

**TO:** The City of Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT)

**FROM:** Martin Bagadion, Raelin Angulo, and Sidney Curven

**RE:** Reimagining the 311: Equitable Application, Community Outreach and Marketing

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## **INTRODUCTION & KEY ISSUES AT STAKE**

The 311 system for the City of Oakland (OAK311) is a reporting service for both non-emergency and urgent issues impacting constituents across the city. Issues such as illegal dumping, graffiti, flooding, poor traffic infrastructure, fallen trees, and sewer overflow are geolocated and can be reported in different ways. This includes reporting online through the OAK311 portal, calling 311, or downloading the OAK311 app on a mobile device.

Although OAK311 aims to quickly address issues through citizen contact with city services, problems arise regarding the accessibility and equity of reporting options as well as biases for Oakland constituents. Whiter and wealthier communities are inclined to have a higher rate of civic engagement – leading to higher reporting – than lower-income communities of color, leading to a reporting bias that overrepresents infrastructure issues located in these affluent neighborhoods (J. Pomar, Apr. 8, 2025). Additionally, the historical context of redlining within the City of Oakland has instilled a lack of proper consideration for investments into infrastructure and resources, devaluing predominantly Black neighborhoods and communities of color for decades. These previously redlined areas, with their exacerbated gaps in resources and substantial lack of trust in the administration, are severely underrepresented in OAK311 reports.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To evaluate OakDOT's 311 system, our team conducted a multi-pronged analysis of its accessibility, equity, and public engagement. Our preliminary process is outlined below:

1. Review of the City of Oakland's online OAK311 system's app interface, website submission form, and language options.
2. Work with OakDOT Chief of Staff & RET Lead Jasmine Pomar to consider structural inequities from redlining and infrastructural disinvestment in marginalized communities.
3. Conduct observational fieldwork in West Oakland around DeFremery Park using OakDOT's pothole survey template to assess pavement quality. This involved counting standard and severe potholes by block, and recent pavement markings.

To complement our field data in the scope of 311 access, we explored the presence of (or lack of) public signage about 311 reporting. This qualitative data helped us understand how visible these resources are to disadvantaged communities from a resident's perspective. To address this gap of resource accessibility, we analyzed advertising and engagement strategies in the Bay Area in the context of surrounding community centers like schools and churches. These were used as inspiration for our proposed marketing campaign tailored to these centers to address underreporting and revitalize the 311 system to be more culturally relevant and user-friendly.

## POLICY CONTEXT

Several Oakland city planning documents and initiatives ground our considerations in informing equitable infrastructure service:

- **OakDOT Geographic Equity Toolbox:** Visualizes the neighborhoods that are most underserved and provides a basis for equitable infrastructure investment. This toolbox is crucial for informing the placements of 311 dropboxes, community partnerships, and marketing in high-priority areas.
- **Capital Improvement Program (FY23-25):** Outlining OakDOT's priority capital projects, this document engages with our review that resource allocation often responds to reporting volume, which reinforces historical inequities. Our proposal for an inclusive reporting system would redirect capital attention to underreporting neighborhoods.
- **Oakland Administrative Instruction 580: Race and Equity (2023):** All city departments in Oakland have mandated equity principles in their planning processes; emphasizing priority to dismantling racial disparities in city services—such as the 311.
- **5-Year Paving Plan:** OakDOT's current paving schedule reflects areas prioritized through existing data, leading to a skewed view of which areas need service. By integrating alternative data collection through our proposed paper-based submissions and community reporting hubs, this plan would better complement the existing paving plan.

## OBSERVATIONS & POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The 311 system as it currently stands is admittedly not a perfect system, but it isn't all downfalls; there is much to be learned from its current configuration.

- **Strengths:** Individuals do utilize the 311 system as there are areas in Oakland with concentrated levels of use. Its online platform allows for ease of access for people with a device, along with an interactive map to locate issues. An easy-to-remember phone number allows for more pertinent issues to be addressed quickly. Lastly, it is already available in multiple languages.
- **Weaknesses:** Individuals may struggle with only being able to report issues over the phone or online (ex, those with no tech access or limited time to make a report). Also, historical contexts have impacted relationships between citizen groups and the local government. Lastly, depending on the report, there is minimal communication from OakDOT surrounding when the issue will be resolved.
- **Opportunities:** The 311 could be expanded to a paper format to accommodate those with technological difficulties or for those who prefer paper. Paper copies could be added to community spaces that people frequent. More trust could be built between OakDOT and residents to encourage them that reporting is an effective option. Finally, there is a big opportunity to expand advertising for 311.
- **Challenges:** Individuals may not take the time to report infrastructure issues despite how easy OakDOT makes the 311. Resolving reported issues may be time consuming and expensive, slowing the process down and convincing residents that it's not worth their

time. The 311 system may also take some time to establish itself equitably within communities (forming relationships with community centers).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

