SCSEP Guide for Measuring and Improving Customer Satisfaction

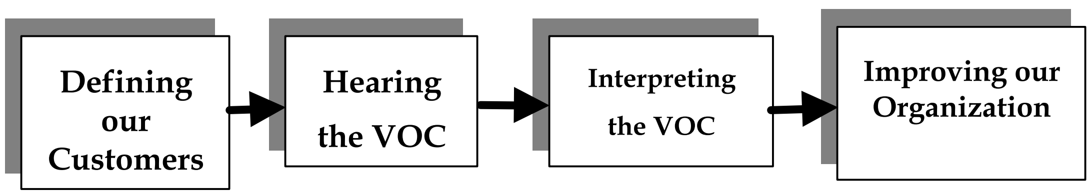
Appendix B to the Voice of the Customer has been designed to be used independently for training, conferences, or individual use. Copies of Appendix B can be obtained on line at wdsc.doleta.gov/seniors (Click Bulletins and Memos, then click Older Worker Technical Assistance Guides.) or contact the Division of Older Worker Programs at 202-693-3842.

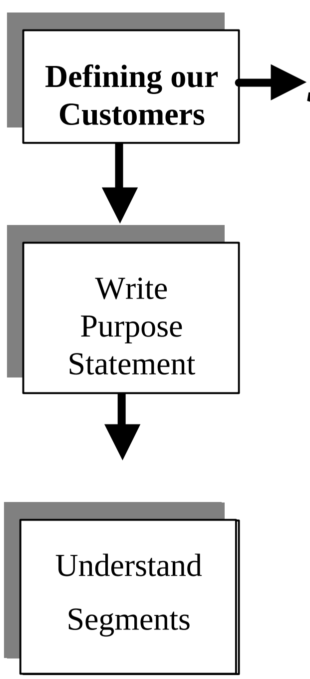
SCSEP Guide for Measuring and Improving Customer Satisfaction

Appendix B

Instructions

This Guide provides SCSEP program operators with tools for hands-on “do-it-yourself” customer-satisfaction research. It shows a roadmap for studying customers, identifying likes and dislikes, exploring specific program components and obtaining a tracking measure of overall satisfaction. The overall process is shown below:





Step 1.0 Defining Our Customers

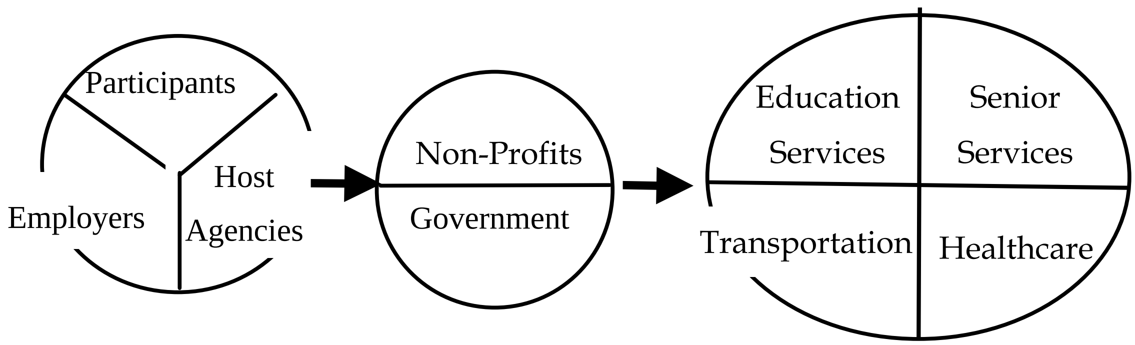
We start by defining our customers.

1.1 Write Purpose Statement

Purpose Statement This statement focuses our attention on why we are doing the study. For example, “The purpose of this study is to identify ways to improve participant satisfaction.” For another study we might write, “The purpose is to learn how to help host agencies solicit donations so they can hire our participants.”

