



Cooperative State  
Research, Education, and Extension Service

# American Customer Satisfaction Index

USDA Cooperative State Research, Education,  
and Extension Service

Administrators, Business Officers, and Grant  
Applicants/Recipients  
Customer Satisfaction Study

Final Report  
August 2005



## Chapter II

### Executive Summary

Chart 1 below displays the Satisfaction scores for the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Administrators, Business Officers, and Grant Applicants/Recipients. **The 2005 customer satisfaction index (CSI) for the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Administrators segment is 65 on a 0-100 scale. The 2005 customer satisfaction index for the CSREES Business Officers segment is 71; and the 2005 CSI for CSREES Grant Applicants/Recipients is 69.** The 2004 Federal Government ACSI and measurements from other agencies providing similar services are included for benchmarking purposes. While the score for the CSREES Administrators segment is considerably lower than the 2004 national ACSI for the Federal Government, CSREES' performance is comparable to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms NIBIN (National Integrated Ballistics Information Network) participants and considerably higher than NSF Grant Applicants. Additionally, the CSREES Business Officers score is right on par with the Federal Government 2004 performance. CSREES can use these benchmarks to measure their current performance and set future performance objectives.

**Chart 1: Overall Satisfaction Scores for CSREES and the Federal Government**

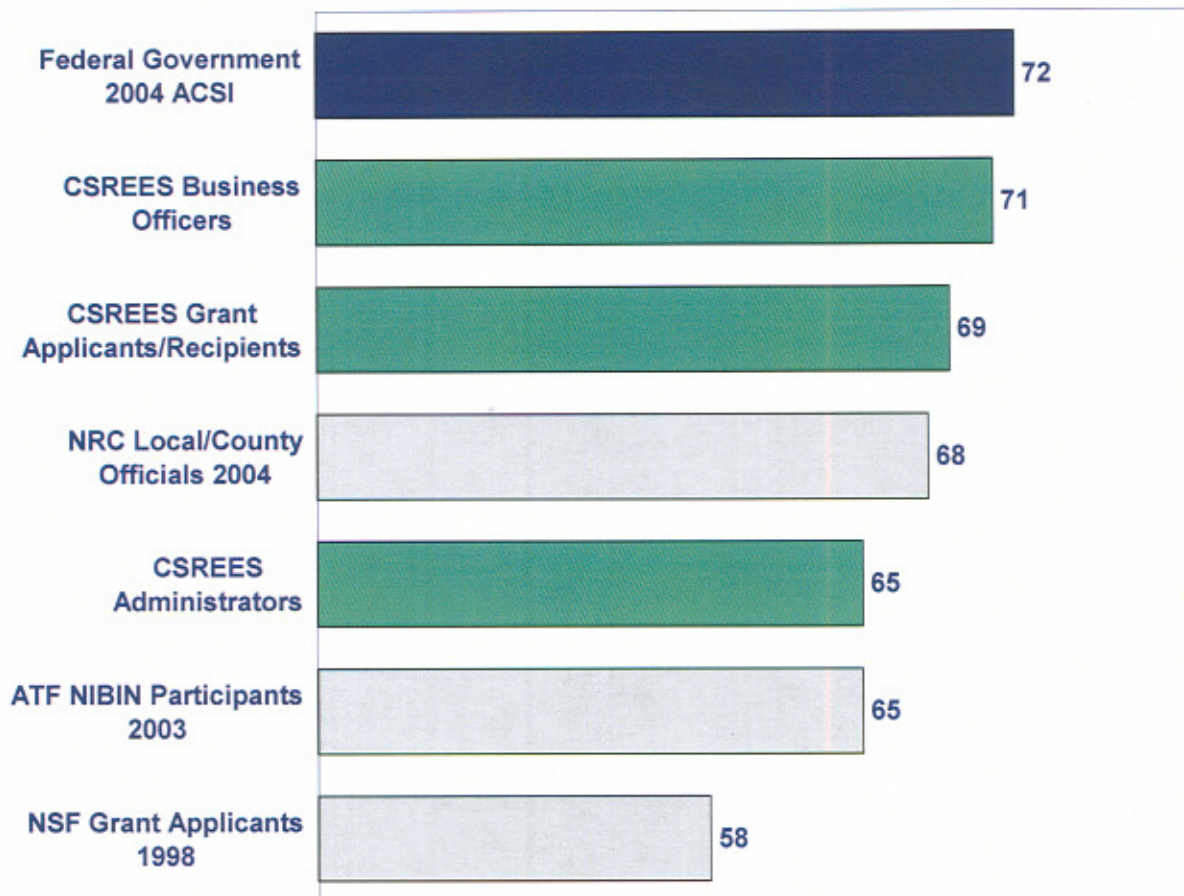
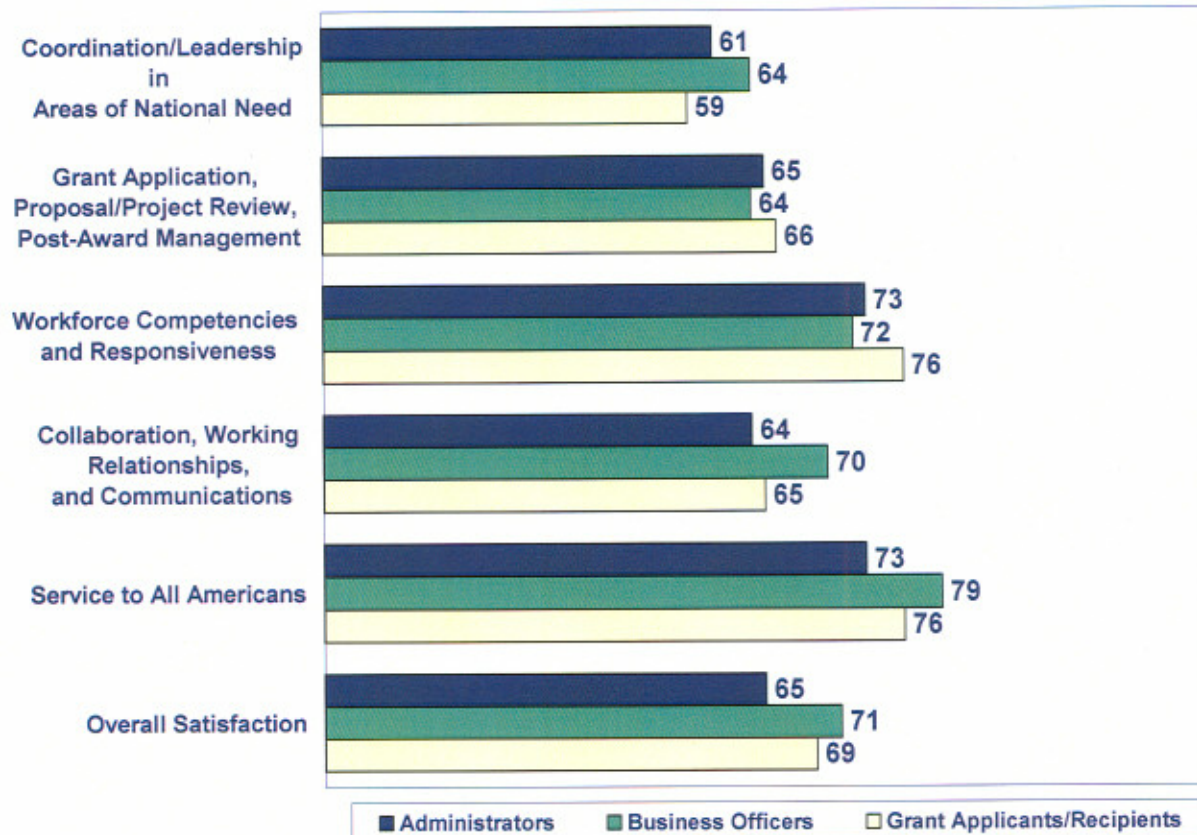


