October 2010

# MANAGING FOR RESULTS

# Opportunities to Strengthen Agencies' Customer Service Efforts

GAO

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

**October 2010**

# MANAGING FOR RESULTS

## Opportunities to Strengthen Agencies' Customer Service Efforts

## Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government has set a goal of providing service to the public that matches or exceeds that of the private sector. Executive Order 12862 (September 11, 1993) and a related 1995 memorandum require agencies to post customer service standards and report results to customers. As requested, this report (1) assesses the extent to which federal agencies are setting customer service standards and measuring related results, (2) assesses the extent to which agencies are reporting standards and results to customers and using the results to improve service, and (3) identifies some customer service management tools and practices used by various governments. The report also examines the steps the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is taking to facilitate agency use of tools and practices. GAO surveyed 13 federal services among those with the most contact with the public, reviewed literature and interviewed agency officials as well as knowledgeable individuals in the area of customer service.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB (1) direct agencies to consider options to make customer service standards and results more readily available and (2) collaborate with the President's Management Advisory Board and agencies to evaluate the benefits and costs of applying the tools and practices identified in this report, and include those found beneficial in its related initiative. OMB had no comments on the recommendations.

## What GAO Found

All 13 government services GAO surveyed . (see table below) had established customer service standards, which varied in their form from quantitative standards based on hourly, daily, monthly or annual averages to general commitments to qualitative standardsAll 13 services reported having measures of customer service, such as measures of wait times or accuracy of service and 11 services had measures of customer satisfaction. For example, the National Park Service surveys visitors at over 320 points of service through a survey card program. All services had methods to receive customer complaints, and all had methods of gathering ideas from front line employees to improve customer service.

| Thirteen Government Services GAO Surveyed | |
|---|---|
| Direct Student Loans | Passport Services |
| Forest Recreation Services | Social Security |
| Park Visitor and Interpretive Services | Tax Information and Advice |
| Medicare | Veteran Disability Compensation |
| Indian Health Service Medical Care | Veterans' Group Life Insurance |
| Border Inspections of Individuals | Veteran Medical Care |
| Passenger and Baggage Screening | |

Source: GAO.

Although standards exist, GAO found that the surveyed services' standards were often made available in a way that would not be easy for customers to find and access or, in the case of two services, were not made available to the public at all. For example, five services made standards available in long, detailed documents mostly focused on other topics, such as annual performance plans, performance and accountability reports, and budget justifications. About half of the services reported customer service results in similar types of documents. All services reported comparing customer service results to the standards and using the results to improve internal processes. For example, Customs and Border Protection officials told GAO that after they studied wait times at land borders and airports, they made facility enhancements and staff assignment changes. At one port of entry, these changes reduced wait times by more than half. However, some services have not compared performance to the private sector, as required by the Executive Order. Most services reported considering customer service measures in employee performance appraisals. For example, according to IRS officials, the performance appraisals for all employees who provide taxpayer assistance are based in part on critical job elements related to customer satisfaction.

GAO identified several customer service tools and practices government agencies have used to improve customer service, such as engaging customers through social media, providing self service options and offering redress for unmet standards. Additionally, OMB has begun an initiative to identify and share private sector best practices among federal agencies and to develop a dashboard where agencies can make customer service standards available. Building on the progress made under this initiative, OMB could evaluate the benefits and costs of applying these tools and practices on a more widespread basis and share those that are found to be beneficial.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**

# Contents

GAO

**Accountability * Integrity * Reliability**

**United States Government Accountability Office**
**Washington, DC 20548**

October 27, 2010

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Chairman
The Honorable George V. Voinovich
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal
  Workforce and the District of Columbia
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Diane E. Watson
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and
  Procurement
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Henry Cuellar
House of Representatives

The federal government has set a goal of providing service to the public
that matches or exceeds the best service available in the private sector. It
is therefore critical for agencies to gauge how their customer services are
meeting the needs of their customers to sustain and focus agency efforts in
continuing improvements. Federal agencies interact with the public in a
vast number of individual transactions between federal employees and an
individual. The circumstances and expectations for service vary based on
the particular transaction as government services include diverse
functions such as providing information, benefits, regulation, and
enforcement.

Both Congress and the executive branch have taken actions to increase
the value of these transactions to those the government serves. In 1993
Congress enacted the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA),
which was intended, in part, to improve federal program effectiveness by
promoting a new focus on results, service quality, and customer
satisfaction.[1] The same year, in order to carry out the principles of the

---

[1]Pub. L. No. 103-62, 107 Stat. 285 (August 3, 1993) (codified at 5 U.S.C. § 306; 31 U.S.C. §§
1101 note, 1105, 1115–1119, 9703–9704; 39 U.S.C. §§ 2801–2805).

National Performance Review,[2] President Clinton issued Executive Order 12862, which required agencies to post customer service standards and measure results against them.[3] In 1995, President Clinton issued a presidential memorandum to the heads of executive departments and agencies on improving customer service which instructed agencies to treat the requirements of the Executive Order as continuing requirements. This memorandum is still in effect. More recently, legislation titled the "Federal Customer Service Enhancement Act" has been introduced in Congress that would, among other things, require the establishment of customer service standards and performance measures for federal agencies.[4]

In light of your interest in determining how federal agencies are currently using customer service standards and measures, you asked us to (1) assess the extent to which federal agencies are setting customer service standards and measuring results against these standards, (2) assess the extent to which federal agencies are reporting standards and results to customers and using the results to improve service, and (3) identify some customer service management tools and practices used by local, state, federal, and other national governments. In addition, we examined the steps the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is taking to facilitate federal agency use of tools and practices to improve customer service.

To assess whether and how federal agencies are setting customer service standards, measuring results, reporting those results and using them to improve service, we conducted a survey, based on the requirements of the Executive Order and the related memorandum, of 13 services provided by federal agencies that are among those with the most widespread contact with the public.[5] Services were chosen for the survey based on a list of agencies with the most contact with the public developed by the National Performance Review in the late 1990s, input from subject matter experts, and available public data. Services included in the survey were:

---

[2]The National Performance Review was a major executive branch reform initiative launched in 1993 to improve government performance. In 1998, it was renamed the National Partnership for Reinventing Government.

[3]Exec. Order No. 12862, "*Setting Customer Service Standards*," 58 Fed. Reg. 48,257 (Sept. 11, 1993).

[4]"Federal Customer Service Enhancement Act," H.R. 315, 111th Cong. (2009).

[5]The sample of services was not a representative sample of services provided by the federal government, meaning that results from our survey cannot be generalized to apply to all services provided by the federal government.

GAO-11-44 Customer Service

- Recreational facilities and services provided by the Forest Service
- Student loans under the Direct Loan Program provided by Federal Student Aid
- Visitor and interpretive services provided by the National Park Service
- Health insurance under Medicare provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- Medical care provided by the Indian Health Service
- Border security inspection of individuals provided by Customs and Border Protection
- Passenger and baggage screening provided by the Transportation Security Administration
- Passport services provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs
- Provision of tax information and advice to individuals provided by the Internal Revenue Service
- Disability compensation provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration
- Life insurance provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration
- Medical care provided by the Veterans Health Administration
- Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income provided by the Social Security Administration

To gain a fuller understanding of the survey responses, we selected five of the services with varying answers to key questions on the survey for follow-up interviews to discuss their responses.

We did not evaluate the overall effectiveness of or level of customer service provided by any of the services reviewed.

To obtain input from services with a lower volume of contact with the public, services with different missions or goals than those that were surveyed, and services that serve government customers and are not subject to the requirements of the Executive Order, we selected an additional five services for interview. These five services were:

- Regulation of power plants and other uses of nuclear materials by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- Health and safety information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Research and education grants provided by the National Science Foundation
- Procurement of goods and services for the government provided by the Federal Acquisition Service
- Federal agency property management services provided by Public Building Services

To assess significant customer service management practices used by local, state, federal and other national governments that may be considered for application by federal agencies, we conducted a review of relevant literature, such as industry, academic, and management journals dealing with customer service practices and an annual evaluation of customer service provided by national governments published each year since 2000. In addition, we interviewed knowledgeable current and former researchers and practitioners with experience managing or designing government performance improvement initiatives, such as the National Performance Review and the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) at the federal level or similar initiatives at the state and local level, experience implementing, in a government setting, one or more of the customer service management tools and practices we identified in our literature review, or had been identified in our literature review as contributing to the field of public sector customer service. We also gathered information from seven local, state, or non-U.S. national governments and incorporated information received from federal agencies through survey and interviews.[6]

We conducted this performance audit from August 2009 to October 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. For a more detailed description of our scope and methodology, see appendix I.

## Background

GPRA was intended to address several broad purposes, including promoting a new focus on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction. GPRA requires executive agencies to develop strategic plans, prepare annual performance plans, measure performance toward the achievement of goals in the annual plans and report annually on their progress.

Building on GPRA and in carrying out the principles of the National Performance Review (NPR), on September 11, 1993, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12862, which remains in effect. The order created

---

[6]The seven local, state, and foreign governments included: New York City, Georgia (USA), Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, and Singapore.

several requirements for agencies related to customer service. Specifically, the order stated that all executive departments and agencies that provide significant services directly to the public shall provide customer service equal to the best in business and shall take the following actions:[7]

- identify the customers who are, or should be, served by the agency
- survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services
- post service standards and measure results against them
- benchmark customer service performance against the best in business
- survey frontline employees on barriers to, and ideas for, matching the best in business
- provide customers with choices in both the sources of service and the means of delivery
- make information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible and
- provide means to address customer complaints

On March 23, 1995, President Clinton issued a presidential memorandum on improving customer service, which stated that the standards agencies had begun issuing in response to Executive Order 12862 had told the federal government's customers for the first time what they had a right to expect when they asked for services. The memorandum instructed agencies to treat the requirements of Executive Order 12862 as continuing requirements and stated that the actions the order prescribes, including surveying customers and employees and benchmarking, shall be continuing agency activities. The memorandum further provided that standards should be published in a form readily available to customers, and that services that are delivered in partnership with state and local governments, services delivered by small agencies and regulatory agencies, and customer services of enforcement agencies are covered by the requirement to set and publish customer service standards. It further stated that agencies shall, on an ongoing basis, measure results achieved against the customer service standards and report those results to customers at least annually in terms readily understood by individual customers, and that measurement systems should include objective measures wherever possible, but should also include customer satisfaction as a measure. Finally, the memorandum stated that agencies should publish replacement customer service standards if needed to reflect customer views on what matters most to them.

---

[7]The order defined the "best in business" as the highest quality of service delivered to customers by private organizations providing a comparable or analogous service.

According to the last NPR report on customer service in 1997, 570 federal departments, agencies, organizations, and programs issued a total of 4,000 customer services standards. The NPR report was accompanied by a database through which customers could search for standards of interest or browse standards by customer group, such as beneficiaries, veterans, and businesses. For example, the Immigration and Naturalization Service issued a standard that it would complete action on naturalization applications within 6 months, and the Department of Health and Human Services issued a standard for Medicare and Medicaid that 80 percent of callers would be on hold for less than 2 minutes. In addition, the report stated that for 2,800 of the 4,000 standards, results of performance against the standards had been identified and were the basis for changes and improvements in the delivery of service.

# All Selected Services Have Customer Service Standards and Measure Results of Service

## All Surveyed Services Established and Reviewed Standards

All 13 services we surveyed had established customer service standards. Officials from the Indian Health Service (IHS), which provides medical care for American Indians and Alaska Natives, told us their customer service standards are established by their area offices and facilities.[8] The other services had standards that applied service-wide.

