

# Malden 311 and Workers' Compensation Reentry Program

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*Communities Served in This Project: Malden*

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## Introductory Letter

Glen Shor, Secretary  
Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance  
Massachusetts State House Room 373  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Secretary Shor,

The City of Malden sought to increase its ability to service its constituents while increasing the efficiency of all departments through the establishment of a 311 Call Center. Funded through the Patrick Administration's Community Innovation Challenge (CIC) grant program, the 311 Call Center allowed city residents to communicate effectively with their municipal government while providing the City with an opportunity to collect and track citizen requests.

The City sought to staff the call center in a truly innovative fashion. The 311 Call Center is used as a way to provide a workforce reentry program to City workers who are out of work on Workers' Compensation benefits who are unable to return to their main job function but are cleared to work in a "light duty" function. Traditionally, light duty work assignments have been hard to both define and create. Prior to this innovative approach, the task of finding a light duty assignment consisted only of looking within one's own department. This approach allowed for any department who could not find a light duty assignment within their department to have an immediate option in sending their returning workers to one central location where there was a need for work as well as an environment that dramatically reduced the potential for re-injury.

With the City of Malden kicking off a program as a charter member of the Commonwealth Connect work-order tracking system ([click for more info about Commonwealth Connect](#)), the City sought to support the launch of this program with a fully operational 311 Call Center equipped with three major elements: (1) Work-order Management System; (2) Automated Call Distribution System and; (3) a Training/Knowledge Management System. The City planned to connect these previously disconnected services together in a unified 311 Call Center, where we would be able to properly serve our residents with consistent and satisfactory customer experience while utilizing the resulting data to constantly improve our services and response times.

The City put the Worker's Compensation Worker Reentry element of the project into place to solve a problem that the City experienced for many years. Workers who are out on Workers' Compensation are a financial burden to a municipality. Medical, administrative, salary and legal costs all accumulate as a worker continues to be unable to perform his or her duties. This project successfully established improved the ability of the City of Malden to respond to requests from residents while also

Regards,

Ron Cochran

Communications Director

## **Executive Summary**

Overall, this valuable exercise effectively improved the City of Malden's connection with residents with the establishment of a 311 Call Center. Along the way, the City experienced some unexpected outcomes that caused officials to reevaluate the program.

The City achieved many of its goals in terms of increasing services provided to constituents and creating a new program to help employees return to a light duty assignment but the City fell short in its efforts to gather effective data to demonstrate a return on investment. This is not to say that the City did not realized any gain in service but rather that the efforts made toward implementing metrics were not as effective as we thought pre-project.

From the perspective of our Worker Reentry Program, it was a huge success for the workers that we were able to get through the program as well as providing a much-needed pathway back to a light duty assignment, but the inconsistency of the availability of this workforce challenged the success of the program.

## **Section 1: Partner Communities**

The City of Malden was the only entity participating in this project however several departments came together to help bring this new program to fruition. Participating officials included: (1) department heads who sent employees to the new assignment; (2) The Legal department for their work to clear all the legalities necessary as well as facilitating communication with the workers themselves; (3) the Human Resources department for their help in the onboarding process; and (4) the Mayor's office for taking the lead in helping drive this program to completion.

This program could easily be replicated in any community. Attached to the bottom of this document are two documents that our legal department helped produce that would be helpful in the onboarding process.

## **Section 2: Goals**

1. To collect a large amount of data to be regularly analyzed. We will source our data gathering from two separate reporting systems:

- a. Standard reporting for incoming call data from the ACD Software; and
- b. Standard reporting for work-order requests from the Commonwealth Connect application.

2. Within six months from the project start date, establish a core group of four 311 Call Center agents to work normal City Hall business hours.
3. Within six months from the project start date, establish a backup group of five additional employees to act as secondary agents to assist in times of high call volume.
4. We will immediately recall back to work two employees currently collecting Workers' Compensation. (These employees will be determined to be "Light Duty" eligible.)
5. At the conclusion of year one, call volume of all direct dial numbers within City Hall will be reduced by 70%.
6. At the conclusion of year one, call volume to the non-emergency fire and police phone lines will be reduced by 40%.