Chart 2 below displays component scores for the three segments defined by CSREES: Administrators, Business Officers and Grant Applicants/Recipients. How to attain improvements in these scores is the subject of the rest of this report.

**Chart 2: Component Scores for CSREES Segments**



## **Recommendations**

CSREES should focus efforts on improving high-priority areas first: Coordination/Leadership in Areas of National Need for all groups surveyed (Administrators, Business Officers and Grant Applicants/Recipients), and Grant Application, Proposal/Project Review Processes and Post-Award Management among Business Officers and Grant Applicants/Recipients. Improvements in these two areas will drive higher levels of satisfaction, and the relatively low scores leave room to improve.

**Coordination and Leadership in Areas of National Need is a top priority** among all groups surveyed. Administrators, particularly, it is THE critical issue for improvement. Both Administrators and Grant Applicants/Recipients want CSREES to do a better job surfacing critical issues that impact policy, assembling experts to address those issues, and providing processes for Administrators and Grant Applicants/Recipients to participate in priority setting. It is important that CSREES review its current mechanisms for these processes, and the communication channels through which these activities are communicated. If internal review suggests that CSREES is adequately performing these tasks, it will be important to institute a communication strategy that lets customers know about CSREES involvement. Business Officers do not perceive that they have adequate opportunity to provide input into Agency implementation of laws, regulations and policies. This is also an opportunity for CSREES to set expectations among this group. Finally, all three groups gave CSREES low marks for keeping them abreast of changes in laws, regulations and policies. The last area surveyed within CSREES' Coordination and Leadership driver was the University Program Reviews. CSREES has a clear, easy process for requesting a review, but the results of the review are not as well perceived. Administrators and Grant Applicants/Recipients do not seem to perceive a benefit – the reviews do not seem to result in increased funding, better organizational unit management or improved coordination with other institutions and Federal Agencies. Again, it is important for CSREES to communicate to Administrators and to Grant Applicants/Recipients what they should expect coming out of a review.

**Grant Application, Proposal/Project Review Processes, and Post-Award Management is also a priority** among Business Officers and Grant Applicants/Recipients. Communication and expectations setting is an issue with the Grant Application, Review and Post-Award Management processes. The Business Officers and Grant Applicants/Recipients have a difficult time finding information about policies and procedures, and about funded projects. They also would like more communication about the status of their application. There is also concern about turnaround time – low scores were given to the time between announcement and deadline to submit proposals and the time to respond to special requests.

**Workforce Competencies and Responsiveness** is a core CSREES strength. The high impacts for this driver indicate that improving Workforce Competencies and Responsiveness would most certainly result in an increase in satisfaction; the relatively higher scores make improvement more difficult and less critical than improvement in lower-scoring areas. Any efforts to improve this area should focus on staffing (adequate numbers to cover high priority fields), and for Business Officers staff availability and staff knowledge of university procedures.

Improvements in the other drivers of satisfaction, **Service to All Americans and Collaboration, Working Relationships and Communications**, will not drive significant increase in overall satisfaction. Resources are better focused in other areas at this time.