citizens first 3

JAN2003

By Erin Research Inc. for
The Institute for Citizen Centred Service &
The Institute of Public Administration of Canada

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Citizen-Centred
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Institute of Public Administration of Canada

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The mission of the **Institute for Citizen-Centred Service** is to promote high levels of citizen satisfaction with public-sector service delivery. The ICCS achieves its mission by undertaking research to identify citizens' service needs and expectations, and by assisting the public sector in applying innovative solutions which support service quality.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

Governments across Canada and around the world are embracing a "citizen-centred" approach to service delivery. Slowly shedding the internally-focused (or "inside-out") perspective that too often dominates large organizations, the public sector is increasingly adopting an "outside-in" perspective when delivering service to the public - a perspective where the interests and opinions of citizens are instrumental in defining expectations, setting priorities, and establishing service standards.

The original *Citizens First* study (published in 1998) was a landmark step in this evolution. Through *Citizens First*, Canadians across the country were asked what they thought about the delivery of public services, what expectations they held, and what they saw as the priorities for improvement. Sponsored by federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, *Citizens First* identified the drivers of satisfaction with service delivery, dispelled myths about the relative quality of public services, and highlighted the importance of service standards.

Citizens First 2000 picked up where the original *Citizens First* report left off, confirming major findings of the 1998 project, tracking trends, and extending the discussion to new areas such the drivers of citizen satisfaction as they relate to specific delivery channels (face-to-face, telephone, and electronic service delivery).

Citizens First 3 is the latest in this series of world-class research initiatives, once again breaking new ground and offering governments across Canada an invaluable understanding of what their citizens expect and experience with respect to service delivery. In particular, *Citizens First 3* focuses on the challenges associated with multi-channel service delivery. As citizens grow increasingly comfortable with new electronic delivery channels such as websites, email, and kiosks, governments are searching for ways to manage seamlessly the service experience of citizens, regardless of which (or how many) channels they choose to use.

Citizens First 3 also breaks new ground by exploring the relationship between service quality and confidence in government. In fact, more than any other finding, this analysis may prove to be the lasting legacy of this research. Through *Citizens First 3* we have quantitative evidence demonstrating that the quality of service that citizens receive has a direct impact on the level of confidence they have in their democratic institutions.

As with the first two installments of the *Citizens First* research, *Citizens First 3* again brings together partner governments from across Canada at the municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal levels. This continued collaboration is a source of great pride and, as the source of our shared research objectives, is undoubtedly one of the reasons the Citizens First research is so valuable to public-sector managers at the fore of service delivery.

Beyond this spirit of collaboration, we would be remiss if we did not highlight the invaluable contributions made by several other groups and individuals: namely, the officers in each jurisdiction who are dedicated to improving the quality of service delivery; the members of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council (PSSDC) for their support and counsel; George Spears and Kasia Seydegart of Erin Research, and Faye Schmidt for their insightful and thoughtful analysis; Brian Marson and Art Daniels for their guidance as co-chairs of the PSSDC Research Sub-committee; the staff of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC); and finally, Nicholas Prychodko and Charles Vincent, the staff of the recently founded Institute for Citizen-Centred Service (ICCS) who managed this initiative on behalf of the partner jurisdictions.

While quality service is as much an art as it is a science, the *Citizens First* research studies have provided public sector managers with invaluable information, and have been instrumental in shaping service improvement strategies across Canada. We are confident that this latest report not only offers new insights, but by establishing a link between service quality and confidence in government, *Citizens First 3* also raises the stakes. In a world where some citizens feel alienated and detached from government, the "moments of truth" encapsulated in each service experience matter – service quality matters.

Co-Chairs, Institute for Citizen-Centred Service (ICCS) Steering Committee

Michelle d'Auray	*Paavo Kivisto*
Lori MacMullen	*Ardath Paxton-Mann*

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Executive Summary

Citizens First 3 is an exciting undertaking by the public sector in Canada. The work is groundbreaking in its scope, its goals, and its analysis. It provides fresh insights and comprehensive information on how citizens and clients of the Canadian public sector perceive the services they receive from governments at the municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal levels.

As the third in a series of biennial studies, *Citizens First 3* takes on several bold, new challenges. *Citizens First 3* builds on and extends the citizen-centred research agenda that is a cornerstone of the Canadian approach to public service improvement.

Citizens First 3 is based on a representative sample of 9,000 Canadians in every province and territory. Its main findings are:

- *Service quality shapes citizens' confidence in their governments.* A new empirical analysis reveals that service quality has a significant impact on citizens' confidence in governments. Since measures of confidence in government have been falling for several decades, this link establishes service quality as an important influence on civic health.

- *Multiple channels are now the norm.* In half of all attempts to obtain government services, citizens use two or more channels. Channel choice is good for citizens, but providing consistent, seamless service across different channels presents managers with an increasingly complex challenge.

- *Service quality ratings are improving.* The public sector in Canada is making progress. Scores on service quality reputation – the overall ratings of satisfaction – are going up for all levels of government. In addition, ratings for many specific services have also improved.

- *Citizens have increasingly high expectations of government.* Citizens expect as good or better service quality from governments as from the private sector. Expectations of public sector service quality have increased steadily since 1998.

- *The five drivers of satisfaction remain key to service excellence.* The five drivers of satisfaction identified in 1998 and confirmed in 2000 remain the primary determinants of excellence. Timely service, knowledgeable staff who go the extra mile to help clients, fair treatment, and a successful outcome combine to create excellent service, with client ratings well over 80 out of 100.

- *Solutions for the telephone channel are pinpointed.* The telephone is the most frequently used service delivery channel, but citizens rate access via telephone as difficult and they rate satisfaction with telephone services low. Results isolate the causes of these difficulties, and so point the way to greater success with the telephone channel.

- *Electronic service delivery can increase satisfaction ratings.* This year's results address the question, "Will moving services

to the Internet improve service quality ratings?" The answer is a qualified yes. When multiple contacts are needed to deliver a service or when service delivery is difficult, the Internet can deliver greater satisfaction than traditional channels. On the other hand, when service experiences are problem-free, satisfaction scores are similar for e-services and traditional channels.

- *Service standards have changed slightly.* Citizens' expectations for the delivery of routine government services have changed somewhat from previous measurements. Citizens today are willing to wait a little longer for in-person service, but their tolerance for lengthy travel to visit a government office is lower and they expect mail service to be faster. Expectations of email response time were unrealistically high in 1998; they continue to moderate, as the limitations as well as the opportunities of electronic communication become more familiar.

- *Access remains an important challenge.* The challenge of improving access remains.

Whereas satisfaction with service delivery is generally on the increase, ratings of ease of access have not changed. This is particularly true for the telephone channel where the access problems documented since 1998 continue today.

- *Citizens' priorities for improvement remain consistent.* Citizens' priorities for improvement have not changed greatly since 1998. At the municipal and provincial/territorial levels the focus is on hospitals, roads, and schools, and at the federal level it is on a set of six services including Employment Insurance, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (formerly Revenue Canada), and Canada Post.

These results are cause for great optimism. Satisfaction scores have increased in many areas. The drivers of satisfaction show how services can continue to improve. Most importantly, results demonstrate a quantitative link between service quality and confidence in government. Improving service delivery has an effect beyond satisfying the client – it strengthens our governmental institutions.

1. The *Citizens First* initiative

The *Citizens First 3* project is an innovative research initiative of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council (PSSDC), which brings together service quality leaders from the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments. The 2002 project is sponsored by fifteen jurisdictions: the Government of Canada, eight provinces, one territory, and five municipalities.

The extent of alliance and cooperation between governments in Canada in undertaking this project speaks to the recognition of service delivery as a critical issue and to the determination of Canadian governments at all levels to address citizens' concerns.

The Institute for Citizen-Centred Service (ICCS) and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) were instrumental in the overall management of the project and in bringing together the jurisdictions that supported this work.

PSSDC is carrying forward the work of the Citizen-Centred Service Network (CCSN), a consortium of government officials that launched this project in 1998 under the direction of the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD). At that time, the CCSN conducted an independent investigation – *Citizens First* – measuring how Canadians perceive the services that their governments provide.

The original *Citizens First* initiative achieved national and international recognition when the CCSN won the prestigious Gold Award for Innovative Management from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) in 1999 and the Silver Medal for International Innovation in Management from the Commonwealth Association for Public Affairs and Management (CAPAM) in 2000.

Citizens First 1998

The original *Citizens First* work in 1998[1] defined three new perspectives on service quality:

- It challenged the widely held view that government services are second rate by showing how polls have often underrated citizens' perceptions of government services;

- It identified the five drivers of service quality that most strongly affect citizens' perceptions of service delivery; and

- It offered managers and service providers clear direction for improving services.

