CASE STUDY:
Honolulu 311

The City of Honolulu's app, Honolulu 311, allows citizens to use personal smartphones to report abandoned vehicles, broken streetlights, illegal dumping and other issues. GovLoop Research Analyst Pat Fiorenza had the opportunity to sit down with Forest Frizzell, Deputy Director at the City and County of Honolulu to learn more about the history behind the app. Forest stated, "When our Mayor took office... he said he wanted to work towards creating a **LEAN, CLEAN, AND SMART CITY THAT IS LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE."**

One of the challenges of implementing mobile is having support from management.

With the call to be a 'lean, clean and smart city' from the highest-ranking public official in the city, Forest was able to run with the project. Forest continued, "We took Mayor Carlisle's leadership as a challenge to create innovative ways for our citizens to get connected to government easier and hopefully become more involved in the process of making Honolulu the best city it can be."

With support behind the initiative, Forest began considering what kind of services the mobile app should provide and the key needs of a citizen on a mobile platform. One observation from Forest was that government does not have all the answers, and should be using existing technology to help leverage change within a city.

"GOVERNMENT CAN'T SOLVE EVERY PROBLEM, WE NEED HELP FROM THE COMMUNITY AND THROUGH APPS LIKE Rock Solid WE CAN FACILITATE THAT HAPPENING," stated Forest.

This kind of philosophy has not only driven innovation in the City of Honolulu, but also across all levels of government. By opening up more channels of engagement and tapping into and extracting knowledge from citizens, government can work to address some of its more critical and complex challenges.

When asked what the driving factors were behind the mobile app, Forest stated that the motivation was not just to improve transparency; a key motivation for development was a desire to move towards improved citizen engagement.

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Forest states, **"TRANSPARENCY IS A LARGE FACTOR, BUT CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL. IF WE MAKE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE TO TAKE BIGGER LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THEIR COMMUNITY THEN WE ALL WIN."**

The Honolulu 311 App has some really interesting features, which in time have the potential to transform citizen engagement for the community. Forest stated, "The combination of using GPS data, a picture, and overlaying that on a GIS map makes it a lot easier for staff to get the necessary information needed on what is being reported. We'll be able to cut out redundant steps that intensive manual paperwork creates. The app itself is fairly intuitive. We like the ability for a user to enter additional text, it helps our staff better assign the report to the responding agency."

A key part of a mobile strategy is making sure that the mobile strategy ties into an entire organizations communication program. Forest mentioned that like many other local governments, the City of Honolulu is very cash strapped. Because of the tight fiscal environment, Honolulu can no longer afford a traditional 311 call center, which most cities provided.

Forest acknowledges the benefits of using a mobile 311 system, **"USING TECHNOLOGY LIKE MOBILE APPS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADDS A LAYER OF "REAL TIME" COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT. WE'VE BEEN WORKING REALLY HARD THE PAST YEAR AND HALF TO FACILITATE CHANGE AND GIVE OUR CITIZENS A VOICE IN WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THEIR COMMUNITY. WE WANT PEOPLE TO BE MORE ENGAGED AND FEEL LIKE THEIR VOICE AND CONCERNS MATTER, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY EMPOWER THEM TO BE PART OF THE PROCESS."**

Forest's comments show the real impact of mobile technology on government, the ability for the citizen to facilitate change and feel empowered by their actions. As citizens see the positive impacts of their engagement, they will be more likely to become engaged, trust government and play a larger role within their community. Forest continues, "Government can't be everything to everybody, we also can't be on every block, and we need help from our citizens to be apart the process."

The City of Honolulu has already seen positive impacts from the app, especially in terms of engagement and the way people view thet government. **"WE'VE SEEN A BIG CHANGE IN THE WAY PEOPLE VIEW THE CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU THE PAST YEAR,"** said Forest. Further, the City of Honolulu has received a lot of positive press and awards around the launch of Honolulu 311. Forest noted that the City received a Sunlight Award for government transparency and Honolulu was also named the number digital city by the Center of Digital Governance. Forest also identified that he has seen participation and citizen interest increase in events such as CityCamp Honolulu and Hackathons.

