



# Audit of Dallas 311 Call Center Performance

March 14, 2025

Mark S. Swann, City Auditor

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Gay Donnell Willis



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## Executive Summary

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### Objective and Scope

The objective of this audit was to determine if Dallas 311 Customer Service Center meets its performance goals for the average speed of residents' calls answered.

The audit scope covers residents' 311 incoming calls from October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023.

### Recommendations

Management should:

- Review current performance targets to include caller tolerance for the length of hold times.
- Limit call handle times.
- Hire more call takers and forecast call volume fluctuations and call taker attendance trends.
- Track customers' digital interactions and identify potential issues with the app or web interface.

### Background

The Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311 call center operates around-the-clock and is staffed by Customer Service Representatives who are trained to receive calls from residents, and based upon their situation, determine which service requests best suit their needs. The 311 service requests are passed along to city departments, who address and solve the problem.

The primary function of the 311-customer service call center is to answer non-emergency questions and serve as a liaison between the caller service request submissions and the appropriate department to address the issue. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Call Center answered 819,899 calls from Dallas residents.

### Observed Conditions

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Call Center did meet the speed of answer performance targets for general 311, Auto Pound, and Courts calls. But the Call Center did not meet speed of answer targets for calls related to Dallas Water Utilities. The current staffing levels do not support 311 customer service center's performance goals. There are opportunities to increase online engagement and decrease call volume. The call answering performance targets are not based on an analysis of what length of hold time Dallas callers are willing to tolerate, and the Call Center does not set limits for the length of customer calls.

## Objectives and Conclusions

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1. Did Dallas 311 meet its performance goals for answering residents' calls during the audit period of October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023?

**Generally, yes.** The Call Center answers residents' calls in four "queues". The Call Center did meet the speed of answer performance targets for 311 Queue, Auto Pound Queue, and Courts Queue. But the Call Center did not meet speed of answer targets for Dallas Water Utilities Queue and average speed of answer for 311 Queue. (See [Observation A](#).)

## Audit Results

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Both *City Council Resolution 88-3428* and Administrative Directive 4-09, *Internal Control* prescribe policy for the City to establish and maintain an internal control system. The audit observations listed are offered to assist management in fulfilling their internal control responsibilities.

### Observation A: Call Answering Performance

The Dallas 311 call center answers resident calls for service in English and in Spanish in the following call queues:

- **Water Queue**— calls related to issues with water main breaks, meter leaks, fire hydrant leaks, clogged or overflowing wastewater mains, emergency water turn offs, and other water related issues. The majority of customer service calls to the 311 Call Center, or 42 percent, are water related concerns or questions.
- **311 Queue** – calls related to animal care and control, city code violations, city parks and trails, storm drains, garbage, recycling, and brush/bulky item collection; homeless outreach and encampments; and other city service requests. About 35 percent of all customer service calls are for these concerns and questions.
- **Courts Queue** – calls related to ticket payment, citation information, filing a complaint, court hearings, court dress code, court requirements, and other court related questions. About 13 percent of all customer service calls are for concerns or questions to the Court queue.
- **Auto Pound Queue** – calls related to vehicle search, vehicle location, and vehicle release requirements. About 10 percent of customer service calls are related to Auto Pound.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Dallas 311 call center had the following monthly performance targets:

- For all queues, achieve an 87-percent satisfaction level with call experience.
- For 311 Queue:
  - Answer calls at average speed of 220 seconds.
  - Answer at least 60 percent of calls within 90 seconds.
  - Abandon<sup>1</sup> no more than 10 percent of calls.
- For Court Services and Auto Pound Queue:

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<sup>1</sup> A call is considered abandoned when a customer was on hold for over 40 seconds and hangs up before speaking with an agent.

- Answer at least 45 percent calls within 90 seconds.
- For Water Queue:
  - Answer at least 45 percent of calls within 90 seconds.

During the audit period of October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023, the Call Center received 967,891 calls from Dallas residents and answered 819,899 calls. Average annual results show that the Call Center did meet the speed of answer performance targets for general 311, Courts and Auto Pound calls. But the Call Center did not meet speed of answer targets for calls related to Dallas Water Utilities and average speed of answer for 311 calls (See [Exhibit 1](#)).

**Exhibit 1:**

Fiscal Year 2023 Performance

Measure	Target	Actual	Target Met?
Percentage of customers satisfied with call experience	87%	89%	Yes
Percentage of 311 calls answered within 90 seconds	60%	62%	Yes <sup>2</sup>
Percentage of Court Services and Auto Pound calls answered in 90 seconds	45%	58%	Yes
Percentage of Water calls answered in 90 seconds	45%	20%	No
Percentage of 311 calls abandoned monthly	10%	9%	Yes
Average speed of 311 calls answered monthly	220 seconds	411 seconds	No

**Source:** City of Dallas, the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311

As a result, some city residents calling with general inquiry questions or questions related to Dallas Water Utilities may not have been able to connect with a Dallas 311 call takers within the time targets set by Dallas 311. According to Dallas 311, the call answering performance targets are based on historical targets and information from peer cities and industry conferences rather than an analysis of what length of hold time Dallas callers are willing to tolerate.

