured\\_311.htm](http://www.accenture.com/Global/About_Accenture/Investor_Relations/Annual_Report/Featured_311.htm)

Accenture Awarded New 311 Contract by City of New York (12/11/07)

[http://accenture.tekgroup.com/article\\_display.cfm?article\\_id=4619](http://accenture.tekgroup.com/article_display.cfm?article_id=4619)

### **211: A Call Number for Community Services**

2-1-1 is an easy to remember telephone number that connects people with important community services and volunteer opportunities. Information and referral services (I&R) are the link between people seeking health and human services assistance and the appropriate providers of such services. I&R services across the United States answer more than 50 million calls annually. I&R specialists assess callers' needs and determine the service provider best equipped to handle their problems or crises. Additionally, I&R specialists are trained to determine whether a caller may be eligible for other programs. I&R providers maintain comprehensive databases of resources, including federal, state and local government agencies, community-based organizations and private non-profits.

United Way of America is working in partnership with the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems to support the nationwide rollout of 2-1-1. More than 500 United Ways fund or operate I&R call centers around the country. Generally, 2-1-1 is funded with money from the United Way, foundations, and federal, state, county and city government funds. Congress has recognized the value of I&R services by authorizing funds under such legislation as the Older Americans Act, the Social Services Block Grant and The Public Health Security and the Bioterrorism Preparedness Response Act of 2002. The most successful 2-1-1 Centers involve strong public/private partnerships.

While services that are offered through 2-1-1 vary from community to community, 2-1-1 provides callers with information about and referrals to human services for every day needs and in times of crisis.

For example, 2-1-1 can offer access to the following types of services:

- **Basic Human Needs Resource:** food banks, clothing closets, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance.

- **Physical and Mental Health Resources:** health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, Children's Health Insurance Program, medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention and rehabilitation.
- **Employment Supports:** financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs.
- **Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities:** adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, home health care, transportation, and homemaker services.
- **Support for Children, Youth and Families:** Childcare, after school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services.
- **Volunteer Opportunities and Donations.**

Sources:

United Way, 211 Service: <http://www.211.org/>

Nationwide Status of 2-1-1: <http://www.211.org/status.html> (Includes a map and summaries of 2-1-1 service available in each state.)

### **GEORGIA 211 SERVICE**

There are nine 2-1-1 call centers currently operating in Georgia.

- [United Way 2-1-1 of Metropolitan Atlanta](#) implemented 2-1-1 in 1997 and serves 13 counties. In 2002 they took about 270,000 calls.
- [CONTACT-Helpline](#), serving five counties in the greater Columbus area, started 2-1-1 in January 2000.
- [Community Connections](#) of Northeast Georgia, serving 11 counties around Athens, started service in April 2001.
- [United Way of Northwest Georgia](#) began its 2-1-1 service in July 2001.
- [United Way of Central Georgia](#) in the Macon area launched its 2-1-1 services in August 2001. United Way 2-1-1 serves 15 counties in central Georgia.
- [United Way of the Coastal Empire](#) in Savannah started its 2-1-1 service in August 2001. The 2-1-1 service covers Chatham, Effingham, & Bryan counties. In 2004, Liberty and Glynn counties will be added.
- [United Way of Hall County](#) welcomed its new 2-1-1 service in October 2002.
- [South Central Georgia](#) was approved as a 2-1-1 service provider in January 2003. 2-1-1 of South Central Georgia, a program of the Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness Inc., serves an 18-county area including: Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner and Ware counties.
- [2-1-1, United Way of the CSRA](#) in Augusta launched 2-1-1 on February 24, 2004. Area serves includes Richmond, Columbia, Lincoln and Burke counties.

### **VIRGINIA 2-1-1 SERVICE**

Officially launched on February 10, 2006, as 2-1-1 VIRGINIA, this new program is coordinated through the Virginia Department of Social Services, in partnership with the Virginia Alliance for Information & Referral Systems (VAIRS). There are participating 211 providers in the following cities and counties: Roanoke, Staunton, Norfolk, Lynchburg, and Richmond.

Virginia 2-1-1: <http://www3.irissoft.com/rich/>

Virginia Department of Social Services Press Release:  
[http://www.dss.virginia.gov/news/2006/pr\\_211\\_02-10-2006.pdf](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/news/2006/pr_211_02-10-2006.pdf)

## **Digital Government Initiatives**

### ***Online Customer Service Centers***

#### **UTAH**

**Utah.gov Online Services:** <http://www.utah.gov/services/index.html>

The Utah.gov website features a directory of government services divided first into 3 customer categories: citizen services, business services, and government to government. Each customer category is then sub-divided into specific service categories. For example, the Citizen Online Services section has ten sub-categories listing government services about: city & county, community, driver & vehicle, education, employment, health, safety & insurance, sports & recreation, state legislature, travel & tourism.

**Utah 24/7 Live Help:** <http://www.utah.gov/contact.html>

Live online chat feature available 24-hours, 7 days a week to speak with a Utah.gov customer service representative.

#### **VIRGINIA**

**Virginia Live Help:** <http://www.virginia.gov/cmsportal/>

The Virginia Live Help service allows users to submit questions to customer service staff and receive real-time answers online. Once an inquiry is submitted on screen, the service staff replies with specific options (phone numbers, website addresses) where the user can acquire the detailed information that they need. At the end of the session, users are asked to fill out a feedback form to offer suggestions on how well the service is working. The Live Help service is available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the Commonwealth of Virginia website.

**Virginia** has launched an [online portal](#) consolidating information about the state's business assistance and support services. The portal is available via the state's Web site, [Virginia.gov](http://Virginia.gov).