1.2 Understand Segments

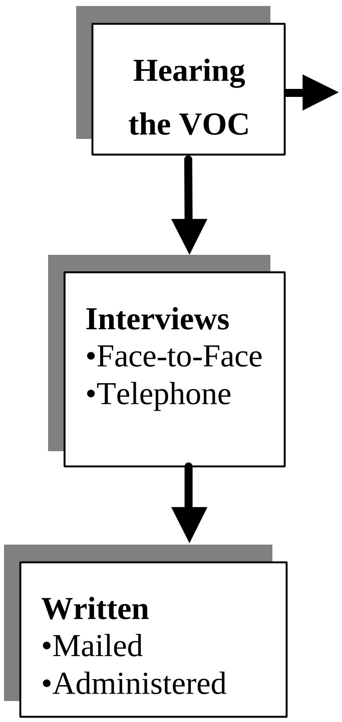
Segmentation Pie Chart Arranging customers into groups is called segmentation. SCSEP programs have three primary segments (participants, host agencies and employers). Segments can then be broken out into sub-segments as shown below.



Customer Segmentation Pie Chart

Host agencies are segmented into non-profits and government. They can also be segmented by the type of service. For a project, we may then focus on a specific segment, such as host agencies that provide healthcare services.

Step 2.0 Hearing the Voice of Our Customer



2.1 Gathering Customer Data.

An easy to use survey is provided for each of three key segments (participants, host agencies and employers). (See three surveys at end of this section.) These surveys can be administered as an interview or in written form.

Interviews are a conversation to obtain information.

- In **face-to-face interviews** we are talking directly to customers. If it is an employer, we are probably at his/her place of business. If it is a participant, we might be interviewing him/her in our office or at the host agency. If the customer is the host agency director, then we are probably at his/her office.
- **Telephone interviews** are the same as the above, except carried out by telephone.

Written questionnaires ask the same questions, but are in written form.

- **Mailed questionnaires** are sent to participants, host agencies or employers along with a self-addressed envelope.
- **Administered questionnaires** are handed out in a classroom or at a worksite. The advantage is that they can be filled in immediately and returned, so that the response rate is higher.

2.2 The Questions We Ask.

In the face-to-face or telephone interviews, we ask key questions and probe for deeper meaning. In the written format, we ask participants to write their "top-of-mind" responses.

Opening: Explain the purpose of the study.

1. General question: Ask a general question to provide an icebreaker and help the customer begin to think about the topic.

2. Likes: The "like question" tells us what is important, what they want and also tells our strengths.

3. Dislikes: The "dislike question" tells us what they don't want, what we are not good at and what we might improve or discontinue.

4. Specific: Based upon our overall purpose, we ask specific questions about our program, such as:

- "Please comment on our IDP process."
- "Please comment on our career counseling."
- "Please comment on our job placement"
- "Please comment on our host agency training "
- "Please comment on our resume preparation assistance."

5. Satisfaction: This is our only quantitative (numeric) question. It asks for overall satisfaction.

6. Anything else: This is a catchall question to see what was missed.

Tips for Writing Questions

- Ask ourselves, "How will we use this information?"
- Write simple questions.
- Avoid theoretical, leading and complex questions.
- Sequence questions in a logical flow. We may first ask, "Have you been on a job interview?" and then ask, "What did you like, if anything, about your first job interview?" If we asked them to comment on a job interview before they have one, the participant would get confused.
- Ask only what we really need to know.
- Pretest the questions with friendly customers.

Tips for Conducting a Customer Interview

- Set an appointment at the customer's convenience.
- Create a friendly, informal atmosphere.
- Use the questions to keep the interview on track.
- Begin with an introduction explaining the purpose.
- Probe meanings. We ask the "why" in different ways until we really understand the customer's thinking. (Why did you like that? Tell me more. Why is that important? Why did that happen? Could you please explain that again? Why do you think that occurred?)
- Don't be defensive. Be open to hearing the good and the bad.
- Pace the interview. Observe body language.
- Tell the customer what the follow-up action will be.
- Summarize the interview and thank the customer.
- Remember in SCSEP we are talking to seniors; some may wear hearing aids and may have trouble hearing us, others may have frail voices and we may have trouble hearing them.

Tips for Taking Notes

- Do not pre-judge customer responses.
- Write customer comments — what people actually say, quote key words, phrases and descriptions.
- Use the interview guide to take notes; if additional writing space is needed and you go to blank-writing paper, remember to relate notes to the appropriate question.

Tips for Mailed Questionnaires and Administered Written Questionnaires

- We can use the same six questions on the survey forms provided, but leave plenty of room for written responses.
- We need to pre-test our questionnaires to make sure our wording is clear and understandable. Remember we won't be there to watch for a confused look or to hear a question.

