Attachment D: Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee (CSLIC) Report

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Proposed Performance Measures, Practices and Approaches
For Government-wide Citizen Contact Activities

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For Government-wide Citizen Contact Activities

October 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President George W. Bush has directed that Government become market-based, citizen-centric, and customer-focused. Through the President's Management Agenda (PMA), President Bush has called for agencies to improve their responsiveness to citizens. However, there are no Government-wide standards or metrics to measure citizen satisfaction or improvements to service delivery. In order to develop standards of performance for customer service delivery the Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee (the "Committee") was formed. Working with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the General Services Administration (GSA), the Committee was created and is managed by the GSA's USA Services E-Gov initiative. The Committee is comprised of 58 contact service representatives from 33 Executive branch agencies and the Smithsonian Institution, a trust establishment of the United States. (See Appendix 1 for a list of participating agencies and representatives)

The Committee's mission is to develop and deploy Government-wide guidelines to ensure that citizens receive timely and consistent service from the Government. USA Services supported the Committee's work through the following activities:

1. Reviewed the baseline of government-citizen activities, practices and service delivery methods, identified by USA Services and OMB through a budget data request (BDR) to each agency, and shared results with the Committee;
2. Contracted with the MITRE Corporation (MITRE) to study contact center metrics, best practices, and technologies utilized in the public and private sectors and provided findings to the Committee; and
3. Contracted with MITRE to collect and compile existing market research on citizen expectations and desires when communicating with Government through a series of 16 focus groups and provided findings to the Committee.

Using this information, as well as its own independent research and findings, the Committee developed a series of draft recommendations for service levels and best practices that are intended to serve as the basis for developing template "service level standards" for agency operations and performance-based Government contracts. The Committee identified a three-level framework for its recommendations. The framework consists of:

- **Standards** which are metrics and best practices to which all agencies should adhere (Example: emails should be acknowledged within 24 hours);
- **Guidelines** which are metrics and best practices with a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction (Example: X% of calls should be answered within Y seconds); and
- **Recommendations** which are suggested improvements at the discretion of the agency.

In order to ensure the broadest possible perspective on Government-wide customer service delivery methods, the Committee established five subcommittees to focus on key issues and develop recommendations for the major citizen channels of communication with Government. The five subcommittees established were:

1. Telephone
2. Email
3. Traditional (included walk-in and postal mail)
4. Cross-Channel Issues (Foreign Languages, Customer Complaints, etc.)
5. Future Methods (video, Instant Messaging, Web Chats, BOTs, etc.)

Following completion of its research and analysis, the Committee circulated its draft report and recommendations for review and comment among various stakeholder groups including contractors involved in citizen contact activities, and Federal, state, local, and foreign governments. The draft report was amended or updated where appropriate as a result of the review process and this document is the final report.

Key findings and most significant metrics, by channel, are on the next page.

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Significant CSLIC Metrics

Metric	Measure	Standard, Guideline, or Recommendation

All Channels

Metric	Measure	Standard, Guideline, or Recommendation
Customer Satisfaction	Ongoing, formal measurement at least annually	Standard
Quality Assurance	Ongoing, formal measurement at least quarterly	Standard
Contact Resolution	Upon initial contact	Standard

Telephone Channel

Metric	Measure	Standard, Guideline, or Recommendation
Respond to messages left after hours	No later than the next business day	Standard
Response Attempts (if no answer for example)	Three, starting no later than next business day	Standard
Answer Speed (once live help is requested)	80% in 60 seconds, measured on a monthly basis	Guideline
Provide an estimate of wait time	If customer will be waiting more than 30 seconds	Guideline
Abandonment Rate	4%, measured on an annual basis	Recommendation

Email Channel

Metric	Measure	Standard, Guideline, or Recommendation
Response Time	• Simple/common questions: 90% within 2 business days • Research and/or multiple topics/agencies involved: 90% within 5 business days • Complex policy or scientific issues: no limit	Standard
Response Attempts (if customer mail box full for example)	Three	Standard
Generate an auto reply	If email will be responded to later than the next business day	Guideline

Traditional Channels

Metric	Measure	Standard, Guideline, or Recommendation
Mailed letters	Respond or give an estimate of response date within 15 business days	Standard
Wait Time At "Walk In" Offices (for customers without appointments)	No more than 15 minutes	Guideline

Definitions:
Standards -- all agencies should adhere.
Guidelines -- demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction.
Recommendations -- suggested improvements at the discretion of the agency.

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INTRODUCTION

President George W. Bush has directed that Government become market-based, citizen-centric, and customer-focused. A key part of the President's Management Agenda calls for agencies to improve their responsiveness to citizens. However, there are presently no uniformly recognized standards or metrics at the Federal level to measure customer support effectiveness. In order to develop recognized and effective practices and approaches for Federal customer service delivery, the Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee (the "Committee") was formed by the General Services Administration's USA Services e-Gov initiative during the early spring of 2005. USA Services used listservs and networks to recruit participants among its own partners and advocates, customer support personnel, and call/contact center managers. It is comprised of 58 contact service managers from 33 Executive Branch agencies and the Smithsonian Institution, a trust establishment of the United States, as listed in Appendix 1. This report is the product of that collaborative development effort, and is intended to serve as guidance wherever Government interfaces with customers. After much deliberation, the Committee decided to use the term customer throughout our report. This takes into account that not all individuals who contact our government are citizens.

THE COMMITTEE'S MISSION AND STRATEGY

The Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee was chartered to develop and endorse practices and approaches to make service and support of today's Government customers highly responsive to their evolving needs and expectations across all contact channels. This was accomplished through subcommittees corresponding to individual customer contact channels, or groups of similar customer contact channels, to allow each participating agency to share expertise related to those customer contact channels with which they were most experienced. These smaller group results were then tentatively reviewed by the full Committee prior to broad external review. Another core strategy was for participants to envision themselves as customers seeking service rather than managers allocating resources, in order to better identify what "should be" where customers touch Government by "putting themselves in the queue."