**My Mobile Virginia:** [http://www.vipnet.org/cmsportal/index\\_wap.html](http://www.vipnet.org/cmsportal/index_wap.html)

My Mobile Virginia is the first program in the nation to make the state homepage accessible through personal digital assistants (PDAs) such as wireless phones, Palm Pilots, and Pocket PCs. Information available on the mobile site includes government contact information, polling place lookup, election results, emergency management, legislative information system, "Lobbyist-In-A-Box", Virginia mobile tax, Virginia tourism, and employee lookup.

#### **IDAHO**

**Idaho's Mobile-Enabled State Website:** [mobile.idaho.gov](http://mobile.idaho.gov)

Idaho offers a mobile version of the state website which incorporates the state's Google-powered search engine and lets users with cell phones search, click and call any state employee without dialing.

## ***One-Stop Permitting Websites***

### **Texas Offers One-Stop Permitting**

Texas has officially launched a one-stop Web site that will allow people to quickly accomplish a variety of tasks online, including applying for an environmental permit, applying for a veteran's home loan, paying a traffic ticket, and renewing an occupational license.

More than 380 state permits can be applied for online through the Texas Online Business Portal, and the number of permits will grow to 600 within a year. In addition, consumer and tourism information, educational opportunities and veterans programs will be available. Within the past year, agency web sites have been linked to the Texas Online sites. Agencies now take applications online, renew licenses and permits, and accept credit cards for payment.

Among other benefits of the one-stop Web access, Texans can find out how to start a business -- choosing a business structure, getting a federal employee identification number, incorporating, and applying for franchise tax permit. In the coming months, applicants will be able to track the status of their permits online.

Other states with online permitting:

- **Michigan** created one-stop shopping for permit applications, which includes an online monitoring tool to check the status of permits and licenses.
- **Oregon** implemented a virtual permitting process in several counties for land use and building permits.
- **North Carolina** streamlined environmental permitting to include online applications and expedited permitting processes.

#### Source:

NGA Front & Center Newsletter, 3/03/05

*\*\*Original article is no longer available on the NGA website*

#### Related Links:

Texas Online: <http://www.state.tx.us/category.jsp?language=eng&categoryId=9>

Michigan Timely Application and Permit Service: <http://www.michigan.gov/mitaps>

North Carolina One-Stop Express Permitting Program (pilot program):

<http://www.enr.state.nc.us/docs/Expresswebsummary21.pdf>

Report of the Oregon Governor's Industrial Lands Task Force:

[http://www.governor.state.or.us/Gov/pdf/final\\_10-17.pdf](http://www.governor.state.or.us/Gov/pdf/final_10-17.pdf)

## ***Online Public Participation Initiatives***

### **South Carolina Indicators Project**

How is South Carolina really performing on key policy areas? How can the state's policy makers and citizens gauge progress over time? What measures should be used? The South Carolina Indicators (SCI) Project is designed to provide citizens and policy makers with valid, reliable and comparable statistical indicators of how South Carolina is performing in eight key policy areas: education, the economy, the environment, public safety, public health, social welfare, culture and recreation, and government administration.

The South Carolina Indicators Project is a Web site operated by the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research. Users not only can compare South Carolina's indicators to those of other states, but also can gauge progress over time. To view the site, visit [www.ipspr.sc.edu/scip/default.asp](http://www.ipspr.sc.edu/scip/default.asp).

#### **Missouri Funding Allocation Challenge (2006)**

The Missouri Department of Transportation is asking its residents to meet what it calls its Funding Allocation Challenge. The online challenge, narrated by MoDOT Director Pete Rahn, invites players to allocate \$100 among 10 categories that include maintenance, construction, safety, urban transit and buses. A player's results are summarized and compared with those of other players. The game, which also shows where the department is actually spending its money, is part of a long-term planning project that will draw on the public's input to help shape the state's future transportation efforts. The game, found on MoDOT's Web site (site no longer available: [www.mapourfuture.org](http://www.mapourfuture.org)) challenges players to distribute money for the state's roads and bridges, as well as the other transportation modes -- aviation, waterways, public transportation and rail.

MoDOT News Release (1/11/06):

“New Online Game Allows You to Spend the State's Transportation Dollars”

<http://www.modot.mo.gov/newsandinfo/newsreleases/2006/January/OnlineFundingGame.htm>

#### **Minnesota Public Radio: Amateur Budget Balancing Initiative (2005)**

More than 7,000 Minnesotans logged on to Minnesota Public Radio's Budget Balancer in 2003 to try their hand at balancing the state's budget, creating 11,000 proposed state spending plans -- 80 percent of them balanced. With the state facing a \$466 million deficit in the coming fiscal year, the Budget Balancer is back. This year's version introduces a new feature that allows users to submit their budgets to state legislators. Participants must register before they can tackle the budget, but once inside, they have more than 100 options for shifting spending or raising revenue. The tool keeps a running tally of each choice, showing how much of a deficit remains or how much of a budget surplus is created. At the end, the program provides a point-by-point comparison to Gov. Tim Pawlenty's proposed budget. Late last year, Pawlenty unveiled a similar Web site asking Minnesotans to offer suggestions on how to fix the budget without raising taxes. To give it a try, visit <http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2005/03/budget/>.

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#### **Additional Information**

The NGA Office of Management Consulting & Training (OMCT) provides governors, chiefs of staff and governors' staff members with valuable resources and management services on the leadership and management of state government and organizing and operating the governor's office. Many OMCT publications are accessible online at [www.nga.org/omct](http://www.nga.org/omct).

For more information on state customer service and efficiency initiatives or for more detailed research on state initiatives described in this brief, please contact Christie Amberman, Senior Management Analyst in NGA's Office of Management Consulting & Training (202/624-5370; [camberman@nga.org](mailto:camberman@nga.org)).