

Customer Story - City of Allen

Digitization Comes to the Rescue





The IT team streamlines and centralizes support for all municipal departments – from police to parks.

About Allen City Hall

Allen City Hall is the political and administrative center for the city of Allen, Texas, with a population of 103,765 and steadily increasing commercial development. The city has five fire stations and three police stations, five major parks and recreation facilities, a very large event center, and a large library.

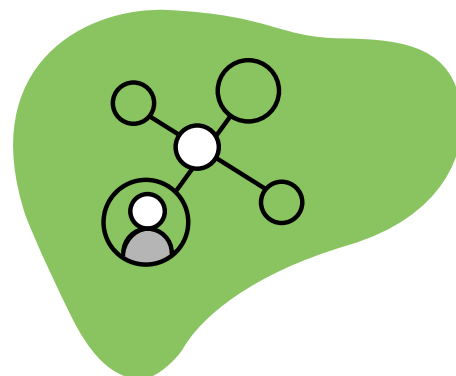
Allen City Hall employs about 1,000 people, half of whom work offsite at the city's various facilities and departments. This includes a service center for employees in the engineering, sewer, streets, parks, and water departments. To support the work of all city employees, Allen City Hall maintains a dedicated IT department of three subdivisions – technology, applications, and GIS.

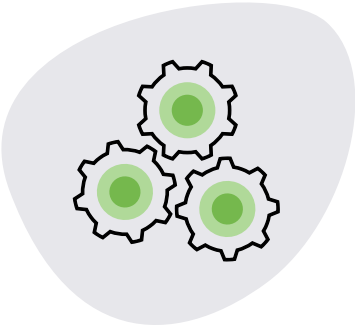


Tackling complex operations for an entire city

Allen City Hall's IT department is responsible for 800 workstations across all municipal departments, as well as mobile data computers (MDC) in the city's fire trucks, police cars, and ambulances. With the remote MDCs, first responders are connected over a cell network to the 911 dispatch center, centralized databases, and each other. These mobile assets and the dispatch center, located in City Hall itself, are mission critical and receive top priority at all times for IT support.

Despite having to support the technology infrastructure of an entire urban environment, the service desk operated opportunistically and manually for some time, using Excel spreadsheets and Access database management. Problems and support issues were brought to the attention of the IT department through phone calls, emails, and personal contact, which meant a lot of inconsistencies and wasted time. For example, police officers on patrol would find themselves having to use their cell phones to describe or take pictures of issues with their MDC. A more serious issue – directly impacting the speed and efficiency of first response during an emergency – was that incorrect MDC notifications of a fire truck or ambulance “not in bay” could only be corrected with a direct phone call to dispatch.





“Everybody was doing everything” on the IT end, as Systems Administrator Michael McDermott put it. Yet, end-user issues sometimes simply fell through the cracks due to uneven awareness of what was being handled at any one time among the staff.

In an effort to take better control of its operations, the IT department began using a free management application distributed by Spiceworks. However, the city soon outgrew the tool and the IT team found it was lacking the necessary functionality, flexibility, and scalability the municipality needed.

For a service management platform that would help digitize its back-office operations across the municipality, Allen City Hall reached out to SysAid.

Peggy Robinette,
Helpdesk Supervisor, Allen City Hall

"SysAid has been a godsend."



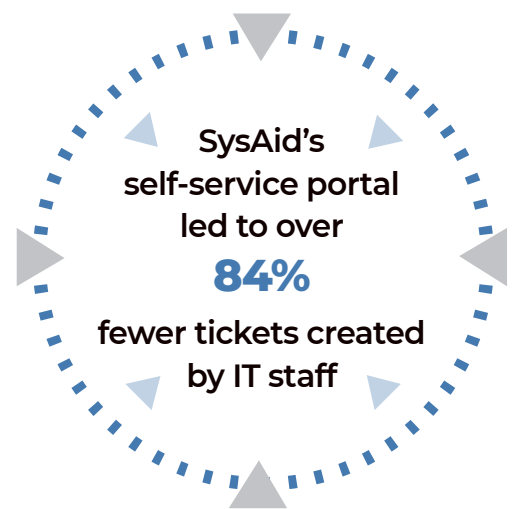


When a picture is worth 1,000 words

The introduction of SysAid's self-service portal led to over 84% fewer tickets created by IT staff, due to a rapid and large increase in end users doing so on their own. This transition has been hugely successful, in large part, thanks to the SysAid hotkey, which McDermott called his favorite SysAid feature. The hotkey allows end users to submit a ticket at the click of a button, while also attaching a screenshot or video clip.

SysAid's hotkey is now being used across Allen's municipal departments, improving and streamlining the service provided by the IT department. McDermott explained that verbal descriptions from non-technical city employees can be misleading and lead to wasted effort, especially in the case of rare or unfamiliar errors. So having screenshots or video captures within the ticket submission addresses this issue by presenting the helpdesk team visual confirmation of an identified issue.