### **Section 3: Implementation Plan**

Several activities made up the City of Malden's efforts to develop a 311 Call Center. These efforts centered around the establishment of physical space, purchase of infrastructure, creation of constituent relationship management software, employment of staff, and assessment of legal issues. \

1. Physical Space
  - a. Cubicals, office furniture and telecom/computer infrastructure such as computer workstations and phones. (A helpful tip is to use computers known as "thin clients" so you do not have to purchase full computer workstations to do what amounts to basic internet browser-based work)
2. Telephony
  - a. Infrastructure such as PRI network cards.
  - b. 311 Service (Landline) purchased from Verizon.
  - c. 311 Service (Cell) in the form of agreements from major cell vendors.
  - d. Call Tracking/Reporting Software – call accounting and tracking from Metropolis Software.
3. Constituent Relationship Management Software
  - a. System Configuration of GovQA Constituent Relationship Management software.
  - b. SeeClickFix Integration into GovQA
4. Staffing
  - a. Volunteers
  - b. Workers Comp workers returning to light duty.
5. Legal
  - a. Creation of process to clear workers for light duty work

The process began by ensuring that the basic requirements set out in the grant application were met. There first had to be three important validation steps taken before the real core of the project could begin.

1. Was there physical space available to house the workers
2. Were the software and hardware environments for the telephony changes up to minimum requirement levels of the new software and hardware that we were looking to purchase and add on.
3. Did our policies and procedures with respect to offering a “light duty” assignment provide a path for workers to come back without incident.

During this validation phase the City discovered some concerns as noted in the “Challenges” section of this document. Fortunately, the City overcame most of these challenges but some challenges required us to pivot in another direction to keep the project afloat.

Below is an approximate timeline of how the project was implemented.

## **Month 1**

- **Task: Verizon Phone Number Procurement**  
Established a business services contact with Verizon to establish the 7 digit land line that would anchor the call center. We used 781-322-2311 as a mnemonic to easily remember the number as in 322 “to get to” “311”. This was also a prerequisite requirement for purchasing the 311 short dial number from Verizon. Although many other development tasks could have been done before this, we were made aware of a 60 business day timeline for implementation of the 311 number so we wanted to make sure this was a parallel task that could run in the background while we did other work.
- **Task: Cell Phone Vendor Short Dial Number Procurement**  
Contacted business reps from all the major cell carriers including Verizon, TMobile, AT&T, Sprint to sign an agreement with each to have them offer the 311 short dial code on their phone. The system works so that the when a customer dials 311 on their cell phone while in the geographical boundaries of Malden, it forwards to our call center.
- **Task: Check Existing Phone Infrastructure for Minimum Requirements**  
Consulted with Valley Communications who is our phone provider to see if our phone system could handle a network card for 311. This is also known as installing another PRI which is what allows another main number to come into our phone system. It is critical to find this out early because it can add significantly to your costs if you need to do major telephony infrastructure updates to accommodate for the new PRI.

## **Month 2**

- **Task: Development of Legal Process for Light Duty Assignemnt**

Our City Solicitor’s office went through an extensive process to determine how best to return workers coming off of Workers Comp to light duty. Details of the final process

are detailed in a task in month 5. This task was more of the brainstorm sessions and early discussions about how to make it possible.

- **Task: Physical Space Prep**  
Worked with an electrician and cubical installation vendor to map out the costs for setting up a small room with cubicles as well as with the electrician to wire the room for workstations.
- **Task: Order Supplies, Equipment and Furniture for Call Center**  
We ordered comfortable chairs for the workers to sit in along with computer and phone accessories that were ergonomically fit so as not to risk furthering any injury that they were coming off of.
- **Task: Produce CRM System**  
We had already been in a CRM evaluation stage prior to this project but would consider it a critical part of the project. We chose a system known as GovQA which allowed for Web and Mobile submissions of requests and administration. Additionally, they were going to be able to integrate with SeeClickFix which would allow us to have a CRM system but also stay involved in the Commonwealth Connect program.

