



AGENDA SUBMITTAL TO SOLANO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

ITEM TITLE Receive a report on the potential benefits of a 311 citizen support service center to Solano County's customer service and process improvement efforts; Authorize the County Administrator to negotiate a contract with ACS to develop and operate a pilot 311 call center for a period not to exceed three years		BOARD MEETING DATE December 11, 2007	AGENDA NUMBER 23
Dept: Contact: Extension:	CAO and DOIT Veronica A. Ferguson and Ira Rosenthal X6107 and X2703	Supervisorial District Number ALL	
	Published Notice Required?	Yes _____	No <u> X </u>
	Public Hearing Required?	Yes _____	No <u> X </u>

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive a report on the potential benefits of a 311 citizen support service center to Solano County's customer service and process improvement efforts;
2. Authorize the County Administrator to negotiate a contract with ACS to develop and operate a pilot 311 call center for a period not to exceed three years.

SUMMARY:

The recommended actions begin the process of establishing a 311 Customer Support Call Center within the County. Institution of "311" is anticipated to improve service responsiveness and gather performance measurement data. A 311 center can also be used as a springboard process to review and improve the effectiveness of internal procedures.

If approved by the Board, the CAO will negotiate a contract with ACS, the County's current Information Technology service provider, for the operation of the pilot. Through the establishment of the pilot, the County will be able to move swiftly in the development of the call center and take advantage of ACS' in-depth experience and expertise in implementing call centers and shared service centers. For the pilot, the County will be partnering with a company that has a proven track record within Solano County and is also the recipient of numerous call center and business process outsourcing awards for service quality.

FINANCING:

ACS has provided an estimate of approximately \$1.3 million as the annual operating cost for the 311 Call Center. These rates are based on the call center being open 7 days a week for 16 hours a day of operation from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. excluding County observed holidays. Costs are calculated on a blended salary hourly rates and projected call times/per minute costs. County staff is currently evaluating the proposal.

The start-up budget for the 311 call center will need to include the build-out of unimproved space on the 3rd floor of the County Administration Center, hardware, software, furniture, telephony enhancements, and other related equipment. All of these costs will be estimated and presented to the Board in January, 2008.

DISCUSSION:

Staff proposes working with ACS with the goal of designing, integrating, and transition to a 311 call center within six months following Board approval. Staff envisions this as a pilot project that would itself have specified service levels and performance improvement goals that would be reviewed annually and correlated with the planned citizen surveys. ACS would provide the call center management expertise and local customer service representatives that will be thoroughly trained on the 311 system, and will speak fluent English. A target number will also speak Spanish and/or Tagalog. The 311 center would operate from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week. For every call, whether or not department action is required, the customer service representatives' (CSR's) use of the customer service portal would automatically record the issue. The portal would give every department the tools needed to receive, track, resolve, and analyze service requests or issues.

311 Definition: The 311 concept provides a centralized, one-call service center for citizens to access all non-emergency services while providing departments the tools they need to track individual requests and overall service performance. All departments within the County can benefit from a centralized 311 program, offering citizens the ability to call a single "311" number when requesting or looking for information on County services while potentially reducing costs and allowing department staff to focus on higher priority activities as opposed to simple inquiries and/or misdirected calls.

The 311 concept provides managed interaction between citizens who need specific information or services and the departments that provide them. Rather than thumbing through the yellow pages to guess which department can address their issues, and/or being directed to an erroneous County extension or Department, citizens can place a single 311 call, explain the issue to a courteous customer service representative (CSR), and trust that the CSR will either provide the citizen with a comprehensive response, or route the call to the appropriate department that will solve/respond to the request. The call center would use an online tool to allow department personnel to receive, track, and close requests that the CSR cannot handle alone. As needed, a CSR would contact the original caller to report the status of the service request. The central technology that manages this interaction is a citizen relationship management (CRM) application that would provide a knowledge base of information to aid the CSR in serving the caller and a suite of online portals and tools that support customer service operations, department resolution, and citizen self-service. The implementation of 311 would provide easier access to information and allow service requests to be taken at the time of the first contact; providing one "front door" to the County for its citizens.