We recommend that OakDOT considers a 3-prong approach that includes equity, outreach, and marketing while implementing these suggestions. (See attachment # 1, 2, and 4 for details)

- **Equity:** Introduce the 311 system to community centers (places of worship, public schools, senior centers, affordable housing) to allow for the reporting system to be more convenient for residents of mixed incomes who may not have the time to report infrastructure issues. This will directly address people of different abilities and incomes, caretakers, and the elderly. These locations should provide online reporting options (QR codes) and pilot paper submissions (catering to that area's common languages). Vessels for submitting paper reports should be added. Lastly, continue utilizing the Geographic Equity Toolbox to inform which community centers will create the most equity.
- **Outreach:** Respond to issues submitted online with a timeline of when submissions will be addressed and completed that is as accurate as possible so residents can be updated on the changes being made, building rapport with constituents. Additionally, OakDOT staff should be accessible at community events across Oakland to encourage constituents to report infrastructure issues, allowing for 311 requests to be addressed and submitted in-person. OakDOT should bring maps of neighborhood streets to identify locations or have technology to aid community members in submissions at these community events.
- **Marketing:** Fun ads that catch residents' eye and stick in their brain will remind those with issues needing service about the 311 and hopefully encourage residents of more demographics to submit reports as they should now have more convenient access to the 311 (see attachment #3).

## **Attachment # 1 - In Depth Recommendations**

We recommend that the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) makes the 311 reporting service more accessible to Oakland residents, especially those in underserved areas by meeting the people where they are. In order to do this, we suggest that OakDOT enter into a few key spaces: local places of worship, public schools, and any other underrepresented community centers such as low income housing or senior homes. Furthermore, there are three elements that will make this a successful, equitable, trustworthy, and well known policy shift; these elements are, equitable access to the 311, community outreach and follow-up, and lastly marketing. This plan can be implemented in the near future and is relatively inexpensive.

Equitable access to the 311 means that the reporting technologies need to be of equal convenience to all Oakland residents. As it stands, people from more affluent areas of Oakland are using the 311 to report issues more frequently than other areas (Pomar, 4/1/25). We suggest that this issue is caused by less affluent people not having the time to fill the 311 out. Having the time in your day to file an infrastructure based complaint is a luxury, but it doesn't need to be. By bringing the 311 into places of worship, public schools, and other under-resourced communities OakDOT will be meeting people at places they have to go no matter their financial status. Church is a place that religious people go to no matter their economic standing, and is even a place those who are struggling (underserved communities) find solace in. By seeking people out, OakDOT will reach a much broader audience than they do at current. Furthermore, public schools also tap into all incomes of people, although not all parents are at school daily we suggest that having 311 forms accessible in the office, at parent teacher meetings, and in children's take home folders will create an environment which makes the 311 reporting system more convenient for busy parents. In all of these location types there should be access to an online 311 via QR code and also a paper version which residents can fill out right there (using provided pens) and then place into a locked drop box that OakDOT can collect periodically (see attachment #4 for a visual example). Lastly, the reporting services (both online, via phone, and on paper) should be provided in multiple languages and using images so that even people who struggle to read can report problems using maps.

Furthermore, to establish trust in this process, reporters need to be followed up with. Again we recommend that OakDOT reach out to reporters to tell them how soon the problem will be addressed or if they are already working on it. These timelines should be truthful and not hopeful in order to show that the program does work. For paper submissions at community centers, OakDOT should have contact with each center they place physical boxes in and maintain a liaison-based relationship to provide updates on 311 reports to be shared by the community center to those submitting reports. This relationship can begin as a pilot program, starting with community centers located in Highest Priority Neighborhoods using the Geographic Equity Toolbox.

Lastly, the newly established accessibility of the 311 must be advertised. As the Bay Area is known for its funny advertisements we recommend that OakDOT also partake. Ads should be implemented in the style of billboards, buses, and benches. Both buses and benches should have QR codes which direct reporters to the 311; we suggest implementing a QR code on this scale due to not wanting to encourage drivers to use their phones while passing billboards and realistically that would be a really big QR code. Buses also make for a more equitable ad as people who ride the bus tend to be lower income than rail users. Also bus users might not always have access to a car but also still have road safety complaints. This choice of ad location would assist OakDOT in their goal to make the 311 used more equitably. Lastly, the following are some ad suggestions we have come up with:

- “God might be there for you but OakDOT certainly is” file complaints at....
- “Life is full of ups and downs but roads don't have to be” file complaints at....
- “Babe... an Oak Branch just fell. Go submit a 311.”
- “OakDOT loves gossip, tell us the 411 on the 311”

