



Service Excellence Initiative

598 Management Report
Kirsten McCaig
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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Government Agent offices offer BC citizens a “one-stop shop” to government services. Staff have a strong service culture and are trained to deliver hundreds of services/programs such as driver licenses, MSP, property tax collection etc., on behalf of provincial ministries and agencies. Throughout its history, the Government Agents’ Branch has demonstrated a strong commitment to providing exceptional customer services in communities across BC. In its last customer satisfaction survey, March 2001, 94 percent of customers were satisfied/highly satisfied with Government Agents services.

Despite its high satisfaction rating and commitment to customer service, the Branch did not have a process for identifying customer service priorities nor a framework for addressing them. The Branch also lacked a common set of service standards for their staff located in 58 offices dispersed throughout the province. These two factors resulted in an ad hoc approach to improving customer service and potentially inconsistent levels of customer service in Government Agent (GA) offices. Continuing its traditional focus on citizen centred services, the Branch decided it was ready to develop a strategy for continuous service improvement and launched the Service Excellence Initiative (SEI) in May 2001.

The overall goal of the SEI is to improve customer satisfaction with Government Agent services. It achieves its goal through two means. First, it establishes a cycle of continuous service improvement whereby customer service priorities are identified and placed in a Service Improvement Plan. Once in the plan, activities are designed to address/resolve

service issues and measures are established to determine if the plan is achieving its desired results. Results are measured annually and as new customer priorities emerge they are placed in the plan and the cycle begins again. The second component of the SEI is to establish service standards for the organization ensuring that they are challenging yet achievable and are customized to the Branch's business environment.

Service Improvement Plan

The first priority for the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was to identify external (customer) and internal (employee) service improvement priorities. As the Branch had just completed a customer satisfaction survey in March 2001, the results were used to identify customer service priorities. The next step was to design and implement an employee service delivery survey to ascertain the internal barriers employees faced when trying to provide excellent customer service. Results from this survey were used to identify internal priorities that once addressed would improve customer service. Through this process eight service priorities were identified and brought to the Branch Management Team.

The Management Team reviewed and discussed the service improvement priorities (external and internal) and then ranked them according to organizational priority. In order to focus resources on the most critical issues, only the top five priorities were taken and placed in the SIP. The following is a list of the five service improvement priorities.

Ranking	Service Improvement Plan Priorities
1	Develop and implement a staff training program. Programs will focus on increasing staff skill and knowledge in providing specific client services and working within their computer applications. Additional courses such as dispute resolution (and customer service) will be developed as needed and within budget constraints. Government Agents leadership will be addressed through training as well.
2	Introduce Service Standards and apply strategies to ensure their adoption throughout the organization.
3	Address staffing and workload issues.
4	Introduce new “business” office hours that are conducive to customer needs and expectations.
5	Strengthen/invigorate/energize the Government Agents Awards/Recognition program. Include awards for exceptional customer service. Introduce criteria for awards.

Once placed in the SIP, activities were developed for each priority. Activities were assigned timeframes and staff members responsible for their completion. Intended results and measures for the activities under each priority were identified. Assigning measures and intended results will help the Government Agents Branch determine whether or not the SIP has achieved its goals. The complete Government Agents Branch Service Improvement Plan can be found in **Appendix J**.

Service Standards

A seven-step consultation process was undertaken to develop the 29 service standards for the Branch. The service standards were discussed/refined via the following groups:

- 1) Branch HQ management,
- 2) Service Excellence Steering Committee,
- 3) Government Agents (managers) Conference,
- 4) a six-month pilot in four Government Agent offices,
- 5) a focus group of Customer Service Representatives,
- 6) managers participating in the pilot and
- 7) the Management Team who, upon review, adopted the service standards.

This process was undertaken to ensure that the standards were challenging yet attainable for Branch staff as well as customized/applicable to the everyday business environment of Government Agent offices located across the province.

The service standards cover nine areas from general customer service values to specific standards with targets and turnaround times. For example, “we strive to answer the phone promptly”, staff answer the phone before the fourth ring 80% of the time. To see a complete list of the Government Agent Branch Service Standards, please refer to **Appendix H**.

Recommendations for the Future

1) Annual renewal of the Service Improvement Plan and the Service Standards

In order to achieve continuous service improvement, the Branch must be committed to renewing its Service Improvement Plan. Customer service priorities and barriers to employee service excellence will continue to change, even as improvements are made. The annual renewal of the SIP will help the Branch identify new service priorities and be proactive in addressing them.

2) Mystery Shopper Program

It is recommended that the Branch initiate a Mystery Shopper program. A mystery Shopper Program is the only direct measure available to determine if the service standards have been adopted across the organization. Once in place, the program will

provide benchmarks against which the standards can be measured in the future to ascertain if the Branch has made progress in the implementation/adoption of the service standards. It will also identify those standards, particularly turnaround times/waiting times, which may not be achievable.

3) Continue to Strengthen the Branch Service Culture

Develop a communication plan that fosters/strengthens the service excellence culture within the organization. A staff communication plan would continue to deliver the message of service excellence to the organization. Communications such as quarterly newsletters or the latest research on service quality could be posted on the Branch's Intranet site. The plan could allow for activities or events such as service quality expert presentations via teleconference, which staff could participate in from the field. There are a myriad of different activities that could be explored and included in a communication plan. While the plan does not have to be comprehensive, it would serve as the basic guide for the Branch to continue to communicate service excellence to the organization, thereby strengthening its service culture.

4) Renewing Client Ministry Service Level Agreements

As part of the Service Excellence Initiative, the Branch needs to communicate its commitment to service excellence to its client ministries. Communication should focus on the Service Excellence Initiative objectives and service standards. The standards can be used as a platform to begin discussions on how client ministry services/programs need to change to meet Branch customer service goals. Later, client consultation can focus on

developing service standards/expectations between the Branch and client ministries leading to new service level agreements between the parties.

Final Thoughts

Overall the Service Excellence Initiative and the Service Improvement Plan should result in increased customer satisfaction; however, the last Government Agent customer satisfaction survey indicated that 94 percent of the Branch's customers were satisfied with services received. As 100 percent customer satisfaction is probably not realistic, it leaves a small margin, approximately 5 percent, for improvement over the next few years.

While the Branch should see an improvement in overall customer service, there is not much opportunity for dramatic results. The Branch may choose instead, to place more emphasis on results from their employee survey as an alternative method of assessing customer satisfaction. This is based on the idea that if the Branch is removing internal barriers to customer service delivery as well as addressing employee issues/concerns i.e. training, staffing, leadership, it will lead to increased customer satisfaction.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

A Service Excellence Initiative (SEI) is a strategy for continuous service improvement within an organization. The overall goal of the initiative is to increase customer satisfaction and to ensure that the organization remains focused on providing citizen-centred services. The purpose of this project is to establish a working SEI for the Government Agents Branch (the Branch). Once created, it will initiate a cycle of continuous service improvement within the organization leading to increased customer satisfaction.

Achieving a successful SEI takes time and involves a number of steps. This paper identifies and outlines these steps from initial research to implementation of best practices to recommendations for the future. The following paragraphs describe the purpose of each section showing how the steps, together, achieve the projects end deliverables. These deliverable include 1) a review of the range of initiatives being undertaken in various public sector organizations and identifying best practices in public sector service quality initiatives; 2) a framework for a SEI appropriate to the needs and resources of the Branch; 3) complete detailed customer service standards for the Branch; 4) a completed Service Improvement Plan; and 5) recommended next steps for the SEI.

The paper first begins by describing the function and activities of the Branch in section three, The Government Agents Branch. In this section the reader is informed about the

types of services the Branch provides to the public and its motivations for initiating the SEI.

Section four, *Serving the Public*, explores how delivering customer service is different in the public sector versus the private sector. It also discusses the difficult balance governments must strike between providing excellent customer service and services that are fair to all its citizens. As the section continues, it provides reasons why managers in the public sector should be focused on improving customer service including the public demand for quality service, the changing political nature in Canada and the link between high service quality and increased confidence in Government. Once compelling reasons for why governments should be focused on service quality are provided, the paper moves on to examine service improvement policy and initiatives in jurisdictions across Canada.

Section five, *The Canadian Approach to Service Improvement – A Best Practices Review*, discusses the Treasury Board's *A Policy Framework for Service Improvement in the Government of Canada*. This policy provides an overall framework for a results-based continuous service improvement model as well as the guiding principles used in the federal Service Improvement Initiative. As section five progresses, it examines surveys (customer, employee and mystery shoppers) and how they are used to identify service improvement priorities and internal service barriers. Lastly, this section looks at the steps/principles an organization needs to undertake to create service standards and a service improvement plan.

Section five, The Canadian Approach to Service Improvement – A Best Practices Review, provides an overall road map for organizations considering implementing a service excellence initiative. However, before launching a service improvement initiative in the Branch, it was necessary to assess what work, i.e. customer surveys, the Branch already had underway that could be leveraged as the foundation for an SEI. This assessment is found in section six, Branch Assessment Prior to SEI Initiation. In this section, it was determined that the Branch had a firm awareness of their customers and services, was customer focused, had an established customer feedback strategy, namely Customer Satisfaction surveys.

Once the SEI elements the Branch already possessed were ascertained, it was necessary to identify the missing elements and design instruments needed to complete the foundation of the SEI, specifically a Service Improvement Plan and the development of service standards. This work was completed in section seven, Methodology.

In section seven, Methodology, it was determined that in order to complete a Service Improvement Plan the Branch would need to undertake a Employee Service Delivery Survey. An employee survey would identify internal barriers to service improvement and its results would be used, in conjunction with the results of the Customer Survey, to identify service improvement priorities for the organization. The need for an internal consultation process to develop service standards for the Branch was also identified. The consultation process was designed to create customized Branch service standards

applicable to staffs' daily working environments at the same time ensuring the standards are challenging yet attainable.

Section eight, Results and Discussions, examines the findings of the Employee Service Delivery Survey and the service standards consultation process. These results led to the creation of the Service Improvement Plan and the service standards in sections nine and ten respectively.

The final section of the paper, section eleven, The SEI and Looking Towards the Future, provides recommendations to assist the Branch strengthen and maintain the SEI over the coming years. These include renewing the Service Improvement Plan and service standards annually; investing in a Mystery Shopper program; continuing to strengthen the service culture within the Government Agents Branch; and focusing on client ministry services and renewing Service Level Agreements.

3.0 THE GOVERNMENT AGENTS BRANCH

The Government Agents in British Columbia have had a long history of service delivery to rural communities across the province. Originally created as gold commissioners and voter registrars in 1858, Government Agents have evolved into “key agents linking British Columbians to government services and information”¹ across the province.

Currently, the Government Agents Branch (the Branch) is a department within the Ministry of Management Services. The Branch does not have its own services/programs; rather it delivers services/programs on behalf of client ministries in rural communities. These services include providing information on ministry services/programs; completing monetary transactions (e.g. property taxes, BC Hydro payments); and accessing services such as permits, driver testing, and licensing. To see a complete range of services provided by Government Agents, please refer to **Appendix A**.

There are 58 Government Agents offices located across the province in rural communities ranging in population from 500 – 70,000. Office size ranges from small, 1-person offices, to large, 15-person offices. Customer Service Representatives work at front counters and provide services to customers. Offices are managed by a Government Agent. Currently, Government Agents offices are only located in rural communities and are divided into five regions. A Manager of Government Agents administers each region.

¹ Government Agents of British Columbia, Performance Plan 2001/2003 page 1.

Every week the Government Agents Branch Management Team meets via teleconference call to discuss and resolve issues that affect the Branch regionally and corporately. It is also used as a forum to discuss new ideas or directions for the Branch. The Management Team is chaired by the Branch Director, and participants include the five Managers of Government Agents and four managers from headquarters in Victoria, British Columbia.

As a service delivery organization, the Branch's vision is "to be the first and best choice for one stop access to public services and information in BC". To this end they have conducted customer satisfaction surveys to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with their services. To date the Branch has received very high customer satisfaction ratings. The last customer survey in March 2001 indicated 94 percent customer satisfaction with Government Agents Branch services.

While the Branch had conducted a number of customer satisfaction surveys since the late 1990s, they had not developed a formal process by which to act on the results of the surveys and improve customer service. This motivated the creation of the Service Excellence Initiative (SEI). The goal of the SEI is to develop service standards as well as create a framework to identify customer service improvement priorities and dedicate actions to deal with them.

The need for the SEI in the Branch was further solidified by the election of the new government in May 2001. The New Era Commitment to enhance service delivery in British Columbia has increased focus on customer service. This policy change required

that the Government Agents Branch present more evidence on how they provide excellent customer service and meet this New Era Commitment.

4.0 SERVING THE PUBLIC

Picture a group of people standing together, perhaps at the water cooler, over Christmas dinner, or at a number of other locations, discussing government and the services they provide. Often the prevailing comment at such

“The key challenge for public servants is to balance the potentially conflicting goals of client service satisfaction with the protection of the interests of all Canadians.”²

gatherings is how government needs to operate more like a business and less like a bureaucratic organization. In these instances running government “more like a business” seems to translate to efficient, effective, and convenient services that are provided at the lowest possible cost. However, in the public sector, serving citizens is not like cooking up a Big Mac in less than three minutes at a discounted price. In the public sector the government must strike a balance between providing excellent customer service and delivering processes that are fair to all its citizens.²

It is for this reason that “providing high quality service is more complex in the public sector than the private sector”.³ Management expert Tom Peters summed up the conflict best when he noted that “when he wants a building permit to build on his own property he wants fast service from city hall; but when his neighbour wants to build, he wants slow careful ‘due process’ that takes the impact of his own property interests into account”.⁴ From this example we can see how the public servant has a dual role to play. First, they must work to “maximize the applicant’s service satisfaction” by providing

² Kernaghan, K., Marson, B., & Borins, S. (2000). *The new public organization*. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada. Page 124.

³ Canadian Centre for Management Development. (1999). *Citizen-Centred Service: Responding to the Needs of Canadians*. Ottawa, Canada: Author. Page 2.

⁴ Ibid page 2.

quick and efficient services that allow the applicant to build the new addition as soon as possible. However, at the same time, the public servant must protect “the interests of all citizens by ensuring that eligibility and procedural” requirements of the applicant are met and not infringing on the rights of others.⁵ This scenario illustrates how “public service delivery takes place in an environment of competing interests that have to balance, and, in a democratic society, delivery processes must be fair to all concerned.”⁶

The second challenge the public sector faces in the delivery of services is that these services “differ in fundamental ways from the simple market delivery of goods and services in the private sector”.⁷ Private sector characteristics such as competition among suppliers; the exchange of money for a good or service; the determination of price by market demand; and quality service which creates and retains a greater customer base either do not exist in the public sector or are rarely found due to the nature of government services.⁸ Instead of selling specific goods or services, the public sector “is engaged in policy and legislation development, in regulation, and in the provision of tax-funded services”.⁹ In addition, the customer – otherwise known as the taxpayer – does not have a choice in or knowledge of where their tax dollars are spent to purchase services that may or may not directly benefit them (i.e. infrastructure). It is for this reason that customers often find it difficult to gain a sense of what they are purchasing and its value. Public

⁵ Ibid page 2.

⁶ Kernaghan, K., Marson, B., & Borins, S. (2000). *The new public organization*. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada. Page 124.

⁷ Ibid page 126.

⁸ Ibid page 124.

⁹ Ibid page 124.

servants need to be aware of this complex environment in which they are providing services.

4.1 WHY GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE FOCUSED ON IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE

The authors of the *New Public Organization* note that the demand for improved customer services from Canadian governments are highly influenced by two elements: the public demand for quality service, and the changing political nature in Canada over the past decade¹⁰. More recently, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) has linked high service quality with increased confidence in government.¹¹ These three factors combined provide a persuasive argument for governments, at all levels, to be focused on improving/providing excellent customer service.

Demand for Quality Service

“Canadians want governments to provide more services of a quality higher than in the past”.¹² This demand for more and better services combined with decreasing budgets and resources “will severely strain public servants’ personal and organizational resources”.¹³ However, it is also recognized that “improved service delivery seems most likely to improve the public’s perception of, and confidence in, government”.¹⁴ With this recognition, service has emerged “as perhaps the most high-profile public-service value”

¹⁰ Ibid page 6-7.

¹¹ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Citizens First 3*. Toronto: Author Page 15.

¹² Kernaghan, K., Marson, B., & Borins, S. (2000). *The new public organization*. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada. Page 7.

¹³ Ibid page 7.

¹⁴ Ibid page 7.

which has and will continue to have “an enormous impact on the structures and management of the public service”.¹⁵

Citizens *expect* government services to be as good as, if not better than, what they can get from the private sector.
– *Citizens First 3*

An illustration of the public demand for quality services can be found in a recent survey, *Citizens First 3*, conducted by the Institute of Public Administration of

Canada. Results found that 54 percent of citizens surveyed agreed with the statement “governments have a more difficult task than the private sector – they must protect the public interest as well as meet the needs of Citizens”.¹⁶ However, despite the acknowledgment that government has a more difficult task than the private sector, 97 percent of respondents “still expect service that is as good as or better than that provided by the private sector”.¹⁷ This presents a challenge that public servants “can meet by working to close the gap between the service the public expects from government on the one hand, and their satisfaction with the services they receive on the other”.¹⁸

Changing Political Culture

As mentioned previously, the public demand for quality service has also been facilitated by a change in the Canadian political culture over the last decade. During this time the “political culture has become a much more participative one. Canadians not only want government to provide more and better services with fewer resources, but also to consult

¹⁵ Ibid page 7.

¹⁶ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Citizens First 3*. Toronto: Author. page 15

¹⁷ Canadian Centre for Management Development. (1999). *Citizen-Centred Service: Responding to the Needs of Canadians*. Ottawa, Canada: Author. Page 3

¹⁸ Ibid Page 3

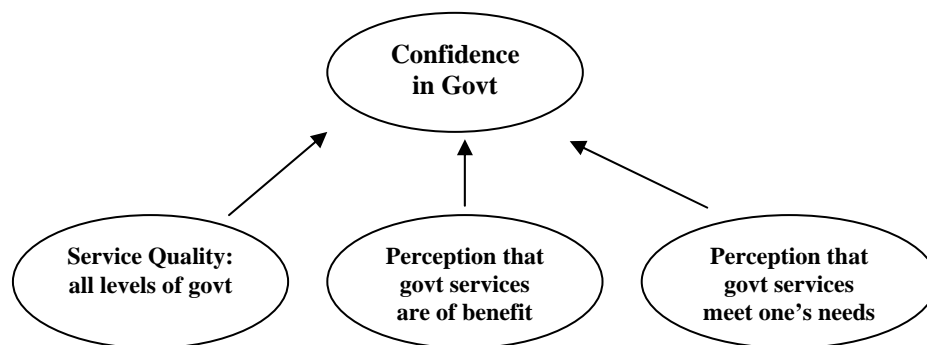
widely on policy development on what services should be provided and how”.¹⁹ This new culture motivated the federal government to begin researching and developing new processes that could achieve increased public participation and satisfaction with services rendered by government.

Section 5: The Canadian Approach to Service Improvement – A Best Practices Review

looks at service improvement initiatives, which began to emerge from federal and provincial governments in the early 1990s. It serves as the road map that guided the development of the Government Agents Branch Service Excellence Initiative.

Confidence in Government

The long hypothesized link between customer service and a citizens’ confidence in government was recently put to the test in Citizens First 3. Using the following model, IPAC sought to determine if there was a link between customer service and citizens’ confidence.²⁰



¹⁹ Kernaghan, K., Marson, B., & Borins, S. (2000). *The new public organization*. Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada. Page 7.

²⁰ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Citizens First 3*. Toronto: Author. Page 7.

Results found that “there is a strong quantitative relationship between government services and confidence in governments. In fact ... services broadly defined, account for 67 percent of the variance in citizens’ overall ratings of government”.²¹

With the link between government services and confidence in government now substantiated, it provides a powerful incentive for governments to improve their services to citizens. The quality of customer service creates the perception of a well-run government and increases citizen confidence in government.

An interesting next step for this confidence model would be to examine the link between quality service, citizen confidence in government and citizens’ likelihood to vote for a government based on that perception of confidence. Linking quality services to government votes could further compel/drive some governments to initiate customer service improvement programs.

²¹ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Citizens First* 3. Toronto. Page 13.

5.0 THE CANADIAN APPROACH TO SERVICE

IMPROVEMENT – A BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

In 1991 the federal government released the *Public Service 2000 White Paper* which called on deputy ministers to establish service standards in their ministries.²² This first step initiated the drive to improving federal public services during the 1990s. The federal focus on citizen-centred service resulted in the creation of the *Service Improvement Initiative: Improving Service Performance* in May 2000.²³ The Service Improvement Initiative, spearheaded by the Treasury Board of Canada, is a framework for a results-based approach to continuous service improvement. Key factors include²⁴:

- adopting a systematic approach to service improvement planning that is integrated into an organization's annual business planning process;
- measuring client satisfaction annually to assess key services to ensure that set improvement targets are achieved over designated time periods;
- measuring and reporting organizational performance annually against set targets (client satisfaction and service standards); and
- ensuring that organizations are held accountable for their results.

Shortly after the release of the *Service Improvement Initiative: Improving Service Performance*, the Treasury Board published "A Policy Framework for Service

²² Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (1995, February). *Service Standards: a guide to the initiative*. Charles Malé: Author Page 2.

²³ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (n.d.). *Achieving Continuous Improvement in Client Satisfaction* [Presentation].

²⁴ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2000, June). *A policy framework for service improvement in the government of Canada*. Ontario. Pages 4-10

Improvement in the Government of Canada". This document describes the overall framework and general first steps for how federal departments and agencies can develop and implement a continuous service improvement model in a coordinated approach across government. The framework adopts a "citizen's outside-in perspective, is results-based, and is anchored in clients' own service expectations and improvement priorities".²⁵ According to the framework "continuous improvement in client satisfaction is best achieved by setting ongoing improvement targets, then ensuring that annual service improvement plans are based on clients' own priorities for service improvement".²⁶ The framework next outlines the guiding principles for the federal Service Improvement Initiative. These principles are taken directly from the framework²⁷ and include:

Citizen/Client Driven: Citizen and client expectations, satisfaction levels, and service improvement priorities are to be measured annually.

