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A BETTER WAY TO CONNECT CITIZENS TO CITY SERVICES

Giving Citizens a Voice

Most people know to dial 911 if there is an emergency. Some know to dial 811 before you dig or dial 411 for directory assistance. Very few people know to dial 311 to request government services. In fact, not enough people know how to request a government service if they see a need and those that do often find the process too cumbersome to bother.

To address this issue, "Open311" was introduced. Open311 first began with an API for Washington D.C.'s 311 system, but it really became a community when the leadership of San Francisco and the support of organizations like OpenPlans, Code for America, and even the White House brought many cities, companies, and organizations together into a productive collaboration. Now it's a rich ecosystem of cities, technology platforms, and forward thinking initiatives around the world that are building toward a common infrastructure for people to better engage with their government and get connected to their community.

Simple and easy reporting of issues for local communities

Social Torch builds on this initiative using AWS technologies to efficiently deploy mobile apps and web services to help citizens request non-emergency services and help cities prioritize requests and better engage their citizens.

> *"A Harvard Business School study found that when citizens had more insight into problems being addressed, their attitudes towards government and government service delivery improved significantly."*

> *"A study published in the Public Administration Review showed that lower-income residents as well as young, college-aged individuals were more likely to use the Open311-enabled smartphone app than the traditional phone number or website."*

In the city of Schenectady, anyone with a smartphone can download a mobile app, snap a picture of an issue (pothole, graffiti, snow needing removal, parks needing maintenance, etc.) and press a button to make the city aware. On the city side, requests come in with photos and GPS coordinates to make prioritizing and dispatching crews a breeze. Citizens can also make requests by talking to their Alexa smart speaker or if needed more traditional means. Throughout the process citizens are kept up to date when crews are dispatched and the request is complete. This drives higher levels of engagement from citizens and in turn, makes city service providers more efficient and better able to plan with rich data on how many of what issues are where.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is Open311

Open311 is an open standard where cities can publish the services they offer and citizens can request those services using an implementation of that standard

See also: https://www.mysociety.org/2013/01/10/open311-introduced/ and http://www.open311.org/

What AWS technologies do you currently use?

We currently use Cognito, API Gateway, Lambda functions, DynamoDB, CloudFormation, Route53, Lex.

What AWS technologies will you utilize next?

Next up is to use AWS's image recognition and machine learning technologies to auto-categorize issues from images as well as helping cities plan the best routes and dispatching schedules

What other adjacent areas can use this technology?

Connecting people who need services to service providers isn't limited to municipalities. Universities and corporate campus also need ways for their students and employees to report issues. The same code base and technologies can meet this need. Further, cities and other organizations often need help administering their IT resources; this opens the door to other cloud services.

What are N11 codes?

N11 codes are used to provide three-digit dialing access to special services. In the U.S., the FCC administers N11 codes. The FCC recognizes 211, 311, 511, 711, 811 and 911 as nationally assigned, but has not disturbed other traditional uses.