It was noted repeatedly in the Committee's deliberations that:

1) The talent and dedication of people at the front lines -- both those who interact with the customer and those who administer customer self-service -- are pivotal to the effectiveness of customer support accomplished.

2) The capacity of agencies to fully adopt the practices and approaches endorsed by the Committee is a function of size and resources.

3) Our work touches many topics addressed elsewhere by Federal laws, regulations, and guidelines. These include web site standards, paperwork reduction, accessibility, usability, business continuity, and telework. This document is intended to augment, and in no way supersede, any such Federal requirements or guidance.

The first of these is widely recognized at the front lines of progressive customer support in industry and, we hope, will be broadly incorporated into the application of the Committee's endorsed practices and approaches. The second is more fully addressed in Appendix 7 ("Reasonable Effort Considerations"). The third is addressed in Appendix 2 ("Related Laws, Regulations, and Guidelines"), where any omission of key guidance and requirements is purely unintentional.

STANDARDS, GUIDELINES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONTEXT

The Committee adopted a uniform framework for ranking each of the practices and approaches which it endorsed as follows, in descending order of emphasis. Note that even the term "standard" as used here is not a mandate, but rather a level of endorsement by the Committee.

Standards -- all agencies should adhere.
Guidelines -- demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction.
Recommendations -- suggested improvements at the discretion of the agency.

A. ALL CUSTOMER CONTACT CHANNELS

Background

All of us are customers of both Government and the private sector, and our common goal when we seek assistance through any contact channel is to obtain a *quick, accurate, courteous solution* to our issue. In identifying and endorsing practices and philosophies to achieve customer-centric Government customer support across all contact channels, the Committee identified a number of key considerations applicable to any situation where a customer touches Government. We consider these the heart of our collective results, and many of them are built upon discerning the evolving voice, needs, and preferences of Government's highly diverse customers.

Among key aspects of customer satisfaction cited in our supporting studies are:

- Easy to locate contact information
- Convenience
- Availability
- Social and ethical responsibility
- Privacy
- Security
- Competent service
- Fair treatment
- Consistent response
- Reliable service
- Successful outcome [1]

This supporting work also found that telling customers what to expect and "doing it right the first time" are key to building customer trust and confidence. [2] Unfortunately, a Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Budget Data Request found that 44% of federal government call/contact centers use number of complaints [rather than customer satisfaction] as their primary method of measuring effectiveness. [3]

The following standards, guidelines, and recommendations endorsed by the Committee focus on responsiveness, usability, privacy, quality, consistency, and customer convenience in serving Government's customers across all contact channels.

A.1. Standards

The following are best practices to which all agencies should adhere:

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[1] Citizen Service Level Expectations, MITRE, 2005, page 13.
[2] Ibid., page 19.
[3] Citizen Contact Follow Up Survey Results, SiloSmashers, 2005, page 3.

A.1.a. Customer Complaints
Customers should have the option to complain via the contact channel of their choice, and the choice of whether or not a response is to be provided to them. Complaints should be counted and evaluated for service improvement opportunities, and customers requesting a response to their complaint should receive it in a timely manner.

A.1.b. Customer Satisfaction
Customer satisfaction should be continuously evaluated across all customer contact channels. Formal monitoring or reviews should occur at a minimum of once per year. Customer feedback should be incorporated into customer service representative training, web site development, business process improvement, and other service improvement activities.

A.1.c. Customer Support Resource Optimization
Application of limited resources should be optimized across customer contact channels based upon agency size, mission, and customer feedback. Topics and volume of customer inquiries should be tracked for use in forecasting contact volumes and scheduling customer support resources to handle them.

A.1.d. First Contact Resolution
Resolution of customer issues during the initial interaction should be recognized and promoted as a key performance indicator in Government customer support.

A.1.e. Plain Language
Use of technical terms and acronyms should be limited as much as possible in customer communications. Acronyms should be defined whenever used. Customer service representatives should be trained in the use of plain language, and style guides and prepared scripts (if applicable) should promote use of plain language relative to the agency's constituency. Guidance available at www.plainlanguage.gov should be incorporated into customer service representative training and reference materials.

A.1.f. Privacy
Agencies should provide links to their privacy policy on web response forms and in responses to email inquiries. The privacy policy should state the agency's legal authority for collecting personal data and how the data will be used. Customers should be informed whenever their interactions are monitored or recorded for training and quality assurance purposes, and advised regarding any other intended use of the resulting information. Customers should also be made aware when information on their inquiry is being retained for future reference in serving them.

A.1.g. Promotion of Continuously Available and Efficient Channels
Continuously available channels (such as web sites) and relatively cost-efficient channels (such as web chat or kiosk) should be creatively promoted to customers utilizing other contact channels. Suggested methods include placards in walk-in customer waiting areas, advertisements on agency mailings and printed materials, recordings for phone customers in queue, and reminders by agents at the conclusion of calls.

A.1.h. Quality Assurance

Quality of customer interactions should be continuously evaluated across all customer contact channels. Formal monitoring or reviews should occur at least quarterly. Particular attention should be given to accuracy, clarity, courtesy, timeliness, and helpfulness. The methodology used should facilitate comparison between channels and between customer service representatives for improvement purposes. The information gained should be incorporated into customer service representative training, web site improvement, and other service improvement activities in a timely manner.

A.1.i. Sharing of Contact Information

Agencies should ensure that USA Services and other agencies which may pass customer contacts to them always have current contact information (new telephone numbers, etc.), to minimize unsuccessful customer referrals.

A.1.j. Style Guide

Each agency should have a style guide or template for customer correspondence which is regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. This helps to ensure consistency in the look and feel of agency correspondence with customers. It should include a standard greeting and closing, as well as instructions on how customer responses are signed (such as agent name or number, how the citizen can follow up, etc.).

A.2. Guidelines

We encourage the following, as they will have a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction:

A.2.a. Complaint Handling

Complaints should be acknowledged and processed in a specified and timely manner using a process which assures a full, holistic view of complaints received across all channels. Special attention should be given to situations where one channel is receiving more complaints than others. Lessons learned from the processing of complaints should be incorporated into customer service representative training, customer support process improvement, and feedback to or from contractors.