Coordinated Leadership: Make continuous service and client satisfaction improvement a corporate and departmental management priority at all levels.

Integration: Service improvement is to be systematically planned at the departmental and corporate levels and integrated into the existing business planning processes and reporting mechanisms.

Staff involvement: Involving staff in the service improvement planning process is key. This can be achieved through sharing with staff the results of client

²⁵ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2000, June). *A policy framework for service improvement in the government of Canada*. Ontario. Page 6.

²⁶ Ibid Page 6.

²⁷ Ibid Page 7.

surveys and focus groups, as well as obtaining information on staff satisfaction and priorities for service improvement and workplace quality.

Continuous Improvement via Service Improvement Plans: Each department and agency will be responsible for establishing an annual Service Improvement Plan based on the measurement of client needs, expectations and priorities for improvement.

Ongoing Process and Performance Measurement: Establishing and monitoring performance against service standards is a key feature of the Initiative and essential for managing client expectations.

Accountability for Results and Reward Good Performance: Departments are asked to report on their results achieved and are encouraged to recognize and reward progress in improving client satisfaction.

Organizations that have been successful using a citizen/client centered approach/consultative process to identify service improvement priorities include the Vancouver International Airport Authority (YVR) and BC Parks. Discussion regarding these two approaches is found in Section 5.1 Surveys: Determining Customer Service Priorities.

5.1 SURVEYS: DETERMINING CUSTOMER SERVICE PRIORITIES

In 1993, the Vancouver International Airport Authority (YVR) initiated a program of service improvement. One of the key elements was the Customer Satisfaction Tracking Program. The purpose of the program was to:

- “measure, monitor, and benchmark core assessments of customer satisfaction;
- maintain a current passenger profile based on demographic and facility-usage characteristics; and
- identify and track customer responses to specific product, service, and facility enhancements”.²⁸

Figure 1 – YVR Highlights

- Customer satisfaction tracking program that monitors, measures, and benchmarks service performance.
- Service improvements based on client feedback.
- Inclusive survey design process.
- Survey tool maintained over time to effectively benchmark results.
- Improved client satisfaction: increased from 68 percent to 84 percent between 1994 and 1997.

Good practices in citizen-centred service.
CCMD page 17

In order to meet these objectives an independent company conducts a quarterly customer satisfaction survey. The survey respondents are randomly chosen passengers at the airport. In addition to being asked about their overall satisfaction with airport facilities, passengers are asked to identify their priorities for improvement. Once priorities have been identified and improvements made, passengers are surveyed again.

²⁸ Blythe, D. M. (with Marson, D. B.) for the Citizen-Centred Service Network. (1999, March). *Good practices in citizen-centred service*. Canadian Centre for Management Development. Page 17.

The survey is used as a tool by all departments in the organization. Each has the opportunity to suggest questions for inclusion in the next survey. Changes are made to the survey annually but the methodological approach and data analysis is maintained to preserve the tool's consistency.

Another organization that has used customer satisfaction surveys to identify customer service priorities, is BC Parks. Between 1981 and 1984 BC Parks suffered an annual 6% decline in the number of visitors to their parks. As BC Parks had invested in a large infrastructure and was a major contributor to BC tourism, this decline became a grave concern to the organization²⁹. "Inspired by the movement of public sector organizations towards a more customer-focused orientation" BC parks adopted a customer survey program.³⁰ The objective of the program was to "reverse the trend in declining park attendance" and to ensure quality service.³¹

The BC Parks Visitor Satisfaction Survey examines park visitors who use campgrounds, day use areas, marine parks and wilderness and backcountry areas. The survey "allows staff to determine visitor satisfaction with services and the extent to which visitors' expectations are being met, and to identify visitors' priorities for improvement".³² Results for each park are distributed to their respective district offices and are also posted in the parks for park users. One of the initial results of the survey in the 1980s was that users felt the washroom facilities in certain parks were significantly lacking. Comments/results

²⁹ Ibid page 23.

³⁰ Ibid page 23.

³¹ Ibid page 23.

³² Ibid page 23.

such as these initiated programs like the washroom and shower programs designed to enhance these user facilities. Over time BC parks reversed its declining attendance and increased its number of users from 2 million in 1983 to almost 3 million in 1996.

As seen in the Vancouver Airport and BC Parks example, customer surveys act as a catalyst for continued service improvement by monitoring customer expectations and priorities. These examples indicate that survey instruments or some form of consistent customer consultation is critical to a successful service excellence initiative. Through monitoring and tracking customer service satisfaction, priorities can be identified and improvements made quickly. Once improvements have been made, increased customer satisfaction should be reflected in the next survey results and new customer priorities should emerge. This creates a cycle where the organization is consistently striving for service excellence. If an organization does not engage in a consistent customer consultation process, the success of its service excellence initiative will be limited.

Since 1996 the Government Agents Branch has used a customer satisfaction survey on an intermittent basis. Surveys were conducted in 1996, 1998, 2001, and 2003 (results not yet tabulated). **Appendix B** shows the results from the 2001 survey. Information gained through these surveys was used to gauge customer service satisfaction as well as be a performance measure for the Branch. However, the survey has not yet been integrated into a consistent process of continuous service improvement. Until this information is systematically used to drive service improvements, the potential benefits from conducting a customer survey will not be fully realized.

5.1.1 Employee Surveys – Uncovering Internal Service Barriers

Once an organization has determined the needs/priorities of their customers, the next step is to look internally and uncover service barriers that exist within the organization itself. Employees, who interact daily with customers and are responsible for service delivery, are in a position to identify slow inefficient processes/procedures that impede customer service delivery. They also hear first hand common customer service complaints or frustrations regarding service delivery. The Treasury Board of Canada states in its *How to Guide for the Service Improvement Initiative* that “management needs the opinions of the work force to identify areas for improvement and should, therefore, provide regular opportunities for employees to participate in the decision making process”.³³ Staff input can be garnered through employee surveys or through open and honest consultation processes using focus groups or interviews.

The benefit of conducting employee surveys is also supported by the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD). In their *Employee Surveys in the Public Sector: Experiences and Success Factors* CCMD states that when used effectively, employee surveys are an excellent tool for managing or facilitating organizational change, as they allow an organization to determine the magnitude and scope of problems.³⁴ Employee surveys are useful for showing what needs to be changed, where change is most needed, and where existing barriers lie.³⁵ Surveys can also identify employee concerns i.e.

³³ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2000, March). *Toward citizen-centred service delivery: A how-to-guide for the service improvement initiative*. Ontario: Author. Page 67.

³⁴ Harwood, Paul de L. *Employee Surveys in the Public Sector: Experiences and Success Factors*, CCMD. 1995. Pages 1-3.

³⁵ Ibid page 4.

training, management/leadership etc. that need to be addressed prior to changes or in order to facilitate change within an organization.

Survey results allow organizations to make well-informed decisions and create targeted actions to mitigate problem areas. In addition, surveys send a clear signal to employees that their input is valuable and necessary to improving the organization's operation. This will create greater acceptance of new policies and initiatives that are developed through this process. It should also be noted that by listening to and acting on employee suggestions that "morale, productivity, commitment and organizational vitality can be substantially improved".³⁶

In addition to identifying key service improvement issues/priorities and fostering staff buy-in, employee surveys establish benchmarks for organizations against which they can assess "the degree to which it meets the criteria of a quality service organization. From this baseline data, the organization can measure progress made in implementing or improving its quality service initiative".³⁷

5.1.2 Mystery Shopper – Alternative Survey Method

Both customer and employee surveys are used to identify service improvement priorities as well as act as performance indicators to determine the success of service improvement initiatives over time. An additional tool for measuring the success of service

³⁶ Ibid page 67.

³⁷ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2000, March). *Toward citizen-centred service delivery: A how-to-guide for the service improvement initiative*. Ontario: Author. Page 67.

improvement strategies, such as service standards, is using a “mystery shopper” approach.

A mystery shopper is a person(s), most often an employee of a contract company, who poses as a customer and requests service in the client’s office or store, over the telephone, or through e-mail/correspondence. They can assess various aspects of a client’s customer service. The purpose of a mystery shopper is to provide an impartial view of what a customer experiences when they either walk into an office or try to engage services remotely over phone/e-mail/correspondence. Once service standards have been introduced into an organization, mystery shoppers can provide insight on, and a measure of, how well offices have been able to adopt and implement the standards.

This approach was used by the Ontario Public Service Restructuring Secretariat in 1999 and again in 2000 to measure the implementation of common service standards across the Ontario government. Survey results indicated the range of improvement between the two years. In addition to providing an overall picture of the government’s success, the 2000 results could be used to set new targets and develop new policies that would see the further integration of service standards in the organization.

5.2 SERVICE STANDARDS

The second component of ensuring success and continuous service excellence is developing service standards and then measuring and reporting organizational performance against set targets.

5.2.1 What are service standards?

“Service standards are increasingly becoming key to service improvement strategies in the public sector. They are the published levels of service an organization promises to deliver to its clients and they play an important role in shaping client expectations”.³⁸

Service standards consist of five main elements³⁹: description and benefits of services provided; service quality principles that describe the quality of service that clients can expect; service delivery targets that are assessed on an ongoing basis; assessment of the cost of services provided; and development of a complaint mechanism for clients when they feel the service standards have not been met.⁴⁰ “While each of these elements can exist on its own, it is expected that, in most cases, service standards will eventually cover all elements”.⁴¹ Please refer to **Appendix C** for an example of Industry Canada Service Standards for Licensing Clients.

According to the national *Citizens First 2000* there are five factors that determine a client’s satisfaction with government service. They are timeliness, knowledge/competence, the extra mile/extra smile, fairness, and outcome.⁴² According to *Citizens First 2000*, “the five drivers of satisfaction are the most critical determinants of

³⁸ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Citizens First 3*. Toronto: Author. Page 69

³⁹ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (1995, February). *Service Standards: a guide to the initiative*. Charles Malé: Author. Page 3.

⁴⁰ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (n.d.). *Service improvement initiative toolbox: Appendix F: Setting service standards and targets*. Retrieved May 14, 2001 from http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/si-si/sii-ias/tools/app-f_e.shtml.

⁴¹ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (1995, February). *Service Standards: a guide to the initiative*. Charles Malé: Author. Page 3.

⁴² Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2001). *Citizens first 2000: Report on “have your say”: A survey on improving government services*. Toronto: Author. Page 2.

satisfaction with government service. Providing good service on each dimension guarantees high service-quality ratings from citizens”.⁴³

5.2.2 Why develop customer service standards?

Customer service standards are used to provide staff with performance targets and inform customers about what they can expect from an organization.⁴⁴ They help ensure that service delivery is as effective as possible and that customer's expectations are met/exceeded. By setting and meeting standards an organization can also demonstrate to the public, client ministries, and stakeholders how well it is performing.⁴⁵

5.2.3 What are the benefits of implementing service standards?

In an era of fiscal restraint, service standards provide a guideline for managing organizational performance. Experience has shown that service can be improved and delivered at reduced cost by refocusing services on clients; determining client service priorities; giving managers the flexibility to respond to client needs; and setting targets and standards and monitoring their performance.⁴⁶

⁴³ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Clients speak: A report on single-window government services in Canada*. Toronto: Author. Page 39

⁴⁴ Institute of Public Administration of Canada. (2002). *Citizens First 3*. Toronto. Page 69.

⁴⁵ Canadian Public Sector Quality Association. (n.d.). *Veterans affairs service standards project*. Retrieved May 24, 2001, from <http://www.cpsqa.ca/hill2.html>.

⁴⁶ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (1995, October). *Quality services guide VII - service standards*. Retrieved May 14, 2001, from http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/Pubs_pol/opepubs/TB_O/7QG1-1E.html.

5.2.4 Steps for developing service standards.

The federal government developed the following steps to guide the development of service standards in departments and agencies across Canada.⁴⁷

1. Know your business

During this step the organization essentially conducts an environmental scan identifying their customers/clients, partners/stakeholders as well as the services that they are providing to these parties. They can also use this time to identify what service improvement initiatives are already in progress.

2. Consult with Clients and staff

It is important to consult clients (vis à vis surveys, comment cards, focus groups, etc) to determine how satisfied they are with current services and use results to identify service priorities to increase their satisfaction with services received. Frontline staff should also be consulted during this stage. “Frontline staff are directly linked to program clients through the program delivery process and can often generate innovative ideas for improving service at no extra cost”.⁴⁸ In addition, “to gain their commitment to any new processes and new service standards, it is essential to involve frontline-line staff in their development”.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (1995, February). Service Standards: a guide to the initiative. Charles Malé: Author. Page 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid page 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid page 10.

3. Set client-sensitive service standards

Consider feedback from customers/clients and staff to ensure that you are developing standards that are responsive to the customer's expectations.

4. Empower and train service providers

Staff should be trained in “techniques and skills for improving quality and client services”⁵⁰ and empowered to make decisions within their offices that will increase customer satisfaction.

5. Communicate service standards and report to customers/clients on performance

“Service Standards are intended to let your clients know what to expect when they deal with you. They can help moderate clients' unrealistic expectations for services. Reporting to your clients on your performance against standards is critical if you are to make service standards credible”.⁵¹

6. Manage your organization based on service standards and service quality

If an agency is “actively involved in quality management and using service standards to manage [their] organization” it will measure its performance against its standards, strive for continuous improvement and develop a quality service improvement plan.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid page 11

⁵¹ Ibid page 11

⁵² Ibid page 13

5.2.5 *Testing Service Standards – A Pilot Project*

One of the primary goals when developing service standards is to create ones that are realistic, challenging yet attainable for the staff who are responsible for implementing them on a daily basis.

The second goal is to introduce the standards in a manner that creates ownership and effectively communicates the organization's new customer service values. According to *Service Quality in the Public Sector* "the place where most initiatives fail is with respect to the implementation".⁵³ This happens because the implementation of service quality initiatives creates organizational change. "Barriers to change are the major reason why such implementation fails. Therefore management has to determine ways in which to overcome barriers such as employee resistance while developing a system that promotes continuous improvement".⁵⁴

A pilot project allows the services standards to be introduced and tested in a limited environment. It provides an opportunity for staff to determine and provide input on whether the standards are realistic and applicable in their daily working environments. Standards that have been customized and tested in a real working environment will have a greater chance of being adopted successfully across the organization, and issues and problems with the standards can be identified and resolved prior to their global introduction.

⁵³ Green, Ryan & Sorensen-Lawrence, L. (1999). *Service Quality in the Public Sector*. Ministry of Human Resources, Victoria, British Columbia. Page 27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* page 27.

5.3 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In March 2001 the Treasury Board of Canada developed *A How-to-Guide for the Service Improvement Initiative*, which laid out nine steps to achieve improved service delivery. These steps were developed based on research of organizations that had successfully implemented service improvement initiatives. These nine steps are identified in a slightly modified form in Figure 2.

The process begins with steps one and two. During this phase the organization assesses its current state identifying its internal and external client(s), product(s), service(s), partners and stakeholders. Next the organization determines “the current levels of client satisfaction and expectations as well as client priorities for improvement”.⁵⁵ In the second phase (steps 3-5) the organization “establishes where its clients want it to be in

Figure 2 – 9 Steps to a Service Improvement Initiative

1. **Internal assessment** – identify clients and products.
2. **Assess current state** – identify current levels of client satisfaction; establish client feedback strategy (survey).
3. **Desired Future State** – mission statement includes a service vision.
4. **Priorities for improvement** – identify client (Customer Survey 2001) and employee priorities (survey).
5. **Set standards and targets** – set improvement targets and standards.
6. **Design improvement plan** – develop action plans to achieve targets, time schedules; allocate responsibility and resources.
7. **Implementation** – implement service improvement plan.
8. **Monitor and measure progress.**
9. **Recognition & communicating success.**

⁵⁵ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2000, March). *Toward citizen-centred service delivery: A how-to-guide for the service improvement initiative*. Ontario: Author. Page 7

the future” and the organization develops service improvement priorities as well as standards and set targets. In phase three (step 6) the organization “determines how it will achieve this future state”⁵⁶ and establishes a Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

A SIP is a detailed plan that allows an organization to formalize its service priorities. It can have broad or very specific actions/objectives and should be customized to the needs of the organization. It is also an efficient and logical system where the organization can assign action responsibilities, timeframes, intended results, and measures to the appropriate person(s). **Appendix D** includes two examples of service improvement plan templates developed by the Treasury Board of Canada.⁵⁷

The SIP, if repeated annually, will drive continuous service improvement within an organization. The SIP process is similar to a performance management plan.

Initial targets and goals are established and the SIP is reviewed quarterly to ensure that actions are being completed and targets are in line. Through the SIP, an organization can set annual service priorities and then develop actions/objectives to mitigate service issues.

An integral part of the SIP is establishing intended results and measures. The intended results state what the organization hopes to achieve through its actions and the measures are the method of evaluating if the organization has met its targets.

⁵⁶ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. (2000, March). *Toward citizen-centred service delivery: A how-to-guide for the service improvement initiative*. Ontario: Author. Page 7.

⁵⁷ The templates are taken from “A How-to-Guide for the Service Improvement Initiative”, Treasury Board of Canada, March 2001.

In the last phase of the service improvement initiative (steps 7-9), the SIP is implemented and results are monitored to ensure that improvements are moving ahead and results are being achieved. Lastly, it is important to communicate the success of the project to both internal and external stakeholders as well as to identify individuals whose participation has increased the success of the initiative. This will provide momentum for continuing the process.

6.0 BRANCH ASSESSMENT PRIOR TO INITIATION OF THE SERVICE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

According to best practices, the first three steps towards creating a service excellence initiative are 1) identifying your clients and products, 2) establishing a customer feedback strategy and assessing the current status of customer satisfaction, and 3) creating a service vision for the future ensuring that it is incorporated in your organization's vision, mission and values.

Prior to the commencement of this project, the Branch had already begun the process, though perhaps not consciously, of building the foundation for a Service Excellence Initiative. The researcher, upon introduction to the Branch, found that it was very cognizant of who their customers and clients were as well as the type of business in which they were engaged. Their key customers are the citizens of BC (with the exception of those living in the lower mainland and Victoria) and their clients are the ministries/agencies on whose behalf they provide services and programs. For more information on the Government Agents Branch please see Section 3: Government Agents Branch. A list of Branch services can be found in **Appendix A**.

The Branch has a customer feedback strategy, which has been in place since 1996. Between 1996 and 2001, the Branch conducted three customer satisfaction surveys. These surveys, used mainly as performance indicators, had not yet been incorporated into a process for identifying and acting on customer service priorities. The Branch had also

participated in a number of national research projects such as Citizens First 2000 and Clients Speak⁵⁸ which surveyed Branch customers across BC on various aspects of customer service and service delivery. This combination of research provided solid customer feedback/consultation from which priorities for customer service improvement could be identified and extracted.

Lastly, in May 2001, the Branch had completed the development of their new vision, mission and values for the organization. This new vision was completed via a Branch wide consultation. While the exact terms service excellence or continuous service improvement were not included in the vision/mission, “excellence in citizen-centred service delivery” is its first core value. It was felt that this value, in addition to the overall vision for the Branch “to be the first and best choice for one-stop access to public services and information in BC”, amply demonstrated that the Branch was focused on its customers and improving Branch services to meet their needs/expectations.

A firm awareness of their customers, clients and services, the established customer feedback strategies and the commitment to becoming the premier service delivery

Government Agents Branch

Vision

To be the first and best choice for one stop access to public services and information in British Columbia.

Mission

To provide efficient, integrated, personalized access to public services and information in communities across British Columbia.

Values

- Excellence in citizen-centred service delivery.
- Leadership throughout the organization.
- Personal and organizational integrity.
- Commitment to adaptability and flexibility.
- Recognizing and valuing diversity in our people, customers, and communities.

⁵⁸ IPAC. (2002). *Clients speak: A report on single-window government services in Canada.*

organization in BC, created a solid foundation from which the Service Excellence Initiative was launched. What was required next was the identification of employee service delivery priorities, the creation of a service improvement plan as well as service standards and finally, the development of a continuous service improvement framework for the Branch. It is with these objectives in mind that the methodology for this project was developed and implemented, and on which the final deliverables were based.

7.0 METHODOLOGY DESIGN

The Service Excellence Initiative is a strategy for continuous service improvement within the Government Agents Branch. This strategy consists of two components. The first is the Service Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP identifies organizational priorities for improving customer service and then establishes Branch activities to address them. The second component is the creation of Government Agents Branch service standards. These standards must be challenging yet attainable for staff. They must also be credible in order to facilitate adoption in all 58 offices.

Section six, Branch Assessment Prior to SEI Initiation, identified SEI foundation elements that the Branch already possessed prior to the commencement of this project.

Section seven, Methodology, outlines additional research undertaken and designs instruments/processes to obtain the missing elements/information needed to complete the SIP and service standards for the Branch. Once these two components are complete, a strategy for continuous service improvement will be initiated.

The SIP identifies service improvement priorities both external and internal to the Branch. External priorities are based on customer feedback and identify what customers believe are service improvement priorities. As discussed in section six, the Branch had already implemented a Customer Satisfaction survey in 2000. This survey was used in section 8.1.2 Service Improvement Priorities, to determine external customer priorities. However, the Branch was missing a method of determining internal service barriers to

service excellence. It was determined that the Branch needed to implement an Employee Service Delivery Survey. The results of this survey were used to establish internal service priorities for the SIP in section 8.1.2 Service Improvement Priorities. Section 7.1 Service Improvement Plan, outlines the steps taken to develop and implement the Employee Service Delivery Survey as well as identify the service improvement priorities for the Branch.