The City of Honolulu's commitment to advancing digitally can also be seen as they applied for and were accepted as a Code for America City in 2012. Code for America is an organization that seeks to help American cities use web technology to do a better job of providing services to citizens. Cities are selected through a competitive application process. Once selected, Code for America identifies suitable projects that can leverage web-based solutions and places a Code for America Fellow to work closely with the City Manager.

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Honolulu is not the first city to implement a mobile app. Across the country cities have been working to develop mobile applications to encourage transparency and citizen engagement, "We had been watching other large Cities like San Francisco and New York launch great 311 sites and wanted to do something similar," said Forest. Honolulu and New York are very different, so when asked how they arrived at Rock Solid for their app, Forest stated, "We have a very small operating budget compared to those cities so we had to be smart and creative in our approach. Rock Solid was a cost effective way to start the process, it was fairly quick to set up and launch." One of the challenges with mobile technology for government is that by developing a mobile app, government may inadvertently perpetuating the challenge of closing the digital divide. Mobile apps are almost always associated with smart phone technology, but basic cell phones also have possibility for improved mobile technology for citizen engagement. "In Hawaii we have a large adoption of cell phones, especially smart phones. I think the national average is 60%, we're at 70% and growing everyday. The low hanging fruit is people who are connected via social media or who love apps. The end goal however is to engage people who might not necessarily be into social media but do want to take a bigger role in making their community the best that it can be," stated Forest.

The app was not developed without any challenges. Forest commented, "The biggest challenge was the responding agencies being worried that there would be a flood of reports coming in via smart phones.
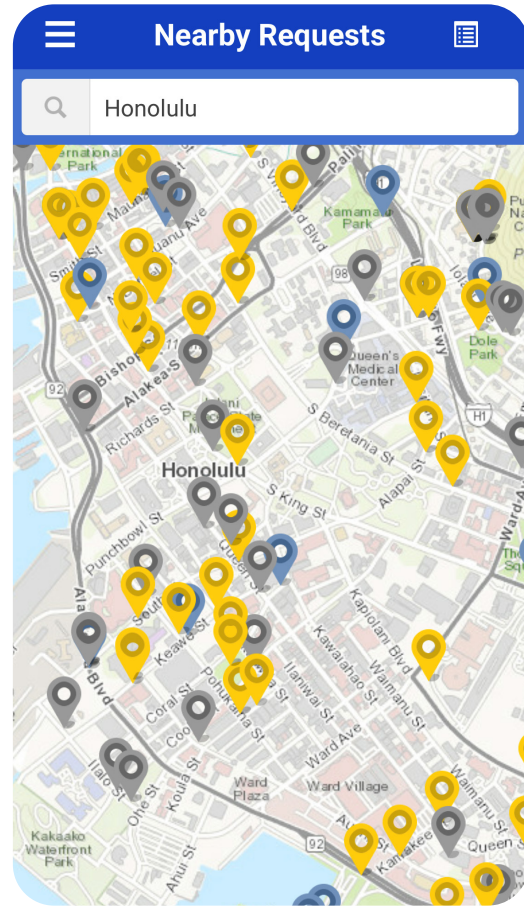
Once we talked through the process, and they saw that the information their getting is actually much better then what could come from a traditional phone call they were more accepting of the idea."

Forest closed out the interview providing some insights to those seeking to implement a mobile app into their community, "The first thing is you have to build trust from with in. You can't launch an initiative like this without first working with the agencies that will be responding to the complaints. The next is to do lots of outreach to community groups, media, and techies, so when you do launch, people are paying attention."

ABOUT ☑ ROCK SOLID

Rock Solid's OneView citizen engagement platform allows you and your constituents to work as one. Through our proprietary Microsoft Dynamics based CRM and Mobile Application PaaS, Agencies bring their citizens to one place for all service and information requests while seamlessly bringing the city's departments together to understand how why constituents are making requests through robust reporting and analytics dashboards.

Contact us for more information on how to improve citizen engagement in your community through innovative technology.

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