A.2.b. Creative Work Scheduling

Flex time, flexiplace, and other creative forms of work scheduling should be applied to meet customer needs and preferences for expanded hours of customer support. Agencies should consider their constituency and continuously reassess their hours of operation relative to customer needs and preferences, as well as the availability of agency resources.

A.2.c. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation

Agencies should evaluate customer satisfaction for all contact channels and use the assessments to improve services and increase satisfaction. A uniform Government-wide customer satisfaction survey methodology should be adopted. It should be effective

across all customer support channels, yet adaptable to the widely differing missions and constituencies of agencies. It should incorporate both a common core of inquiries applied across all agencies and the capacity for additional inquiries specified by agency. Care should be exercised in customer surveying to ensure that persons interacting with the agency on a frequent basis are not excessively asked to respond to event-based surveys. It should be noted that the variance of missions, constituencies, and resources may make full comparison of customer satisfaction scores across agencies difficult.

A.2.d. Language Translation
Agencies are required to provide appropriate access for people with limited English proficiency by implementing Department of Justice guidance for Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for People with Limited English Proficiency." Whenever language translation is utilized in customer support, the quality of translations should be emphasized over the quantity of languages available, and auto-translators (when used) should be verified for translation accuracy and usability.

A.2.e. Option to Speak to Supervisor
Customers should have the option to interact with a supervisor in a timely manner if they request to do so.

A.2.f. Style Guide Adherence
Customer service representatives should be evaluated, in part, on their adherence to the agency's style guide.

A.3. Recommendations

The following are suggested improvements:

A.3.a. Customer History
Records of prior contacts by a customer should be available to customer service representatives as deemed appropriate by the agency. This minimizes the need for repetition by the customer.

A.3.b. Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
The holistic CRM philosophy of creatively and proactively serving customers should be applied within the fiduciary and privacy constraints of individual agencies.

A.3.c. Language Capabilities
Each agency should monitor and address evolving needs for language capabilities in customer support based on the evolving demographics of the agency's constituency.

A.3.d. Quality Improvement
Special attention should be given to service quality improvements in customer contact channels where quality assurance or customer satisfaction results have indicated the quality of customer support to be significantly lower relative to other channels.

A.3.e. Style Guide Applicability

Style guides should be applicable to all types of written communications to ensure uniformity of spelling, terminology, style, etc. across all customer communications and to maximize customer understanding and the effectiveness of customer web searches.

A.3.f. Unique or Identifying Numbers

Agencies handling large volumes of customer contacts should consider use of unique or identifying numbers for tracking. In lieu of numbers, email addresses, phone numbers or names could be used.

B. TELEPHONE CHANNEL

Background

Despite the growing use and potential of other methods to interact with Government, recent studies indicate that the telephone is still the most preferred communication channel for all age groups -- especially if the inquiry is complex or urgent. [4] Among those with internet access, dial-up users are more likely to turn to the telephone than those with broadband access. [5] Factors which support a continuing strong role for the telephone channel include less expensive long distance rates and parallel data connections made available by Voice Over Internet Protocol technology, as well as the proliferation of mobile phone technologies. [6] Problems cited by citizens in using the telephone channel to access Government include busy phone lines, transfers from person to person within and between agencies, problems with automated answering systems, unreturned voice mail, long hold times, and the need to make repeat calls regarding the same issue. [7]

Interactive voice response (IVR) systems are a versatile key technology for automating customer access to services via the telephone channel, enabling callers to navigate a menu to reach specific information or assistance, request a prepared fax on a topic of interest, complete a survey, or perform other similar functions via keypad (most common) or voice responses to voice instructions from the system. Unfortunately, the customer-friendly design critical to achieving the potential of IVR systems is still somewhat lacking across Government, with 33% of citizens reporting them not helpful in one of our attached supporting studies. [8] Quoting another study, "Most organizations approach IVRs primarily as a way to reduce costs. ... Projected cost savings, however, can quickly disappear if callers resort to opting out of an IVR [system] that is confusing and poorly designed." [9]

The following standards, guidelines, and recommendations endorsed by the Committee focus on consistency, accessibility, courtesy, timeliness, and customer-friendly automation in serving Government's customers via telephone

B.1. Standards

The following are best practices to which all agencies should adhere:

B.1.a. After Hours Contacts
Recorded information provided to callers after contact center operating hours should include the contact center's hours of operation. It should also encourage callers to utilize

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[4] Citizen Service Level Expectations, MITRE, 2005, pages 21, 30, and 31.
[5] Ibid., page 31.
[6] Ibid., page 33.
[7] Ibid., pages 15 and 17.
[8] Ibid., page 18.
[9] Improving Citizen Services: Metrics, Benchmarks, Best Practices, and Technology Trends, MITRE, 2005, page 39,

any 24x7 option available for self-help in the interim such as a web site, or call back during business hours.

B.1.b. Participate in the U.S. Blue Pages Initiative
Agencies should participate in the GSA Blue Pages program to obtain listings in the Government section of telephone directories. The program operates on a "fee-reimbursable" basis. A U.S. Blue Pages website (http://www.usbluepages.gov) also provides agencies an ability to post their national listings on-line for directory search by citizens.

B.1.c. Call Return
Calls in response to customer voice mail messages should be made no later than the next business day. Up to three attempts should be made to reach the customer or their voice mail using the information provided by them (except for international calls).

B.1.d. Call Transfers
When their calls must be transferred, customers should be advised as to (1) where they are being transferred, (2) why they are being transferred, and (3) a telephone number there (if possible) to use in case their telephone connection is lost during the transfer process.

B.1.e. Common Voice
The same voice (and personality) should be used for consistency in all telephone recordings accessible to agency customers (except when recordings are required on short notice in response to unpredictable "spikes" in incoming calls).

B.1.f. IVR Script Wording
IVR voice scripts should provide the number or keyword to say or press _after_ the description of the function it initiates. For example : "To ask a tax question, press or say '1.'"

