

**TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION DEPARTMENT  
CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER  
AUDIT 21-03  
FEBRUARY 2, 2021**



# CITY OF TAMPA

Jane Castor, Mayor

Internal Audit Department

Christine Glover, Internal Audit Director

February 2, 2021

Honorable Jane Castor  
Mayor, City of Tampa  
1 City Hall Plaza  
Tampa, Florida

RE: Customer Service Center, Audit 21-03

Dear Mayor Castor:

Attached is the Internal Audit Department's report on Customer Service Center.

We thank the management and staff of Technology & Innovation Department for their cooperation and assistance during this audit.

Sincerely,

/s/ Christine Glover

Christine Glover  
Internal Audit Director

cc: John Bennett, Chief of Staff  
Dennis Rogero, Chief Financial Officer  
Russell Hauptert, Director of Technology & Innovation  
Diane Jamai, Enterprise Change Manager  
Brian Morrison, Assistant City Attorney II

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/s/ Stephen Mhere

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Auditor

/s/ Christine Glover

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Audit Director

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**BACKGROUND**

The City of Tampa (COT) implemented the Customer Service Center (CSC) system in 2003 to facilitate efficient and centralized communications between citizens and its various departments. COT department staff, including members of the City Council and their staff, communicate with citizens through this web-based system. In essence, through this system citizens are able to independently submit and track requests for services or research payment options available to them for services. The system is simple to use and has a keyword search function that allows citizens to quickly find services they may be looking for without a comprehensive knowledge of COT's organization. In addition, citizens who may be looking for services that COT does not provide, such as those provided by county, state, or federal governments, can be redirected to the respective agencies from the CSC system.

Although the City has a telephone number through which citizens can access customer service, the volume of requests made via the telephone is negligible. The bulk comes through the CSC system. Departments with the highest volume of requests in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 were Public Works and Utility Services, Neighborhood Empowerment, Office of the Mayor, Police Department, Economic Opportunity, Chief of Staff, City Council, and Fire Rescue.

Technology and Innovation (T&I) plays a service provider role for departments that use the CSC system, providing system administrative and troubleshooting services. The various departments utilize these services through their use of the system, but have independent policies and practices in COT's decentralized customer service function. According to T&I, a position of Customer Experience Director has been created to promote and review common standards across the City. The FY 2021 budget shows funds have been appropriated for that purpose and for upgrading the CSC system.

**STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES**

This audit was conducted in accordance with the Internal Audit Department's FY 2021 Audit Agenda. The objectives were to determine if the CSC system:

1. Has sufficient internal controls to enable effective and efficient communication between COT and its citizens.
2. Enables effective coordination of actions when multiple departments/divisions are involved in a citizen request.
3. Is an effective tool for the assessment of COT's service response times.

**STATEMENT OF SCOPE**

The audit covered CSC system activities for FY 2019 and 2020, as well as a limited scope assessment of records retention in prior years. Although we solicited information from COT customer service coordinators, the scope of this audit did not include broad customer service in every department, except where use of the CSC system was involved.

## **STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY**

To complete this audit, our procedures involved evaluating, analyzing, and reviewing:

- Internal controls, including CSC system notification e-mails, logs, as well as policies and procedures used to guide the handling of citizen requests.
- CSC system practices with respect to the State of Florida's records retention law.
- Information security measures in place to protect citizens' personally identifiable information if provided in the system.
- CSC system coordinators' perspectives on their departments' handling of citizens' requests.
- Reports of responsiveness statistics and backlog available in the CSC system.

Analysis of responsiveness to citizen requests was based on time data associated with requests entered in the system. We deemed the data to be reliable based on our assessment.

## **STATEMENT OF AUDITING STANDARDS**

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 on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## **AUDIT CONCLUSIONS**

We determined that the CSC system:

1. Has sufficient internal controls to enable effective and efficient communication between COT and its citizens. However, some of the controls can be improved, and departments can do more to improve responsiveness to citizen requests.
2. Enables effective coordination of actions when multiple departments/divisions are involved in a citizen request.
3. Is an effective tool for the assessment of COT's service response times.