To create service standards that are customer sensitive but also realistic and attainable for staff, a two-prong approach was used. First research was undertaken to identify service standards established by other public sector organizations as well as identify drivers of customer satisfaction. Once a set of draft standards, based on this research, was complete, an extensive consultation process was developed to ensure that staff feedback was obtained. This input was needed to customize the standards to the daily working environment of staff, to ensure the standards are realistic, challenging yet attainable and to create greater staff commitment to the standards. The methodology for this process is discussed in section 7.2 Service Standards.

7.1 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

7.1.1 Secondary Data

The Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was adapted from templates developed by the federal government in *A How-to Guide for the Service Improvement Initiative*. SIP templates can be found in **Appendix D**. The priorities for the SIP were derived in part

from the results of the *Government Agents Branch Customer Satisfaction Survey 2001* found in **Appendix B** and the Employee Survey results in **Appendix E**.

7.1.2 Primary Data

Two sources of primary data were used to create the Service Improvement Plan: the employee survey and the Management Team ranking of the service priorities.

7.1.2.1 Employee Service Delivery Survey (Employee Survey)

The Service Excellence Initiative best practices review identified the need to develop and implement an internal employee survey. “Surveys provide quick, inexpensive, and accurate means of assessing information”⁵⁹ about a particular population group. The intent of an employee survey was to gauge staff (managers as well as Customer Service Representatives) perceptions of customer service in their offices as well as identify internal barriers staff face to providing excellent customer service. The results of the survey were to guide development of service standards and established priorities for the Service Improvement Plan. The survey was implemented in all 58 regional offices.

Instrument Design

- **Questionnaire Development**

The survey included 14 questions ranging from rating aspects of the quality of services provided in Government Agents offices to open-ended questions asking staff to identify the challenges they face (internal barriers) and to

⁵⁹ Zikmund, W. G. (1997). *Business research methods* (5th ed). Toronto: The Dryden Press. Page 203.

provide suggestions on how to improve customer service. Respondents were asked to rate the various aspects of service (timeliness, courteousness, fairness, range of services, and training) on a five-point scale. The scale was based on the Common Measurement Tool, a tool created by the Citizen-Centred Service Network and the Canadian Centre for Management Development to assess satisfaction with service factors. Questions regarding the use of the Government Agents Branch intranet site were also included to obtain feedback on the site and how it could be improved and better utilized to support staff efforts to provide excellent customer service. A copy of the Employee Service Delivery Survey Questionnaire (generally referred to as the Employee Survey) can be found in **Appendix E**.

- Questionnaire Pre-testing

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the questionnaire the following steps were taken:

1. Once the survey was drafted, feedback was obtained from the Manager of Business Development, Manager of Program Analysis, and Manager of Program Development for the Government Agents Branch. Revisions were made based on their comments.
2. The questionnaire was forwarded to five Customer Service Representatives and two Government Agents to ensure that the questions were easy to comprehend and follow. Revisions were made as necessary.

Instrument Implementation

The survey was distributed to 289 staff in all 58 offices via e-mail with a cover letter describing the study and its purpose. The nine staff members located at headquarters in Victoria were excluded from the survey as they do not provide services directly to customers. Respondents were given a week to return their surveys to the Service Excellence Officer. Staff were assured confidentiality with only the Service Excellence Officer having access to the results. Respondents could choose to self-identify, thereby making themselves available for additional comments.

Results Analysis

Surveys were returned either electronically or by facsimile to Branch headquarters. In all, 189 staff responded to the survey, which equated to a response rate of 65 percent. Surveys were numbered as they arrived and the survey's origin (city/region) was recorded. This was done to ensure that surveys were representative of all the regions and that larger offices were completing and returning the surveys. Survey data was both quantitative as well as qualitative and was analyzed using the following methods:

- **Quantitative Data:**

Data from Common Measurement Tool rating questions was entered into a spreadsheet that had been pre-designed to report on the different aspects of the data. This included average response, percent attributed to each ranking, and

response rates for each region. From this material, pie charts were created to provide a visual picture of the results.

- Qualitative Data:

Written responses were entered into Word documents and numbered in the order they were received. This was done to ease retracing of comments to specific response sheets.

A review of the qualitative responses from the open-ended questions (1,075 responses) was conducted for each question and applicable themes developed. Responses were then grouped into corresponding themes under each question. Themes were ranked based on the frequency of comments per category, not the quality of the responses. Next, the respondents' comments were summarized and discussed under each theme.

Statistical Validity

In order to ensure a 95 percent confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 5 percent, in a fixed population of 289 respondents⁶⁰, the following equation⁶¹ was used to determine the needed response rate.

$$N_s = \frac{(N_p)(p)(1-p)}{(N_p - 1) (B/C)^2 + (p) (1-p)}$$

Where:
N_p = 289 B = .05
p = 0.5 C = 1.96

$$N_s = 165.18$$

N _s =	Completed sample size needed for desired level of precision.
N _p =	Size of population
p =	Proportion of population expected to choose one of the two response categories
B =	Acceptable amount of sampling error
C =	Z statistic associated with the confidence level

Through this equation it was determined that the Branch needed a 57 percent return rate (165 surveys) to ensure a confidence level of 95%.

Challenges/Validity Issues

The survey was distributed during the beginning of property tax season (June/July), which may have limited the number of responses or the time staff had to read and complete the survey. At property tax time, citizens living in unincorporated areas, go to GA offices to pay their property tax. Staff are extremely busy during this time with many offices experiencing long line ups. This may have made it very difficult for staff to find time, away from serving customers at the counter, to complete and send in the survey.

⁶⁰ Population was obtained through a manual count of filled positions from most current CHIPS data.

⁶¹ Dillman, Don A. (2000). *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (2nd ed). Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Page 205-207.

7.1.2.2 Identifying Service Improvement Priorities

After reviewing the results of the Employee Survey and the 2001 Customer Satisfaction Survey, eight service improvement priorities, internal and external, emerged. In order to focus Government Agents Branch resources on the highest priority areas, the eight service priorities were ranked by the Management Team (headquarters executives and regional managers). The top five ranked service priorities serve as the cornerstone for the Service Improvement Plan.

7.2 SERVICE STANDARDS

7.2.1 External Sources

The initial service standards evolved from two secondary research streams. The first stream was service standards found in provincial/federal jurisdictions as well as outside of Canada. These secondary sources included the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, Canada/BC Business Centre, Service New Brunswick, Ontario Public Service, Industry Canada Service Standards for Licensing Clients, Veterans Affairs, and Post Offices Counters Ltd. (United Kingdom). Research indicated that the majority of these standards were established in consultation with customers.

The second stream explored were results of customer service satisfaction surveys including the *Government Agents Branch Customer Satisfaction Survey 2001* and the *Citizens First 2000 Report on "Have Your Say": A Survey on Improving Government Services*. These secondary sources served as the basis for the creation of the initial draft service standards, which included approximately 75 standards. To develop standards that

were relevant to the Government Agents Branch, the Branch went through an extensive consultation process described in the next section.

7.2.2 *Internal Validation*

To ensure that the service standards were challenging but attainable and applicable to the Government Agents Branch business environment, the service standards went through an extensive filtering/feedback process in the organization. The initial draft standards were reviewed and revised by Branch headquarters management; discussed and revised by the Service Excellence Initiative Steering Committee; introduced and revised at the Government Agents Conference in Vancouver; implemented/revised in a six-month pilot project in four regional offices; reviewed and revised by a focus group of Customer Service Representatives; reviewed and revised by managers participating in the pilot project; and reviewed and adopted by the Executive Management Team.

7.2.2.1 Headquarters Management

Managers working at headquarters were the first to review the draft service standards. A Service Excellence Initiative Steering Committee was established to gather input from regional staff. The standards went to this group for review and discussion.

7.2.2.2 Service Excellence Initiative Steering Committee

The steering Committee, comprised of GAs, CSRs etc., provided feedback on the attainability of the standards and identified any barriers to their implementation. The

standards were revised according to their input and were then presented at the annual Government Agents Conference.

7.2.2.3 Government Agents Conference

The draft service standards were presented in four workshops at a Government Agents Conference for managers in Richmond, British Columbia. Teams in each workshop were asked to first identify standards that were not attainable and provide suggestions for revisions. Next they were asked to review 3-4 standards per team and provide descriptors for the standards. For example, descriptors provided for the standard “Government Agents’ offices are clean, organized and well maintained” included:

- desks are free of clutter;
- counters are kept clean of paper and dust;
- general office is neat and tidy;
- repairs are done on a timely basis;
- staff know where forms/materials are located in the office;
- customers know where to queue via good signage/directional carpet; and
- information displays are kept neat and stocked with current information.

Government Agents were then asked to suggest different mechanisms that could be used to measure if the standards were being implemented in their offices.

7.2.2.4 Pilot Project

The implementation of service standards in the Government Agents Branch will create a shift in organizational culture. In order to facilitate a smooth transition, the Branch will need to incorporate change management strategies into the service standards implementation plan for the whole organization. By determining how staff react to the standards in a pilot project, the Branch can build strategies on how to best implement, communicate, and foster staff ownership of the service standards. It will also provide insight into any barriers or staff resistance to the new standards. Once issues/barriers have been identified, strategies can be developed to overcome or lessen their impact during the full implementation of the standards in the organization.

The pilot project was an opportunity to test the standards in a small number of offices and provide insight into any issues/barriers to implementing the standards. The pilot project results will be used to inform the service standards implementation plan including strategies on how to best implement, communicate, and foster staff ownership of the service standards.

The pilot project had the following objectives:

- determine if the service standards are challenging yet attainable;
- assess staff ownership and acceptance of the standards;
- customize the standards so they are relevant to the daily business environment of Government Agents offices; and

- determine to what level the standards have been implemented.

Pilot Office Selection and Introduction of the Standards

Participating offices were selected randomly. Criteria included ensuring there were a range of small, medium, and large offices and that each office was located in a different geographical region. Office size is based on the number of full-time equivalent positions in an office. Offices selected were Vernon (large) with 13 staff members, Nelson (medium) with 9 staff members, Prince Rupert with 4 staff members (small), and Squamish with 4 staff members (small).

The pilot was conducted over a six-month period. Staff were informed that they had been chosen to be a part of the pilot project. The Service Excellence Officer visited each office to introduce the Service Excellence Initiative and the service standards to staff. This provided staff with an opportunity to ask questions and provide some initial feedback. The Government Agent in each office was responsible for implementation of the standards over the six-month pilot.

Measuring the Implementation of the Service Standards

Two methods were used to assess the implementation of the service standards in the pilot offices. They were a Customer Service Representative staff focus group and a debrief with managers responsible for implementing the standards.

7.2.2.5 Customer Service Representative Focus Group

At the end of the pilot project a staff member from each participating office was asked to volunteer to participate in a focus group in Vancouver. Participants were sent a list of questions in advance and asked to consult their colleagues and gather their comments prior to the focus group. Participants were asked to bring forward concerns and issues from their co-workers as well as provide their own insight into the standards. The Customer Service Representative Focus Group Questionnaire and Agenda is found in **Appendix F**.

Staff were questioned about the attainability⁶² of the standards and if there were any standards that needed to be revised. Next, participants were asked to identify staff resistance or barriers to the service standards and provide suggestions on how to overcome them. The majority of the session, approximately 2.5 hours, was spent with staff reviewing and revising the standards and the corresponding descriptors. Lastly, the focus group was used as an opportunity to gain information on the best ways to communicate the service standards--formally and informally--to staff in order to create future ownership within the organization.

7.2.2.6 Government Agent Debrief

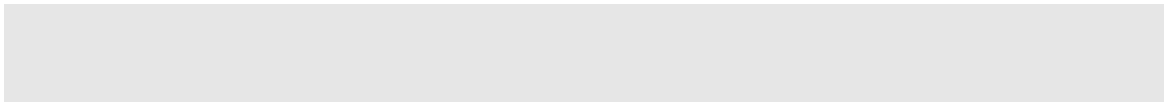
Government Agents were contacted periodically during the pilot to discuss the progress of the implementation of standards in their offices. At the end of the pilot, they were asked to participate in a final teleconference call. The call was used to

⁶² Attainable is defined as realistic standards based on analysis, consistent with program objectives, and achievable while at the same time providing a challenge to the service providers.

present the newest version of the standards, which incorporated the focus group comments, and provide a final opportunity for feedback. Agreement was reached that the standards were ready to be presented for adoption to the Management Team.

7.2.2.7 Management Team

The Management Team completed the final stage of consultation by making final comments and approving the adoption of the service standards into the organization.



8.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

8.1.1 Employee Service Delivery Survey - Summary of Findings

A total of 189 staff responded to the survey - a response rate of 65 percent. The following is a summary of results from the Employee Survey. The complete analysis of results can be found in **Appendix G**. A summary of survey highlights can be found on the following page.

Overall, 89.3 percent of employees agreed that Government Agents offices offer excellent customer service. Based on their experience, staff feel their offices offer customer services that are timely, fair, and courteous. In addition, staff feel they go the extra mile for customers and are knowledgeable about the services the Government Agents Branch provides.

However, only 27.6 percent and 8.0 percent of survey participants agree or strongly agree, respectively, that they receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service. This translates to 64.4 percent of employees feeling they are not sufficiently trained. When asked “*what type of training would increase your ability to provide excellent customer service*”, top responses included more training in client specific programs (e.g. Medical Services Plan, Rural Property Tax, property transfers/manufactured homes), staff receiving organized and consistent training, training for computer

Employee Service Delivery Survey Highlights

89% of employees agree that GAs offer excellent customer service.

Employees rank themselves high on the *five drivers* of customer satisfaction.

- 87% of staff feel their office offers *timely service*
- 88% feel staff are *courteous* and go the *extra mile*.
- 84% say *staff are knowledgeable* about the services they provide.
- 88% believe staff *treat customers fairly*
- 86% feel that our offices offer a complete range of services that meet the needs of their clients.

However, 64% of staff do not feel they receive sufficient training...

...specifically in client programs. They would like increase training in the following client programs /applications:

- MSP
- Rural Property Tax
- Property Tax Transfers/Manufactured Homes
- ICBC
- BC Gaming

Staff also suggested several alternative training methods and topics that would help them deliver excellent customer service including:

- Mentor/shadow programs
- Mini-sessions/ refresher courses
- Training manuals

- Online information
- Customer service training
- Computer training
- Conflict/dispute resolution

Top three challenges to delivering excellent customer service are:

1. Workload/Staffing Constraints
2. Lack of Training
3. Client Ministries' Programs

Top three solutions to improving customer service in GAB are:

1. Improved Training
2. Increased Staffing
3. Management (leadership and acknowledgement/rewarding well performing staff)

75% of staff agree that the Intranet is a great tool...

...for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy, procedures and Ministry news....

... but only 62% of people agree that the Intranet helps them provide excellent customer service.

Suggested tools and information to improve customer service included:

- Search tool/engine
- Additional printable or on-line fillable forms
- More links to clients' web sites
- More time for staff to become familiar with the Intranet and its capabilities

programs/databases, and communication/dispute resolution training to deal with difficult customers. In addition, employees expressed frustration regarding finding sufficient time for training. While employees recognize that training and information is available to them through computer programs and written materials, they are not able to fully utilize them since they have to access such materials between serving customers.

Question three of the survey asked employees to list the top three challenges they face in the delivery of excellent customer service. After compiling the responses sixteen themes emerged. The top three themes (based on frequency of response) were: staffing/workload constraints, training (lack of), and client ministries (communication).

In an attempt to break away from creating a survey that was only an outlet for participants to express their frustrations, question four was designed to give employees an opportunity to problem solve. Employees responded to the question “*what can be done to improve the level of customer service in your office and in the Government Agents Branch in general.*” The top three themes that emerged were: training (development of an effective training program), staffing (maintaining adequate staffing levels), and management (active leadership/employee recognition).

The last section of the survey delved into employees’ perceptions about the Government Agents Branch Intranet; specifically, its use as a tool for communicating in the organization, and as a tool for providing excellent customer service. Overall, a majority of employees, 75.5 percent, agreed/strongly agreed that the Intranet was a great tool for

keeping up-to-date on the latest Government Agents Branch policy, procedures, and ministry news. However, only 61.5 percent agreed/strongly agreed that the Intranet helps them provide excellent customer service.

8.1.2 Service Improvement Priorities

Eight service improvement priorities were drawn from the results of the Customer Survey (**Appendix B**) and the Employee Survey (**Appendix G**). The results of these surveys were used to create priorities that are focused externally on the customer as well as internally on the needs of staff in the organization. The Management Team ranked the following as the top five service improvement priorities for the Government Agents Branch. These priorities form the cornerstone of the Service Improvement Plan.

Ranking	Service Improvement Plan Priorities
1	Develop and implement a staff training program. Programs will focus on increasing staff skill and knowledge in providing specific client services and working within their computer applications. Additional courses such as dispute resolution (and customer service) will be developed as needed and within budget constraints. Government Agents' leadership will be addressed through training as well.
2	Introduce Service Standards and apply strategies to ensure their adoption throughout the organization.
3	Address staffing and workload issues.
4	Introduce new "business" office hours that are conducive to customer needs and expectations.
5	Strengthen/invigorate/energize the Government Agents Awards/Recognition program. Include awards for exceptional customer service. Introduce criteria for awards.

8.2 SERVICE STANDARDS

The seven-step consultative process yielded 29 services standards with corresponding descriptions and measures. Service standards can be found in **Appendix H**. The most constructive revisions to standards emerged from the Customer Service Representative (CSR) focus group held at the end of the pilot project. The four CSRs provided candid feedback and the standards were significantly re-drafted based on their input regarding what was achievable in their offices.

The CSRs recommended that the Government Agents Branch use conferences or workshops to communicate the service standards to CSRs across the province. They felt the workshops should focus mostly on inspiring and motivating staff to use the service standards, as well as how to work together as a team to implement them. Staff commented on the need of the Government Agents Branch to continue to support the introduction of the service standards over the long term to ensure that the interest and momentum of the standards does not diminish over time. The CSRs suggested several internal activities such as award programs, posting information on the intranet on service quality, and Planning and Performance Reviews to help maintain Branch focus on the service standards. **Appendix I** is a summary of comments from the CSR focus group.

Once the standards had been re-drafted based on the focus group input they were forwarded to the Government Agents participating in the pilot. The Government Agents made minor revisions to the standards and agreed the standards were ready to be presented to the Management Team. The Management Team reviewed and adopted the

service standards and agreed to communicate the standards to the CSRs through a series of six workshops across the province.

9.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The overall goal of the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) is to improve or maintain customer satisfaction. In order to initiate activities that are targeted at improving customer satisfaction, two sources of information, external and internal, were used to form the SIP.

As previously discussed in the methodology and results sections, the Management Team ranked the five service improvement priorities for the organization. This was done to focus resources on the highest priority areas. Internal priorities are drawn from the results of the Employee Survey and focus on employee issues that need to be resolved in order to improve customer service. External priorities are customer identified and are extracted from the *Government Agents Branch Customer Satisfaction Survey 2001*.

Once placed in the SIP, activities were developed for each priority. Activities were assigned timeframes and staff members to be responsible for their completion. Intended results and measures for the activities under each priority were identified. Assigning measures and intended results will help the Government Agents Branch determine whether or not the SIP has achieved its goals. The Government Agents Branch Service Improvement Plan can be found in **Appendix J**.

9.1 IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the Service Excellence Initiative commenced after its creation and adoption of the Service Improvement Plan by the Management Team. To help ensure buy-in and support for the Service Excellence Initiative among GA managers, a SEI presentation was developed and presented at workshops for the GAs in Richmond, BC. This was necessary as their continued leadership and support will play an important role in the success of SEI in Government Agents offices across the province.

9.2 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROCESS

Based on best practices we know that if the Service Improvement Plan process is maintained it will drive a cycle of continuous improvement in the Government Agents Branch. Therefore, to ensure service excellence, the Branch must be committed to renewing/implementing future SIPs. Without a commitment to continuous improvement the SIP will be in danger of becoming a one-time plan to resolve current customer service issues, and not a plan that grows with the organization becoming a part of its mission and culture.⁶³ “The transformation to create a culture of continuous improvement can generally take several years and demands a conscientious effort on the part of all employees and management in order for the transition to be successful”.⁶⁴ For an illustration of the SIP process developed for the Branch, see Figure 3 on the following page.

⁶³ Green, Ryan & Sorensen-Lawrence, L. (1999). Service Quality in the Public Sector. Ministry of Human Resources, Victoria, British Columbia. Page 27.

⁶⁴ Ibid page 27.