B.1.g. IVR Response Options
Speech recognition capabilities should be included in IVR systems. Keypad response capabilities should be retained for persons with speech disabilities as well as others who prefer them. Options for direct routing to a customer service representative should be considered for persons with disabilities which limit their use of automated response systems.

B.1.h. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP)
When used for customer communications, VOIP should be tested for sound quality and consideration should be given to retaining backup communications for use during Internet connectivity outages.

B.2. Guidelines

We encourage the following, as they will have a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction:

B.2.a. Answer Speed
Agencies should answer 80% or more of incoming calls within sixty seconds, measured on a monthly basis. This applies to situations where the customer has asked for live help.

B.2.b. Audio on Hold
Agencies should offer solutions to frequently asked questions (first preference) or music to callers on hold, in order to expand customer self-help opportunities and confirm for customers that there is a continuing connection, respectively.

B.2.c. Expected Wait
Callers who will be waiting for more than 30 seconds to speak to a customer service representative should be informed of the expected duration of their wait.

B.3. Recommendations

The following are suggested improvements:

B.3.a. Abandonment Rate
Call abandonment rates in customer service representative (CSR) queues should not exceed 4%, measured on an annual basis.

B.3.b. IVR Structure
The structure of IVR systems should be determined through careful balance of the complexity and volume of incoming calls with customer preferences. The term "structure" refers to key customer-facing functionality such as number of options per level, the number of levels, the types of services available and at what stage of system navigation to first offer the "live help" option. Agencies should analyze the results of callers navigating through IVR systems to ensure that the most pertinent prompts are placed at the beginning.

B.3.c. IVR System Navigation
New and infrequent IVR system users should be offered guidance on how to navigate IVR systems.

B.3.d. Toll-Free Numbers
Agencies should offer incoming toll-free service to callers within the United States.

C. EMAIL AND WEB RESPONSE FORM CHANNELS

Background

For citizens with high speed internet connections at home, these electronic channels are narrowly preferred over the telephone as a way to contact government. [10] Email is generally preferred over the telephone for seeking information of a non-urgent nature. [11] A problem identified by 41% of responding citizens in dealing with Government on issues via email was the need to send multiple emails due to lack of a response. [12] Another customer-centric consideration is the "auto-reply" or automated response to received email which confirms receipt -- one of the attached support studies found that only 31% of organizations are currently generating auto replies. [13]

The following standards, guidelines, and recommendations endorsed by the Committee focus on accessibility, efficiency, courtesy, effective tracking, and customer convenience in serving Government's customers via email and web response forms.

C.1. Standards

The following are best practices to which all agencies should adhere:

C.1.a. Designated Email Addresses
Email addresses designated for customer contacts should always be monitored during hours of operation.

C.1.b. Mandatory Fields
Mandatory fields which must be completed in web response forms should be limited to the minimum necessary to respond to the inquiry via whatever acceptable means the customer designates (email address, street address, etc.).

C.1.c. Misdirected Email
The free service offered by GSA's USA Services to handle misdirected email should be considered for email inquiries outside the jurisdiction of the agency. Otherwise, the senders of misdirected emails should be advised regarding where their inquiry is being forwarded, why it is being forwarded there, and how they can follow up if no reply is received within a reasonable time. Agencies should also have documented procedures in place to handle misdirected internal email.

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[10] Horrigan, J. May 24, 2004. "How Americans Get in Touch With Government." Pew Internet & American Life Project. www.pewinternet.org
[11] Ibid.
[12] Improving Citizen Services: Metrics, Benchmarks, Best Practices, and Technology Trends, MITRE, 2005, page 52.
[13] Ibid.

C.1.d. Prominence of Email Address
Email addresses and links to web response forms should be prominent on agency websites. Agencies should have a "contact us" page and links to it should appear, at a minimum, on the homepage and every major entry point.

C.1.e. Response Attempts
When email is not successfully delivered, you should generally make two additional attempts to respond to customer emails, except for situations such as an incorrect email address.

C.1.f. Response Time
Maximum time to respond to incoming customer email should be determined as follows:

1) Relatively simple and/or common questions should be answered at least 90% of the time within two business days. Alternative channels (phone, web site, etc.) should be suggested where the customer might find the answer sooner.

2) More complex questions which require research, sign off, or involve multiple topics or agencies should be answered at least 90% of the time within five business days. The agency should inform the customer within two business days of the status and estimated response time.

3) For questions which involve personal data, complex policy or scientific issues, or time-consuming research, the customer should receive an email within two business days citing the complexity of the inquiry and advising them when they might expect a complete answer. Every five to ten business days thereafter, an email should update them as much as possible, until a full response is provided.

C.1.g. Unique or Identifying Numbers
Agencies which utilize unique or identifying numbers for tracking customer inquiries should always reference them in related emails.

C.2. Guidelines

We encourage the following, as they will have a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction:

C.2a. Auto Replies
Unless they will be responded to no later than the next business day, all customer emails should be acknowledged upon receipt with an auto reply (or equivalent) advising that the customer's message has been received and providing an estimate of how long it will be before the sender can expect to receive a response. These replies should also suggest any other available channels -- such as web site and telephone -- where the customer might get a faster response if it is needed.

C.2.b. Web Response Forms

Use of web response forms is strongly encouraged to minimize the adverse impacts of spam on agency customer support resources. Web response forms should begin with a link to FAQs to ensure customer awareness of alternative self-service options, and should include a reminder to the sender to ensure that the subsequent email response from the agency can pass through any spam filters the sender may have in place. Drop down menus should be used to allow customers to self-categorize the topics of their inquiries. The date and time of receipt of inquiries via web response form should be automatically annotated as a tool for monitoring response times.

C.3. Recommendations

The following are suggested improvements:

C.3.a. Authentication

Agencies should stay informed on the evolution of techniques and technologies to verify email sender identification and apply them to email transactions with customers at the appropriate level of maturity. This is especially important for those agencies whose mission requires customers to provide personal information and data in email transactions. Use of email addresses from any web domains other than ".gov," ".mil," or ".fed.us" is strongly discouraged.