The services' standards varied in their form. Some standards were general commitments to qualitative standards, often stating commitments to meet certain identified customer rights. Other standards were structured quantitatively and based on daily, monthly, or annual averages. The Bureau of Consular Affairs, for example, had standards that include general commitments to qualitative standards for Passport Services, such as "We will provide service in a courteous, professional manner," as well as commitments to meet customer rights, such as "You have the right to

---

[8]IHS consists of a system of more than 650 IHS-funded facilities organized into 12 geographic areas of various sizes. Within the 12 areas, direct care services are generally delivered by IHS-funded hospitals, health centers, and health stations.

speak with management if you are not satisfied with the service you have received." Some of the standards from IHS area offices and facilities also stated general commitments to qualified standards such as, "have pride in our appearance, and provide a pleasant greeting," while other IHS area offices and facilities had individual level quantitative standards, which included, "answering phone calls within three rings." The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has established several quantitative standards for customer service related to their Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) program, including averages such as the speed of answer for their call center, which is set at 20 seconds, as well as call abandonment rates, which they set at 2 percent. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has similar quantitative standards for their Medical Care program, such as a standard for the number of new patient appointments completed within 30 days of the appointment create date.

All services reported that they had reviewed their standards within the last year.[9] For example, VGLI told us that they review standards annually, and 2 years ago changed the standard for e-mail response time from 48 to 24 hours based on this review. Similarly, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) officials told us that standards for taxpayer assistance are reviewed to see if they need updating three times per year by executives, directors, and managers, and the Forest Service told us that they review standards for recreational facilities and services as part of their annual performance reporting required by GPRA.

## Nearly All Surveyed Services Have Measures of Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction

All 13 of the surveyed services reported having measures of customer service, and 11 of the services reported having measures of satisfaction.[10] Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has methods of gathering input from customers, such as through their comment card program and the online question and comment section of their CBP Info Center Web page, and is planning to measure customer satisfaction through a customer satisfaction survey in 2011. CBP submitted the planned survey for review

---

[9]The presidential memorandum "Improving Customer Service" states that surveying customers shall be a continuing agency activity. Additionally, the memorandum states that customer views should be obtained to determine whether standards have been set on what matters most to customers, and that agencies should publish replacement standards if needed to reflect these views.

[10]We previously reported that significantly more federal managers governmentwide had customer service measures in 2007 than in 1997. GAO, *Government Performance: Lessons Learned for the Next Administration on Using Performance Information to Improve Results*, GAO-08-1026T (Washington, D.C.: July 24, 2008).

and approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on September 1, 2010.[11] The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has methods of gathering input from customers by phone or e-mail through their Customer Contact Center, through the "TSA Blog" and "Talk to TSA" feedback Web site, or through speaking with a TSA manager at the airport; however, they do not have measures of satisfaction.

All the services reported they measure customer service at least annually, and all 11 services that measured customer satisfaction reported doing so at least annually as well. In addition, many services measured more frequently. Eleven of the surveyed services measure customer satisfaction daily, for example, and 8 reported that they measure customer service daily.

The surveyed services reported measuring various aspects of their customer service. Customer service measures can include measures related to customer access to services, wait times, accuracy and other factors. Eleven surveyed services had measures related to quality or accuracy of service. For example, IRS measures the accuracy of responses provided by service representatives to questions on both tax law and taxpayers' accounts by listening to and reviewing phone calls. Ten services had measures related to customer wait times, eight had measures of processing time, and eight had measures related to access times. For example, Passport Services measures wait times for customers applying in a passport agency office, application processing times, and the number of passport book re-writes due to errors made by Passport Services. Similarly, for VGLI, VBA measures the percentage of calls that receive busy signals and the average speed of answer, as well as processing time for disbursements, applications, and correspondence.

All surveyed services but TSA and CBP reported gathering input from customers regarding their level of satisfaction through surveys. The National Park Service (NPS), for instance, reported using a visitor survey card program to survey visitors at over 320 of its points of service. These surveys are conducted annually at NPS units to measure performance related to visitor satisfaction and visitor understanding of park significance.

---

[11]The OMB review is part of the Paperwork Reduction Act clearance process. See the section below on the Paperwork Reduction Act for more information on this process.

Four surveyed services stated that they use the American Customer Satisfaction Index[12] (ACSI) to gather and report results. ACSI is a standardized customer satisfaction survey that measures customer satisfaction for a particular service based on drivers of satisfaction, including customer expectations and perceived quality. Overall results of the ACSI survey are made available on the ACSI public Web site, http://www.theacsi.org, where results can be compared among federal agencies that use the survey. Participating agencies receive more detailed results that contain information, trends, and recommendations for areas to work on to improve results. Federal Student Aid (FSA), which provides student loans under the direct loan program, for instance, uses an independent third-party contractor to conduct the ACSI survey on FSA's behalf. Officials stated that from the results of ACSI, they determined that some of the responses that they were providing customers on telephone calls were not achieving satisfactory marks, which led FSA to start a task force to address the issue.

In addition to customer surveys, most services also employed other methods through which they gathered customer input. The most common of these were comments cards or suggestion boxes (seven services), telephone numbers (seven services), and e-mail or written correspondence (five services). For instance, Social Security Administration (SSA) officials stated that customers have the opportunity to either complete comment cards at field offices, or send letters to field offices regarding their satisfaction with the service received.[13] Passport Services officials stated that they gather input from customers by having them complete comment cards while being served at a passport agency. Additional methods services reported using for gathering input include focus groups, e-mail lists, conferences, and outreach campaigns. IHS, for instance, uses patient satisfaction surveys, telephone surveys, a director's blog, personal interviews, an incident reporting process, tribal negotiation meetings,

---

[12]The ACSI is a survey instrument that was developed at the University of Michigan. The Department of the Interior's Federal Consulting Group has obtained generic Paperwork Reduction Act clearance for agencies to use the ACSI under a fee-for-service relationship. See the section below on the Paperwork Reduction Act for more information on generic clearances.

[13]While SSA has methods to gather customer input regarding their level of satisfaction, we have previously recommended that SSA establish procedures for documenting and assessing customer reported complaints. See GAO, *Social Security Administration: Additional Actions Needed in Ongoing Efforts to Improve 800-Number Service*, GAO-05-735 (Washington, D.C.: August 08, 2005).

suggestion boxes, and a patient needs task force to gather input from customers.

All surveyed services reporting having methods to receive customer complaints. In addition to general methods of gathering input described above, many agencies reported using additional methods to receive complaints. These included complaint forms on the agency Web site, identifying service mailing addresses to receive complaints, providing customers with additional telephone numbers to provide feedback, and general feedback forms and survey cards about the service they received. For example, VBA reported that they use a public message management system called the Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) for receiving inquiries, including complaints, for beneficiary medical care and disability service. All electronic messages received from the public through VA Web sites are directed through the IRIS system, and a set of policies and procedures is in place that guides the agency in sorting through and responding to submissions.

## Paperwork Reduction Act Affects Gathering of Customer Views

Before requiring or requesting information from the public, such as through customer satisfaction surveys, federal agencies are required by the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) to seek public comment as well as approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on the proposed collection of information.[14] The PRA requires federal agencies to minimize the burden on the public resulting from their information collections, and to maximize the practical utility of the information collected. To comply with the PRA process, agencies must develop and review proposed collections to ensure that they meet the goals of the act. Once approved internally, agencies generally must publish a 60-day notice in the Federal Register soliciting public comment on the agency's proposed collection, consider the public comments, submit the proposed collection to OMB and publish a second Federal Register notice inviting public comment to the agency and OMB. OMB may act on the agency's request only after the 30-day comment period has closed. Under the PRA, OMB determines whether a proposed collection is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the

---

[14]44 U.S.C. ch. 35, subchapter I. The Paperwork Reduction Act was originally enacted into law in 1980. Pub. L. No. 96-511 (Dec 11, 1980). The law was significantly revised by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Pub. L. No. 104-13 (May 22, 1995).

information will have practical utility.[15] The PRA gives OMB 60 days to approve or disapprove a proposed collection, however, OMB can also instruct the agency to make a substantive or material change to the proposed collection.

There are two primary ways that the normal clearance process can be altered. First, agencies may request and OMB may authorize emergency processing under certain circumstances.[16] Second, agencies may submit generic information collection requests, which are requests for OMB approval of a plan for conducting more than one information collection using very similar methods, such as a plan to gather views from the public through a series of customer satisfaction surveys. The plan itself is subject to the standard 60- and 30-day public comment periods, but, if approved, each specific collection under the plan requires only OMB review and approval without additional public comment, subject to the terms of the original generic clearance.

According to some agency officials, the Paperwork Reduction Act clearance process may, in certain instances, make obtaining customer input difficult. A March 2009 report from the Government Contact Center Council, an interagency group of contact center directors and managers sponsored by the General Services Administration's (GSA) Office of Citizen Services, notes that although the PRA is important and affords many safeguards and benefits, the council commonly hears from agencies that the approval process takes 9 months or longer, in fact, so long that sometimes a survey is no longer relevant.[17] The report recommended that OMB lead a task force to help to fully understand the implications of the Paperwork Reduction Act for agencies and to identify ways to minimize the length of time it takes for an agency to get approval for surveys intended for citizens.

---

[15]Under the PRA, OMB's review of agency information collections includes evaluation of factors such as unnecessary duplication with other information collections, reduction of burden on persons who shall provide information to the agency, consolidation and simplification of reporting requirements, use of effective statistical survey methods, and use of information technology to reduce burden and improve data quality. See 44 U.S.C. §§ 3506(c)(3) and 3507.

[16]For example, if public harm is reasonably likely to result if normal clearance procedures are followed, an unanticipated event has occurred, or the normal clearance procedures are reasonably likely to prevent or disrupt the collection of information or to cause a statutory or court ordered deadline to be missed. See, 44 U.S.C. § 3507 (j) and 5 C.F.R. § 1320.13 (a).

[17]The Government Contact Center Council, *Removing Barriers to Citizen Engagement, A White Paper for the Obama Administration* (March 2009).

Two services we surveyed told us that the PRA clearance process made obtaining customer input difficult. NPS officials referred us to the letter of input they provided in response to OMB's Federal Register notice seeking comment on, among other things, reducing paperwork burdens and avoiding adverse consequences of the PRA clearance process.[18] In the letter, NPS stated that lengthy delays in obtaining approval of information collections such as visitor surveys under the PRA sometimes causes research to be postponed or even abandoned. In addition, Forest Service officials told us that the time needed to obtain clearance for surveys is a major barrier in gathering input from customers on their level of satisfaction. Forest Service officials told us that because approval for new collections of information often takes in excess of a year, which is in addition to the time for collection, data entry, and reporting, it is not possible to include customer input in many time-sensitive decisions.

OMB representatives noted that the reported lengths of time to clear submissions include the time for internal agency development and processing and that some delays can be the result of inappropriate submissions. OMB representatives told us that once an Information Collection Request (ICR) is submitted to OMB, the average time for review at OMB is typically less than the required sixty days.

According to OMB representatives, the time to obtain clearance could be reduced by using generic clearances, if the collections meet the criteria for generic clearances. Some other agencies we contacted also told us that the generic clearance process made PRA requirements manageable for surveying. For example, SSA officials told us that obtaining OMB clearance for its surveys had not presented a challenge, and that this was facilitated by a generic clearance for satisfaction surveys that SSA has had since the mid-1990s. Likewise, FSA officials told us that the expedited review process associated with a generic clearance allows it to get surveys approved within 10 to 15 days and that most problems with surveys that arise during the process are quickly resolved.

As required by a presidential memorandum issued on January 21, 2009, OMB issued an Open Government Directive,[19] which among other things, instructs the Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) to review existing OMB policies, such as PRA guidance, to

---

[18]"*Improving Implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act,*" 74 Fed. Reg. 55,269 (Oct. 27, 2009).

[19]Memorandum, *Transparency and Open Government*, 74 Fed. Reg. 4685 (Jan. 21, 2009).

identify impediments to open government and the use of new technologies, and where necessary, issue clarifying guidance and/or propose policy revisions. OMB recently released three memorandums containing clarifying guidance to improve the implementation of the PRA. The memorandums provide information for federal agencies to facilitate their understanding of PRA clearances and when and how they can be used. The most recent memorandum, issued on May 28, 2010, outlines the availability and uses of generic information collection requests. The other two memorandums, issued on April 7, 2010, relate to the central requirements of the PRA and the treatment of social media and Web-based interactive technologies under the PRA.

