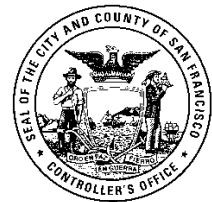


City and County of San Francisco

Office of the Controller – City Services Auditor

SAN FRANCISCO 311:

**New Technology, Stronger
Departmental Partnerships, and
Robust Internal Controls Will
Improve Customer Service**



August 9, 2018

**OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER
CITY SERVICES AUDITOR**

The City Services Auditor (CSA) was created in the Office of the Controller through an amendment to the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco (City) that voters approved in November 2003. Charter Appendix F grants CSA broad authority to:

- Report on the level and effectiveness of San Francisco's public services and benchmark the City to other public agencies and jurisdictions.
- Conduct financial and performance audits of city departments, contractors, and functions to assess efficiency and effectiveness of processes and services.
- Operate a whistleblower hotline and website and investigate reports of waste, fraud, and abuse of city resources.
- Ensure the financial integrity and improve the overall performance and efficiency of city government.

CSA may conduct financial audits, attestation engagements, and performance audits. Financial audits address the financial integrity of both city departments and contractors and provide reasonable assurance about whether financial statements are presented fairly in all material aspects in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles. Attestation engagements examine, review, or perform procedures on a broad range of subjects such as internal controls; compliance with requirements of specified laws, regulations, rules, contracts, or grants; and the reliability of performance measures. Performance audits focus primarily on assessment of city services and processes, providing recommendations to improve department operations.

CSA conducts audits in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office. These standards require:

- Independence of audit staff and the audit organization.
- Objectivity of the auditors performing the work.
- Competent staff, including continuing professional education.
- Quality control procedures to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with the auditing standards.

For questions regarding the report, please contact Chief Audit Executive Tonia Lediju at Tonia.Lediju@sfgov.org or 415-554-5393 or CSA at 415-554-7469.

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City and County of San Francisco

Office of the Controller - City Services Auditor

San Francisco 311:

August 9, 2018

New Technology, Stronger Departmental Partnerships, and Robust Quality Assurance Controls Will Improve Customer Service

Why We Conducted the Audit

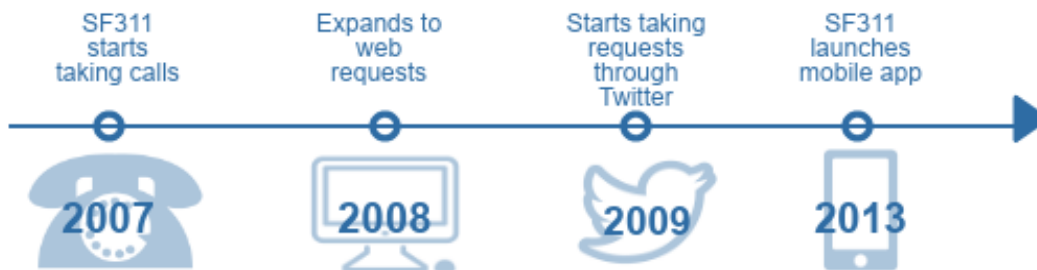
The Office of the Controller's City Services Auditor Division (CSA) audited San Francisco 311 (SF311), which is the single point of entry for—and resolution of—requests made by residents of and visitors to the City and County of San Francisco (City).

Given the growing demand for government services and the ever-evolving business technology landscape, CSA audited SF311 to assess how it uses human and technological resources and to identify opportunities to optimize performance and provide a better public experience.

What We Found

OPERATIONS

Since inception, SF311 has expanded its operations to respond to the growing demand for its services. The extent of government services and contact methods available to customers continues to evolve.



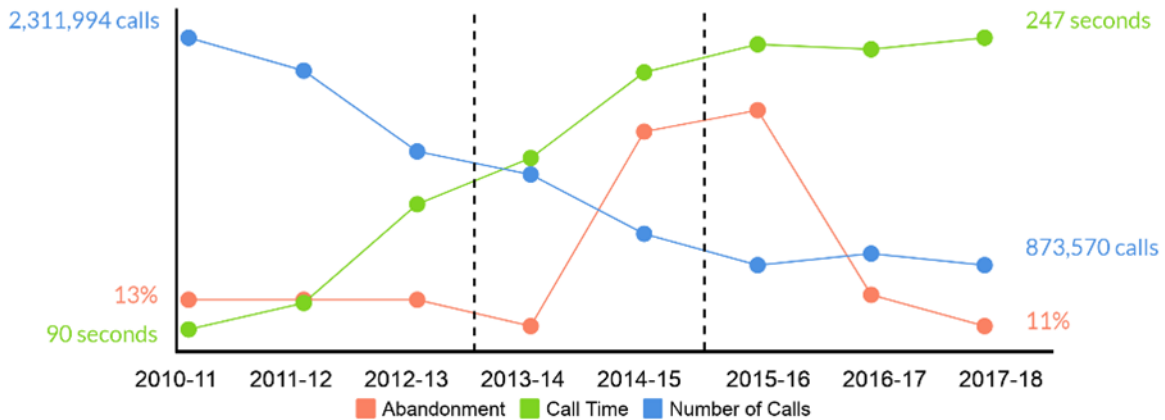
Customers can submit an array of requests to SF311 for services, which are fulfilled by responding city departments, and for answers about government information. In 2015 SF311 routed 335,242 service requests and accessed 309,977 articles to answer or transfer information requests. These requests ranged across many categories.

- Business Information Lookup (3%)
- Property Tax (5%)
- Damaged Parking Meters (2%)
- Hazardous Materials (6%)
- Gross Receipts or Payroll Tax (6%)
- General Cleaning (12%)
- Bulky Trash Items (14%)
- Business Registration (8%)
- Other (78%)
- Graffiti (16%)
- Other (50%)



The Call Center—which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, answering calls for information and service requests—is SF311’s largest contact channel. In recent years, the variety and complexity of requests the Call Center receives has demanded more of customer service representatives’ time, creating a challenge for SF311 to effectively respond to growing demands. SF311 call volume dropped significantly from fiscal year 2010-11 through 2014-15, from 2.31 million to 1.09 million calls, and remained relatively constant through fiscal year 2017-18.¹

SF311's Call Center Eight-Year Trend



Note: The area between the dashed lines represents the audit period.

Call volume in fiscal year 2014-15 dropped to less than half the level of fiscal year 2010-11, while the average call time increased by 120 percent (90 to 198 seconds). The abandonment rate—the rate at which callers hang up before the Call Center answers—also increased in the same period, from 13 to 19 percent. These changes in key Call Center performance measures are directly linked to the significant drop in call volume, which is due to the growing demand on customer service representatives’ time. The increased demand requires new technological solutions to further optimize Call Center operations.

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

SF311 has built and sustains strong business relationships with its stakeholders, especially those city departments that provide most of the services offered through SF311. These key partnerships have generally been successful, with contributions from both SF311 and other city departments, but opportunities exist to enhance these partnerships and improve the customer experience.

INTERNAL CONTROLS

SF311 has weak internal controls over how it reports performance data that is used for management decisions and shared publicly, jeopardizing performance results. Although SF311 management has implemented controls to produce reports on performance data, it does not reconcile between different reports containing similar information, increasing the risk that decisions will be made with incomplete or inaccurate data.

Despite its operational risks and weak internal controls over reporting performance data, SF311 remains committed to identifying and implementing improvement strategies, including working collaboratively with other city departments to further optimize its operations and achieve its mission.

¹ Audited trend data is for 2013 through 2015, as shown in the illustration above.

What We Recommend

The report includes seven recommendations to help SF311 optimize performance and create a better experience for the public. Specifically, SF311 should:

- Consider implementing Integrated Voice Response capability or other automation technologies to align Call Center capacity with demand.
- Regularly communicate with all departments to ensure the accuracy of requests and to boost departmental and customer satisfaction.
- Implement policies and procedures to ensure that its performance results data is consistent, accurate, and complete.

Copies of the full report may be obtained at:

*Office of the Controller • City Hall, Room 316 • 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place • San Francisco, CA 94102 • 415.554.7500
or on the Internet at <http://www.sfgov.org/controller>*



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

Ben Rosenfield
Controller

Todd Rydstrom
Deputy Controller

August 9, 2018

Ms. Nancy Alfaro
Director
San Francisco 311
One South Van Ness Avenue, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Ms. Alfaro:

The Office of the Controller's City Services Auditor Division (CSA) presents its audit report of San Francisco 311 (SF311). The audit had as its objectives to determine how SF311 uses technological and human resources to manage operations efficiently and effectively and to identify opportunities to optimize performance and create a better experience for the public. To do so, the audit assessed:

- Whether SF311's technological solutions optimize Call Center performance.
- The efficiency and effectiveness of SF311's collaboration with city departments to accurately fulfill service and information requests.
- The effectiveness of SF311's staff management model to optimize performance.

The audit found that SF311 should improve technological solutions with enhanced system capabilities and expand self-service options—including considering the implementation of an interactive voice response system—to improve its Call Center performance, which declined substantially from 2013 to 2015. The audit also found that SF311 has effective operating procedures and effective relationships with city departments to answer information requests and route service requests to responding departments but can enhance its communications with its stakeholders to boost the satisfaction of other departments and the public. Last, the audit found that SF311 should improve internal controls to ensure requests are accurately addressed and to rely on information in key reports used for management decisions and shared with the public.

The report includes seven recommendations for SF311 to improve customer service through enhanced system capabilities, more automated features, continued strong partnerships with key city departments, and extending partnerships to all city departments. SF311 also needs more robust internal controls to enhance service delivery and aid in management decisions. SF311's response to the report is attached as Appendix C. CSA will work with SF311 to follow up on the status of the recommendations made in this report.

CSA appreciates the assistance and cooperation of SF311 staff during the audit. For questions about the report, please contact me at Tonia.Lediju@sfgov.org or 415-554-5393 or CSA at 415-554-7469.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tonia Lediju', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tonia Lediju, PhD
Chief Audit Executive

cc: Board of Supervisors
Budget Analyst
Citizens Audit Review Board
City Attorney
Civil Grand Jury
Mayor
Public Library

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ASA	Average Speed of Answer—the average duration a caller waited to speak to a customer service representative
Avaya	Phone system used by San Francisco 311
Average Call-Handle Time	The amount of work time related to calls, including average talk time and average after-call work time, divided by the number of calls handled.
Call Center	The Call Center operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, answers calls, provides information, and initiates service requests for customers.
Calls Offered	The number of calls that come to SF311, excluding calls in which the customer hangs up before making all the necessary selections in the call tree
City	City and County of San Francisco
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
Controller	Office of the Controller
CSA	City Services Auditor Division
DataSF	The website used to search hundreds of datasets of the City and County of San Francisco
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
Public Works	San Francisco Public Works (formerly Department of Public Works)
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
LAGAN	Customer Relations Management software used by San Francisco 311 to house the knowledge base and create service requests and distribute them to the appropriate city department.
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
Muni	San Francisco's network of buses, light rail trains, streetcars, and cable cars
PG&E	Pacific Gas and Electric Company
SF311	San Francisco 311
SFMTA	San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency
SFPD	San Francisco Police Department
SFPUC	San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Treasurer	Treasurer-Tax Collector, Office of the

INTRODUCTION

Audit Authority

This audit was conducted under the authority of the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco (City), Section 3.105 and Appendix F, which requires that the City Services Auditor (CSA) of the Office of the Controller (Controller) conduct periodic, comprehensive financial and performance audits of city departments, services, and activities.

Background

SF311 provides information and allows customers to report problems or submit service requests to the City via a Call Center, website, a mobile application (mobile app), and Twitter. SF311's mission is to provide a prompt, courteous, and professional customer service experience 24 hours a day to San Francisco residents, visitors, and businesses seeking general information, enabling the government to be transparent, responsive, effective, and efficient. This includes:

- Serving as a single point of entry for—and resolution of—information and service requests.
- Continually integrating and updating information from across the government.
- Enabling improved government service delivery through performance reporting and analysis.
- Supporting emergency response for the government and community through information and communications.

SF311 launched its Call Center in 2007 and added an online portal in 2008 and a mobile app in 2013.

SF311 launched its Call Center in 2007. In 2008 it launched an online portal that allows users to make service requests. In 2009 it began taking requests via Twitter. In 2013 SF311 introduced a mobile app. These efforts give users additional options for obtaining information and tracking service requests. According to SF311 management, most requests submitted via the online portal and mobile app are routed directly to the responding departments without SF311 staff needing to handle them, saving the Call Center (and users) time.

In 2016 SF311 revamped its website to create a more user-friendly navigation experience.