C.3.b. Employee Email Addresses

Customer use of individual employee email addresses should be minimized to mitigate adverse impacts of leave and attrition on customer service levels.

C.3.c. Response Format

Email responses should be as concise as possible given the nature of the inquiry, and bullet format should be considered when appropriate for customer convenience.

D. MAIL, FAX, AND WALK-IN CHANNELS

Background

Although they were not included in the original work plan for the Committee, it was recognized early in the process that a number of Federal entities deal with very large volumes of customer contacts via these "traditional" channels. Studies have shown a citizen preference for transactions in person or via postal correspondence when the nature of the issue involved is urgent, complex, or requires disclosure of personal information. [14] Given increases in longevity, and the well recognized progression of the "baby boom" in age, these channels merit attention due in part to a preference toward them among older members of the population. It is also important in moving Government toward the 21st Century customer support paradigm to dispel the past stereotypical visions of long lines in Government offices.

The following standards, guidelines, and recommendations endorsed by the Committee focus on accessibility, efficiency, courtesy, effective tracking, and customer convenience in providing Government's customers mail, fax, and walk-in service.

D.1. Standards

The following are best practices to which all agencies should adhere:

D.1.a. Postal Mail
Customer letters should be acknowledged by mail with an estimated response time if a complete answer cannot be provided within 15 working days. The topic, receipt date, and date of response should be tracked for all mail inquiries to ensure that customers receive responses. Routing and processing procedures should be in place for mail from the public addressed to the leadership of the agency as well mail for which the intended recipient is not clear.

D.1.b. Faxed Letters
Faxed letters should be responded to by either mail or fax, applying the same standards as specified for postal mail above. [NOTE: Fax use may save costs and delivery time compared to postal mail, to both the agency and the customer, especially when mail screening security procedures are required.]

D.1.c. Walk-In Customers
Walk-in customers should be given the opportunity to speak to a receptionist or person performing equivalent function immediately upon arrival.

D.2. Guidelines

We encourage the following, as they will have a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction:

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[14] Citizen Service Level Expectations, MITRE, 2005, page 31.

D.2.a Appointments

Use of appointments should be considered by agencies whose transactions with walk-in customers typically require a relatively large amount of time (greater than 15 minutes). Advance scheduling through appointments permits scheduling of staffing resources to match demand, lessening delays for customers.

D.2.b. Hours of Operation

Extended weekday and Saturday hours of operation should be considered for the convenience of walk-in customers who cannot visit during regular business hours. Agencies should continually evaluate their hours of operation with respect to the evolving needs and convenience of their walk-in customers and utilize creative work scheduling to respond.

D.2.c. Queuing

Manual "take a number" systems, electronic self-registration, or other means should be used whenever necessary to ensure that walk-in customers without appointments are served in the order of their arrival, and can sit or otherwise relax compared to standing in line while awaiting service.

D.2.d. Wait Time

Walk-in customers without appointments should be waited on in 15 minutes or less.

D.3. Recommendations

The following are suggested improvements:

D.3.a. Greeters

When walk-in customer volume warrants, a greeter should provide an estimate of wait time and ensure that each arriving customer has all needed information and documents to conduct the intended transaction.

E. WEB CHANNELS

<u>Background</u>

The World Wide Web ("web") is widely recognized as a key future channel for customer contacts as the current tech-savvy younger generations mature and increase their interactions with Government. One of the most frequent public sector barriers to better use of this channel at present is poor design which makes customer navigation and searching of web sites to find what they want difficult. To cite one of our supporting studies, "The key to improving satisfaction for the site overall lies with truly understanding how visitor audiences use the site." [15]

As already noted by OMB, up-to-date and relevant solutions to the most frequently asked questions ("FAQs") posted in an organized and searchable manner on line have been found by citizens to be particularly helpful for web-based self service. [16] Experience in both public and private sectors, however, reminds us that keeping FAQs highly effective from the customer's perspective usually requires a significant ongoing resource obligation.

One of the more recent and innovative web-based tools for supporting Government's customers is "really simple syndication" or "RSS" technology, which enables websites to notify those who choose to subscribe of newly posted content. Use of RSS requires the installation of "readers" available elsewhere on the web. Several of the web-based items endorsed by the Committee below are related to this new web capability.

Some internet-related technologies and capabilities which are not yet making large impacts in Government customer support, but which should be monitored and addressed as appropriate in the future -- along with others yet to evolve -- are: wireless internet access, web chat, instant messaging, internet access via power lines, personal digital assistants, cell phones with web browsing capabilities, podcasting, and web-based videoconferencing.

The following standards, guidelines, and recommendations endorsed by the Committee focus on completeness and currency of agency contact information, currently evolving web capabilities in the Government space, service availability, usability, self-service effectiveness, and customer convenience in serving Government's customers via the world wide web (except for web response forms which were previously addressed).

<u>E.1. Standards</u>

The following are best practices to which all agencies should adhere:

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[15] Freed, L. March 15, 2005. "E-Government Satisfaction Index." ForeSee Results.
[16] Office of Management and Budget. December 17, 2004. Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites. http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/req2d4.shtml

E.1.a. BOT Response Reviews
When BOTs are used as an automated tool for responding to customer inquiries, BOT responses should be reviewed at least quarterly for accuracy.

E.1.b. "Contact Us" Web Page
The content of agency "contact us" web pages should be multi-channel, including telephone number, postal mail address, email address, and contact information for other customer support channels as applicable. The "contact us" page should be prominently linked from the agency home page.

E.1.c. Contacts for Other Agencies
Contact information for other agencies posted on line should be coordinated with them in advance to facilitate their planning for possible additional contacts and to ensure that future changes to the posted contact information are shared.

E.1.d. Frequently-Asked-Question (FAQ) Page
A frequently-asked-question (FAQ) page for self-service should be prominently accessible from the agency home page on the world wide web and every major entry point. Questions and corresponding answers posted there should be reviewed at least yearly for accuracy, and the person or group responsible for doing so should be documented and easily contacted within the agency.