Note: An administered written questionnaire is when we hand customers the questionnaire and they write their answers in our presence. This has many advantages. First, we can immediately collect the questionnaires, so our response rate will be higher (this gives us data that are more reliable). Also, using an administered questionnaire we are able to immediately address any confusion. Administered questionnaires are a good choice for SCSEP participants and host agencies. (Just hand the questionnaire to the host agency director and ask him or her to place the response in a sealed envelope.)

2.3 Sampling

In conducting research we can select a representative sample to reduce the cost and time involved. Sampling must be random. This means that each person in the population has an equal chance of being chosen. Here are some guidelines for determining sample size.

Number of customers in the segment.	<5	5-19	20-49	50-99	100+
Number of customers for personal interviews.	ALL	5	7	8	9-20
Number of customers for written questionnaires.	ALL	5	10	12	15-25

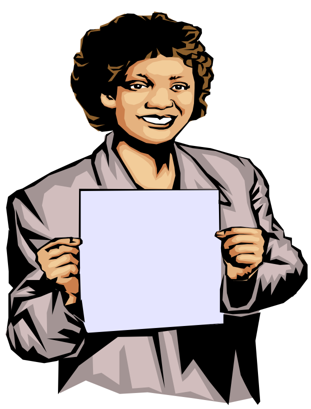
In addition, we must decide how often to conduct a customer survey.

- **Option One: Annual Survey.** This could be conducted each year (or semi-annually).
- **Option Two: Ongoing Tracking.** This is a more frequent survey that can be conducted weekly, monthly or at the end of each class. An easy way to get started is to draw small samples but to do it on a continual basis. Consider a small sample of 10 respondents, 10 host agencies or 10 employers.

Response rate refers to the percentage of people we contact who actually complete their interview/survey. Because the number to interview and survey is generally small, the key is to get responses from each person in the sample.

Fielding the survey involves duplicating and controlling the questionnaires, recruiting respondents, getting correct addresses if a through-the-mail method is used, or obtaining correct telephone numbers if surveying over the phone.

A word of advice: try to find a Title V participant who is experienced or interested in customer research to conduct the interviews. If you do not have someone inside, look for someone on the outside. Ask a local college or a business school for help, often there are students who need to conduct a research project before they can graduate.



Find that person who really wants to do a customer-research project.

Following are three sample interviews. Feel free to modify these to fit your purpose.

- Participant Satisfaction Survey
- Employer Satisfaction Survey
- Host Agency Satisfaction Survey

Participant Satisfaction Survey

Opening: We are working to improve our program operations and would appreciate your honest opinions.	
1. In general, please tell me about your experience with the ________________ program.	
2. What, if anything, did you like about the program?	Please explain.
3. What, if anything, did you dislike about the program?	Please explain.
4. Please comment on the following specific aspects of the program? ______________ ______________ ______________	
5. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the program? Were you: ❑ Very satisfied ❑ Satisfied ❑ Dissatisfied ❑ Very dissatisfied	
6. Is there anything else you could tell us so we can improve this program?	

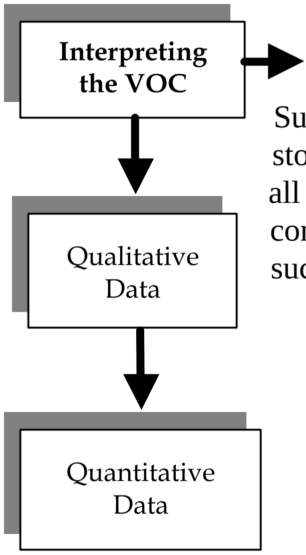
Host Agency Satisfaction Survey

Opening: We are working to improve our program operations and would appreciate your honest opinions.	
1. In general, please tell me about your experience with the ________________ program.	
2. What, if anything, did you like about the program?	Please explain.
3. What, if anything, did you dislike about the program?	Please explain.
4. Please comment on the following specific aspects of the program? ______________ ______________ ______________	
5. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the program? Were you: ❑ Very satisfied ❑ Satisfied ❑ Dissatisfied ❑ Very dissatisfied	
6. Is there anything else you could tell us so we can improve this program?	