While Dallas 311 offers a post call customer survey to monitor customer experience with calls related to 311, Water, and Court questions, the survey does not include questions addressing customer satisfaction with the wait time before speaking with a call taker.

<sup>2</sup> The target was lowered in Fiscal Year 2023 from 75 percent in Fiscal Year 2022 and was raised to 70 percent in Fiscal Year 2024.

While the target is met by most of the 311 queues, there is an opportunity to reevaluate the 90 second goal to a more obtainable goal. According to a 2014 survey conducted for American Express by the data research company Ebiquity, consumers who call a customer service center are willing to wait, on average, a maximum of 13.0 minutes on hold before hanging up. However, approximately 22.0 percent of customers placed on hold will hang up in less than 5.0 minutes, and an additional 27.0 percent will hang up within 10.0 minutes.

On the other hand, a review of call answering targets reported by other peer cities shows that Dallas 311's speed of answer is largely out of line with other peer cities both for time and percentage goal. (See [Exhibit 2](#)).

**Exhibit 2:**

Comparison of Speed of Answer Targets

City	Target	Goal (percent)
Dallas, Texas <sup>3</sup>	90 seconds	60%
Fort Worth, Texas	30 seconds	80%
San Antonio, Texas	45 seconds	80%
Chicago, Illinois	45 seconds	85%
Los Angeles, California	100 seconds	95%

**Sources:** City of Dallas, the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311; 311 National Conference Annual Survey 2021-2022 of programs hosted by CSWeek.org

Research shows that the speed of answering the calls is generally affected by the following factors:

- The length of each interaction with the callers. According to Dallas 311, they do not set limits for the length of customer calls, which impacts call taker availability to answer incoming calls, average speed of answer, and hold times.
- The number of call takers available to answer the calls. During the period from Fiscal Year 2021 to Fiscal Year 2024, the Dallas 311 experienced an average decrease in headcount by 11 call takers (See [Exhibit 3](#)). The turnover rate has been improving from 51.7 percent in 2021 to 24.6 percent in 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Excluding Court, Auto Pound, and Water related calls.

**Exhibit 3:**

## Turnover Summary by Fiscal Year

<b>Call Taker Turnover</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024 (as of April 23, 2024)</b>
Start Headcount	74	67	67	63
End Headcount	69	76	63	59
Average Headcount	72	72	65	61
Total Terminations	37	38	16	15
<b>Turnover Rate</b>	<b>51.7%</b>	<b>53.1%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>

**Source:** Office of Communications and Customer Experience/311 Turnover Summary.

**Note:** Turnover Rate = Total Terminations/Average Headcount.

While Dallas 311 scheduling is automated with manual changes by a scheduling manager to optimize productivity, the call center does not use all available scheduling system features to forecast call volume fluctuations and call taker attendance trends. According to Dallas 311, this will require an upgrade of the call taking system and additional training by the software vendor.

While Dallas 311 overtime and leave hour totals were higher at the start of the COVID epidemic in 2020, the levels have stabilized over time and the percentage of overtime in Dallas 311 is at about 1 percent of total time. Workday data for the period of March 11, 2020, to June 01, 2024, indicates that Dallas 311 totals of leave hours are reasonable compared to other City departments.

According to the Erlang Calculation<sup>4</sup>, Dallas 311 should hire at least 28 more call takers to consistently achieve speed of answer targets. The optimal staffing level to meet the current performance targets is 93 full-time call takers. The average call taker headcount in Fiscal Year 2023 was 65 and remained the same as of October 11, 2024.

- The number of incoming calls compared to web and app traffic. While the numbers of mobile app downloads and service requests coming through the app and web compared to phone calls have been consistently improving (See [Exhibit 4](#)), the Dallas 311 currently does not have a capability to track customers' digital interactions and identify potential issues with the app or web interface that may cause customers to abandon the mobile app and website and opt for a phone call instead.

<sup>4</sup> Erlang C is a traffic modeling formula used in call centers to determine the number of resources needed to keep the wait times within the call center's service level targets. Erlang C bases its formula on three factors: the number of call takers providing service, the number of callers waiting, and the average amount of time it takes to serve each caller.



