



Online Municipal Public Service Systems

10 Points 15 Points

New action - October 2015

If the point of government is to provide services that are in the best interest of the public, what better way to do that than by engaging the customers (residents) in the process? Community engagement in the public service process is a win-win for the entire town. Municipalities with limited resources can crowd source issues happening around town and streamline the process for requests; while the public feels empowered, has peace of mind through the tracking of progress on their issues and requests, and enjoys the convenience of being able to complete municipal transactions online. This action awards points to towns that provide essential information regarding public services on the municipal website, along with an online system for citizens to request services, report issues, make payments and track progress.

This is a variable point structured action. As long as the systems are still operational, the necessary pieces of information are published and easily accessible on the website, and the submission meets the following standards, a town can receive up to 15 points for this action. Each year, towns must resubmit with evidence that all required functions are still operational in order to continue gaining up to 15 points.

Why is it important?

One of the key dimensions of sustainability is governance, and within it is the goal of government institutions providing efficient and effective services to the public. When engaging the public in the process, not only does it create trust between the citizenry and government, it can also help save significant staff time. But citizens won't participate if they feel that their input will likely not result in action. This action is about getting municipal government to communicate and interact with the public in a more effective way, which can assist in creating a sustainable community.

Who should lead and be involved with this action?

The head of the public works department should be the lead on this project. Information technology and public information (municipal clerk) specialists should also be included in the implementation of this action.

Timeframe

The timeframe for implementing this action is 2-4 months, depending upon whether a town does the work in house or contract a third party to develop the reporting and/or tracking functions.

Project Costs and Resource Needs

This action can be done with little resources beyond up front staff time to gather the information and get it on the website, and work with the IT department to create a reporting and/or tracking form. If a town decides to go with a company that provides dynamic online and mobile platforms, it will cost anywhere from \$2,500-\$10,000/annually, depending upon the size of the town and length of the contract. Whichever path is taken, the work flow and information management efficiencies created will save money in the long term.

What to do, and how to do it (“How to”)

This section lists the requirements for earning points for this action. **It is highly recommended to view our in depth guidance for implementing the action and examples from around the state and nation.** However, it is not required to follow this guidance exactly as long as the final product meets the requirements.

1. Provide useful explanatory information about routine, non-emergency public services, permits, registrations, and licenses on the municipal website as appropriate to the town. Some examples of town services could include: department contact information and hours; leaf and snow removal information; recycling, trash and street cleaning schedules; road repair information and recreation programs. [\(Click here for additional NJ municipal examples and guidance.\)](#)
2. Develop a system for the public to report issues or place a request for non-emergency services, via an online and/or mobile platform, and by phone. By working with your municipal public works, animal control officers, shade tree commission, zoning officer or road department identify the list of routine items that residents or the general public routinely report. Then develop a system to report and direct these items to the appropriate department. Typical items include the reporting of potholes, abandoned vehicles, property maintenance or zoning issues, sidewalk or road repairs, street sign or street light issues, hazardous trees, or snow removal issues. [\(Click here for additional NJ municipal examples and guidance.\)](#)
3. Develop a system for the public to pay items such as traffic violations, property taxes,

fines, licenses, municipal utility bills, registration for municipal recreation programs, and/or other obligations online. ([Click here for additional NJ municipal examples and guidance.](#))

4. Create a way for residents to sign up and receive notifications about non-emergency public services, including changes in scheduling and other updates, and routinely publicize its availability through varied communication channels. These systems are most effective when they include a simple way for the public to sign up for email, text message, or voice message notices. ([Click here for additional NJ municipal examples and guidance.](#))

5. The municipality can earn an additional 5 points for completing at least one of the two items described below. Action step #'s 1-4 must have already completed to earn these points.

- Institute an automated tracking system for service requests and reported issues that allows the public to track and see which department (or agency) the referral was directed to, the status of the service request, and final resolution of the issue. ([Click here for additional NJ municipal examples and guidance.](#))
- Develop a system for online application and tracking of permits/licenses available to the public, including status updates (notification to requestor that submission was received, case is closed, etc.), and departmental staff responsible for granting the permit. The purpose is for the applicant to be able to track the status of their application. Examples could include: business registrations; construction and building permits, pet licenses; landlord registration; public event permits; recreation program registration; solicitor's/peddler's licenses; construction code inspections or water heater permits. ([Click here for additional NJ municipal examples and guidance.](#))

What to submit to get credits/points

In order to earn points for this action, the following documentation must be submitted as part of the online certification application in order to verify that the action requirements have been met. This is a variable point structured action. As long as the systems are still operational, the necessary pieces of information are published and easily accessible on the website, and the submission meets the recommended standards, a town can receive up to 15 points for this action. Each year, towns must resubmit with evidence that all required functions are still operational in order to continue gaining up to 15 points. Towns must complete the downloadable [submission checklist](#).