Employer Satisfaction Survey

Opening: We are working to improve our program operations and would appreciate your honest opinions.	
1. In general, please tell me about your experience with the ________________ program.	
2. What, if anything, did you like about the program?	Please explain.
3. What, if anything, did you dislike about the program?	Please explain.
4. Please comment on the following specific aspects of the program? ______________ ______________ ______________	
5. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the program? Were you: ❑ Very satisfied ❑ Satisfied ❑ Dissatisfied ❑ Very dissatisfied	
6. Is there anything else you could tell us so we can improve this program?	

Step 3.0 Interpreting the Voice of Our Customer



Step 3.1 Analyzing Word Data

Survey questions #1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 will give us comments, such as: stories, anecdotes, suggestions, and quotes. The first step is to review all of these comments and select key comments for further analysis. Key comments can then be analyzed using a Voice of the Customer Table, such as the one below:

In the first column we write key customer comments. Then we interpret what it means; often the meaning is obvious. Sometimes we must check with customer for clarification. In the third column, we make a judgment. "What does this comment mean to us? How important is it?" Finally, in the fourth column, we describe what action, if any, we might take. The fourth column will feed into our Project Management Worksheet.

Voice of the Customer Table			
What did the customer say? (Key Comments)	**What did the customer mean?**	**What does it mean to our agency?**	**What action, if any, shall we take? (Project Worksheet)**
"We need security guards." (ABC company, HR Manager)	There is a shortage of people willing or qualified to take these jobs.	We could create a program in this area, but frankly, it is not something in which we have expertise.	No Action
"We need a 'sitter' for mentally ill people who are recovering from surgery." (ABC Hospital, Chief of Nursing)	There is a shortage of people willing or qualified to take these jobs.	This unique area is worth exploring because we have many participants in healthcare agencies.	Send job developer to hospital for more information.
"Your paperwork is a burden." (ABC Host Agency, Executive Director)	Something is upsetting about our paperwork.	This is usually not a problem for us; maybe they have some new staff we have to train.	Send monitor to site to investigate and report.

(A blank Voice of the Customer Table is provided.)

Voice of the Customer Table			
What did the customer say? (Key Comments)	**What did the customer mean?**	**What does it mean to our agency?**	**What action, if any, shall we take? (Project Worksheet)**
	.		.
			.

Step 3.2 Analyzing Numeric Data

Question 5 is a quantitative question, often called the "global satisfaction" question. It asks: "Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the program, were you:

- ❑ Very satisfied
- ❑ Satisfied
- ❑ Dissatisfied
- ❑ Very dissatisfied"

If 20 particpants were asked this question, we might obtain the following answers:

❑ Very Satisfied
❑ Satisfied

Top boxes. These are the customers who are satisfied.

❑ Very Dissatisfied
❑ Dissatisfied

Bottom boxes. These are the customers who are not satisfied.

Ratings	Participants	Percents	
Very satisfied	6	30%	80% Top boxes (Satisfied)
Satisfied	10	50%	
Dissatisfied	3	15%	20% Bottom boxes (Dissatisfied)
Very dissatisfied	1	5%	
Total Participants	20	100%	

This shows that 6 participants said they were "very satisfied," 10 were "satisfied," 3 were "dissatisfied" and 1 was very dissatisfied." We next calculate the percentages as follows:

6 of 20 participants were "very satisfied"
6 divided by 20 equals .30
To convert .30 to a percentage multiplying .30 by 100
So .30 times 100 equals 30%

If we add the 30% who were "very satisfied" and the 50% who were "satisfied," we have a total of 80% in our top-boxes. This means that 80% of our customers are generally satisfied with our services.

If we calculate the average for the same 20 participants we get a satisfaction score of 3.05. What does that mean? Isn't it clearer to say, "80% of our customers were satisfied," rather than to say