## All Surveyed Services Use Various Methods to Gather Frontline Employees' Ideas for Improving Customer Service

All surveyed services reported that within the last 12 months they gathered ideas for improving customer service from frontline employees who are in contact with customers. The Executive Order is not prescriptive in the method agencies should use to survey employees, and the services reported employing a variety of methods to survey their employees for ideas for improving customer service. These included staff meetings, blogs, employee suggestion programs, and employee surveys. Passport Services officials, for example, stated that each regional Passport Agency location is staffed with at least one customer service manager charged with reviewing the ideas and suggestions from staff within the agency or center. The manager then communicates the information to colleagues at other locations and the customer service division at headquarters to initiate further discussion and action on suggestions. To encourage customer service managers to gather and share ideas, there is a bi-weekly teleconference, an e-mail list, a monthly customer service report, and an annual conference. SSA officials stated that some of its offices have established councils, which include frontline employees, to look for new ideas to improve customer service. At the Forest Service, input from employees is gathered primarily at the individual forest level with no formal mechanism in place to communicate employee input at a national level.

## Selected Services with Less Widespread Contact with the Public Also Set Customer Service Standards and Measure Results

The five additional services we interviewed that had less widespread contact with the public and different customer groups or missions than those we surveyed perform many of the same customer service management activities as those we surveyed.[20] All five had customer service standards. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a target that 75 percent of customers will report being very satisfied, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has a standard that 90 percent of power plant licensing actions will be completed within 1 year of receipt.

All five services reported measuring service results. Four of these had measures related to customer satisfaction, and most used the ACSI as a measure. In addition, four had measures of customer access, wait times or other measures. For instance, CDC measures the percentage of phone calls answered in less than 30 seconds. All of the additional services reported having methods to receive and act on customer complaints, such as through distributing feedback forms in person or through the agency Web site, as well as through designated e-mail and phone numbers or call centers, which were also used by the surveyed services. All five services gather ideas from employees on improving customer service. For example, GSA's Federal Acquisition Service is using the social network tool "Yammer," as a mechanism to gather internal employee input.

## Most Selected Services Could Increase the Public Availability of Customer Service Information, but All Use Results to Improve Service Quality

---

[20]Two of the five services, which are provided by GSA, have customers who are government entities and are not subject to the requirements of executive order 12862.

## Most Surveyed Services Share Standards and Results, but Could Increase Their Availability to Customers

About half of surveyed services' standards were not in a form readily available to the public, as the March 1995 presidential memorandum on improving customer service requires. We found that the standards were often either not made available to the public at all or were made available in a way that would not be easy for customers to find and access. Ten services reported making standards available to customers through both government Web sites and government publications; one service, TSA's Passenger and Baggage Screening, reported making standards available through only a government Web site; and two services did not make standards available at all. Five of the 11 services that reported they make standards available do so in documents or Web sites that are not likely to be viewed by customers. These services made their standards available in long, detailed documents mostly focused on other topics, such as Annual Performance Plans, Performance and Accountability Reports, and budget justifications.

The two services that did not make standards available to customers were Federal Student Aid (FSA) and Forest Service for recreational facilities and services. FSA officials reported that they do not make their standards for the Direct Loan Program, which are standards for contractor performance, available to customers because they were not intended to inform the public. Similarly, the Forest Service officials told us that they have standards that are part of a contract with an external service provider, but because they are not in an understandable format and presentation for customers they are not made available. Forest Service officials also reported that Forest Service has standards employees must meet in the operation of recreation program areas that are not consistently shared with the public, such as the frequency with which rest rooms must be cleaned. Forest Service officials feel the standards would not be helpful to the visitors who evaluate such things as "cleanliness" of rest rooms against their own standards rather than the frequency of cleaning.

Some services made their standards more readily available to customers. For example, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has a Web page called "Know Before You Go," http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/, which communicates regulations for international travel by U.S. residents. This Web page, which is also available as a document, specifically identifies customer service standards, such as a pledge to explain the CBP process to customers, and provides information and instructions to customers on how they can express their service concerns to CBP representatives. The standards are also available through a link on CBP's travel customer service page, http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/customerservice/. Five services, including the Indian Health Service, the Passport Service, the Veterans Health Administration, CBP, and SSA, make

standards available by posting them in government offices open to the public.

**Figure 1: Customs and Border Protection's Pledge to Travelers**



CBP's pledge to travelers displayed on their customer service web site.
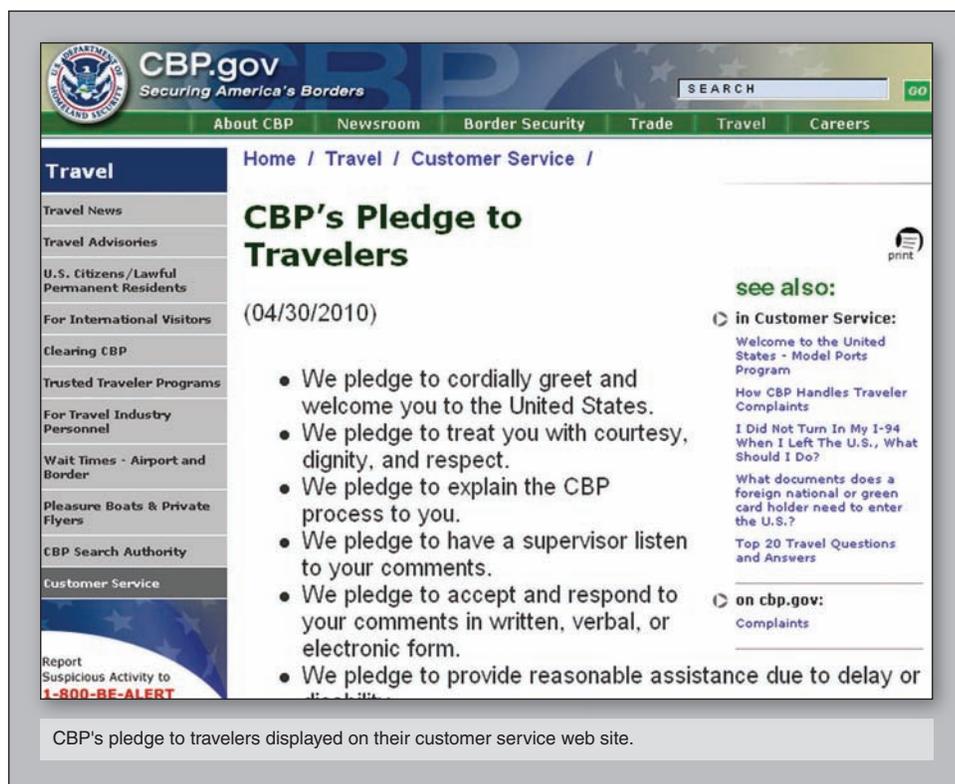
Source: DHS, GAO (presentation).

In addition to standards, all services we surveyed stated that they report customer service results to customers through a government Web site, and 11 of these services told us that they also make results available through written publications. Further, the Indian Health Service and the Veterans Health Administration also post service results in government offices open to the public. However, most services did not post service results in government offices. Two services, IRS and Forest Service, told us their results are too lengthy to post in their public offices.

Similar to the reporting of customer service standards, about half of services posted customer service results in documents that may not be

easily accessible to customers.[21] Six services we surveyed only report customer service results in their Performance and Accountability Reports, Congressional Budget Justifications, or other documents that are targeted to larger or different audiences than customers, or through Web sites such as the ACSI Web site that customer may not know to visit to find customer service results. However, some agencies made their customer service results more readily available to customers. For example, CBP has a web page with airport and border wait times that can be accessed directly from CBP's main travel page, http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/.[22] In another example, the Veterans Benefits Administration has a customer service page for Veterans Group Life Insurance with service results that can be accessed from the insurance home page, http://www.insurance.va.gov/.

---

[21]Although the presidential memorandum does not explicitly require that customer service results be easily accessible to customers, it does require agencies to report results to customers at least annually in terms readily understood by individual customers. The intended goal of these stated requirements is the effective communication of customer service results to customers. In order to achieve this goal, however, agencies need to post these customer service results where customers are likely to find them.

[22]We recently reported that CBP's border wait times data are collected using inconsistent methods and are unreliable. GAO, *Border Security: CBP Lacks the Data Needed to Assess the FAST Program at U.S. Northern Border Ports*, GAO-10-694 (Washington, D.C.: July 19, 2010).

**Figure 2: The Department of Veterans Affairs' Life Insurance Customer Service Web Site**



Customer service results reported on VA's life insurance website.
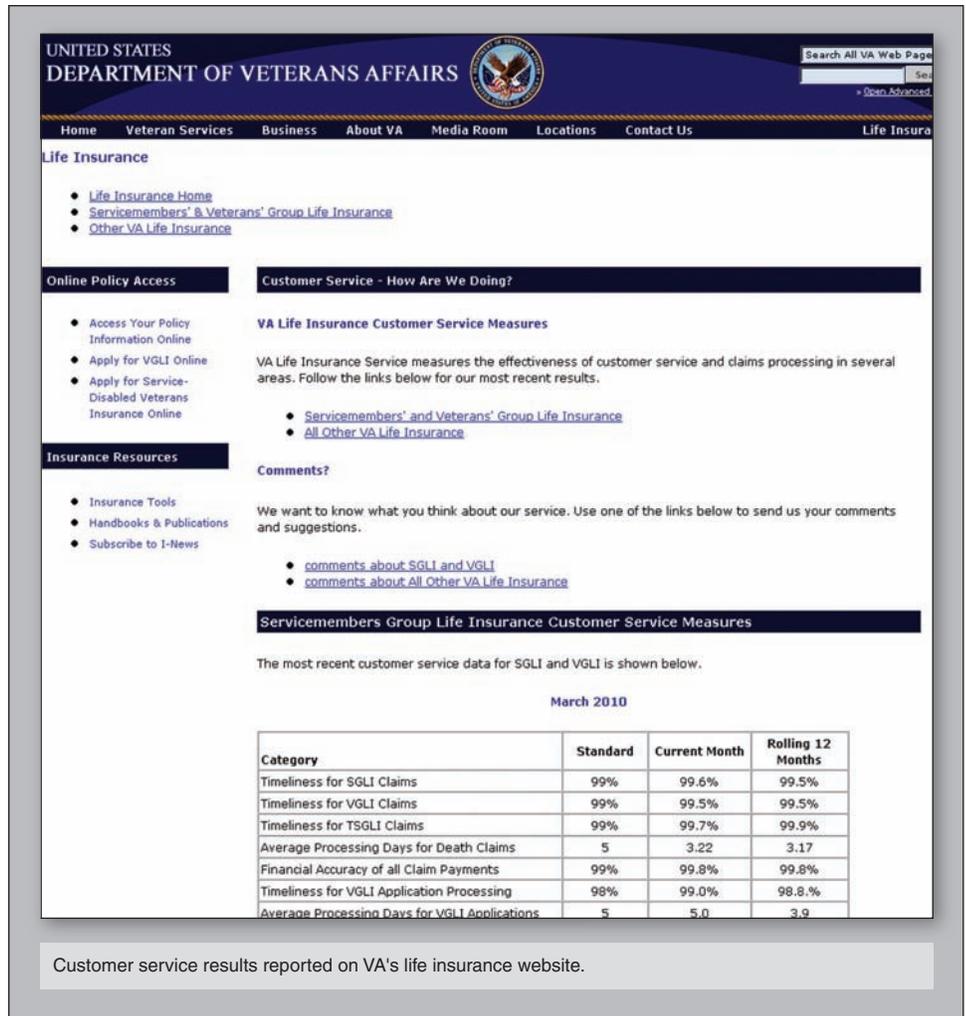
Source: VA, GAO (presentation).

As required by the presidential memorandum, all services report results to customers at least annually. In addition, more than half of services post some customer service results as frequently as monthly, and in one case, results are posted as frequently as hourly. Customs and Border Protection collects hourly wait time estimates for land border ports of entry, from 70 of the largest land border crossings on the Northern and Southwestern borders. This information is posted directly from the ports of entry to CBP's wait times Web site on an hourly basis so that the public can use the

information in trip planning. For airline travel, CBP collects detailed daily flight information at the arrival terminals of 48 of the busiest air ports of entry. This information is assembled into an historical database that provides hourly flight processing time estimates for any time of day, and is available to the public on the airport wait times Web site.