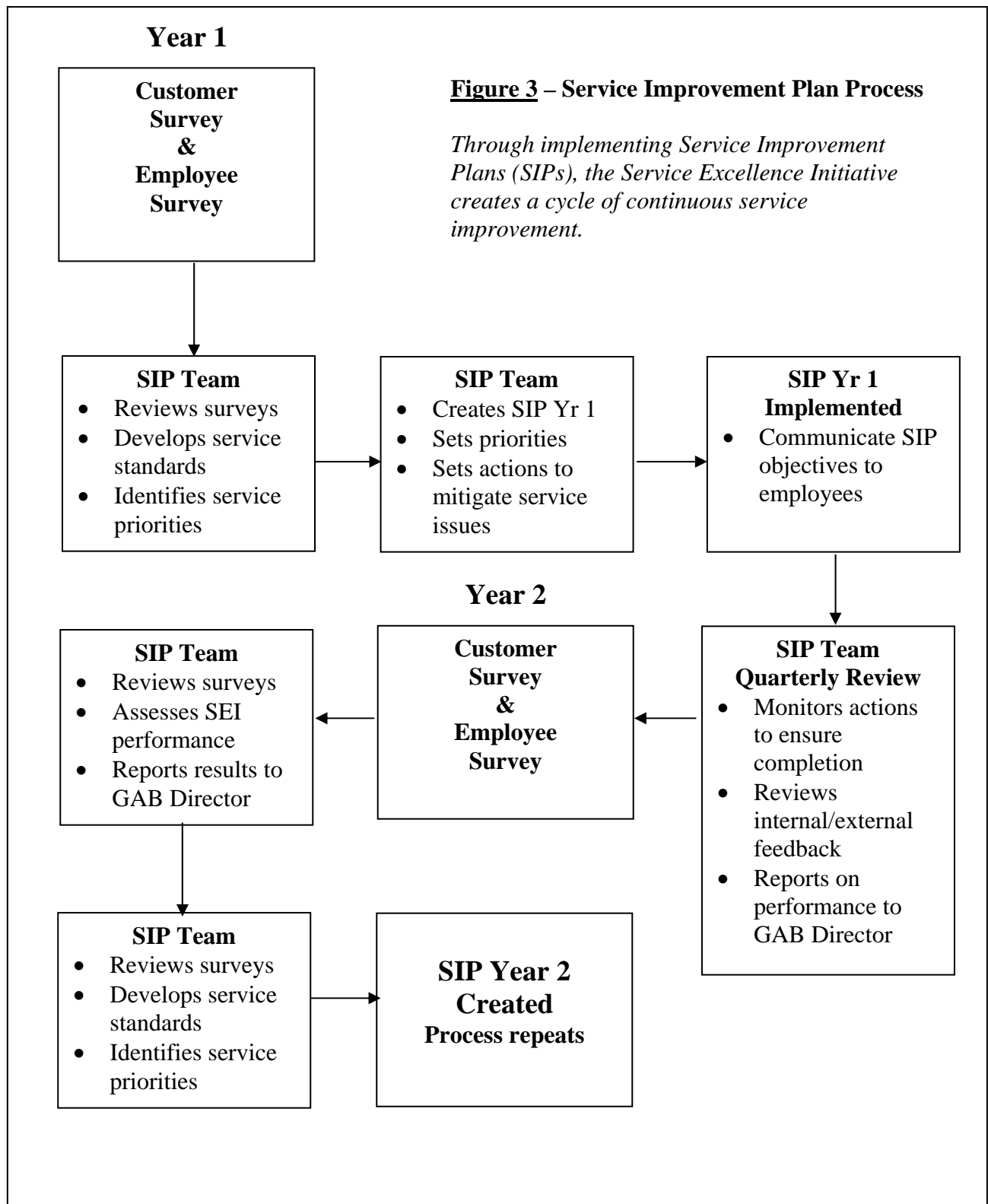


Figure 3 – Service Improvement Plan Process

Through implementing Service Improvement Plans (SIPs), the Service Excellence Initiative creates a cycle of continuous service improvement.

It is recommended that the Branch establish a team to review the SIP quarterly and report on its performance to the Branch's Management Team. This team will monitor the Service Improvement Plan ensuring objectives are being met and work is being completed. They will also be responsible for monitoring the success of the Service Excellence Initiative and recommending new annual targets and service priorities. The annual customer satisfaction surveys and employee input will drive new targets and service standards. Figure 3, on the previous page, outlines graphically how the process will proceed.

The SIP Team will consist of five members representative of both provincial geography and overall perspectives in the Branch. The SIP Team should consist of a Customer Service Representative, a Government Agent, a Manager of Government Agents, a client ministry representative, and a headquarters staff member. The headquarters staff member will be responsible for gathering, analyzing, and presenting information to the SIP Team. Team members will be responsible for making an annual commitment to the SIP process, providing input/feedback, and completing action items as assigned.

9.3 MEASUREMENT AND RESULTS

Overall the Service Excellence Initiative and the Service Improvement Plan should result in increased customer satisfaction. Federal literature indicates that organizations should set 10 percent improvement targets over a period of five years. However, the last customer satisfaction survey indicated that 94 percent of Government Agents Branch customers were satisfied with services received. As 100 percent customer satisfaction is

probably not realistic, it leaves a small margin, approximately 5 percent, for improvement over the next few years.

While the Branch should see an improvement in overall customer service, there is not much opportunity for dramatic results. The Branch may choose instead, to place more emphasis on results from their employee survey as an alternative method of assessing customer satisfaction. This is based on the idea that if the Branch is removing internal barriers to customer service delivery as well as addressing employee issues/concerns i.e. training, staffing, leadership, it will lead to increased customer satisfaction.

Several measures within the SIP include the successful completion of activities such as completed reports or training programs, however, some measures also include specific percentage improvement goals on the employee survey scores. For example, implementing a training program that addresses identified staff training needs hopefully will decrease the number who feel they do not have sufficient training to provide excellent customer service by 15 percent. It is also hoped that training programs will result in a 5 percent increase in the number of staff who indicate they are knowledgeable about the services the Branch provides. For a more complete review of measures and results, please refer to the Government Agents Branch Service Improvement Plan found in **Appendix J**.

9.4 REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Service Excellence Initiative performance reporting will be conducted quarterly and be forwarded to the Director of the Government Agents Branch. Every quarter a SIP report will be presented to the Management Team to inform them of the plan's progress. This ensures that the Branch remains focused on the SIP and that work on the improvement priorities continues. The Director will report results to the Assistant Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Management Services annually.

To maximize the effect of reporting on service performance, the Government Agents Branch should integrate reporting on SIPs into the performance management plan for the Branch.

10.0 GOVERNMENT AGENTS BRANCH SERVICE

STANDARDS

10.1 RATIONALE: WHY DEVELOP SERVICE STANDARDS FOR THE GOVERNMENT AGENTS BRANCH

Essentially there were three motivations for developing the service standards for Government Agents Branch. Motivations include fulfilling the New Era commitment to enhance service delivery in British Columbia; strengthening the service culture within the Government Agents Branch; and increasing/maintaining customer service satisfaction.

1. Fulfilling the New Era Commitment to enhance service delivery

For years the Government Agents Branch has maintained that they have a strong service culture and provide excellent customer service to the citizens of British Columbia. In fact their last customer satisfaction survey in 2001 indicated that 94 percent of customers were satisfied/very satisfied with services received.

However, the New Era Commitment to enhance service delivery in British Columbia increased focus on customer service in the province. This policy change requires that the Government Agents Branch set goals, measure and report back on how they are achieving their service delivery responsibilities. In essence they can no longer just say they provide excellent customer service, they have to prove it.

The service standards are a testament to the type of services that the Government Agents Branch strives to provide its customers and can be used to measure the

performance of Government Agents offices. Performance results will be reported to executive (Assistant Deputy Minister/Deputy Minister) in the Ministry of Management Services and will verify that the Branch is achieving their New Era Commitment. Performance results can also be used to identify new service improvement priorities that will then be included in the Service Improvement Plan.

2. Strengthening the Service Culture within the Government Agents Branch

An organization with a strong service culture will produce more satisfied customers. In the past the Branch has not provided staff with a common set of expectations or targets for customer service. They have instead relied on both Government Agents to manage customer service in their individual offices, and enthusiastic staff who are committed to providing great service. However, as in any large organization, not all staff provide the same level of customer service. The service standards will strengthen the service culture by providing a clear and common vision of the service objectives for the organization. Once this common vision has been communicated to staff, the standards will be used to create a consistent level of service in Government Agents offices across the province. This means that a customer walking into a Government Agents office can expect to receive, at a minimum, the services as described in the service standards, regardless of its location.

3. Increasing/Maintaining Customer Service Satisfaction

The most important reason for developing and introducing standards is to increase or at a minimum maintain customer service satisfaction levels. The current customer

satisfaction level is 94 percent, a difficult score on which to improve; the Branch may see minor increases in the future, however, large gains or 100 percent satisfaction may not be realistic.

10.2 SERVICE STANDARDS OVERVIEW

Over the course of the consultation process, 29 service standards were created. For a complete copy of the standards, please refer to **Appendix H**. The service standards cover nine areas, from general customer service values to specific standards with targets and turnaround times. With the exception of the first standard, each standard has a corresponding description. The description is intended to clarify for staff what the standard really means and how it will roll out in their offices and daily working environments. The service standards have been grouped into the following categories.

1. Customer Service Values

Standards in this first section are the core service values for the organization. They are based on the five drivers of customer satisfaction as identified in the *Citizen First 2000* survey: timeliness, knowledge/competence, the extra mile/extra smile, fairness, and outcome. The first eight standards are based primarily on these drivers with the exception of timeliness. Specific turnaround times have been established for standards later in the document. Turnaround times set targets for staff that will ensure services are provided in a timely manner.

2. *Office Signage*

Office signage clearly identifies the location of the Government Agents office and provides contact information and hours of service. These standards are particularly challenging for the Government Agents Branch as offices within the province have varying degrees and types of signage. In 2001 the Branch developed a new Government Agents Logo and a branding plan for its offices. They began to replace old signs with ones with the new logo. It is not financially possible to replace all Government Agents office signs within fiscal year 2002/03. They will have to be replaced as funding allows. However, offices will remove old window decals and include the new web site information on their doors.

3. *Office Appearance*

When a customer walks into an office an instant impression is made. This impression, in part, is based on the physical appearance of the office, and it can set the tone for a customer's interaction with staff. If the customer perceives that the office is a professional place of business this can set a positive tone; however, if they perceive that it is dirty and not an agreeable place, it can detract from the service experience. These standards establish common guidelines about cleanliness and the availability of appropriate materials for customers when they come into the office.

4. *Telephones*

The balance between serving walk-in customers versus telephone customers is a challenge for staff. Government Agents offices often have line-ups and/or long,

complicated interactions with customers. This can make it difficult to answer the telephone before it is transferred to voice mail. A target of answering the telephone by the fourth ring 80 percent of the time was established to encourage staff to answer the telephone before it goes to voice mail. The goal of 80 percent provides staff with some flexibility to use their best judgment of when to answer the telephone. For example, if staff are dealing with a widow who is applying for a death certificate for her recently deceased husband, staff can use their judgment not to answer the telephone so they can better serve the customer in the office.

5. *Voice Mail*

Sets general guidelines for the activation of voice mail when one leaves the office. These standards only apply to those who have individual voice mail boxes, mainly managers and headquarters staff.

6. *Returning Calls*

Establishes turnaround times for responses to calls. This standard includes calls from customers, client ministries, as well as internal staff.

7. *Walk-ins*

After much discussion and consultation with staff, it was agreed to set the goal of serving the customer within 10 minutes of their arrival in the office. This is an ambitious goal for high traffic offices that often have long customer line-ups.

Addressing customers in a courteous and professional manner and wearing nametags are also outlined in this section.

8. *Correspondence (Mail/Facsimile)*

Presently Government Agents offices do not receive a high volume of mail; however, they do receive hundreds of inquiries which often require faxed responses. This standard outlines how staff should handle incoming mail/faxes and provides turnaround times for all correspondence.

9. *E-mail*

Staff receive a large number of general e-mails every day. The majority of these e-mails deal with client ministry policy or program changes. A lesser number are directed at the individual Customer Service Representative or Government Agent and require a specific response. E-mail standards set turnaround times to respond to direct e-mails from customers, client ministries, or internal staff and also direct staff to engage their auto replies when away for long periods of time (vacation, courses, etc.).

Throughout the standards, you will note that staff are encouraged to be empathetic to the needs of the customer and use their judgment to react appropriately to each new situation. Staff are considered service experts and are relied upon to use their experience to resolve issues as new situations arise. The service standards are not intended to be a cookie-cutter approach to providing services to customers. Indeed, it may be inappropriate to continue to smile when a customer is unhappy that they have to pay a fine, taxes or their driver's

licence has just been confiscated. Instead the standards are a guideline to ensure that a common service standard approach is maintained throughout the Branch.

10.3 MEASURING THE SERVICE STANDARDS

During the consultation process, Government Agents suggested several measurement tools that could be used to assess how the service standards are working in their offices. Due to the nature of the service standards, it is difficult to measure them directly. With the exception of the mystery shopper and the Government Agents Branch Regional Managers Reports, all measurement tools will provide indirect or proxy measures. However, with a total of four proxy measures including comment cards, customer satisfaction survey, employee survey, and staff Planning and Performance Reviews (PPR), the organization will be able to assess its overall performance.

It should be noted that the Government Agents Branch has never implemented a mystery shopper program. It is recommended that they consider investing in a future program, as it would be the only method of directly measuring many of the service standards.

The service standards will be measured and reported annually. Results will be made available to the Management Team and the executive management at the Ministry of Management Services.

11.0 THE SERVICE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE AND LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The Government Agents Branch has successfully completed its first stage of the Service Excellence Initiative. However, as it looks to strengthen service excellence within the organization, there are four priority areas where the Government Agents Branch should direct its future energies. These include renewing the Service Improvement Plan and service standards annually; investing in a Mystery Shopper program; continuing to strengthen the service culture within the Government Agents Branch; and focusing on client ministry services and renewing Service Level Agreements.

11.1 ANNUAL RENEWAL OF THE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND THE SERVICE STANDARDS

In order to maintain the cycle of continuous service improvement, the Branch must remain committed to renewing its Service Improvement Plan (SIP). Customer service priorities and barriers to employee service excellence will continue to change, even as improvements are made. The annual renewal of the SIP will help the Branch identify new service priorities and be proactive in addressing them. As part of the SIP renewal process it is recommended that the Branch continue implementing customer and employee surveys. Ideally, these surveys should be implemented annually and be methodologically consistent so that results can be compared over time and used to assess performance of the SIP. A second suggested modification is to ensure that the process for developing questions for each survey is flexible and includes opportunities for Government Agent

involvement. While time constraints for conducting the surveys may limit the number of additional questions, consultation with the Government Agents will create broader understanding and acceptance of the process.

It should be noted that the Branch has recently completed a client ministry satisfaction survey. It is recommended that service improvement issues identified in the results of that survey be included in future SIPs. Once in the SIP, client issues will be folded into the continuous cycle of service improvement and actions/measures will be undertaken to mitigate them.

The service standards should be considered a living document that can be refined or added to as needed. The Government Agents Branch should continue to ask for staff feedback on the standards and make adjustments as necessary. This will further customize the standards to the Government Agents business/working environment. As staff adopt the standards and the service culture is strengthened, the Branch, in consultation with staff, can begin to improve existing standards and also add new standards, such as a staff dress code etc., as appropriate.

11.2 MYSTERY SHOPPER PROGRAM

As mentioned previously in Section 8.3, the Branch does not currently have a mystery shopper program. It is recommended that they invest in such a program, as it is the only direct measure available to determine if the service standards have been adopted. Once in place, the program will provide benchmarks against which the standards can be measured

in the future. It will also identify those standards, particularly turnaround times/waiting times, which may not be achievable. This will allow for customization of the standards so they remain challenging yet attainable for staff.

11.3 CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN THE BRANCH'S SERVICE CULTURE

In the fall of 2002 the Government Agents Branch introduced the service standards to its staff through a series of Customer Service Representative workshops across the province. Overall, the standards were well received and the workshops served to strengthen staff's commitment to customer service. While this was an excellent start to strengthening the service culture, the Branch must take steps to maintain the momentum created by the workshops. One approach could be the creation of a Service Excellence Initiative communication plan for staff.

A staff communication plan would continue to deliver the message of service excellence to the organization. Communications such as quarterly newsletters or the latest research on service quality could be posted on the Government Agents Branch intranet. The plan could allow for activities or events such as service quality expert presentations via teleconference, in which staff from the field could participate. There are a myriad of different activities that could be explored and included in a communication plan. While the plan does not have to be comprehensive, it would serve as the basic guide that the Branch would use to continue to communicate service excellence, thereby strengthening its service culture.

11.4 RENEWING CLIENT MINISTRY SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

The Branch delivers hundreds of services in fifty program areas for government ministries/agencies. The Branch strives to provide efficient service to its customers; however, the very structure and process of client ministry programs can impede service excellence. Long/unclear forms, inefficient information or transaction processes, and Government Agents offices having to wait weeks for needed forms often lead to customer dissatisfaction and staff frustration.

As part of the Service Excellence Initiative, the Branch needs to communicate its commitment to service excellence to its client ministries. Communication should focus on the Service Excellence Initiative objectives and service standards. The standards can be used as a platform to begin discussions on how client ministry services/programs need to change to meet Branch customer service goals. Later, client consultation can focus on developing service standards/expectations between the Branch and client ministries leading to new service level agreements between the parties.

It should be noted that the initial scope of this project is to create service excellence in the current Government Agents Branch service environment. However, to reach beyond initial improvements the Branch must address and initiate changes in client ministry program/process structures which pose substantial barriers to service excellence.

12.0 SUMMARY

Since the activation of the Service Excellence Initiative, the Government Agents Branch has continued to demonstrate its commitment to providing exceptional customer service. Already, in many instances, it goes the extra mile for its customers and staff.

The journey through this process has been neither short nor painless. However, due to careful planning, work on Service Improvement Plan priorities, has been continuing at a steady pace and the results of upcoming employee and customer surveys will be important to assess the Plan's performance. Also with the extensive consultation undertaken to develop the service standards, it is a solid document to which staff can relate and incorporate into their daily working routines. It will serve as a living document for the Branch as it continues its quest for service excellence in the years to come.

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Appendix A

Government Agent Branch Services

Government Agent Branch Services

The following services and information needs are available at most Government Agents offices.

Business

BC Gaming Commission
Business Information and Referrals
Commissioner For Taking Affidavits
Company Searches
Employment Standards
Notary Public
OneStop Business Registration
Sales Tax Number Registrations
WCB Information
Women's Services and Child Care

Education

Student Loan Program

Family & Health

Commissioner For Taking Affidavits
Disabled Forms - Parking, Fishing
District Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages
Driver's Licences
Medical Services Plan
Motor Vehicle Information
Notary Public
Public Guardian and Trustee Assistance
Vital Statistics
Voter Registrations
Wills Registration and Searches

Housing/Property

BC Assessment Information
Land Title Searches
Manufactured Home Registrations
Renting in British Columbia
Rural Property Taxation

Other

Assistant Gold Commissioner
BC Gaming Commission
Court Services
Crown Land Information
Crown Publications
Freedom of Information Act - Information and Applications
Land Claim Settlements
Mineral Claim Tags
Pesticide Exams
Placer Claim Tags
Purchasing Commission Tenders
Site Registry
Sub-recorder of Mineral Claims
Treaty Negotiations

Recreation

BC Parks Reservations
Hunter Number Cards

Registrations & Searches

Company Searches
Land Title Searches
Lien Searches
Manufactured Home Registrations
OneStop Business Registration
Personal Property Security Registrations
Repairer's Liens Registrations
Sales Tax Number Registrations
Voter Registrations
Wills Registration and Searches

Seniors
European Pension Verifications
Senior's Assistance

Tourism/Travel

BC Parks Reservations
Tourist Information

Appendix B

GAB Customer Satisfaction Survey 2001

Government Agents Branch Customer Satisfaction Survey 2001

Summary of results

Overall Satisfaction

Satisfied: 94% (76% of total were "Very Satisfied")

Neutral: 4%

Dissatisfied: 2% (almost evenly split between "Somewhat" and "Very dissatisfied")
(1998 survey used a different scale; 94% rated service either "Excellent" or "Good")

Customers in small offices had a slightly higher satisfaction level than those in medium and large offices (more said they were "Very satisfied" instead of "Somewhat satisfied")

Large offices accounted for most the "Dissatisfied" customers (but there weren't very many to start with)

Wait times

3 of every 5 customers "did not wait"

Over 95% of customers served within 5 minutes

Most customers (70%) would like to be served within 5 minutes

85% of customers were served more quickly than the amount of time they said was acceptable to wait

7% were served at the length of time they said was acceptable

Only 8% had to wait longer than they feel is acceptable

Did you get what you needed?

Overall 97% said "yes", another 1.3% said "in part"

Big offices do better: 99% either get all or part of what they need

Medium: 98%

Small: 96%

Satisfaction with key elements of GA service

	% dissatisfied
Availability of parking	21.1
Office hours	7.8
Convenience of payment methods	3.4
Convenience of location	3.2
Signage in office	3.2
Courtesy of staff	1.4
Skill and competence of staff	1.2

How important is it that you are able to carry out your government business and transactions in the following ways?

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Total (%)
A personal visit to the office	73.3	15.6	88.9
Telephone	28.9	19	47.9
Posted mail	18.8	14	32.8
Internet	15.1	12.1	27.2
Self-help computer in GA office	14.8	11.2	26.0
Fax	14.1	11.3	25.4
E-mail	13.6	11.2	24.8

Is there anything that can be done to improve the services that the GAs offer?

60% said “No”

“Yes”: a quick glance through the list (of 240 unprompted suggestions) indicates the top desires are: 1) More staff at lunch hour and 2) Longer opening hours (opening earlier and closing later, and Saturday)

(The responses will be tallied by common theme)

One favourite: “Counter staff seem to be frazzled or tense...”

Appendix C

Industry Canada Service Standards

Industry Canada Service Standards for Licensing Clients

Here's what you can expect from us:

Counter Service

During office hours, there will always be someone available to serve you.

You will be served within 10 minutes of arriving at our office.

We will respond to most requests for information immediately. If this is not possible, we will explain the reason for the delay and estimate how long you will have to wait. The delay will not normally exceed 5 working days.

Telephone Service

We will direct you to the right contact person on the first referral.

We will return all telephone messages within one working day. However, if the person you want to speak with is away, we will suggest another contact. If you prefer to speak to your original contact, then that person will return your call within one working day of returning to the office.

Quality Information

All our documents and information will be easy to understand.

All new or revised forms will be reviewed by our staff and clients to make sure they are clear.

Our goal is to have all licences and correspondence error-free.

Notification of Approval

Upon receipt of a radio station licence application that includes all the required information, we will mail out your authorization according to the following schedule:

Fixed Parameter Stations - includes aircraft, ship, amateur and radiotelephone stations, as well as mobile stations added to an existing fleet when no frequency selection is required - within three weeks.

Land Mobile Stations

- within 13 weeks if international coordination International coordination is required for all stations located within 120 kms of U.S. border. is required,

- within 7 weeks if international coordination* is not required.

Microwave Stations - all types - before the proposed in-service date or in accordance with the standards described in Radio Standards Procedure (RSP) 113.

