

CUSTOMER SERVICE PLAN

WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

COMPREHENSIVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ASSESSMENT

Historically, the Water Resources Department (WRD) has assessed customer satisfaction through a variety of informal means. These have included periodic “*how are we doing?*” conversations with members of our customer community, and *focus groups* where we gather in a more formal setting to discuss service delivery to a specific customer group.

While generating useful information that has prompted course corrections in the past, none of these methods provide the kind of quantitative assessment of customer satisfaction needed in today’s environment. To rectify this shortcoming, the Department is proposing a three-pronged approach to develop a quantitative customer satisfaction assessment.

The first assessment tool will consist of randomly selecting and surveying individuals as they complete various water right transactions (water right permits, extensions, permit amendments, transfers etc.) This survey will be provided with the Department’s final decision document and will pose questions about applicants’ experience as they worked through the process to receive the Department’s determination on their request. The survey will be designed to provide information on the performance of our employees and on the process itself. Means to gather the information could include a mail-in, telephone, or web-based survey.

The second assessment methodology will be a Web-based survey of individuals accessing WRD’s internet home page. It will be modeled after a survey the Department of Environmental Quality has implemented, and will invite home page visitors to answer a few short questions. This survey will be designed to gather information about the usefulness of our web site, general information about the visitors themselves (private citizen, well driller, attorney, etc.), and solicit general comments to assess the visitor’s satisfaction with agency programs they work with on a regular basis.

The third tool the Department will employ to assess customer satisfaction will be the continued use of Focus Groups. This will consist of face-to-face conversations with key agency customers to solicit their views as to the strengths and weaknesses of Department services. The Department will continue to survey Focus Groups in this manner on at least a biennial basis.

The Department also plans to explore the implementation of other customer assessment tools. Development of a survey instrument for use in our 20 field offices is a possibility, as is contracting with a professional survey firm for a comprehensive, third party customer satisfaction assessment, assuming funding can be secured.

The Department intends to develop and implement the random “transaction survey” by February 1, 2004. The Web-based survey should be implemented by March 1, 2004.

IDENTIFIED STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Through its informal assessment of customer satisfaction the Department has been able to identify success stories and areas for improvement. A broad theme of success is the

Department's "Customer Service Culture." Repeatedly, the Department has been praised for its proactive approach to problem solving, its use of Alternative Dispute Resolution to avoid litigation and facilitate negotiated settlements, its actions to decentralize functions and create customer service centers in the field, and its use of technology to benefit customers. Broad themes of shortcomings include "Coordination," both intra-agency and inter-agency, and "Decision-Making," specifically regarding the transparency and timeliness of the permit-decision making process.

BEST PRACTICES USED TO ACHIEVE STRENGTHS

The Department has worked hard over the last several years to establish a culture of service. This customer service culture is embraced by Department staff and supported by the Department's Director and executive management team. Guiding principles regarding customer service have been articulated by the Department in its previous strategic plans and in its current 2003-2005 Strategic Outlook.

<http://www.wrd.state.or.us/publication/pdfs/StrategicOutlook03.pdf>

As a means of reinforcing the value of customer service, the Department maintains a "Kudos" bulletin board in a prominent location where positive customer comments are posted. The Department Director also uses "all staff" meetings to share positive customer service comments and to recognize the efforts of staff.

ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS WEAKNESSES

To date, the shortcomings conveyed to the Department largely focus on the cumbersome and lengthy process of water right transactions rather than poor customer service skills or attitudes.

There is no doubt that the Department's mandate to ensure the protection of existing water rights and the public interest is becoming increasingly complicated as public resource values shift and the water available for appropriation shrinks. Nevertheless, there is much room for improvement. Over the next 12 months, the Department will continue its current efforts to improve interagency and intergovernmental coordination, reduce paper work, improve forms and instructions, and eliminate unnecessary steps and oversight. We will also continue our efforts to make statutes, rules and policies understandable and reasonable and to make Department decisions more transparent. Finally in the face of decreasing staff and budget resources we will continue to look for ways to use technology to assist us in getting the job done in a timely fashion.

Over the next 12 months, in addition to current activities described above, the Department intends to look for low cost training opportunities to provide staff foundational and refresher training in customer service. Over the long-term, assuming staff training is provided, the Department will incorporate customer service attributes (e.g. clear communication, problem solving, interpersonal skills) into annual performance evaluations.

Over the next 12 months the Department will incorporate customer services skills into its hiring decisions.

Finally, as information is gathered from the Department's customer service assessment described above, over the next 12 months, the Department will develop metrics to measure performance in customer satisfaction levels.

RESOURCES AND ASSISTANCE NEEDED

Resources and assistance anticipated by the Department include professional input on the form and content of the “transaction surveys” described above and in identifying minimal cost foundational and refresher customer service training programs. The Department is also interested in any success stories from other regulatory and permitting agencies that can be incorporated into the Department’s customer service program.

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