**Attachment #2 - 311 Paper Pilot Formatting**

**311: Report Oakland Infrastructure Issues**

Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Location of Submission (where are you submitting this form?):

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**Circle** one of the following Issues:

- **Illegal Dumping** - Debris (appliances, etc), Green Waste, Mattress (or boxspring)
- **Graffiti** - List on what it has been painted on \_\_\_\_\_
- **City Building Maintenance\*** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Traffic** - Potholes, Abandoned Vehicles
- **Other\*** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Describe in this section the issues as concisely as possible (ex - alarm, plumbing, etc)

Describe the selected issue in detail:

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Location of the problem: (if possible street intersections, building names, and nearby landmarks are helpful along with the exact address if possible)

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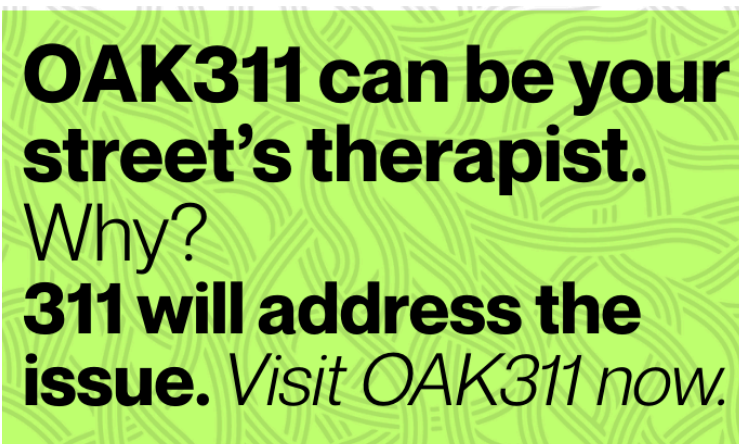
**Thank you for helping us keep Oakland thriving and beautiful!** OakDOT will be in touch shortly with our best estimate of when this issue will be resolved. Please share this reporting system with your friends so we can stay on top of the maintenance.

**DROP FORM INTO NEARBY DROPBOX (if applicable) OR RETURN TO SENDER IF DELIVERED BY SCHOOL.**

Attachment #3 - Ad Recommendations (Funny and Memorable)



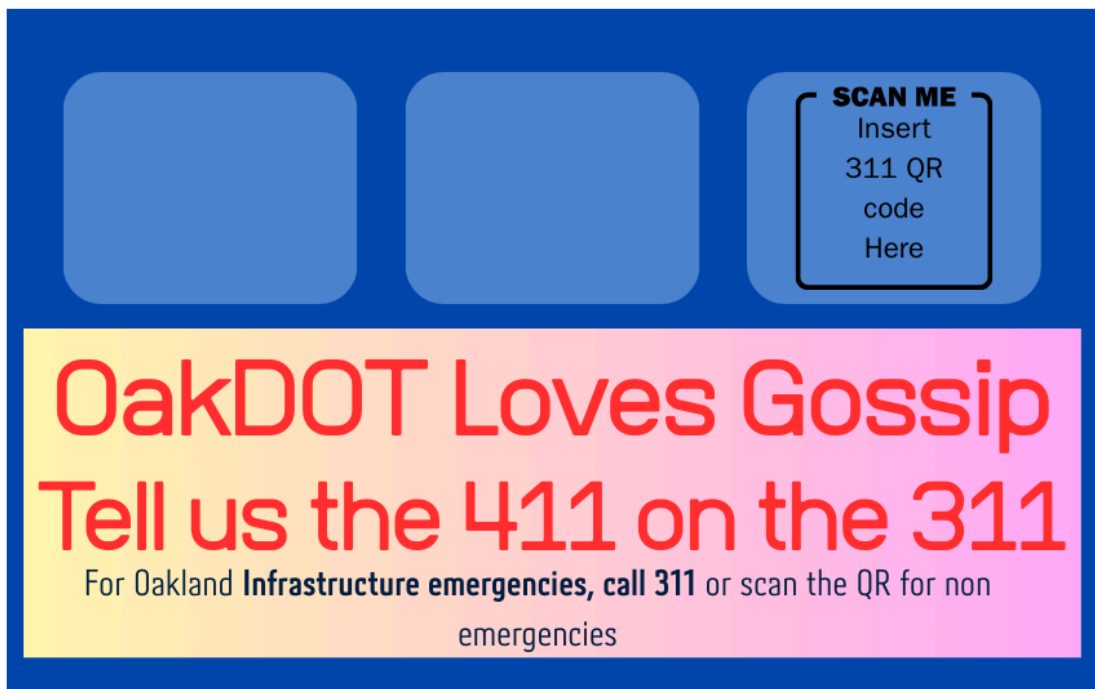
Above: Example of a general 311 advertisement that OakDOT could place on buses or benches.  
A QR code can be added to take reporters directly to the 311 survey.