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The website now offers:

- Quick links to the most common request forms.
- A search feature that allows customers to check the status of a request.
- Updates on items of interest, such as upcoming events and traffic advisories, which may address customer questions without requiring a phone call.

SF311 has repeatedly expanded the types of calls it takes to meet the needs of customer departments and the public. For example, in 2012 it began taking calls for the Office of the Treasurer and Tax Collector (Treasurer), and in 2015 it launched a centralized process for taking noise complaints. According to management, some of the new types of calls SF311 is taking are more complex and have caused the average call duration to increase.

As shown in Exhibit 1, SF311’s operations have evolved since the organization’s inception.

EXHIBIT 1 Since Its 2007 Inception, SF311 Has Expanded Operations and Begun Taking Fewer But Longer Calls

		Fiscal Year 2007-08	Fiscal Year 2014-15
Contact Channels		Phone, Web ^a	 Phone, Web, Mobile Application, Twitter
Total Contact Volume		2,707,737	1,280,571 ^b
Average Call-Handle Time ^c		2 minutes 27 seconds	3 minutes 16 seconds
Budget		\$9.8 million	\$12.3 million
Number of Full-Time Equivalent Positions		89	91

Notes:

^a SF311 first began receiving web requests in April 2008.

^b SF311’s system capabilities during the audit period hindered SF311 from including in total contact volume, mobile and web contacts that did not result in a service request and phone contacts where information was provided without accessing the knowledge base.

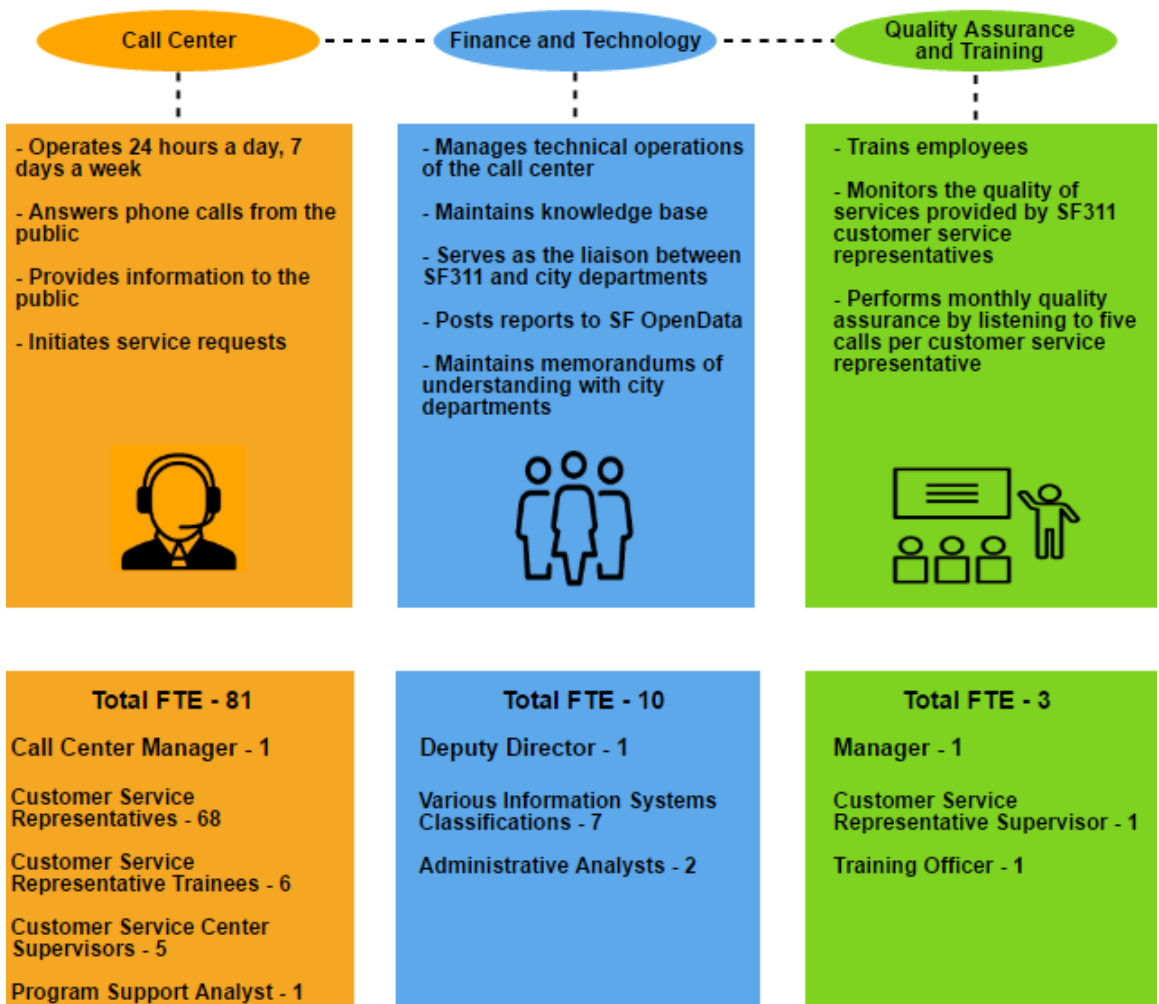
^c Average call-handle time is the total work time related to calls, including average talk time and average after-call work time, divided by the number of calls handled.

Source: Auditor’s summary of information from SF311 and the City’s Approved Budget Book.

SF311 Organizational Structure and Staffing

SF311 is organized into three units: the Call Center, Finance and Technology unit, and Quality Assurance and Training (Quality Assurance) unit, all of which report to SF311’s director. Exhibit 2 shows the organizational structure of SF311 and the number and function of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in each unit for fiscal year 2015-16.

EXHIBIT 2 SF311’s Three Operational Units



Note: The director of SF311 is excluded from this exhibit but oversees the three units.

Source: Auditor’s summary of information from SF311 for fiscal year 2015-16. Auditor relied on data from fiscal year 2015-16 due to difficulties in obtaining a complete organization chart for fiscal year 2014-15.

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Call Center staff work in 68 FTE customer service representative² positions and 5 customer service representative supervisor FTE positions^{3, 4}. A temporary customer service representative trainee classification is also used to staff the Call Center.

Permanent customer service representatives are assigned shifts in advance every six months via a shift-bid.

Scheduling for the permanent representatives occurs twice a year, in June and November, via a shift-bidding process. Customer service representative trainees work on an as-needed basis, and full-time customer service representatives work the shifts assigned to them via the shift-bidding process. Staff are scheduled to work staggered shifts covering the 24-hour period on each day of the week.

The Finance and Technology unit maintains the knowledge base that contains scripts for customer service representatives to follow in answering callers' questions, updates the SF311 website, posts SF311's data onto the DataSF website, maintains SF311's computers, builds and distributes reports, manages purchasing and contracting, and generally assists with all the business functions of the center, according to management.

Finance and Technology also is the liaison between SF311 and other city departments and business partners such as Clear Channel Outdoor, Inc.,⁵ Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), Recology,⁶ and the U.S. Postal Service. To fulfill its liaison role, the unit:

- Informs SF311 of changes to information or new information from city departments.
- Collaborates with city departments to obtain answers to information requests that SF311's knowledge base does not address and updates it with the new information.

² In the budget these positions are referred to as customer service agents. However, to be consistent with the terminology SF311 uses, this report refers to them as customer service representatives.

³ Six customer service representative supervisor positions exist, five in the Call Center and one in the Quality Assurance and Training unit.

⁴ According to the GSA budget analyst, these were the numbers of adopted budgeted positions for fiscal year 2015-16.

⁵ Clear Channel Outdoor, Inc., contracts with the City to provide billboard and outdoor advertising throughout San Francisco.

⁶ The City's contracted solid waste disposal and recycling provider.

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- Maintains memorandums of understanding between SF311 and certain departments.
- Creates and manages service level agreements for special projects requested by city departments.

The Quality Assurance unit trains employees and monitors the quality of services provided by customer service representatives.

The Quality Assurance unit runs a training program for customer service representative trainees that lasts up to 19 weeks and includes modules covering San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) calls, telephone training, and how to handle various service requests, as well as supervised call-taking, according to management.

According to its management, the Quality Assurance unit also provides ongoing quality assurance by monitoring calls. The customer service representative supervisor in the Quality Assurance unit listens to five calls for each customer service representative per month for the following skills:

- Opening skills - *use of appropriate greeting and acknowledging the caller's request.*
- Communication skills - *using a courteous tone, staying engaged in the conversation and listening to the caller.*
- Call handling skills - *appropriate handling of transfer calls.*
- Service request procedure - *verifying the caller's contact information, checking for duplicate service requests, and appropriately documenting the request.*
- Closing skills - *conveying appreciation for the call.*

These scores are provided to the customer service representatives for coaching purposes. The unit also provides customer service training to other departments that have requested such training.

SF311 Systems

Of the four systems used by SF311, two systems relevant to this audit are: the Avaya system, which handles telephone and call metrics, and LAGAN, which houses the knowledge base and tracks and routes service requests, according to management.

According to management the Avaya system:

- Splits incoming calls into queues for Treasurer, Muni, and all other calls.
- Records and routes calls to available Call Center representatives.
- Tracks a variety of call metrics, including call volumes, and answer and abandonment rates.

LAGAN contains the knowledge base and is used to log service requests and route them to departments.

LAGAN, the customer relationship management (CRM) system, houses the knowledge base, which contains information on over 4,000 topics. According to management, the knowledge base was populated with information at SF311's inception and is now updated by Finance and Technology when the unit learns of new or revised information.

LAGAN is also used to create service requests and relay them to the appropriate departments. It has mapping features that allow Call Center representatives to accurately determine where service is needed. For example, it contains a map of every street tree in San Francisco with information about who is responsible for maintaining that tree, so that Call Center representatives can route the request appropriately.

SF311's Relationships With Departments

SF311 has liaisons in 79 departments, units of departments, and city agencies.

According to SF311 management, the information in the knowledge base is provided by departments or found on department websites. SF311 has 121 liaisons in 79 departments, units of departments, city agencies and offices. According to management, SF311 has formal relationships under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) with seven departments and works with several others on special projects, such as taking noise complaints or homeless shelter reservations.

The types of collaboration with departments described by management can be grouped into three general categories, which vary in the degree of formality, frequency and regularity of contact:

- Outlining formal service commitments by SF311 in memorandums of understanding with departments.

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- Meeting with departments on a regular basis to coordinate services and receive updates.
- Corresponding with departments via email and phone on an ad hoc basis to obtain new information and update the knowledge base.

According to management, SF311 meets with some departments on a routine basis, while with others, contacts occur only as needed, for example when a question is posed for which SF311 does not have an answer in its database or sometimes if SF311 notices that service requests have not been addressed.

SF311 Contact Channels

SF311 can be contacted via phone, mobile, web and Twitter

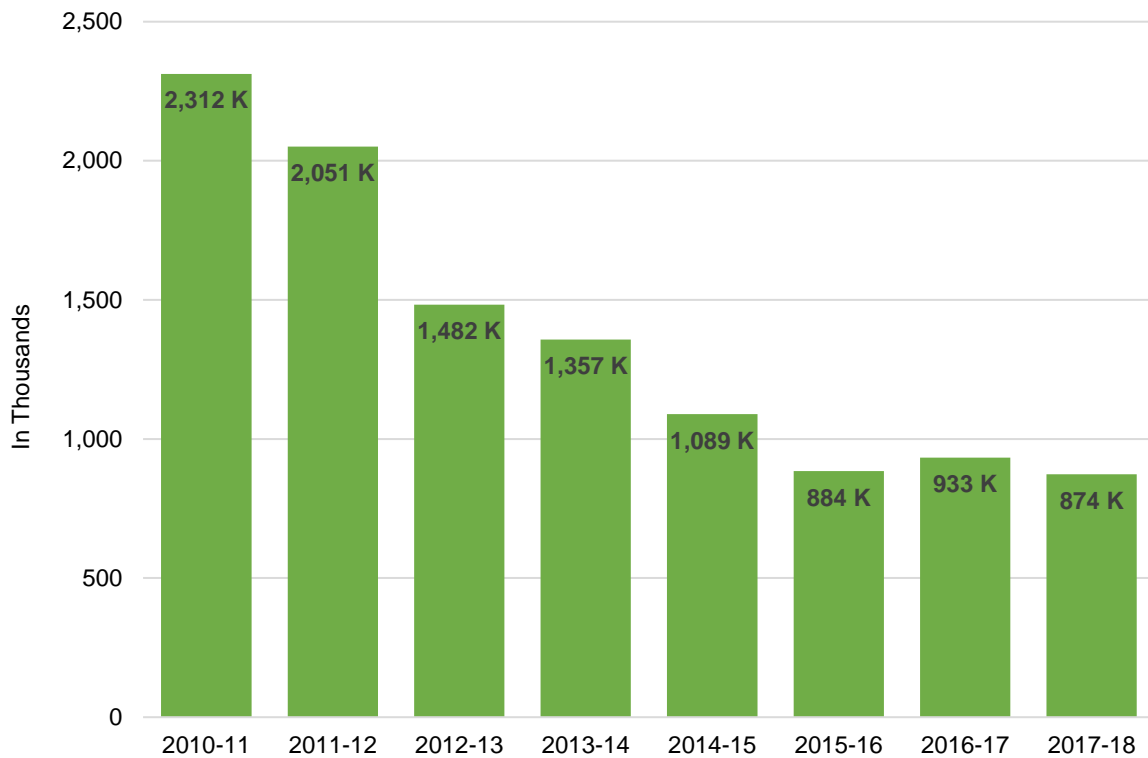
Customers can reach SF311 via four channels: phone, mobile app, web, and Twitter, however the Call Center is by far the most frequently used method. In fiscal year 2014-15 the Call Center received 84 percent (1,089,133) of requests made via phone, with 9 percent (99,635) coming in via mobile app and 6 percent (87,989) coming in via web⁷. Mobile app requests are increasing by an average of 31,612 per fiscal year over the audit period, while web requests increased by an average of 7,230 per fiscal year during the audit period

Total and annual phone contacts are decreasing faster than the increase in mobile app and website requests.