We will strive to meet our standards and your in-service dates. If we cannot meet the deadline, we will advise you at least 2 weeks **before** the expected authorization date. We will explain the reason for the delay, give a new date, and provide you with an opportunity to discuss the matter.

*International coordination is required for most stations located within 120 km of the U.S. border.

Your Role

You can help us meet our commitment to you by:

Making sure your application is complete, or includes as much information as possible, when you submit it to our local office.

Including your licence fees with your application. You can wait for an invoice for the fees, but we cannot issue an authority until the fees are paid.

Including, with your application, all other applicable licensing documents and an indication that you meet our eligibility requirements.

Our objectives:

to ensure availability of the radio spectrum for new users, new uses and new technologies,

to ensure that all spectrum use is compatible,

to provide users with suitable frequency assignments for their needs,

in short, to maximize access to the radio spectrum while minimizing occurrences of interference.

Our commitment to you:

We will provide prompt and courteous service to all our clients.

This outlines our standards for client service, including the time required to approve a licence application.

If you're not satisfied:

We expect to meet the service standards described here. But if you think we haven't, please let us know.

Talk to the person who served you. Find out the reason why the standards were not met.

Talk to the supervisor of the unit if you do not know the name of your contact person or are not satisfied with the explanation you get. The supervisor will investigate your complaint and respond within five working days.

For more information:

Consult your local Industry Canada district office.

Aussi disponible en [français](#)

Normes de service relatives à la délivrance de licences aux clients

Please [e-mail](#) your favourite examples of service standards, your suggestions or your comments.

[Discussion: Service Standards](#)

[English Main Menu](#)

Last revised August 9, 1998

Appendix D

**Service Improvement Plan Temeplates from
*A How-to Guide for the Service Improvement Initiative.***

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR [ORGANIZATION]

For the Period: *Dates for which the plan is in effect*

Scope: *Services/programs affected by the service improvement plan*

THE CONTEXT

Brief summary of the background to the plan, in the citizen-centred approach, and any previous planning efforts.

DIRECTION

MISSION STATEMENT

A brief explanation that states the purpose of the organization.

VISION OF CITIZEN-CENTRED SERVICE

The desired future state for the organization based on the citizen-centred service approach.



Priorities Template: Example #1

PRIORITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

PRIORITY 1: *Reduce the need for clients and citizens to contact the government office by exploring new approaches in client service delivery.*

	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	RESULTS	MEASUREMENT
1.	Reduce telephone calls for information				
A.	Review of most frequent requests for information by telephone to identify gaps	Client Services Manager	May, 2000	Thorough review of information requests	Summary report of findings and information gaps
B.	Review information products for information gaps related to client requests	Director of Communications	June, 2000	Increased satisfaction with information needed being available	Client satisfaction survey
C.	Review forms for clarity and plain language	Client Services Manager	June 2000	Increased satisfaction with forms being easy to understand and fill out	Client satisfaction survey
2.	Increase availability of information across service channels				
A.	Expand information available on the Internet	Director of Communications	August 2000	Expansion of information available through the Internet service channel	Number of paper information documents available electronically through the Internet

PRIORITY 2: priority statement

Definition/clarification of terms in priority statement, or elaboration on statement

	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	TARGETS	MEASUREMENT
1.	Objective #1				
A.	Action		Date finished		
2.	Objective #2				
A.	Action		Date finished		

Priorities Template: Example #2

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT	OBJECTIVES / ACTIONS	SERVICE CHANNELS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	RESULTS	MEASUREMENT										
<p>Based on client and citizen priorities, identify improvement priorities on which actions should be undertaken</p> <p>IMPROVE SERVICE ACCESS</p>	Which action(s) will be undertaken to address client priorities for service improvement?	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Phone</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>In Person</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mail</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Electronic</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Phone		In Person		Mail		Electronic		Other		Who is (are) responsible parties for taking action?	When will this be undertaken (U) and finished (F)?	What result(s) is (are) expected?	How is progress and results measured?
	Phone															
	In Person															
	Mail															
Electronic																
Other																
<p>Objective 1: Facilitate the identification of points of service</p> <p>Action 1.1: Installing new signage inside and outside buildings</p>	X	Director of Administrative Services	U: June 2000 F: October 2000	Increased client satisfaction with signage.	Measured through the client satisfaction survey											
<p>Action 1.2: Review of "blues pages" information in telephone directories</p>	X	Director of Communications	U/F: September 2000	Increased client satisfaction with accessibility by telephone	Measured through the client satisfaction survey											
<p>Objective 2:</p> <p>Action 2.1:</p>																
IMPROVE SERVICE TIMELINESS																
IMPROVE STAFF COMPETENCY / KNOWLEDGE																
IMPROVE SERVICE FAIRNESS																
IMPROVE SERVICE STAFF COURTESY																
IMPROVE STAFF SATISFACTION																

ACTION PLAN AND FOLLOW-UP

MONITORING AND REPORTING PROCESS

Brief description on how the plan will be monitored, how frequently results will be reported, and how the results will be reported (i.e. reports).

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Identification of those accountable for the initiative, and to whom the reports are presented for further action.

Appendix E

Employee Service Delivery Survey Questionnaire

Employee Service Delivery Survey

Please FAX responses to the GAB at (250) 387-5633 or fill out electronically and send to Kirsten.McCaig@gems8.gov.bc.ca by Thursday, June 21, 2001

This is a confidential internal employee survey that will take approximately 7 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary, but the results will be more useful if *all* GAB employees respond. Results will be used to learn about employee perception of current GA customer service and identify internal service barriers. Thank you!

Survey Scale:

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

- | | Strongly Disagree | | | Strongly Agree | |
|--|-------------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. As a whole, would you agree or disagree that your Government Agents <u>office</u> provides excellent customer service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Based on your experience of providing customer service in a Government Agents office, how does your office rank in the following. | | | | | |

- | | Strongly Disagree | | | Strongly Agree | |
|--|-------------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (a) Staff provide timely customer service. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Staff are courteous and go the extra mile for customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Staff are knowledgeable about services that we provide? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Staff treat all customers fairly regardless of age, gender, ethnicity etc. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Staff are able to provide a complete range of services to meet the needs of customers? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (f) Staff receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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3. What are the top 3 challenges you face in the delivery of excellent customer service.

i.

ii.

iii.

4. What can be done to improve the level of customer service in your office and in the GAB in general?

5. The GAB *Intra-net* is intended to promote communication within the GAB and provide you with the information necessary to effectively deliver programs and services.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
(a) Do you agree or disagree that the <i>Intra-net</i> is a great tool for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy, procedures and Ministry news?	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Do you agree or disagree that the GAB <i>Intra-net</i> helps you provide excellent customer service?	1	2	3	4	5

(c) How could the *Intra-net* be improved to meet your information needs when serving a customer?

(d) What type of additional information would you like to see on the *Intra-net*?

Thank-you for your comments! 😊

Optional

NAME: _____ **LOCATION:** _____

Appendix F

CSR Focus Group Questionnaire and Agenda

Service Standards Focus Group

Agenda

May 31, 2001
"B" Board Room
Executive Airport Plaza
Richmond, BC

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Introductions | 8:30 – 8:45 AM |
| 2. Lessons Learned | 8:45 – 10:30 AM |
| Break | 10:30 - 10:45 AM |
| 3. Defining the Standards – Workshop | 10:45 AM – 12 PM |
| Lunch | 12 AM – 1:15 PM |
| 4. Defining the Standards – Workshop Cont'd | 1:15 – 2:30 PM |
| 5. Brainstorming Communication Strategies | 2:30 – 3:15 PM |
| Break | 3:15 – 3:30 PM |
| 6. Closing Thoughts and Comments from Staff | 3:30 – 4:15 PM |

Dress: Casual and comfortable.

Objective 1: Lessons Learned

Lessons learned is an open discussion regarding your and your colleague's experiences with the Service Standards. Office representatives are responsible for talking to colleagues and bringing their perspective to the focus group. If staff indicate an issue(s) ask them for potential solutions that would help resolve the problem.

Lessons Learned	
Question	Your Thoughts/Staff response
Were the standards easy to understand (were they straightforward)?	
Were the standards easy to incorporate into your daily working routine?	
Did staff find the standards challenging? If, yes were standards still attainable?	
Which standards are the most challenging and why?	
Are there any standards that staff feel are unattainable – if so which one(s) and why.	
Thinking about your response from the question above, how could the standard(s) be changed to make it more attainable?	

Lessons Learned

Question	Your Thoughts/Staff response
Did staff find that they were using the standards right away – did they consciously think about the standards when providing customer service?	
Did staff find that they were using the standards later in the project i.e. February? If no, why not?	
Did staff find any difference between using the standards once they were first introduced and then later as time progressed? (did enthusiasm peter out?)	
Was there any resistance to the standards? If so why and what form did it take? Are there any suggestions for solutions so we can avoid the type of problems identified in this question?	

Objective 2: Defining the Standards

We will spend this part of the focus group going through each service standard and refining their descriptions/definitions. Please carefully review the **service standards** attached in the email prior to Friday, May 21. If you have time ask your colleagues for feedback on the standards and if they have any suggestions they would like you to bring forward to the focus group.

Objective 3: Brainstorming Communication Strategies

In order to implement the standards across the organisation we will need a communication plan (a strategy for communicating the service standards to each office and obtaining staff buy-in) that will be applicable to all staff in offices of all sizes.

Communicating to the Organisation	
Question	Your Thoughts/Staff Input
How did the presentation of the Service Excellence Initiative and the service standards (last November) work as an introduction to the service standards?	
If we could not go forward with a service standards presentation in each office – what kind of alternatives could we use to communicate the standards to staff that they would understand and adopt them?	
Brainstorming Activity	
Initial Introduction of the Standards	
1) Suggestions/alternatives for communicating the standards to the organisation. (What is the ultimate communication plan? What is the minimum communication plan?)	
2) Rank the methods of communication suggested in question 1	
After the Initial Introduction of the Standards	
What kind of on-going communication is needed to keep standards top-of-mind and create a smooth as possible adoption?	
How do we create staff ownership of the standards? What are some suggestions?	

Appendix G

Employee Service Delivery Survey Results



Service Excellence Initiative

**Employee Service Delivery Survey:
Results and Discussion**

August 2001

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EMPLOYEE SERVICE DELIVERY SURVEY 31

Survey Highlights

89% of employees agree that GAs offer excellent customer service.

Employees rank themselves high on the *five drivers* of customer satisfaction.

- 87% of staff feel their office offers *timely service*
- 88% feel staff are *courteous* and go the *extra mile*.
- 84% say *staff are knowledgeable* about the services they provide.
- 88% believe staff *treat customers fairly*
- 86% feel that our offices offer a complete range of services that meet the needs of their clients.

However, 72% of staff do not feel they receive sufficient training...

...specifically in client programs. They would like increase training in the following client programs /applications:

- MSP
- Rural Property Tax
- Property Tax Transfers/Manufactured Homes
- ICBC
- BC Gaming

Staff also suggested several alternative training methods and topics that would help them deliver excellent customer service including:

- Mentor/shadow programs
- Mini-sessions/ refresher courses
- Training manuals

- Online information
- Customer service training
- Computer training
- Conflict/dispute resolution

Top three challenges to delivering excellent customer service are:

1. Workload/Staffing Constraints
2. Lack of Training
3. Client Ministries Programs

Top three solutions to improving customer service in GAB are:

1. Improved Training
2. Increased Staffing
3. Management (leadership and acknowledgement/rewarding well performing staff)

75% of staff agree that the Intranet is a great tool...

...for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy, procedures and Ministry news....

... but only 62% of people agree that the Intranet helps them provide excellent customer service.

Suggested tools and information to improve customer service included:

- Search tool/engine
- Additional printable or on-line fillable forms
- More links to clients' web sites
- More time for staff to become familiar with the Intranet and its capabilities

1. Purpose

In May 2001 the Service Excellence Initiative (SEI) Best Practices review identified the need to develop and implement an internal employee survey. The intent of the survey would be to gauge employee perception of customer service in their Government Agents offices as well as identify internal barriers staff face to providing excellent customer service. Pursuant to the recommendations of the Best Practices review an internal employee survey was developed and implemented in June 2001. The results of the survey will used to guide the development of service standards and established priorities for the Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

2. Results and Discussion

Summary of Findings

Overall 89.3% of employees agreed that GA offices offer excellent customer service. Based on their experience staff feel their offices offer customer services that are timely, fair, and courteous. In addition staff feel they go the extra mile for customers and are knowledgeable about the services GAB provides. These findings, however, contrast sharply with, or are in spite of, the fact that only 27.6% and 8.0% of survey participants agree or strongly agree, respectively, that they

89.3% of employees agree that GAs offer excellent customer service.

receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service. This translates to 72.4% of employees feeling that they are not sufficiently trained. When asked “what type of training would increase your ability to provide excellent customer service” top responses include more training in client specific programs (such as MSP, Rural Property Tax, property transfers/manufactured homes etc.), staff receiving organised and consistent training, training for computer programs/databases and communication/dispute resolution training to deal with difficult customers. In addition employees expressed frustration regarding finding sufficient time for training. While employees recognise that training and information material is available to them through computer programs and written materials, they are not able to fully utilise them since they have to access it in between customers.

However, 72.4% of employees feel that they are not sufficiently trained.

Question three of the survey asked employees to list the top three challenges they face in the delivery of excellent customer service. After compiling the responses 16 themes emerged. The top six themes (based on frequency of response) were:

Top 3 Challenges
1. *Staffing/Workload Constraints*
2. *Training*
3. *Client ministries*

- 1) staffing/workload constraints,
- 2) training (lack of),
- 3) client ministries (communication),
- 4) communication issues (the way info is communicated in GAB i.e. channels like email etc as well as consistency of messages/policies),
- 5) time constraints (i.e. staying current on new changes/materials),

- 6) change management issues (i.e. finding it difficult to keep up with the pace of change).

In an attempt to break away from creating a survey that was only an outlet for participants to express their frustrations, question four was designed to give employees an opportunity to problem solve. Employees responded to the question “*what can be done to improve the level of customer service in your office and in the GAB in general*”. The top six themes that emerged were:

Top 3 Solutions

- 1) Training
- 2) Staffing
- 3) Management

- 1) training (development of an effective training program)
- 2) staffing (maintaining adequate staffing levels)
- 3) management (active leadership/employee recognition)
- 4) increase customer service options (credit cards payments)
- 5) communication (internal communication)
- 6) office layout.

The last section of the survey delved into employees perceptions about the GAB Intranet, specifically, its uses as a tool for communicating in the organisation and as a tool for providing excellent customer services. Overall a majority of employees, 75.5% agreed/strongly agreed that the Intranet was a great tool for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy, procedures and ministry news. However, only 61.5% agreed/strongly agreed that the Intranet helps them provide excellent customer service. When asked how the Intranet could be improved to meet their information needs the top three themes that emerged were:

- 1) time constraints/not familiar with the Intranet to comment
- 2) new suggested materials/restructuring
- 3) suggested new tools (i.e. search engine).

The final question in this section, and the survey, asked what additional information would you like to see on the Intranet. The top two themes identified were:

- 1) additional Information/tools/links
- 2) staff not familiar enough with the Intranet/ “no comment”.

Results and Discussion

The following identifies and discusses the results for each question contained in the Employee Service Delivery Survey.

Regional Survey Participation

The survey was successful with a 67.5% return rate (189 responses). The Kootenay region had the highest return rate at 78.0% while the Thompson/Okanagan region had the lowest at 51.6%. At least one survey was received from each of the 59 offices across the province.

The survey was distributed at the beginning of the property tax season which may account for a 34.6% non response rate.

Table 1: Survey Response Rate

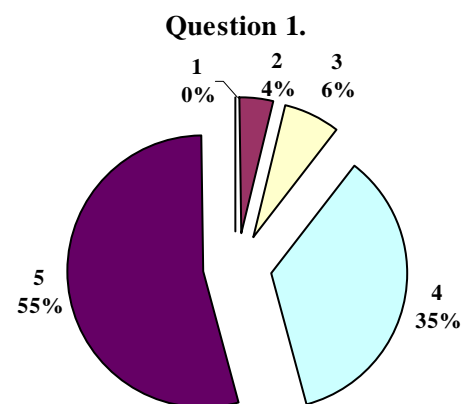
Region	Count	No. of Possible Responses	Response Rate/region
1 Kootenay	32	41	78.0%
2 North Central	46	63	73.1%
3 Northwest	24	37	64.9%
4 Thompson/Okanagan	33	64	51.6%
5 Van Island. / South Coast	53	84	63.1%
Unknown	1		Response Rate
Grand Total	189	280	67.5%

Question 1: *As a whole, would you agree or disagree that your Government Agents office provides excellent customer service?*

The intent of this question was to gauge staff perception of customer service in their offices. The results indicate that staff are very positive about customer service with 89.3% of staff strongly agreeing/ agreeing that GAs provide excellent customer service. However, 6.4% of respondents indicate that they are neutral and 4.3% disagreed that GAs provide excellent customer service.

Table 2: Question 1

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
2 Disagree	8	4.3%
3 Neutral	12	6.4%
4 Agree	65	34.8%
5 Strongly Agree	102	54.5%
Grand Total	187	100.0%
(blank)	2	
Average	4.40	



Question 2: *Based on your experience of providing customer service in a Government Agents office, how does your office rank in the following...*

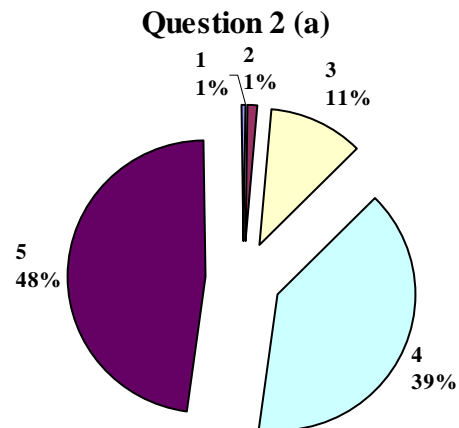
In the second section of the survey employees were asked to rank 6 questions based on their experience of providing customer service in a Government Agents office. Question 2 (a) to 2 (e) were based on the five drivers of customer service identified in the Citizen First 2000 survey (timeliness, knowledge/competence, the extra mile/extra smile, fairness, and outcome)¹. Question 2 (f) asked employees if they receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer services with space to offer comments on what types of training would enhance their ability to provide excellent customer service.

(a) *Staff provide timely customer service.*

Results show that 87.3% of employees believe GAs provide timely customer service. 11.1% of respondents indicated that they had neutral feelings regarding GA timely services and 1.5% disagreed/strongly disagreed that customers receive timely service.

Table 2: Question 2 (a)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	1	0.5%
2 Disagree	2	1.1%
3 Neutral	21	11.1%
4 Agree	74	39.2%
5 Strongly Agree	91	48.1%
Grand Total	189	100.0%
(blank)	0	
Average	4.33	



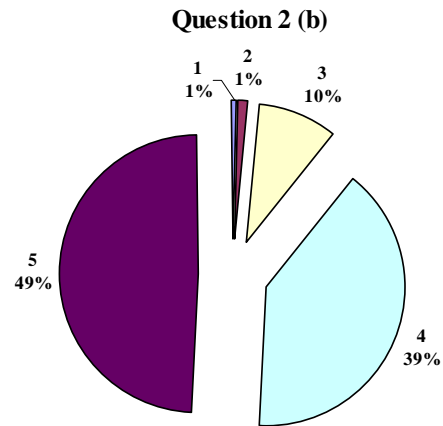
¹ Spears, George and Kasia Seydegart. Citizens First 2000. Toronto, Ontario.: Institute of Public Administration of Canada 2001.

(b) *Staff are courteous and go the extra mile for customers.*

When asked if staff were courteous and went the extra mile for customers, survey participants were positive with 88.4% agreeing/strongly agreeing. In contrast 9.5% of participants ranked staff as neutral and 2.1% disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 3: Question 2 (b)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	1	0.5%
2 Disagree	3	1.6%
3 Neutral	18	9.5%
4 Agree	74	39.2%
5 Strongly Agree	93	49.2%
Grand Total	189	100.0%
(blank)	0	
Average	4.35	

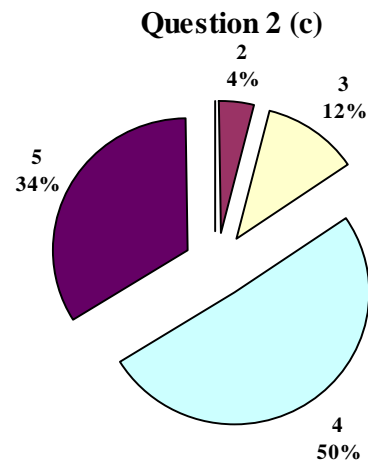


(c) *Staff are knowledgeable about services that we provide.*

On whole 84.0% of staff agreed/strongly agreed with the statement “staff are knowledgeable about services we provide”. 11.7% of staff stated that they took a neutral stance on the statement and 4.3% disagreed with it. The indication that some staff do not feel they are knowledgeable about the services we provide may be linked with the high number of staff who indicate that they do not feel that they receive sufficient training (discussed further in Question 2 (f)).

Table 4: Question 2 (c)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
2 Disagree	8	4.3%
3 Neutral	22	11.7%
4 Agree	94	50.0%
5 Strongly Agree	64	34.0%
Grand Total	188	100.0%
(blank)	1	
Average	4.14	

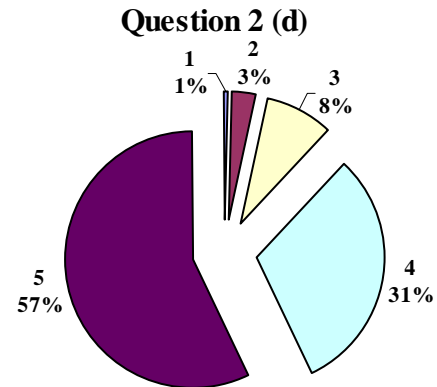


(d) Staff treat all customers fairly regardless of age, gender, ethnicity etc.