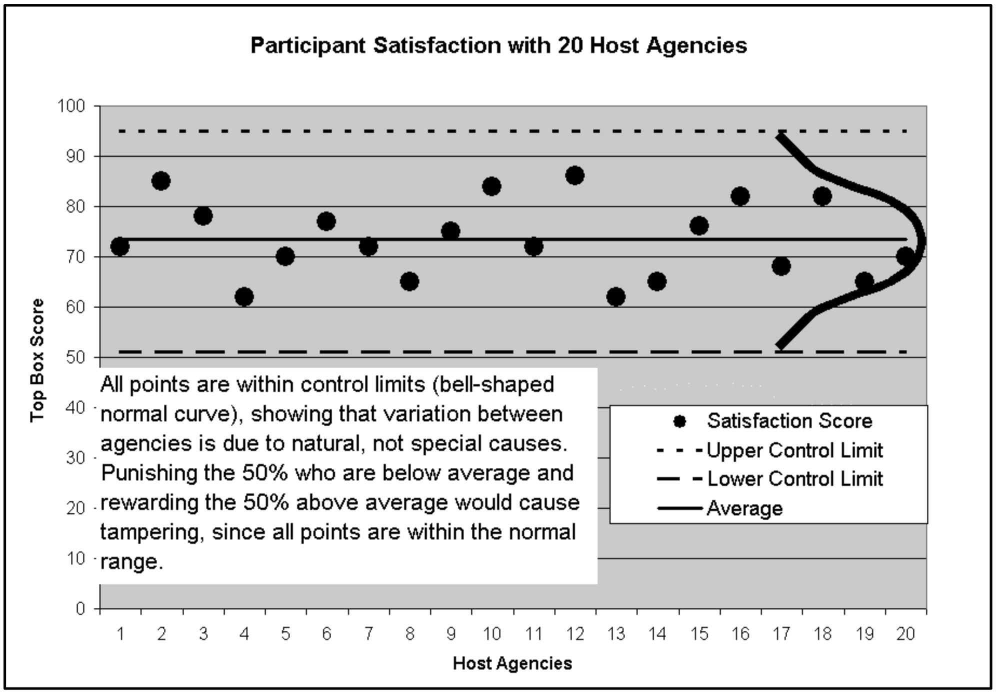
"We have an average satisfaction level of 3.05"? Professional market researchers prefer to use top-boxes rather than averages.

Now that we can determine our top-box scores for customer satisfaction we can plot these scores on graph paper.

If we have a regular training workshop we might give the survey to each participant and then track the scores over several cycles. We then plot the scores on a graph and see if there is a trend, as in the example below:

Tips for Handling Satisfaction Scores

- For SCSEP program operators it is generally expected that most improvements will come from analysis of the key customer comments.
- Although you may be collecting satisfaction scores, this is not mandatory. Satisfaction scores are mainly used for tracking improvements. Be cautious not to over-react to minor changes in the numbers.
- For example, in the chart below there are differences in scores of host agencies, but when statistical tools are applied, we see that the differences are not significant, just natural variation.



When satisfaction scores are stable (as in the chart above), management must be careful not to "tamper." An example of tampering is the declaration that "all programs below average must improve." This causes below average programs to issue polices, reprimands, and re-assignments, often with little benefit. The ones above average receive undeserved rewards and praise. Being above or below average is usually due to random variation, measurement error or luck.

A more scientific approach to quality improvement is to see if any program is way above the average. Study what they do and learn best practices. Then share these best practices system wide.

Step 4.0 Improving Our Organization

Improving our Organization

To make improvements based upon customer data, a simple project management worksheet is recommended that covers:

- **What** do we want to improve?
- **Why** do we want to improve it?
- **Who** will make the improvement?
- **When** will the improvement be made?
- **Where** will the improvement be made?
- **How** will the improvement be made?

For example, in our employer satisfaction survey the Chief of Nursing commented, "We need 'a sitter' for mentally ill people who are recovering from surgery." This was a key comment we wrote on our Voice of the Customer Table. The project management worksheet can then be used as follows:

Project Management Worksheet	
What:	Job placement opportunity for a "sitter" in the recovery room.
Why:	This could be a community service job that could lead to unsubsidized employment.
Who:	Send our job developer to three hospitals.
When:	Let's do this month.
Where:	Visit only the hospitals in our jurisdiction.
How:	Job developer conducts interviews. If we find an interest, then talk to the community college healthcare trainer. Determine possible host agencies. Determine possible private agencies for unsubsidized placement opportunities. Make go, no-go decision.

Many fine tools for improvement exist in the *Service by Design Guidebook*. This is available from the Workforce Excellence Network at www.workforce-excellence.net
Keep in mind that customers may have limited knowledge and experience compared to the knowledge and experience of SCSEP staff. Often the customer does not know what he or she wants. Customers never asked for the electric light bulb, the Xerox machine or the Internet. Some of the greatest innovations come from the subject matter experts. So be creative and keep an open mind to your own ideas and the ideas of others working with the SCEP program.