E.1.e. Really Simple Syndication (RSS) Feeds
Web pages with associated RSS feeds should have the feed(s) linked internally in the html so that programs which "know how" will automatically recognize them. RSS feeds should include descriptions, rather than just titles.

E.1.f. RSS Link
Agencies offering RSS feed capability should link to brief instructions on creating/using an RSS feed, and provide an orange button or icon labeled with "XML" or "RSS" in white on their web site(s) to link to the agency URL created for that purpose. No particular RSS reader should be recommended -- instead customers should be offered a list of examples or advised to use search engines to locate RSS readers. Agencies should notify FirstGov of new RSS feeds so they can be included in the government-wide RSS library.

E.1.g. Self-Service Follow Up
Further inquiry by customers whose questions could not be fully answered using frequently-asked-questions on line should be facilitated in as convenient a manner for the customer as possible (clicking on "contact us," initiating web chat, etc.).

E.1.h. Web Chat Availability
Hours of availability of web chat should be publicized (if less than 24x7), to ensure that agency customers are aware of when they can use it. Alternative channels such as web page self-help should be suggested for use by customers during hours web chat is not available. Agencies should monitor and adjust the number of simultaneous web chat

sessions per customer service representative to ensure appropriate levels of quality and service.

E.1.i. Web Site Usability
Low load times, minimization of scrolling to accommodate small customer monitor screens, page layout, navigation, writing, text appearance, content organization, and other considerations of user convenience should be incorporated into the design of web sites supporting agency customers.

E.2. Guidelines

We encourage the following, as they will have a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction:

E.2.a. Effectiveness of Frequently-Asked-Questions (FAQs)
The effectiveness of individual FAQs in resolving customer questions and issues should be measured through customer feedback, and customer recommendations for improvements to FAQs should be acknowledged and acted upon as soon as possible.

E.2.b. Frequently-Asked-Questions in E-Mail Response and Web Chat
A source of prepared answers to the most frequently asked questions should be available to customer service representatives providing e-mail response and web chat services to save typing time and add efficiency and consistency to responses to customers.

E.2.c. Search Effectiveness
Agencies are required to provide a search function on the principle agency website and any major web entry points to help the public find information. Agencies should study what customers search for on web sites, and the words they use to do so, including common misspellings. The resulting familiarity with customer needs should be used to improve information and terminology in all channels, facilitate natural language inquiry and improve effectiveness of customer key word searches.

E.3. Recommendations

The following are suggested improvements:

E.3.a. BOT Personality
The personality of BOTs, when used, should be determined by the agency to maximize the effectiveness of the BOT in serving the agency's constituency.

E.3.b. Impacts and Use of Frequently-Asked-Questions
The impacts of changes to frequently-asked-questions available on line upon customer contact volumes in other channels should be monitored by the agency as appropriate. [Example: Having the address for mailing tax returns on the FAQ page may save the IRS from having to answer thousands of phone calls and enable them to focus instead on

more complex questions.] Agencies should monitor how many times individual FAQs are "hit," so that those most frequently used can be moved to the most visible positions.

E.3.c. RSS Compatibility
Agencies should periodically test web site content with several different RSS readers to ensure it is fully usable via RSS.

E.3.d. Web Chat Scripts
Customers should be offered the option to receive a transcript of their web chat sessions for review and future reference.

NEXT STEPS

The completion of this report, though highly significant for the broad collaborative Federal focus on the customer which it represents, is only the beginning of the path to responsive 21st Century Federal customer support. The Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee will continue as a living collaborative network to refine, advocate, and implement these practices and approaches in final form at the front lines of Government -- incorporating feedback on this report from the Office of Management and Budget as well as findings from the General Accounting Office's recent study of contracted Federal contact centers.

We hope as a group to help bring to fruition a Federal-wide methodology for systematically measuring customer satisfaction. We intend to serve as strong advocates for those who touch Government's customers directly -- they are the key to effectiveness through their individual creativity fostered by effective leadership and professional growth. Through our collective many decades of experience in managing and evolving Government's customer touch points, we hope to serve as a reliable "reality check" whenever perspective is needed to help balance resources with customer-centric results. We also hope to help evolve the practices and approaches which we have endorsed to keep them commensurate with changing customer needs and expectations, as well as to share our results with foreign, state, and local government for such use as will benefit them respectively.

CONCLUSION

The Committee appreciates the opportunity and honor to help make a difference in Government's provision of information and services to customers. We realize the challenges of the road ahead, recognize them as greater opportunities, and embrace the goal to continually seek and foster responsiveness to the needs and preferences of Government's customers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The efforts of Mr. James Vaughn, formerly of GSA, led to the formation of the Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee. His early leadership and the direction of co-

chairs Daryl Covey (NOAA) and Mary Lamary (OPM) have been key to the timely and effective completion of our work. The managerial and mentoring support of Mr. Stuart Willoughby of GSA and the excellent program support of Ms. Karen Trebon of GSA have been pivotal to maintaining direction and systematically approaching our work, respectively. Our primary work approach was patterned after the prior work of the Interagency Committee on Government Information (ICGI), the results of which are available for review at the URL listed in the References Appendix. Above all, heartfelt thanks is due to the agency representatives serving on the Committee who each persevered through a long summer's work and made time beyond their regular duties to help make a difference.

LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND PERSONNEL

Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee (CSLIC)

		Subcommittee Membership				
Agencies (33) Trust Establishments (1)	Members (58)	Email (23)	Phone (26)	Future Methods (17)	Traditional Methods (7)*	Cross Channel Issues (13)
Agriculture	Ronald Anderson			x		
Archives	Tom Fortunato					x
Commerce, Census Bureau	Leslie D. Solomon		x	x		
Commerce, Economic and Statistics Administration	Dee Atwell	x	x			x
Commerce, International Trade Administration	Wendy Smith					
Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	Daryl Covey, Co-Chair	x	x	x	x	x
Defense, Defense Finance and Accounting Service	Dennis Eicher					
	Scott Schnick					
	Kenneth Sweitzer					
Defense, Defense Information Systems Agency	Jean Baugh					
Education	Nina Colon					
	Sharon Stevens		x			
Energy, Energy Information Administration	Susanne Johnson	x	x			x
Environmental Protection Agency	Mike Weaver	x				
	Seema Schappelle					
Federal Trade Commission	Chris Stone	x	x			x
	Ida Bolen				x	
	Kathy French		x	x		x

Agencies (33) Trust Establishments (1)	Members (58)	Email (23)	Phone (26)	Future Methods (17)	Traditional Methods (7)*	Cross Channel Issues (13)
	Karen Trebon, Coordinator	x	x	x	x	x
	Jacob Parcell					
	Diane Devera					
Government Printing Office	Kevin O'Toole					
Health and Human Services	Linda Adams					
Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Suzi Gates					
Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services	Mary Agnes Laureno	x	x			x
	Ernest Muldrow		x			
Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration	Mary Kremzner	x	x			
	Barry Poole	x	x		x	
	Gelind Creath					
	Kathy Cooper		x	x		
Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health	Judi Patt					
	Debra Steverson					
Health and Human Services, National Library of Medicine	Jenny Heiland	x	x	x		
	Ron Gordner	x	x	x		
Housing and Urban Development	R. Lynn Kring	x				
Interior, Geological Survey	Kent Swanjord	x	x	x		
Justice	Darlene Mongelli					
Labor	Margaret Stewart	x	x	x		x

Agencies (33) Trust Establishments (1)	Members (58)	Email (23)	Phone (26)	Future Methods (17)	Traditional Methods (7)*	Cross Channel Issues (13)
Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics	Jack Tracy					
	Dionne Little	x	x	x		
	Vanessa Newton	x	x			
Office of Personnel Management	**Mary Lamary, Co-Chair**	x	x	x	x	x
Postal Service	Carlton Roark					
	John Mahoney					
Railroad Retirement Board	Richard Spada				x	
Small Business Administration	Justin Van Epps					
Smithsonian Institution (trust establishment)	Ken Burke	x				
	Katherine Neill Ridgley					
Social Security Administration	Rhonda Finch	x		x		
	Bruce Carter			x		
	Joan B. Bryan					
Treasury	Tracia Ward Rainey	x				x
Treasury, Internal Revenue Service	Corliss Brooks	x	x			x
	Diane Fox		x	x		x
	Shannon Stegarp	x	x	x		x
	Richard Firely		x	x		
Treasury, Office of Thrift Supervision	Ronald Oberbillig	x	x	x	x	
Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration	David Roesner		x			

*This subcommittee received additional input from the Social Security Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

9/22/2005

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Appendix 2:

RELATED LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND GUIDELINES

Agencies establishing or operating a contact center should be aware of the following laws, regulations, and guidelines:

- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998
  - Requires that all proposed technology solutions be fully accessible by individuals with disabilities
    http://www.section508.gov/

- Executive Order 13166 "Improving Access to Services for People With Limited English Proficiency"
    http://www.osc.gov/documents/EO13166.pdf

- Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA, Public Law 104-13)
  - In administering customer satisfaction surveys, agencies should adhere to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The PRA aims to minimize the paperwork burden imposed on the public by the Federal government and ensure that the greatest possible benefit comes from the collection of information from the public.
    http://www.cio.gov/archive/paperwork_reduction_act_1995.html

- Telework (also called telecommuting)
  - The ability to do your work at a location other than your "official duty station."
    http://www.telework.gov/

- Business Continuity/Continuity of Operations (COOP)
  - Federal Preparedness Circular
    http://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/fpc67.pdf

- Plain Language
  - http://www.plainlanguage.gov/

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abandonment rate – Refers to abandoned or lost calls. The caller hangs up before reaching an agent. Should not be used as the sole measure of contact center performance since it is often driven by caller behavior, which the center cannot control.

Agent - A person who handles incoming or outgoing contacts. Also referred to as customer service representative (CSR), customer care representative, telephone sales or service representative (TSR), representative, rep., associate, consultant, engineer, operator, technician, account executive, team member, customer service professional, staff member, attendant or specialist.

Authentication – To establish as genuine in authorship or origin. For example, a website is official government webspace, or an email message is actually from a government agency. This is a growing concern in the internet age, since bad actors often establish websites and send email messages seeking personal information from individuals. This information is then used in identity theft.

Automated (or Auto) Reply – A system – generated email that is automatically sent to a customer acknowledging that his or her email was received. Many inform the customer of when to expect a response.

Auto translators – Programs that allow you to translate text into another language automatically. Caution should be exercised since words have different meanings in different languages.

Average Speed of Answer (ASA) – A measure that reflects the average delay of a call, from the time the call is queued and is waiting to be answered. ASA does not always reflect the typical caller's experience, since most calls get answered more quickly. Some wait far beyond the ASA.

Benchmarking – Finding out what the best looks like and using that information to measure one's own performance. Also identify gaps in performance and close the gaps.

BOT - Short for robot, a BOT is a program used on the Internet that performs a repetitive function such as posting a message to multiple newsgroups or searching for information or news. BOTs are used for example, to provide comparison shopping.

Business continuity – Plans in place to ensure that customers can reach you in the event of an emergency. In some cases, customers may not be able to reach you. Business continuity plans should at least let customers know why they can't reach you and when they should call back.

Channel – A means by which citizens and government send communication messages to one another. Examples of channels include voice conversations via the telephone, interactive voice response (IVR) systems, voice mail, email, text messages, instant messaging, postal mail, and face-to-face office visits.

Customer – Anyone who is a patron of government services for business or personal reasons, although they may not legally qualify as a citizen or live in that country.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – The process of holistically developing the customer's relationship with the organization. It takes into account their history as a customer and the depth and breadth of their business with the organization.

First Contact Resolution – The customer is able to have their question answered or their need filled without breaks in the chain of communication. The customer is taken care of via their first visit, letter, phone call, or email. The customer does not have to state their question again in another letter, visit, phone call or email message.

Guideline – Performance metrics and best practices with a demonstrated impact on citizen satisfaction (For example, X% of calls should be answered within Y seconds).