Once again 87.8% of participants indicate that they agree/strongly agree with the statement that staff treat all customers fairly. 8.5% indicate they are neutral while 3.2% disagree/strongly disagree with this statement.

Table 5: Question 2 (d)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	1	0.5%
2 Disagree	6	3.2%
3 Neutral	16	8.5%
4 Agree	58	30.7%
5 Strongly Agree	108	57.1%
Grand Total	189	100.0%
(blank)	0	
Average	4.41	

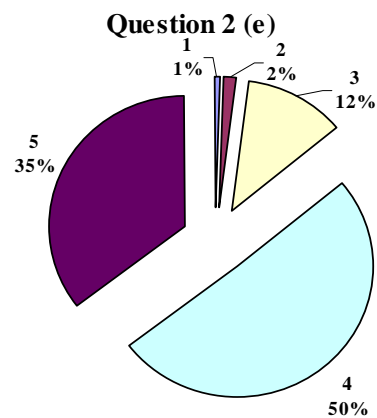


(e) Staff are able to provide a complete range of services to meet the needs of customers?

When asked if staff are able to provide a complete range of services to meet the needs of customers 85.7% of respondents stated that they agree/strongly agree while 12.2% responded neutrally and 2.1% disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement. Respondents may feel that GAs do not offer complete services due to the number of customers who request Federal services/information or need information on provincial services that GAB does not offer. A number of GAB employees have requested more training or information on where to direct customers regarding federal services so they could provide optimal customer service. This will be discussed further in Question 2 (f) and Question 3.

Table 6: Question 2 (e)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	1	0.5%
2 Disagree	3	1.6%
3 Neutral	23	12.2%
4 Agree	95	50.3%
5 Strongly Agree	67	35.4%
Grand Total	189	100.0%
(blank)	0	
Average	4.19	

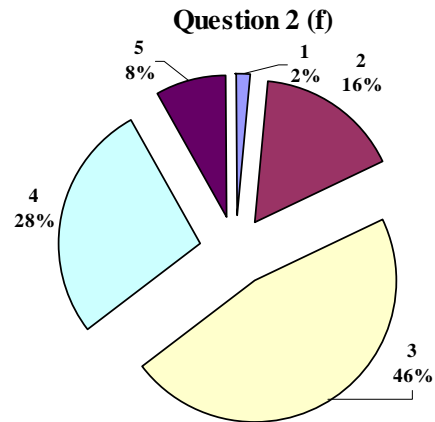


(f) Staff receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service?

In the last question of section 2, employees were asked if staff receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service. The overall response was negative. Only 35.6% of employees agreed/strongly agreed that they had adequate training. 46.3% were neutral and 18.1% disagree/strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 7: Question 2 (f)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	3	1.6%
2 Disagree	31	16.5%
3 Neutral	87	46.3%
4 Agree	52	27.6%
5 Strongly Agree	15	8.0%
Grand Total	188	100.0%
(blank)	1	
Average	3.24	



If you ranked the above question 3 or less, what types of training would increase your ability to provide excellent customer service?

If an employee responder to question 2 (f) 3 (neutral) or less, the survey requested that they provide comments on what types of training would increase their ability to provide excellent customer service. The comments were compiled and the following themes emerged:

"In order to provide 'top notch' services, we need training."

Suggested Training Changes		
Ranking	Themes	Response Count
1	Training General, Methods and Topics	66
2	Client Ministries	64
3	Time Constraints/Challenges	19
4	Communication	15
5	Budget and Staffing	2
6	Misc.	1
	Total	167

Suggested Training Techniques and Topics

In essence, employees indicate they receive little training and the training they do receive is “on the job”. This creates a feeling of inconsistency regarding the level of training among staff members as well as staff feeling unsure about their knowledge to deliver programs effectively. Overall staff requested more in-depth training and made suggestions for alternative training methods and areas for supplemental training. These suggestions have been compiled and summarised below. They are not listed according to frequency of topic but rather, try to capture the ideas and sentiments as expressed by the employees as a whole. It should, however, be noted that the most frequent (and most significant) request for supplemental training was in client specific programs.

- **Client Ministries**

In order to deliver superior customer service employees identified the need for supplemental training in client specific programs/databases. The top six programs employees would like training in are MSP, Rural Property Tax, property transfers/manufactured homes, Mining, ICBC and BC Gaming.

It is interesting to note that when asked in Question 2 if “*staff are knowledgeable about services that we provide*” 84.0% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed with this statement. However, this response belies the results found in 2 (f) where staff identify a lack of knowledge/training in client programs and navigating within client computer databases as a significant hindrance to excellent customer service. This is further contradicted by results to Question 3 when staff identify again, the need for more training in client ministry programs in order to provide excellent customer service.

Suggested training alternatives include:

- **Mentor/shadow program**

Employees would like to see the creation of a mentoring or shadow program for new employees. The new employee would be partnered with an experienced CSR and would spend considerable time with them learning about client ministry programs as well as familiarising themselves with the services of GAB.

- **Mini-Sessions**

Mini-sessions were suggested as a method of familiarising staff with new significant changes to client ministry programs and to ensure consistency in program delivery. Mini-sessions would provide an opportunity to inform all staff about changes at the time as well as present an opportunity to ask questions together. Some employees feel that information communicated only through email leaves some changes/procedures up to different interpretations by staff members and thereby creates inconsistent service delivery among staff and GA offices. Mini-sessions could be conducted as staff meetings.

- **Refresher Courses**

Would be brief training sessions where employees could re-familiarise themselves with client programs and discuss any new changes in procedures before the commencement of busy seasons such as property tax.

- **Training Manual**
Employees recognise that information is always changing but feel that having the “basics” available would help them greatly in their day to day transactions. Ideally the manual would include step-by-step procedures or a checklist for client ministry programs/transactions. It was also felt that a manual would help create consistency among staff when delivering a client program.
- **On-line Information**
Employees would like to see better on-line information. Suggestions include having examples of completed client ministry forms so CSRs and customers have a better understanding of how to complete them. It should be noted that overall employees feel that on-line information should not replace classroom style training. There is support for using the intra/internet as a source of information but generally employees indicate they would learn more effectively from classroom style/group training. The reluctance towards on-line training could be affected by time constraint issues, lack of familiarity with the intra/internet and different learning styles i.e. reading versus interactive learning. A balance between these two teaching mediums will need to be reached in the future.

In addition to training alternatives, employees identified areas or topics in which they would like supplemental training to increase their customer service.

- **Customer Service**
Training in customer service would improve service delivery in GAs across the province. Currently employees do not receive this training.
- **Computer Training**
The majority of comments regarding computer training focused on increasing knowledge and familiarity with accessing and using client programs/databases. Employees do not feel they have sufficient training in these programs to deliver excellent customer service. Staff also expressed the need for Internet and email training.
- **Communication Skills**
One element of excellent customer service is successfully mitigating issues regarding upset or disgruntled customers. To many customers, the GA office is the face of government in their community. This leads to occasional problems with customers who take out their frustrations on CSRs working on the front counters or customers getting upset over policies that employees have no control over. Employees feel training in conflict resolution would help mitigate these situations successfully.
- **Federal Training**
Due to the number of customers who come to GA offices requesting federal services two respondents indicated that they would like increased training in federal programs.

Time Constraints

Employees feel that training will be most effective if it is completed away from the front counters/office. Employees are aware that information and training material are available on line but feel they are not able to learn from them effectively as they have to access them in between serving customers. Designated time away from the counter for specific training would alleviate this problem.

Communication

GAB staff would like a clear consistent system of informing staff of new changes to program information, policies, and procedures. Communication is a significant issue within GAB and will be discussed in more detail under Question 3.

Question 3: *What are the top 3 challenges you face in the delivery of excellent customer service?*

In Question 3 employees responded to the question *what are the top 3 challenges you face in the delivery of excellent customer service*. The 189 respondents provided 506 responses, which emerged into 16 themes. Themes were ranked according to the number of responses allotted to each theme.

Challenges to Service Excellence		
Ranking	Themes	Response Count
1	Staffing/Workload Constraints	73
2	Training	63
3	Client Ministries	57
4	Time Constraint Issues	46
5	Communication	41
6	Change Management	39
7	Technical/Computer Issues	37
8	Management/ Leadership	35
9	Customer Expectations	19
10	Complexity of Material/ Procedures/ Policy	17
11	Customer Requesting Federal	16
12	Physical Office Location/Layout/Equipment	15
12	Customer Payment Options/ Hrs of Service	15
14	Staff Morale	13
15	Difficult Customers	8
16	Misc.	12
	TOTAL	506

Staffing/ Workload Constraints

Staffing issues were identified as the top challenge to customer service. Issues include staffing levels, interpersonal relationships between staff /distribution of the workload and working alone.

- Staffing Levels

Maintaining adequate levels of staffing in GA offices emerged as the top challenge to service excellence. Employees feel that GA offices are not sufficiently staffed and that vacation and sick leave compound this issue.

“Sickness and vacation time with no relief can mean running 2, 3, or 4 short of normal staffing levels – longer line-ups and increased waiting time alienate the public and increase staff stress.”

Some offices are so small that the absence of one staff member greatly affects their working environment. Staff become frustrated with the increased workload while trying to serve customers in person, over the phone and fax (staffing levels at some offices leads to the closure of the GA offices at lunch) and staff are not able to take breaks because of the lack of available coverage. Staff also suggested that workload issues affect their ability to keep abreast of new information/policies, which can also affect service quality.

- Working Alone

Related to staffing levels, working alone was identified as a challenge to customer service. Due to the small size and remoteness of some GA offices, staff have to work alone throughout the day. When the office is busy it can affect customer service.

- Interpersonal Relationships Between Staff/Workload

The personal interaction between some staff (five counts) and the appropriate sharing of the workload (seven counts) was identified as an issue that could affect customer service.

Training

As foreshadowed by the results of Question 2 (f) “Do staff receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service?”, training was identified as a major challenge to excellent customer service. Themes that arose again in this category were lack of training, the need for consistent training among all staff and GA offices, as well as examples of types of training staff would like to see in their offices.

“Proper training – when I first started in this office I received no formal training [and] was told to watch the others [but] everyone has a different way of doing things!”

- Lack of training / Consistent training

Staff feel that they lack training and would like to see GAB develop a consistent staff training program. This would help create uniform services in GA offices across the province. The current lack of training affects all staff but makes the learning curve for new staff particularly difficult. New staff must learn about GAB’s programs and procedures through completing transactions/processing tasks and are told to ask colleagues if they have any

questions. Staff methods of completing procedures can vary which makes learning procedures difficult for new staff.

- **Types of Training**
Suggested training techniques and topics are similar to those found in Questions 2 (f) and include one-on-one training, mini/small training sessions, follow-up training when new policies or procedures are introduced, client programs, conflict resolution, and computer training. Again staff would like to see additional information posted on the *Intranet* such as examples of completed forms that can guide staff or customers when completing the form.

Client Ministry

As previously acknowledged in Question 2 (f) lack of training/familiarity with client ministry programs and databases is a significant barrier to service excellence. In Question 3 client ministry issues emerged again as the third most important challenge to excellent customer service. While this theme is closely linked to the issue of sufficient training, the issue focus for Question 3 is communication between client ministries and GAB employees, sufficient access to databases, change management and bureaucratic clients.

- **Communications Issues**
Staff state that one of the greatest challenges to service excellence is communication barriers between GAB employees and client ministries. Staff expressed frustration at not being able to quickly reach client ministry representatives. Their calls are put on hold, blocked or transferred to voice mail. Employees find client ministry responses to their inquiries are often delayed or sometimes even go unanswered. In addition staff do not feel they have adequate information regarding new changes before they are to be implemented. These factors, plus ministry information packages/forms that arrive late and unreliable client web and/or manual information, greatly impede excellent customer service.

“When we try to reach offices in order to answer queries, voice mail seems to hinder our ability to reach a ‘real person’. The client is in the office and we are unable to solve their problems because we cannot reach a staff person for an answer.”
- **Computer Databases**
Some GAB employees feel that their customer service is limited because they have limited access to client databases. They feel that limited access can create the perception that staff “don’t know the answers” to customers’ questions.
- **Bureaucratic Clients**
Staff find that client programs such as MSP that are months behind in processing applications impact their ability to offer excellent customer services. Also red tape created by client “rules”/policies that deters clients rather than assisting them.

Time Constraints

GAB staff work at a busy pace providing services to thousands of clients every day. Due to the nature of their position staff state that finding sufficient time for training and keeping abreast of changing information is a challenge. As stated previously, staff are aware that training and information are available to them but, it is the ability to set aside sufficient time to read and process this information that remains a challenge. Designating time away from the desk/office to learn about new things was suggested as a way to alleviate this problem.

GAB Communication

Many sub-themes developed under the heading of GAB communication. The focus of comments was on the need for consistent internal communication within the organisation as well as the challenges regarding the effective use of popular communication channels such as email.

Additional minor sub-themes included client ministries and marketing GAB services to the general public.

- **Internal Communication**

Employees feel that the current communication structure/methods allow staff to interpret procedures and policies in different ways. Information should be communicated to customers in a uniform manner and staff should not be giving different responses to the same questions. They would also like new information available “at their fingertips” and to not have to ask other staff for answers as they sometimes receive conflicting answers.

Staff would also like to be kept up to date on changes and have lead time prior to their implementation. This would replace the “last minute changes” which employees do not like. This would help staff who sometimes have customers who know about a program before they do.

- **Internal Communication Channels**

Employees expressed the need for one source where staff can retrieve information easily and quickly on changes to policies, programs and procedures.

It should be noted that 24.5% of respondents did not agree with the statement from Question 5 (a) that “*the Intranet is a great tool for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy*”. This could be due in part to unfamiliarity or level of comfort using computers. Therefore, any decision to amalgamate information on the Intranet will necessitate the creation of Intranet computer training so that 25% of staff are not left behind.

Currently emails, *Intranet* and bulletins are used to communicate changes and staff find the volume of information sometimes overwhelming. In addition the particular use of email as a communication tool can be conflicting because if an initial change was not correct, a new email(s) gets sent out with new instructions. With so many emails on one subject staff find it

“Trying to wade through all the info each day on email, internet, bulletins and intranet – the volume just keeps growing.”

difficult to remember what were the right changes. Lastly, the volume of information takes time away from other duties as employees have to sort through emails, read them, and then decide what to keep and what to delete.

- **Communication to General Public**
Employees would like see the GAB implement more marketing activities that would increase customer awareness about the services they provide.

Change Management

Change management issues focus on employees trying to cope with the “constant changes” that their jobs require. Changes to client policy were cited as particularly difficult to manage i.e. the Fisheries and Wildlife programs. Staff are acutely aware that their ability to “keep up” affects the quality of service they provide to customers. Their quality of service is further hindered when they receive “last minute” changes or new programs that they have to deliver/explain to customers when they are not yet familiar or comfortable about their knowledge levels. To alleviate this staff expressed the need for more time to become familiar with program/procedural changes in advance of implementation.

“Everyday new changes via email, faxes, house mail. Staff are constantly trying to keep up and it is beginning to be a losing battle.”

Technical/Computer Issues

This issue centres on slow computers systems/crashes, lack of public access to computers to obtain GAB information, and unreliable intranet/internet (GAB/client ministry) information available to successfully complete services for customers. Staff also commented that out moded phones systems and the time consumed logging in and out of GAB programs (GARMS, MODE 3 & 4, GAM, ISTD, DSCS, PAR and Mining) and rebooting their computers is a challenge to excellent customer service.

Management / Leadership

Management and leadership issues were ranked as the 8th theme for challenges staff face in the delivery excellent customer services. Management issues include effective management of GA offices, development of policy with no input from non-management staff and/or little consideration for its affects on certain offices. In addition to management issues there is a perceived lack of leadership and/or direction within some GA offices and the organisation as a whole.

Customer Expectations

The GAB is unique in that it delivers programs on behalf of their ministries, it does not develop and implement its own. Customers, however, are sometimes not sufficiently aware of this distinction and become frustrated with client policy over which staff have no influence. Staff feel that when customers are dissatisfied with a service it reflects more on the client program they are delivering and the customer’s expectations regarding the service that staff may not be able to

satisfy. Staff also indicate that because customers are not aware of GA services, they come to the office requesting information/services that GAs do not deliver, such as federal programs, and leave dissatisfied because their expectations and needs were not met.

Complexity of Material/Procedures/ Policy

GAB delivers hundreds of services for over fifty program areas. Since GAB has an integrated service approach each frontline worker must be knowledgeable about all of the programs that GAB provides. Staff indicate that learning about and keeping up to date with all of GAB's programs is a challenge, especially for new staff members.

“Information overload and lack on time – there are only 2 staff in my office. Therefore, not enough people to specialise on different topics. We often say [we] ‘know just enough to be dangerous on 10,000 topics.’”

Customer Requesting Federal Services

As stated previously, GAs offices are often the face of government in their community. This translates to people requesting information/forms that are the jurisdiction of the federal or even municipal governments. Staff recognise that “having to turn clients away for services that are federal in nature” may create the perception of poor customer service. So in order to provide excellent customer service, staff would like training on where to find federal government information and/or carry more federal forms/information in their offices.

“Lack of agreement with federal government to provide their services which are in high demand [particularly as there are no] federal government offices within a reasonable distance.”

Physical Office Location/Layout/Equipment

Staff cite that some office layouts and antiquated equipment are a hindrance to customer service. Problems include lack of space to house publications, brochures or pamphlets, no disabled access, and crowded counter space, which does not allow for customer privacy when dealing with sensitive issues. Other issues included old buildings with poor presentation or lack of parking for customers. Also remote locations that receive mail only twice a week was cited as hampering customer service, though the respondent felt that this was being alleviated somewhat by the increased number of forms on-line.

Customer Payment Options and Hours of Service

Currently, GAB does not offer credit card services as one of its customer payment options. In order to deliver excellent customer service staff state that GAB should accept credit cards for services. Another impediment cited were office hours typically, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm, which are “not customer friendly and do not match other service delivery businesses in the community”.

Staff Morale

Comments included in this theme indicated that low staff morale is a challenge to customer service. Factors affecting morale include: lack of a GA/management which leave staff feeling alienated and left on their own; lack of goal to create office unity; conflicting co-workers and office disharmony; overcoming attitudes; dealing with cynical bureaucrats; and trying to keep focused on positive experiences instead of taking negative comments/actions personally.

Difficult Customers

Interaction with difficult customers was touched on previously in the *Training* theme. Difficult or irate customers present a challenge to staff trying to deliver excellent customer service. Responses indicate that customers are not necessarily dissatisfied with GAB services, rather they are dissatisfied with “government” or the “system” and GAs offices are the face of that government. As suggested in *Training*, courses in conflict resolution may alleviate these situations.

Question 4: What can be done to improve the level of customer service in your office and in the GAB in general?

Question 4 gave staff the opportunity to provide solutions to the daily challenges they face in the delivery of customer service. Staff offered 287 responses that were classified into eleven themes. Themes were ranked according to the number of responses allotted to each theme. Themes were given identical rankings if they contained the same number of comments.

Solutions for Customer Service Challenges		
Ranking	Themes	Response Count
1	Training	77
2	Staffing	47
3	Management	33
4	Increase Customers Service Options	29
5	Communication	25
6	Office Layout/Equipment	17
7	Client Ministries	15
7	Federal Services	15
9	Computer/Technology	13
9	Marketing	13
11	Misc.	8
	TOTAL	287

Training Solutions

- Training – Training Program

Staff identify an effective training program as a key factor for improving the level of customer service in GAB offices. The program would create a consistent level of knowledge between all staff members and enhance customer service. The new program should be flexible and easily tailored to each office's needs and be focused on a continuous learning model. Some staff are enthusiastic about placing more training information on-line and others are resistant. The general consensus is that components of a training program can be delivered on-line but it should not rely completely on email and the internet/intranet. Staff are also generally supportive of train the trainer programs though, again, some are resistant and would prefer training classes that are away from the office.

- Training – Client Ministries

As indicated previously in Question 2 (f) and Question 3 employees would like more comprehensive training in client programs. Specific programs include MSP, MVB Property Tax, Manufactured Homes Registry, Gaming, and Hunting.

“Better training by client ministries – better service comes with knowledge to do the job.”

- Training – Customer Service

“Have training and discussions on customer service to ensure all CSRs are clear on the standards expected.”

Staff feel customer service would improve with specific customer service training. This would create a culture where clients are the number one priority. Comments included GAB setting service standards i.e. standard telephone greetings/closings and then ensuring that all staff have a clear understanding of the expected standards.

Staffing

Three sub themes emerged from the Staffing category. They are maintaining adequate staff levels, suggestions for staffing, and morale.

- Maintaining Adequate Staffing

The predominant response in this category was the request that GAB increase or maintain adequate staffing levels in GA offices, particularly during busy seasons. Staff would also like improved recruitment strategies that will lead to faster methods of hiring/replacing staff and strategies to renew the GAB workforce.

- Morale

Staff indicated that activities to increase morale in the office would enhance customer service. One staff member stated that “if you have a happy staff it carries forward in customer service”. Statements such as “make staff accountable for their actions”, “make staff do the job they are paid to do”, and “make staff do the job they are hired for” may be indicative of low morale in some GA offices.

- Staff Suggestions

Additional suggestions regarding GAB staffing include:

- hiring summer students to cover staff holidays;
- hire part-time staff full-time for their first month so they have greater exposure and more time to familiarise themselves with GAB services and programs;
- encourage staff empowerment; and
- increase negotiations with client ministries.

Management

Effective office management and active GA/HQ leadership were cited as an important component for creating an environment conducive to good customer service. In addition to leadership, staff indicated that they would like increased acknowledgement of staff who provide excellent customer service coupled with incentive programs i.e. “staff member of the month, awards, gift certificates or even a thank-you for a job well done”. Lastly, fostering a team oriented environment was recommended as a way to increase customer service.

“Reinforce positive attitudes and celebrate examples of good customer service by acknowledge[ing] employees who go the extra mile.”