Total SF311 contacts have steadily decreased year over year starting in fiscal year 2010-11. Although requests via unassisted channels—the mobile app and website—are increasing, total annual phone contacts, which are representative-assisted, are decreasing. Exhibit 3 shows that call contacts have shown a downward trend starting in fiscal year 2010-11.

⁷ Less than one percent of contacts per year are received via Twitter.

EXHIBIT 3 SF311 Phone Contact Volumes Have Declined



Note: Twitter accounts for less than one percent of all contacts each fiscal year.

Source: Auditor's analysis of data from SF311.

According to management, SF311 receives two types of requests: service requests and requests for information.

Service Requests

SF311 takes service requests and forwards them to city departments to be fulfilled.

According to management, SF311 Call Center staff takes service requests, provides case numbers, and enters the information into LAGAN, which forwards the requests to servicing departments who fulfill the requests. Requests also come in via web, mobile app, and Twitter. Per management, most web and mobile app requests are routed automatically through LAGAN to the departments that will address the requests and do not require customer service representatives to handle them. Management also stated that a few categories of requests, which may be handled by a variety of departments, may require customer service representatives to route them appropriately. Also,

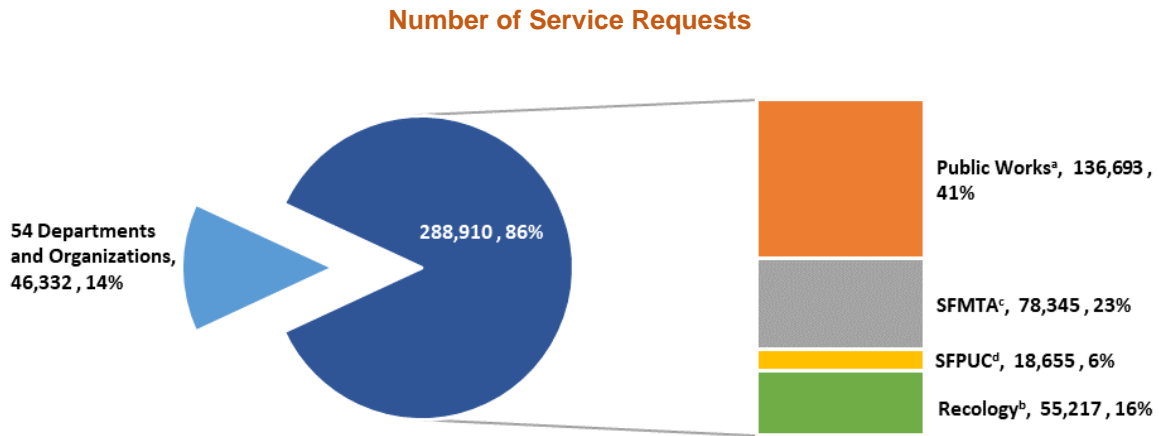
requests made via Twitter, which represent less than 1 percent of requests (1,650 in 2015), are manual and require SF311’s customer service representatives to check the Twitter feed and log any requests into LAGAN.

SF311 posts reports showing whether each request is open or closed on the City’s open data website. According to management, the servicing department is responsible for closing out the request in LAGAN.

In 2015 SF311 received service requests that fell into 1,852 categories.

In 2015, SF311 received service requests that fell into 1,852 categories. Exhibit 4 shows the departments that received the majority of service requests in 2015, which totaled 335,242 and averages 918 requests per day.

EXHIBIT 4 86 Percent of Service Requests in 2015 Concerned Three Departments and the City’s Solid Waste Contractor



Notes:

^a Public Works – San Francisco Public Works

^b Recology – Recology Sunset Scavenger, Recology Golden Gate, and Recology San Francisco

^c SFMTA – San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency

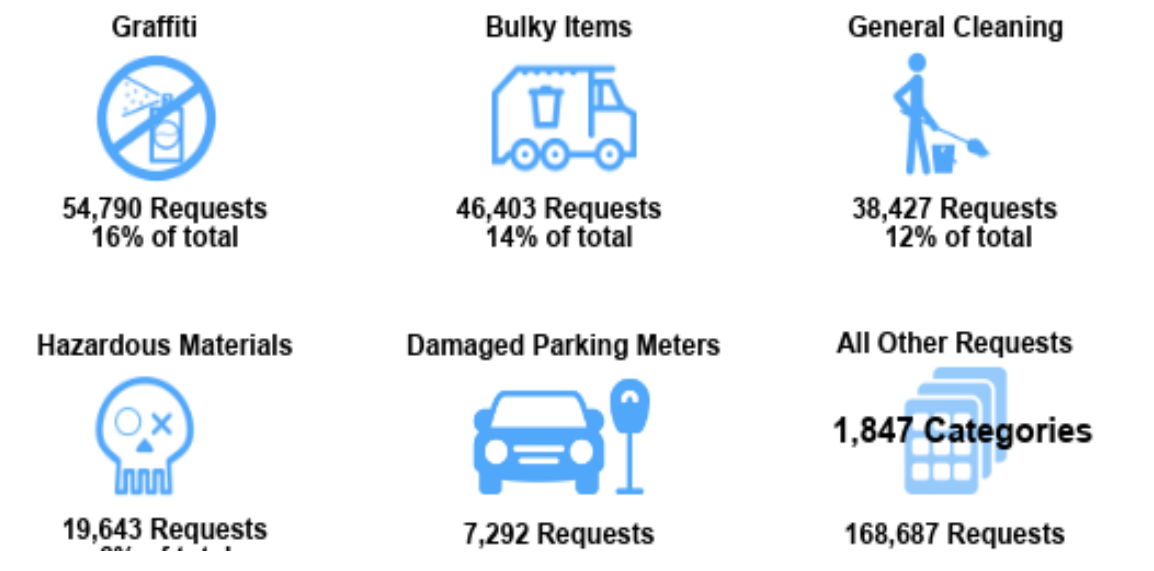
^d SFPUC – San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

Source: Auditor’s analysis of SF311’s data publicly available on DataSF.

As shown in Exhibit 4, 41 percent of the service requests in 2015 were for services provided by Public Works. That year, Public Works received requests for 223 types of services, for example general cleaning, sidewalk repair, and tree landscaping.

Exhibit 5 summarizes the common types of requests across all servicing departments.

EXHIBIT 5 Most Frequently Requested Service Categories



Source: Auditor's analysis of SF311's 2015 data publicly available on DataSF.

Requests for Information

Since 2012, SF311 customer service representatives have accessed information on 4,088 topics, in the SF311 knowledge base.

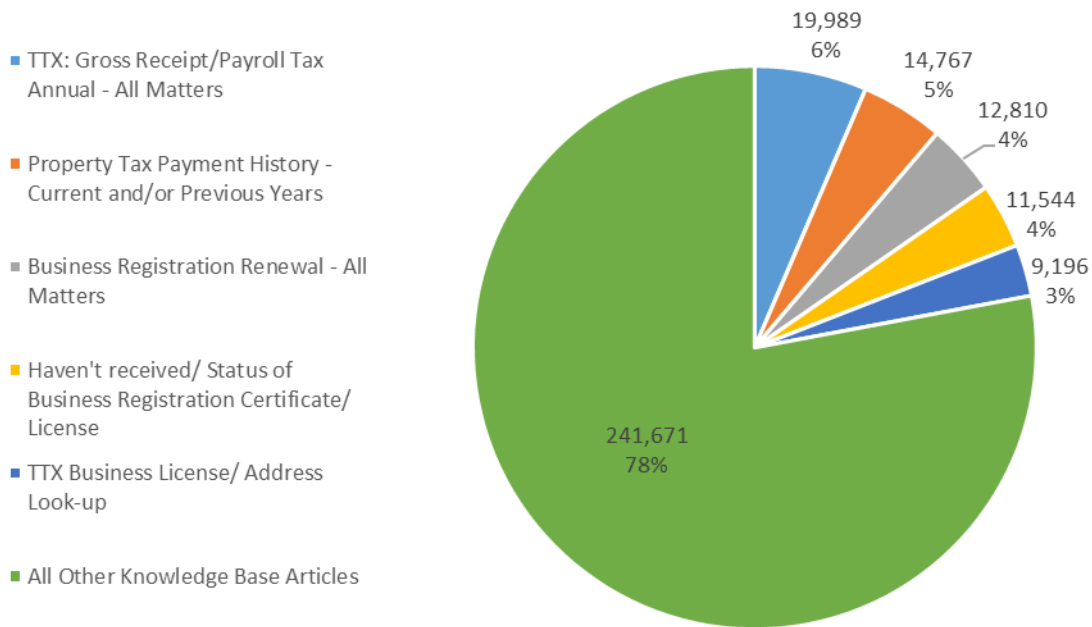
SF311 customer service representatives provide information to callers on a wide variety of topics. Between fiscal year 2012-13 and 2015-16, SF311 Call Center staff has accessed information on 4,088 topics⁸ in the SF311 knowledge base in the LAGAN CRM system. The knowledge base contains answers and information about all topics that have been requested previously, according to management. If an information request comes in with no known answer, the Finance and Technology unit researches the issue and posts the answer in the knowledge base. Some questions are also answered using tools outside of the database, according to management. For example, for calls pertaining to Muni⁹ departures, customer service representatives use an application outside of LAGAN.

⁸ SF311's can count the times a topic is accessed but is unable to count the times a question is answered without accessing the knowledge base.

⁹ Muni, San Francisco's network of buses, light rail trains, streetcars, and cable cars.

Exhibit 6 shows the five most popular information requests of 2015, as measured by the number of times each knowledge base article was accessed. As the Exhibit shows, staff accessed 309,977 articles of information on a wide variety of topics.

EXHIBIT 6 The Top Five Knowledge Base Articles Accessed by Staff in 2015 to Address Callers' Questions



Note: TTX is the abbreviation that SF311 uses in its systems for the Office of the Treasurer-Tax Collector.

Source: Auditor's analysis of SF311's data publicly available on DataSF.

SF311 receives questions on numerous topics infrequently.

As shown in Exhibit 6, the most commonly accessed knowledge base articles pertain to gross receipts and payroll tax, property tax payments, business registrations, and birth certificates. Many articles were accessed infrequently, that is, less than once a week. 501 articles were accessed only once in 2015. These less-common questions were on topics such as trolley cars, the wild parrots of Telegraph Hill, volunteering at the Opera House, the Arts Commission store, and many others.

SF311 is handling longer, more complex calls.

The types of information requests SF311 handles have evolved over time. To serve the needs of city departments and the public, SF311 reports taking on a variety of new call types, such as Treasurer calls, noise complaints and homeless shelter reservations. According to management, some of these calls, particularly those related to the Treasurer are more complex, and require more of the customer service representative's time to handle.

SF311 Performance Data

SF311 monitors their performance using several performance metrics

SF311 monitors several call metrics to determine the overall performance of the Call Center. In the Government Barometer¹⁰ report, which was published by the Office of the Controller on a quarterly basis through fiscal year 2014-15, SF311 reported trends in the average daily number of contacts via all channels, and the percentage of SF311 calls answered by customer service representatives within 60 seconds. The fiscal year 2014-15 4th Quarter Government Barometer showed declines in both metrics both compared to the previous quarter and to the same quarter one-year prior.