Instant Messaging (IM) – A form of text-chat used primarily for non-commercial communications between two or more internet users. Incompatible addressing and protocol issues have limited its use for business to consumer applications.

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) – A system that enables callers to use their telephone keypad (or spoken commands if speech recognition is used) to access a computer system for the purpose of retrieving or updating information, conducting a transaction, or routing their call. IVR systems can also be used to conduct caller surveys at the completion of calls.

Misdirects - These are inquiries that your agency receives that are not under your jurisdiction, but are perhaps under the jurisdiction of another agency.

Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) – A small lightweight "palm" computer often used for personal organization tasks (calendar, database, note-taking) and communications (email, wireless internet access and in some cases wireless telephone). Recent models offer multimedia features (cameras, music storage and playback, video storage and playback.) Most PDAs rely on pointing devices rather than a keyboard or a mouse.

Podcasting – Sometimes referred to as "Tivo for radio." This technology allows you to download audio files from websites for later listening.

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) – Also known as web feeds or live bookmarks. A method of summarizing the latest news and information from a website. RSS collects headlines, news summaries, and links for current stories or information on topics or websites you have designated. RSS feeds a listing of newly available information from

these sources directly to your computer, and is more efficient than browsing and searching for new information.

Recommendation - Suggested improvements at the discretion of the agency.

Section 508 - Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998. It requires that federal agencies' electronic and information technology be accessible to people with disabilities.

Self Service Communication – Communication between a citizen and an automated system that allows the citizen to receive service without any contact with another person. Examples of channels that can provide self service communication include: IVR systems, automated teller machines (ATMs), kiosks and Web sites.

Service Level – Sometimes referred to as answer speed. As used in our title (Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee), it refers broadly to:
- Service level or answer speed
- Response time objectives
- Hours of operation
- Abandoned call objectives
- First contact resolution
- Services provided
- Escalation procedures
- Quality procedures and standards

Standard - Metrics and best practices to which all should adhere.

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) – Experts employed by federal agencies. For example, a meteorologist employed by the National Weather Service may be called upon to handle complex customer inquiries.

Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) – Transmitting voice conversations as packets of data from one communication device (voice switch, PC, or IP phone) to another over a TCP/IP network.

Webchat – Real time written communication, similar to instant messaging. Unlike email, there is no delay.

Webforms – Customers send in their inquiries via "fill in the box" form, rather than free form as in an email message. Webforms are preferred over posting your email address on your website. Having your email address(es) on your website could lead to spam.

Wi fi – Internet access that is available via "hot spot." You don't have to dial up. This is similar to the antenna concept, i.e. the TV and radio stations you can access are dependent on your location.

Appendix 7:

REASONABLE EFFORT CONSIDERATIONS

As managers of Government customer support, the members of the Committee were challenged to assume the perspective of the customer in determining what "should be" at Government's front lines. Although we deal intrinsically with the special fiduciary responsibilities to balance cost efficiency with effectiveness which are unique to the public sector, the word "resource" arose frequently in Committee deliberations on a wide range of practices and approaches. Given that Government funds customer support (with very few exceptions) with public funds, some key standards, guidelines, and recommendations which we have endorsed specify what we believe represents a "best try" within reasonable expense to respond to needs and expectations of customers. Some summarized examples are as follows:

-- Up to three attempts to return telephone calls and respond to emails
-- Use of creative work scheduling to expand hours of operation
-- Improvements based on quality assurance and customer satisfaction results
-- Attention to relative effectiveness by channel
-- Consideration of call nature and volume in structuring IVR systems and "live help"
-- Promotion of efficient and cost-effective contact channels
-- Providing response time estimates to preclude unreasonable customer expectations
-- Suggesting self-service channels when faster responses are needed
-- Use of appointments for efficient scheduling of staffing resources

The Committee does not want our endorsed practices and approaches to Federal customer support to become "unfunded mandates," or precipitate unrealistic deadlines and resource commitments. They should instead be applied as a tool for serving customers with available resources in the spirit of one of our key standards:

> **Customer Support Resource Optimization**
> Application of limited resources across customer contact channels should be optimized based upon agency size, mission, and customer feedback. Topics and volume of customer inquiries should be tracked for use in forecasting contact volumes and scheduling customer support resources to handle them.

The enticement to resource and utilize our endorsed practices and approaches will, we hope, lie ultimately in the impressiveness of the results from doing so.

Appendix 8:

REFERENCES

1. Mitre (2005). <u>Improving Citizen Services: Metrics and Benchmarks, Best Practices and Technology Trends.</u> http://www.usaservices.gov/research.htm

2. Mitre (2005). <u>Citizens' Service Level Expectations.</u>

3. Incoming Calls Management Institute – ICMI (2003) – Call Center Management Dictionary: The Essential Reference for Contact Center, Help Desk and Customer Care Professionals.

4. Webcontent.gov / ICGI - A Practical Guide for Managing U.S. Government Websites http://www.webcontent.gov

5. Usability.gov – Resource for designing usable, useful, and accessible web sites and other user interfaces http://www.usability.gov

6. Plainlanguage.gov – Improving Communications from the Federal Government to the Public http://www.plainlanguage.gov

7. Podcasts from the U.S. Government http://www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Reference_Shelf/Libraries/Podcasts.shtml

Appendix 9:

STAKEHOLDERS

CSLIC transmitted the document to the following stakeholders for comment (August 22, 2005-September 16, 2005):

Federal Government
- USA Services Partners and Advocates
- Federal Consulting Group
- Office of Management and Budget, Office of Electronic Government
- Contact Center Managers listserv
- American Council for Technology (ACT)
- Government Customer Support News listserv - includes individuals from Incoming Call Management Institute (ICMI)

Private Sector
- Mitre
- Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals (SOCAP)
- Aspen Systems
- Datatrac
- Pearson Government Solutions
- ICT Group
- Teletech
- Booz Allen Hamilton

Public / Private Partnerships
- Industry Advisory Council (IAC)

National Organizations
- Council for Excellence in Government

State Government
- National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO)

Local Government
- National Association of Counties (NACo)
- National League of Cities (NLC)

International
- Government Services Canada (contact center managers)