Increase Customer Service Options

Staff listed several options for increasing customer service. Suggested options are summarised as follows:

- improve customer payment options i.e. accept credit card as well as encourage clients i.e. MSP to allow debit card payment;
- expand services i.e. accept payments for BC Gas, telephone, federal payments
- install external drop boxes;
- improve office hours so they are conducive to customer service i.e. stay open during lunch and have longer office hours;
- increase electronic service delivery; and
- increase access to public computer terminals.

Communication

Emphasis was on developing an internal communication system that facilitates clear, concise and consistent procedures to create a uniform level of services in all GA offices – but does not rely on emails as its key information channel. The confusion of multiple emails containing conflicting/changing policy information was highlighted once again as a staff challenge.

Staff offered several suggestions for enhancing the telephone system such as 1) ensuring that staff are always available to answer questions from the field and 2) establishing one answering point in GA offices where a staff member directs the calls to appropriate staff so the line remains open for incoming calls.

Office Layout

Suggestions found in this theme are summarised as follows:

- improve office layout/presentation;
- improve access for disabled customers;
- better parking facilities; and
- design work stations that create privacy for customers.

Client Ministries

Employees had several client ministry suggestions for improving customer service. They include:

- Distribution of pamphlets and information (i.e. angling and fishing) – have stock shipped directly to larger GA offices instead of to client ministry who then forwards to GAs. This would save both time and costs.
- Vital Stats – GA access to Vital Statistics’ functions such as the ability to print out birth certificates.
- Procedure manuals/instructions – Specific step-by-step on-line procedures for processing various transactions i.e. MSP and Property Tax.
- New Client Software – have client ministries use “standard” template when creating new software/programs.
- Policies – “Consistent and robust policies and procedures from client agencies”.
- Dedicated phone lines – eliminate automated phone service for dedicated lines.

Federal Services

Once again staff would like to increase GAB services to include federal information/payments as well as receive info on where to access federal forms and training on how to complete them. It is felt that providing these service will create a true one-stop-shop service environment for customers.

Computer/Technical

Staff would like quick access to pertinent information that is amalgamated in a consistent format in one portal. One log on feature for all databases/programs was suggested as a tool to simplify computer access and reduce time required for getting in and out of programs.

Marketing

Advertising, community outreach, and showcasing GAB services in local communities/trade shows were cited as important to improving customer service. Staff believe that customers are currently unaware of the depth and breadth of services GAs provide.

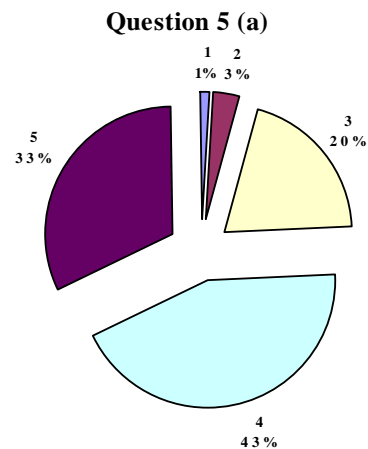
Question 5: *The GAB Intranet is intended to promote communication within the GAB and provide you with the information necessary to effectively deliver programs and services.*

(a) *Do you agree or disagree that the Intranet is a great tool for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy, procedures and Ministry news?*

Overall 74.5% respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the Intranet is a great tool for keeping up to date with GAB policy, procedures and Ministry news. However, 24.5% of respondents, or one out of every 4 staff did not agree with this statement. 20.1% were neutral and 4.4% disagreed/strongly disagreed. As seen in written responses staff seemed divided into two camps. Those who strongly support and use the Intranet and those who were too unfamiliar with the internet to add suggestions or comments.

Table 8: Question 5 (a)

Response	Count	%	
Strongly Disagree	1	2	1.1%
Disagree	2	6	3.3%
Neutral	3	37	20.1%
Agree	4	79	42.9%
Strongly Agree	5	60	32.6%
Grand Total		184	100.0%
(blank)		5	
Average	4.03		

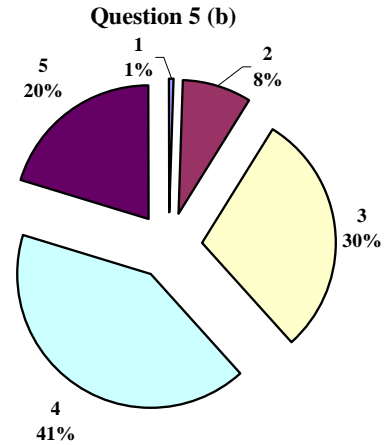


(b) *Do you agree or disagree that the GAB Intranet helps you provide excellent customer service?*

Only 61.5% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the Intranet helps them provide excellent customer service. 29.7% indicated a neutral response and 8.7% disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement. Again lack of familiarity and comfort levels with using the Intranet could affect staff ability to use its informational capabilities effectively to improve customer service.

Table 9: Question 5 (b)

Response	Count	%
1 Strongly Disagree	1	0.5%
2 Disagree	15	8.2%
3 Neutral	54	29.7%
4 Agree	75	41.2%
5 Strongly Agree	37	20.3%
Grand Total	182	100.0%
(blank)	7	
Average	3.73	



(c) *How could the Intranet be improved to meet your informational needs?*

Employees were asked to provide comments on improving the Intranet 111 participants responded providing 116 comments. After analysis the following themes emerged. Themes are ranked based on the number of comments received per theme. Themes that had identical counts were given the same ranking.

Intranet Improvements		
Ranking	Themes	Response Count
1	Time Constraints /Not Familiar Enough with the Intranet to Comment	36
2	New Suggested Materials /Restructuring	26
3	Suggested New Tools	19
4	Happy or Satisfied with the Intranet as is	12
5	Staff Intranet Challenges	6
5	Training	6
5	Misc.	6
8	Computer Access for Customers	4
	TOTAL	115

Time Constraints / Not Familiar Enough with the Intranet to Suggest Comments

Thirty-six respondents reported that they either did not have sufficient time to explore the *Intranet* or were too unfamiliar with it to provide suggestions for improvements. These statements again strongly reinforce the need for computer training and/or for the designation of staff time away from the counter/office to explore the *Intranet* and its uses.

New Suggested Materials/ Restructuring

Suggestions for new *Intranet* material include more information related to program delivery, links to client's web sites, more printable forms for collections, quick access to out of province Vital Statistics, a flashing banner to indicate new updates. It was also suggested that on-line fill-able forms be listed on the *Intranet*.

"Intranet, extra-net, Internet, email (by the hundreds), surely there must be a way to coalesce these into one logical methodical system and then provide training that all staff can attend."

Respondents provided several helpful suggestions for some minor restructuring of the *Internet* itself. These include: linking all manuals/forms at one site; improving site map and indexing system; making the *Intranet* more user friendly, alphabetising the listings on the first page and getting rid of password access.

Suggested New Tools

The most frequent request was for a key word search tool that would quickly link staff to sites with the appropriate forms and policies. It was also suggested that one sign on tool should be developed for access to all programs and that GAB provide an *Intranet* avenue i.e. bulletin boards for staff to share ideas.

Happy/Satisfied with Intranet

Eleven respondents indicated that they were happy/satisfied with the current *Intranet* and had no suggestions for improvement.

"So far I am very satisfied with the way that it is. "

Staff Intranet Challenges

A small number of participants took the opportunity to identify items they do not like about the *Intranet*. Comments included: *Intranet* contains info that does not pertain to all staff and it is sometimes difficult to assess what is pertinent to staff; too many sites with the same information; would like to see less personal information posted (marriage and birth announcements); and when computers are down the information is inaccessible.

Training

In this theme staff indicate they would like more training on how to use the *Intranet*. Staff comment that they are unfamiliar with the *Intranet* so they are unable to use it effectively to provide excellent customer service.

Computer Access for Customers

Staff expressed the need for a public computer terminal that customers could access to look up the information they require. This could be related to the comment that in certain parts of the province people do not have access to the Internet.

(d) What type of information would you like to see on the Intranet?

Employees were asked what types of information would they like to see on the Intranet. Only 59 comments were received. After analysis the following themes emerged. Themes are ranked based on the number of comments received per theme.

Suggested Types of Information		
Ranking	Themes	Response Count
1	Additional Information/ Tools/Links	29
2	Staff Not Familiar Enough with the Intranet/“No Comment”	25
3	Positive Comments	4
4	Misc.	1
	TOTAL	59

Additional Information/Tools/Links

Staff indicate that they would like information centralised as much as possible so staff can enhance the delivery of timely customer service. The following were suggestions for information, tools or links that staff would like to see added to the Intranet: all forms, manuals (including more client ministry manuals), info notes, circulars instructional memos and legislation required to provide all services; problems encountered by fellow workers and how they were solved; easy step by step procedures with search capabilities; place all forms in one place and index them; on-line customer service training; health and wellness info; toll free number directory for provincial and federal governments; links to federal government sites. Staff also stated they would like a keyword search tool to locate information quickly within the Intranet.

Staff Not Familiar Enough with the Intranet/“No Comment”

Once again staff indicated that they were not sufficiently familiar with the Intranet to offer suggestions. As stated in 5 (c) this is indicative of the need for additional computer training and/or designating specific time away from the desk/office to explore the Intranet.

Staff Satisfied with the Intranet

Four comments indicated that staff were satisfied with or had no changes to the current Intranet site.

3. Methodology

Pursuant to recommendations from the Service Excellence Initiative: Best Practices Review the Government Agents Branch developed an internal employee survey to determine employee perceptions about customer service in Government Agent offices and to identify internal barriers to customer service excellence. The two-page survey was sent by email to 289 GAB staff members in 59 offices across the province. The survey was a success with a 65% (189) survey return rate. Survey returns were representative of all five regions (Kootenay, North Central, Northwest, Thompson/Okanagan, Vancouver Island/South Coast) and at least one survey was received from each GA office. The respondents rated various aspects of customer service in their offices and provided written responses to daily challenges they face to delivering excellent customer service. Respondents were also asked to provide potential solutions to the challenges/barriers they face.

Questionnaire Development

The Employee Service Delivery Survey was designed as a voluntary survey consisting of fourteen questions. Nine questions requested that the respondents rank their response on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and the remaining six were written responses.

The first ten questions focused on aspects of customer service and identifying barriers to service excellence. Questions were drawn from the results of the Citizen First 2000 survey, which identified five drivers of customer satisfaction. These driver are timeliness, knowledge/competence, the extra mile/extra smile, fairness, and outcome. Training was also addressed in this section. The last four questions focused on staff use of the Intranet as a tool for providing excellent customer service and as a channel for internal communication. The survey was developed in consultation with the SEI Steering Committee to ensure that questions were relevant to issues facing GAB staff. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Survey Implementation

Distribution

The survey was distributed to all GAB employees (280) electronically on June 14, 2001 and participants were given until June 21, 2001 to respond. The survey was voluntary. Prior to the

survey distribution, the Director of the GAB, sent a note to encourage staff participation. The Quality Service Analyst distributed additional survey reminders on June 18 and 20, 2001.

Responses

Surveys were completed and were returned either electronically or by fax to GAB headquarters. Surveys were numbered as they arrived and the survey's origin (city/region) was recorded. This was done to ensure that surveys were representative of all the regions and that larger offices were completing and returning the surveys. On June 19-21, 2001, G. Cookson, GAB Manager of Business Development, contacted eight GA offices, which had not yet responded, to encourage their participation.

Statistical Validity

In order to ensure a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 5%, in a fixed population of 289 respondents², it was determined that GAB needed a 57% (165) return rate. In fact GAB received 189 responses for a return rate of 65.4%.

Challenges/Validity Issues

The survey was distributed during the beginning of property tax season, which may have limited the number of responses or the time staff may have had to read and complete the survey.

The nature of staff jobs in GAs across BC is time consuming allowing little time for completing and returning the survey.

Data Entry and Theme Development

Responses to questions which required ranking were entered into an excel spreadsheet. Data was then used to create charts found in Section 2, *Results and Discussion*.

Written responses were inputted into word documents and numbered in the order they were received. This will ease facilitation for retracing comments to specific response sheets, if further contact with the participant is required. Once data entry was complete comments were grouped into similar theme columns. Themes were then ranked on the number of comments per category not the quality of the responses.

² Population was derived through a manual count of filled positions according to the most CHIPS data dated Jan 2001.

Appendix A

Employee Service Delivery Survey

July 2001

Employee Service Delivery Survey

Please FAX responses to the GAB at (250) 387-5633 or fill out electronically and send to Kirsten.McCaig@gems8.gov.bc.ca by Thursday, June 21, 2001

This is a confidential internal employee survey that will take approximately 7 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary, but the results will be more useful if *all* GAB employees respond. Results will be used to learn about employee perception of current GA customer service and identify internal service barriers. Thank you!

Survey Scale:

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. As a whole, would you agree or disagree that your Government Agents <u>office</u> provides excellent customer service?	1	2	3	4	5

2. Based on your experience of providing customer service in a Government Agents office, how does your office rank in the following.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
(a) Staff provide timely customer service.	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Staff are courteous and go the extra mile for customers.	1	2	3	4	5
(c) Staff are knowledgeable about services that we provide?	1	2	3	4	5
(d) Staff treat all customers fairly regardless of age, gender, ethnicity etc.	1	2	3	4	5
(e) Staff are able to provide a complete range of services to meet the needs of customers?	1	2	3	4	5
(f) Staff receive sufficient training to provide excellent customer service?	1	2	3	4	5

If you ranked the above question 3 or less, what types of training would increase your ability to provide excellent customer service?

3. What are the top 3 challenges you face in the delivery of excellent customer service.

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

4. What can be done to improve the level of customer service in your office and in the GAB in general?

5. The GAB *Intranet* is intended to promote communication within the GAB and provide you with the information necessary to effectively deliver programs and services.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
(a) Do you agree or disagree that the <i>Intranet</i> is a great tool for keeping up to date on the latest GAB policy, procedures and Ministry news?	1	2	3	4	5
(b) Do you agree or disagree that the GAB <i>Intranet</i> helps you provide excellent customer service?	1	2	3	4	5

(c) How could the *Intranet* be improved to meet your information needs when serving a customer?

(d) What type of additional information would you like to see on the *Intranet*?

Thank-you for your comments! ☺

Optional

NAME: _____ **LOCATION:** _____

Appendix H

GAB Service Standards

GAB SERVICE STANDARDS AND DESCRIPTIONS 2002

Vision:

To be the first and best choice for one stop access to public services and information in British Columbia

Mission:

To provide efficient, integrated personalised access to public services and information in communities across British Columbia

Service Standard	Description (what the standards looks like in a GA office)	Measures
We strive to serve our customers through the service channel of their choice: over the counter, telephone, mail, email, fax and/or Internet.		<i>Proxy Measures</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and Performance Review (PPRs) • Comment Cards (letters from customers) • Customer Satisfaction Survey • Employee Survey
We always seek to exceed customers' service expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We go the extra-mile for our customers. • We make a reasonable attempt to answer any enquiry (even those outside of GA responsibilities i.e. municipal, provincial, or federal) or provide information to a customer before referring them to another government agency. We strive to provide web addresses and/or phone numbers to these government agencies. • We use staff members as resources and work as a team to provide services to our customers or answer their enquiries. • We explain where and how customers can find information (phone books, web sites, etc) so they can do so independently in the future. 	
We are respectful of all our customers regardless of age, gender or ethnicity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We maintain a professional attitude and are empathetic to the needs of all our customers. 	
We are calm, cheerful, and serve with a smile.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We interact with customers in a professional and courteous manner greeting them with a smile as they come to the counter. • We are empathetic to the needs of the customer and use our judgement to react appropriately to each new situation. 	
We speak clearly and listen attentively to customer enquiries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We speak clearly while listening attentively to customer enquiries remaining aware of cultural diversity and reacting appropriately to each new situation. 	
We are knowledgeable about GAB services and can make linkages across services/programs understanding how one service affects another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate we offer customers additional services or make the customer aware of the impacts of one service on another. 	
We strive to communicate effectively so that customers understand the information/service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We take the time to ensure that our customers clearly understand the service/information we are providing to them. • We strive to use plain language when explaining information/services. 	
Our goal is to provide services correctly the first time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We take the time and make the effort to provide correct information/services to the customer on their first visit. 	

Office Signage		
GA offices provide adequate signage that clearly identifies its location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GAB signage is uniform for all locations. GA signage is visible to customers. When a customer sees the building they easily see signage that identifies the GA office. Signage is located on more than one side of the building (depending on the location) so it more clearly identifies the GA office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper GAB Regional Manager Reports
GA offices post exterior signs that clearly indicate hours of business, web address, fax and phone number.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information is located on the front door (decals) and states Open Mon - Fri 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM Closed Statutory Holidays Web site address 	
GA offices that close at lunch post hours they are closed and when staff will return.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information is located on the front door (decals) and states Open Mon – Fri 8:30 AM – 12 PM and 1 PM – 4:30 PM Closed 12 PM – 1 PM for Lunch (alters with particular offices) Closed Statutory Holidays 	
Office Appearance		
GA offices are clean, organised and well maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desks are free of clutter. General office is neat and tidy. We know where forms/materials are located in the office. Customers know where to queue via good signage/directional carpet Counters are kept clean of paper and dust. Information displays are kept neat and stocked with the most current information available. A staff member is responsible for keeping brochures up to date. Obsolete information is recycled to avoid clutter in the display racks. Repairs are done on a timely basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper Planning and Performance Review <p><i>Proxy Measure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment cards
GA offices have public waiting areas for customers and/or their children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If adults are in the waiting area, staff can suggest that they browse the CAT to see what type of information/services are available. Waiting area has two or more chairs where clients/children may sit and wait. Waiting area has some material available for reading i.e. GA brochure(s) or client ministry material. Additional <i>optional</i> reading materials include children's books, magazines, and newspapers. All reading materials are to be kept recent. If GAs choose to provide optional reading material, subscription dates are not to exceed six months for magazines and one week for newspapers. 	<p><i>Proxy Measure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment cards
Public waiting areas are kept clean and tidy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading materials are kept in stacked tidy piles. 	

Telephones		
Staff answers phones promptly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The phone is answered before the fourth ring 80% of the time. Phones will be set to 4 rings before voicemail/ answering machines are activated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
Staff uses a standard greeting for all calls	<p>Greeting: Good morning/afternoon Government Agents office, Jane speaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are empathetic to the needs of the customer and use our judgement to react appropriately to each new situation. 	
It is our goal to refer customers to the right contact for information the first time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When referring a customer to a staff member inside the GA office or a client ministry for further assistance, we strive to refer them to the right person the first time. Referrals answer the customer's needs, not just the questions. Referrals move client forward in their quest. GA offices have an internal system for finding referrals as well as communicating the information to other staff. We encourage customers to contact the GA office if their referral was not successful. We encourage customers to contact the GA office if their referral was successful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper <p><i>Proxy Measure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment cards
If a customer calls for information and decides to come in for a service, staff informs the customer of office hours and non-peak times when they can receive the quickest service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are aware of non-peak office hours specific to our offices. When providing non-peak hours to customers, staff can use the phrase, for example, "the office is usually quieter between XX and XX, if you are able to come in then". As an alternate, staff can inform customers of the hours with the highest volume of customers i.e. between 12 – 1pm. We suggest appropriate times for customers to come to the office based on the length of service required. For example suggesting that a customer come in the morning for services that have long transactions times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
Voice Mail		
When away for a long period (vacation, courses etc.) staff leave a voice mail indicating the dates they are away from the office and anticipated date of return.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies <i>only</i> to staff who <i>already</i> have individual voice mail boxes. An alternative phone number of a colleague is provided for questions that need an immediate response. Colleague is informed that their number has been provided on the voicemail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper Planning and Performance Review
Voice mail on the general client line provides office hours and GA location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All GA offices have voicemail or answering machines, which are engaged at all times. Office develops internal system to check voicemail/answering machine messages on a regular basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
Returning Calls		
Staff return calls within one business day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This standard applies to customer, client ministry, and internal staff calls. It includes messages from voice mail and telephone message slips. If call comes in the morning it is answered by close of day – at a minimum to report on the progress of the request. If call comes in the afternoon return the call preferably the same day. If that is not possible, respond by 12 PM the next day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper

Walk-ins		
We strive to serve our customers promptly and in the order in which they arrive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We strive to serve customers within ten minutes of their arrival. We use eye contact and body language, such as nodding the head, to acknowledge the next person in line. This indicates that you are aware of their presence and are working to serve them as quickly as possible. If it is likely that customers will have to wait longer than ten minutes (during specific busy seasons i.e. RPT) a sign should be posted stating why customers can expect a delay and thanking them for their patience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
Staff wears a name tag that identifies them to the customer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We wear a name tag provided by the GAB. The name tag states <i>only</i> our/a first name. 	
Staff use standard greeting when serving a customer Opening: Good morning/afternoon how may I help you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We address customers in a professional and courteous manner greeting them with a smile as they come to the counter. If staff are serving customers that they know or have served frequently in the past, they can choose to use a more informal greeting. However all greetings will remain friendly and professional. GAs have the discretion to decide what types of greetings are acceptable in their offices. Using personal judgement and if appropriate, staff address customers by their first name when providing them services. We use our judgement to ensure that the customer does not need any further assistance or services. This can be done through questioning or simply asking "Is there anything else you need today". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper <i>Proxy Measure</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and Performance Review
Correspondence (Mail/Fax)		
Staff verifies addresses /fax numbers to ensure that information is sent to the correct place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When writing down a customer's address/fax number, we repeat the address/fax to the customer ensuring that the information is correct. 	
Material requests are mailed as quickly as possible after their request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requested materials will be sent out as soon as possible but no later than 3 business days from the request. (excluding vendors or other high priority clients as identified by your GA). If we are unable to send material within the designated time frame, we will contact the customer and provide an estimated time the information will arrive and the reason for the delay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
Information requests are faxed to customers as quickly as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This standard includes customer, client ministry, and internal staff fax requests. Requested materials will be sent out as soon as possible but no later than 3 business days from the request (excluding high priority clients as identified by your GA). If we are unable to send material within the designated time frame, we will contact the customer and provide an estimated time of when the information can be sent and the reason for the delay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
Correspondence (mail or fax) will be answered within 5 business days.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correspondence that requires a <i>letter</i> response will be answered and mailed within 5 business days of the initial receipt. If a response cannot be issued within 5 business days, a letter will be sent (or a phone call/email, if possible) to the customer with the estimated time needed for the response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper <i>Proxy measure</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and Performance Review

Email		
Staff responds to e-mails within one business day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This standard applies to direct emails sent by customers, client ministries, or internal staff that requires a specific response. It does not include general emails from client ministries regarding policy changes or general office/Branch announcements. We strive to answer customer emails as quickly as possible however if this is not possible the following standards apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the email arrives in the morning it is answered by close of day. If the email arrives in the afternoon, reply preferably the same day. If that is not possible, respond by 12 PM the next day. If the email requires information that will take time to get together or we are busy in the office and do not have the time to respond within stated timeframes, we will send a quick note (1-2 sentences) to the person stating that we have received their email and that we will be able to fully respond within XX amount of time. We then send the information within the timeframe that we have set. We check our email a minimum of twice a day – once in the morning and once in the afternoon to see if we have received new mail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper
When away for a long period (vacation, courses etc.) staff engage the Microsoft Outlook office assistant and indicate the dates they are away from the office and anticipated date of return.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies only to staff who have individual email accounts and have office assistant type tools on their email systems. A phone number/email address of a colleague or main office number is provided for questions that need an immediate response. GAs will post the name and contact info (including email address) for the Acting GA while they are out of the office. Colleague is informed that their number has been provided on the email. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mystery Shopper <p><i>Proxy Measure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and Performance Review

Place in PPR's for GAs ONLY, does not include CSRs.

