EBOOK

Taking Control of the Narrative:

A Local Government Playbook for Resident Request Management

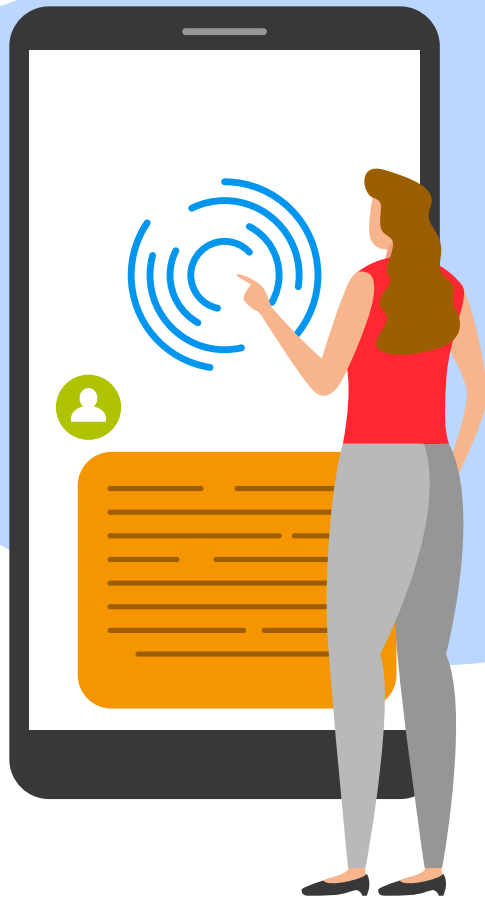How to divert resident complaints from social media to the community departments meant to respond

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The Civic Experience — Do Your Residents Trust Local Government?

Opportunities for residents to engage with local government happen everyday — when a resident hits a pothole on the way to visit a friend, for instance, or when they're looking for voter information during a local election, or trying to sign a child up for swim lessons at the public pool. These countless touchpoints of interaction give rise to civic experiences, and depending on how easy it is for residents to access the services they need to achieve their goals, their opinion of local government will shift.

To create positive civic experiences, governments must provide transparency and accountability at every touchpoint, offering personalized interactions, responsive communication, and frictionless navigation. Of course, every municipality wants this to happen. But without the right solutions to streamline and direct resident outreach efficiently, ensuring a positive civic experience for everyone becomes a significant challenge.

Public expectations for service are higher than ever due to the influence of private sector leaders like Amazon and Starbucks. For people accustomed to using apps, chat bots, and large call centers to achieve quick solutions to their problems, not having an easy way to report issues in their town or city contributes to a negative impression of local government — which can lead to tangible repercussions for your office.

Let's say a tree falls during a storm and blocks access to a street at the edge of town. Residents of that street will try to report the issue through whatever channels they can think of (e.g., the town website, phone calls to different departments), but if those various methods don't immediately succeed, some may be frustrated enough to turn to social media to voice their complaints. Once that information is published online, it can be amplified, even by those who aren't directly involved. A surge of negative social media attention may even attract local news outlets to report on the incident — ultimately generating more distrust and placing blame on local government, regardless of what circumstances were standing in the way of addressing the situation.

This is what happens with a lack of accountability and visibility: officials are faced with the possibility of residents escalating an unresolved issue through external channels before the problem can be constructively addressed. To rewrite this narrative of distrust and frustration, and connect government services with the people who need them, there must be a simple, effective way for residents to communicate with the right departments at the right time. In a world of fast-paced technological innovation, it's time for local governments to equip themselves with the right technology: a 311 CRM software that empowers residents and generates trust through positive civic experiences.
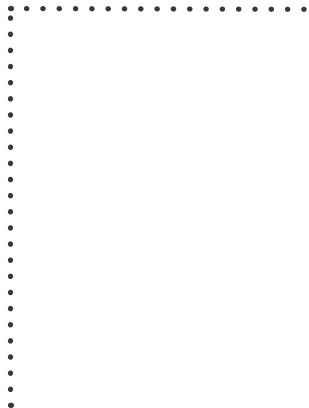
CHAPTER 2

Trust and Technology — Can Your Residents Access Services with Ease?