1. Description of Implementation – In the text box provided on the submission page for this action provide a short narrative (300 words or less) of what has been accomplished and the impact it has or will have on the community.
2. Upload a completed [submission checklist](#)

3. Optional Upload: Promotional materials or supporting documents to show the publication of the new public service tools for reporting issues, requesting services, paying obligations; and/or notification sign up process.

This is an annual program action and your documentation will need to be updated annually to continue to receive points for this action.

IMPORTANT NOTES: There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 20 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended. All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

Spotlight: What NJ Towns are Doing

Middletown Township recently completed an overhaul of its website, and with it came a streamlining of information and new provisions of common municipal services which can now be completed online. This includes allowing residents to submit and track service requests; report problems; pay for parking permits, recreation registration, pet licenses, traffic tickets, and property taxes; a webpage containing a list of all forms and applications, organized by department; more descriptive information for services in high demand which was determined by public focus groups that informed the web redesign; and a mobile app that provides all of these services to residents over their smartphone. “Middletown Marvin,” a recognizable icon was created for users to know where to go to get useful information and submit requests.

A new focus coming out of Princeton’s consolidation was a focus on providing municipal services in a more efficient way to its residents. Providing commonly requested information in descriptive and easy to find ways and allowing taxes to be paid online were just the start. Princeton launched a new department called Access Princeton, which allows citizens easy access to report problems in town by phone or an online application provided through SeeClickFix. Not only can people go to the Access Princeton website or mobile app if they have questions about municipal services, want to get information on town events or utility companies, or be kept up to date in the event of an emergency, but a municipal staff member also provides office hours to handle such requests. Through these varied ways, the Access Princeton department helps to promote transparency within Princeton and is geared to promote more citizen engagement. <http://www.princetonnj.gov/accessprinceton/index.html>

Resources

See the “What to do” section for links to resources specific to steps listed in this action.

Accela – “**Citizen Relationship Management**” is a fee based tool that allows citizens to report and track issues; interactive map to view exact issue, including photo uploads and geocoding

Center for Digital Government - a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government. Try “**Best Practices for 24/7 Government**” for more guidance.

CitySourced – fee based platform that lets residents to identify civic issues (public safety, quality of life, environmental issues, code enforcement, public services, etc.) and report them to city hall for quick resolution

GovPilot - fee based platform that allows departments to go paperless and connect through an internal dashboard, share data, set up work flows, communication with constituents through notifications, create map visualizations using GIS and create forms online so residents can submit requests, pay obligations, register for services, etc. 201.222.1155 (NJ users: Morristown, Passaic City, Union Township)

Open311 – a free, open source issue tracking platform; no off the shelf model, but one can borrow from other build outs and customize their own with an IT/coding professional. (Examples: Chicago’s “**Service Tracker**”; Chicago’s Health Dept “**Foodborne Chicago**” allows the city to track tweets about food poisoning, and for people to report food poisoning.)

OS Ticket – a free, open source customer support ticket system which routes email, phone or online inquiries into a web-based customer support platform

PublicStuff – fee based platform to engage residents providing access for reporting and tracking issues, submit requests and gain access to other town information; includes workflow management tools; uses push notifications to update mobile users; interactive map to view exact issue, including photo uploads and geocoding; translates to 17 languages. (NJ town users: South Orange, Hoboken)

QR Codes – an interactive feature that can be used to provide information to the user about trash and recycling schedules, new online tools, etc. The user scans the QR Code with their phone and receives the information. There are loads of free tools to create QR codes, here are a few: <http://qrstuff.com>, <http://qrcode.kaywa.com>, <http://qurify.com/en/>, <http://delivr.com/qrcode-generator>.

SeeClickFix – fee based, customizable platform that allows citizens to access government information and report and track issues; includes various service management tools; interactive map to view exact issue, including photo uploads and geocoding. (NJ users: Princeton, Brigantine, Atlantic County Utilities Authority. The ACUA has free licenses available to any Atlantic County towns interested in using SCF.)