Above: Examples of billboard ads that OakDOT could implement on highly trafficked roads or in areas which they suspect have low reporting rates. Note that there is no QR code as it could encourage dangerous driving in the context of a roadside billboard.



Above: Example of a bench ad that would go on the backrest of a bench so that people who pass by or sit can read the ad and fill out the QR code if they have any complaints.



Above: Example of a bus ad; the blue background with light blue squares represents the bus and its windows so there is a better understanding of the size of the ad. Furthermore, on this add the QR code that directs people to the 311 is placed on the bus window.

#### **Attachment #4 - Wooden Lock Box for Report Collecting**

This form of collection method for 311 paper reports is recommended so users can report at their own time and without the help of others. Furthermore, this box allows for privacy in reporting and prevents others from taking reports out. Lastly, the box is easy to use and very price efficient, making it a great short term financially feasible way to enhance the 311. The specific design can be curated with OakDOT branding.



(Above: Wooden reporting box mounted on wall with side slot to place pens.)

#### **Source for Attachment #4:**

Displays2Go. (n.d.). *Charity box locking top*. Displays2Go. Retrieved April 17, 2025, from <https://www.displays2go.com/P-3248/Charity-Box-Locking-Top>

# Attachment #5 - OakDOT 311 Reporting Statistics (2023)

## OAK 311 Service Requests - Interactive Charts

Council District

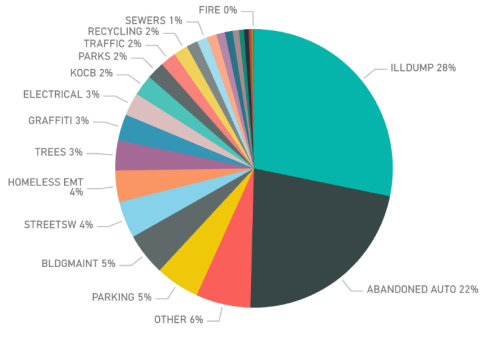
Select all (Blank) 3 7 Area 4 CCD 6 CCD1 CCD2 CCD3 CCD4 CCD5 CCD6 CCD7

Choose a Year(s) or Quarter(s) for the charts below

Year 2023 - 2023

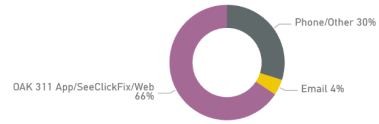
2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

Service Requests - by Category

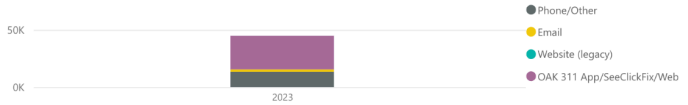


44833

Service Requests - by Source



Service Requests - Total by Year and Source



Refreshed Nightly, Last Refreshed On:

April 21, 2025

Shows non-duplicated service requests (status does not equal cancel). See the City of Oakland [open data website](#) for more information.

## Attachment #6 - Bibliography

City of Oakland. (2023, March 22). *Administrative Instruction 580 – Race and Equity*.

[https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/Administrative-Instruction-580-Race-and-Equity\\_2023-03-22-211634\\_ykyr.pdf](https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/Administrative-Instruction-580-Race-and-Equity_2023-03-22-211634_ykyr.pdf)

City of Oakland. (n.d.). FY 23-25 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Overview. OpenGov Stories. [https://stories.opengov.com/oaklandca/published/\\_4Gyv58vCA\\_](https://stories.opengov.com/oaklandca/published/_4Gyv58vCA_)

City of Oakland. (n.d.). OAK 311 Service Requests Interactive Charts. Powerbigov.us. [app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiaODQzNTQ2NjEtMDY1Mi00OGQxLWFiZTgtNGJlNGU0YmQwNTZjIiwidCI6Ijk4OWEyMTgwLTZmYmMtNDdmMS04MDMyLTFhOWVIOTY5YzU4ZCJ9&pageName=ReportSection](https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiaODQzNTQ2NjEtMDY1Mi00OGQxLWFiZTgtNGJlNGU0YmQwNTZjIiwidCI6Ijk4OWEyMTgwLTZmYmMtNDdmMS04MDMyLTFhOWVIOTY5YzU4ZCJ9&pageName=ReportSection).

City of Oakland. (n.d.). *Report a problem to OAK311*. Oakland.gov.

Oakland Department of Transportation. (2024, October 29). OakDOT Geographic Equity Toolbox. City of Oakland.

<https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/oakdot-geographic-equity-toolbox>