



## Appendix J, Public Sector Leaders

Several government agencies are focusing significant efforts on strategies for customer satisfaction. The United States Geological Survey (USGS), Veterans Benefits Association (VBA), Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are among those agencies that have made a commitment to world-class customer satisfaction.

### Case Study: United States Geological Survey<sup>1</sup>

The USGS is the science agency within the Department of the Interior. USGS has devised an exemplary customer service strategy that includes a Customer Service Policy augmented by an annual Customer Service Plan. Among the goals USGS hopes to achieve are:

- USGS customers are satisfied with our products, information and services.
- USGS products are delivered to our customers in a timely and accurate manner.
- Customer needs are integrated into USGS program planning and product development.
- Products, services, and information provided by USGS to its customer make this a better world.

To mark progress, USGS publishes an annual customer service report that compares the year's performance against all of the identified goals and targets.

To further demonstrate its commitment to customer satisfaction, in 1997 the USGS created its *Customer Service and Research Team*. This team was charged with defining customer service from a bureau perspective, providing a future vision, identifying pilot projects for customer satisfaction surveys and customer service enhancements, and integrating customer service standards and measures into GPRA and strategic planning documents.

In 1998, USGS piloted the Customer Measurement Framework (CMF) Model to determine how to better capture, analyze, and apply customer data and feedback. The CMF consists of six steps designed to respond to customers:

1. **Identify key customers:** Who are they, and how can they be grouped?
2. **Assess customer requirements:** Qualitative and quantitative requirements obtained through written or telephone surveys, focus groups, and face-to-face discussions.
3. **Produce products/services in response to the customer's requirements:** Document actions taken to respond to customer requirements.
4. **Communicate about products/services:** Track methods used to obtain requirements from customers as well as their feedback on actions taken.
5. **Deliver products/services:** Track how new products/services are delivered to customers.
6. **Evaluate customer satisfaction with products/services:** Follow-up new initiatives with qualitative and quantitative customer research tools.

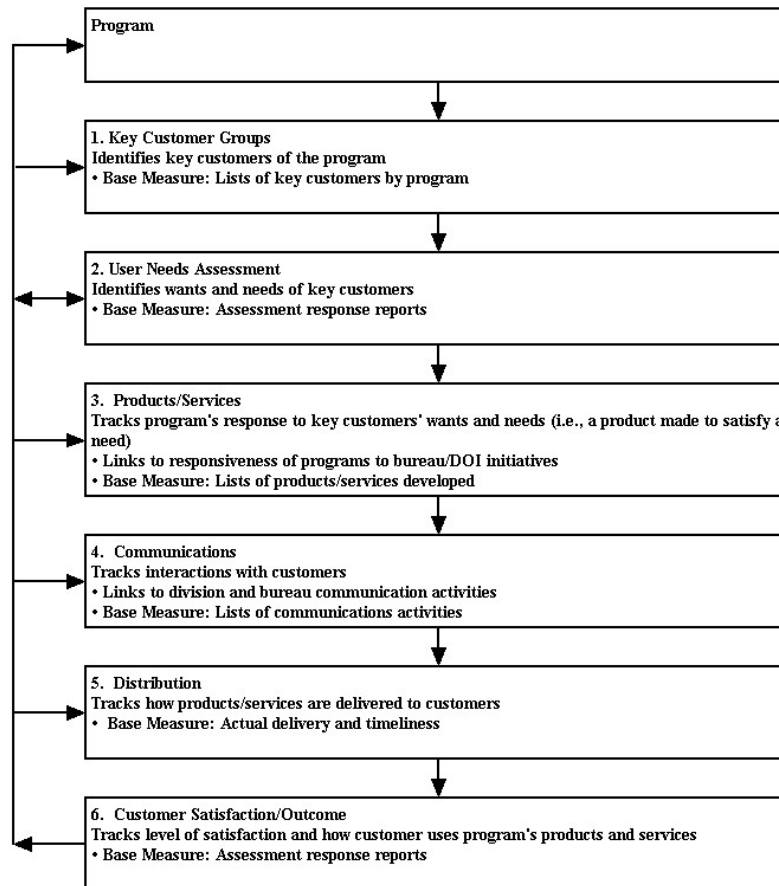
The six steps as well as the associated performance measure for each are depicted in the table below:

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<sup>1</sup> Information in this section taken from USGS customer service web site, <http://www.usgs.gov/customer/>.



