

2006 NASCIO Recognition Awards
Government to Citizen—Arizona 2-1-1 Submission

Executive Summary

In response to Governor Janet Napolitano's call to improve access to vital services, the State of Arizona, working with local government, non-profit and private organizations, has developed Arizona 2-1-1 Online (www.az211.gov) and a 2-1-1 Call Center for use during significant community emergencies.

Arizona 2-1-1 Online is the State of Arizona's comprehensive, statewide source for health, human service and emergency response resources. This innovative system is the first of its kind to effectively link information about local emergencies with public and private health and human services online. Arizona 2-1-1 was developed in partnership with several State agencies, local governments and many community partners including the United Way, Salvation Army, and Red Cross.

Arizona's Chief Information Officer, Chris Cummiskey, has taken a key leadership role in the development of Arizona 2-1-1. He serves as the chair of the Governor's Council on 2-1-1 and the 2-1-1 Community Advisory Committee. His office has provided extensive strategic planning and communication leadership for this important initiative coordinating personnel from dozens of different agencies and programs and working in partnership with a myriad of organizations throughout Arizona in the health/human service and emergency response communities.

The 2-1-1 database has comprehensive listings from State, local, federal and tribal governments, non-profit, faith-based and where appropriate, for-profit providers. The 2-1-1 database includes detailed eligibility requirements, contact information, links to web sites and maps for over 18,000 services in Arizona from over 3,000 providers, including childcare, health care, senior services, counseling, and thousands of other services.

The Emergency Bulletin System of Arizona 2-1-1 Online provides a one-stop shop for information about public emergencies from federal, State, local, tribal and nonprofit emergency response organizations coordinated by the Arizona Division of Emergency Management. In addition, the site provides preparedness information to help individuals, communities, schools and businesses prepare for any emergency. When the State Emergency Operation Center is activated for a major emergency, Newsflashes are posted on 2-1-1 and the public can also dial 2-1-1 to connect with a live operator to access the information in the Arizona 2-1-1 Emergency Bulletin System.

In addition, the Emergency Bulletins are simple to view and contain consolidated information from many different official sources regarding a particular event in a format that is easy for the public to understand. For example, one bulletin can contain official information from an incident command team regarding event status, evacuation routes from the transportation department, shelter information from the Red Cross, volunteer information from local volunteer management organizations, etc.

Arizona 2-1-1 Online is easy to use. It provides ready access to a variety of powerful Find Help search tools. For those who don't know where to turn or how to use the internet, there is also a point and click section for each fundamental public need called Basic Services.

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A. Concise description of the business problem and solution, including length of time in operation.

Arizona's public and nonprofit health and human service infrastructure provides vital services to millions of Arizonans. While the continuum of service provided by State agencies and nonprofit organizations leads to a better standard of living for Arizonans, the resulting network of providers and programs can be incredibly confusing to the public. Given these challenges, Governor Napolitano identified the need to develop a tool that would allow the State's residents to easily navigate between all of their service choices regardless of what agency provides the service.

In recent years, Arizona has also faced critical challenges in keeping the public informed during large-scale emergencies such as wildland fires, monsoons and flash floods. With the additional responsibility of preparing the public for local or state emergencies, the State of Arizona recognized the need for a system that could be used to disseminate emergency preparedness and response information to the public.

In 2003, Governor Janet Napolitano called for the development of a multi-disciplinary 2-1-1 system as part of the State's Homeland Security Strategy. She asked the State Chief Information Officer to work with stakeholders to look beyond the traditional model for 2-1-1 to a broader vision that would integrate emergency preparedness and disaster response into a one-stop shop with day to day health and human service information. State CIO Chris Cummiskey leads the Governor's Council on 2-1-1 and the 2-1-1 Community Advisory Committee. His office has provided extensive coordination, strategic planning, and communication leadership throughout the development of this important initiative.

Hundreds of State partners were consulted in the development of Arizona 2-1-1 Online including Government Information Technology Agency (Office of the State CIO), Department of Economic Security, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, Arizona Division of Emergency Management and Arizona Department of Health Services. Each of these agencies serves as a member of the Governor's Council on 2-1-1. Community and non-profit sector partners were also consulted including the United Way, Salvation Army, Red Cross and Arizona's network of volunteer centers. These organizations and more serve on the 2-1-1 Community Advisory Committee.

The consensus from these stakeholders was that the integration of emergency bulletins and social service programs in Arizona 2-1-1 would provide citizens with a quick and easy way to access valuable information day to day and during times of hardship. After a year of research of other 2-1-1 systems and consultation with constituencies throughout Arizona, the Governor's Strategic Plan for 2-1-1 was issued (April 23, 2004).