In addition, visual records provided through the self-service portal made it easier to spot repeat issues that might indicate a problem within a given system. A trend analysis dependent on verbal or written descriptions of an issue, from different sources, is more challenging and time-consuming.





Automated ticket routing and escalation

To make its support for municipal personnel even more efficient, the Allen City Hall IT department uses SysAid's automation capabilities to route incoming tickets to teams specializing in specific areas (such as administration, police and fire, etc.). When a ticket is submitted, every service agent in the relevant team gets a notification, so any team member can handle priority items without waiting for approval by a senior manager.

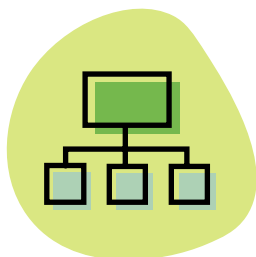
With those automation capabilities, they can also automatically escalate incoming tickets according to prioritization. Tickets from the 911 dispatch center are given top priority, 24/7 and 365 days a year. Next is the MDCs in the first response vehicles, followed by fire and police stations, and then administrative offices. Facility outages are also prioritized, depending on the type of disruption and what infrastructure it affects.



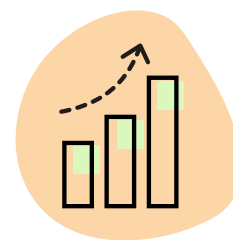
SysAid workflows for all the city's operations

Allen City Hall makes use of an array of relevant, automated SysAid workflows, replacing previously manual and cumbersome processes.

Employee onboarding, for example, is a complex workflow that spans multiple departments and systems. While human resources (HR) may handle certain aspects of decision-making and payroll, the new employee may need a laptop, a phone, system access credentials, a physical desk, a badge and uniform in the first response departments, shift scheduling, and more. Juggling all of these processes manually is time-consuming, error-prone, and frustrating for all concerned.



With SysAid, onboarding and offboarding of Allen city employees have been radically improved. The two workflows are now automated, customized and coordinated with the HR department, with employee IDs quickly set up or terminated in the context of a single ticket. In the past, the same tasks required four or five tickets just to keep everybody on the same page and updated.



Notably, the city has seasonal mass onboarding and offboarding of employees. The complexity, intensity, and speed of these labor changes made it a “nightmare” for IT personnel to manage and track before SysAid.

“SysAid has been a godsend to us for this,” according to Peggy Robinette, Helpdesk Supervisor for Allen City Hall. “Once a workflow is launched based on a user request, everyone automatically knows what to do next.”



All incoming tickets – from onboarding processes to patching software – remain linked with the IT staff member who provided the original service, so that any follow-up communications are directed to the person most familiar with the case. This also reduces the need for additional administrators to get involved, limiting their hands-on intervention to cases in which escalation is really necessary.



SysAid frees admins to focus on higher value

SysAid has provided Allen City Hall with a coherent, customized, and streamlined service management platform, which has digitized back-office operations, leading to faster ticket resolution, enhanced IT staff productivity, and a vastly improved end-user experience. Moreover, with centralized information on all tickets, available to the entire IT department, everyone knows who is doing what, and for whom, at all times.

IT administrators said they have been freed from routine organizational work and are now able to focus on their higher value contributions. This includes reviewing the built-in reporting and analytics, which provide an overview of tickets that help highlight chronic issues and identify their sources. For example, the service desk data shows which municipal departments are producing more tickets than others and can help ensure that no member of the IT team is getting disproportionately flooded with requests.

Such information is also critical to the IT director in demonstrating the volume and value of the work his department is doing. The reports and analytics are used to justify expenses and manpower requests, as well as to demonstrate department efficiency, to the Allen City Council, the City Auditor, and more.

As for working with SysAid, Helpdesk Supervisor Robinette expressed her excitement about the online chat support. By eliminating the typical phone tag, she said, SysAid provided exactly the assistance she needed, very quickly.

"Everything overall has just been so much better since we went to SysAid," Robinette said. "Everybody is more on top of their tickets."

Peggy Robinette,
Helpdesk Supervisor,
Allen City Hall

"Reports and analytics are used to demonstrate department efficiency."



Looking forward to the next innovation

Having seen the benefits of SysAid in the IT department, other Allen municipal departments may be seeking to implement it down the line, as well. The HR department, which has already benefited from SysAid onboarding and offboarding workflows, initiated conversations with IT about how SysAid can be used for managing other HR processes.

Commenting on Allen City Hall's ongoing relationship with SysAid, Systems Administrator McDermott said, "We are very excited to see what's next on the SysAid product roadmap. That's why we read every SysAid announcement the minute it arrives, always ready to learn about, and adopt, their latest innovation in service management."

With SysAid, the Allen City Hall team is fulfilling its commitment to ongoing development of municipal operations, with a clear trajectory of expanding options, services, and scalability.



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