Who Calgary's 311 Hears

Equity in 311 reporting: findings and recommendations for The City of Calgary

By Hassan Ali · October 2026

Independent analysis of City of Calgary open data · 311 requests October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2026 · 195 communities, 1,279,690 residents · hassanaliarshad110.github.io/calgary-311

In short. 311 responds equally fast everywhere, but it hears much less from some communities. Where more residents have no knowledge of English, residents report 39% fewer infrastructure problems per person than in communities with the fewest non-English speakers. About 23% of the gap remains after comparing like with like. The likely cost is uneven maintenance: the City can only fix what it hears about.

Three findings

	Finding	Key figure
1	Communities where more residents don't speak English report far fewer infrastructure problems (roads, water and sewer, parks and trees).	90.0 vs 54.6 reports per 1,000 residents a year; about 23% fewer after adjustment
2	Once a problem is reported, the City closes requests equally fast in every income and language group.	Within 1.5% of the citywide pace at 7 days and 0.6% at 30 days
3	A smaller share of requests come through the 311 app in lower-income and non-English-speaking communities.	App share 18.6% where most residents don't speak English vs 23.4% where fewest don't

Top recommendations

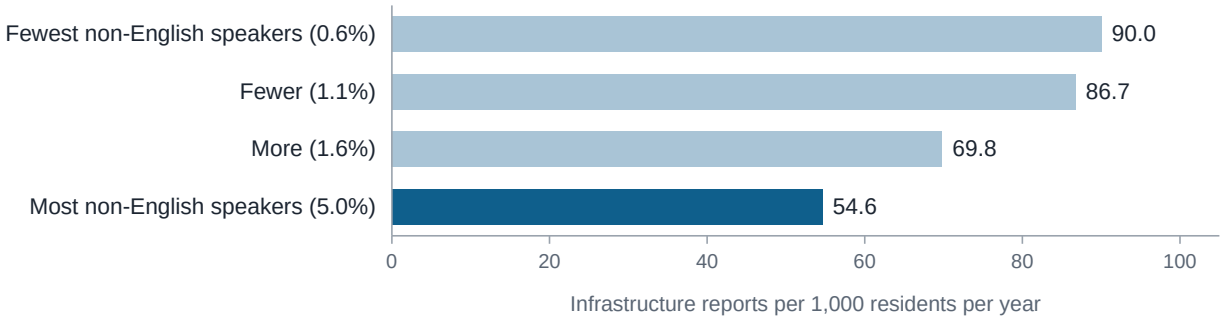
- **Measure who 311 hears.** Turn the raw community counts 311 already publishes into reports per 1,000 residents, compared with similar communities, in 311's quarterly performance reporting.
- **Make 311 visible.** Put small signs with simple icons and a QR code where people walk and wait (parks, transit stops, community halls, streetlight poles), with a separate code for each community so the City can count the reports each sign brings in.
- **Reward reporting.** Pilot "Fix-It Points": verified, non-duplicate reports earn points redeemable for City recreation passes or transit tickets.
- **Work through trusted messengers.** Fund multilingual 311 ambassadors with settlement agencies and community associations, and a community challenge with small grants.
- **Don't wait for reports.** Send proactive inspections, including camera-based road defect detection, first to under-reporting communities.

Why this matters

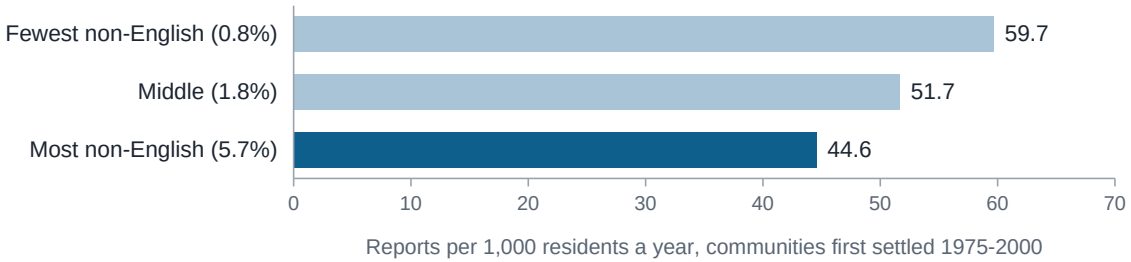
Much of the City's day-to-day maintenance responds to what residents report through 311: potholes, broken streetlights, damaged sidewalks, sewer backups, fallen trees. That is efficient, but it assumes every community reports at the same rate. If some communities report less because of language, time, trust or familiarity with the system, their problems are less likely to reach a work queue, even though the City responds fairly to the reports it receives.

