

National Archives and Records Administration

NARA 104
June 4, 2002

SUBJECT: Customer Service

TO: All employees

Purpose of this transmittal memo. This transmits a new directive that defines our customer service program and our various responsibilities and authorities to ensure its success.

Background. Customer service at NARA is not limited to our strategic performance target 2.1, but informs every interaction we have with our fellow employees, Government colleagues, and members of the public. It is central to our longstanding mission of providing ready access to essential evidence, by improving the practical value of the information, services, and products we provide, as well as the delivery mechanisms used to distribute them.

Customer service is not a new concept or practice at NARA, but we have learned in recent years, with the Government-wide focus on improving customer service, that we too have not always taken systematic advantage of the various tools – planning, training, communication, and measurement – that help ensure that we excel in this critical area.

This customer service policy reaffirms our commitment to serving our customers with excellence. It serves as a reminder to all of us of the importance of interacting proactively with customers, identifying their needs, and integrating these needs into our program planning and implementation. This directive not only provides, for your ready reference, detailed definitions of our customer goals and values, but also descriptions of the various responsibilities and authorities each of us has to successfully provide the very best service to every customer of NARA.

Whom can I contact if I have questions about this directive? Additional details on what our customer service program should look like, how we should deliver it, how to fix problems, how to improve delivery or make it easier for our customers to contact us, how information technology will be used to improve and expand customer services, the role of individual offices in determining customer service objectives and delivering services, and how NARA supports customer service and the people delivering those services will be provided in a forthcoming supplement to this directive scheduled for issuance in FY 2003. In the meantime, any questions you may have can be directed to Debra Leahy (NPOL) in room 4100, AII; on 301-837-1903; by fax on 301-837-0319; or by email.

JOHN W. CARLIN
Archivist of the United States

Attachment

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NARA 104
June 4, 2002

SUBJECT: Customer Service

104.1 What is the purpose of this directive?

This directive establishes NARA-wide policy for customer service and a framework for complying with the authorities described in par. 104.2.

104.2 What is the authority for this directive?

This policy is established in compliance with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and Executive Order 12862, "Setting Customer Service Standards," and associated Presidential memorandums that delineate Federal agencies' responsibilities for customer service.

104.3 What do GPRA and the Executive order require?

GPRA requires Federal agencies to set performance goals and measures with an emphasis on outcomes. Measures linked to the outcome of customer satisfaction provide critically valuable information about organizational performance and confirmation that our strategic goals are equally valued by those customers. The Executive order and memorandums require Federal agencies to:

- a. Identify the customers who are or should be served by us;
- b. Survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services;
- c. Make information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible;
- d. Provide customers with choices in both the sources of service and means of delivery;
- e. Provide means to address customer complaints;
- f. Post service standards and measure results against them;
- g. Benchmark customer service performance against the best in the business;
- h. Survey frontline employees on barriers to and ideas for matching the best in business;
- i. Publish a customer service plan that can be readily understood by our customers;

- j. Take action to motivate and recognize employees for meeting or exceeding customer service standards and for promoting customer service;
- k. Measure results achieved against customer service standards and report those results to customers at least annually; and
- l. Create activities and programs, continuing throughout the year, that will engage customers in a discussion about how to improve Government service.

104.4 Definitions

- a. **Customer** - anyone who uses (or might use) NARA information, services, and products or who works (or might work) with us to produce and deliver these materials.
- b. **Customer service** - providing and supporting the impartial development and delivery of information, products, and services that are timely, cost effective, useful, and relevant.
- c. **Customer Service Plan** - the official periodically published compilation of NARA-wide values, standards, and processes for ensuring excellent customer service.
- d. **Customer service standard** - measurable, publicly acknowledged indicator of performance.
- e. **Customer service teams** - site-specific teams of NARA staff drawn from the organizational units at that location.
- f. **NARA customers** - a broad spectrum of American society, as well as researchers worldwide, including:
 - (1) Genealogists and family historians;
 - (2) Veterans, current and former Federal employees, their families and authorized representatives;
 - (3) Academic, business, occupational, and historical researchers;
 - (4) Publication and broadcast journalists;
 - (5) Congress, the White House, the Courts, and other public officials;
 - (6) Federal Government agencies and the individuals they serve;
 - (7) State and local government personnel;
 - (8) Professional organizations and their members;

- (9) Supporters' groups, foundations, donors of historical materials;
- (10) Students and teachers (K-12);
- (11) General public, including museum visitors; and
- (12) Our fellow employees.

104.5 Who is responsible for customer service?

a. Providing good customer service is the responsibility of all NARA employees, contractors, interns, detailees, and volunteers. All NARA staff are authorized to take action to provide our customers with a completely satisfactory experience, address customers' problems, and eliminate the problems. All NARA staff must review, accept, and implement customer service standards and demonstrate a personal commitment to customer service excellence.

b. All office heads and staff directors must integrate customer service activities into their program planning and management efforts and ensure that:

- (1) Their current and potential customers are identified and made aware of NARA services;
- (2) Feedback from customers regarding services and products is regularly and frequently obtained and used to identify and eliminate service problems;
- (3) Customer service performance measures are developed and incorporated into programs as part of the strategic, annual, and individual performance planning process;
- (4) Customer service goals, based on customer needs and expectations, are measured and achieved;
- (5) Staff are knowledgeable, trained, and equipped to deliver high-quality customer service at all times;
- (6) Opportunities for improvement in customer services are identified and addressed in a timely manner; and
- (7) Staff are encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues in other NARA offices to address customer service needs through participating in customer service teams.

c. Customer service teams must:

- (1) Integrate customer service standards specific to the various organizational units represented at a facility; and
- (2) Help establish common guidelines for empowering customers at those

facilities by ensuring that:

