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Review

FILE NO: 22-0001-R

SUBJECT: Review of 311 Complaint Process

STATUS: Final

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05/27/2022
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06/29/2022
Date of Approval

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Albuquerque (City) operates a 311 Communications Center where constituents can call in for information, report matters, or file complaints. All calls are documented in the CRM system. Calls requiring additional assistance are referred to the appropriate department and sometimes to the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The OIG initiated a review of the 311 processes on February 14, 2022. The purpose of this review is to gain an understanding of the process utilized by the 311 Communications Center to determine if duplication of efforts by the City departments and the OIG can be mitigated while ensuring that all complaints of fraud, waste, or abuse are appropriately referred to the OIG for assessment and investigation.

Background

The 311 Communications Center consistently receives sixty thousand (60,000) calls or more each month. The calls vary in nature, the caller may be needing some information about the City, the caller may wish to report matters to the City, or the caller may wish to file a complaint regarding the City, its employees, or practices. The 311 Communications Center does a preliminary assessment of the call and may address the call immediately, or refer the call to a department, the OIG, Counsel Services, or the Mayor's Office.

The OIG receives 311 referrals for matters of fraud, waste, and abuse. The OIG noticed significant variations in the number of 311 referrals each month and also noticed that many of the 311 referrals made to the OIG office did not rise to the level of fraud, waste, or abuse. The OIG sought out information to provide insight into the process as a way of mitigating duplication of efforts while ensuring that 311 calls containing allegations of fraud, waste, or abuse are appropriately referred to the OIG for assessment and investigation.

Approach

The OIG met with the Division Manager of the 311 Communications Center to gain an understanding of the CRM system, the basis for call referrals, and how calls are routed. The OIG also reviewed the data for 311 referrals submitted to our office and we obtained a report from the 311 Division Manager and compared the data. The OIG compared the number of 311 referrals to the OIG office by month and year to determine if there were any trends. The OIG calculated the percentage of 311 calls referred to OIG, in total and by month. The OIG looked at how many of the calls referred to the OIG resulted in subsequent referrals to the departments because they did not rise to the level of fraud, waste, or abuse. Our preliminary objectives were to assess the 311-referral process to (1) gain an understanding of the 311-referral process and (2) to identify where duplicative efforts between departments and the OIG are occurring and why.

Observations

The OIG staff met with the Director of the 311 Communications Center on April 6, 2022, to observe the CRM system for complaint initiation and referral and to gain an understanding of how the referrals are directed to the OIG and the departments. The OIG learned that the 311 Operators enter the complaint based on the information provided. The 311 operator uses his/her judgment in determining where to route the complaint, however, a supervisor will review referrals and may change the initial routing. This process results in the complaint being referred to different departments and may cause duplication of efforts. The 311 Operators visit the OIG website for assistance in determining the proper routing or to access the definitions of fraud, waste, or abuse.

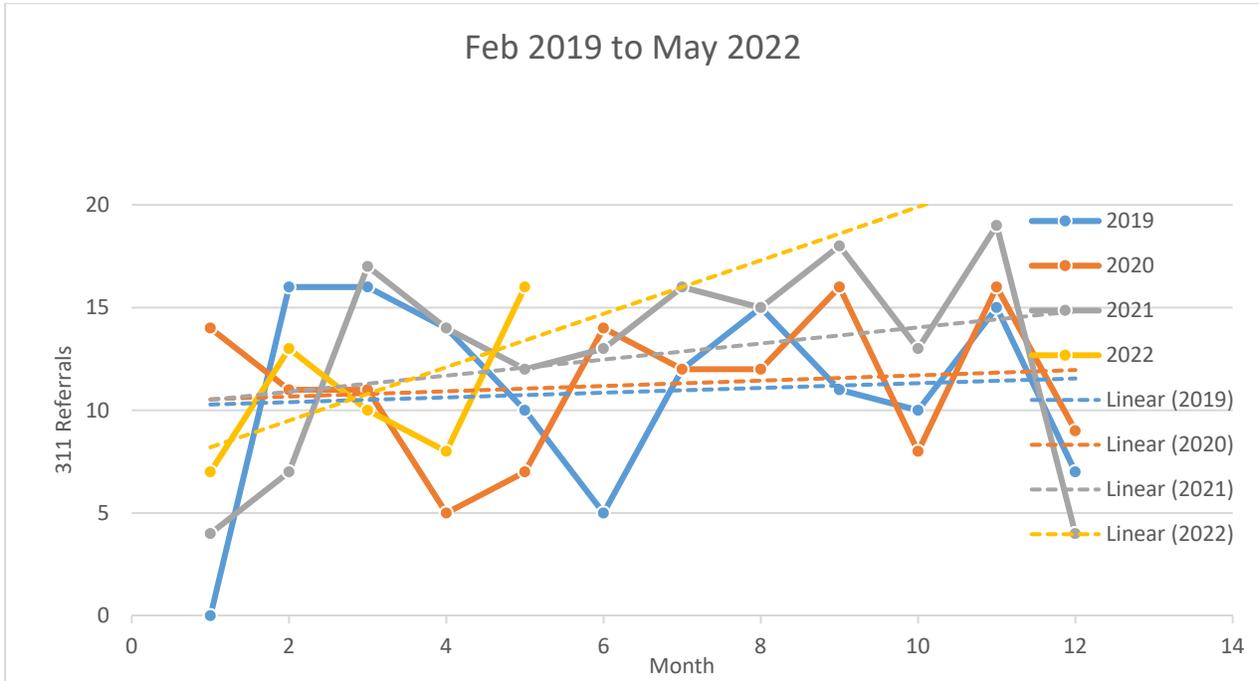
When a complaint is submitted to the OIG, the complaint is logged and a case is initiated. The complaint is assessed for elements of fraud, waste, or abuse.