SF311's target service level is to answer 60 percent of calls within 60 seconds.

SF311 tracks the following metrics:

- The number of calls answered.
- The percentage of calls answered within 60 seconds, also known as service level.
- The average amount of time a caller waits on hold before the call is answered by a customer service representative, also known as the average speed of answer.
- The percentage of calls transferred to another agency.

According to management, SF311's target service level is to answer 60 percent of calls within 60 seconds (excluding Treasurer calls).

In 2015 SF311 received a B+ grade for its customer service.

Overall customer satisfaction with SF311 is also evaluated in the biennial City Survey. The survey, which is administered to a random sample of city residents,

¹⁰ The final Government Barometer Report was issued in November 2015 by the Office of the Controller.

inquired about respondents' ease of requesting services, and ease of obtaining information via phone or using the website or mobile app. In 2015 SF311 received a grade of B+ on the survey.

SF311 publishes numerous datasets on the DataSF website and includes such information as the dates and times of service requests, whether these requests are open or closed, which department the request was assigned to, and the location of the request. Data regarding which knowledge base articles are being accessed by customer service representatives is also available.

Objectives

The audit objective was to determine how SF311 uses technological and human resources to manage operations efficiently and effectively and identify opportunities to optimize performance and create a better experience for the public. To do so, the audit assessed:

1. Whether SF311's technological solutions, including its customer relationship management system's capabilities, optimize Call Center performance.
2. The efficiency and effectiveness of SF311's collaboration with city departments to accurately fulfill service and information requests.
3. The effectiveness of SF311's staff management model to optimize performance.

Because SF311 was implementing a new staffing model after the audit period, the audit focused on evaluating SF311's use of technological solutions and evaluated staffing at a very high level. Further, because SF311 has significantly more city departments than business partners and the business partners have contractual obligations with SF311, the audit focused on SF311's collaboration with city departments and not its business partners.

**Scope and
Methodology**

The audit scope included SF311 operations during 2013 through 2015. To perform the audit, the audit team:

What we did.

- Determined whether SF311's current call wait times and abandonment rates are acceptable given historical performance, industry benchmarks, and performance goals.
- Surveyed a sample of four jurisdictions regarding their use of technology and its impact on their operations to determine whether SF311 has fully utilized system solutions and self-service options to improve Call Center efficiency and effectiveness.
- Administered ten cold call information requests via SF311 and determined whether the answers provided were accurate. The questions were conceived by the team and the topics were chosen to span departments that have varying relationships with SF311 and that account for varying information and service request volumes.
- Made a sample of ten typical service requests representing a variety of departments, and business partners and determined whether the requests were routed and addressed appropriately.
- Selected a judgmental sample of nine departments and business partners, representing small, medium, and high volumes of SF311's service requests and call volumes, and surveyed these departments to determine whether they feel that SF311 communicates with them effectively and with sufficient frequency to meet their needs.

**Statement of Auditing
Standards**

This performance audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. These standards require planning and performing the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for the findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives. CSA believes that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for the findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives.

CHAPTER 1 – Increased Use of Technological Solutions Can Optimize Call Center Performance

Summary

SF311 implemented several strategies to align the Call Center's resources with increased demand for its services. However, despite these efforts, call wait time (average speed to answer) and the rate at which callers hang up before speaking to a representative (abandonment rate) have increased significantly. In fiscal year 2014-15 callers waited an average of one minute and 45 seconds to have their call answered and almost one-quarter of them hung up before reaching a customer service representative¹¹. These negative impacts jeopardize SF311's customer's experience.

SF311 uses human and technological resources to implement strategies in managing operations, and it has implemented self-service methods for customers to obtain information and make service requests via the web or a mobile app. This is a step in the right direction, however has not diverted enough call volume to bring down wait times. SF311 needs to continue to implement technological solutions to improve Call Center performance. Integrated voice response (IVR), which SF311 has not implemented, has been credited by several jurisdictions for helping to manage call volumes and achieve wait times significantly lower than SF311's.

SF311 management has also deployed various other strategies to align Call Center capacity with demand by limiting the types of calls it takes, experimenting with shortening some types of calls, and hiring more staff. However, these efforts were very limited or not timely, and such options are usually constrained by factors outside of SF311's control.

¹¹ In April 2017, after the audit period and after more customer service representatives were hired, SF311 management reported that its call abandonment rate had decreased to 10 percent.

Finding 1

SF311 Call Center resources do not match the growing demand for its services, resulting in long wait times.

SF311 has expanded the types of requests the Call Center handles, which has resulted in longer calls and more demand for customer service representatives' time. SF311 has implemented several strategies to align the Call Center's resources with this increased demand, however, despite these efforts, average speed to answer and the call abandonment rate have increased significantly, which runs contrary to SF311's mission to provide prompt service.

SF311 can do more, particularly by using technology, to better align resources with demand.

New services require longer calls, slowing Call Center performance.

SF311 management states that in recent years SF311 has received requests from departments and the Board of Supervisors to offer new services and expand the type of information it provides, which has increased the demands on the Call Center. For example, SF311 expanded its services to include:

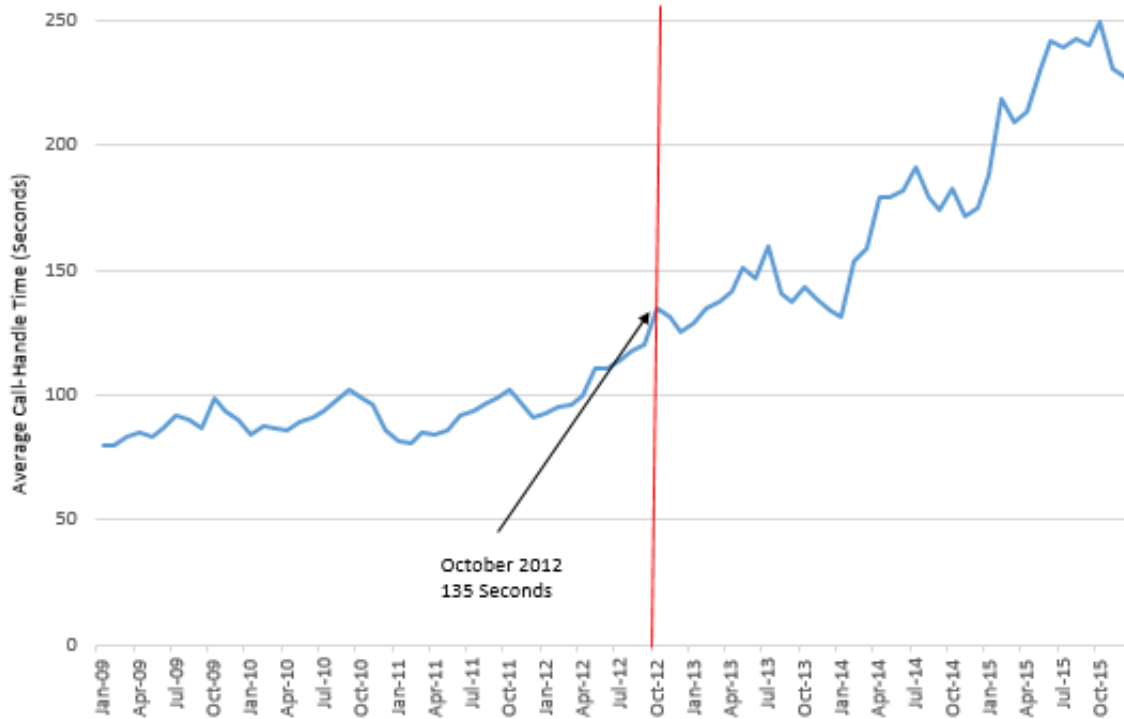
- Answering calls for the Treasurer and Tax Collector (Treasurer).
- Taking noise complaints.
- Taking requests for homeless shelter reservations.
- Handling calls to the County Clerk's main line.
- Launching an events calendar that departments can populate with public events.

The new call types SF311 is handling take more time, on average, for customer service representatives than did the previous call mix.

According to management, Treasurer calls, added in October 2012, are amongst the complex types of calls handled by SF311. Exhibit 7 shows that since these calls

were added, average call-handle time¹² increased significantly, from 2 minutes and 15 seconds in October 2012 to 4 minutes and 5 seconds in August 2015¹³.

EXHIBIT 7 SF311's Average Call-Handle Time Increased During the Audit Period



Note: SF311 began taking Treasurer calls in October 2012

Source: Auditor's analysis of performance data compiled by SF311 based on reports from Avaya.

However, as shown in the graph above, the upward trend started in 2011, before SF311 took over the Treasurer calls, indicating that other factors also contributed to increasing call lengths. Non-Treasurer average call-handle time increased by 1 minute and 8 seconds from 1 minute 52 seconds in August 2013 to 3 minutes in August 2015. The five-year upward trend from 2010-11 to 2014-15, which includes the period before SF311 began taking Treasurer calls shows average call-handle

¹² Defined as the amount of time a customer service representative spends on a call, including speaking with the caller and any activities related to the call after the caller hangs up or is put on hold by the customer service representative.

¹³ Auditor randomly selected August as the sample for 2015.

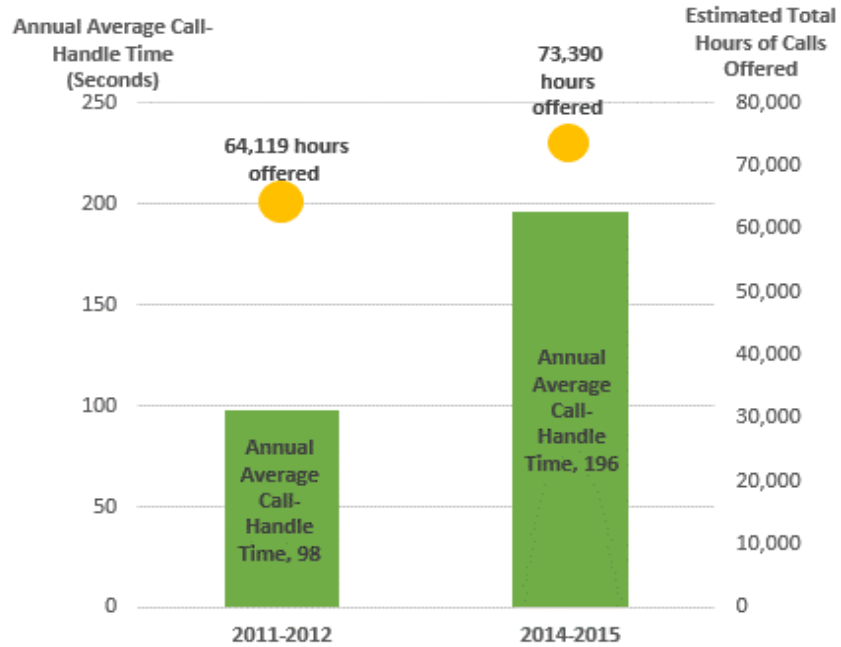
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time increased 120 percent (1 minute and 30 seconds to 3 minutes and 18 seconds). The abandonment rate—the rate at which callers hang up before the Call Center answers—also increased in the same five-year period from 13 to 19 percent.

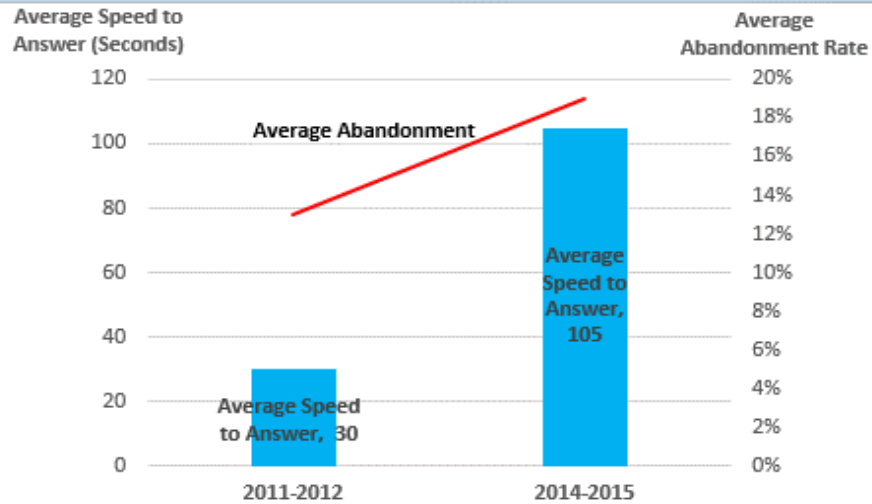
Although the number of budgeted customer service representatives has remained largely the same, the estimated hours of calls coming into the Call Center have increased by over 9,000 from fiscal year 2011-12 to 2014-15. Exhibit 8 shows how the increases in the average call-handle time (AHT) from fiscal year 2011-12 through 2014-15 have affected the overall demand on customer service representatives' time. Average speed to answer (ASA) and the call abandonment rate have both increased.