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[1] *Citizens First*. Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1998. Available at www.iccs-isac.org

Citizens First 2000

Citizens First 2000 addressed new service issues by adding the following perspectives to the original three:[2]

- It further explored the area of citizens' access to government services

- It examined the drivers of citizen satisfaction as they relate to specific delivery channels (telephone, the Internet, single gateways)

- It tracked trends and compared results against the 1998 baseline survey, particularly with respect to citizens' performance ratings on 50 government services, public and private sector benchmarks, and Canadians' priorities for improvement in government services.

Citizens First 3

Citizens First 3 replicates and extends both of these previous studies and addresses important, emerging issues in service delivery and service improvement. The report delivers these innovative components:

- An investigation of the intriguing link between satisfaction with public services and confidence in government, which other research has suggested but not defined;

- An examination of how citizens use both single and multiple channels to obtain government services;

- Canadians' preferences for service delivery channels, and differences in satisfaction that are associated with service delivery channels;

- A thorough investigation of the question, raised in *Citizens First* 2000, "Will moving services to the Internet improve satisfaction?"; and

- A re-analysis of the drivers of satisfaction identified in 1998 and 2000, using current data, in order to confirm their continued relevance to service delivery.

Citizens First 3, conducted by Dr. George Spears and Ms Kasia Seydegart of Erin Research Inc with Dr. Faye Schmidt, also provides comparative data in six key areas: service standards, access, priorities for improvement, service quality with a slate of more than 60 major services, the blue pages of telephone books, and the drivers of satisfaction. But, as critical as these trend data are, the major breakthroughs of *Citizens First 3* are in two directions: results that offer new insights into service delivery channels, and an analysis that expands our understanding of service delivery at the more global level where citizen satisfaction links to confidence in government.

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[2] *Citizens First 2000*. Institute for Public Administration of Canada. Available through the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service, www.iccs-isac.org.

2. Why is service quality important?

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE

- *I like government services when I see my own and others' reflections in it.*

- *Government is starting to shed its hard headed image. It appears to be treating citizens with greater respect.*

- *I like the increasing focus on getting information to citizens and the expanded ways (government is using) to provide alternate access/delivery mechanisms.*

- *I think the government should be open to sincere suggestions and ideas from the public.*

- *I like that you are doing surveys to get input from the citizens. We need to be more involved.*

- *I commented to a friend a month ago how friendly government employees have been at the CCRA office in Sydney and HRDC office in North Sydney. The staff have gone the extra mile to help me filling forms and giving me needed information. I'm impressed!*

- *I believe the Federal Civil Service is becoming less bureaucratic and more accessible to the public. My dealings with members of the civil service have been professional and they have been very helpful.*

- *I would like more accountability on what services are being cut and why, etc. Explain it so people don't get all crazy about it and say "It's the damn government". Let people know, we can handle the truth.*

Figure 1. *"My view of government is shaped to a large extent by the quality of service that governments provide"*

Citizens First 3
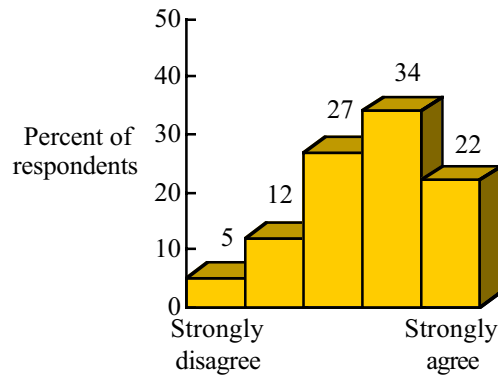
Everyone likes good service, but that does not, in itself, make the case that governments ought to provide good service. In the private sector, providing good service is justified on competitive grounds. Good service will attract and retain customers and poor service will lose them. For many government services, competition does not exist. Does it matter, then, if the service is a little 'slow and surly'? Governments are not likely to lose customers, so what is the liability of lax service? What is the benefit of excellent government service?

In the first instance, service quality is important because citizens believe that it is. Fifty-six percent say that service quality shapes their view of government to a large extent, while only 17 percent say that it does not.

If it is true that service quality shapes citizens' views of government, the issue gains greatly in importance. Democracies survive because

citizens believe that governments address their needs and promote their interests. The past thirty years have seen a steady decline in citizens' regard for governments. Measures of "confidence in government" and "trust in government" have plummeted throughout the western world. The causes of this disillusion are not fully understood: possible reasons include the perception that government influence is declining in the face of global economic forces, and the intensity of media attention on flaws in political processes.[3]

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[3] There is an extensive literature on the subject. For overviews see Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, Eds. *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Bilateral Countries?* Princeton University Press, 2000, and Bouckaert Geert, Steven Van de Walle, Bart Maddens & Jarl K. Kampen. *Identity vs Performance: An Overview of Theories Explaining Trust in Government, 2002.* www.kuleuven.ac.be/facdep/social/pol/io/Trust/trepublications.htm.

Figure 2. Conceptual model of services and confidence in government

Citizens First 3

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Confidence in  │
                    │   government    │
                    └─────────────────┘
                    ↗        ↑        ↖
        ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
        │Service quality:│  │Perception │  │ Perception that│
        │  Municipal,   │  │that       │  │  government   │
        │Provincial/    │  │government  │  │services meet   │
        │Territorial    │  │services are │  │one's needs   │
        │& Federal      │  │of benefit  │  │              │
        │services       │  │           │  │              │
        └──────────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────────┘
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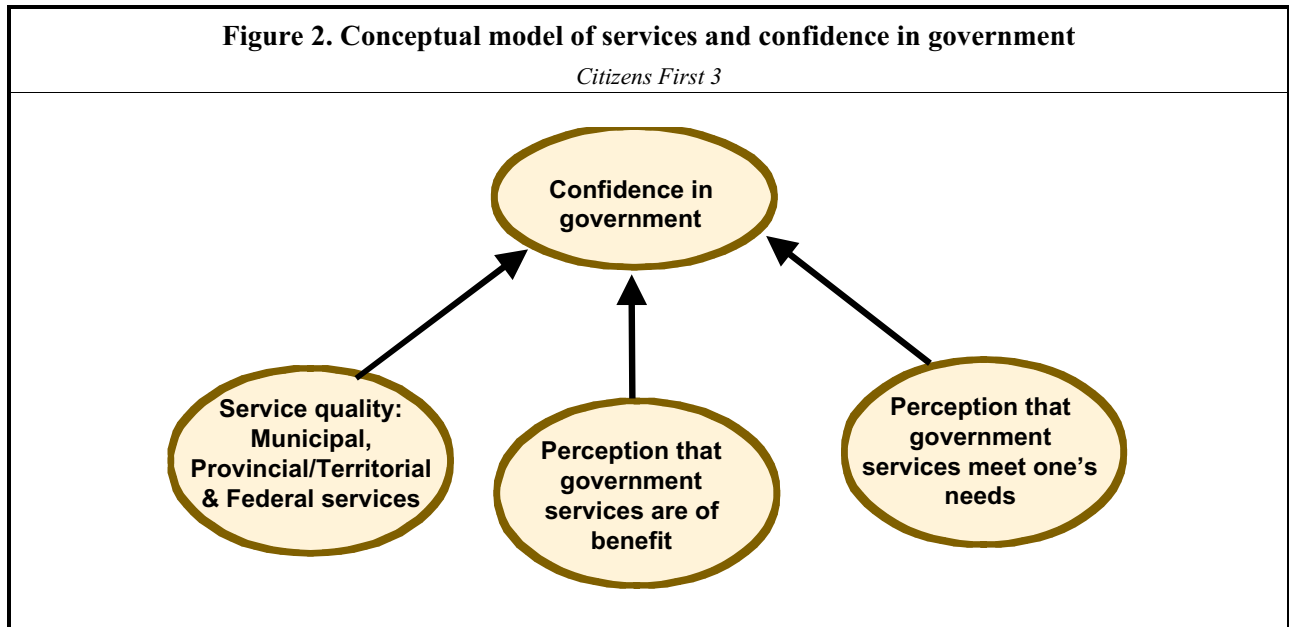
Reversing the trend is therefore a matter of considerable interest, and service quality has been widely discussed as one element in the solution. It was, for example, a tenet of the Clinton administration's National Performance Review that better service would increase trust and confidence in government[4], although to our knowledge, a convincing proof of the idea was never attempted.

A central goal of the *Citizens First 3* project is to test in the Canadian context how government services affect citizens' confidence in government. Will improvements in services and service quality contribute to a more positive view of government in general? The hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 2.

The conceptual model states that citizens' confidence in government follows from the degree to which:

- Citizens perceive service quality at all levels of government as good

- Citizens perceive benefit from government services

- Citizens perceive that government services meet their needs.

Improvements in any of these areas should therefore raise the overall assessment of government. At this stage, the model is pure conjecture; it is a hypothesis that can be either proved or disproved. In order to test the validity of the model, *Citizens First 3* developed survey measures for each component. The responses of citizens across the country were then analyzed to determine whether the model was accurate and how great an impact services had on citizens' overall impression of government.