If there are any elements of fraud, waste, or abuse, the OIG will initiate an investigation. If there is no element of fraud, waste, or abuse, the OIG refers the complaint to the department to look into and to provide any resolution back to the OIG for case closure.

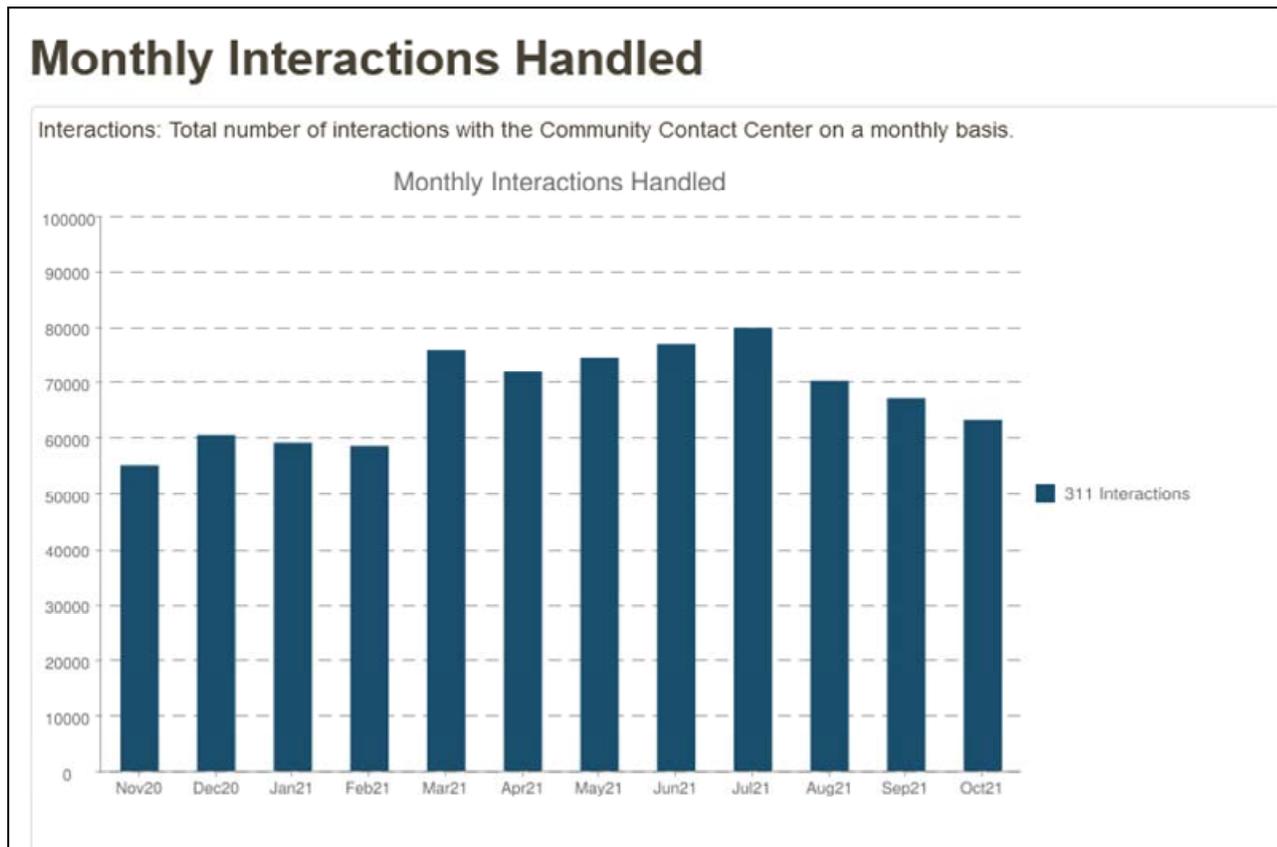
The OIG data shows that four hundred seventy-two (472) referrals were made to our office through the 311-referral system during the period February 1, 2019, and February 18, 2022. The data received from the 311 Communication Center showed that sixty-one (61) referrals were processed during that same time frame. The disparity in figures led to further inquiry and it was later determined that Supervisors in the 311 Communication Center review the Operator's calls and during their review, they may re-assign the call. If a call is originally routed to the OIG and then subsequently re-routed, there is no notice to the OIG by the 311 Communications Center and this may result in a duplication of efforts.