EXHIBIT 8 SF311's Increased Average Call-Handle¹ Times Mean Greater Demand for Customer Service Representatives' Time

The **Average Call-Handle Time** increased from 2011-12 to 2014-15, leading to an increase in the **total hours of calls offered¹ into the Call Center**



As calls became longer and staffing stayed constant, the **ASA²** and **Abandonment³** rates **Increased**



Notes:

¹ Average Call-Handle Time is the amount of work time related to calls, including average talk time and average after-call work time, divided by the number of calls handled.

² ASA stands for Average Speed of Answer.

³ Call abandonment rate is the percentage of calls that are disconnected by the caller before the call is answered divided by the total number of calls offered.

Source: Auditor's analysis of performance data compiled by SF311 based on reports from Avaya.

The increases to some key Call Center performance measures—AHT, ASA, and Call Abandonment Rate—can be directly linked to the 46 percent drop in Call Center contacts during fiscal years 2011-12 through 2014-15¹⁴, as was shown in Exhibit 3. In addition to human resources, technology solutions are needed to reduce overall demand on customer service representatives' time and to optimize Call Center operations.

Technological solutions beyond those SF311 has already implemented are needed to handle growing demand.

SF311 uses human and technological resources to implement strategies for managing operations.

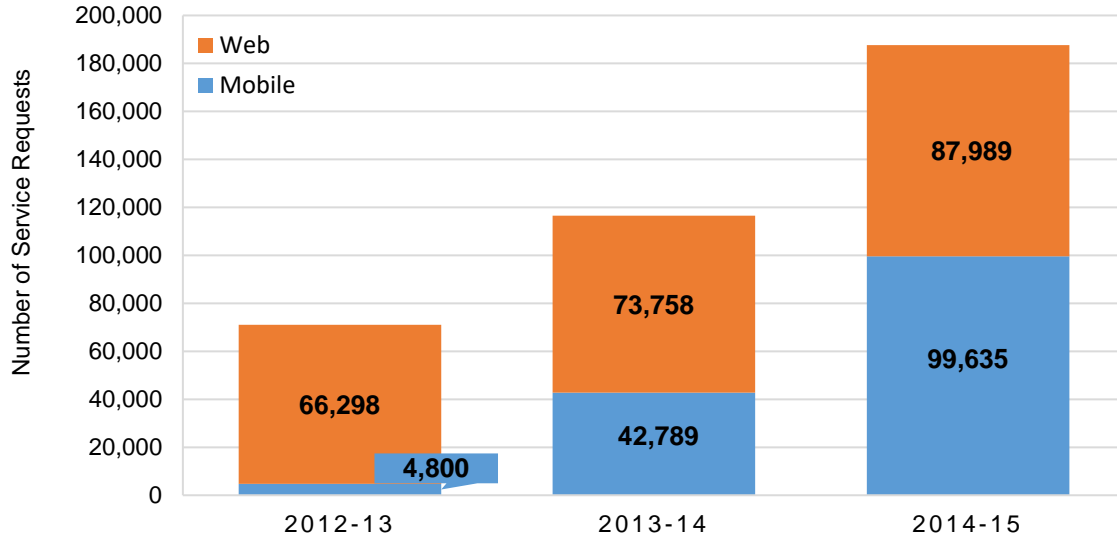
According to management, implementing technologies that divert calls away from the Call Center by giving customers self-service options has been a leading strategy for diverting call volume. The 2013 launch of the mobile app and the 2016 launch of a redesigned, more user-friendly website are the two most significant examples. SF311 continues to expand and improve these options. For example, according to management, an interface was created between LAGAN and a San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) system so that certain cases coming in via SF311 can be seen by SFPD without SF311 staff intervention.

Although a step in the right direction, these solutions have not been enough to absorb excess demand on the Call Center, and do not incorporate some leading practices. Exhibit 9 shows the current volume of diverted contacts in addition to estimated excess demand on the Call Center and total calls potentially diverted with self-service technologies.

¹⁴ Since the audit period the AHT has continued to rise through fiscal year 2017-18, increasing to 247 seconds, and the ASA spiked to 161 seconds in 2015-16 but fell to 72 seconds in 2016-17 and 2017-18. However, the call abandonment rate (11 percent in 2017-18) has decreased, which could be attributed to staff being added and the increasing use of self-service options. The audit's findings and recommendations are based on trend data for 2013 through 2015.

EXHIBIT 9 SF311 Has Been Able to Divert a Large Quantity of Calls, Saving Thousands of Hours of Staff Time Annually

Total Calls Diverted



	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total Calls Diverted	71,098	116,547	187,624
Annual Calls Abandoned	220,311	179,462	250,448
<i>Based on the Information Above and Average Call Durations, CSA Projects the Following Call Hours Diverted and Abandoned</i>			
Estimated Hours of Calls Abandoned	8,078	7,577	13,636
Estimated Hours Diverted	2,607	4,921	10,215

Note: This exhibit does not include Twitter numbers as all cases that come in via Twitter require a supervisor to manually enter all service requests.

Source: Auditor's analysis of August 2015 data from SF311.

Exhibit 9 shows that the technology implemented by SF311 has had a measurable positive impact; however, more can and needs to be done. SF311 needs to continue to implement technological solutions to improve Call Center performance. SF311 has not implemented integrated voice response (IVR) or fully optimized its phone tree to divert callers from needing to speak with a customer service representative. Also, its customer relationship management system (CRM) lacks some useful features.

As shown in Exhibit 10, other jurisdictions found that using IVR had a high impact in diverting significant call volumes from their Call Centers. Also, most jurisdictions with IVR showed higher performance levels and lower abandonment rates than those without IVR. Two of the jurisdictions also had “service level” goals of answering a certain percentage of their calls within 30 seconds instead of 60, which is San Francisco’s target.

EXHIBIT 10		Three of Four Sampled Jurisdictions Use IVR to Manage Calls and Report Positive Impacts on Call Handling	
Jurisdiction	2015 Service Level	2015 Abandonment Rate	Impact of IVR
Without IVR			
City and County of San Francisco	29%-56% ^c in 60 seconds	24%	Not Applicable
City and County of Denver (Colorado)	41% in 60 seconds	25% ^a	Not Applicable
With IVR			
City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (North Carolina)	90% in 30 seconds	1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met or exceeded all operational metrics for past 65 months. • Since 2011 inception, IVR has accepted over 2 million calls with a completion rate of more than 82%. • Reduced need for representatives by nearly 20 FTE positions annually.
City of New York (New York)	86% in 30 seconds	Not Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IVR resolves approximately 10 million calls, or 50% of total call volume to 311 annually. • Interactive speech resolves more than 10% of transactional call types in IVR, reducing the load on call service representatives and resulting in a positive customer satisfaction ranking. • IVR can resolve up to 80% of all calls during citywide emergencies.
City of Sacramento	33% in 60 seconds	19% ^b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IVR handles average call volumes in the high 40,000s per month. • Management estimates that IVR diverted approximately 10 percent of calls when it was first implemented, which increased to approximately 20% when the information available through IVR was refined. • Queue times would be unmanageable without IVR.

Notes:

^a Denver 311 did not specify the timeframe to which this metric pertains. The document referenced (City and County of Denver Mayor’s 2016 Budget) reported 2014 actual performance and 2015 estimated performance.

^b Sacramento 311’s Abandonment Rate reported is for fiscal year 2014.

^c Monthly averages for 2015.

Source: Auditor’s analysis of survey data submitted by each jurisdiction and of August 2015 data from SF311.

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These jurisdictions, which vary in size, services offered, and operating budget, use both human and technology resources in their operations. Appendix A shows key data factors of SF311 and other surveyed jurisdictions that contribute to overall performance.

The jurisdictions surveyed that use IVR do so in a variety of ways, depending on the needs of their operations. For many call types, the jurisdictions reported significant call diversion and positive impacts on their call centers. Exhibit 11 shows examples cited by other jurisdictions of particular tasks for which they use their IVR and describes work performed by SF311’s customer service representatives that may be similar.

EXHIBIT 11 Examples of How SF311 Could Use IVR			
Examples of How Other Jurisdictions Use IVR	Jurisdictions*	Similar Work Performed by SF311’s Customer Service Representatives	SF311 Call Volume in 2015
Transferring calls to other departments for call types that are not handled by 311	Sacramento 311 New York 311	SFMTA blocked sidewalk complaints	1,856
Resolving calls during citywide emergencies, such as blizzards, or short-term events, such as water boil advisories	Sacramento 311 New York 311	Taking calls during citywide emergencies	No data available
Providing the location of animal shelters (which led to a large decrease in calls about shelter locations, according to Sacramento 311)	Sacramento 311	• Animal Care and Control – General Information	786
		• Parking Meter Hours and Rates	885
		• Parking Holiday Enforcement Schedule	1,022
Building inspection scheduling	Sacramento 311	• Scheduling Passport Appointments	3,782
		• SF City ID Card	3,152
Providing access to customers’ water accounts 24 hours a day, seven days a week; allowing callers to receive account information, make a payment, report water and sewer issues, and transfer to customer service representatives	City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County 311	Property Tax Payment History – Current and/or Previous Year	14,767
Handling parking citation and utility bill payments	Sacramento 311	“Parking Citation– Fine Amounts – Pay a Citation”	1,878
Note: *Refer to Exhibit 10 for complete names of jurisdictions.			

Source: Auditor’s analysis survey results provided by each jurisdiction and of August 2015 data from SF311.

SF311 management stated that it does not use IVR because at SF311's inception in 2007, according to management, city leaders expressed a desire to have calls reach customer service representatives directly in the shortest possible time to promote human interaction and connect callers with a live individual. However, as shown later in Exhibit 14, callers wait times increased each year between 2013 through 2015. Also, 41 percent are hanging up while waiting. With increasing wait times, SF311 is not enabling callers to connect with live call-takers promptly.

SF311 management also explained that SF311 continually reviews its processes for automation but has not found a large volume of simple requests suitable for IVR to handle.

SF311 also has not implemented some automated solutions in its phone tree that could achieve part of what IVR would with less up-front investment. SF311's existing phone tree allows customers to select their language and then presents the caller with three options to select from: 1) Muni calls¹⁵, 2) Treasurer calls, and 3) All other calls.

SF311 could enhance its phone tree by:

- Expanding phone tree options for call types SF311 normally transfers out.
- Offering a call back service so customers do not have to wait on hold.
- Providing an announcement to callers waiting for a customer service representative of alternate contact methods (web, mobile app, and Twitter) immediately after language selection.

Also, SF311's LAGAN customer relationship management system does not have features other jurisdictions have found useful. One significant limitation of LAGAN is that it does not interface with the phone system, Avaya, so cannot track the length of calls by topic, which impedes SF311's ability to strategically decide what types of calls to prioritize for diversion

¹⁵ Muni calls are the only SFMTA calls under option one in the phone tree.

efforts through self-service methods. Appendix B shows the CRM systems surveyed jurisdictions use and the features they find most useful.

Although SF311 uses its phone system to track the average length of Treasurer and SFMTA calls, management states that it does not have data to determine how long its customer service representatives are spending on any other type of call. This limits SF311's ability to make strategic decisions about what types of calls to prioritize for diversion efforts. Management mentioned that SF311 is considering ways to integrate the two systems.

SF311 should continue to employ non-technological strategies to the extent possible; however, these options are often constrained by factors beyond SF311's control.

Other strategies available to SF311 for aligning resources to demand include limiting the types of calls it takes, shortening some types of calls, and hiring more staff. SF311 has made some effort to align Call Center resources using these strategies; however, these efforts were very limited or came too late, and these options are often constrained by factors outside of SF311's control.

SF311 limits taking some new service types but added others despite resource shortages.

According to management, SF311 turned down at least one request to begin providing a new type of service, but did add others to its workload, including answering all calls for the Office of the City Clerk and taking all noise complaints. This occurred in 2015, when call wait times and abandonment rates were increasing. However, management explained that adding these services streamlined processes for the City and allowed it to increase service to the public, which helps SF311 achieve its mission. Also, SF311 does not believe that it can always postpone or deny requests for new service, particularly if these are requested by stakeholders such as the Board of Supervisors or if the benefit of taking the new service will better serve the public.