Governor Napolitano launched Arizona 2-1-1 Online on June 29, 2005 after just over a year planning including a technical development timeline of eight months. The initial development cost of Arizona 2-1-1 Online was \$492,000.

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Arizona 2-1-1 Online (www.az211.gov) offers a high level of functionality and usability to access health, human service and emergency response resources statewide. Arizona 2-1-1 Online meets State web standards, so the site's navigation is familiar to State website users.

The 2-1-1 database includes comprehensive listings from State, local, federal and tribal governments, non-profit and faith-based providers. Also included are detailed eligibility requirements, contact information, links to web sites and maps for over 18,000 services in Arizona from over 3,000 providers (i.e. childcare, health care, senior services, counseling, etc.).

The Homepage highlights "Find Help" and the "Emergency Bulletin System." During times of intensive preparation or critical events, the Homepage also includes an "Emergency Newsflash." The "Feature Section" draws attention to key events or changes in health and human services that are of immediate importance to the public (i.e., availability of flu vaccines, enrollment deadline for Medicare Part D, etc.). The Homepage also includes the left menu navigation bar, which is accessible from all sections of the web site and includes Spanish Resources, Volunteer Opportunities, Providers Tools, Basic Services, Find Help, Emergency Bulletins, etc.

The "Basic Services" section provides point and click access to key organizations for those who are unfamiliar with the internet or who do not know where to start looking for help. Also included in this section are canned 2-1-1 searches to find additional providers. They often link to Arizona Self Help, an assessment tool that allows the public to determine eligibility to a dozen benefit programs.

The "Find Help" section has multiple search options. The keyword search feature reviews essential database fields and provides the option to sort results by distance from a zip code to enable the statewide database to perform like a local directory. The search result display allows the user to see details regarding the agency, program or service. Each entry contains detailed information such as operating hours, eligibility criteria, and links to maps and web sites with additional information (applications, screening tools, etc.). The agency listings contain clickable links to all programs and services offered by the agency listed in 2-1-1. "Find Help" also allows users to narrow their search using an "Age Group" or "Target Population" designation. "Directory of Services" and "Advanced Search" features are available for advanced users such as caseworkers, librarians and other service providers. The anonymity of an online system benefits individuals seeking information on sensitive topics, such as domestic abuse, suicide prevention or whether the person needs to be a US Citizen to obtain services.

The "Emergency Bulletin System" (EBS) is highlighted on the 2-1-1 Homepage with a link to the main EBS webpage for more details and for bulletin searching. The EBS provides a one-stop shop for information (i.e. protective measures, evacuation routes, recovery efforts) about an emergency event from federal, State, local, tribal and nonprofit emergency response organizations. In addition, the site provides preparedness information to help individuals, communities, schools and businesses prepare for any emergency. When the State Emergency Operation Center is activated, the public can dial 2-1-1 to connect with a live operator to access the information in the "Emergency Bulletin System."

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B. Significance to the improvement of the operation of government.

Arizona 2-1-1 Online is the first system of its kind to effectively link information about local emergencies with online health and human services. Arizona took a robust set of information and referral search tools (Tapestry by VisionLink) and a web content management tool (developed for Comcare 2-1-1 by Terida) and fused them together into a newly designed, easy to use interface to enable the public and caseworkers to access vital services effortlessly.

Arizona 2-1-1 Online is the State's official outlet for timely bulletins during natural or man-made emergencies, such as wildland fires, floods and other disasters. During an emergency, affected citizens are in need of immediate safety information provided by the 2-1-1 Emergency Bulletin System. These bulletins are updated frequently and can be linked to GIS maps showing the areas affected by a disaster. All government entities (state, local, county or tribal) participating in the emergency response are able to send information to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) where it can be packaged into a comprehensive bulletin for public dissemination. Posting of bulletins can be accomplished from anywhere in the State, including an incident command center, and appear on the web almost instantly.

In an emergency, the public not only needs information about the disaster, but also needs to know about shelters, evacuation routes, vaccinations, food boxes, temporary housing, volunteering and other health and human services to assist them to survive and recover from the disaster. The Arizona 2-1-1 database is an innovative combination of nonprofit and government health and human services. By providing this information through Arizona 2-1-1 Online, Arizona has created a one-stop system for persons in any type of crisis to connect with services available.

Three digit dialing to connect with a live operator to get information about state declared emergencies is available. In the event of a wildland fire or other major public emergency, the State will make the 2-1-1 emergency call centers available in order to disseminate information to the public about the disaster. 24-7-365 call centers are also being developed by the State to complement the online health and human service database. This system will feature live operators using the established 2-1-1 database to answer inquiries over the phone. By building the web-enabled database first, the State is already providing vital information to the public and has created the database for the 2-1-1 call centers.