Management Standard Only

- This case management strategy is for calls/walk-ins from either difficult customers or questions that are referred directly to the Government Agent by staff or situations that required additional attention and follow-up from the GAs.
- Customer is referred to a client ministry or government agency. Follow-up with the customer the next business day to determine if they were able to successful contact the person to whom they were referred.
- Client agency is forwarded the customer's name for further contact. Follow-up with the customer the next business day and ask if the client ministry has contacted them in regards to their query. If the query has gone unanswered, the call, at a minimum will let the customer know that their query has been passed on to "so-and-so" at the ministry client.

Customer Satisfaction Survey – once standards are implemented overall customer satisfaction should increase.

Employee Satisfaction Survey – once standards are implemented, overall employee satisfaction should increase.

Mystery Shopper – consultant to perform a mystery shopper program through walk-in, telephone/fax and email.

Comment Card – internal collection of customer service comments

Planning and Performance Reviews – internal performance will indicate whether or not staff is implementing the standards. It will act as a performance monitoring in the individual offices.

Appendix I

CSR Focus Group Comments

Service Standards Pilot Project Focus Group – Comments and Recommendations

May 31, 2002

DESCRIPTION/PURPOSE:

On May 31, 2002, four staff members, one from each of four pilot offices, met in Richmond, BC to discuss the implementation of the service standards in their offices. Participants were sent a list of questions prior to the focus group and asked to consult their colleagues for their input and advice. Questions centred on the attainability of the standards, the extent to which they were incorporated in their offices as well as recommendations on how best communicate the standards throughout the organisation. Staff also used the focus group as an opportunity to discuss other issues relating to customer service.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON RESULTS:

- Re-draft standards based on input from the CSRs and remove the unattainable standards.
- CSR training-day in the fall with workshops on Service Standards/ Service Excellence. The workshop should focus mostly on inspiring and motivating staff to use the service standards, as well as how to work together as a team. Staff also expressed the need for a dispute resolution course in order to learn how to diffuse tense situations quickly and effectively.
- Focus on re-energising GAB service culture through internal activities such as an awards program, Intranet, and performance review.
- Participants recommend that staff use customer's first name, as appropriate, when providing service.
- GAB update the phone system and install music or an automated message that tells the customer waiting on the other end that their call will be answered soon.
- Participants suggested that office hours be extended to meet the needs of customers. It was recommended that offices remain open until 5 PM everyday or that one night be designated in the week that the office stays open until 7 PM.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:

Lessons Learned

- Participants stated that it is difficult to wade through all of the "irrelevant" emails they receive in a day. They feel that these emails

often do not pertain to services they provide to customers and confuse communication. Staff were informed of the new Communication Protocol that is being developed as part of the new intranet site. This protocol guides the use of three communication channels; Email, GAB News and GABFest. Email is for high priority time sensitive information, GAB News is to announce policy changes (client ministries) and for staff/office announcements; GABFest is a business related discussion forum where staff can comment on/discuss Email and GAB News Announcements.

- It was commented that, in theory, standards are good but from a practical sense, after the initial implementation, enthusiasm peters out and people began to fall back into their old habits.
- Participants stated that two GAs in the pilot already incorporated standards in their job/performance evaluations. They felt that this helped keep the standards at the forefront of their minds.
- Staff expressed concerns regarding the attainability of the standard to answer the phone before the fourth ring. It was decided to state in the description that we strive to answer the phone before the third ring 80% of the time. The target of 80% can be revisited once a Mystery Shopper Program is complete and the actual percentage is determined.
- Staff feel that an emphasis on Team Work in their offices is needed, particularly increasing awareness of what other staff are doing and working together to resolve problems or provide customer service. Working together means respecting other team members and implementing the service standards by example (“peer pressure”).
- It was mentioned that Squamish uses a counter rotation system so that staff rotate between different positions during the day. Two persons are responsible for the counter and the third can work on materials at their desk. The third person remains aware of customer volumes and is always ready to go to the counter when needed. This way staff know what role they are in and can complete their corresponding tasks during the designated timeframe. It was suggested that a counter rotation system might increase team awareness in other offices as it designates duties and responsibilities to staff members during a certain time frame and then rotates so everyone has the opportunity to try every role.
- The telephone/walk-in greeting standard (opening) was discussed. Staff stated that they liked the using a standard opening on the phone but did not like using a standard greeting for walk-in customers. They felt that a standard greeting for walk-ins might seem artificial and not appropriate, particularly if you have dealt with the same customer several times. They would prefer to maintain a degree of autonomy when greeting walk-in customers. Greetings will remain courteous and professional and up to the discretion of the GA to determine what is and is not appropriate.

- In conjunction with the above paragraph, the telephone/walk-in closing standard was also discussed. Staff indicated that the closing statement “Is there anything else I can help you with?” is difficult to get out and not appropriate for all situations. Again, staff indicated that they would like to retain some autonomy in choosing how to end a service with their customers.
- Staff discussed personal service and how it can make a difference with customers. The example used was telling someone where something is located on a display rack versus walking them to the rack and showing the customer where the information is. Granted, this is not always possible due to busy times and long line-ups, but staff feel that by using “good judgement” staff will know when a customer needs extra attention. Particularly if, for example, the customer in this situation was a senior citizen.
- Personal service also opened up the topic of using a customer’s first name during a transaction/service (when, of course, we have the opportunity to obtain their name during a transaction/service). Participants indicated that they had enjoyed this type of personal service when in a bank or other such institution. They clarified that they did not like being addressed as a Mrs/Ms/Mr. Last-Name but preferred the use of their first name. The focus group thought this might be a nice touch to add to our services and put it forth as a recommendation to the GA/Management Team.
- Participants feel that most of their colleagues inherently have customer service skills. However, these skills are sometimes forgotten or are not at the forefronts of their minds. One person compared it to driving saying, “as you get older you tend to get a little more sloppy”. Staff indicated that implementation should be less than just teaching/reviewing the standards and more about re-energising, re-motivating, and re-inspiring staff. Participants commented that when you are happy and enthusiastic about work, that energy works its way into customer service. They also stressed that when implementing the standards it is important to act sincerely and not artificially. Customers know when someone is artificial and will not be happy about their service.
- Participants commented that when a customer calls the office and staff are put on hold, they hear nothing on the end of the line to indicate that they are still on a live line. This can be confusing for customers, as they do not know whether they are still waiting for a live person or have been disconnected. Staff recommend that GAB update the phone system and install music or an automated message that tells customers waiting on the other end that their call will be answered soon.
- Two participants commented that some staff in their office’s were still hesitant about using their first name when answering the phone. They stated that there are a lot of angry customers who are frustrated with

- government and which makes them reluctant to use their names. It was stated that staff would only use their first names and that last names would never be used. (Conversely, it was suggested that staff have nametags with the new logo on it.)
- Due to the increased level of citizen frustration towards government, it was recommended that staff receive a course in dispute resolution in order to learn how to diffuse tense situations quickly and effectively.
 - It was recommended that office hours to be extended to meet the needs of customers. It was suggested that offices remain open until 5 PM everyday or that one night be designated in the week that the office stays open until 7 PM. It was noted that this could be an issue for our client ministries as they usually shut down their systems around 4:30 PM, therefore, a number of transactions may not be able to be processed.
 - It was indicated that further training in MSP is needed. Staff stated they were frustrated with the amount of time they spent waiting on the phone with MSP. Participants asked if there had been any discussion regarding GAB providing more services on their behalf.
 - Participants commented that if a CSRs are at their workstations and working on a project or other work related duties that the customer should always come first. This means that staff should be available to provide service to people waiting in line and if, a customer comes to their counter they should not tell them to go back to the line. Discussion then ensued regarding staff's need to have uninterrupted time to work on duties as designated by their GAs. These duties may require a specific time period time away from customer service duties. However, this poses a particular problem for offices with workstations. From a customer's perspective, it may look like a staff member is sitting at their station ignoring customers. It was suggested that if staff are working on designated projects that they place a "closed" counter sign at their work station. This will stop customers from walking up to counters where staff members are unavailable and which will help avoid sending them back to the line.

Defining the Standards

The majority of the focus group was centred on this section. Staff provided comments and feedback regarding the standards but also helped finalise the language. These standards will be redrafted and forwarded to the GAs who participated in the pilot project for further input and discussion. Once GA input is obtain, the standards will be redrafted and then forwarded to the management team for changes/approval.

Communicating the Standards

Staff discussed different options of effectively communicating the service standards to GAB. Four options were developed and ranked in order of preference. The chosen strategy would be used in conjunction with other communication strategies as recommended by participants.

1. CSR Training Day/Conference

This was the number one choice for communicating the standards to CSRs. While other means of communicating the standards can be used in conjunction with a training day, such as an initial introduction of standards by GAs, the staff felt the main introduction should be concentrated in a CSR training day. During the training day participants suggested that the introduction of the service standards and service excellence should be more than just going through the standards. The training day should be used as an opportunity to inspire, motivate and energise staff to provide excellent customer service. Dispute resolution was suggested as an additional course for a training day.

2. Video Demonstrating Customer Service

Staff suggested that a video developed specifically for GAB would be a great tool for communicating the standards across the organisation as well as for new staff joining GAB. However, in order for the video to work effectively, it would need to be an “exceptional” video with lots of “pizzazz” so it would pique the interest of the CSRs and hold their attention.

Suggestions for video content includes:

- Use of humour to highlight standards and best practices
- Role playing with and without the standards (exaggerating what to do and not to do).
- Staff telling humorous stories about customer service and how they dealt with situation exemplifying skills contained in the service standards.

3. Train-the-Trainer

A train the trainer approach was discussed. In this strategy CSRs who are renowned for their customer service skills are chosen to develop a training program to introduce the standards to the offices in their regions. Through this approach CSR trainers communicate the standards to staff in a manner that they can relate to. The trainers would also use the opportunity to re-inspire staff to provide excellent customer service. This strategy uses the idea of peer pressure/colleague support for creating greater use of the

standards in GA offices. The CSRs would be looked on as champions of service standards in their regions.

4. GAs Introduce the Standards to their Staff.

While participants felt that this was an acceptable method of introducing the standards, it was truly their last choice. Participants stated that while a GA could introduce and go over the standards with their staff, what CSRs really need is something that is going to inspire them to provide excellent customer service. As stated previously, participants feel that staff know inherently what the service standards are but at this point they need to be inspired and motivated to use them. This speaks to rejuvenating GAB's service culture.

Other recommendations that could be used in conjunction with one of the above major strategies include:

- Standards binders (can be placed on-line as well) for all offices that contain an introduction to the standards, definitions and case scenarios. Binders should be used as part of orientation for all new staff.
- Standards should first be introduced and supported by the Director, B.J. Hughes, then GAs introduce them to the staff.
- Message regarding benefits of using the standards/Service Improvement Plan needs to be communicated to staff. Including why are we working on the Service Excellence Initiative and how it relates to new government priorities – results based approach to service improvement.
- Staff indicated that comment cards are good as they create pressure to perform. However, participants were not unanimous in their agreement of where the comment cards should be placed in the office. Some liked that it was placed at their workstations others thought it might intimidate customers from taking one and filling it out.
- CSRs recommended that the service standards be linked to job evaluations. GAs would review staff performance once or twice a year based on the service standards. GA would provide suggestions, as needed, where staff need to strengthen their client service. They feel that this would help reinforce the standards their daily routines.
- Staff suggested that encouraging staff to lead by example would be effective method of reinforcing the standards in their offices. Participants equated this to “peer pressure” or “colleague support”.
- Publish the standards for the public. It was suggested that a service standard sign/plaque be hung in GA offices. This sign would list the general service standards (the first 8) that the organisation as a whole strives to provide to our customers.

- Strengthen the awards program and provide awards for outstanding attitudes and customer service. MGAs and GAs need to be more aware of award system and use it for staff that are providing excellent customer service. It was suggested that awards could be tied into Mystery Shopper results.
- Intranet should be used to help reinforce the service standards. It was suggested that ticker tape/"flash-ups" that remind you about customer service could be used on the GAB Intranet. "Have you smiled today" was suggested as one such "pop-up" phrase. It was also suggested as a tool to post and highlight customer service awards.

Appendix J

GAB Service Improvement Plan

Service Improvement Plan

PRIORITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Priority 1: Develop and implement a staff SERVICE EXCELLENCE training program. Programs will focus on increasing staff skill and knowledge in providing specific client services and working within their computer applications. Additional courses such as dispute resolution (and customer service) will be developed as needed and within budget constraints. GA training programs/workshops are also addressed within this priority.

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
1	<i>Contact PSERC to assess current training models</i>	Kirsten McCaig	Sept-Oct 2001	A range of effective approaches that facilitate staff training and are customised to the needs of clients are identified.	PSERC Contacted and range of programs are researched.
A.	Determine range of training approaches that are best suited to clients and the organisation.				
2	<i>Develop staff training program</i>	Kent Saxby/Kirsten McCaig	Dec 2001 – Jan 2002	Program contains priority training as identified by staff and management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Surveys Surveys sent to staff are completed and identify specific training needs and preferred methods of training in five program areas (MSP, RPT, MHR, CR, and PPR)
A.	Prioritise employee demand for specific client ministry training				
B.	Approach (consult with) top 2(3) client ministries re: the demand for increased training for their programs and computer applications.				
C.	Develop training modules (including manuals) in concert with client ministries.				
3.	<i>Implement Training Program</i>	Kent Saxby	Jan-Mar 2002	Staff receive the training they need to provide excellent customer service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Survey 2003 15% Decrease in the number of staff who feel that they do not have

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
					sufficient training to provide excellent customer service. Increase in the % of staff who indicate they feel knowledgeable about the services GAB provides Staff indicate that they are satisfied with the range of training models that have been developed.
A.	Assess success of the program				
4.	<i>Additional Training Courses</i>	Kent Saxby	On-going	Staff receive training in courses (as budget allows) that help them provide excellent customer service	(IF additional training is provided measures are) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee Survey 2003 15% decrease in the number of staff who feel that they do not have sufficient training to provide excellent customer service. 5% Increase in the number of staff who indicate they are knowledgeable about the services GAB provides
A.	Determine additional courses requested/needed (dispute resolution/customer service)		November-December 2001		Completed core courses matrix and staff training plan.
B.	Assess cost to implement courses				
C.	Consult budget to determine funding available				
5.	<i>GA Conference 2001</i>	GAB Headquarters	Sept 2001	GAs are aware of GAB strategic objectives and incorporates them in management activities /decisions in their offices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops regarding GABs strategic vision are conducted GA Conference Survey indicates GA satisfied with conference
A.	Develop GA workshops on various GAB priorities.	Guy Cookson Deb Lipscombe Kirsten McCaig		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative Service Delivery Health and Wellness Service Excellence Initiative 	

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
		Martin Monkman		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance Planning 	
B.	Assess conference success.	Sandra Bramhill/ Guy Cookson (?)			
6.	<i>Review current training for Government Agents.</i>	Kent Saxby/Kirsten McCaig	November 2001	Increased GA leadership and management skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and staff matrix training completed Employee Survey 2003 Decrease in the number of staff who identify improved office management and active GA/HQ leadership qualities needed to provide excellence customer service.
A.	Determine need for specific training courses				
B.	Develop training modules for GAs.				
C.	Implement training GA courses.				

Priority 2: Introduce Service Standards and apply strategies to ensure their adoption throughout the organisation.

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
1	<i>Develop services standards</i>	Kirsten McCaig	Sept – Oct 2001	Services standards that are applicable across the organisation are developed.	Standards are created.
A.	Draft standards and forward to SEI Steering committee for review and revision.				
B.	Introduce standards to MGAs and GAs to gather feedback and develop descriptions for the standards.				
2.	<i>Pilot Service Standards</i>	Kirsten McCaig	Oct – Nov 2001	Pilot will determine the 1) attainability of standards 2) staff ownership 3) level of implementation 4) test monitoring mechanisms	Pilot plan is completed.
A.	Develop pilot for services standard				

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
3.	<i>Pilot Program Implementation</i>	Kirsten McCaig	Nov 2001 – Mar 2002	The SEI and the service standards are introduced and implemented in 4 offices – Nelson, Prince Rupert, Squamish and Vernon.	Pilot is implemented.
A	Implement service standards in 3-month pilot. Introduce the SEI and the standards in each office. Gather initial staff feedback and readjust standards as necessary.				
4.	<i>Pilot Program Assessment and service standard readjustments</i>	Kirsten McCaig	March 2002	Service standards are attainable and applicable to all GA offices and have been developed in conjunction with staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GA debrief CSR Focus Group
A.	Determine success/acceptance of the standards				
B.	Hold focus group(s) with staff to gather their input/reaction to standards. Adjust standards as necessary				
5	<i>Introduce service standards across the organisation.</i>	Kirsten McCaig	March 2002	Service standards are introduced and staff implement them in their offices and routines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GAB Mystery Shopper Customer Satisfaction Survey 2003 Employee Survey 2003
A.	Develop implementation plan and strategies to facilitate the organisational adoption of service standards				

Priority 3: Address staffing and workload issues.

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
1	<i>Identify specific workload issues.</i>	MGAs for their Region Director for the Branch	On-going 2002	Staff/workload issues identified.	Reports completed biannually <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee Survey 2003 Decrease in the number of employees who identify

					staffing/workload as a issue.
A.	Implement Time Tracker and prepare Workload Analysis Reports quarterly (ensure instruments are accurate and credible).	Martin Monkman	On-going 2002	Workload reports are used by the Management Team as a tool for identifying workload issues and aiding in equitable resource allocation.	Progress reported in quarterly reports.
B.	Assess equitable allocation of workload/resources between GA offices.	Management Team	On-going 2002	As above.	
2	<i>Development strategies to address/mitigate workload issues. (strategies will encourage co-operation between GAs and regions)</i>	MGAs for their Region Director for the Branch		Workable, realistic and co-operative strategies that address workload issues are created.	Strategies developed
A.	Reallocation of resources (as warranted) based on changing times, needs and community growth.				
3	<i>Assess current strategy for the staggering of vacation times in GA offices.</i>	Kent Saxby	April-May 2002	Assessment identifies problem areas and provides potential solutions.	Assessment completed.

Priority 4: Introduce new “business” office hours that are conducive to customer needs and expectations.

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
1	<i>Expand business hours to 8 am – 5 pm.</i>	Kent Saxby	Sept 2002	Where possible GA offices expand their business hours increasing customer service satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client Satisfaction Survey 2003 Decrease in the number of clients who comment that they would like to see GA offices expand their business hours.
A.	Review constraints/barriers to expanding a flexible hour strategy. (union)				
B.	Assess staff interest in voluntarily flexing work hours to keep their GA				

	office open one day a week from 5-9pm. (union approval)				
C.	Determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of new office hours on GAs offices • Feasibility of new hours in all offices (it may not be feasible for some small offices) • Support needed from client ministries to support services/ computer applications after 5 pm. 				
D.	Devise strategy to implement new hours that mitigates barriers, negative impacts and meets customer needs/ expectations.				
2	<i>Ensure, where possible, GA offices are open during the lunch hour</i>	Kent Saxby	October 2001	Where possible GA offices remain open during the lunch hour increasing customer service satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service Survey 2003 Decrease in the number of clients who comment that they would like to see GA offices open during the lunch hour. • Number of new offices who have adopted new hours
A.	Review issues re: GAs remaining open over the lunch hour.				
B.	Assess benefits /challenges to GA offices currently open during the lunch hour.				
C.	Develop strategy to ensure that sufficiently staffed GAs are open over the lunch hour.				
D.	Provide information to customers as to why it is not possible to open the GA office in their community over the lunch hour.				

Priority 5: Strengthen/invigorate/energise the GA Awards/Recognition program. Include awards for exceptional customer service

	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Results	Measurement
1	<i>Develop criteria for Employee Appreciation Awards</i>	K. Saxby	August 2001	Employees are appreciated for service excellence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awards program initiated. Employee Survey 2003 Decrease in the number of comments indicating that staff would like more appreciation/awards.
A.	Develop award criteria and post on the intranet.				
2	Promote the Employee Appreciation Awards	Guy Cookson	Ongoing 2002		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of awards issued.