

Danbury, Connecticut Establishes 311 for Less Than \$100K

The Organization

The City of Danbury is Connecticut's sixth largest city with a population in excess of 75,000 people. Its mission is to ensure a superior quality of life for its citizens by providing the most cost-effective municipal services while preserving the cultural, historical, and natural resources of the City. Danbury City is committed to working with citizens to enhance its position as a premier place to live, work, and raise a family in a traditional yet progressive community.

The Problem

In the past, citizens with an issue would often call or email more than one department or staff member to get resolution. If contact with the City did not produce an immediate response, citizens would call or email again, contacting the Mayor's office or a staff person they knew, whether or not that staff person was able to handle their issue.

The result was a duplication of effort as the multiple phone calls, voice-mail messages, and emails were passed to others and more than one staff member sought to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Often, a citizen would receive more than one reply, sometimes with different responses to the same issue. This would spawn another round of contact.

In other cases, citizens anxious to find correct information, impatient for a resolution, or unsure of who to call, were calling 911.

Analysis

The duplication of effort yielded four serious issues:

- Staff time was being wasted — normal job functions were taking longer to complete
- Citizens were getting inconsistent, inaccurate, and/or incorrect information
- Calls that came through the Mayor's office were resolved first, regardless if they were a high priority or not
- Extra incoming calls to 911 were endangering the lives and livelihoods of citizens who were making 911 calls for true emergencies

The Recommendation

At the direction of Mayor Mark Boughton, the City of Danbury formed a 311 Task Force. Its goals were to:

- Establish a 311 call center on a tight budget
- Reduce duplication of effort within the City
- Reduce non-emergency calls to 911
- Provide a common voice for the City at every point of contact with citizens
- Help staff become more efficient at answering everyday questions
- Resolve citizen service requests in a more timely and efficient manner
- Make staff more available to do their jobs
- Interface with GIS to begin tracking problem areas in the City

(more)

The Solution

In order to establish its 311 non-emergency call center, first the City of Danbury met with its local telephone service provider to establish a 311 calling area, as well as a direct dial seven-digit number. Next, officials met with the largest cell phone service providers in the Danbury area to establish 311 routing.

Danbury officials learned that each the phone service provider needs to retain and attract customers, so the to install a 311 service with the local telephone company fell to just a fraction of the six-digit number first proposed. To keep pace with the land-line provider, the cable and mobile providers instituted 311 mapping for free.

Once it became known that Danbury was seeking to install a 311 system, numerous companies stepped forward seeking to be the provider for the call-tracking system. Since the City was already using QScend's QContent product to manage the City's municipal website, officials chose QScend's QAlert citizen request management system.

With all the pieces in place, the City found existing office space in which to house the 311 office and tracked down existing resources to furnish the space. An operator was then hired to staff the office during City Hall hours.

In addition, the City of Danbury added QAlert to its website to make it easy for citizens to submit a request any time of the day, any day of the week, from any Internet-ready computer. With the 311 center staffed only during the day, this extra point of contact was crucial.

The Implementation

In implementing its new 311 call center, the City of Danbury undertook a project that would eliminate the "old way of doing things," according to Mayor Boughton.

Suddenly, *out* were the days when service requests were written on scrap pieces of paper or typed straight into email. *In* were days when all citizen questions, requests, and complaints were automatically routed and tracked electronically.

First and foremost, the City instituted a collection of scripts so that anyone answering the phone would respond in the same manner — "*Thank you* for calling the City of Danbury. How may I help you?"

"That disarms people right away," said Mayor Boughton. "If you're trying to collect money from people in the form of tax dollars, why wouldn't you be nice?"

In putting its 311 call center online, Danbury:

- Held training sessions to familiarize department heads with QAlert — how to respond to service requests and how to report on their departments' activities at staff meetings
- Established a 90-day rollout period with a soft launch for departments to get used to the new language and to transfer citizen service requests to the 311 line

(more)

- Printed refrigerator magnets with the 311 logo and the Mayor's name ("What elected official wouldn't love to have his or her name sticking to every fridge in town? This works by council wards, too," quipped Mayor Boughton)
- Marketed the 311 center to the City using the local news media and direct mail
- Generated interest and publicity by having City officials, including Mayor Boughton, field calls in the Call Center
- Established regular meeting and reporting times for all City departments

Conclusion

311 calls and QAlert submissions via the Web are quickly becoming the City of Danbury's main way for citizens to gain information about City services and contact the City to report problems, from potholes to missed garbage and recycling pick-up to blight.

When the system was first implemented, the Danbury 311 call center was receiving an average of 60 calls per month. Within three months, that number had grown to more than 300. To put that into perspective, a nearby city in Connecticut with three times the population of Danbury is recording approximately one-third the number of calls that Danbury is. That city spent more than six figures to institute its 311 center.

In addition, Danbury has seen a nearly 30 percent reduction in the number of non-emergency 911 calls, meaning police and rescue personnel are that less likely to be on such a call when a serious issue is reported.

With all departments funneling calls to the 311 line, and with each call being entered into QAlert, the City of Danbury can automatically notify a citizen as to the closure of a service request; generate reports to assist department heads in project and staff management, project budgeting, and budget requests; and offer citizens an estimated time of completion for a service request type.

As the City of Danbury, Connecticut has shown, by using QScend's QAlert as a cornerstone, it is possible to establish a robust, efficient, and successful 311 non-emergency call center fit to rival any other such service.