Finding 1: some communities report far fewer problems

Communities were split into four equal groups by the share of residents with no knowledge of English (2021 Census). The quarter with the most non-English speakers reports far fewer infrastructure problems per resident.



Some of that raw gap reflects other differences, such as older neighbourhoods having older infrastructure. Among the 63 communities first settled between 1975 and 2000, the gap remains:

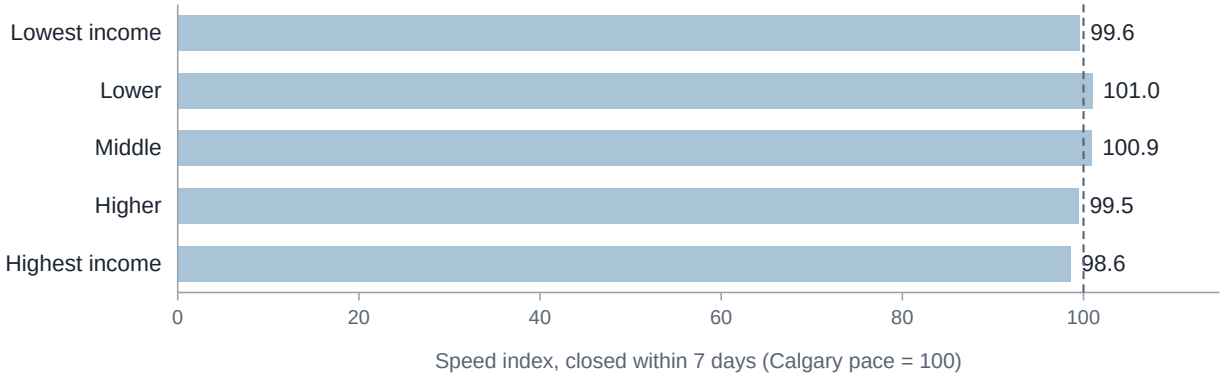


A regression that accounts for income, renters, community age and distance from downtown gives about 23% fewer reports for a community where 5% of residents do not speak English compared with one where 1% don't (95% range 9% to 33%). The result held in all 14 versions of the model tested: outside northeast Calgary, for roads, water and parks separately, in each year, and at area level.

Caution: language, visible-minority status and recent immigration go together across Calgary communities and cannot be separated with these data. The analysis shows who 311 hears less from, not exactly why.

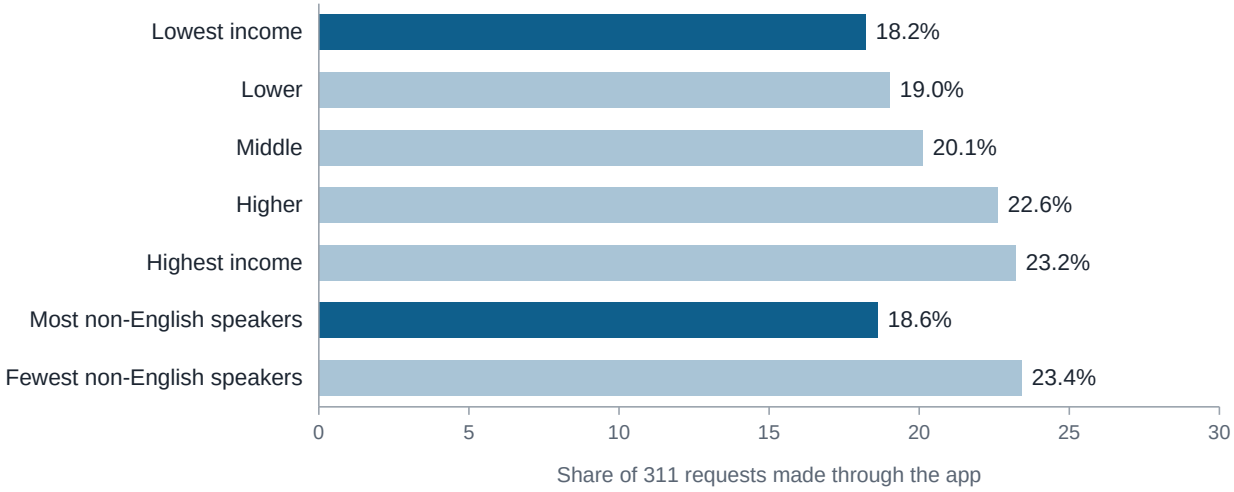
Finding 2: once reported, response is equally fast

Each community's requests were compared with the citywide speed for the same request type in the same year. A score of 100 means exactly the citywide pace.