SF311 has been unable to limit complex call times to the same degree that other jurisdictions have.

SF311 also experimented with limiting the average length of Treasurer calls by transferring calls of more than five minutes to the Treasurer. However, SF311 found that this led to customer dissatisfaction, as reflected by more caller complaints, according to management.

Based on our survey of four other jurisdictions, they can answer their Treasurer calls in an average of approximately 1 to 2 minutes more quickly than can SF311. For example, SF311's average call-handle time for a Treasurer call is 5.5 minutes¹⁶, while New York City reported it only takes its staff an average of 4.6 minutes and Denver reported it takes its staff an average of 3.5 minutes to handle tax calls¹⁷. Both jurisdictions also noted that tax calls were among their most complex calls¹⁸.

Although SF311 has made strong efforts to ensure that it answers calls courteously and addresses questions appropriately, the increasing duration of calls has caused almost one-quarter of callers to wait so long for a customer service representative that they hang up, which is unacceptably high.

Adding staff to meet fluctuating demand on the Call Center may not be sufficient.

SF311 management states that in July 2016 the Call Center added 8.57 FTE positions for Treasurer calls, and one part-time position for San Francisco Public Utilities Commission calls, (a 9 percent increase in Call Center staffing), which improved its performance metrics. According to management, as of April 2017, the ASA across all call types was 55 seconds (138 seconds faster than the ASA of 193 seconds in April 2015) and the average abandonment rate had dropped to 10 percent, indicating that the additional staffing has helped.

¹⁶ CSA used August 2015 data to calculate the time SF311 takes to resolve Treasurer calls.

¹⁷ Both New York City and Denver times were calculated from 2015 data, with no month specified.

¹⁸ New York City also noted that service requests, social services inquiries, and language-assisted calls are among their most complex.

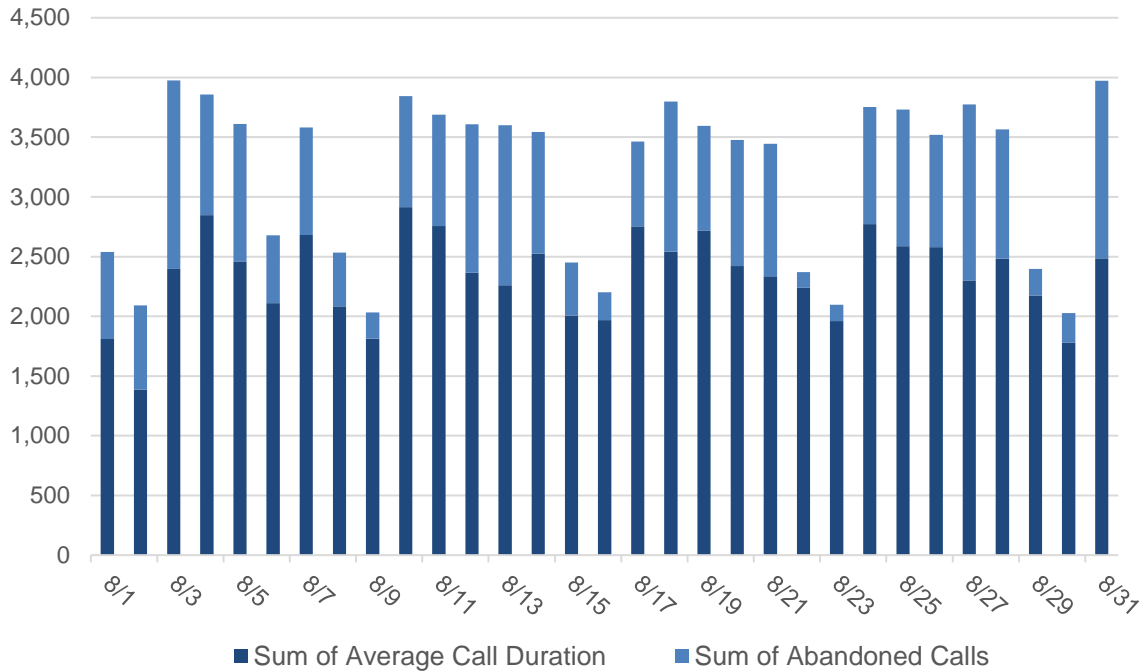
While a positive development, this was done only after several years of declining performance. Managing Call Center performance through staffing alone may not be possible due to budget constraints, call volume fluctuations, and obligations to schedule staff six months in advance.

According to SF311, additional staff were requested before 2016, but the requests were not approved despite the Call Center’s long wait times. Also, because demand for the Call Center fluctuates significantly from one day to the next and can be unpredictable, managing the fluctuations through staffing alone can be challenging, particularly because the shift-bid process requires that all permanent staff be scheduled six months in advance.

Exhibits 12 and 13 show that call volumes can vary by day each month and by day of the week, with unpredictable spikes and ebbs.

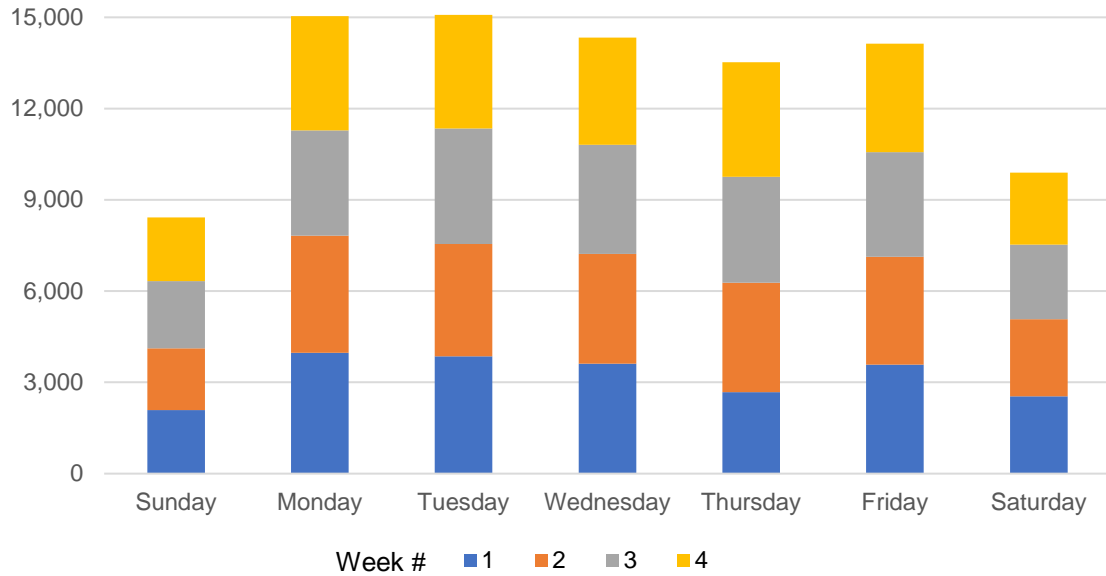
EXHIBIT 12 Daily Call Volumes Can Fluctuate Significantly

Daily Call Volumes in August 2015



Source: Auditor’s analysis of August 2015 data from SF311.

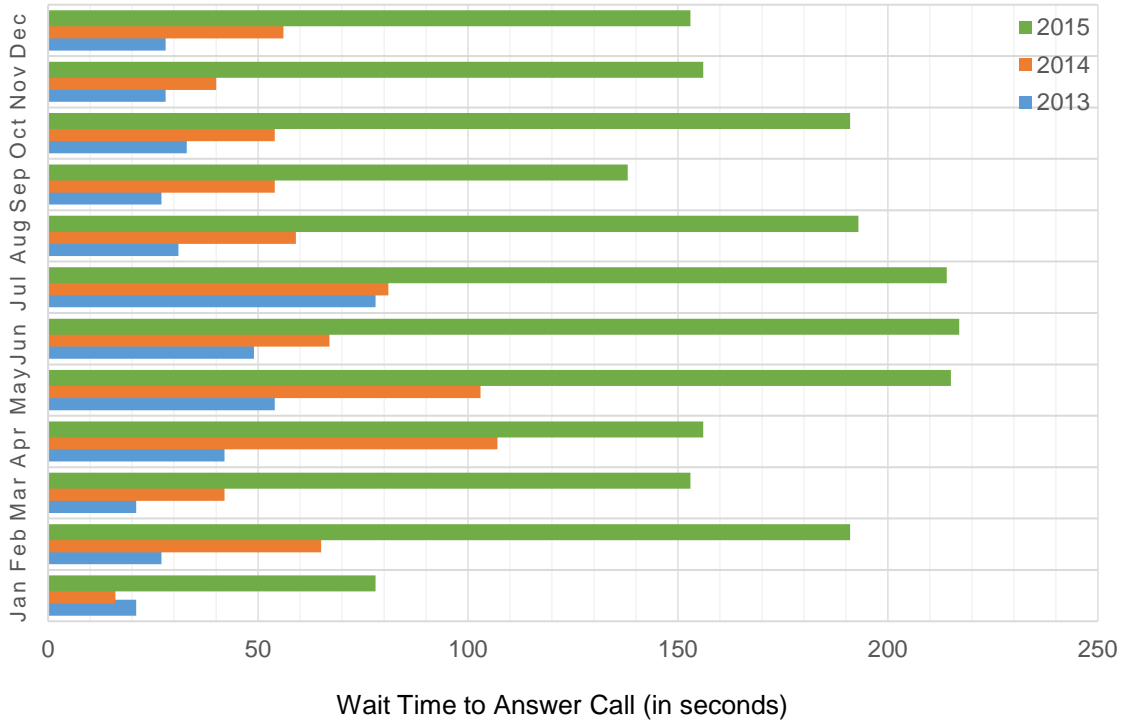
EXHIBIT 13 Call Volumes Fluctuate Significantly by Day of the Week



Source: Auditor's analysis of August 2015 data from SF311.

Managing the Call Center through staffing alone could lead to inefficient operations. As shown in Exhibit 14, SF311's ASA was longer in every month of 2015 than it was in the same month of 2014 and 2013. For example, a month-on-month comparison indicates that, from August 2013 to August 2015, ASA increased 2.75 minutes: from 28 seconds in August 2013 to 3.22 minutes in August 2015.

EXHIBIT 14 SF311’s Wait Time to Answer Calls Was Longer in Every Month of 2015 Than in the Same Month of the Two Previous Years



Source: Auditor’s analysis of data from SF311.

At the peak hour of 10 to 11 a.m. during the sample month of August 2015, callers had to wait an average of 7.7 minutes, and 41 percent hung up before speaking to a customer service representative.

Finally, as Exhibit 15 shows, the number of employees needed to meet Call Center demand could continue to significantly escalate if SF311 continues to take on more complex work to serve departments.

EXHIBIT 15 **Increasing Call-Handle Times Impact the Number of Customer Service Representatives Needed to Handle 100,000 Calls Per Month**

Average Call Duration (minutes)	Notes on Average Call Duration	Total Monthly Hours of Call Time if 100,000 Calls Offered ^a	Hours of Calls Taken in August 2015	Estimated Call Hours Above August 2015 Volume	Estimated FTE Positions Needed Above August 2015 Levels
2.5	Approximate average length of call that 2015 staffing levels can handle	4,167	3,887	280	2.0
3.22 ^b	Average Call Handle Time for August 2015	5,361	3,887	1,474	10.6
4.23	Projected Average Call-Handle Time if Treasurer or similarly complex calls were half of total call volume	7,067	3,887	3,180	22.9

Notes:

^a 100,000 monthly hours of call time is an estimate of the average monthly number of calls offered. In 2015 an average of 104,059 calls per month were offered into the Call Center.

^b This average call duration is based on the actual call volume the Call Center was able to handle in 2015, given staff levels at that time.

Source: Auditor's analysis of SF311 data.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, "management (should establish) processes to evaluate performance against the entity's expected standards of conduct and address any deviations in a timely manner." SF311's inability to align its resources with increasing and fluctuating demand is jeopardizing customer's experience.

Recommendation

1. SF311 should ensure that its Call Center capacity is aligned with demand. Specifically:
 - a. Continue expanding its efforts to automate services. As part of this effort, determine a frequency (at least annually) at which to evaluate what call types could be diverted to an integrated voice response system and consider the costs and benefits of implementing such a system.
 - b. As part of implementing a new customer relationship management system, include features that allow integration with the phone system to

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permit the tracking of the average duration of calls related to various topics.