Technology plays a role that can't be overlooked when it comes to building resident trust. It all starts with a simple, one-stop application where residents can voice their concerns directly to the departments capable of helping them, diverting complaints away from social media. With a 311 CRM software for request management, tracking, and data analysis, officials can streamline their responses to communicate more productively with residents and act faster to solve issues.

The value of 311 CRMs and other digital tools is backed by data. In a recent survey of over 16,000 Americans, residents in communities with digital self-service technologies were shown to be more satisfied with their local government in comparison to people still dependent on analog interactions to gain access to services.

69%
of surveyed residents support tax dollars being spent on a mobile application that allows them to report and track government responses to quality-of-life issues.

78%
support their local government spending tax dollars on a software solution that makes getting information out to the public more efficient.

More than half
of those without trust in their local government said technologies that could increase communication and engagement to fix problems are important.

Similar findings around transparency increasing resident trust in local government were also present in a Harvard Business School study in 2020. This tells us that the use of modern technology to communicate and solve community issues is critical for improving residents' perceptions of government. Furthermore, residents support government investment in such technologies, even in cases when trust is already low.

However, technological capabilities alone are not enough. The data shows the correlation between technology and satisfaction with government is driven primarily by the **ease of access** to the resident services that technology affords. Mobile applications and online portals can empower people to engage with their local government for the sake of a better community, but low trust and slow technology adoption are correlated. Developing strategies to reach and engage residents and staff is an important step for government leaders, as is providing education on new technologies for all who need it.

CHAPTER 3

311 CRM Technology — What Features Help Local Governments Change the Narrative?

Even if you understand the value of a 311 CRM solution and are ready to employ this software to empower your community, which product do you choose? What aspects of a 311 CRM solution are going to make the greatest impact for your residents, and improve operations for staff?

We can gain some insight into the answers to these questions with a visit to Reading, Massachusetts. Reading is a lively community of over 25,000 just north of Boston. Its residents have always shown willingness to take action to preserve what they love about their Town, which boasts an excellent school system and well-maintained green spaces. But with a myriad of departments and services, local government officials found themselves struggling to maintain consistent communication with community members. The process of managing requests for services, such as pothole repair, was inefficient and time-consuming. When a backlog of requests led to a delay in addressing these issues, residents often resorted to social media to voice their concerns, leading to negative public sentiment and backlash.

"Facebook [had] become… a place where people could complain about whatever frustration they were experiencing," says the Reading, Director of Operations. "We wanted to pull those conversations away from social media and have them live in a place where there's still accountability; where people can see that accountability, where those service requests go exactly to the person who should be responsible for solving that problem, and that person also has the agency to resolve it."

Seeking a more structured and accountable platform to handle resident complaints, Reading turned to the CivicPlus® SeeClickFix 311 CRM solution. The system allowed residents to report issues directly to relevant departments from a single digital application, ensuring quick and efficient responses.

Late in the summer of 2022, the SeeClickFix 311 CRM solution was put to the test when Reading experienced a breakdown in service for garbage pickup. The Town's waste management provider had been acquired by another company, and when the labor model for pickup changed, the trucks fell so far behind schedule that some residents never had their trash picked up at all. The Director of Operations' office ran all complaints related to the incident through the 311 CRM system and leveraged the software to plan how to address specific neighborhoods.

"Importantly, residents could see the direct connection between the service requests and the subsequent pickup," the Director said. "That became part of the discussion in other social media spaces – that [our SeeClickFix 311 CRM solution] worked to solve the problem, and then more people used it."
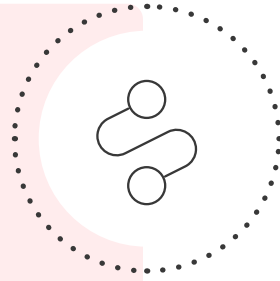
Let's take a closer look at what features of Reading's 311 CRM system helped turn their trash collection challenge into an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with the community.