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[4] See John M. Kamensky, "Role of the 'Reinventing Government' Movement in Federal Management Reform", *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 3 (May/June 1996), p. 247.

We constructed two sets of measures:

1. Measures that capture citizens' confidence in government

2. Measures that capture citizens' views of government service and service quality.

These measures are described in turn in the following sections.

Measures of confidence in government

Perceptions of large systems are usually complex and based on a broad array of factors. Perceptions of government are no exception – when citizens are asked about government overall they base their response on a composite of several dimensions. On the basis of focus groups conducted prior to the survey, four statements were developed that express central aspects of citizens' confidence in government. They are:

- Governments in this country conduct their business in an open and accountable manner

- I believe governments do a good job

- I get good value for my tax dollars

- Governments are responsive to the needs of citizens.

The *Citizens First 3* survey presented these items as agree/disagree statements, with the result shown in Figure 3. Responses tend toward the negative on each statement.

While the negative tone of these results is cause for concern in itself, what is important for present purposes is whether the four items "hang together", forming a coherent whole that can be said to represent a single view. In fact they do - statistically, there is a strong relationship between the responses on each of these items. As a result, we are justified in grouping the four items together as a single construct, representing citizens' confidence in government, in the model. This gives us the first half of the model. What is needed to complete the picture are measures of how citizens rate government services and service quality.

Measures of service and service quality

Measures of service and service quality – the other half of the model – were gathered from three areas: perceptions of how government services benefit individuals, ratings of the degree to which government services meet people's needs, and ratings of the quality of government services. Each of these revealed interesting results.

Figure 3. Components of confidence in government

Citizens First 3

"Governments in this country conduct their business in an open and accountable manner"

Percent of respondents

50 — 40 — 30 — 20 — 10 — 0

25 31 29 11 4

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

"I believe governments do a good job"

Percent of respondents

50 — 40 — 30 — 20 — 10 — 0

13 28 40 16 3

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

"I get good value for my tax dollars"

Percent of respondents

50 — 40 — 30 — 20 — 10 — 0

22 30 32 13 4

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

"Governments are responsive to the needs of citizens"

Percent of respondents

50 — 40 — 30 — 20 — 10 — 0

15 30 36 14 6

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

1. Perceived benefit of government services to the individual

Objectively, government services are of benefit to all Canadians. Governments provide health care, education, transportation, infrastructure and a myriad of other necessities. On the other hand, many individuals feel hard done by, by virtue of being over-taxed, or having been denied services that they feel they deserve, or being ill-treated in some way.

Canadians are evenly divided on the degree of benefit they perceive in government services (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Perceptions of the benefit of government services

Citizens First 3

"Government services have had a positive effect on me and my family"

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2. Perceived adequacy of government services: Do services meet the individuals' needs?

Canadians are also divided as to whether government services meet their needs or not (Figure 5). The perceived match of government services to individuals' needs is very much a matter of perception, and depends little on external circumstances. For example, there is not a significant relationship between perceived adequacy and income: those with low family incomes and those with high incomes are equally likely to agree or to disagree with this statement.
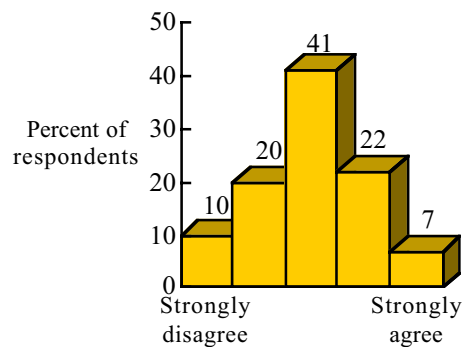
3. Perceptions of the quality of government services

There are two approaches to obtaining service quality ratings. One is to rate government services as a package, for example, "How would you rate the quality of service you get from your provincial/territorial government?" This rating is termed "service reputation". The other approach, "service experience", asks people to rate specific services that they have recently received. A "service reputation" rating yields just one number for any government, while service experience yields a number for each service. *Citizens First 3* asks both questions, i.e. a rating of service reputation for the respondent's municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal governments and specific ratings of a slate of more than sixty specific government services. Detailed results of both the service reputation and the service experience measures appear in Chapter 10.

Figure 5. Perceived adequacy of government services[5]

Citizens First 3

"The services that I get from governments meet my needs"

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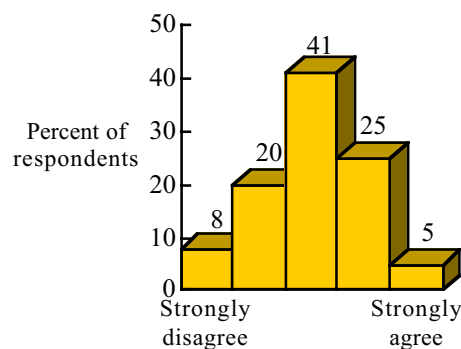
[5] Throughout the report, percentages are rounded on an individual basis, and so may not add to exactly 100.

Service quality ratings: federal government

Respondents rated the quality of 18 federal services that they had used in the past year and then selected three as their top priorities for improvement. They also answered the service reputation questions regarding "federal services in general". The model uses two measures from each respondent:

- Service reputation rating for federal services

- A mean service quality rating for the six highest-priority services. These six services are among the most widely-used and highly visible federal services in the set of 18. They are:[6]

  - Canada Post
  - Canada Customs & Revenue Agency (formerly Revenue Canada)
  - Employment Insurance
  - Customs & Immigration border services
  - Canada Pension Plan/Old Age Security
  - Health Canada – information on health issues.

Service quality ratings: municipal, provincial/territorial governments

Municipal and provincial/territorial services appear in the survey as a single group since the division of services between municipal and provincial/territorial governments varies widely across the country. Respondents provided a service quality score for each of the 40 municipal and provincial/territorial services that they had used in the past year, and then identified the services that they considered high priority. These are again widely-used and highly visible services. The measures are:

- Service reputation rating for municipal services[7].

- Service reputation rating for provincial/ territorial services.

- The mean rating of the four highest priority municipal and provincial/territorial services:[8]

  - Hospitals
  - Road maintenance and snow removal
  - Health care outside hospitals
  - Publicly funded schools.

[7] Even though municipal and provincial/territorial responsibilities differ across the country, it is reasonable to ask individual respondents for service reputation ratings of their own municipal services and their own provincial/territorial services. In making such ratings, residents of New Brunswick and residents of Saskatchewan will have somewhat different groups of services in mind.

[8] See Chapter 10 for service quality ratings and Chapter 11 for priority rankings.

[6] See Chapter 10 for service quality ratings and Chapter 11 for priority rankings.

A model that links service to citizens' confidence in government

Combining all this information into a model shows the relationship between service satisfaction and perceptions of government. Figure 6 shows the components of the model. Statistical details appear in Appendix B and confirm that the model is a very good fit to the survey data.

It has long been assumed that service quality has a bearing on citizens' appreciation of governments. The model confirms, for the first time, that there is a strong quantitative relationship between government services and confidence in governments. In fact, according to this model, services, broadly defined, account for 67 percent of the variance in citizens' overall ratings of government.[9]

The model is constructed by a mathematical process called structural equation modeling (SEM). First, the hypothesized relationships among each of the dozen or so variables in the model are defined, then the survey data are fit to the model. This is the critical test: either the responses of several thousand randomly selected Canadians align with the predictions of the model, confirming its validity, or they do not, sending the designers back to the drawing board. In fact, the model describes respondents' attitudes towards services and governments with great accuracy.

The statistical analysis suggests that two-thirds of the variance in people's confidence in government is attributable to government services. Is this figure believable? On the one hand, it seems reasonable: government services are an integral part of daily life, and most citizens agree that services shape their view of government "to a large extent" (Figure 1). From this perspective, the 67 percent figure would appear plausible. On the other hand, citizens' overall assessment of government should also be shaped by government policies, by political figures, and by political parties. From this perspective the 67 percent figure might appear high.

It is likely that the factors in the model – service quality, benefit, and adequacy – overlap with other factors that were not measured in the current work. For example, consider the link between government services, government policies, and the political figures that are responsible for them. Services are the physical manifestation of policies and the fruit of politicians' labour. The link between policy and service can be very direct – for example, a government changes Employment Insurance regulations and the amount of an individual's cheque goes up or down. More often the link is less immediate – for example, a policy to improve infrastructure may promise results a year or more in the future. In either case, citizens will perceive that service, policy, and politicians are linked elements.

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[9] For an introduction to "variance" see Appendix C.