- c. Analyze average call length by topic and determine whether some calls may be shortened through enhanced staff training or leveraging self-service options to place requests.
- d. Develop a systematic approach to manage growing demand and optimize Call Center capacity. Include analysis of Call Center demand and project how much additional volume the Call Center can absorb (while sustaining or enhancing performance) before taking on more work.

CHAPTER 2 – SF311 Effectively Manages Its Operations but Should Enhance Internal Controls

Summary

SF311 generally provided appropriate service to its external customers (the public) and its internal customers (city departments). SF311 also has effective operating procedures and communicates appropriately with city departments, which are its key stakeholders, to answer information requests and route service requests to responding departments. However, additional opportunities exist for SF311 to optimize its operations through improved internal controls over information and service requests.

SF311 also does not have controls over the quality of its data, which is used for management decision-making and reported to the public. This has led to significant discrepancies between datasets that SF311 could not fully explain, indicating that SF311 management and public stakeholders may be using incomplete or inconsistent data for decision-making and analysis.

Finding 2.1

SF311 effectively responds to requests but can improve its internal controls.

SF311 generally responded to sample information questions and service requests appropriately, indicating its effective operating processes. SF311 also has effective approaches to communicating and partnering with city departments, which are its key stakeholders, to answer information requests and fulfill service requests. However, additional opportunities exist for SF311 to optimize performance and provide a better public experience by strong partnerships with city departments.

SF311 addressed most sample information requests accurately but puts accuracy of information at risk by how it communicates with departments.

CSA made ten sample information requests to SF311 to determine the accuracy of information provided by the Call Center. Of the ten questions CSA posed, SF311 answered five accurately, appropriately referred four calls to other departments or agencies, and answered one question inaccurately.

Exhibit 16 shows that SF311 generally answered questions accurately when they pertained to departments linked to high or medium call volume¹⁹. For departments associated with a low call volume, SF311 typically referred the caller to contact the department or agency directly and, in one case, gave an incorrect answer.

¹⁹ CSA used the following scale to categorize departments by their call volume: Low = up to 5,000 calls per year, Medium = 5,001 to 49,999 calls per year, High = 50,000 or more calls per year.

EXHIBIT 16 SF311's Accuracy Is Highly Driven by Its Typical Method of Coordinating With City Departments and Their Call Volume

Department Linked to the Question	Typical Method of Coordinating With Department	Topic Questions	SF311 Call Volume for Department ^{b,c}	# of Calls About Topic
Questions Answered Accurately				
Office of the Treasurer and Tax Collector	Weekly meetings	Tax history for a specific property	High	5
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency	Monthly meetings	Price of a neighborhood parking permit	High	
Office of the Controller	Ad hoc communications	Process to file claim against City	Low	
Office of the County Clerk	Ad hoc communications	Process for a wedding at City Hall	Medium	
Department of Public Health	Ad hoc communications	Closest free clinic	Low	
Questions Transferred to Other Departments				
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency	Monthly meetings	Chartering a cable car	High	4
Department of Building Inspection	Ad hoc communications	Permit for a home remodel	Low	
City College of San Francisco	None	Cost of SF City College for city residents	Low	
Recreation and Park Department	Semiannual meetings	Outside Lands Festival	Low	
Questions Answered Inaccurately				
Human Services Agency	Memorandum of understanding for homeless shelter reservations	Homeless shelters that allow dogs ^a	Medium	1
Total Calls				10
Notes:				
^a SF311 responded inaccurately to a question that pertained to homeless shelters that allow dogs as pets. The customer service representative stated they were unaware of any shelter that accepts dogs but provided the phone numbers of two shelters, so the caller could determine whether they accommodate dogs. However, the Navigation Center does allow dogs, according to its website.				
^b Based on fiscal year 2014-15.				
^c Departmental call volumes categories used are: Low = up to 5,000 calls yearly, Medium = 5,001 to 49,999 calls yearly, and High = 50,000 or more calls yearly.				

Source: Auditor's analysis of SF311 data and auditor's cold call results.

SF311's approach to updating its knowledge base, which is used to answer information requests, requires significant contributions from city departments to ensure information given to customers will be accurate.

SF311 expects departments to update the knowledge base with revised and additional information.

SF311 management explained that it is the department's responsibility to let SF311 know when information needs to be updated. SF311 reaches out to departments if a caller asks a question for which there is no answer in the database but relies on the department liaison to take the initiative to inform SF311 of new information or changes to existing information in the knowledge base.

Communications between SF311 and other departments vary, partly depending on the volume of requests SF311 receives related to a given department. SF311 communicates routinely with the few departments that represent the majority of requests SF311 receives and communicates only as needed with other city departments that represent a lower volume and frequency of requests. It is unclear whether SF311 informs other departments through these communications that they must provide updated information to SF311 to ensure the knowledge base is current.

Six of the seven city departments surveyed were satisfied with SF311's services.

CSA surveyed city departments to assess their level of overall satisfaction and communication methods with SF311. Six of the seven departments that responded were satisfied with their level of services and communication from SF311. One department, the Public Library (Library), reported being dissatisfied with its level of communication with SF311 because it believed SF311 provides inaccurate information about the department's operations.

The Library stated that it found its level of communication with SF311 unsatisfactory because SF311 did not understand that law librarians cannot give legal advice to the public. According to the Library and SF311, the Library does not have regular contact with SF311. Management of SF311 explained that it is up to all departments to provide SF311 any information or updates regarding department's operations. The reportedly infrequent communication between SF311 and the Library may have contributed to the Library's lower satisfaction with SF311's services and created the perception that SF311 often provides inaccurate information about the Library.

The example of the Library illustrates the risks to customer satisfaction and accuracy of information SF311 provides. These risks can be mitigated as SF311 and its stakeholders collaborate better to ensure customer satisfaction and accuracy of information, especially for those departments that do not routinely communicate with SF311.

SF311 routed all sample service requests correctly, but servicing departments are ultimately responsible for fulfilling and closing requests.

CSA made nine sample service requests, covering different topics, fulfilled by five service-providing departments. SF311 correctly routed each sample request to the appropriate service-providing department, although one sample request was inaccurately closed by the servicing department.

Of the nine sample service requests, four were fulfilled by the service providing department accurately and within the timeframe indicated by SF311. Four others were resolved²⁰.

One request of nine—asking that a damaged parking meter be repaired—was not fulfilled in the timeframe provided by SF311. SFMTA did not fix the damaged parking meter we reported within the timeframe specified, although SFMTA closed the ticket in LAGAN, erroneously indicating that the service request had been fulfilled and making the erroneous information available to the public.

Exhibit 17 summarizes the nature and outcome of the nine sample service requests the audit team made through SF311.

²⁰ Due to the nature of the issues reported (car blocking a sidewalk, dead animal pickup), it was impossible to determine whether these issues were resolved by the servicing department or a member of the public.

EXHIBIT 17 Service Requests Are Generally Accurately Fulfilled, but One Request Was Inaccurately Closed Before It Was Resolved

Department or Outside Organization Providing Service	Service Requested	Number of Sample Requests	% of Total Requests
Request Fulfilled Accurately			
Recology	General Cleaning	4	44%
Recology	Bulky Items		
PG&E	Streetlight		
Recology	Overflowing Receptacle		
Unknown Who Resolved the Issue^a			
Recreation and Park	General Cleaning	4	44%
SFMTA	Blocked Sidewalk		
SFMTA	Blocked Sidewalk		
Public Works	Dead Animal Pickup		
Request Inaccurately Closed by SF311 Before Being Resolved			
SFMTA	Damaged Parking Meter	1	11%
Total Questions		9	100%^b

Notes:

^a The issue was resolved in the timeframe expected, but due to the nature of the request, CSA could not determine whether it was resolved by a city department or a member of the public.

^b Numbers above do not total to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Auditor's analysis of data from SF 311.

Also, SFMTA provided poor customer service for two of the calls. SF311 routed calls regarding blocked sidewalks to SFMTA, which answered them in a rude, unpleasant tone, and provided no expected response time or an incident number, contrary to SF311's standards of customer service.

SF311 management explained that it is the responding departments' responsibility to ensure that accurate information regarding estimated time to close, updating the status of requests, and fulfilling service requests is communicated. However, although the servicing department may be the source of the inaccurate information, providing such information to the public and routing calls to a department whose call takers do not exhibit adequate customer service could reflect poorly on SF311's (and the City's) reputation.

SF311 does some monitoring of whether services requested through SF311 are provided and may follow up with departments if requests are not being closed. The five surveyed departments that fulfill service requests reported receiving updates on open requests from SF311, so departments can address and close the requests.

Like other city departments, SF311 recognizes the importance of partnering with its key stakeholders to achieve its mission. Equally important, city departments are also invested in the partnership with SF311 to provide their government services to customers. For example, a 2016 Controller's report on the City's management process for Muni-related complaints identified opportunities for SFMTA to improve operations and the customer experience, in cooperation with SF311²¹.

Specifically, the report stated that SFMTA could:

- Set up more comprehensive feedback mechanisms to communicate to SF311 about missing information needed to fulfill requests.
- Establish two-way communication between SF311 and SFMTA information systems.
- Create customizable e-mail scripts for all frequent types of Passenger Service Reports to close the loop with customers.

This example is one way that SF311 and other city departments can partner to identify opportunities to optimize operations and improve the customer experience.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, management should design control activities in response to the entity's objectives and risks to achieve an effective internal control system.

Given that SF311's mission includes providing a prompt, courteous, and professional customer service experience and enabling the government to be transparent,

²¹ Office of the Controller, *SFMTA: As-Is Review of the Passenger Service Report Process*, 2016, pp. 25-39.

responsive, and effective, additional internal controls could address these objectives as part of a comprehensive internal control system.

Recommendations

SF311 should:

2. Continue to effectively partner with other city departments, its primary stakeholders, to achieve its mission.
3. Establish a comprehensive process to proactively and regularly communicate with all other city departments to verify that information in the knowledge base is accurate, confirm whether any new information should be added and communicate expected timelines to update the knowledge base.
4. Identify and assess the costs and benefits to developing a systematic and comprehensive process to track whether all service requests are appropriately closed and systematically communicate any delinquent open requests to department management.

Finding 2.2

SF311 needs to improve internal controls to ensure data it uses and provides to the public is complete, consistent, and readily understood.

SF311's data lacks consistency from report to report.

SF311 does not have appropriate controls over the data it uses for management decision-making and shares publicly because it does not document the nature of its report queries or have a process for checking its reports for completeness and accuracy.

This has led to significant inconsistencies between its public and internal reports, which management cannot fully reconcile indicating that SF311 may be using incomplete data for management purposes, is providing filtered data to the public, or both.

As shown in Exhibit 18, public reports differ from internal reports generated by SF311 regarding the number of

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service requests, total calls received by SF311, and total number of informational requests by up to 34 percent.

EXHIBIT 18		SF311 Call-Related Performance Measures Vary Between Internal and Public Reports		
Publicly Available Report	Report Description	Comparable Internal Report	Discrepancy	SF311's Explanation of Discrepancy
DataSF 2015 – Case Data from SF311	List of service requests made during 2015	CSC51 - All Contact Metrics: Cases by Department	DataSF: 349,614 records CSC51 Cases: 414,046 records Variance: 64,432 records (18%)	SF311 stated that both reports are filtered, but was unable to explain what was filtered out in each
DataSF 2015 – SF311 Information Requests by Month 311_Information_Requests_by_Month	Data that documents the number of times each knowledge base article was accessed	CSC51 - All Contact Metrics: Knowledge Used	DataSF: 309,977 records CSC51 Knowledge Used: 331,675 records Variance: 21,698 records (7%)	SF311 stated that both reports are filtered, but was unable to explain what was filtered out in each
DataSF 2015 - SF311 Cases by Channel	Number of cases SF311 received each month by request channel	Cases by Channel	No Variance: 467,511 records	Not Applicable
DataSF 2015 - Case_Data_from_San_Francisco_311_2015_Calendarv2	Total number of service requests received in 2015	Cases by Channel	DataSF: 349,614 Cases Cases by Channel: 467,511 cases Variance: 117,897 cases or 34%	SF311 was unable to explain the variance

Note: Cases represent service requests and channels represent contact methods (phone, web, mobile app, and Twitter).

Source: Auditor's analysis of data from SF311.