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C. Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state.

The 18,000 service entries included in Arizona 2-1-1 Online provide the public with easy access to a wealth of health and human service information. By combining both public and private services into the 2-1-1 database, the State has created a one-stop website for available services. The State made Arizona 2-1-1 even more comprehensive when it added the Emergency Bulletin System, which disseminates vital information about public emergencies to all Arizonans.

An example of the importance of Arizona 2-1-1 Online to the State was its use when evacuees of Hurricane Katrina were brought to Arizona. Arizona 2-1-1 Online was a valuable tool for evacuees of Hurricane Katrina who were looking for short-term or permanent housing, employment and support in rebuilding their lives. Citizens desperate for information on how they could help the evacuees were instructed by Governor Napolitano and the media to visit Arizona 2-1-1 Online. Within the first seven days that Arizona received evacuees, Arizona 2-1-1 Online received over 30,000 visits from people interested in learning how to locate loved ones, volunteer, and make a donation.

Arizona 2-1-1 is available for other State declared emergencies. It is the State's official source for information to all activated emergency call centers throughout Arizona. During times of public emergency, the Emergency Bulletin System is available by dialing 2-1-1 or over the internet. The incorporation of the Arizona 2-1-1 Online system into emergency procedures allows any government entity – state, local, county or tribal – participating in an emergency response to provide up-to-date, reliable safety information to the public.

In addition, since going live, the number of entries in the 2-1-1 database has swelled to over 18,000 from the initial 15,000 services. Each new entry represents a current benefit to people using Arizona 2-1-1 Online and a future benefit to those who will dial 2-1-1 once health and human service call centers go live. These enhancements ensure that the public can always find a comprehensive list of available emergency and human service resources available in their communities.

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D. Realized return on investment, short-term/long-term payback.

The specific return on investment (ROI) for Arizona 2-1-1 Online to the State of Arizona is outlined below. Though impressive, the true value of the system to the citizens of Arizona is broader than a simple financial benefit. The main advantage is the intangible efficiencies gained through sharing of health, human service and emergency response information between various levels of government, the private sector and the public.

The development cost for Arizona 2-1-1 Online was \$492,000 and the estimated five year operating costs are \$495,000. Therefore, the total cost for developing and operating Arizona 2-1-1 Online over a five year life cycle is \$197,400 per year. There have been about 200,000 visits to Arizona 2-1-1 Online in its first year of operation. Hence, the average cost per visit is \$.98. Arizona 2-1-1 Online is currently averaging 10,023 unique visitors per month. Nationally, the average price per call to a 2-1-1 system is \$11.38. So Arizona is providing the same information at a substantial savings, \$10.40 per contact or \$12.5 Million per year (assuming a constant usage of 120,000 per year for five years).

Additional, less tangible benefits include:

1. The system administration tools and the update tickler system in 2-1-1 enable key providers to update 2-1-1 by themselves. Department of Economic Security, Salvation Army and many other government and nonprofit organizations keep their office locations, services and contact information current in the Arizona 2-1-1 database to the benefit of their constituencies. These organizations and many others have discontinued use of their own health and human service databases and now use Arizona 2-1-1 Online.
2. Instead of going to several government and nonprofit agencies for information about a disaster, citizens, reporters, and local governments now go to one centralized place - Arizona 2-1-1 Online - for all necessary updates. In the case of a wildland fire, for example, Arizona 2-1-1 Online includes information about: fire-fighting efforts from the State Forestry Department; evacuation routes from the Department of Transportation; air quality issues from the Department of Environmental Quality; shelters or other evacuee services from the Red Cross and Salvation Army, etc. Based on the increased visits to Arizona 2-1-1 Online during past disasters, it is clear the public is utilizing Arizona 2-1-1 Online to gather invaluable safety information. Now, with the addition of 2-1-1 Call Centers for State declared emergencies, the public has even better access to information about disasters.
3. Arizona 2-1-1 Online also has the potential to mitigate increasing pressures on the 9-1-1 system. Arizona 2-1-1 Online provides up to the minute information about public emergencies. Firefighters and police are already referring people in need to Arizona 2-1-1 Online as an alternative to calling 9-1-1 for emergency health and human service information and to get information during State declared emergencies.
4. Arizona 2-1-1 Online generates reports to inform policy makers on the health, human service and emergency response needs in the State. This information is invaluable to policy makers in terms of setting public priorities and balancing budgets.