

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

Customer feedback is not fluff, and customer satisfaction measurement is not mystifying. These Guidelines were developed so more people across the agency will understand the value of customer feedback. We hope this document will help you feel comfortable with the concept, the processes, and with your capacity to perform or manage customer feedback activities and measure customer satisfaction.

This document provides information about collecting and receiving feedback from EPA's customers. Using these Guidelines will improve the agency's ability to effectively collect, receive, and use feedback from EPA's customers, both within and outside the agency.

WHY IS CUSTOMER FEEDBACK NECESSARY?

Learning how we can better serve our customers can help all of us to provide better environmental and public health protection. Feedback—which refers to input on needs, expectations, and experiences—from EPA's customers enables us to measure whether the agency is increasing its ability to satisfy customers. The bottom line is that finding out what customers think about what we do and how we do it will help us to make improvements in our products and services, the kinds of changes that customers will notice and value.

Finally, all Federal agencies are required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) to measure customer satisfaction and make changes to improve service and satisfaction.

What's in these Guidelines for managers?

How many times have you discovered you were missing a critical piece of information so you could not

- Figure out why service-delivery was inefficient?
- Understand why customers seemed dissatisfied?
- Answer an inquiry about your program's accomplishments or weak spots?
- Make a strong case for additional budget dollars?
- Be sure you made the right decision about which action would make the most significant program improvement?

You may have missed an opportunity because you lacked timely and reliable information. Armed with the right information, you could have made more informed decisions, eliminated a bottleneck, understood your customers' problems, documented your resources, protected the program from profiteers, or known which changes would produce the biggest payoff.

As a program manager, you are probably inundated with data and statistics, and may not even recognize a customer-focused information deficit. Yet you may find you don't have data-based answers to policy and operational questions when you need them, despite huge investments in data collection and reporting.

These Guidelines are about getting the customer-generated information you need quickly and at a relatively modest cost. This information is something more than the data typically produced by management information systems. This is a collection of facts and logical conclusions which answer the types of questions like those above. By learning and using a variety of strategies for obtaining customer satisfaction information, you can better address specific problems, gain insight into what's happening in your program, and determine what directions you should be taking.

WHO CAN USE THE GUIDELINES?

The Guidelines focus on obtaining feedback from EPA customers on their needs and experiences with EPA products, processes, and services.

The Guidelines are intended for

- Policy makers as they determine improvements for EPA's products and services and program managers who seek information from EPA's customers
- States, tribes, local entities, and other EPA partners interested in assessing customers' satisfaction with services and products they provide
- Project officers who monitor Government contractors conducting customer feedback projects for EPA.

WHY HAVE GUIDELINES FOR CUSTOMER FEEDBACK?

These Guidelines are designed to help you perform your work. By following them, you will have a clear road map. The Guidelines will enable you to conduct customer feedback with less labor intensity, trouble, and personal concern. By having a set of Guidelines that everyone can follow, EPA will have a consistent approach to customer feedback.

The Guidelines can *benefit staff* responsible for planning and conducting customer feedback activities by helping them lead or do the work; understand the importance of obtaining management and employee buy-in for conducting customer feedback inquiries; act on lessons learned; and respond to staff concerns such as fears about extra work, change, or how to begin customer feedback.

The Guidelines can *benefit managers* because they outline what is necessary to obtain and use feedback that can help them to improve decisions about changing products, processes, and services. The Guidelines can *benefit the agency* because following a uniform set of principles and procedures will help EPA institute a consistent approach to customer feedback; build a repository of information about customers to track developments and improvements in customer service; and establish information about who has been contacted, which will help in subsequent customer feedback activities.

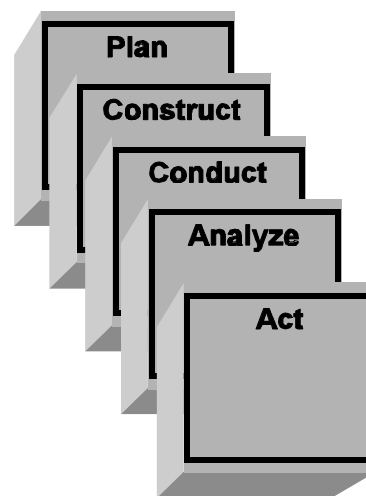
HOW ARE THE GUIDELINES ORGANIZED?

The Guidelines begin with an introduction and progress through a five-step model which can be successfully applied for obtaining customer feedback that constitute a model and can be applied

successfully. The Guidelines contain discussion and checklists at the back of each section to help you organize and facilitate your customer feedback projects.

The five steps are

- ✓ **PLAN** the customer feedback project
- ✓ **CONSTRUCT** the data collection procedures
- ✓ **CONDUCT** data collection
- ✓ **ANALYZE** the data
- ✓ **ACT** on the results.



At the end of the Guidelines are several **Factsheets** that provide additional help. They are referenced throughout the text.

A note about conducting customer feedback activities

The purpose of these Guidelines is to help EPA staff conduct customer feedback activities in a systematic, scientific manner. The principles and practices in this document are sound, but there are many other informal ways to listen to your customers. Some of them may provide you with more valuable information than you will ever get from a statistically solid formal survey.

The most obvious way to get feedback is to *talk to your customers*. It may be a casual conversation while you are providing a service or product, attending a meeting, or sharing information. You might find valuable feedback in a complaint that provides good information about what needs fixing. You may hear a small or large suggestion about how to make things easier for the customer or the agency. Much of this kind of feedback is unsolicited, so you have to be sensitive to it. You need to know when to stop and listen; recognize the chances to learn from your customers, use them, and remember to take notes! You have opportunities every day—every time a customer contacts you—to get feedback. This “gut-level” customer reaction can be the strongest indicator of satisfaction. When you pay attention to their comments, customers will notice that you are listening to them and that you care about what they say. That builds trust between you, and trust in EPA.