



COMMONWEALTH CONNECT

Commonwealth Connect is a mobile application that allows residents to report non-emergency issues to their municipal government. The system, modeled off Boston's highly successful Citizens Connect app (now Bos:311), logged 65,000 issues in 76 municipalities from 2013 to 2015.

However, not all municipalities have the same success with the tool. It turns out the best predictor of widespread adoption isn't income, housing tenure or other demographic characteristics, but whether municipal staff use the tool internally. Using the tool to communicate across departments and to track response times seems to create a virtual feedback loop that encourages resident utilization. It's no coincidence that Malden — where Mayor Gary Christenson has established a strong staff culture around the program, and is himself the top reporter — has among the highest number of per-capita users.

Commonwealth Connect is an important example of how technology can radically transform and improve the relationship between residents and government. But it also reminds us that taking full advantage of these opportunities requires institutional changes, which may be more difficult than programming a new app. Visit worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/Commonwealth_Connect to interact with the data.