**Figure 3: Customs and Border Protection's Border Wait Times Web Site**



Border wait times reported on CBP's website.
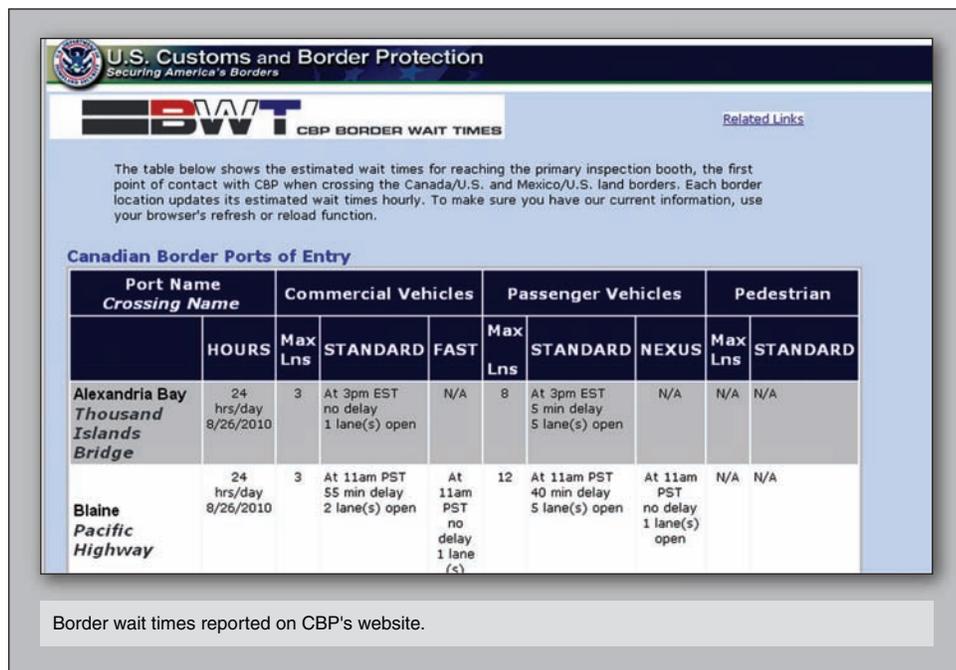
Source: DHS, GAO (presentation).

| All Surveyed Services Compare Customer Service Results to Standards and Use Them to Improve Internal Processes, and Some Have Recently Compared Performance to the Private Sector | All services we surveyed reported that they compare their performance to their service standards, as Executive Order 12862 requires for agencies that provide significant services directly to the public. All services but two reported doing so at least monthly, and five services reported making daily comparisons. For example, SSA officials said their performance on customer service measures, such as the average speed of answer and busy rate for calls to their national phone number are tracked and compared to monthly standards, and the results are reported on an internal tracking report that is distributed to SSA's Commissioner and executive staff.[23] CBP produces daily wait times exception summary reports for internal Headquarters and regional management of the ports of entry. Officials said wait times in excess of 1 hour at either air or land border ports require explanation and are tracked to monitor ongoing problems and develop mitigation strategies. |
|---|---|

Further, all services reported that they use the results of their customer service measures to improve customer service. Several services reported using performance data to improve training, allocate staff, and improve phone systems and Web sites. For example, the Passport Services reported that they use measures of passport center workloads to ensure timely processing of applications by transferring application processing work between centers at various times, such as during inclement weather. In addition the Internal Revenue Service said that it analyzed wait times for taxpayer assistance to improve service by making staffing adjustments and routing certain types of activities to specific employees.

CBP officials said land border, and airport wait time patterns have been studied, which led to facility enhancements and staff assignment changes. The officials told us that changes at one port of entry, the Detroit Ambassador Bridge reduced wait times and recurring traffic delays by more than half. Medicare officials said the 1-800-Medicare call center used customer service measure results to improve and clarify the script used by its customer service representatives to answer beneficiary questions. Medicare officials also stated that their review of the volume, nature, and turnaround time for complaints about private companies marketing

---

[23]Although SSA has customer service standards for calls to their national phone number, we have previously recommended that SSA establish standards for field office customer waiting times and phone service. GAO, *Social Security Administration: Service Delivery Plan Needed to Address Baby Boom Retirement Challenges*, GAO-09-24 (Washington, D.C.: January 9, 2009).

Medicare products led them to apply a more rigorous turnaround time requirement for staff handling these complaints.[24]

Seven services reported that they had compared customer service performance against performance in the private sector in the prior 12 months, and these seven also reported that they had used this comparison to improve their customer service. For example, officials from the Direct Student Loan Program (DLP) said they obtained information from the private sector that borrowers using electronic services (such as electronic debit and services on Web sites) were among the most satisfied. Subsequently, DLP implemented initiatives to increase borrowers' awareness of online services and provided information on how to enroll in these services. Similarly, officials from Veterans Benefits Administration's Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) said comparisons against performance in the private sector offered ongoing confirmation that their measures and practices remain competitive against industry standards. For example, officials said awareness of changing technology in the private sector has led to enhanced self-service Web-based features that include the ability to pay VGLI premiums, add or change beneficiaries, update customer demographic information, and print certificates of coverage online. Officials from SSA told us that their national call centers operate efficiently by using sophisticated call forecasts and changing agent shift assignments to better match projected call patterns based on methodology used in the private sector. Finally, Medicare officials said after comparing the program's turnaround time for urgent complaints with that of private sector health plans, they made a decision to revise their internal standard to align with the private sector plans.

However, four of the services reported they had not compared their customer service performance against performance in the private sector as Executive Order 12862 requires, and one other service had not done so recently. Officials of three of the four services that had not compared customer service performance against the private sector, CBP, TSA, and the Bureau of Consular Affairs, told us that they do not have a comparable private entity to compare with. CBP officials, however, also told us they have worked with a number of private companies to identify improvements that could be made to the federal inspection service areas that would reduce confusion, shorten delays, and improve customer

---

[24]We recently reported on Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services assistance to beneficiaries affected by inappropriate marketing. GAO, *Medicare Advantage: CMS Assists Beneficiaries Affected by Inappropriate Marketing but Has Limited Data on Scope of Issue*, GAO-10-36 (Washington, D.C.: December 17, 2009).

**GAO-11-44  Customer Service**

service, such as better managing passenger lines and improving CBP signs at airports. In addition, CBP is working closely with several private sector regional organizations, such as the U.S.-Canada Border Trade Alliance, to develop technology solutions for improving vehicle processing and traffic management at the ports of entry. Forest Service officials told us that they had worked with a private company that runs campgrounds to develop standards in the late 1980s, but have not had funding for benchmarking against the private sector since then.

## Most Surveyed Services Consider Customer Service Measures in Employee Performance Appraisals

Most surveyed services told us that they base performance appraisals for their employees, in part, on customer service measures; these include members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) or equivalent, managers,[25] supervisors of frontline employees, and frontline employees themselves. Office of Personnel Management regulations require agencies to establish performance management systems that evaluate SES performance using measures that balance organizational results with customer, employee, and other perspectives. Eleven of the 13 services we surveyed reported that they based performance appraisals for all SES in part on customer service performance measures, and two services reported that they based some SES performance appraisals on customer service performance measures. In addition, all services reported that performance appraisals for managers and supervisors of employees in contact with customers were based in part on customer service performance measures. Finally, 11 surveyed services reported that performance appraisals for all employees in contact with customers were based in part on customer service performance measures.

Among those services that based performance appraisals on customer service performance measures, the extent to which they did so varied by service and job type. For example, performance appraisals for all employees in Federal Student Aid's Direct Loan Program have two sections: organizational priorities and customer service. Officials from FSA told us that some staff are assessed for service to internal or external customers depending on the assigned job and some lower level employees have quantitative measures in their appraisals, such as accuracy and the average time it takes to resolve issues. For other services, performance appraisals are based on qualitative measures of customer service. For example, officials from IRS told us that, for taxpayer assistance, customer
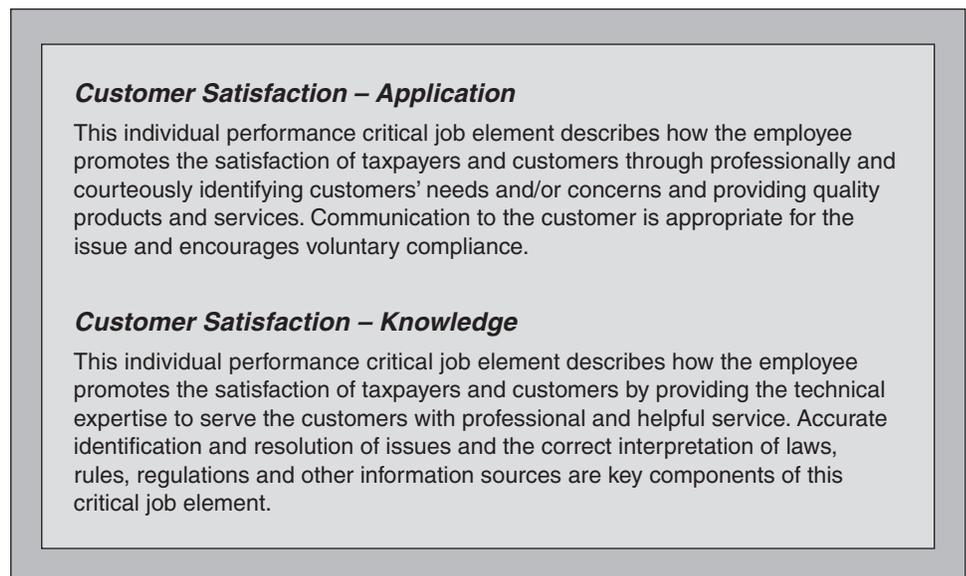
---

[25]For the purposes of our report, we defined managers as those below SES but above supervisors of personnel in contact with customers.

satisfaction knowledge and application have been critical job elements in performance appraisals for all employees, including those in their bargaining unit, for at least 10 years. Figure 5 shows descriptions of IRS's customer satisfaction knowledge and application critical job elements. In addition, all employees are rated on whether they have met the standard for the fair and equitable treatment of taxpayers developed in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998.[26] The standard states, "Administer the tax laws fairly and equitably, protect all taxpayers' rights, and treat each taxpayer ethically with honesty, integrity, and respect." The inclusion of customer satisfaction in employee performance appraisals is part of the agency's collective bargaining agreement with the union.

**Figure 4: IRS Critical Job Elements for Taxpayer Assistance Related to Customer Satisfaction**

*Customer Satisfaction – Application*

This individual performance critical job element describes how the employee promotes the satisfaction of taxpayers and customers through professionally and courteously identifying customers' needs and/or concerns and providing quality products and services. Communication to the customer is appropriate for the issue and encourages voluntary compliance.

*Customer Satisfaction – Knowledge*

This individual performance critical job element describes how the employee promotes the satisfaction of taxpayers and customers by providing the technical expertise to serve the customers with professional and helpful service. Accurate identification and resolution of issues and the correct interpretation of laws, rules, regulations and other information sources are key components of this critical job element.

Source: IRS, GAO (presentation).

Officials from the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) and the American Federation of Government Employees, the two unions that represent the largest number of federal employees, both expressed

---

[26]The IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 requires IRS to use the fair and equitable treatment of taxpayers by employees as one of the standards for evaluating employee performance. Pub. L. No. 105-206, § 1204, 112 Stat. 685, 722 (July 22, 1998).

concerns about the use of customer service performance measures in performance appraisals. Officials from both unions told us that many employees do not have control over the customer service results achieved, and one said that customer service performance is best addressed at the agency level. This official also cautioned that using customer service measures, such as the time to handle a case, in performance appraisals could lead to employees overlooking details of the case as they attempt to save time. Nevertheless, agency officials did not report recent issues related to including customer service as part of performance appraisals. Similarly, IRS and NTEU officials told us there had not been any recent concerns or issues related to the way customer service measures are used in performance appraisals.

