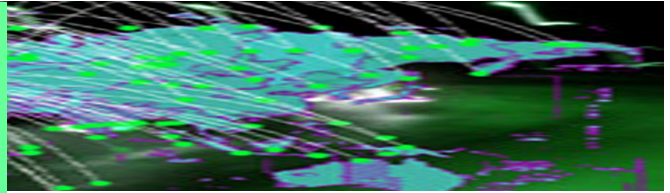


# CITIZEN-CENTERED SERVICE



Citizen-centered service is an important aspect of effective government action, and recent research shows a positive relationship between improved citizen satisfaction with service delivery and citizens' trust and confidence in government.

## What is Citizen-Centered Service?

Service that is citizen centered takes account of citizens' needs and concerns at every stage of the design and delivery of government services. South Africa's Batho Pele (Citizens First) principles provide an excellent policy framework and implementation strategy for citizen-centered delivery. These principles are:

- *Consultation:* Citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice about the services they are offered.
- *Service standards:* Citizens should be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they know what to expect.
- *Access:* All citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.
- *Courtesy:* Citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration.
- *Information:* Citizens should be given full, accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive.
- *Openness and transparency:* Citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge.
- *Redress:* If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy; and, when complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic positive response.
- *Value for money.* Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best possibly value for money.

## Citizens and Customers

The current focus on citizen-centered service has been influenced by the New Public Management (NPM) movement, according to which public organizations should follow the example of business firms by seeking high-quality service to "customers." While many governments use the term "customers" to highlight their dedication to good service, it is important to remember that the role of customer is only one of the several roles that "citizens" play. Citizens can also be clients, claimants, compliers, and captives. Government leaders need to keep in mind that these various roles must be reconciled in the public interest. For example, while customers of government may want lower admission fees to public parks, other citizens may want better social services or lower taxes.



## Pursuing Citizen-Centers Service

The implementation of two important concepts helps to promote citizen-centered service. The *no-wrong-door* concept means that no matter what point of service citizens contact (e.g. a government website, a government telephone number), they should be able to get the assistance they need. The idea here is that citizens should not have to think about which department or even which government provides the service they are seeking. The necessary coordination and integration should be provided by the government(s) involved.

A second and related concept is that of a *single window* (or integrated service delivery). This involves bringing government services together so that citizens can access them in a single seamless process where the focus is on citizens' needs and wants. Many governments are improving service by providing citizens with information through each of the main service-delivery channels — the Internet, the telephone and in-person service. A smaller number of governments have moved toward the integration and rationalization of these channels to foster efficient and effective service.

Providing successful *integrated service delivery* across government boundaries and between governments and private sector service providers requires the creation and implementation of collaborative arrangements, especially formal partnerships.

### Measuring Citizen Satisfaction

A number of countries use diagnostic tools to determine citizens' satisfaction with service-delivery performance. The benefits of citizen satisfaction surveys can be substantial. A survey in South Africa, for example, identified the gap between citizens' expectations for the delivery of particular services and their perception of the quality of the actual delivery of those services. And a survey in Canada found that citizens perceive the quality of service delivery for many government services as higher than that for many private sector services. Canada established a non-profit organization called the Institute for Citizen-Centered Service to promote citizen-centered service across delivery channels and throughout the public sector, to undertake research on citizen satisfaction, and to provide a benchmarking service for public organizations.

### Drivers of Citizen Satisfaction

An especially notable benefit of research on citizen satisfaction with service delivery is the identification of the major forces driving that satisfaction. Research in Canada identified the primary drivers, in order of importance, as *timeliness, competence, 'going the extra mile,' fairness, and outcome*. Research in the United Kingdom identified similar driving forces, namely (in order of priority),

- delivery of promised outcomes and the effective handling of problems;
- timeliness of service provision;
- accurate and comprehensive information, and the provision of progress reports;
- professionalism and competence of staff and the fair treatment of customers, and
- staff attitudes — friendly, polite and sympathetic to customers' needs.

Government leaders should note that improvement in a government's performance on virtually all of these drivers is within the control of public managers.

### Readings

See the Leadership for Results info-Notes, "Public-Private Partnerships" and "Single Windows and Integrated Service Delivery."

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