Figure 6. Impact of service on citizens' confidence in government

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Confidence in government

"I believe governments do a good job"

"Governments are responsive to the needs of citizens"

"Governments in this country conduct their business in an open and accountable manner"

"I get good value for my tax dollars"

Service quality: Municipal Provincial Territorial	**Service quality: Federal**	**Benefit**	**Adequacy**
Service reputation of municipal govt	Service reputation of federal govt	"Govt services have had a positive effect on me and my family"	"The services that I get from governments meet my needs"
Service reputation of provincial /territorial govt	Quality ratings of 6 priority services *		
Quality ratings of 4 priority services *			

* Priority services of municipal and provincial/territorial governments are hospitals, health care outside hospitals, public education and road maintenance/construction. Priority services of the federal government are Canada Post, CCRA, EI, Customs and Immigration border services, CPP-OAS, and Health Canada information services.

The measures in the four rectangles account for 67 percent of the variance in citizens' confidence in government.

To the extent that connections exist among services, policies, and the political figures behind them, then survey measures of these dimensions will be related. Our present model has direct measures of services, but not of policies or political entities. Our model may therefore incorporate variance that overlaps with the policy and political dimensions. If these

dimensions were brought into the model, the 67 percent proportion of variance that is now identified only with service would decrease to the extent that it is shared with the policy and political arenas. Therefore sixty-seven percent is probably an over-statement of the "pure" effect of services – by how much we do not know.

We were aware, when designing the research, that omitting policy and political issues would leave this question open. The topics were excluded for two reasons. One is simply that they would require substantial additional measures. *Citizens First* is a lengthy survey, and adding more material was not an option. Neither is replacing questions that were already there – each existing section of the survey has enthusiastic supporters who require their valued questions for measuring progress and advancing service delivery. In addition, *Citizens First*'s mandate is clearly focused on service quality, and does not presently extend to other areas. Fitting the additional pieces into the puzzle therefore remains as an intriguing future challenge.

As important as further research is to expanding our knowledge about the link between service satisfaction and confidence in government, the value of the model emerging here should not be underestimated. For the first time, the variables at play in this relationship have been probed and the strength of what has been found is striking. This finding is strong enough to suggest that the service agenda is a key component that needs to be carefully advanced in order to ensure a strong, successful democratic government in our country.

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[10] Causation is frequently unidirectional. Consider "viruses cause colds", "experience leads to wisdom", "wealth causes happiness".

Does confidence in government affect perceptions of service quality?

The model establishes a firm link from experience with services to confidence in government. Does the connection also run the other way? Do individuals with high confidence in government perceive public services as better than those with less confidence?

In fact, the link goes mainly in one direction.[10] Good service creates a positive view of government, but citizens' overall confidence in government has a barely measurable impact on their ratings of individual government services. The survey results that speak to this issue appear in Chapter 4.

In a word

Service quality matters. It matters to the quality of the lives of clients and citizens and it shapes how people view their government. While there are likely other factors that also shape this view, we now know with certainty that service reputation, the degree to which government services are seen to be of benefit, and the extent to which the services meet individuals' needs are all related to overall views of government. Whether we call this public trust or confidence in government or general views of government, an important new relationship has been uncovered.

But, as important as it is to know that service matters, it isn't enough. This understanding has to extend to include information on what good service looks like – what clients and citizens expect from governments.
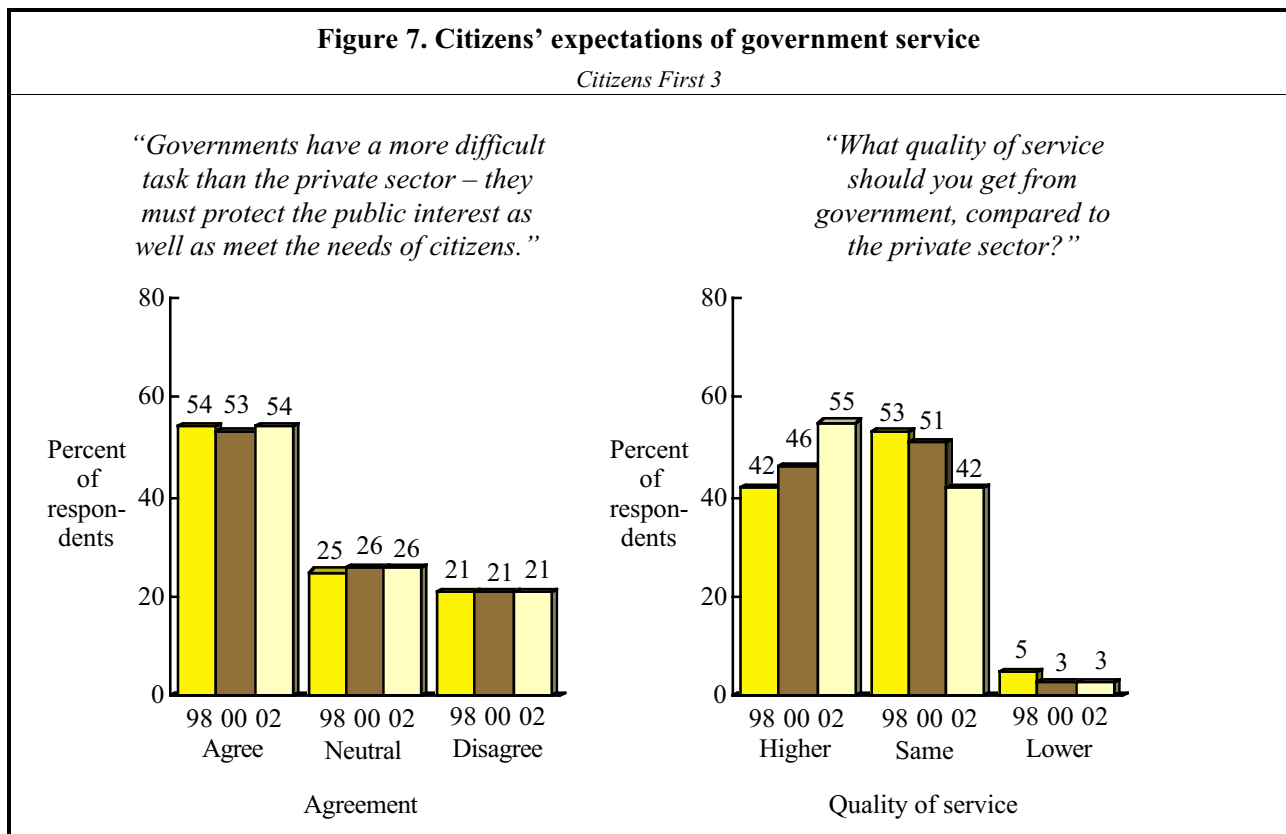
3. What do citizens expect from governments?

Previous editions of *Citizens First* reveal a paradox in the way citizens view governments. On the one hand, most citizens recognize that governments have a more difficult job than the private sector – governments must protect the public interest as well as meet the needs of citizens. At the same time, citizens hold that governments should provide a higher level of service than private sector organizations.

The *Citizens First 3* results show that this discrepancy continues to grow (Figure 7). While the appreciation of government's more difficult

task has remained constant since 1998, increasing numbers of Canadians are expecting better service from governments. The proportion who expect better service has now climbed past the half-way mark of the population, from 42 percent in 1998 to 55 percent today.

In Chapter 2 it was shown how strongly service quality affects citizens' overall assessment of governments. The fact that expectations of government service quality are increasing adds further weight to the service agenda.

Figure 7. Citizens' expectations of government service

Citizens First 3

"Governments have a more difficult task than the private sector – they must protect the public interest as well as meet the needs of citizens."

"What quality of service should you get from government, compared to the private sector?"

There are several possible reasons for the increase. Many governments have made serious efforts to improve services and have communicated their activities widely to citizens – who have apparently received the message. The advent of Internet services may also have raised expectations. Finally, as Chapter 10 documents, service quality has improved significantly since 1998 – perhaps expectations are simply keeping pace with citizens' experience.

The data reveal some interesting dynamics at the demographic level. While noteworthy in their own right, none of these explains why the bar has been raised so dramatically in recent years.

Gender:
More women than men expect a high level of service. In 2002, 59 percent of women and 52 percent of men said governments should provide better service. In 2000, 50 percent of women and 42 percent of men took this position. Both groups changed by similar amounts.

Age:
Older people, especially those over age 65, tend to expect a higher level of service from government. The increase in expectation has been universal, i.e. all age groups changed by similar amounts from 2000 to 2002. (Canada's aging population could, over time, contribute to increased expectations for government service quality, however the actual increase in expectation is occurring at a faster rate than the aging of the population.)

Region:
Expectations rose in all regions, but most strongly in Ontario and Western Canada (Figure 8).

Income:
Expectations are higher among lower income groups, especially those with family incomes less than $30,000, however the change from 2000 to 2002 was similar for all income groups.