# Six Valuable 311 CRM Solution Features in Action

1. Efficient Issue Routing

Route and assign service requests based on location and category

When it comes to handling incoming requests efficiently, **automated issue routing** is key. Traditionally, incident reports tend to bounce from department to department until they reach the right desk. But based on the category and location of the issue, a 311 CRM software can directly route the issue to the correct department, essentially eliminating the possibility of misrouted or lost reports. Another critical feature for boosting efficiency is **duplicate management**: by automatically filtering out duplicate requests, a CRM lessens the burden of administrative work so staff can focus on solving the problem itself.

In Reading, complaints of delayed trash pickup were sent directly to the relevant department with the location of the issue automatically tagged, allowing officials to quickly map out every area that needed attention. This allowed them to catch up on roadside collection in a timely manner, using their own dumpster containers to remove rubbish from residents' curbs as quickly as possible.
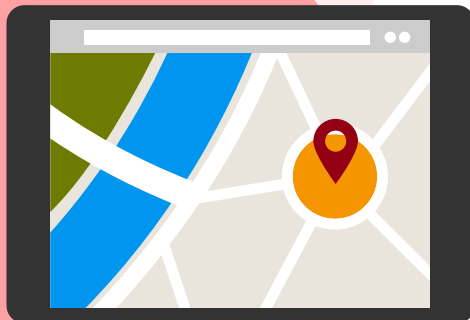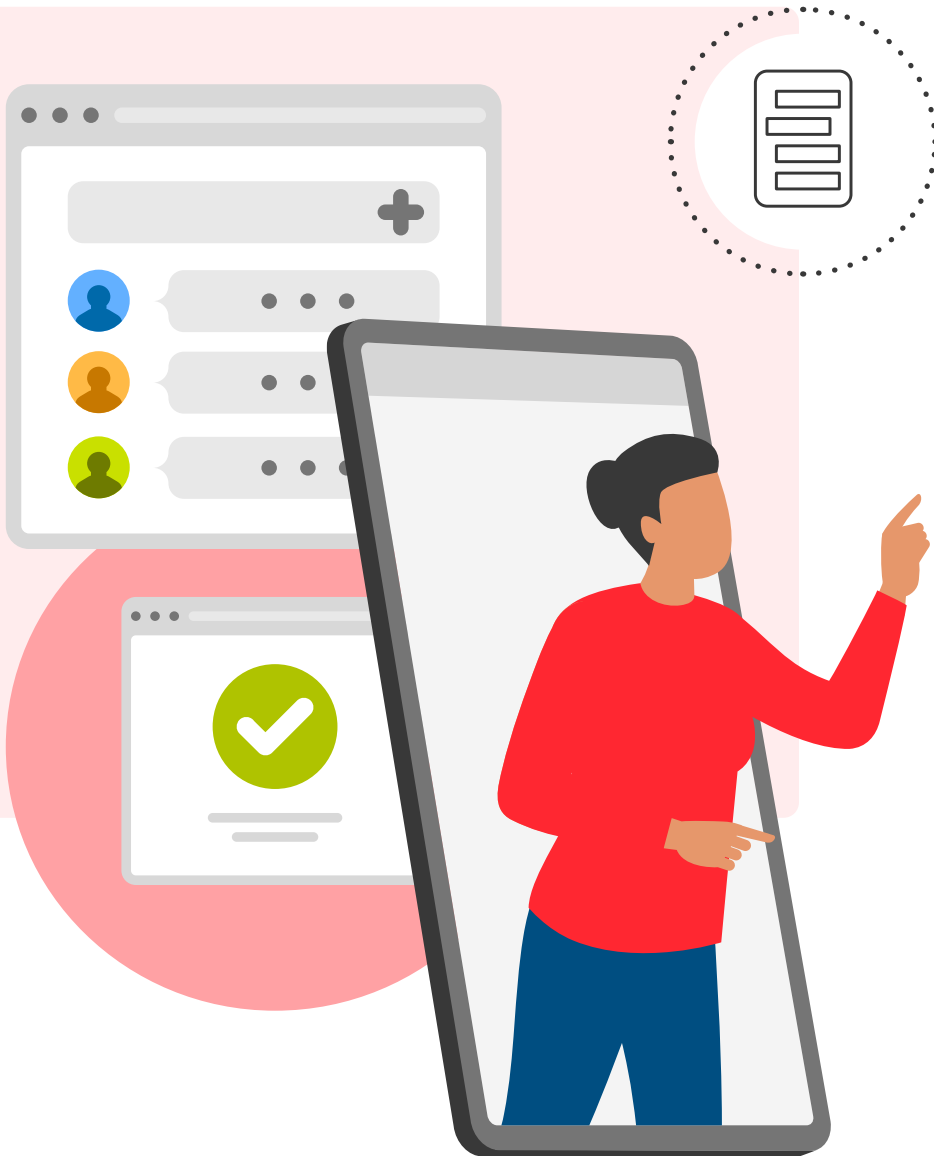
2. Mobile Accessibility

