

**Government Upgrade: How Can 3-1-1 Call Centers Improve Service Delivery in Jackson,
Mississippi?**

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Abstract

In order to reduce the 9-1-1 call volume, municipalities across the country have adopted 311 call centers for their non-emergency requests. 3-1-1 is a non-emergency telephone number that citizens can use to find information about and/or access municipal services or to submit service requests to their local governments. The intention of this article is to ask how 311 centers can improve program and service delivery. It later describes the 311 center adopted by the City of Jackson, Mississippi.

According to the City of Jackson, the major causes for poor response times to 911 calls are lack of government accessibility. Citizens have become more reliant on 9-1-1's emergency services for personal situations or quality of life issues. 9-1-1 should only be used for emergency situations. An emergency is any situation that requires immediate assistance from the police, the fire department or an ambulance. In order to release the call volume of 9-1-1 and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services and programs, the municipalities across the country implemented 311 service centers to address nonemergency situations or quality of life issues. 311 centers are citizen service centers that provide citizens with a single number for their non-emergency problems. Some local jurisdictions combine 311 call centers with constituent relationship management which can enhance performance in delivering services. They are favored by local governments because they may increase accountability and transparency of government to their citizens through easy and equal access to services and because they may also increase efficiency and effectiveness in delivering services.

The 311 service center is optional and it may be purchased by a local government such as a city or a county to enhance its service delivery system. The first 311 call center in the United States was adopted in 1996 in Baltimore, Maryland and today these centers exist in many local jurisdictions throughout the country. They are used for several purposes, as follows: to collect information about governmental services, for service requests, to track the status of service requests; to help local governments achieve better results when delivering services, to save costs for local governments, to identify critical service areas, to provide equal access for all citizens and so on.

Launched in April 2011, the City of Jackson's 311 service center sought to reduce nonemergency requests to 9-1-1 calls and to increase government transparency and accountability

and citizen access through a system that receives and tracks municipal service requests. The City of Jackson spent approximately \$600,000 for the purchase of 311, its integration into existing software, equipment, and training. The service center was scheduled to be implemented in three phases; one of three phases has been implemented. Phase I included the installment of 311 online and the development of a call center; as a result, citizens are able to make request via the web or by dialing 311. Currently being implemented, Phase II which includes work orders that can be transmitted to employees in the field and mobile applications for smart phones and tablets that can be used by citizens and employees.

Citizens can make requests via phone, Monday through Friday, 7:30AM-5:30PM. In addition, citizens are able to make online requests and choose from over 100 service categories which include but are not limited to missed recycling, potholes, adopt-a-park and 9-1-1 complaints and response times. Through online requests, citizens are able to map the location of their requests. Jackson's 311 has been paired with three software systems: JACKSTAT (a accountability system), Cityworks (geographical information system), and Request LoGISTics (user-intuitive, web-based interface for the creation of service requests and public inquiries. Both phone and online requesters receive a confirmation to track their requests.

Figure 1: 3-1-1 Reporting System

The City of Jackson MISSISSIPPI

Report a Problem or Request a Service ?

In an emergency, **CALL 911** and do not use this page.

Start a New Request Find Existing Request(s) Cancel this Request

- 1 Identify the Request Type (None Selected)
- 2 Describe the Request
- 3 Map the Request Location
- 4 Enter Contact Information
- 5 Verify and Submit Request

You can always check the status of your request by going to: <http://www.jacksonms.gov/311> or by calling 311 (between 7:30 AM and 5:30 PM, M-F) and providing one of our Customer Service Representatives with your service request number.

REQUEST LOGISTICS

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Like most municipalities, the City of Jackson paired its 311 Service Center with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. First adopted by the private sector as early as the 1980s and later migrating into the public sector, CRM is used to streamline information and predict the needs of customers. Successful 311/CRM Service Centers have reported cost savings through performance based budgeting, easy coordination of projects, accountability, transparency and citizen empowerment.

The 311 system in the City of Jackson is still being implemented. The City of Jackson must measure 311's success to determine if it has reduced the burden of nonemergency calls to 9-1-1. Overall, this will allow the City of Jackson, its tax payers and other municipalities to determine if 9-1-1 response times have improved, if there are less non-emergency calls being placed to 9-1-1, if government accessibility to citizens has improved, if non-emergency requests have been resolved, and if customers are satisfied. At the very least, it will provide officials with

a cost/benefit analysis of 311 and assist them in determining if they should consider other alternatives and interventions.

Future research will include a national study incorporating mixed-methods. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key officials instrumental in the implementation of 311 and surveys designed specifically for employees in both 311 service centers and 9-1-1 call centers. Primary data will be obtained from both centers to determine if nonemergency requests decreased at 9-1-1 call centers thereby increasing nonemergency requests to 311.

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