While reviewing some of the complaints, the OIG noted that departments were not adequately documenting a conclusion for the complaint. The lack of documentation is resulting in the OIG performing a follow-up with the department.

The OIG compiled a list of all 311 referrals made to our office between February 2019 and May 2022. The OIG data revealed the number of referrals ranged between four (4) and nineteen (19), with the average number of referrals being sixteen (16) per month. The OIG created a graph to reflect the number of calls per month for each year and compared each year and found that there is a slight trend upward, in 2019 and 2020, for the number of cases each month for each year presented. In 2021 and 2022, the upward trend is more pronounced.



Data obtained from the 311 Communications Center revealed that between November 2020 and October 2021, the 311 Communication Center received between fifty-five thousand (55,000) calls and eighty thousand (80,000) calls per month.



For the period November 2020 to October 2021, the OIG calculated the percentage of calls referred to the OIG per month to the total monthly calls received at the 311 Communications center. The following table shows that less than .03% of calls result in referrals to the OIG.

Month	311 calls referred to OIG	311 calls received	Percentage
Nov-20	16	55,000	0.029%
Dec-20	9	60,000	0.015%
Jan-21	4	59,000	0.007%
Feb-21	7	58,000	0.012%
Mar-21	17	75,000	0.023%
Apr-21	14	71,000	0.020%
May-21	12	73,000	0.016%
Jun-21	13	77,000	0.017%
Jul-21	16	80,000	0.020%
Aug-21	15	70,000	0.021%
Sep-21	18	68,000	0.026%
Oct-21	13	63,000	0.021%

Upon assessment of the one hundred fifty-four (154) calls referred to the OIG by the 311 Communication Center, one hundred forty-six (146) were referred out to the departments. Based on this sample, 95% of the 311 referrals do not rise to the level of fraud, waste, or abuse. The OIG derived the number of referrals from the OIG to the department by reviewing data in our Case Management Tracking System (CMTS) system for cases logged. Prior to August 2021, the OIG did not log all referrals in the CMTS system. If there was no case logged between November 2020 and August 2021, the complaint was referred to the department. 311 referrals between August 2021 and October 2021, totaled forty-six (46) with nineteen (19) of those being referred to the department by the OIG. This resulted in 41% of 311 referrals that did not rise to the level of fraud, waste, or abuse.

CONCLUSION

Unclear instruction, insufficiently defined terminology by the OIG, and high turnover in the 311 Communications Center created the inconsistency in how the 311-referral system is operating. The 311-referral process appears to be adequately designed, however, opportunities exist for a process with limited or no duplication of efforts while ensuring that calls are addressed by the appropriate City department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion, the OIG is providing the following recommendations for consideration about opportunities for improvement to the 311-referral process:

- The OIG should consider updating the Inspector General website to refine the definitions of fraud, waste, and abuse to ensure that the information accessed by the 311 operators is clear and is consistently conveyed.
- The OIG should consider creating instructions for the 311 Communication Center Operators guiding what calls to refer to the OIG.
- The OIG should consider providing a quick desk reference of example calls to be routed to the OIG and also to the departments.
- The OIG should consider allowing 24 hours for the departments to address any complaint that was sent to both the OIG and the department. After 24 hours, the OIG will perform a follow-up with the department to any calls/complaints where there is no indication that the department addressed the matter.
- The OIG should consider providing quarterly training to new 311 Communication Center Operators to ensure consistency of referrals.
- 311 Operators should consider familiarizing themselves with the OIG website and definitions of fraud, waste, and abuse.
- The 311 Communication Center should consider providing its Operators with OIG guidance.
- The 311 Communication Center should consider requiring its new Operators to attend a training with the OIG as close to hiring as possible to ensure consistency.
- Each City Department should consider offering training on how to adequately research and document each complaint so the OIG can determine that the complaint was addressed.
- The OIG should consider quarterly monitoring to determine if implemented recommendations are resulting in an improvement for the City.

These suggested recommendations, if implemented, will aid in mitigating the duplication of effort while ensuring that calls are addressed by the appropriate City department.