**Exhibit 4:**Service Request Origin<sup>5</sup>

Source	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Phone Call	67%	66%	61%	62%	60%	56% (as of June 14, 2024)
Digital (App or Online)	33%	34%	39%	38%	40%	44% (as of June 14, 2024)
<b>Total App Downloads</b>	7,973	8,424	8,273	13,362	15,886	15,037 (as of May 31, 2024)

**Source:** City of Dallas, the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311, October 1, 2018, to May 31, 2024. Communications, Outreach, and Marketing / 311 Overview and FAQs, July 5, 2024

**Criteria:**

- ❖ Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government:
  - *Principle 10 – Design Control Activities*
  - *Principle 12 – Implement Control Activities*
  - *Principle 16 – Perform Monitoring Activities*

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<sup>5</sup> One call can result in multiple service requests. However, not every call or app message becomes a service request. For example, out of 819,899 phone calls in Fiscal Year 2023 only 273,801 of the calls were recorded as service requests.

Assessed Risk Rating:

**Moderate**

We recommend the **Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311 Director**:

**A.1:** Perform a review of current performance targets that would include an analysis of caller tolerance for the length of hold times for individual customer queues.

**A.2:** Develop guidelines for acceptable call handle times depending on the type of call.

**A.3:** Ensure that Dallas 311 Call Center has enough call takers to meet performance targets for the speed of answering resident calls by hiring more call takers and using scheduling features to forecast call volume fluctuations and call taker attendance trends.

**A.4:** Work with the software vendors to obtain customer feedback regarding the app and web interface designs to increase customer app and web traffic.

## Appendix A: Background and Methodology

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### Background

The three-digit 3-1-1 phone number was first implemented by the Baltimore, Maryland Police Department in October 1996 to address non-emergency police calls. In February 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved the 311 number for nationwide use to assist cities in distinguishing between emergency and non-emergency services. The City of Dallas implemented the 311 system for non-emergency City services in December 1997.

The Dallas 311 call center's Fiscal Year 2024 budget is \$6,331,204, an increase from Fiscal Year 2023 budget of \$5,850,587. The regular Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) budget in Fiscal Year 2024 is 121 and is a decrease from Fiscal Year 2023 Full-Time Equivalent budget of 133. Currently, there are 28 customer service taker vacancies and 3 vacancies in leadership roles.

The Offices of 311 and Communications, Outreach, and Marketing were realigned in July 2024 into The Office of Communications and Customer Experience/311. The Office of Communications and Customer Experience/311 Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Budget is \$9,660,834, a decrease from Fiscal Year 2024 budget of \$10,108,792 for both 311 and Communications, Outreach, and Marketing. The Office of Communications and Customer Experience/311's regular Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) budget for Fiscal Year 2025 is 137, which is decrease from Fiscal Year 2024 combined FTE budget of 148 for both 311 and Communications, Outreach, and Marketing.

Dallas residents typically call for services that address potholes, missed garbage, high weeds, water billing and payment questions, start and stop of water service, court information about tickets, court payments, court dates, the dispatch of field crews for urgent services such as water main breaks, traffic signals out, aggressive dogs, etc. According to Dallas 311, there was a total of 460,117 service requests in Fiscal Year 2023 and 462,682 service requests in Fiscal Year 2024. The tables below show the top ten city departments for service requests submissions (see [Exhibit 5](#)), and the top ten types of service requests (see [Exhibit 6](#)).

**Exhibit 5:**

## Top 10 Service Requests by Department

Department	FY 2023		FY 2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Sanitation Department	126,709	28%	73,292	16%
Department of Code Compliance	121,473	26%	132,025	29%
Transportation and Public Works Department	95,654	21%	106,951	23%
Department of Animal Services	60,294	13%	72,074	16%
Office of Communications & Customer Experience/311 - 311	17,946	4%	36,106	8%
Dallas Police Department	10,755	2%	12,169	3%
Office of Homeless Solutions	9,514	2%	11,190	2%
Dallas Water Utilities <sup>6</sup>	6,563	1%	6,879	2%
Department of Park and Recreation	3,510	1%	3,901	1%
Planning and Development	2,331	1%	3,281	1%
All Other Departments	5,368	1%	4,814	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>460,117</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>462,682</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** City of Dallas, the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311

<sup>6</sup> The majority of water calls are tracked and resolved through a system separate from the one used for other service requests. This results in a significant gap between the water call volume and the service requests for Dallas Water Utilities.

**Exhibit 6:**Top 10 Service Requests<sup>7</sup> by Type

Type	FY 2023		FY 2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
City Code Concerns	111,687	24%	124,252	27%
Sanitation Roll Cart Maintenance and Delivery	40,834	9%	40,183	9%
Reports a Parking Violations	32,691	7%	36,440	8%
Missed Garbage Collection	28,402	6%	18,254	4%
Missed Recycling Collection	21,911	5%	5,903	1%
Loose Animals	17,289	4%	15,284	3%
Animals in Need of Care	14,594	3%	14,381	3%
Dead Animal Pick Up	13,532	3%	13,267	3%
Water and Wastewater Line Location	13,380	3%	15,988	3%
Complaints and Compliments	12,930	3%	11,279	2%
All Other	152,867	33%	167,451	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>460,117</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>462,682</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** City of Dallas, the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311

## Methodology

The audit methodology included: (1) Interviewing personnel from the Office of Communications and Customer Experience/311. (2) reviewing policies and procedures, the *Dallas City Code*, applicable Administrative Directives; and (3) performing various analysis. In addition, all five components of *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* were considered.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

<sup>7</sup> Ranking is based on Fiscal Year 2023.

