Increasing the efficiency of MOIA's constituent referral process

The Urban Policy Lab is Milano's oldest and largest client-centered course. Students in the lab work in teams to advise clients in government and the nonprofit sector on pressing policy and management issues. Working under the supervision of a faculty supervisor, students research the issue, identify possible solutions, and analyze them. The students present their recommendations to the client in a formal briefing and then submit a written report incorporating client feedback.

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) is responsible for promoting the well-being of New York City's immigrant communities, through immigrant advocacy and the removal of access barriers to NYC programs. MOIA's Constituent Services (CS) Team is primarily tasked with responding to constituent inquiries, which have grown in recent years due to national immigration policy changes which have incited fear in New York City's immigrant communities.

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Subject: Increasing the efficiency of MOIA's constituent referral process
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Central Policy Issue
Given MOIA's capacity to only make referrals to constituents, how can this process be done more **efficiently**?

Background
The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) is responsible for promoting the well-being of New York City's immigrant communities, through immigrant advocacy and the removal of access barriers to NYC programs. MOIA's Constituent Services (CS) Team is primarily tasked with responding to constituent inquiries, which have grown in recent years due to national immigration policy changes which have incited fear in New York City's immigrant communities. Currently, MOIA successfully closes 90% of incoming cases within a 14-day period, and seeks to further improve efficiency, particularly at the CS Team level. The unclosed 10% of cases that remain usually result from the CS Team's lack of legal knowledge. When they do not know where to refer constituents to, they send the inquiry to the MOIA policy legal team for legal advice and then it comes back to them. This process, referred to as the two-step protocol, leads to inefficiency in the CS team as the policy legal team.

Methodology
We conducted research by interviewing representatives from city agencies such as NYC311, Catholic Charities, the Legal Aid Society, the NYC Commission on Human Rights, NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, as well as MOIA's Constituent Services team. We also reviewed best practice literature on case management, advocacy materials, MOIA's annual report, and pertinent literature on current immigration policies from USCIS.

Criteria
Based on MOIA's concerns, our priority was to address transversely two criteria based on equity and one based on simplicity (for efficiency) in all the alternatives -- (1) Protect identity and safety of constituents, (2) increasing well being and program access, (3) reduce the incidences of the two-step protocol, respectively. We also include:
1. *Efficiency*. Efficiency is determined by the increase in "first-hand legal knowledge" of the CS Team and in the "second-hand" knowledge of the CS team (via access to another person or resource). We measured each of these two questions via yes/no answers. Two yeses would represent high efficiency, one yes and no would represent medium, and to no's would represent low.
2. *Time*. Time for implementation is measured by days, weeks, months, or years.
3. *Cost*. Cost is determined by how much the solution would cost for MOIA to implement, as measured in current US dollars.
4. *Sustainability / Adaptability*. This criterion determines the resilience of the alternative in light of political context changes (e.g., drastic new immigration laws), and is measured in

two ways: If the (1) CS team structure and/or (2) the alternative's structure would change over time in light of changes in the political context. We answered each of these via yes/no, and used these to measure them in conjunction as low (two yeses), medium (a yes and a no) or high (two no's).

Alternatives
1. *In-House Legal Counsel*: Our first alternative is hiring an in-house legal counsel to sit between the CS Team and the Policy Team within MOIA. The attorney would work mostly with the CS team and help them refer difficult legal cases to the appropriate agencies, but wouldn't actually offer legal advice to constituents. They would also work alongside the MOIA's policy/legal team if a case becomes too complex for the legal counsel. They would be paid an annual salary ranging $56-85k by MOIA.
2. *Training + Customer Relationship Management (CRM)*: Our second alternative is a new training structure and a customer relationship management (CRM) system. The new training would give the CS Team better practical skills, understanding of constituent's needs and immigration knowledge. The CRM would use data to improve interaction with constituents, retain notes, and improve response time. It is a 'best practice' adapted from NYC311, who is currently using a similar system.
3. *Website*: Our final alternative is a constituent self-service website owned and operated by MOIA. Because 40% of the CS Team's time is dedicated to fielding inquiries, the website would relieve some of their workload for simpler cases, as it would allow constituents to access CS expertise and would lessen the number of calls and emails to the CS team. This option costs $200,000 and involves maintenance by newly assigned content managers from MOIA.

Analysis

	In-house legal counsel (LC)	Website	Training + CRM(T+CRM)
Efficiency	Medium	Low	Medium/High
Time	3months - 1 year	6 months	3-4 weeks
Cost	$56-85k/year	$200,000	$4,500/yr + $6,000 once
Sustainability+Adaptability	Low	Medium	High

Final Recommendation
We recommend the implementation of the Training + CRM alternative. Out of all the alternatives, the T + CRM would increase efficiency the most as the CS team training workshops would increase firsthand legal knowledge over time, and the CRM would increase second hand legal knowledge by storing and providing specific guidance on how to answer inquiries. The implementation time for the T+CRM is the shortest at 3 to 4 weeks. Also, the cost in comparison to the Legal Counsel salary is more affordable at $10,500 the first year and $4,500 thereafter. Despite being more expensive long-term than the website, the T+CRM alternative is more resilient than the two options, as it is the only alternative that would not require changes to the CS team structure or alternative structure if the political climate changes (e.g., increasing volume of complex cases).