Make issue reporting effortless by meeting residents where they are

As Chapter Two of this eBook shows, the majority of U.S. residents support their local government investing in mobile applications to improve communication and response to issues. With a 311 CRM software that provides a way to submit requests on a smartphone, residents can easily log issues and give feedback wherever they are.

Thanks to CivicPlus' SeeClickFix mobile application, Reading residents were able to report delayed trash collection as soon as they became aware of the issue, even if they were on their way out the door. Mobile accessibility supported their busy lives, and the app's availability demonstrated that the Town of Reading understood their need for a solution that worked with the methods of communication they use everyday — making it as easy to connect with local government as it is to post on social media.
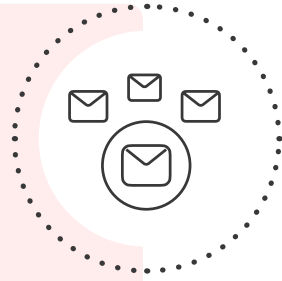
3. Omnichannel Inbox

Receive and respond to resident feedback from a single, centralized hub

While it's important for issues to be routed to relevant departments, it can be easy to lose track of resident feedback that goes to multiple places. A 311 CRM solution with an omnichannel inbox allows for every inquiry, service request, or general comment to be accessed from **one centralized location**. From that inbox, staff can respond to residents in real time, and residents can know that their voices are being heard.
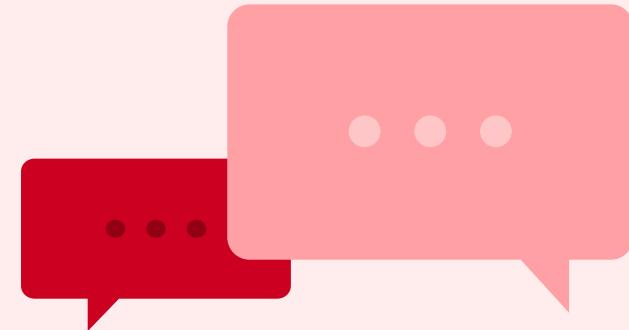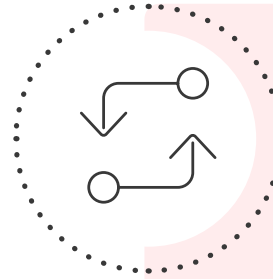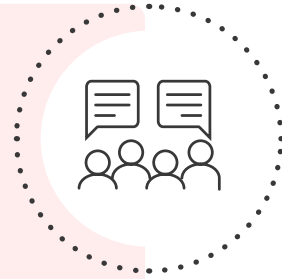
4. Two–Way Communications

Respond to residents with status updates or follow-up questions

The ease of submitting an issue is paramount, but a lack of follow-up can leave residents feeling like no one is listening. 311 CRM software with two-way communications helps residents feel like the valuable community members they are, while allowing officials to build relationships as they resolve everyday issues. Conversations are saved and tracked for enhanced accountability, supporting a swift resolution of resident concerns.

In Reading, being able to **communicate directly with residents** was essential for keeping them informed. It provided an opportunity for transparency that strengthened trust and gave the community a chance to see clearly how their government was adapting to solve their trash collection issue.

"After trying to just solve the problem for a while, we had to hold our vendor accountable and explain to our residents that, 'This is a vendor issue, and we will be reconsidering this contract,'" Reading's Director of Operations said. "Making that change would have incurred considerable expense, but we had to challenge it."