## Selected Services with Less Widespread Contact with the Public Also Make Customer Service Information Available and Use Results

Most of the services we interviewed that had less widespread contact with the public and often different customer groups or missions than those we surveyed reported making customer service standards and results available to customers and using customer service results for various purposes. Four of the five services reported making their customer service standards available to customers, but only three of the four services post the standards where they are likely to be viewed by customers. Similarly, three of the five services reported making customer service results available to customers, but two posted the results in documents that may not be readily available to customers. Three services reported comparing the results to customer service standards, and two reported comparing results to the private sector. All five services reported using results of its customer service measures to improve customer service. Finally, three services reported basing performance appraisals in part on customer service measures. For example, performance appraisals for employees staffing CDC's information contact center contain elements based on ensuring customer satisfaction for internal and external customers.

## Several Additional Tools and Practices for Customer Service Management Are Used by State, Local, and Non-U.S. National Governments

A number of approaches have been used by state, local, and other national governments to improve customer service. Several approaches, which are also employed by some federal agencies, were identified as good practices in our literature review of customer service and customer service management and by knowledgeable current and former researchers and practitioners in these fields. These practices include methods to better understand customers' needs, facilitate improved customer decision making, and provide citizens with the information necessary to hold government accountable for customer service performance. OMB is planning several initiatives designed to facilitate the use of many of these approaches across federal agencies.

## Improved Understanding of Customers Helps to Align Standards with Customer Needs

Organizations may be able to increase customer satisfaction by better understanding customer needs and organizing services around those needs. Governments of both the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand reported that research into customer needs helped them establish drivers of customer satisfaction. Once they identified the drivers, they used them to set customer service standards to better meet customer needs. In the United Kingdom, the Cabinet Office commissioned a nationally representative survey that yielded a set of five drivers of customer satisfaction in the United Kingdom.[27] These drivers, listed in order of impact on customer satisfaction, include:

- Staff deliver the outcome as promised and manage any problems
- Staff address customer requests quickly and directly
- Information given to customers is accurate and comprehensive
- Staff are competent and treat customers fairly
- Staff are friendly, polite and sympathetic to customers' needs

In 2008, the UK government created a standard called Customer Service Excellence (CSE) that includes five criteria for evaluating customer service quality based on the five drivers of customer satisfaction. Organizations can apply for formal CSE certification in which their performance is measured against 57 sub-elements of the five CSE criteria by licensed certification bodies, accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service.[28] For example, one sub-element asks organizations to demonstrate that they evaluate customer satisfaction by asking customers specific questions related to the drivers of satisfaction, such as timeliness, delivery and information.

The New Zealand Government's State Services Commission (SSC), New Zealand's central public service management agency, works with government service providers to monitor and improve performance. SSC conducted its own citizen survey, Kiwis Count 2007, to determine citizens' perspectives on drivers of customer satisfaction.[29] Although similar to the United Kingdom's drivers in many respects, the SSC reported that New Zealanders also considered the value of a service relative to taxpayer

---

[27]UK Cabinet Office, *The Drivers of Satisfaction with Public Services* (2004).

[28]The United Kingdom Accreditation Service is a non-profit organization authorized by the UK government to assess organizations that provide certification, testing, inspection and calibration services.

[29]New Zealand State Services Commission, *Understanding the Drivers: Summary Report* (Wellington, New Zealand, March 2009).

investment when evaluating the overall customer service experience. The six drivers are:

- Service experience met citizen expectations
- Staff were competent
- Staff kept their promises—they did what they said they would do
- Citizens were treated fairly
- Citizens felt their individual circumstances were taken into account
- Citizens felt the service was an example of good value for tax dollars spent

The SSC reported that respondents rated the "service met your expectations" driver as the most important driver of customer satisfaction, followed by "staff competency." Although the New Zealand government does not have national standards, SSC worked with agencies to help them better understand what the drivers mean and how to appropriately set agency level standards. Additionally, SSC, in collaboration with other central agencies, developed a Performance Improvement Framework (PIF) to assess performance and drive improvements. According to an SSC official, the PIF includes a component that examines how well agencies meet customer expectations. In the future, this component may be expanded to examine the impact of basing standards on the drivers of satisfaction.

In addition to establishing drivers of satisfaction, segmenting the population into groups and providing differentiated service delivery can be an effective strategy to better meet diverse customer needs. In 2005, the government of Canada reorganized its diverse set of service providers under one umbrella service organization, called Service Canada, that offers citizens a single point of access to a wide range of government services and seeks to make access to services easier, quicker, and more convenient. As one part of its efforts to improve service delivery, Service Canada crafted a segmentation strategy centered around seven subpopulations: workers, seniors, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, newcomers to Canada, youth, and families. Service Canada then tailored its service delivery processes to the needs of each subpopulation. Specifically, Service Canada outlined priority service issues for each population segment, as well as marketing approaches tailored to better inform customers about available services. For instance, to improve its outreach to Aboriginal populations, Service Canada created fact sheets in 11 Aboriginal languages, hired staff that spoke Aboriginal languages and modified the distribution of office locations to better serve remote and northern communities. Service Canada attributes improved results in the

areas of citizen satisfaction, access to services and efficiency of service delivery to the implementation of its segmentation strategy.

Organizations can also use social media to better understand and engage their customers. Social media can facilitate low effort communication between customers and service providers. It allows service providers to disseminate up to date and relevant information that may lead to improved customer decision making, while also allowing customers to provide feedback on their experiences. In order to encourage the use of social media by federal agencies, the General Services Administration (GSA) sponsors a Web site, http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/, that is managed by the Federal Web Managers Council, an interagency group of Web managers from every cabinet-level agency and numerous independent agencies. The Web site contains information on the benefits of using social media for customers of government agencies, as well as detailed advice on social media best practices. For example, it states that agencies can use microblogs[30] to both provide timely information to citizens and improve understanding of customer needs by searching microblogs for references to their agency name or acronym.[31] Additionally, GSA has negotiated terms of service with several social media vendors to make it easier for agencies to employ these tools on their Web sites.

TSA is an example of an agency that has been using social media to engage and communicate with customers. TSA communicates policy changes and other relevant information via articles on its blog, http://blog.tsa.gov/, and allows customers to post comments and complaints. Using the feedback obtained from their blog, TSA learned from customers when policies weren't being implemented appropriately in various airports or regions and made changes when appropriate. For example, a blog comment prompted the TSA Blog Team to investigate and ultimately stop a local airport policy that required passengers to remove all small electronics for individual screening.

Additionally, social media may reduce the effort required of customers to complete service transactions. San Francisco enables city residents to sign up as followers of the San Francisco's 3-1-1 customer service center on Twitter and send short messages containing service requests and

---

[30]Microblogging is the practice of writing extremely short blog posts, similar to text messages. Twitter is an example of a microblog service.

[31]"Microblogging," General Services Administration, last Modified July 21, 2009, http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/microblogging.shtml

complaints, rather than trying to reach city customer service representatives by phone.[32] Providing this additional channel of communication has the potential to reduce the customer effort required and improve customer service. However, service transactions may require customers to communicate more detailed information than microblogs generally allow.

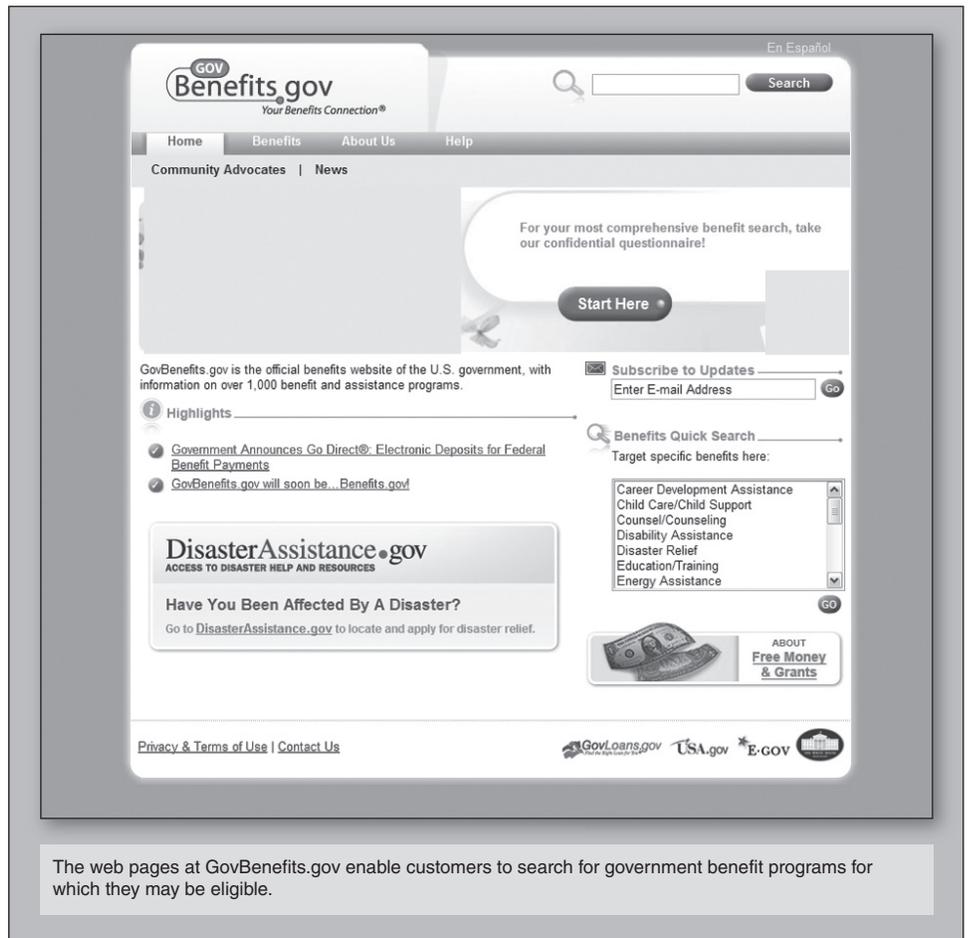## Self-Service Options and Customer Relationship Management Systems Can Improve Customers' Experiences and Facilitate Better Decision Making

Providing customers autonomy and control by allowing them to serve themselves can also be an effective strategy to improve customer service. Self service options may reduce customer effort and provide customers with information that allows them to make informed decisions. In addition, customers often report a preference to self-serve over speaking to a representative.

Several U.S. federal agencies allow customers to self-serve via the Web. For example, customers can make reservations online for National Park Service, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management campsites. Similarly, FSA allows students to apply for financial aid online, manage their accounts and make payments over the Internet. Officials from Service Canada told us that they have started a campaign entitled "Why Wait in Line When You Can Go Online" to encourage the use of online services; they have also been working to ensure that self-service tasks are easy to complete. Agencies such as the Social Security Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs now use their Web sites to help customers identify benefits that may be available to them and to develop a personalized estimate of those benefits. The Social Security Administration provides a Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool that enables customers to determine benefits they may be eligible for, as well as calculators that estimate future retirement, disability, and survivor benefits based on current law and the citizen's earnings record, and the next steps to apply. In 2002, 10 federal agencies partnered to develop a Web site, http://www.GovBenefits.gov.

---

[32]San Francisco's 3-1-1 customer service center connects customers with service representatives who provide general government information and facilitate service requests.

**Figure 5: Govbenefits.gov Web Site**



The web pages at GovBenefits.gov enable customers to search for government benefit programs for which they may be eligible.

Source: DOL/GovBenefits.gov, GAO (presentation).

The Web site helps customers find government benefit programs for which they may be eligible and then provides information on the next steps to learn more about and apply for those eligible benefits. As of fiscal year 2010, the initiative included 1,000 programs provided by 17 federal partners.