Figure 8. Expectation of better public service by region

Citizens First 3

Percent who expect better service from governmments than from the private sector

Region	2000	2002
West	45	55
Ontario	48	62
Quebec	42	46
Atlantic	55	62

REGION
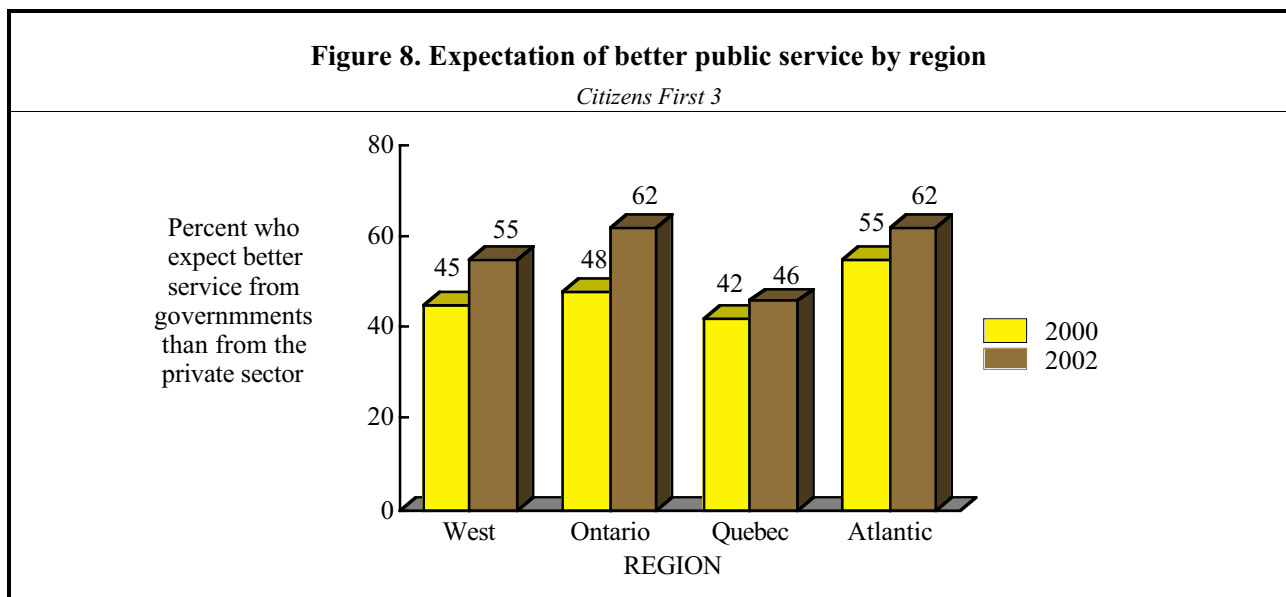
Views on government and government services

To round out this first phase of the report, Figure 9 summarizes responses to the opinion statements presented thus far (and a few that will appear later in this report). Together, these general views and expectations provide an overview of the mood in Canada about the quality of what is offered by government. In spite of recent improvements in government services (see Chapter 10), they paint a picture in which there is great room for progress. Citizens are expecting more from their governments.

This seems to be the case for all types of respondents. The survey collected complete demographic information on respondents, including age, gender, region, family income, education, and other variables. With very few exceptions, demographic differences in response to these opinion statements are small to non-existent. As one interesting example, responses to the question, "Services that I get from governments meet my needs" do not vary with family income; those with incomes under $30,000 consider themselves as well served as those in the $90,000 plus bracket.

Figure 9. Summary of views on government and government services

Citizens First 3

Statement	Disagree	Neither	Agree
My view of govt is shaped by service quality	16	27	56
Govts have more difficult task than private sector	21	26	54
I can readily access any govt service I need	26	41	33
Services that I get from govt meet my needs	28	41	30
Govt services have a positive effect on me, family	30	41	30
I believe governments do a good job	41	40	19
Govts are responsive to the needs of citizens	45	36	19
I get good value for my tax dollars	52	32	16
Governments are open and accountable	56	29	15

In a word

Clients and citizens receiving public services in Canada expect that the services they receive will be superior to those they get from the private sector. While expectations are high, many feel that the services they receive do not meet their needs, are not good value, and do not provide major benefit. Understanding these expectations is the first step toward making the kinds of improvements that matter most - improvements that have the greatest chance of driving satisfaction upward. These improvements are the subject of the next chapter.

4. What drives citizens' satisfaction with government services?

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE

- *Services seem to be delivered in a more timely fashion than they were a year ago.*

- *Once you get to the government person you really need to talk to, they're awesome in their friendliness and helpfulness.*

- *Most people who deliver government services care about the users.*

- *The staff were very knowledgeable and very helpful. We never had to wait to see someone.*

- *The vast majority of government employees are honest, accountable, intelligent and hard working.*

- *Government service is adequate, reliable and becoming faster.*

- *I receive CPP and OAS payments each month. These are deposited in my bank account regularly. I appreciate receiving them this way.*

- *I appreciate 1-800 O Canada – one access number to call to get in touch with the right government service. I also like to use websites for 24/7 access to government services.*

- *I found the people I dealt with kind and helpful. They were patient when I wasn't sure of something.*

- *Do not make people a number. Have more person-to-person contact.*

- *Respond promptly to enquiries. If a delay is anticipated, let the citizens know that the resolution of the matter will take some time.*

- *Dealing with the passport office, I was originally told that my Government of Canada Department of National Defence birth certificate was sufficient to send. Imagine my surprise when I was contacted personally and told other documentation would be required. Those working at the office in Hull are to be commended for continued communication until the matter was resolved!*

Knowing what drives citizens' satisfaction with government services is critical in light of the two following facts:

1. Satisfaction with government services contributes powerfully to citizens' confidence in government. The quantitative model in Chapter 2 is proof of this.

2. Satisfaction with government services currently averages about 65 out of 100 (though scores for individual services range above and below this mark – see Chapter 10). If satisfaction were 80 out of 100, the task might seem less urgent, but an average mark of 65 leaves ample room to improve.

The conclusion then, is that improving service quality will pay off in terms of more satisfied citizens – which is good in itself – and also in terms of a more positive overall perception of governments.

What, then, drives satisfaction with government services?

The ambitious goal that was originally defined in *Citizens First 1998* was to provide an empirical answer to this question: Is there a set of attributes that are critical to service quality in all major services that governments provide? This was a bold agenda, as there was no guarantee that any such set of attributes existed. There was a clear possibility that the quest would fail – that there was no common denominator underlying satisfaction with services ranging from public transit to libraries to passport applications.

The 1998 study proved successful. It identified a set of five elements that were important across all levels of government and more than one hundred diverse services.

These five "drivers of satisfaction" were timeliness, competence, going the extra mile, fairness, and outcome. When the service delivery process did well on each of these five elements, satisfaction scores were typically more than 80 out of 100. The fact that satisfaction scores for government services currently average in the 60s reflects, to a large extent, that services do not consistently perform well on all of the five drivers.

Method for identifying drivers of satisfaction

The current *Citizens First* project replicates the analysis of drivers in order to confirm and extend the original findings. It follows the same general method as the earlier 1998 and 2000 studies. Respondents are first asked to select any recent government service that they consider of interest, be it simple or complex, happy or not. More than 6,000 respondents participated in this portion of the survey, and the top-of-mind experiences they describe do, in fact, run the gamut of public sector services. Table 1 shows the proportion of respondents who described each of 62 different types of service. Having selected a specific service experience, respondents then answered a series of 43 questions about it.

Table 1. Service experiences of respondents

Citizens First 3

Service	%	Service	%
MUNICIPAL & PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL SERVICES		Public libraries	2
Education		**Utilities and transportation**	
Colleges and universities	2	Automobile insurance	1
Job training, apprenticeship programs	1	Drinking water treatment and distribution	<1
Publicly funded schools	1	Garbage collection, waste transfer	1
Student loans, bursaries	2	Recycling	1
Health and emergency services	1	Public transit: bus, streetcar, subway	1
Ambulance services	<1	Road construction, maintenance	1
Fire department	1	Sewage and waste water treatment	<1
Health card application / renewal	4	**Other**	
Hospitals	9	Agricultural services	<1
Health care outside hospitals	3	Small business startup services	1
Mental health services	1	**Quebec**	
Public health	2	Régie des rentes du Québec (RRQ)	<1
Justice and enforcement		Revenue Québec	1
Municipal police force	1	Centres locaux d'emploi (CLE)	<1
Provincial/Territorial Courts	1	Communication Québec	<1
Provincial/Territorial jails, probation and parole	<1	**FEDERAL SERVICES**	
Provincial Police (OPP, Sûreté du Québec, RNC)	<1	Access 1-800-O-Canada etc	1
Licenses and permits	<1	Canada Customs and Revenue Agency	9
Birth, marriage, death certificates	3	(formerly Revenue Canada)	
Building permits and inspections:	2	Canada Pension/Old Age Security	4
Hunting and fishing licences	2	Canada Post	2
Motor vehicle registration, drivers' licences	14	Citizenship services	1
Planning and land development	1	Coast Guard	<1
Property tax collection	1	Customs and Immigration border services	1
Social Services		Employment Insurance (EI)	6
Emergency shelters and hostels	<1	Federal Courts	<1
Family services, counselling, children's aid	1	National Parole Board, federal prisons	<1
Public housing	<1	Financial Services CMHC, CDIC etc	<1
Public or subsidized day care	<1	Health Canada: Information	1
Social assistance, welfare	1	Human Resource Centres of Canada	1
Workers' compensation, injured worker programs	1	Canada Information Office, Statistics Canada	<1
Recreation and culture		NFB, National Museums, Galleries	<1
Municipal parks, recreation and heritage	1	National Parks	1
Provincial/territorial museums, art galleries, etc.	1	Passports	6
Provincial/territorial parks, campgrounds	5	RCMP	<1