## Customer Measurement Framework



In 1999, USGS obtained clearance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to conduct customer surveys over a three-year period. The official OMB approval was for a “Three Year Program of Voluntary Customer Satisfaction Collections in Accordance with Executive Order 12862, ‘Setting Customer Service Standards,’ Within the U.S. Geological Survey.” This clearance allows USGS to conduct written customer surveys and focus group sessions without going through a lengthy approval process for each survey or session.

Other elements of the USGS customer service program have included a customer service recognition award program and the *Going the Extra Mile* award. The former is a means for organizations, teams, and individuals to be recognized as “heroes of customer service.” The award is non-monetary, and there are no limits to the number of nominees or awards given. USGS. The latter is also considered part of the customer service program, but awards employees for performing above and beyond their normal job duties. Award recipients can choose between a \$150 cash bonus and special parking privileges. There are no limits to the number of nominees or awards given.

### Case Study: Veterans Benefits Association

The VBA services 3.2 million veterans and survivors through 57 regional offices, nine service delivery networks, five business lines, and \$25 billion in benefits payments annually. After strong



criticism in the late 1990's, the VBA sought to revolutionize customer service throughout the organization.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in the creation of a leading edge performance management system that uses a balanced scorecard. The scorecard measures performance in five key areas:

- Speed
- Accuracy
- Unit cost
- Customer satisfaction
- Employee development

Executive, management, and non-management employees are eligible for bonuses based on performance levels in each of the scorecard areas. Some organizations within VBA have chosen to use the bonus money to award teams while others recognize individuals. Scorecard results are made available via the VBA intranet to keep all employees informed of agency performance.<sup>3</sup>

Other initiatives making up the VBA program of customer service improvement are described below:

- **Establish customer service standards.** Performance levels were developed in the four service areas of Courtesy and Respect, Communication, Timeliness, and Responsiveness.<sup>4</sup>
- **Conduct customer satisfaction surveys.** VBA participates in the annual American Customer Satisfaction Index survey, and also conducts its own surveys where results are regularly posted on the VBA website.
- **Establish customer complaint processes.** The new processes allow customers to register complaints via the VBA web site. VBA plans to track and analyze complaints so that customer service can be improved in the areas where needed.
- **Improve telephone access.** VBA's toll-free customer service number was improved and expanded. A new system called the National Automated Response System was implemented that included pre-programmed informational messages and better call routing.
- **Improve employee training.** VBA will implement an IT system to track employee skills and training, develop general learning plans, deliver computer-based training, and generate training effectiveness measures. VBA is taking an advanced approach to computer-based training by developing training modules aimed at workgroups rather than individual employees. If one employee fails a module exam, the entire group must retake the course. New employee orientations are also required, and are conducted at VBA's academy in Baltimore, MD. The orientation includes meetings with VBA customers, not just VBA staff or trainers.
- **Provide training to veterans' organizations.** Frequently veteran claims are filed through non-profit organizations. VBA is providing training to these organizations on how to most accurately and effectively file and follow claims through the process.

<sup>2</sup> Ferris, Nancy, "Benefits Balancing Act," *Government Executive Magazine*, March 1, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Osborne, David, "Paying For Results," *Government Executive Magazine*, February 1, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Inspector General, "Evaluation of Veterans Benefits Administration's Implementation of Customer Service Standards," Report No.: 9R1-B18-127, June 30, 1999.



- **Establish a Data Management Office.** The purpose of the office is to improve the quality of VBA data and reporting. In 1998 the Inspector General found VBA was reporting a claims processing time of 128 days, but in actuality it was taking an average of 151 days to process claims. The Data Management Office will help to prevent such calculation and reporting errors.
- **Establish a new case monitoring system.** The new system, the Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR), keeps better track of performance data and helps managers improve accuracy in claims processing.
- **Develop an electronic claims processing system.** The new system (called VetsNet) will automate much of the required paperwork, thus speeding up claims processing. For every veteran client, the VBA currently maintains 400 pages of paper files.

Since the implementation of its change program, the VBA has seen tremendous improvement in customer service. The VBA customer segment surveyed (recipients of death claims benefits) in the 2001 U.S. Federal Government customer satisfaction survey reported a 90% overall satisfaction rating. This is by far one of the highest ratings received by government agencies.

## Case Study: Social Security Administration (SSA)

The Social Security Administration services 45 million Americans who receive Social Security benefits. According to Federal Computer Week, SSA is “planning to become the L.L. Bean of the Internet for senior citizens seeking information and online services...”<sup>5</sup> In the 2001 U.S. Federal Government customer satisfaction survey, SSA’s survivor benefits customers reported an 86% overall satisfaction rating. This is one of the highest ratings received by government agencies.