## **RESPONSIVENESS TO CITIZEN REQUESTS**

**STATEMENT OF CONDITION:** COT receives a large volume of customer service requests from citizens via the CSC system. Citizens may submit requests, questions, or comments about a service they receive from the City or about any issue that is important to them. COT employees in the various departments respond to requests in the system either by providing a resolution to the request or by forwarding the request to another department that may be in a position to provide a response.

Our review of CSC system reports showed that 38,672 citizen requests were submitted in FY 2020. A high percentage of them, about 97%, were resolved and closed less than two weeks after being submitted. However, a further 1,029 (about 3%) of the requests remained unresolved. While the percentage of resolved requests is quite high, there still are a number of unresolved requests. At the time of our analysis, 931 requests (about 2.4%) of the requests had remained an average of 215 days without being resolved. A further 98 requests (less than 1%) remained in the system an average of 186 days without even being opened.

<b>Status of Request</b>	<b>Number of Requests</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>	<b>Average Duration in Status</b>
Resolved	37,464	96.9%	13 days <sup>1</sup>
Open/Unresolved	931	2.4%	215 days
Received/Unopened	98	0.3%	186 days
Other <sup>2</sup>	179	0.5%	9 days

Source: Report generated by auditor from the CSC system

The CSC has internal controls to help respond to citizen requests expeditiously. It sends notification e-mails to relevant system users in appropriate departments when requests that have been submitted remain unopened after about five days (depending on the service). An escalation is triggered (a second e-mail notification sent) when requests still remain unopened after a further five days beyond the first notification.

The system also generates what is called a CSC Backlog report which provides departments with information relating to the status of requests submitted to them. This report is readily available in the system and departments can download and review it at any time.

**CRITERIA:** One of the key principles of good customer service is quick resolution of customer problems, part of which is to respond to customer service requests in a timely manner.

**CAUSE:** Some departments are not fully utilizing the tools and methods in the system designed to help them successfully manage citizen requests. Also, the system's escalation protocol does not persist beyond the second e-mail notification. If a department does not open the request at the second notification, as time goes by, it is unlikely that it will do so without further notifications. Also, some departments do not review the CSC Backlog report as often as they could. CSC coordinators' responses to a survey on how often their departments review the backlog report ranged from weekly, monthly, every few months, and bi-annually, to "as and

<sup>1</sup> This is the average number of days it took to close or resolve requests after they were submitted.

<sup>2</sup> "Other" refers to requests that may have been withdrawn, waitlisted, suspended, or under research.

when needed.” One coordinator thought review was only done when a reminder to do so came from T&I.

EFFECT OF CONDITION: As long as citizen requests remain unopened in the system for extended periods of time, COT does not know the kind or severity of problems those citizens are experiencing and misses the opportunity to resolve them in a timely manner. That potentially results in citizen dissatisfaction and a possible negative perception of the City’s reputation.

RECOMMENDATION: Based on conversation with the Mayor’s Chief of Staff, the importance of timely response and accountability for that timeliness will be emphasized in the next Mayor’s senior staff meeting. Further the Chief of Staff would like to set up periodic reporting to his level (quarterly or semi-annually) of outstanding responses that meet specified criteria.

Our recommendations are predicated on departments’ optimal use of CSC system tools available to them for effective management of requests. We recommend that, for departments to further improve their responsiveness to citizen requests, T&I consider helping them by improving CSC internal controls by:

- (a). Reprogramming the system escalation protocol so that as long as citizen requests remain unopened, e-mail notifications are sent progressively higher up the management hierarchy.
- (b). Implementing a system protocol whereby departments are reminded through e-mail or other notifications to review the CSC Backlog Report. This will help departments not only improve their use of the backlog reporting tool but also do so consistently.
- (c). Consider retraining department personnel on the tools available to track compliance.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: We agree to research additional options to the current controls that are in place to enhance the user experience including additional refresher training.

TARGET IMPLEMENTATION DATE: In Process