

Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

Information from the 311 system is used for multiple purposes and communicated to multiple audiences including the public, city management, and elected officials.

The city uses 311 data to respond to problems reported by the public; to determine the city's timeliness in resolving reported problems; to communicate with the public about the city's response and resolution of reported problems; and as part of some employees' evaluation process.

Background

The 311 Call Center is a one-stop information resource and point of contact for the city. Residents and visitors can contact 311 to report a problem, request a city service, or obtain information.

Call Center employees answer requests for information and schedule some requests for service, clarify information submitted by the public, and electronically assign and forward reported problems to city departments for investigation and resolution.

Departments review, resolve, and sometimes reassign reported problems. In fiscal year 2014, the 311 Call Center opened over 100,000 service requests.

For more information, contact the City Auditor's Office at 816-513-3300 or auditor@kcmo.org.

To view the complete report, go to <http://kcmo.gov/cityauditor> and click on Search Audit Reports.

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

The Accuracy and Validity of 311 Data Could Be Improved

What We Found

Some work groups we reviewed were assigned goals that are not valid because of legal and contractual requirements. City code restricts the removal of abandoned vehicles for 48 hours and contract provisions allow the contractor two to five days to repair streetlights depending on the outage. 311 goals for these activities do not take into account established legal and contractual requirements as the goal in both instances is one day.

Variations and changes in definitions used as the basis for defining when a case is resolved or "closed" can lessen the relevance and meaningfulness of the data. The definitions of what "closed" means is left to the discretion of management in each department and range from the creation of a work order to when an inspection verifies that work was properly completed.

In addition to affecting the meaningfulness of the 311 data, inconsistent definitions of "closed" also affect the public. Residents and visitors who report problems to 311 can become frustrated, confused, and angry when informed their case is closed, but the problem they reported has not been fixed. This could generate complaints to 311, city departments, or elected officials. The public may also question the reliability of the information they receive from the city.

Actions by some 311 performance management staff also impacted the accuracy of reported 311 data. Although all mowing cases should have been excluded from reported statistics, only the "late" cases were excluded, inflating the reported on time results for May 2014, by 5 percentage points.

311 performance management staff did not exclude holidays from timeliness calculations resulting in some on-time cases being reported as late in September 2014. Three work groups would have met the city's performance goal for closing cases if the timeliness calculation had excluded the holiday.

311 staff does not always assign cases to the proper work group for resolution. When this happens, there is less time for the correct work group to resolve the case and data is less accurate. Reassigning cases takes time, and a misdirected case can be late by the time it is received by the correct work group, affecting that work group's performance. Of the cases closed in May 2014, 455 were reassigned at least once.

What We Recommend

Our recommendations are directed towards:

- Improving the accuracy and validity of 311 data.
- Ensuring 311 goals are reasonable and valid.
- Increasing the consistency and meaningfulness of what "closed" means.

Management agreed with all of the recommendations.