5. Internal Commenting

Discuss resolutions internally with team members without public visibility

Equally important as having an open line of communication to hear residents' concerns is having a way of collaborating internally to get those issues addressed. Internal commenting allows government teams to **discuss and strategize directly in the 311 CRM platform**, supporting efficient problem-solving.

Collaboration was key to being adaptable and coming together with a quick solution to get rubbish off the curb in Reading. Together, Town officials were able to come up with a timely solution to the problem, and the results of their effective handling of the situation were clear for residents to see.
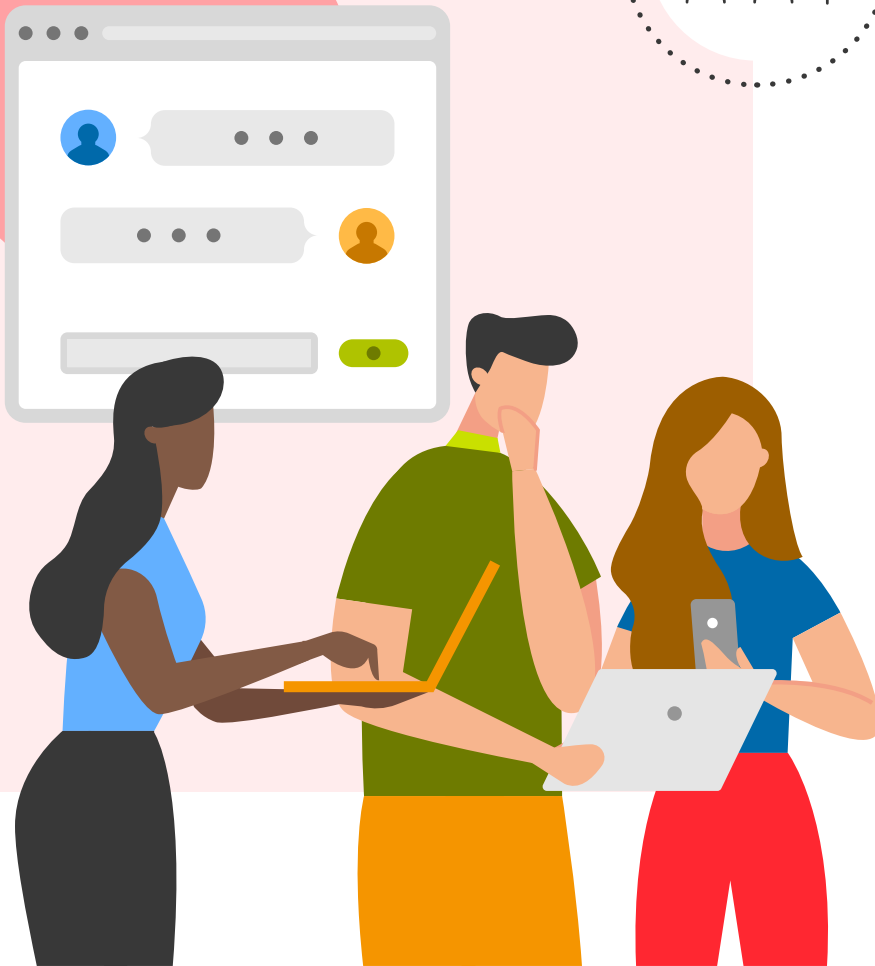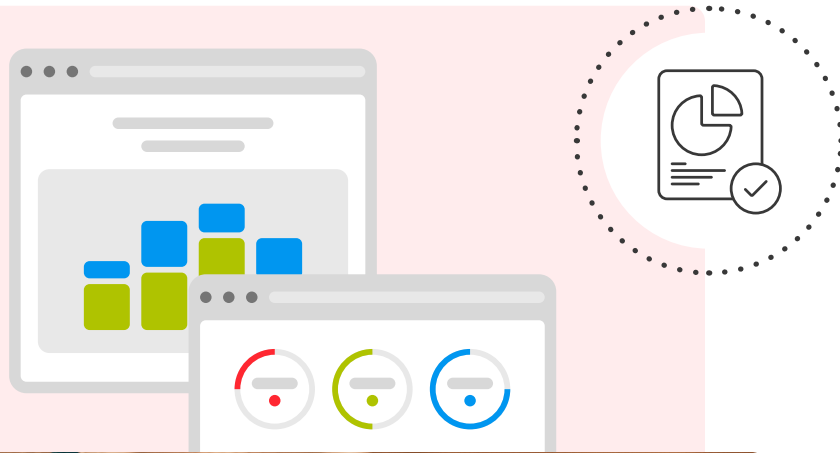
6. Report Card Monitoring