This is a real strength of the 311 system and should be recognised. It also means the gap in Finding 1 is not a response problem; it happens before a request exists.

Finding 3: lower app use where barriers are highest



The City plans to add more languages to the 311 app in 2026. These are the communities where that change can matter most.

Where the gap is concentrated

The interactive map at the study website shows every community. The table lists the largest communities that combine a high share of non-English speakers (3% or more) with reporting at least 25% below what is typical for similar communities.

Community	Ward	Residents (2021)	No knowledge of English	Reports vs similar communities
Panorama Hills	3	25,535	7.0%	-41%
Taradale	5	17,630	9.1%	-34%
Martindale	5	14,540	9.5%	-27%
Hamptons	2	7,360	4.0%	-29%
Forest Heights	9	5,985	6.5%	-35%
Downtown West End	7	2,825	5.9%	-38%
Chinatown	7	2,250	5.9%	-42%
Greenview	4	2,100	6.4%	-40%

"Reports vs similar communities" compares a community's infrastructure reports per resident with what is typical for communities of the same income, renter share, age and distance from downtown. Language characteristics are measured for areas that group several neighbouring communities.

Recommendations

Each recommendation sets out what is missing today and what we propose. Most can be piloted within existing budgets; the incentive and ambassador ideas are best tested in two or three wards first and measured against similar communities that do not get them.

A. Measure who 311 hears

The City tracks how fast 311 responds, but not which communities it isn't hearing from.

1. Make "reports per 1,000 residents" an official 311 measure

The gap today. 311's dashboards show raw request counts by community, and the ward dashboard compares wards per household. Raw counts favour big communities, and wards mix high- and low-reporting communities together. Neither shows which communities report less than similar ones. The City's quarterly performance report tracks only how quickly 311 calls are answered.

What we propose. Report infrastructure reports per 1,000 residents for every community, next to the rate expected for similar communities, in 311's quarterly performance reporting alongside response time. Flag communities reporting well below expected.

Lead: 311 & Insights · Effort: Low · How we'd know it works: Within a year the measure appears in the quarterly report, and the City uses it to choose where to act.

2. Refresh the gap analysis every year

The gap today. No City report looks at which communities under-report. This study is a one-time outside snapshot, and its data stops at September 2026.

What we propose. Repeat the analysis each year with the City's own, more complete data, and share the list of low-reporting communities with ward offices and community associations.

Lead: 311 & Insights · Effort: Low · How we'd know it works: A yearly list is published, and the gap between low-reporting communities and similar ones narrows year over year.

B. Make reporting easier

Many residents don't know 311 exists, or find it hard to use without English. Reporting should be visible, simple, and possible without English or typing.

3. Put 311 where people already are

The gap today. Many residents may not know 311 exists, or that they can use it to report a pothole or a broken streetlight. The gap is not only in the app: in the communities with the most non-English speakers, phone and other non-app requests are about 22% lower per resident (220 vs 283 per 1,000 a year), and app requests 42% lower.

What we propose. Put small, simple signs where people walk and wait: park entrances, transit shelters, community halls, libraries and streetlight poles. Each shows icons (pothole, light, tree, water), "Call, tap or scan 311", a QR code, and a line in the community's main languages. Give each community its own QR code so the City can count the reports each sign brings in. Repeat the message on utility bills, waste carts and community newsletters, and point to the app's new languages when they launch in 2026.

Lead: 311 & Insights; Marketing & Communications; Parks; Mobility · Effort: Low · How we'd know it works: Reports from each community's QR code, and reports per 1,000 residents in signed communities against similar unsigned ones.

4. Add photo-first reporting

The gap today. Reporting online or in the app means choosing from a long list of request types and answering written questions. That is hard without strong English.

What we propose. Let residents snap a photo, drop a pin and tap a simple icon (pothole, light, water, tree). Staff route the request from the photo and location. No typing and no English needed.

Lead: 311 & Insights · Effort: Medium · How we'd know it works: More first-time reporters in high-gap communities, and the share of requests made photo-first.

5. Accept reports by text or WhatsApp

The gap today. 311 takes reports by phone, online and through the app. Many newcomers use messaging apps every day, but there is no way to report a problem by text or WhatsApp.