### Use of Technology

With the use of technology, SSA has made great strides in the area of customer service. While the majority of SSA’s beneficiary population is made up of senior citizens - one of the fastest growing segments of Internet user population - there are still millions who do not use computers at all. For this reason, SSA continues to provide services through traditional delivery channels (such as face-to-face and mail). In addition to these channels, they are making rapid progress in establishing electronic service delivery channels. SSA has piloted and implemented several web-based services that have been very well received. These new interactions include online requests for personal earnings statements and Social Security cards. Additional online services the SSA is preparing to offer include:

- Instant messaging
- Sending requests for medical evidence (related to disability claims)
- Filing medical claims
- Developing individual electronic folders
- Filing initial claims
- Expanding the retirement planner to compute survivor and disability benefits online.

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<sup>5</sup> Hasson, Judi, “An L.L. Bean for senior citizens,” *Federal Computer Week*, July 24, 2000.



Through direct deposit, SSA has made receiving benefit payments easier and less expensive for the Administration. SSA has heavily marketed direct deposit options, and will even set up Electronic Transfer Accounts or debit cards for those who do not have a bank account.

### **Market Measurement Program<sup>6</sup>**

To develop a more coordinated, comprehensive program of collecting and analyzing customer data, in 1998 SSA approved the Market Measurement Program. Through improved data collection and analysis, SSA could better understand their market, which consists of customers, stakeholders, and employees. Components of the program are described below.

- Customers
  - Customer Segment Analysis. Focus groups for each of SSA's 10 core customer groups, followed by detailed surveys.
  - Interaction Tracking. Surveys to monitor customer satisfaction with telephone services (field office and 800 number), office visits, and the Internet. Surveys are conducted shortly after the service is provided.
  - Special Studies. When information on specific issues or new initiatives is needed, special focus groups and surveys are conducted. Between 1998 and 2000, more than 40 focus group projects were completed, involving about 3,000 customers.
  - Comment Cards. Comment cards are paper cards that customers complete immediately following a service, typically provided face-to-face or via telephone.
  - "Talking and Listening to Customers" (TLC) System. This new automated system was developed to capture and analyze customer complaints and compliments.
  - Best Practice Inventories. Internal SSA best practices are captured and posted on SSA's Intranet, allowing employees who work with the public to share with each other successful experiences and practices.

- Stakeholders

SSA considers stakeholders those groups who are interested in, or influence, SSA services. Stakeholders range from employers, advocacy groups, and taxpayers, to unions, management and employee associations, and oversight groups. SSA employs the following methods to obtain feedback from their stakeholders:

- Face-to-face or telephone interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Presentations, discussions, meetings, forums, and "brown bag" lunches.
- Employees

As of 2000, SSA was in the process of evaluating the best way to survey employee satisfaction.

### **Lessons Learned**

Through focus groups, surveys, and other components of the Market Measurement Program, SSA has identified several helpful findings and lessons learned in the area of beneficiary service.

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<sup>6</sup> Hasson, Judy.



These findings are summarized on the SSA website in an article titled “Gathering and Using Customer Information to Improve Service to the Public.” Findings include:

- “Telephone access and field office waiting times seem to have a major influence on how customers perceive satisfaction with all other aspects of service.”
- “Customers are more satisfied if the business they conduct is completed at the initial contact.”
- “...improving notice clarity provides one of the greatest opportunities for us to increase customer satisfaction.”
- “Although access and timeliness are important to customers, the ‘human factor’ is what means the most to customers.”
- “In rating service received in SSA field offices, customers are least satisfied with privacy and the amount of time they waited to be served.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Case Study: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

EPA’s Customer Service Program (CSP) is guided by EPA’s Six Principles of Customer Service. These principles are to be used by EPA employees when interacting with external and internal customers.

1. Be helpful! Listen to your customers.
2. Respond to all phone calls by the end of the following business day.
3. Respond to all correspondence within ten business days.
4. Make clear, timely, accurate information accessible.
5. Work collaboratively with partners to improve all products and services.
6. Involve customers and use their ideas and input.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, EPA has identified eight core processes through which most Agency products and services are delivered to external customers. For each process area, specific service standards have been set which must be met in addition to the Six Principles of Customer Service. The eight core processes and corresponding standards are the following:

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<sup>7</sup> Social Security, “Gathering and Using Customer Information to Improve Service to the Public,” Found at <http://ftp.ssa.gov/reports/customer>.

<sup>8</sup> Taken from “Customer Service Standards of The United States Environmental Protection Agency,” <http://www.epa.gov/customerservice/standards.htm>.