A Successful Customer Service Model: The Solano County Board of Supervisors has emphasized improved customer service as a key strategic planning goal. County staff has engaged in a number of programs in support of this goal including the recently completed organization-wide customer service training and soon to be initiated web site redesign and citizen survey. We have also studied other methods to improve customer service, streamline business processes and improve the effectiveness of service delivery. The concept of a consolidated citizen service center, "311" has the potential to advance these goals.

A number of cities and counties across the country have implemented 311 centers and have seen marked improvement in citizen satisfaction with services and have also seen significant improvements in productivity. Some of the notable successes include Baltimore, the City and County of Denver, New York City, and Miami-Dade County.

The experience of the City and County of Denver is of particular interest because their combination of call centers is similar to the one staff is proposing for Solano County. Denver has both a regional 211 call center operated by the United Way, a separate social services call center (similar to the call center that H&SS is in the process of establishing) and a 311 center. They have found that these three customer interaction centers work very well in concert with one another and that citizens are not confused about which center to call for services. Denver's 311 experience in improving citizen satisfaction, streamlining service delivery, and improving operational efficiency, is similar to scores of other examples studied by ICMA.

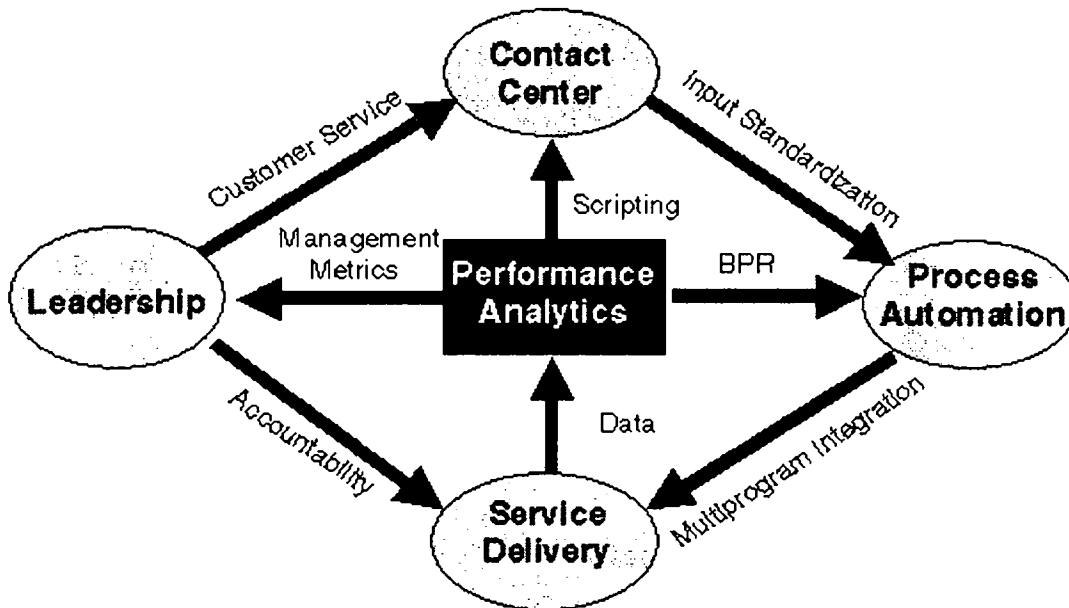
A recent study by ICMA found that forty-two percent of U.S. local governments have either implemented a centralized customer service system (15%) or are considering adopting one (27%). They have also found that 311 call centers significantly reduce the demands on 911 call centers allowing them to focus on true emergency response situations rather than distributing information. Other key ICMA findings include:

- The customer service/311 system has become a key tool for understanding the needs of citizens and an effective channel for fostering better communications with them.
- The customer service/311 system makes it possible to close the loop in response to citizen needs and document the results of the local government response.
- The customer service/311 system, by giving citizens convenient access to local government services, allows enhances citizen engagement and public outreach.
- Performance measures and service level agreements associated with 311 commit departments to responding to citizen needs in a specified time period, enhancing accountability for programs and services.
- Data collected through the customer service/311 system can aid departments in workload management and resource allocation by determining where demand is greatest.
- Having the customer service/311 system allows policymakers and upper management to spend more time setting long-term policy for the community

Process and Performance Improvement: Staff believes that the 311 concept supports the transformational objective that the Board has for customer service improvement and is consistent with the County's 2008-2012 strategic plan and catalytic projects supporting the goal of Invest in the Future. Significant benefits would be derived through increased attention to the statistics generated from the 311 center. As a result of monitoring these statistics, the County can more rapidly address issues affecting County services and public safety and by doing so, improve the efficiency of both

the 311 center as well as the County departments. Additionally, the performance metrics that are delivered in a 311 solution serve to integrate accountability into each process and provide County management with the tools to improve performance and deploy resources more effectively.

Staff also believes that a 311 center can significantly leverage other improvement programs we have included in the 2008-2012 strategic plan. The graphic depicted below shows the influence a 311 call center can have on: the collection and interpretation of performance data; improvement in customer service and accountability; business process re-engineering, process simplification, and automation.



BPR = business process re-engineering

Contract Negotiation: Staff is recommending that the County pursue a professional services contract with ACS. ACS has in-depth experience and expertise in implementing call centers and shared service centers and employs over 17,000 customer service agents nationwide. In New Orleans, ACS implemented a call center allowing them to consolidate inquiries and requests for 30 departments. In Denver County, ACS provides a customer service call center for child support enforcement and other Health and Human Service programs such as TANF, food stamps, medical assistance, and employment and eligibility services. ACS is also a business partner with Lagan Technologies. Lagan provides CRM technology that has been top-rated by technology research companies including Gartner, Inc. and Forrester Research. ACS is also the recipient of a number of call center and business process outsourcing awards for quality.

Negotiating with ACS is recommended because of their capabilities and track record in the call center business as well as their experience with Solano County. Staff believes that ACS can quickly implement a 311 program that will yield positive results over the 3 year term of the pilot. Staff proposes to continue working with ACS to fully develop timelines, budgets, implementation, and operating plans and contracts for review by the Board in January, 2008.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board may choose to not implement a 311 citizen service center. This is not recommended as there have been many examples of successful 311 centers that have significantly improved citizen perceptions of and satisfaction with government services.

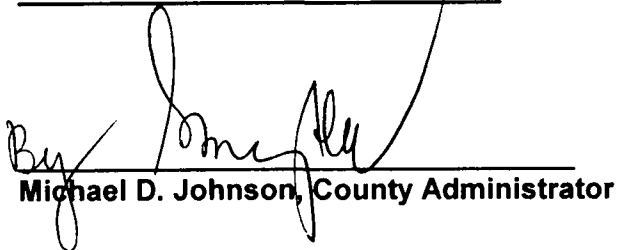
The Board could direct staff to competitively bid the development and implementation of a 311 center. Staff does not recommend this option due to the time and cost of the solicitation process. ACS has a firm track record in the call center business and prior analysis of our technology contract with ACS shows they are very price competitive. ACS also has proven experience implementing the necessary CRM software and their experience with County operations should allow for a faster implementation of the pilot.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The County Administrative Office has worked closely with the Department of Information Technology (DOIT) on the concept of a 311 call center. The County Department Heads have received presentations on the potential of a 311 call center. County Counsel has reviewed the agenda report and will assist in the contract negotiations.

The CAO has spoken to the City Managers about cities participating in a consolidated 311 call center. The cities have opted not to join the effort at this time due to their budget constraints. It may be possible that the cities will participate in the call center after the program is implemented and the benefits of the call center are documented.

DEPARTMENT HEAD SIGNATURE:



Michael D. Johnson, County Administrator

Attachment A: 311 Citizen Support Center, PowerPoint presentation by ACS
Attachment B: 311 Assessment for Solano County, dated 10/9/07, by ACS