## Major Contributors to the Report

Nadia Gonzalez – Auditor

Anatoli Douditski, MPA, CIA, CFE, ACDA – Engagement Manager

## Appendix B: Management's Response

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### Memorandum



**DATE:** March 14, 2025  
**TO:** Mark S. Swann – City Auditor  
**SUBJECT:** Response to Audit of Dallas 311 Call Center Performance

This letter acknowledges the City Manager's Office received the *Audit of Dallas 311 Call Center Performance* and submitted responses to the recommendations in consultation with the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311.

City management recognizes that the 311-customer service center is a valuable tool for assisting City residents and commends them for facilitating answers and resolutions for 819,899 calls in fiscal year 2023. Further, we are pleased that Dallas 311 met the majority of its performance goals during the audit period.

The Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311 appreciates the valuable recommendations the City Auditor had to improve our processes further.

Specifically, the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311 agrees to:

- Review the current performance targets that consider caller tolerance for hold times for individual customer queues;
- Develop guidelines for acceptable call handle times depending on the type of call; and
- Ensure that Dallas 311 Call Center hires an adequate number of call takers to meet performance targets for the speed of answering resident calls and using scheduling features to forecast call volume fluctuations and call taker attendance trends.

While the Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311 can not agree to implement one moderate-risk recommendation that requires unbudgeted funds and technology enhancements, it agrees to strongly consider the recommendations during the budgeting process and when renewing or soliciting new contracts for technology tools.

Service First, Now!

  
Kimberly Bizor-Tobert (Mar 11, 2025 15:49 CDT)

Kimberly Bizor Tobert  
City Manager

Response to Audit of Dallas 311 Call Center Performance

March 14, 2025

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C: Jack Ireland, Chief Financial Officer  
Elizabeth Saab, Chief of Strategy, Engagement, and Alignment (I)  
Daisy Torres Fast, Director, Office of Communications and Customer Experience / 311



Assessed Risk Rating	Recommendations	Concurrence and Action Plans		Implementation Date	Follow-Up/ Maturity Date
<b>Moderate</b>	We recommend the <b>Communications &amp; Customer Experience/311 Director:</b>				
	<p><b>A.1:</b> Perform a review of current performance targets that would include an analysis of caller tolerance for the length of hold times for individual customer queues.</p>	Agree	<p>Communications &amp; Customer Experience/311 (CCX) will review the current performance targets. Fiscal Year 2025 performance targets will reflect a balance of caller tolerance for hold times for individual customer queues, available resources, including staffing levels and budget, anticipated call volume, and other relevant information.</p>	12/31/2025	3/31/2026
	<p><b>A.2:</b> Develop guidelines for acceptable call handle times depending on the type of call.</p>	Agree	<p>CCX currently monitors call handle times to identify trends related to longer than anticipated calls. CCX will further formalize this by formally documenting its current process to monitor and audit acceptable call handle times by call type. However, as a forward-facing component of the City Manager’s “Service First, Now” initiative, CCX will prioritize customer service and not use individual call handle times as an individual performance metric.</p>	12/31/2025	3/31/2026
	<p><b>A.3:</b> Ensure that Dallas 311 Call Center has enough call takers to meet performance targets for the speed of answering resident calls by hiring more call takers and using scheduling features to</p>	Agree	<p>CCX will continue to reduce attrition and hire new agents on an aggressive hiring and training schedule. CCX is already coordinating with Information &amp; Technology Services and the vendor to enhance the City’s Workforce Management System by adding scheduling features to forecast call</p>	3/31/2026	9/30/2026

Assessed Risk Rating	Recommendations	Concurrence and Action Plans		Implementation Date	Follow-Up/ Maturity Date
	forecast call volume fluctuations and call taker attendance trends.		volume fluctuations and call taker attendance trends.		
	<b>A.4:</b> Work with the software vendors to obtain customer feedback regarding the app and web interface designs to increase customer app and web traffic.	Accept Risk	<p>CCX's current software is an off-the-shelf software platform used by several other cities. Customizing the software will incur costs and may not be supported by the vendor.</p> <p>CCX will revisit the recommendation and consider including more robust feedback tools when developing specifications for a replacement system.</p>	N/A	N/A