With or without prior use of self-service, when customers interact directly with government service providers, they expect the government to have relevant information about them to produce an effective customer service experience. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a tool to help service providers use data to understand their customers and provide

better service. CRM uses technology to provide a single, integrated view of customers, enabling an organization to reach desired outcomes with a minimum of customer effort, thereby improving customer service. Singapore's Central Provident Fund Board, which manages the comprehensive social security savings plan for working Singaporeans, has a CRM system that centrally stores information about their customers which enables both board staff and citizens to track the status of customer transactions via the Web. Moreover, the board's complete profiling of customers within their CRM system enables them to personalize their service to their customers. Personalized service improves customer service by reducing the investment of time required of customers and aids customer decision making by providing customers with relevant and timely information. However, experts caution that privacy concerns need to be considered when federal agencies introduce CRM.[33] Nevertheless, federal agencies, such as GSA and the Small Business Administration, have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, CRM systems. SBA is implementing a CRM tool that aggregates data from a variety of systems to allow employees to access information in less time and in a more concise format when interacting with small business borrowers, lenders and other stakeholders, which SBA believes will improve customer service

## Offering Redress for Unmet Standards and Reporting Meaningful Performance Results Can Foster Accountability for Effective Customer Service

Providing redress to customers when standards are not met can enhance the effectiveness of standards. For example, Service Ontario, a provincial partner of Service Canada, refunds the birth certificate fee a customer pays if the certificate is not issued within the established timeliness standard. In the United Kingdom, London TravelWatch, a local consumer watchdog organization established by Parliament, investigates complaints made by travelers using transportation services in London, including the London Underground and London's buses, and makes recommendations for recompense when appropriate. In its literature, TravelWatch cited examples of Transportation providers dispensing compensation, such as ticket refunds, when they agreed with TravelWatch's findings. California State University at Long Beach (CSULB) established a one year pledge relating to the performance of its College of Education graduates. If first

---

[33]The Privacy Act of 1974 establishes requirements governing the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of personally identifiable information about individuals that are maintained in an agency's system of records, including establishing appropriate safeguards to ensure the security and confidentiality of the information. The Privacy Act specifically prohibits agencies from disclosing information about an individual absent the consent of the individual, unless the disclosure is permitted under one of the statutory exceptions. Pub. L. No. 93-579, 88 Stat. 1897 (Dec. 31, 1974) (codified at 5 U.S.C. § 552a).

year teachers experience problems at their school of employment, CSULB will assist them in areas related to their credential preparation.

Including customer service measures in performance evaluations of frontline employees may be an effective strategy for improving customer service. As previously discussed, most of the services we surveyed already consider customer service measures in employee performance appraisals, though the extent and weight varied widely by job and service. However, as noted earlier, there can be challenges to creating effective performance standards for frontline employees. A primary concern is that some performance standards, such as call duration, are easy to measure but ignore the tradeoff between efficiency and quality customer service. Call center employees being judged solely on call duration might sacrifice the quality of the customer service they provide in order to end calls more quickly. One solution is to create performance metrics that attempt to balance operational efficiency and quality service. For example, telephone agents at the nonemergency services call center in the city of Denver, Colorado, are graded using a balanced scorecard which takes into account both call duration and whether or not the agent resolved a customer's issue without having to transfer the caller to another employee. Because this measure emphasizes service quality, it serves to counterbalance the incentive to rush through service calls. A representative from the Georgia Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) raised the additional concern that including customer service measures in performance appraisals may be perceived as a mechanism for placing blame on frontline employees. In order to gain employee support, the OCA representative recommended that agencies engage employees in the conversation about customer service management and seek employee input about how management can help them provide better customer service. The representative from the OCA reported that involving employees in the development of new processes has led to increased employee trust in management and openness to setting common goals and performance standards.

Public reporting of agency standards and performance results can also improve customer service by providing citizens with the facts they need to make informed decisions and hold agencies accountable for service quality. As previously discussed, about half of the surveyed services published results in documents that may not be easily accessible to customers. New York City's Customer Service Group has instituted an online tool called the Citywide Performance Report[34] that allows the

---

[34]"Citywide Performance Report," New York City Office of the Mayor, accessed 8/25/2010, http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/cpr/html/home/home.shtml

public to visualize trends based on general performance data, such as crime rates and cleanliness ratings of city parks, and hold underperforming agencies accountable. Due to the success of this tool, the Customer Service Group plans to create a similar portal dedicated to customer service performance data. The data would then be visually linked to locations using a Geographical Information System in order to present the information in a clear format for customers. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the National Health Service publishes comparative quality data, such as differential mortality rates at hospitals, which enables customers to make informed choices about where to receive treatment. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has a Web site, http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov, where customers can view comparative data on outcomes, process, and patient satisfaction.

**Figure 6: Example of Medicare Hospital Comparison Web Page**
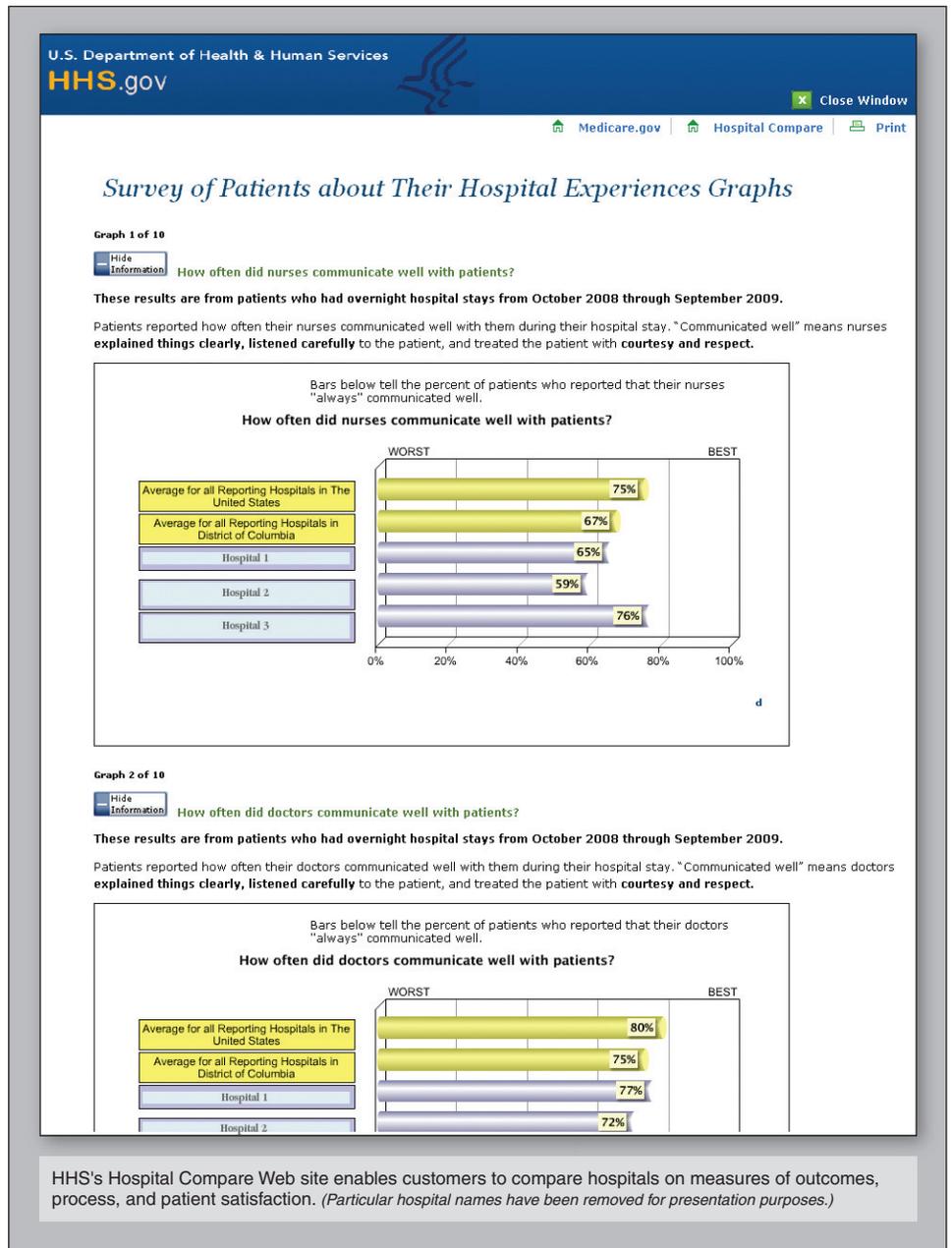


Source: HHS, GAO (presentation).

## OMB Has Taken Several Steps to Facilitate Use of Some Tools and Practices across Federal Agencies to Improve Customer Service

Starting early in 2010, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) began planning several initiatives to promote federal agencies' responsibility for quality customer service to their customers. On September 14, 2010, President Obama issued a presidential memorandum to the Senior Executive Service (SES) on the Accountable Government Initiative. The memorandum was accompanied by a memorandum from OMB's Deputy Director for Management to the SES outlining, among other things, the steps OMB is taking on customer service. An OMB representative told us they have begun working with GSA's Office of Citizen Services and other agencies to generate and share ideas and improve customer service. OMB plans to accomplish this by holding agency discussion groups, one-on-one meetings with private sector CEOs who participated in a forum on modernizing government on January 14, 2010, and meetings with officials who were part of the National Performance Review. An OMB representative stated that they have already begun holding some meetings. Planned topics for discussion include: offering agency services online, coordinating services provided across multiple points of contact and examining how agencies gather and use customer feedback. The OMB representative told us this will involve looking at the Paperwork Reduction Act clearance process, which entails OMB approval of agency data collection prior to accumulating feedback from customers.

As a part of its broader initiative with GSA's Office of Citizen Services, OMB is also developing a pilot dashboard which contains agency standards and some related measures, with links to agency Web sites where customers can track their individual transaction status, where available. OMB has asked agencies participating in the pilot to identify metrics that are drivers of customer satisfaction, such as wait time, processing time, and first call resolution, and is currently reviewing their proposals. OMB expects the pilot dashboard to launch publicly in late fall 2010.

On April 19, 2010, Presidential Executive Order 13538 established the President's Management Advisory Board within the General Services Administration, to be chaired by the administration's Deputy Director for Management.[35] The board's mission is to provide advice and recommendations on effective strategies for the implementation of best business practices related to federal government management and operation. OMB is selecting members and it expects to hold the first

---

[35]Exec. Order. No. 13538, "*Establishing the President's Management Advisory Board,*" 75 Fed. Reg. 20,895.

meeting of the board by the end of 2010. The board is expected to focus on improving productivity, the application of technology, and customer service.

In addition, in its fiscal year 2011 Budget planning memorandum on June 11, 2009, OMB outlined its guidance to agencies to identify a limited number of high-priority performance goals for the next 12 to 24 months. These goals are intended to foster accountability and the chances that the federal government will deliver results on what matters most by making agencies' top leaders responsible for specific goals that they themselves have named as most important.[36] Although the guidance did not require agencies to create goals specifically related to customer service, more than half of the services we surveyed had at least one goal related to customer service in their agencies' high-priority performance goals. For example, as part of its goal to improve customers' service experience on the telephone, in field offices, and online, the Social Security Administration has a goal to increase the percentage of customers who rate service as "excellent," "very good, " or "good" from 81 percent to 83.5 percent. Also, the Department of Veterans Affairs has a goal implement a 21st Century paperless claims processing system by 2012 to ultimately reduce the average disability claims processing time to 125 days. See appendix IV for more examples of high-priority performance goals that relate to customer service.

## Conclusions

The elements of a customer-centered approach to delivery of federal service are common among those services with the most widespread contact with the public that we surveyed, as well as those we interviewed with less direct contact. All 13 government services we surveyed report they had established customer service standards, measured service results, and shared the results with customers. In a number of instances, the services report improvements in the quality of service delivered and customer satisfaction. Further, the fact that more than half of the services we surveyed had a specific goal related to customer service among their agencies' High Priority Performance Goals indicates that these services recognize the importance of customer service.

While a number of services have not encountered problems with survey clearances, some services that obtain customer input through surveys and

---

[36] OMB, *Analytical Perspectives*, *Budget of the United States Government*, *Fiscal Year 2011* (Washington D.C.: Feb. 1, 2010).

other methods, which is critical to understanding the level of customer satisfaction, reported challenges related to obtaining PRA clearance for these activities. These challenges can lead to missed opportunities to involve customers in decision making. OMB has recently issued clarifying guidance on the PRA clearance process, including guidance on obtaining generic clearances, though it remains to be seen whether the guidance will reduce agency challenges or increase effective agency use of the generic clearance process.