What we propose. Set up a number residents can message, in the most-spoken languages of high-gap communities, that feeds the same 311 queue.

Lead: 311 & Insights · Effort: Medium · How we'd know it works: Messages received that become valid requests, by community.

6. Close the loop

The gap today. Residents can check a request's status, but "closed" does not always mean fixed, and there is rarely a photo or plain note showing what was done. People who don't see results stop reporting.

What we propose. When a problem is fixed, tell the reporter in plain language, with a photo where possible.

Lead: Service departments · Effort: Low · How we'd know it works: More residents report again, and satisfaction with 311 rises.

C. Reward and encourage reporting

Small, well-designed incentives and trusted local messengers can turn reporting into a habit in the communities that report least.

7. Fix-It Points

The gap today. Reporting takes time and effort, and residents get nothing back for it. The people least familiar with 311 have the least reason to start.

What we propose. Verified, non-duplicate infrastructure reports earn points that can be traded for City-owned rewards such as leisure centre drop-in passes or transit day passes. Points are capped each month and awarded only after the City verifies the report.

Lead: 311 & Insights; Recreation · Effort: Medium · How we'd know it works: Verified reports per 1,000 residents rise in pilot communities, with no rise in duplicates.

8. Community Care Challenge

The gap today. Community associations are the City's closest local partners, but nothing links their work to 311 reporting.

What we propose. Associations in high-gap communities earn small grants for growth in verified reports per resident, with a public leaderboard by ward.

Lead: Community Services · Effort: Low to medium · How we'd know it works: Verified reports per resident grow in participating communities.

9. 311 Community Ambassadors

The gap today. Newcomers often learn about City services from settlement agencies, faith centres and neighbours rather than City campaigns. No program trains these trusted people to help residents use 311.

What we propose. Train multilingual residents through those organisations to help neighbours report, and to lead seasonal walk-and-report audits with ward offices.

Lead: Community Services; ward offices · Effort: Medium · How we'd know it works: Residents helped, and reports made at walk-and-report audits.

10. Bring in young people

The gap today. Young people in newcomer families often help their parents with English and online services, but they aren't asked to help report neighbourhood problems.

What we propose. Run school and youth-group "map your block" projects that report real issues, recognised with volunteer certificates.

Lead: Community Services · Effort: Low · How we'd know it works: Schools and groups taking part, and valid reports they make.

D. Don't rely on reports alone

Even with better reporting, some problems will go unreported. The City can find them directly.

11. Inspect proactively where reporting is low

The gap today. Much day-to-day maintenance starts with a complaint. The City has tested camera-based road defect detection, but there is no plan to send inspections first to the communities that report least.

What we propose. Schedule proactive inspections, including camera-based detection, first in under-reporting communities.

Lead: Mobility; Water; Parks · Effort: Medium · How we'd know it works: Defects found by inspection in under-reporting communities, and a falling repair backlog there.

12. Measure "fixed", not just "closed"

The gap today. 311 tracks how fast requests are closed, but not whether the same problem comes back.

What we propose. Track how often a closed request is followed by a new one for the same issue at the same place, by community, and report it next to response time.

Lead: 311 & Insights · Effort: Low · How we'd know it works: The reopen rate is published and falls over time.

Incentives carry risks: duplicate or trivial reports, and rewards flowing to residents who already report. Verification before points are awarded, monthly caps, and a pilot limited to high-gap communities address most of these. The City's own data will show quickly whether verified reports per resident rise.

A 12-month pilot the City could run

Element	Proposal
Where	Two or three wards with large reporting gaps (for example Wards 3, 5 and 9), with similar communities elsewhere as a comparison group.
What	Local 311 signs with a QR code for each community, photo-first reporting, Fix-It Points, a Community Care Challenge and trained ambassadors.
Measures	Verified infrastructure reports per 1,000 residents; share of new reporters; duplicate rate; repair backlog found by proactive inspection; resident awareness of 311.
Success test	Reporting in pilot communities moves at least halfway toward similar communities, with no rise in the duplicate rate.
Cost control	Rewards limited to City-owned passes with a fixed annual budget; ambassadors through existing settlement-agency partnerships.