Upon request, SF311 management was able to reconcile most of the variances from the CSC51 and Cases by Channel reports for the period under audit but does not have a documented process for checking its reports for completeness and accuracy. According to management data made public on DataSF intentionally excludes information that pertains solely to an individual. For example, calls from taxpayers wanting to get specific

information about their business taxes or someone making a shelter reservation are not included. But when departments request performance data on their services, SF311 can generate the relevant information to support data-driven management decisions. Still, SF311 recognizes that more can be done to develop a process that is documented and applied consistently for reporting performance data.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, management should use quality information to support the internal control system. Effective information and communication are vital for an entity to achieve its objectives. To ensure it relies on quality information, management should evaluate both internal and external sources of data for reliability. Quality information is appropriate, current, complete, accurate, accessible, and provided on a timely basis. Management uses the quality information to make informed decisions and evaluate the entity's performance in achieving key objectives and addressing risks.

By not having a consistent process that is documented for how data is filtered from reports used for internal decision-making and shared publicly, SF311 risks relying on incomplete or inconsistent information for management decisions and providing incomplete information to the public without disclaimer.

Recommendations

SF311 should:

5. Implement policies and procedures to regularly check that data used for management purposes or reported to the public is consistent, accurate, and complete, and, where incomplete, that the omissions are documented and communicated.
6. Maintain documentation of what is included in and excluded from each of its reports containing similar information and reconcile between data sets.
7. Document and make publicly available a guide that describes what information is included in and omitted from public datasets to facilitate appropriate understanding of the data.

APPENDIX A: PERFORMANCE DATA FACTORS OF 311 JURISDICTIONS

CSA performed simple quantitative analyses on key performance data factors for SF311 and the surveyed 311 jurisdictions. Exhibit A shows call volume, contacts, operating budget, and staff all affect 311 operations across jurisdictions. However, it's unclear to what extent the data factors individually or together contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of 311 operations.

EXHIBIT A Key Performance Data Factors of 311 Jurisdictions					
Jurisdiction	Year Metrics Were Reported ^a	Total Contacts ^b	Total Call Volume ^b	Adopted Budget	2015 FTE Positions ^c
San Francisco	FY 2014-15	1,280,571 ^d	1,089,133 ^d	\$12,273,735	91
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	FY 2014-15	1,674,403 ^e	1,153,426 ^e	10,636,041	113
Sacramento	FY 2014-15	403,000 ^{ef}	342,000 ^{e,f}	1,869,374	26
Denver	2015	531,098 ^e	498,629 ^e	1,976,900	32
New York City	FY 2014-15	31,615,000 ^g	21,079,000 ^g	44,100,000	337

Notes:

- ^a Year can be the calendar or fiscal year, depending on the jurisdictions' operating cycle.
- ^b The point at which each jurisdiction counts a *contact* may vary across jurisdictions surveyed and impact the total of *contacts and call volumes*. Also, not all jurisdictions have the same contact channels, and certain contact channels require more CSR involvement. SF311 defines a *contact* as a phone call where the caller has passed through the initial phone tree, or any request made via web, mobile app, or Twitter.
- ^c The full-time equivalent (FTE) count is a total for each 311 jurisdictions listed. The body of work can vary greatly across jurisdictions. San Francisco count excludes part-time and temporary staff. The 2017 Charlotte-Mecklenburg FTE count is approximate.
- ^d SF311's *total contacts* and *call volume* were calculated by CSA based on reports provided by SF311.
- ^e Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Denver, and Sacramento call volume and total contact numbers are self-reported via survey.
- ^f City of Sacramento and New York City call volume and total contacts were rounded to the nearest thousand.
- ^g New York City publishes its metrics in the Mayor's Management Report.

Source: Contacts, calls, and budget numbers available closest to the end of the audit period for each jurisdiction from survey responses and adopted budgets and, for San Francisco only, from the salary ordinance. Denver's 2015 budget was appropriated and not adopted.

APPENDIX B: OTHER JURISDICTIONS' CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND FEATURES

EXHIBIT B		CRM Systems Used by Other Jurisdictions Have Various Useful Features		
Phone Call Volume FY2014-15 (Approximately)	Time With System	Most Useful System Features and/or Attributes	Comments on System Features	Impact on Call Performance
City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County: City-Owned Proprietary System				
1,150,000	>20 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong knowledge base 2. Easy to use and learn 3. Integration with several department work order systems 4. Solid complaint management process 5. Integrates well with customer service representative processes 6. System stability 7. Relatively easy to modify existing needs 	Although the reporting and search capabilities are somewhat limited, we have used the system for more than 20 years. It is stable and easy to use and learn. The knowledge base is robust, and request entry easy to follow. The system was built for and maintained by the City of Charlotte staff, so it was built with city operations in mind.	Don't know; it has been used for more than 20 years.
City and County of Denver: Salesforce				
500,000	One year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Case intake 2. Auto-routing: limited but expanding 3. Ease of use 4. Easy to make changes/updates 5. Integration with other applications 	So easy and intuitive to use.	Improved call-handling time and agent availability.

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Phone Call Volume FY2014-15 (Approximately)	Time With System	Most Useful System Features and/or Attributes	Comments on System Features	Impact on Call Performance
City of New York: Oracle/Siebel				
20 million	13 years ²²	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search 2. Next steps navigation 3. Radio-dial buttons for transactions 4. Content presentation 5. Activity recording (for reporting) 	<p>The system and top features are designed to support the 311 Call Center customer experience baseline. Agents engage with customers by probing and dialogue to determine the customer need, use the search tool to obtain relevant topics (aka "services") based on the keywords, and then use the content dialogue boxes to comprehend the material and relay it to the customer.</p> <p>The "next steps" navigation is critical. It allows the content to determine the outcome, so the agent does not have to decide or even know the decision path. Transactions such as transfers or conference bridging are easily accessed by the radio-dial buttons. As part of the design, a data capture and reporting function was included to capture pertinent information (date, time, phone number, agent ID, services offered, outcome) on every call and then format for handoff to a business intelligence platform.</p>	Don't know; all features were implemented at the launch of the 311 program and CRM platform in 2003.
City of Sacramento: Oracle Cloud Service				
340,000	Since May 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Configurability 2. E-mail automation 3. Integration with other systems 4. Multiple workspaces 5. Simple reporting tools 6. E-mail integration 7. Included customer portal 8. Included online reporting tools 	I like being able to easily test system changes with a group of agents in the production environment. As a non-developer, I can change business rules, workspace rules, and workspace layout very easily, and test those changes in a production environment, while limiting who sees the changes.	Still too early to know for certain.

²² City of New York has started the process to replace its Customer Relationship Management System.

APPENDIX C: DEPARTMENT RESPONSE



Nancy Alfaro
Director

311 Customer Service Center City and County of San Francisco

June 25, 2018

Tonia Lediju
Director of City Audits
City Hall, Room 476
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Response to the Audit on San Francisco 311

Dear Ms. Lediju,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your draft report, "SAN FRANCISCO 311: New Technology, Stronger Departmental Partnerships, and Robust Internal Controls Will Improve Customer Service."

We know your team dedicated many hours reviewing and analyzing our reports and spent a lot of time interviewing members of our team, other departments, and other municipalities. We greatly appreciated the time you and your team offered our department to generate this report.

Attached, please find SF311's response to the audit's recommendations. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any additional questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Alfaro', written over a white rectangular background.

Nancy Alfaro
Director

cc: Naomi Kelly, City Administrator

Mark Farrell, Mayor
Naomi M. Kelly, City Administrator



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For each recommendation, the responsible agency should indicate whether it concurs, does not concur, or partially concurs. If it concurs with the recommendation, it should indicate the expected implementation date and implementation plan. If the responsible agency does not concur or partially concurs, it should provide an explanation and an alternate plan of action to address the identified issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

Recommendation	Agency Response	<i>CSA Use Only</i> Status Determination*
The San Francisco 311 should:		
1. Ensure that its Call Center capacity is aligned with demand. Specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue expanding its efforts to automate services. As part of this effort, determine a frequency (at least annually) at which to evaluate what call types could be diverted to an integrated voice response system and consider the costs and benefits of implementing such a system. b. As part of implementing a new customer relationship management system, include features that allow integration with the phone system to permit the tracking of the average duration of calls related to various topics. c. Analyze average call length by topic and determine whether some calls may be shortened through enhanced staff training or leveraging self-service options to place requests. d. Develop a systematic approach to manage growing demand and optimize Call Center capacity. Include analysis of Call Center demand and project how much additional volume the Call Center can absorb (while sustaining or enhancing performance) before taking on more work. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur Incorporating an integrated response system (IVR) requires callers to navigate complex phone trees and is contrary to the Mayor’s directive given to SF311 upon launch. SF311’s guiding principle is to connect people to government services by offering them the ability to reach a “live” representative who can assist callers with their issues. Live representatives can also connect callers to a language translation service with over 170+ language options; in comparison, IVRs do not offer such accommodation. SF311 has averaged a monthly service level of 66.85% for the last 2 years, which exceeds our goal of answering 60% of calls within 60 seconds. Our current telephone system has allowed us to create dedicated vectors and announcements to divert callers to representatives with a specific skill through a short list of phone tree options. Options which represent at least 20% of our call volumes have discrete entry points. The telephone system can	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team’s review of the agency’s response and proposed corrective action

Recommendation	Agency Response	<u>CSA Use Only</u> Status Determination*
	<p>provide us with critical call metrics for these entry points, including length of call.</p> <p>Therefore, SF311 disagrees with implementing a costly IVR system for the small percentage of calls that CSA identified as it would make it harder for the majority of callers to reach a live person. Ultimately, the decision to redirect callers to machines rather than people is a Mayoral policy decision.</p> <p>On an ongoing basis, SF311 considers adding options to the SF311 app and web for existing services offered via phone and agrees that this should continue. Over 60% of our service requests are now done via self-service options, which exceeds any other 311 center in the nation. SF311 also agrees that we should continue to analyze length of call for various topics and services and enhance training or expand on self-service options where applicable. 90% of our services offered by phone are also available via self-service options, and SF311 continues to look for ways of expanding this. As an example, blocked driveways and illegal parking was recently added to the service options on our SF311 app and web.</p> <p>SF311 agrees that we need to have a better systematic approach to anticipate growing demand for our services, which should include impacts on performance. However, this is not always possible due to lack of data available from departments. Departments tend to underreport call volumes, since they are unable to report abandoned calls, so call volumes are often much higher than what departments report to SF311 when taking on a service. However, we are incorporating self-service options as part</p>	

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action

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Recommendation	Agency Response	<i>CSA Use Only Status Determination*</i>
	of the plan when implementing any new service. Furthermore, there are times, when the decision and directive to transfer a function to 311 has been made by the Mayor or other Executive City leaders without much notice to SF311.	
2. Continue to effectively partner with other city departments, its primary stakeholders, to achieve its mission.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested
3. Establish a comprehensive process to proactively and regularly communicate with all other city departments to verify that information in the knowledge base is accurate, confirm whether any new information should be added, and communicate expected timelines to update the knowledge base.	<input type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur As of July 31, 2017, SF311 began holding quarterly meetings for all 311 Liaisons and CRM users, allowing a platform for participants to provide feedback, raise concerns, learn of new system changes, and to provide an opportunity to notify SF311 of changes within their departments. Since SF311's knowledge base links directly to department websites, SF311 believes that departments are responsible for maintaining the accuracy of that information.	<input type="checkbox"/> Open <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested
4. Identify and assess the costs and benefits to developing a systematic and comprehensive process to track whether all service requests are appropriately closed and systematically communicate any delinquent open requests to department management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur SF311 already provides a weekly report to departmental 311 liaisons showing open requests. Additionally, we design custom reports and/or provide training on accessing reports to department managers so that they can manage 311 requests. SF311 also regularly meets with the larger departments so they can raise issues and provide feedback for process improvements. SF311 strongly believes it is the responsibility of departments to verify if requests were appropriately closed and investigate and act on delinquent requests. SF311	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action

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Recommendation	Agency Response	<i>CSA Use Only Status Determination*</i>
	escalates and raises awareness to department supervisors and managers when receiving complaints via phone or if requests are not addressed. However, SF311 does not have dedicated staffing to verify if someone replaced a streetlight or removed an encampment, for example. Departments do not report to SF311; therefore, SF311 does not believe this responsibility should fall on SF311.	
5. Implement policies and procedures to regularly check that data used for management purposes or reported to the public is consistent, accurate, and complete, and, where incomplete, that the omissions are documented and communicated.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested
6. Maintain documentation of what is included in and excluded from each of its reports containing similar information and reconcile between data sets.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested
7. Document and make publicly available a guide that describes what information is included in and omitted from public datasets to facilitate appropriate understanding of the data.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested

* Status Determination based on audit team's review of the agency's response and proposed corrective action