Communicating customer service standards and results in a way that is useful and readily available to customers is important in enabling them to hold government accountable and to inform customer decision making. Most services we contacted do make customer service standards and results available to customers, but many do so through documents that serve larger purposes, such as Performance and Accountability Reports and Budget Justifications which, while not excluding customers, are targeted to a much broader audience. On the other hand, some services make standards and results readily available to customers in documents, websites or government offices specifically targeted to customers to better deliver service and achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction. The OMB pilot dashboard initiative has the potential to facilitate agency efforts to make customer service standards and results readily available to customers, but has not yet been launched.

Most services reported they base employee performance ratings from SES to frontline employees, in part, on customer service measures, but the manner and objective weight that attaches to this varied. There seems to be widespread agreement among services, management, and labor officials that customer service is an important factor in assessing employee performance, although there is also some reservation relative to how conclusively service measures can and should be applied at the individual employee level. But while labor officials and others expressed concerns about lack of employee control over variables that may affect the quality, accuracy, processing time, and level of a customer's satisfaction, agency officials did not report recent issues. For example, IRS customer service is included in IRS's performance appraisal system and IRS and NTEU officials stated that there had not been any recent issues with the system relating to customer service. While the experience of several of the surveyed services suggests that the use of service measures in performance appraisals can be effective and appropriate, as current and former researchers and practitioners pointed out, they need to be developed with care, particularly balancing all dimensions of customer service and involving employees in their selection and application.

Tools and practices identified in our review, such as using social media to engage customers and segmenting customer groups to provide tailored services based on particular needs, could lead to potential benefits for customers of federal agencies. Some of these are already being used by some federal agencies, but OMB's initiative to gather and share customer service ideas through the President's Management Advisory Board, established in April 2010, and meetings with GSA's Office of Citizen Services, agencies, and other groups offers an opportunity to evaluate the benefits of applying these tools and practices on a more widespread basis and to share those that are found to be beneficial.

## Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Director of OMB take the following two actions, building on the progress OMB has already made as part of its customer service initiative:

- Direct agencies to consider options to make their customer service standards and results more readily available to customers using documents or Web pages specifically intended for customers, or the dashboard once it is more fully developed.
- Collaborate with the President's Management Advisory Board and agencies to evaluate the benefits and costs of applying the tools and practices related to understanding customers' needs, facilitating improved customer decision making, and providing citizens with the information necessary to hold government accountable for customer service, and include those that are found beneficial to the federal government in the initiative on gathering and sharing customer service ideas.

## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report for review to OMB and the departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the Interior, State, the Treasury, Veterans Affairs, and the General Services Administration, the National Science Foundation, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the Social Security Administration.

OMB provided comments and additional information regarding the PRA review process. We made changes as appropriate to describe the process more fully. OMB had no comments on the recommendations.

The departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs and the Social Security Administration provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. The departments of Agriculture, Education, the Interior, and State and the

General Services Administration, National Science Foundation and Nuclear Regulatory Commission had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretaries of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the Interior, State, and Veterans Affairs; the Commissioners of the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Administration; the Administrator of the General Services Administration; the Directors of the National Science Foundation and OMB; the Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; and other interested parties. The report will also be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you have any questions concerning this report, please contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardtb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix V.

Bernice Steinhardt
Director, Strategic Issues

# Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of our study were to (1) assess the extent to which federal agencies are setting customer service standards and measuring results against these standards, (2) assess the extent to which federal agencies are reporting standards and results to customers and using the results to improve service, and (3) identify some customer service management tools and practices used by local, state, federal, and non-U.S. national governments. In addition, we examined steps the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is taking to facilitate federal agency use of tools and practices to improve customer service.

## Survey of Federal Government Services

To assess whether and how federal agencies are setting customer service standards, measuring results, reporting those results and using them to improve services, we conducted a survey, based on the requirements of Executive Order 12862 and the related presidential memorandum "Improving Customer Service." We surveyed 13 services provided by federal agencies that are among those with the most widespread contact with the public. We selected a nonrepresentative sample of government services because there is no single list of government services that could be used to pull a representative sample. We selected the sample based on a set of criteria including: services provided by a federal agency; 1 million customers served annually; customers are primarily U.S. individuals; and primary customers are not employees of a government agency receiving benefits related to employment. We compiled the list of potential services by starting with a list of Vanguard agencies (agencies having the most contact with the public) that was developed as part of the National Performance Review in the late 1990s and identifying services within those agencies. To this list we added agencies and respective services that were suggested by at least two of the five knowledgeable individuals in the area of customer service whom we consulted,[1] or by one of the knowledgeable individuals in the area of customer service and OMB. The final list of services surveyed can be found in appendix II. The sample of services surveyed was not a representative sample of services provided by the federal government, meaning that results from our survey cannot be generalized to apply to any other services provided by the federal government.

---

[1]See section below on Additional Interviews to Supplement the Survey, for more information on the individuals contacted.

To minimize errors that might occur from respondents interpreting our questions differently than we intended, we pretested our questionnaire with four officials who were in positions similar to the respondents who would complete our actual survey. During these pretests, we asked the officials to complete the questionnaire as we observed the process. We then interviewed the respondents to check whether (1) the questions were clear and unambiguous, (2) the terms used were precise, (3) the questionnaire was unbiased, and (4) the questionnaire did not place an undue burden on the officials completing it. We also submitted the questionnaire for review by a GAO survey methodology expert and four external reviewers who were experts on the topic of the survey (selected based on their experience managing or designing government performance improvement initiatives). We modified the questions based on feedback from the pretests and reviews, as appropriate.

We sent the questionnaire by e-mail to the individual identified by the service as the lead respondent. We asked services to complete the questionnaire within the electronic form and return it as an e-mail attachment. All 13 services completed the questionnaire. We reviewed all questionnaire responses and followed up by phone and e-mail to clarify the responses as appropriate.

We analyzed responses to closed-ended questions by counting and summarizing the type and frequency of response for each of the 13 services. For responses to open-ended narrative questions, we coded the responses from each service and created categories for the purpose of organizing and summarizing the response of each service (e.g., methods used to gather input from customers regarding their level of satisfaction with the service).

The practical difficulties of conducting any survey may introduce nonsampling errors. For example, differences in how a particular question is interpreted, the sources of information available to respondents, or the types of respondents who do not respond to a question can introduce errors into the survey results. We included steps in both the data collection and data analysis stages to minimize such nonsampling errors. As indicated above, we collaborated with GAO survey specialists to design and review draft questionnaires, versions of the questionnaire were pretested with four officials from services not included in our survey but who were in positions similar to the respondents who would complete our survey, we asked several external experts to review and comment on a draft of the questionnaire, and we revised the questionnaire as necessary to reduce the likelihood of nonresponse and reporting errors on our

questions. We examined the survey results and performed computer analyses to identify inconsistencies and other indications of error, and addressed such issues as necessary. A second, independent analyst checked the accuracy of all computer analyses to minimize the likelihood of errors in data processing. In addition, GAO analysts answered respondent questions and resolved difficulties respondents had answering our questions. For questions that asked respondents to provide a narrative answer, we created content categories and had one analyst code each response into one of the categories, and another analyst verify the coding. Any discrepancies in the coding were resolved through discussion by the analysts.

We did not evaluate the overall effectiveness of or level of customer service provided by any of the services reviewed.

## Additional Interviews to Supplement the Survey

To gain a fuller understanding of the survey responses, we selected five of the services with varying answers to key questions on the survey for follow-up interviews to discuss their responses. The five services selected were the Forest Service, National Park Service, Veterans Benefits Administration, Customs and Border Protection, and Federal Student Aid.

In addition, because the scope of the survey was limited to services that have widespread direct interaction with the public, we selected and interviewed five additional services with a lower volume of contact with the public and different missions or goals. These five services were selected from a listing of independent agencies of the United States government, and were chosen to ensure at least two services were from each of the following categories:

- Services whose direct customers are individuals, but have fewer contacts with the public than those in our survey
- Services that serve government customers and are not subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12862
- Services that benefit the public as a whole rather than individuals directly, such as agencies that make policy or regulate businesses

The sample of additional services interviewed was not a representative sample of services provided by the federal government, meaning that results from the interviews cannot be generalized to apply to any other services provided by the federal government. A list of the five additional services we interviewed can be found in appendix II.

The key topics presented in the survey formed the basis of the interviews with the five additional services. To prepare for analyses of the open-ended interview questions, we created content categories and had one analyst code each response into one of the categories (e.g., measures related to customer satisfaction), and another analyst verify the coding. Any discrepancies in the coding were resolved through discussion by the analysts.

## Identification of Tools and Practices

In order to gain insight into the current application of leading customer service tools and practices, challenges to implementing them and strategies to overcome these challenges, we first reviewed relevant literature, such as industry, academic, and management journals dealing with customer service practices and an annual evaluation[2] of customer service provided by national governments begun in 2000. Based on the literature review, we selected and interviewed six knowledgeable individuals in the area of customer service. We selected these individuals based on their having one or more of the following characteristics: (1) experience managing or designing government performance improvement initiatives, such as the National Performance Review and the Government Performance and Results Act at the federal level or similar initiatives at the state and local level; (2) experience implementing, in a government setting, one or more of the customer service management tools and practices we identified in our literature review; and (3) published in peer reviewed journals, books, or frequently referenced publications in the field of public sector performance improvement.

Based on suggestions from these individuals and the literature, we identified several customer service tools and practices. We then identified local, state and foreign organizations to interview that were either implementing tools and practices we had identified, were suggested by the individuals we contacted, or were highly ranked in the 2007 edition of the annual evaluation of customer service provided by national governments, which was the most recent edition that contained rankings.

We obtained input from the following governmental organizations:

- Cabinet Office, United Kingdom

---

[2]For example, Accenture, *Leadership in Customer Service: Delivering on the Promise*, 2007.

- Centerlink, Australia
- Central Provident Fund, Singapore
- Customer Service Group, New York City
- Office of Consumer Affairs, Georgia, USA
- Service Canada, Canada
- State Services Commission, New Zealand

We used the input from these organizations to refine and provide context for the list of tools and practices we had identified.

We conducted this performance audit in Washington, D.C. between August 2009 to October 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, which require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

# Appendix II: List of Services Contacted

| Surveyed services | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Agency** | **Organizational unit** | **Service** |
| Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Recreational facilities and services |
| Department of Education | Office of Federal Student Aid | Student loans under the Direct Loan Program |
| Department of Health and Human Services | Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services | Health insurance under the Medicare program |
| Department of Health and Human Services | Indian Health Service | Medical care for American Indians and Alaskan Natives |
| Department of Homeland Security | Customs and Border Protection | Border security inspections of individuals |
| Department of Homeland Security | Transportation Security Administration | Passenger and baggage screening |
| Department of the Interior | National Park Service | Visitor and interpretive services |
| Department of State | Bureau of Consular Affairs | Passport services |
| Department of the Treasury | Internal Revenue Service | Provision of tax information and advice to individuals |
| Department of Veterans Affairs | Veterans Benefits Administration | Disability compensation |
| Department of Veterans Affairs | Veterans Benefits Administration | Veterans' Group Life Insurance |
| Department of Veterans Affairs | Veterans Health Administration | Beneficiary medical care |
| Social Security Administration | Social Security Administration | Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income |

Source: GAO.

| Interviewed services | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Agency** | **Organizational unit** | **Service** |
| Nuclear Regulatory Commission | Nuclear Regulatory Commission | Regulation of power plants and other uses of nuclear materials |
| National Science Foundation | National Science Foundation | Provision of research and education grants |
| General Services Administration | Public Building Services | Property management services for other federal agencies |
| General Services Administration | Federal Acquisition Service | Procurement of goods and services for the government |

Source: GAO.

# Appendix III: Examples of Standards from Surveyed Services

As part of our methodology we asked all services involved in the survey to provide us with a copy of their customer service standards. Below are examples of the standards we received from each service.