Figure 10. Ratings of service quality for the chosen services
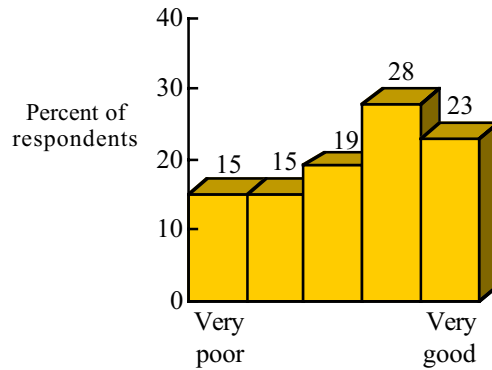
Citizens First 3

Figure 10 shows how the more than six thousand respondents who completed this portion of the survey rated the service experiences that they chose. Some had very good experiences, some had very poor experiences, and the majority encountered something in between. What makes the difference between a happy service experience and a dismal one? The remainder of this section is a comprehensive examination of this question. We consider a large set of potential contributors and ask, in each instance:

• Does this factor make a difference to service quality?

• If so, how much?

The set of elements analyzed in this review includes:

• Is the service mandatory (e.g. filing a tax return) or discretionary (e.g. visiting a provincial park)?

• Is the service new or familiar?

• Do some delivery channels produce higher satisfaction scores than others?

• How many channels do customers typically use?

• What level or levels of government were involved?

• Was the service easy or difficult to access?

• Do characteristics of the staff who provided the service have an impact, i.e. were they courteous, competent etc?

• Do demographic factors such as region, age, gender and income play a role?

The drivers of satisfaction are confirmed

We begin with the strongest results. Five aspects of the service delivery process are primarily responsible for creating satisfied or dissatisfied clients (Table 2). These "drivers of satisfaction" remain unchanged from 1998 and 2000. They account for 66 percent of the variance in satisfaction with the service received – a very solid result[11].

Timeliness has the greatest impact on satisfaction scores, while the other four drivers are similar in strength.

Table 2. The five drivers of satisfaction

Citizens First 3

Driver

TIMELINESS
> *I was satisfied with the amount of time it took to get the service*

KNOWLEDGE, COMPETENCE
> *Staff were knowledgeable and competent*

STAFF WERE COURTEOUS/ WENT THE EXTRA MILE
> *Staff were courteous/went the extra mile to make sure I got what I needed*

FAIRNESS
> *I was treated fairly*

OUTCOME
> *I got what I needed*

---

[11] Social science research never explains 100 percent of the variance in an event. In the present instance, some aspects of the service experience go unmeasured, as no set of survey questions can capture everything that is important about service quality. As well, respondents differ in their use of the 5-point response scale.
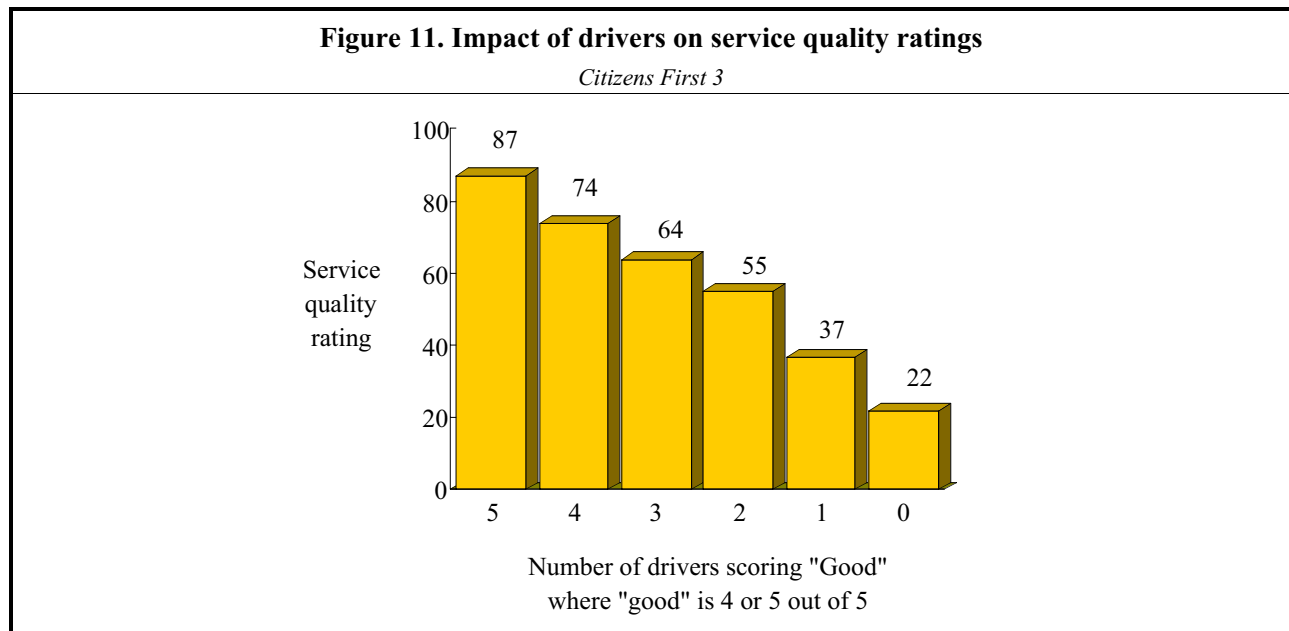
Impact of the drivers

Figure 11 illustrates the impact that the five drivers have on service quality ratings.

- The first bar represents citizens who received good service on each of the 5 drivers. "Good" is defined as a rating of either 4 or 5 out of 5. These citizens experienced timely service from knowledgeable staff who went the extra mile. They were treated fairly, and they got the outcome they were after. The result? They rated service quality, on average, at 87 out of 100!

- The second bar represents those who received good service on *any 4* of the 5 drivers (i.e., they rated one driver at 3 out of 5 or less). This group rated service quality, on average, at 74 out of 100.

- The third bar represents citizens who received good service on *any 3* of the 5 drivers. In this case the average service quality rating falls to 64 out of 100.

- When service is below par on all five drivers, service quality registers only 22 out of 100.

A high overall service quality rating does not demand perfect, five-out-of-five performance on the drivers. The standard used to construct this illustration is just four out of five on each measure, and this is not an unreasonable standard for service providers to aspire to. The secret is to provide consistently good service across the set of drivers, and not to let any elements fall below the four-out-of-five standard.

Figure 11. Impact of drivers on service quality ratings

Citizens First 3

Service quality rating — 87, 74, 64, 55, 37, 22

Number of drivers scoring "Good" where "good" is 4 or 5 out of 5: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0

Since these five elements determine service quality, the next logical question is this: how well are governments performing on them? Table 3 summarizes the results. Across all services and governments, timeliness scores just 51 out of 100. Timeliness has, by a slight margin, the lowest score of all the drivers, moreover it has the strongest impact on satisfaction. It follows that *improving timeliness presents the greatest single opportunity for improving government services*.

Courtesy/going the extra mile is a composite measure. The courtesy portion scores reasonably well, 71 out of 100, and the extra mile portion is lower, just 55 out of 100.

Outcome is the one driver where service organizations cannot always oblige the customer. To simplify, a negative outcome can occur in either legitimate or questionable situations:

- **Legitimate negative outcomes:**
  The customer failed the driving exam; the rezoning application had no merit; the park campground was full, etc.

- **Questionable negative outcomes** (examples are from the research):
  The "closed for the day" phone message was in effect 20 minutes before closing time; the driving exam centre had no record of the pre-booked appointment when the person arrived to take the test; the roadside ditch that overflowed onto the citizen's property was never fixed.