### Month 3

- **Task: GovQA Training**  
Pulled in all parties that will be responsible for solving any service requests across all departments.
- **Task: 311 Number Go-Live and Testing**  
Once Verizon and the associated cell vendors completed their tasks of creating a short dial number, we tested it from all points to make sure that we would be receiving calls correctly.

### Month 4

- **Task: Logo Design and Branding**  
Engaged with a graphic designer to develop a logo and branding images to go along with the 311 program.
- **Task: Light Duty Worker Onboarding and Training**  
Workers were cleared for light duty and told to report to our call center for assignment.
- **Task: Worker Request Type and Workflow Development for CRM system.**  
Worked extensively with GovQA to develop all possible request types and any automated workflow tasks that needed to be put into the system.

### Month 5

- **Task: Finalize Legal Process to Return Light Duty Workers to Work in the 311 Call Center**

We employed an outside claims administrator who performs regular review of medical information. As soon as it appears from medical information an employee may have the functional capacity for modified duty assignment, the employee's job description and the call center call description are provided together with a request to the employee's treating physician for details of the employee's functional capacity, and whether or not the employee is able to return to modified duty assignment. Most of the regular job functions do not have a modified/light duty assignment, although effort is made to look within the department in which the employee is working first; if no modified assignment is available, and the employee is medically capable of returning to duty, he is assigned to the call center.

## **Month 6**

- **Task: Additional GovQA Training**

We found that more departments throughout City Hall would be making use of this tool than we originally anticipated and we wanted to provide more training for them.

## **Month 7**

- **Task: Decal Printing**

Had main logo developed as a decal that could be placed on all city vehicles. After these were printed, we handed them out to all the departments with vehicles to have them affix the sticker to their vehicle.

- **Task: Volunteer Worker Recruiting**

Put out a press release and social media campaign asking for residents to apply to be 311 volunteers.

## **Month 8-12** (Grouped and Summarized Because Tasks Occurred Sporadically Through This Timeframe)

- **Task: Podcast Creation**

In our original project plan we anticipated that promotional materials would largely consist of physical printed ads or paper communication. We felt that a much more powerful means of communicating the message would be to do something innovative that could sustain for many months or even years after the grant was over.

We hired our web developer who had experience in creating a podcast to guide us through the process from what equipment to purchase along with how to configure the podcast to be consumed on our website as well as the popular podcasting mediums such as iTunes and Stitcher.



- **Task: Volunteer Onboarding and Training**  
Finalized the onboarding of all volunteers who put their names in back during our recruiting campaign. Although this was a volunteer effort, we conducted full interviews and background checks on these volunteers as if they were paid workers.

## Section 4: Budget

The most significant change to the budget was in moving funds from promotional materials into call center infrastructure. It became clear that we were going to need to better prepare our infrastructure to allow agents to answer the phone. Promotional materials made the most sense to shift the money from.

### Budget

|                                        |          |
|----------------------------------------|----------|
| 311 Number acquisition and maintenance | \$2,460  |
| Call Tracking and Reporting            | \$10,000 |
| Call Center Infrastructure             | \$4,970  |
| CRM System and Integration             | \$4,000  |
| Promotional materials                  | \$6,000  |

### Line Item Expenditures

| Item                               | Cost     |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| PRI Configuration                  | 458.40   |
| 311 Number Acquisition             | 1,875.00 |
| Cube Installation                  | 1,875.00 |
| CRM System                         | 4,000.00 |
| PRI Install                        | 647.00   |
| Jacks and electrical for back room | 1,500.00 |
| 311 Website integration            | 1,000.00 |
| Cubical Reconfiguration            | 315.00   |

|                                                         |          |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Metropolis Call Tracking                                | 9,535.80 |
| Chairs for Back room                                    | 599.85   |
| Repair of broken jacks                                  | 158.00   |
| Logo Development                                        | 1,040.00 |
| Podcasting Equipment                                    | 649.00   |
| Podcasting Equipment                                    | 349.55   |
| Podcast Hosting                                         | 480.00   |
| Podcast Development, Setup,<br>Integration and Tutorial | 3,000.00 |
| Decals for city trucks                                  | 289.00   |

## **Section 5: Challenges and Solutions**

The City faced several challenges throughout the term of the project.