## Passport Services Provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs

- Bureau of Consular Affairs will provide service in a courteous, professional manner
- Bureau of Consular Affairs will always try to meet your travel needs
- Bureau of Consular Affairs customers have the right to speak with management if you are not satisfied with the service you have received

## Health Insurance under Medicare Provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

- A target of 90 percent has been established for the Customer Satisfaction Survey pass rate
- A target of 90 percent has been established for the percent of persons with Medicare Advantage Plans who report they usually or always get needed care right away as soon as they thought they needed it
- A target of 90 percent has been established for the percent of persons with Medicare Fee for Service who report they usually or always get needed care right away as soon as they thought they needed it
- A target of 90 percent has been established for the percent of persons with Medicare Advantage Plans who report that it is usually or always easy to use their health plan to get the medicines their doctor prescribed

## Border Security Inspection of Individuals Provided by Customs and Border Protection

- Customs and Border Protection (CBP) pledges to:
- Cordially greet and welcome you to the United States
- Treat you with courtesy, dignity and respect
- Explain the CBP process to you
- Have a supervisor listen to your comments
- Accept and respond to your comments in written, verbal or electronic form.
- Provide reasonable assistance due to delay or disability

| Passenger and Baggage Screening Provided by the Transportation Security Administration[1] | • A target of > 78 percent has been established for the number of phone calls answered by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Contact Center within 20 seconds<br>• A target of < 4 percent has been established for the TSA Contact Center telephone call abandonment rate<br>• A target of > 98 percent has been set for the accuracy of TSA Contact Center telephone responses<br>• A target of 0 has been established for the number of reportable communications that were not escalated at the TSA Contact Center |
|---|---|
| Student Loans under the Direct Loan Program Provided by Federal Student Aid | • The Customer Support Center contractor shall provide bi-lingual (English or Spanish) phone support to schools, students, parents, and borrowers Monday through Friday<br>• A target of 80 percent has been established as the percentage of customers that will be on hold for less than 20 seconds in the Interactive Voice Response system<br>• A target of less than 2 percent has been established as the percentage of calls in the Interactive Voice Response that are abandoned by the customer before reaching the customer service representative<br>• A target of greater or equal to 95 percent has been established as the percentage of first time correct answers<br>• A target of 99 percent has been established as the percentage of availability of the Common Originations and Disbursement system and Web site excluding schedule downtime and required processing outages |
| Recreational Facilities and Services Provided by the Forest Service | • Provide all reservation transaction processing with 100 percent accuracy including advance reservations, walk-ins, cancellations, and transfers.<br>• Provide trip planning and mappings with no more than 10 valid complaints per Month<br>• The trail and trailside are free of litter<br>• Interpretive presentations, publications, displays, Web sites, and visual aids are accessible<br>• Visitors are provided an opportunity to communicate satisfactions |

---

[1]The TSA Contact Center handles contacts for all of TSA, not only for passenger and baggage screening. These standards apply to all contacts at the contact center.

| Medical Care Provided by the Indian Health Service[2] | • Respond to internal customers within 2 working days. Send e-mail to address the issue or to provide a timeframe when you can work to address the issue<br>• Utilize "out of office" message as appropriate so customers know how long you will be away from the office, who to contact for assistance, and/or how to contact you if this is important<br>• Answer phone calls in three rings<br>• Pleasant greeting<br>• Return phone calls within 1 business day |
| --- | --- |
| Provision of Tax Information and Advice to Individuals Provided by the Internal Revenue Service | • A target of 71.0 percent has been established for the relative success rate of taxpayers that call for customer account services seeking assistance from a Customer Service Representative<br>• A target of 91.2 percent has been established for the measure of how often the customer received the correct answer with the correct resolution to all tax law inquiries<br>• A target of 93.7 percent has been established for the measure of how often the customer received the correct answer with the correct resolution to all account inquiries<br>• A target of 698 seconds has been established for the average number of seconds customers waited in an assistor queue before receiving service<br>• A target of 92.0 percent has been established for the measure of taxpayer's overall satisfaction with the services provided by Field Assistance personnel as determined by the customer satisfaction survey |
| Visitor and Interpretive Services Provided by the National Park Service[3] | • A target of 97 percent has been established for the percent of visitors satisfied with appropriate facilities, services and recreational opportunities<br>• A target of 93 percent has been established for visitor understanding and appreciation of the significance of the park they are visiting<br>• A target of 90 percent has been established for the percent of designated National Historic Landmarks that are in good condition<br>• A target of 92 percent has been established for the percent of National Park Service (NPS) managed stream channel and shoreline miles in desired condition |

[2]IHS did not have standards at the service-wide level, but provided us with examples of standards from area offices and facilities.

[3]Target figures reflect long term 2013 targets

| | |
|---|---|
| | • A target of 75 percent has been established for percent of miles of National Historic Trails and Wild and Scenic Rivers under NPS management meeting their heritage resource objectives |
| **Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income Provided by the Social Security Administration** | • A fiscal year 2011 target of 83.5 percent has been established for percent of individuals who do business with SSA rating the overall services as "excellent," "very good," or "good"<br>• A fiscal year 2011 target of 264 seconds has been established as the average speed they wish to achieve for answering national 800 number calls<br>• A fiscal year 2011 target of 7 percent has been established as the percent busy rate they wish to achieve for national 800 number calls |
| **Disability Compensation Provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration** | • A target of 5 percent has been established for the percentage of abandoned calls to Veterans Benefits Administration Public Contact Representatives in the National Call Center<br>• A target of 70.0 percent has been established for the agent availability rate<br>• A target of 75.0 percent has been established for overall quality, includes measures of technical proficiency, client contact behaviors, and effective call management. |
| **Life Insurance Provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration** | • The standard for the average speed of answer for their call center is set at 20 seconds<br>• The standard for the overall customer satisfaction rate is set at 90 percent<br>• The standard for the average processing days for Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) applications is set at 5 days<br>• The standard for the financial accuracy of all claim payments is set at 99 percent<br>• The standard for the accuracy of VGLI application processing is 99 percent |

## Medical Care Provided by the Veterans Health Administration

- A target score of 83 has been established for the responsiveness of hospital staff, calculated as the percentage of responses that fall in the top two categories
- A target score of 83 has been established for the privacy in hospital rooms, calculated as the percentage of responses that fall in the top three categories
- A target score of 56 has been established for the overall rating of health care, calculated as the percentage of responses that fall in the top two categories
- A target score of 80 has been established for getting care quickly, calculated as the percentage of responses that fall in the top two categories

# Appendix IV: High-Priority Performance Goals Related to Customer Service

The President's budget for fiscal year 2011 included high -priority performance goals that agencies had committed to achieve within 18 to 24 months.[1] The identification of high-priority performance goals, coupled with measures and targets, will be used by the President to evaluate agency progress in meetings with cabinet officers. Several agencies have crafted specific goals to improve customer service. These goals include targets and measures to improve customer satisfaction, as well as objective performance measures such as wait times, operational capacity, citizen engagement, and call center efficiency. This appendix documents examples of customer service oriented, high-priority performance goals drafted by federal agencies.[2]

## Department of Education

- Simplified Student Aid: All participating higher education institutions and loan servicers operationally ready to originate and service Federal Direct Student Loans through an efficient and effective student aid delivery system with simplified applications and minimal disruption to students.

## Department of Homeland Security

- Improve security screening of transportation passengers, baggage, and employees while expediting the movement of the traveling public (aviation security).
  - Wait times for aviation passengers (Target: Less than 20 minutes by 2012).
- Improve security screening of transportation passengers, baggage, and employees while expediting the movement of the traveling public (surface transportation security).
- Strengthen disaster preparedness and response by improving FEMA's operational capabilities and strengthening State, local and private citizen preparedness.
  - Improve to 90 percent the percentage of shipments arriving with the requested materials at the requested location by the validated/agreed upon delivery date.
  - Improve to 95 percent the percentage of respondents reporting they are better prepared to deal with disasters and emergencies as a result of training.

[1]Office of Management and Budget, Analytical Perspectives, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2011 (Washington, D.C., Feb. 1, 2010).

[2]The goals listed in this appendix appear as they were reported in the President's Budget for fiscal year 2011. Agencies may have updated the goals since that time.

| Department of the Treasury | • Increase individual income tax filers' American Customer Satisfaction Index score to 69.<br>• Improve telephone level of service to at least 75 percent by the end of 2011. |
|---|---|
| Department of Veterans Affairs | • By the end of 2011, reduce the average number of days to complete original Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefit claims to 18 days.<br>• Implement a 21st-century paperless claims processing system by 2012 to ultimately reduce the average disability claims processing time to 125 days.<br>• Deploy a Veterans Relationship Management (VRM) Program to improve access for all Veterans to the full range of Department of Veterans Affairs services and benefits by June 2011.<br>   • By the end of 2010, implement call recording, national queue, transfer of calls and directed voice and self help.<br>   • By the end of 2010, enhance transfers of calls among all Veterans Benefits Administration lines of business with capability to simultaneously transfer callers' data.<br>   • By the end of 2010, pilot the Unified Desktop within Veterans Benefits Administration lines of businesses to improve call center efficiency. |
| Social Security Administration | • Increase the Number of Online Applications: By 2012, achieve an online filing rate of 50 percent for retirement applications. In 2011, the Social Security Administration's (SSA) goal is to:<br>   • Achieve 44 percent of total retirement claims filed online.<br>   • Achieve 27 percent of total initial disability claims filed online.<br>• Issue More Decisions for People Who File for Disability: SSA will work towards achieving the Agency's long-term outcomes of lowering the disability backlogs and accurately processing claims. SSA will also ensure that clearly disabled individuals will receive an initial claims decision within 20 days. Finally, the agency will reduce the time it takes an individual to receive a hearing decision to an average of 270 days by 2013. In order to efficiently issue decisions in 2011, SSA's goal is to:<br>   • Process 3.317 million out of a universe of 4.316 million initial disability claims.<br>   • Achieve 6.5 percent of initial disability cases identified as a Quick Disability Determination or a Compassionate Allowance.<br>   • Process 799,000 out of a universe of 1.456 million hearing requests.<br>• Improve SSA's Customers' Service Experience on the telephone, in field offices, and online: To alleviate field office workloads and to provide the variety of services the public expects, SSA will improve |

telephone service on the national 800-number and in the field offices. By fiscal year 2011, SSA's goal is to:

- Achieve an average speed of answer rate of 264 seconds by the national 800-number.
- Lower the busy rate for national 800-number calls from 8 percent to 7 percent.
- Raise our overall rating of "excellent," "very good," or "good" given by individuals who do business with SSA from 81 percent reflected in 2009 to 83.5 percent.

## General Services Administration

- Provide agile technologies and expertise for citizen-to-government interaction that will achieve unprecedented transparency and build innovative solutions for a more effective, citizen-driven government.
  - Create three readiness assessments and criteria based tool selection guidance by April 15, 2010.
  - Provide assistance to other federal agencies in conducting six dialogs by September 30, 2010.
  - Realize 136 million touch points (citizen engagements) through Internet, phone, print, and social media channels by September 30, 2010.
  - Successfully complete three agency dialogs with the public to better advance successful use of public engagements by September 30, 2010.
  - Train 100 government employees on citizen engagement in forums, classes, and/or Webinars that are rated highly successful by participants and linked to agency capability building and successful engagement outcomes by September 30, 2010.

## Office of Personnel Management

- Hiring Reform: 80 percent of departments and major agencies meet agreed upon targeted improvements to:
  - Improve hiring manager satisfaction with applicant quality.
  - Improve applicant satisfaction.
  - Reduce the time it takes to hire.

## Small Business Administration

- Disaster Assistance: Process 85 percent of home loan applications within 14 days and 85 percent of business and Economic Injury Disaster Loan applications within 18 days.

# Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

## GAO Contact

Bernice Steinhardt, (202) 512-6543 or steinhardtb@gao.gov

## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above, key contributions to this report were made by William Doherty, Assistant Director; Charlesetta Bailey; Mason Calhoun; Martin De Alteriis; Justin Dunleavy; Karin Fangman; Robert Gebhart; Colin Morse; Kelly Rubin; Michael Silver; Eugene Stewman; and Ethan Wozniak.