## EPA Core Processes and Performance Standards<sup>9</sup>

Core Process Area	Standards
Public Access (requests from the public for general information)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “We will strive to make information available through a variety of channels, including electronic media and intermediaries, such as, community organizations and local libraries.</li> <li>2. We will hold ourselves accountable for a satisfactory response by providing mechanisms (contact names and telephone numbers or e-mail addresses) for reporting back on the quality of our responses and referrals.</li> <li>3. When customers write to us (via mail, fax or computer): We will mail a response within ten business days of receipt. If we need more time to research the answer, we will contact you within those ten days to tell you when to expect our response and who the contact person is.</li> <li>4. When customer telephones us, we will: Provide an Agency-wide public information telephone line, which will help route inquiries. Answer the call promptly and courteously. Make every attempt to answer questions immediately. Where that is not possible, we will provide a timetable for responding during the initial conversation.</li> <li>5. When customers contact us via computer: We will provide a single address for connection to all EPA resources on the Internet [<a href="http://www.epa.gov">http://www.epa.gov</a>]. We will provide descriptions, including source and known quality, of data made available electronically.”</li> </ol>
Research Grants	Four standards exist around the following areas: issuing requests for proposals, acknowledging receipt of proposals, administrative and legal reviews, and processing amendments.
Permitting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “We will prepare permits that are clear, fair, appropriate, enforceable, and effective.</li> <li>2. Our staff will be knowledgeable, responsive, cooperative, and available.</li> <li>3. We will work with representatives of permitting authorities to continually improve permitting processes and services.</li> <li>4. We will make our permit decisions within the time frame that is established for the type of permit being requested.”</li> </ol>
Pesticides Regulation	Eight standards exist around the following areas: answering telephone calls (within 24 hours); answering correspondence (within 10 days); involving stakeholders in decision-making; disseminating information; processing applications; providing information on pesticides; involving States, Tribes, and EPA Regions in decision-making; surveying customers.
Partnership Programs	Eight standards exist around the following areas: treatment of customers; providing information; listening to customers; referring inquiries; responding to inquiries; providing alternate information channels; streamlining customer reporting requirements.
State, Tribal, and Local Program Grants	Four standards exist in the following areas: reducing paperwork; acknowledging receipt; awarding grants; consulting stakeholders.
Enforcement Inspections and Compliance Assistance	Seven standards exist in the following areas: assistance from field representatives; field representative knowledge; compliance inspector visits; compliance inspector knowledge; development of tools; involvement of stakeholders; information channels; compliance assistance centers; enforcement actions.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from “Customer Service Standards of The United States Environmental Protection Agency,” <http://www.epa.gov/customerservice/standards.htm>.





Core Process Area	Standards
Rulemaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “We will ensure that customers have input into the rule development process by conducting public forums, or using electronic media or other forms of communication.</li> <li>2. We will write Principles so they can be understood by the people who use and implement them. Principles will be tailored to the legal and technical knowledge and resources available to those affected.</li> <li>3. We will include, in the preamble of all Federal Register notices accompanying a proposed or final rule, a plain English explanation summarizing the problem the rule is trying to solve, a summary of what the rule requires, and a short explanation of how the rule solves the problem.</li> <li>4. We will work to ensure that all members of the regulated community know what is expected of them. To the extent possible, we will work with trade association, the press and others to notify all known parties who must comply with the rule through written or electronic media.”</li> </ol>

For each process area, EPA established process groups to develop and test the standards described above. The process groups were also responsible for implementing the standards throughout EPA.

Other elements of EPA’s Customer Service Program include:

- A Customer Service Steering Committee consisting of 26 members across EPA’s regions, offices, and other locations. The Committee sets policy for the Customer Service Program.
- Customer service Coordinators and teams designated in most regions to implement standards and conduct training in their region.
- An OMB clearance to conduct customer surveys and focus groups is in place (officially called a "generic" Customer Satisfaction Information Collection Request). This expedites clearance of specific surveys or focus group sessions to 10-15 days. The plan for 1998-2000 included over 900 surveys and 150 survey instruments.
- Five benchmarking studies have been conducted to identify best practices in the area of organizational change.
- An introductory customer service course titled, “Forging the Links” has been developed and implemented. Follow-up courses have also been developed.
- Complaint systems across the Agency are being studied to identify best practices for managing customer complaints.
- An employee rewards and recognition program is being developed specifically for the Customer Service Program.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Customer service program elements taken from “EPA’s Customer Service Program,” <http://www.epa.gov/customerservice/csprogr.htm>.