Assess reported issues and how you're performing against service-level agreements

When used to your advantage, data can become your government's greatest asset for serving residents. A 311 CRM with insightful **data analysis capabilities** allows enhanced assessment of reported issues, helping local governments make informed decisions about vendor contracts, spending, and more.

Reading's Director of Operations is adamant about using its 311 CRM solution for reporting and analytics to improve efficiencies. "You can see trends as we've had staff changes, and as we have newer employees come in and take over certain responsibilities," she says. "We have a new highway superintendent. He has taken so much ownership for it, he cleared backlogs of requests when he first took over the position, and he's been all over it since."

Having **quantitative data** strengthens the ability of officials like Wellman to identify recurring issues or justify successful programs, strengthens the ability of officials to identify recurring issues.

CHAPTER 4

Accentuating the Positive — How Can Local Government Successes Become Part of the Narrative?

A robust 311 CRM software allows local governments to steer conversations around community issues away from social media and reclaim the narrative of positive community impact, accountability, and responsiveness. A software such as the SeeClickFix 311 CRM solution gives residents' concerns a direct route to the right department. It allows for personalized, two-way communication that results in greater resident appreciation and trust, and better request management and collaboration that empowers government staff. Instead of allowing issues to escalate outside of appropriate channels, it lets residents engage with your office in a constructive, transparent way.

In Reading, using SeeClickFix led to quicker resolutions. The Town's response to issues was more efficient, reducing frustration and improving satisfaction among residents. Putting the infrastructure in place to streamline workflows and processes, 311 CRM software gives local government officials time to focus on excellence, and the opportunity to be recognized for what they care about most: making their community a better place to live.

Conclusion

This eBook offers a roadmap to empower your community and enhance the efficiency of your government operations. Whether you're battling negative public sentiment or looking to proactively improve resident services, we hope you found the insights and strategies within these pages valuable.

By downloading and reading "Taking Control of the Narrative," you've taken the first step toward a more connected, responsive, and trusted local government. Take the next step and start your self-guided online demo of the CivicPlus SeeClickFix 311 CRM solution now.

About the Author

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John Cordone is an experienced marketing professional driven by the goal to help promote exciting and effective technologies to improve mission-driven industries such as healthcare, legal services, and now, powering and empowering local governments.

About CivicPlus®

CivicPlus® is a trusted technology company dedicated to empowering government staff and powering exceptional digital experiences for residents. With a comprehensive suite of solutions that combine to form THE Modern Civic Experience Platform, we strive to create one-stop, frictionless, interactions that delight residents and help staff collaborate and work efficiently. As a result, government administrations that choose CivicPlus realize greater trust and satisfaction among their community members.

Backed by over 25 years of experience and leveraging the insights of more than 850 team members, our solutions are chosen by over 10,000 global entities and are used daily by over 340 million people in the U.S. and Canada alone. For more information, please visit civicplus.com.

About the SeeClickFix 311 CRM Solution

CivicPlus offers a comprehensive and robust 311, request management, and resident engagement solution that empowers local governments to demonstrate their positive community impact, accountability, responsiveness, resulting in greater resident appreciation and trust.

Our industry-leading request management system is easily integrable with the most widely used ESRI and asset management systems to help local governments receive, respond, and report on community issues and repairs.

Our solution also allows residents to submit feedback, questions, inquiries, and requests using the most common digital communication tools they already use daily—text, email, and phone. All messages are aggregated in a single system and associated with individual resident profiles for historical reference and administrative triage, assignment, resource management, and resolution.

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