### **Phone Systems:**

#### *Challenge*

When we had originally conceptualized this project, we imagined a fully functional call center with a phone system that could do many things including call tracking and monitoring, advanced call queuing and routing. We budgeted for the low end of such a system but found out that what we had budgeted for would not be com

#### *Solution*

We went back to our phone vendor and had them make some basic programming changes to allow multiple phones to receive simultaneous rings so that calls to the 311 Call Center could be answered by the first available agent rather than an actual hold queue. We did lose a lot of functionality we had planned for but it allowed us to be up and running with answering 311 calls without having to step up into a call routing software in a much higher cost bracket. We redeployed the funds saved to a robust call tracking and reporting software that could monitor phone traffic on our network. This allowed us to run the detailed level metrics we needed to monitor our progress.

### **Staffing:**

#### *Challenge*

The City successfully onboarded the first 3 Workers Comp Light Duty Workers. They did outstanding work for us but due to the legalities of their ongoing cases, they became unable to work in the call center any more. Some of the reasons for their departure included early retirement, case settlement, termination for other reasons. From a perspective of trying to clear people off the roles of workers compensation, this looks like a win for the City but from a perspective of relying on these workers to staff the call center, it became a challenge.

### *Solution*

When we lost our workers, we could not backfill these positions due to the fact that having workers eligible to return to light duty work is an unknown commodity. Our solution was to solicit our residents for volunteers who would staff the call center during the gaps of time when we did not have paid workers. We launched an outreach campaign for these volunteers and were very successful onboarding nearly 5 volunteers who regularly staff the call center to this day.

### **CRM Software:**

#### *Challenge*

We encountered a number of challenges with the implementation of our Constituent Relationship Management(CRM software but the most significant was that of integration with Commonwealth Connect. Because we were a Commonwealth Connect community seeing great success with SeeClickFix as a resident reporting issue, we wanted to maintain that continuity with our residents. While SeeClickFix is a great tool for residents to report quality of life issues, it cannot scale well for other issue types that could potentially be reported in a 311 Call Center. This was the impetus for getting a more robust CRM system. However, this presented a new challenge; how would we continue to function but not have to constantly check two systems. We assumed that because the new CRM system was Open 311 Compliant that it would be able to easily integrate with Commonwealth Connect. We significantly underestimated this integration and as a result spent almost 6 months going back and forth between the two vendors to find an adequate solution.

#### *Solution*

As a solution, the Commonwealth Connect program and GovQA work together to tie in each other's Application Programming Interface (API) such that tickets entered in either system would spawn a sister ticket in the other. There needed to be a way for each system to be notified of closure of the sister ticket and also to update that ticket with the necessary closure information. When a ticket is closed out the requesting resident gets notified that the work is complete which satisfies the resident and a closed ticket is data that becomes reportable down the line for the City to do analysis on. Integration between these two systems was necessary so both of these consumers of the resulting data (resident and City administration) needed to have things accurately reflect the status of the request. The integration eventually made to work seamlessly and continues to work nicely to this day.

## **Section 6: Outcomes**

Our city benefited greatly from this project and could certainly see it being effective for other municipalities. Below are the most significant outcomes that happened as a result of this project coming to fruition.

1. Our residents now have one clear path to getting their non-emergency questions and requests answered.

2. Our administration has a viable option to return workers to a light duty assignment that accommodates any medical limitations they may have.
3. We now have a way to monitor incoming call volume to all departments of City Hall allowing us to see how the 311 Call Center affects this call volume.
4. We now have a new influx of volunteers working for the call center as well as a repeatable onboarding process for any workers that work in the 311 Call Center.
5. We now have a way to track service request data so that we can begin to align city resources with the service requests to see what efficiencies can be gained through statistical data. This will also allow us to make strategic decisions on resources using tools such as StatNet.
6. We now have one easy way of communicating with our residents a resource for them to go to when we are broadcasting announcements about City Emergencies such as weather events. This allows us to substantially reduce the amount of calls that would have otherwise gone into our 911 emergency line.
7. We now have a new and innovative way to communicate with our residents in our “What’s The 311” podcast. Not only does this serve as a tool to promote our 311 service but it allows us to bring a high level of visibility to our constituent services efforts.