Table 3. How citizens rated performance on the drivers of satisfaction		
Citizens First 3		
Driver		**Current performance**
		Satisfaction (0 – 100)
Timeliness:	Overall, how satisfied were you with the amount of time it took to get the service?	51
		Agreement (0 – 100)
Fairness:	I was treated fairly	69
Competence:	Staff were knowledgeable and competent	64
Courtesy/	Staff were courteous	71
Extra mile:	Staff went the extra mile to help me get what I needed	55
		Percent successful
Outcome:	I got what I needed	72

As a rule of thumb, an organization should not rest with scores under 80 on any critical scale, so there is room to grow with respect to timeliness, fairness, competence, and courtesy/extra mile. It is not possible to set any quantitative criterion with respect to outcome: organizations must strive to create positive outcomes in each instance where the client's goal is valid. When the outcome is negative, it is even more important for the other four drivers to be handled well – even negative outcomes can be dealt with in ways that generate more satisfying experiences. These performance scores are an average that applies to all services and all governments. Performance will vary widely across different services and governments. These results should therefore be regarded as a general guide to service improvement. One cannot go far wrong by following these principles, but on the other hand, many service providers do their own customer surveys. Those who do, can (and should) identify the drivers of satisfaction that operate in their own specific environments.

The Common Measurements Tool (CMT) has been designed to assist public sector organizations in two tasks, 1) conducting service quality research, and 2) benchmarking with comparable public sector service providers. The CMT is a model survey that contains a wide range of service quality questions. The questions can be used as is, or modified, or added to, in order to create the survey that is best for any organization. The CMT has been developed in parallel with the *Citizens First* research. *Citizens First* provides a global analysis of government services in Canada, while the CMT gives individual service organizations a template for

conducting their own client research. The CMT is available from the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service, www.iccs-isac.org. In addition to supporting CMT users, the Institute maintains a confidential database of CMT research results and provides benchmarking reports to participating organizations.

Confidence in government

Chapter 2 showed that service experiences go a long way toward shaping citizens' confidence in government. We can turn that assertion around and ask whether confidence in government affects citizens' perceptions of service quality each time they obtain a government service.

The four survey questions that constitute our measure of "confidence in government" are (from Figure 6):

- "I believe governments do a good job"
- "Governments are responsive to the needs of citizens"
- "Governments in this country conduct their business in an open and accountable manner"
- "I get good value for my tax dollars".

The test is to add this composite measure of confidence in with the five drivers and determine if it contributes to the explanation of service quality scores. It does, but only to a minute degree. It does not approach the impact of the drivers.

Is there a case to be made for admitting "confidence in government " as a sixth driver? There is no practical reason to do so. The original five are useful because service providers

can act to improve them: they can make service faster, ensure fairness, and so on. Service providers can do nothing at all about the overall views of government that clients hold prior to the service encounter.

So, interestingly, the link between service quality and confidence in government goes mainly in one direction. Good service creates a positive view of government, but citizens' overall confidence in government has a barely measurable impact on their ratings of individual government service.

Drivers and channels

It is often asked whether the drivers of satisfaction differ across service delivery channels. This apparently simple question immediately raises the same issue that complicates any comparison of service delivery channels, that is, the confounding of channels and services. Clients get a somewhat different range of services via telephone than they do in government offices or on the Internet or in the mail. Difference in drivers will therefore result partly from the mix of services associated with the channel and partly from the characteristics of the channel itself.

Table 4. Drivers of satisfaction in four service delivery channels	
Citizens First 3	
Channel	**Drivers**
Telephone	I was satisfied with the amount of time it took
	Staff went the extra mile
	I got clear and accurate information
	I got what I needed
Visit an office	I was satisfied with the amount of time it took
	Staff were courteous
	Staff were knowledgeable and competent
	I got what I needed
Mail	I was satisfied with the amount of time it took
	I got clear and accurate information
Internet (from Chapter 8)	It is easy to find what I'm looking for
	I got what I needed
	It is visually appealing
	It has all the information I need

Table 4 shows drivers for four individual channels. For clarity, only those respondents who used a single channel are included in the analysis. It is apparent that the drivers do differ among channels (or, more accurately, among the service-and-channel combinations). Timeliness appears as a driver in each channel. (In the Internet context, "It's easy to find what I'm looking for" bears on timeliness.) As well, there is a driver in each channel that expresses some aspect of the information theme – that the information is clear and accurate or that staff were knowledgeable or that the information is available.

Fairness is the only one of the five original drivers that does not appear anywhere in this channel-by-channel analysis. The probable reason is that only single-channel service experiences were used, in order to clearly separate the channels. This tends to skew the sample towards quick, routine services, where fairness is less likely to be an issue than it is with longer and more complex services.

In a word

The drivers of satisfaction are the variables in a service experience that have the biggest impact on satisfaction. When an organization performs well on each of these dimensions, very high satisfaction scores are obtained. The key drivers found in 1998 and 2000 have been confirmed in *Citizens First 3*: timeliness, knowledge/competence, extra smile/extra mile, fairness, and outcome. These drivers are based on citizens' experiences across all government services and all delivery channels. Managers can use this information to direct their service improvement strategies. They can, in addition, conduct research to identify the specific drivers for their services, which may differ somewhat from the universal drivers reported here.

5. How do service delivery channels affect satisfaction?

> ## *THE CITIZEN'S VOICE*
>
> - *What is really frustrating is when you phone any level of government, you have to go through all the number punching and you can't to talk to a real person.*
>
> - *When you phone the provincial government, you can talk to a real person right away. The City of Regina has one inquiry line – this is very helpful. They put you through to the person who can help or get that person to return your call. The City should be commended for this excellent service.*
>
> - *It is nice having on-line access to services like the library, city archives and the universities.*
>
> - *I really like the Blue Pages in the phone book. I have also used the 1-800 information line throughout the years and have found it to be excellent.*
>
> - *Electronic resources have lots of potential, but flashy, game oriented websites are insulting and wasteful. We want real information, content not flash.*
>
> - *I like anything that can be done by Internet. Don't waste my time standing in line ups.*
>
> - *Use Internet more, especially for information delivery and routine services.*
>
> - *Staff answering inquiries must be well trained to avoid different people giving different information.*
>
> - *J'adore aussi, lorsque j'appel au bureau des passeports, que l'on me dise combien de personnes en ligne il reste avant que l'on me réponde.*
>
> - *I really like using the kiosks in malls around Ontario. It really makes things more convenient.*
>
> - *If they can't help, they readily forward you to someone or some department that might help (unfortunately, often through the "voice mail jail" again).*
>
> - *I like the Internet access as it increases the hours of availability and the amount of information available (the trick is finding it).*

Today's service environment provides customers with a greater choice of service delivery channels than ever before, but it creates corresponding challenges in channel management for service organizations. Some of the questions that arise are:

- What channels do clients prefer?

- Does satisfaction suffer if clients must use a channel other than the one they prefer?

- To what extent do clients use multiple channels to get a single service?

Citizens First 3 contained a range of items to help further our knowledge in this area. Part of the information that respondents supplied when describing their "recent experience" with government service was to identify the channels that they used and how many contacts they made in each.

How many channels do clients use?

Across the spectrum of services, respondents used an average of 1.9 channels to obtain the recent service they described. Half used a single channel while half used two or more channels (Figure 12). These results show a high level of multiple channel activity and emphasize that understanding the relationship between channels and the service experience is critical to service improvement.

As one example, a client who calls on the phone may simultaneously be looking at the organization's website. Clearly, the person who takes the phone call needs to know everything that is (and is not) available on line. Modern call centres and service counters are now designed to integrate multiple channels, but creating an environment of seamless channel transitions remains a challenge in almost every service area.