- (a) Their customers understand what service options are available and how to reach those service destinations (e.g., signage and wayfinding are clear and up-to-date);
 - (b) Their customers are provided the tools they need to deal with unexpected difficulties (e.g., lost-and-found, first aid, and other resources to deal with personal emergencies are readily accessible); and
 - (c) Competing customer needs are balanced and equitably addressed at all times (e.g., researchers and general visitors receive comparable service).
- (3) Periodically report their accomplishments and issues.

d. The Policy and Communications Staff (NPOL) must:

- (1) Provide oversight, guidance, and technical assistance to all offices concerning implementing the NARA customer service program, including:
 - (a) Developing and issuing customer service policy and procedures;
 - (b) Coordinating a continuous customer service measurement system that includes surveys and other data collection, analysis of data, and reporting of findings;
 - (c) Coordinating the approval process for customer service data collection within NARA, according to agency, OMB, GSA, and budget requirements;
 - (d) Monitoring the operations of customer service teams; and
 - (e) Coordinating the regular updating and issuance of the NARA Customer Service Plan, with input from all NARA offices.
- (2) Monitor progress on NARA's accomplishment of customer service goals;
- (3) Manage and evaluate NARA data collection and reporting under the GPRA, Executive Order 12862, and related Presidential memorandums; and
- (4) Advise the Archivist on program management.

e. The Office of Human Resources and Information Services (NH) must:

- (1) Ensure that the curriculum of courses that addresses the universal and supplemental competencies expected of NARA employees includes appropriate kinds and amounts of customer service training for staff, supervisors, and managers; and
- (2) Ensure that employee performance plans and staff development plans

reflect our commitment to customer service through specific references to our customer service goals and expectations.

104.6 What are our customer service values and goals?

- a. Our customers are satisfied with our products and services.
- b. Our products and services are delivered to customers in a timely and accurate manner by knowledgeable staff.
- c. Customer needs are integrated into our program planning and product development.
- d. Our products, services, and information contribute to people's understanding of our democracy.

104.7 What should our customers expect?

- a. Courteous and respectful treatment.
- b. Knowledgeable staff.
- c. Credible, relevant, and impartial information about NARA holdings, services, and products.
- d. Prompt and accurate answers to questions and requests for information, services, and products.
- e. Prompt attention to mistakes and problems, and their timely correction.
- f. Consideration of customer input in our plans, programs, and services.
- g. Opportunities to provide input with ease.

104.8 What are the basic elements of the NARA customer service program?

- a. Securing regular and timely feedback on customer needs and satisfaction levels.
- b. Identifying opportunities for enhancing and improving customer service.
- c. Correcting problems and their underlying causes in a timely fashion.
- d. Setting annual customer service goals.
- e. Measuring progress in meeting goals.

- f. Ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to provide excellent customer service.
- g. Ensuring that staff have the tools they need to provide excellent customer service.
- h. Collecting accurate data needed to report progress annually.
- i. Publishing goals and reporting accomplishments at least annually.

104.9 Frequently asked questions

a. **How will publishing customer service standards improve customer service?**

Publishing standards communicates to our customers that we are aware of and value their needs and expectations. It counters unrealistic expectations and, through ready access, fosters timely and productive communication when standards are not met. Our acknowledgement of these standards also helps ensure timely response and resolution of problems areas as they develop. When this occurs, it will flag problem areas that must be improved, possibly by changing schedules, re-engineering the processes by which the service is delivered, or by making some other change.

b. **How will NARA support customer service initiatives?** We will support customer service by integrating customer service goals and initiatives into our strategic, annual, and individual performance planning and staff development efforts, and by ensuring that all staff acquire the tools they need to deliver high-quality customer service and are rewarded for customer service excellence.

c. **How will information technology (IT) and the Internet change our customer service programs and delivery of services?** At the same time that email has raised customer expectations concerning the timing of responses to their queries and requests, such NARA IT initiatives as our Archival Research Catalog and our Order Fulfillment and Accounting System have streamlined and created a more direct access to our holdings and other resources. Although the ways in which we deliver customer service will continue to change in response to the ongoing development of information technology, our customer service values and goals will remain the same.

d. **How will our customer values and standards affect my performance evaluations?** Excellent customer service is not only a critical success factor for achieving our Strategic Plan's Key Performance Target 2.1 (By 2007, access to records and services and customer satisfaction levels meet or exceed NARA's published standards.), but also every other strategic goal and performance target. As such, our customer values and standards will always be among the factors that will be used to evaluate our activities and accomplishments NARA-wide. In effect, we all should ensure that the general customer expectations contained in par. 104.7 are met whenever we interact with another NARA employee, another Government employee, or a member of the public, for whatever purpose. To help ensure that our customer service ethic permeates our everyday activities, we will take advantage of two significant strategic developments: staff development plans and our new NARA performance management system. The staff development plans will help guarantee that all employees receive timely

training in the skills needed to readily and effectively provide a level of customer service that always meets our customer values and standards and allows us to accomplish our strategic goals.

NARA's performance management system, also developed in accordance with our Strategic Plan, will ensure that every employee is provided with a performance plan and appraisal that measures and rewards that staff member's contributions to accomplishment of our goals.

e. **How do I propose a customer service initiative?** New ideas are always welcome and there are many avenues for sharing them. Many offices now hold regular meetings for the purpose of discussing customer service problems and vetting ideas for improving service delivery and products. In some cases, working groups also have been established to facilitate the development of ideas for enhancing customer service. You may also share your ideas more privately through a meeting with or memo or email to your supervisor, a program manager, or the Vision email box.

f. **Will our current customer service goals change?** As our new performance measurement and management systems mature and we change processes and programs to enhance their effectiveness, refinements and improvements to the standards and values will be likely, based on input from our staff and customers.