#### **Regionalization Documents:**

Not Applicable

#### **Contact Information:**

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Communications Director  
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200 Pleasant St.  
Malden, MA 02148  
[rcochran@cityofmalden.org](mailto:rcochran@cityofmalden.org)  
781-397-7000 x2007

#### **Resources:**

**Sample Light Duty Return to Work Letter**

Dear

After reviewing the response to our letter to Dr.                    dated                    concerning your ability to return to a modified assignment immediately, I am taking this opportunity to notify you that we do have temporary assignment of work available for you that is compatible with the capabilities outlined by your treating physician. This assignment, as directed by your physician, will only involve light duty                    hours per week at the 311 call center with a break after each two hour period.

Accordingly, please report to Ron Cochran in the Mayor's Office, on Monday, October 7, 2013 at 8:00 a.m. for your assignment. Please note your working hours will be 20 hours per week during "City Hall" hours of operation (Mon, Wed and Thu 8-4; Tue 8-7pm and Fri 8 to 12 noon). The specific work hours will be determined by Mr. Cochran. You should dress comfortably, however, if possible business casual attire would be appreciated. Please park at the Jackson Street garage, obtain a ticket and your parking will be validated each day of work.

You will, of course, be compensated at your regular rate of pay from your regular position.

If you have any questions or concerns as to what may be involved, please do not hesitate to contact Diane Anthony, worker's compensation representative at 781 397 7106.

Thank you for your attention to this letter and welcome back. We hope that you will be able to resume full duties as soon as possible in accord with your doctor's treatment plan.

Sincerely,

### **311 Call Center Job Description**

#### **Job Description**

The Call Center Customer Service Representative responds to residents' general inquiries, questions, and customer complaints by attempting to resolve the problem according to guidelines established by the department. The CSR projects a professional company image when responding verbally via phone but also through inquiries that come from various input channels such as email, mobile and social media.

#### **Essential Job Functions**

- Answer incoming phone calls from the 311 Resident Response Call Center

- Support and provide superior service via phones, e-mails and resident facing ticket systems.
- Use questioning and listening skills that support effective telephone communication.
- Use an effective approach to handle special telephone tasks like call transfers, taking messages, call backs, holds, interruptions, and unintentional disconnects.
- Understand the impact of attitude in handling calls professionally
- Effectively deal with angry callers, and upset residents
- Use the most appropriate way to communicate with different behavior types on the telephone.
- Apply the elements of building positive rapport with different types of customers over the phone.
- Apply the proper telephone etiquette to satisfy various customer situations.
- Apply appropriate actions to effectively control a telephone call.
- Identify voice skills and how to enhance a good telephone presentation.
- Other duties as assigned.

### **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities**

- Be able to communicate effectively with a diverse age and ethnic population.
- Ability to remain calm and polite during resident complaint calls
- Demonstrate an audible, friendly, professional, and well-mannered speaking voice.
- Possess impressive telephone etiquette.
- Ability to deliver excellent customer service, externally and internally.
- Ability to interact positively with the public via telephone.
- Good communication and problem solving skills are a must.
- Great communication skills and computer skills as well as ability to work with others in close manner.
- Computer literate or ability to learn customer service software applications.
- Exceptional organizational and follow-through skills.

### **Physical Demands and Working Conditions:**

Stand, Sit and Walk as needed

No Bending, Stooping or Lifting required

No Pushing, Pulling or Carrying Needed

Headset Available for answering the telephone

Breaks as needed

Other accommodations/restrictions may be considered on an as needed basis