How the analysis was done

- **Data:** City of Calgary open data: 311 Service Requests (every non-duplicate request made October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2026), 2021 Census by community, Calgary Equity Index, property assessments, building permits and historical community populations.
- **Scope:** 195 communities with 500 or more residents in 2021 (1,279,690 residents). Reporting rates use 30 common resident-reported request types; infrastructure means 21 types covering roads, water and sewer, and parks and trees.
- **Speed:** each request was compared with the citywide share closed within 7, 30 and 90 days for the same request type and year.
- **Estimate:** population-weighted regression on the log of reports per resident, controlling for income, renters, community age and distance from downtown; 14 model versions; a 1,000-draw bootstrap resampling whole areas for the 95% range.
- **Checks:** every figure was independently recomputed from the raw extracts, and the analysis code reproduces every result from the published data package.
- **Limits:** the analysis shows an association, not its cause. Fewer reports could partly reflect fewer problems. Income and language are measured for areas that group several communities, and population is from the 2021 Census.

The full methodology (with every model result), the community map and all data and code are at **hassanaliarshad110.github.io/calgary-311**.

This is an independent study. It is not affiliated with The City of Calgary, and it makes no allegation against any person, department or contractor.

The City's 311 ward dashboard: why it shows Ward 5 differently

The City publishes a **311 ward dashboard** (calgary.ca/311/311-ward-dashboard) that compares wards by **service requests per 100 households**. It shows Ward 5 *above* the city: 117 requests per 100 households in 2025, against 96 citywide. This study finds Ward 5 reports *less*. Both use the same requests. They differ in what the requests are divided by.

1. The request counts agree

Ward 5, all 311 requests	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
City ward dashboard	33,607	34,189	39,834	35,165	34,682
City open data, Ward 5 communities (this study)	33,437	33,483	39,182	34,580	33,562
Difference	0.5%	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	3.3%

Counting open-data requests inside the Ward 5 boundary instead of by community gives almost the same numbers, so the boundary is not the reason. The dashboard is built from the City's own 311 records. The open data leaves about 33,000 requests a year with no location (facility bookings, lost property, general enquiries), which the City can link to a ward from the caller's address and the open data cannot. That is the most likely reason the dashboard is 1 to 3% higher. The comparison below uses the dashboard's own figures.

2. The dashboard divides every year by 2021 households

Ward 5's dashboard figures imply about **29,600 to 29,700 households in every year from 2021 to 2025** (33,607 ÷ 113 × 100 in 2021; 34,682 ÷ 117 × 100 in 2025). That is the 2021 Census count for Ward 5: 29,585 households. Since then Ward 5 has grown by about a quarter, to about 36,300 homes on the City's 2026 property roll. Divided by today's homes, Ward 5's 2025 figure would be **under 100 per 100 households, not 117**. A fixed 2021 count makes every fast-growing ward look like it reports more each year, only because it has more people.

3. Per household favours wards with large households

Ward 5 households are among the largest in Calgary. A household of 3.6 people makes more requests than a household of 2.6, without each person reporting more. 2021 is the fairest year to compare, because every count is from the same Census:

2021 (Census year)	Ward 5	Calgary	Ward 5 vs Calgary
People per household (2021 Census)	3.6	2.6	+40%
Requests per 100 households (City dashboard)	113	94	+20%
Requests per 1,000 residents	317	350	–10%
Requests per 1,000 residents, 2025 (estimated population)	259	296	–12%

Per 1,000 residents: dashboard requests divided by 2021 Census population (Ward 5 106,185; Calgary 1,306,784); for 2025, by this study's Ward 5 estimate (133,700) and the City's own estimate for Calgary (about 1,571,000). Calgary's requests are the dashboard's ward average × 14 (457,422 in 2021; 464,464 in 2025).

4. A ward total also hides the communities inside it

The dashboard counts every request type, including waste carts and bylaw complaints, for the ward as a whole. This study counts only reports of broken infrastructure (roads, water and sewer, parks and trees), per resident, community by community, and compares each community with similar ones. Inside Ward 5 that shows Taradale (–32%) and Martindale (–26%) reporting far less than similar communities, while Cornerstone (+53%) reports more. A ward average mixes them together.

In short. The dashboard's counts are right and match the open data. But dividing by 2021 households makes Ward 5 look like a heavy reporter, for two reasons: its households are large, and it has grown since 2021. Per resident, using today's population, Ward 5 reports less than the city, and the gap is concentrated in a few communities. Recommendation 1 of this study asks the City to add reports per 1,000 residents, with current population, to its 311 reporting.

Sources: City of Calgary 311 ward dashboard (figures as shown on October 31, 2026); 311 Service Requests, 2021 Census population and households by community (City of Calgary open data); Ward 5 population estimate from this study.