Figure 12. Use of multiple channels

Citizens First 3
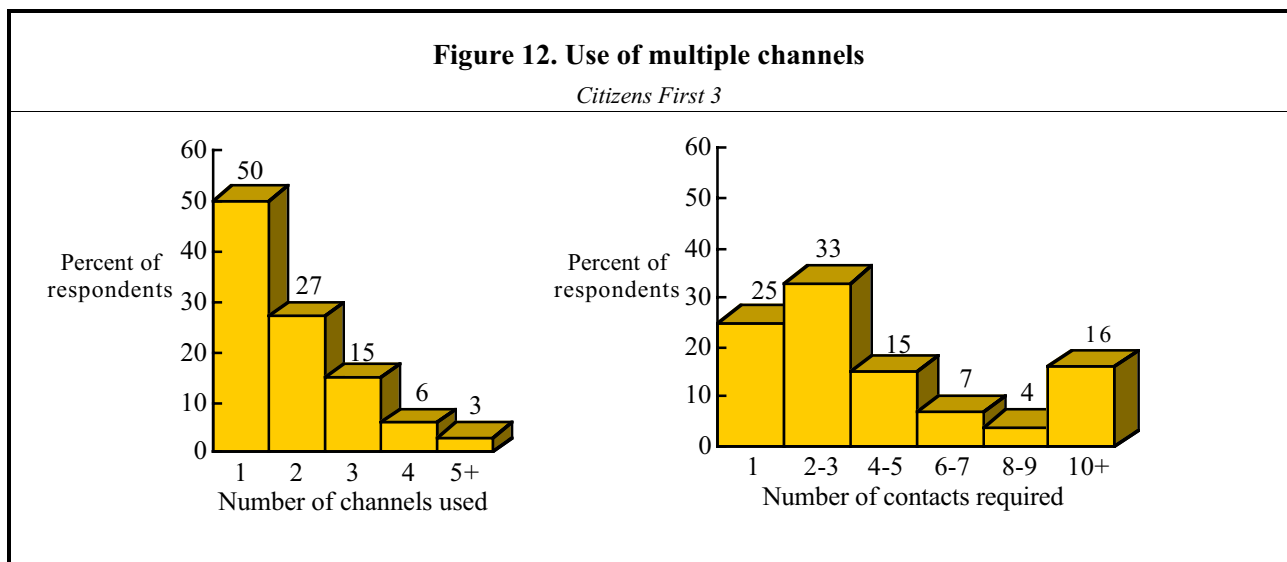
We can also consider the number of contacts that it takes to get a service. If several contacts are involved, they may all be within one channel or they may be spread across different channels. As Figure 12 shows, one-quarter of services were completed on the initial contact and more than half were completed within three contacts.

An interesting feature of Figure 12 is the final column, which shows that 16 percent of respondents took 10 or more contacts to get their service. This group deserves a brief look.

In the first place, respondents who took 10-plus contacts are concentrated in the electronic channels. Among those who identify the Internet as their primary channel for obtaining the service, 30 percent made 10 or more contacts. Among those who used email, the proportion is 26 percent. In the traditional channels, the proportions who required 10-plus contacts are

much lower: 16 percent of those who got their service principally by telephone and 10 percent of those who got the service principally by office visits.

Secondly, these 10-plus experiences cluster into several service areas. They include CCRA (income tax services), student loans, university/college applications, job searches, job training, social assistance, employment insurance, mental health, workers' compensation, planning and land development, and the justice system. To clarify, this set of experiences divides roughly into three groups:

• Electronic services such as computer job searches, university/college applications and student loans, and information searches. In each of these instances, a single contact involves relatively little time or effort.

Table 5. Overall use of different channels		
Citizens First 3		
Channel	**Number**	**Percent**
Phone	3,439	55
Visit an office	3,019	48
Internet	1,870	30
Mail	1,562	25
Email	528	8
Fax	304	5
Kiosk	293	5
Other (e.g, a visit to a museum)	538	9
Total respondents	6,231	–

Percentages add to more than 100 as some respondents used several channels.

- Lengthy processes involving tax issues, permissions, and searches for records (birth, death certificates etc). Some of these are seemingly routine procedures that become problematic for one reason or another.

- More complex human problems involving social assistance, medical, and legal issues.

When separated in this way, the experiences associated with high numbers of contacts are more understandable. Some, such as computer job searches, are no cause for concern. Others reflect problems that were difficult to begin with, or that became difficult when routine processes broke down.

What channels are most common?

Across the spectrum of all government services, the telephone was the most frequent channel, being used in 55 percent of all the services reported (see Table 5). Office visits were a part of 48 percent of the services reported, and the Internet was involved in 30 percent.[12]

Table 6. Use of different channels *Citizens First 3*			
	Percent of respondents who used…		
Channel	**1 channel**	**2 channels**	**3+ channels**
Phone	30	71	90
Visit an office	39	49	69
Internet	10	33	70
Mail	5	29	65
Email	1	6	28
Fax	<1	3	18
Kiosk	4	5	5
Other (e.g, museums, parks, hospital stays, transit, etc)	11	6	6
Total	100	200	351
Number of respondents	3,092	1,696	1,443

The 2-channel column adds to 200 percent because each person used two services. The 3+ column adds to 351 because respondents in this group used an average of 3.5 channels.

[12] These percentages describe channel usage *in the services that respondents chose to report*. Because respondents tended to choose services that were meaningful in some way, these percentages do not necessarily reflect the actual proportions of contacts that occur.
In fact, there are no definitive statistics on the number of contacts that occur in each channel, but it would seem likely that the 25 percent figure for mail may be low and the 48 percent figure for office visits may be high. Such discrepancies would occur if, when choosing a service to report, respondents tended to pass over routine mail contacts such as remitting a payment, in favour of more memorable services that involved a visit to an office and interaction with the staff in that office.

It is instructive to break this overall pattern down. In Table 6, the column labeled "1 channel" describes those who used a single channel to get the service. Office visits are the most frequent means of access (39 percent of respondents), followed closely by the telephone (30 percent of respondents).

For people who used two channels, the telephone was the most frequent contact (71 percent of respondents), and it remains the most frequent means of contact among those who used three or more channels.

Channels and satisfaction

The possible link between service delivery channels and satisfaction has been an intriguing topic for some years. The fascination arises partly because it is so difficult to answer with any certainty. Theories are plentiful but convincing evidence is scarce. The central problem, which has been mentioned already, is that different channels are associated with different services; the pure effect of the service delivery channel – if there is one – is hard to tease out.

Table 7. Service quality when customers use a single channel		
Citizens First 3		
Channel	**Percent who used the channel**	**Service quality (0 - 100)**
Internet/email	11	68
Office visit	39	62
Kiosk	4	62
Phone	30	56
Mail	5	55
Other (parks libraries, police etc)	11	54
Fax	<1	-
Total	100	59
Base number of respondents	3,092	

Citizens First 3 provides an excellent cross section of channels and services to test this link. This chapter provides an analysis across all service delivery channels, and Chapter 8 takes an in-depth look at the Internet.

Table 7 shows service quality ratings for clients who used just one channel to get service. There is a spread across channels of 14 points out of 100, from 68 for Internet/email down to 54 for the somewhat unstructured "other" category.[13] This may appear to be a large range, but in fact the delivery channel accounts for just 1.5 percent of the variance in service quality ratings. (This signifies that there is a wide range of scores *within* each channel. If, for example, Internet scores were *consistently* higher while mail and telephone scores were *consistently* lower, the proportion of variance accounted for would be greater.) Note that Table 7 does not control for the fact that each channel provides a somewhat different range of services. The Internet, for example, has a higher proportion of discretionary services than the other channels, and discretionary services tend to get higher service quality scores than mandatory services. Taking influences such as this into account would lessen the difference among channels, so an effect that is rather weak to begin with would likely become even smaller.

To continue the analysis, Table 8 through Table 10 show satisfaction for different combinations of channels. To simplify the presentation, these combinations leave out the fax and kiosk, which are the least frequently used channels, as well as the "other" category.

The outstanding feature of these tables is that the telephone is always associated with lower service quality scores. No other channel shares this distinction. If we compare all those who used the telephone, singly or in combination with other channels, and all those who did not use the telephone, there is a difference of 8 points out of 100 (scores of 54 and 62 respectively). This does suggest a problem with telephone services, and the following section pinpoints its roots.

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[13] The "other" category is diverse and includes visits to parks, libraries, hospitals and other locations, fire and police services, contacts with elected officials, and more.

Table 8. Service quality when clients use two channels
Citizens First 3

Channel	Number	Satisfaction Percent	(0 - 100)
Net and mail	70	5	68
Office and mail	107	8	65
Office and net	116	8	62
Phone and net	262	19	60
Phone and mail	289	21	57
Office and phone	550	39	55
Total	1,394	100	58

Table 9. Service quality when clients use three channels
Citizens First 3

Channel	Number	Satisfaction Percent	(0 - 100)
Office, net, mail	38	11	79
Phone, net, mail	134	37	57
Office, phone, net	212	59	56
Office, phone, mail	240	68	46
Total	624	100	54

Table 10. Service quality when clients use four channels
Citizens First 3

Channel	Number	Satisfaction Percent	(0 - 100)
Office, phone, net, mail	154	100	58

What's wrong with the telephone?

It is beginning to look suspiciously like there is some inherent characteristic of the telephone that leads to lower satisfaction. Fortunately, this hypothesis can be tested.

Since the five drivers of satisfaction are the basis of satisfaction ratings, the first step is to determine whether the apparent telephone effect exists *in addition to* the drivers. The answer is clear: controlling for the effects of the drivers leaves no significant difference between the telephone and other channels. When performance on all five drivers is at a reasonable level, satisfaction with the telephone channel is as high as satisfaction with other channels. This holds true in the single-channel situation and also in the two-and three-channel clusters. In other words, the answer to the question, "What's wrong with the telephone" lies in the 5 drivers.

Further analysis shows that performance on three of the drivers is worse in the telephone context than it is in other channels (Figure 13). These performance differences entirely explain the telephone's lower satisfaction scores.
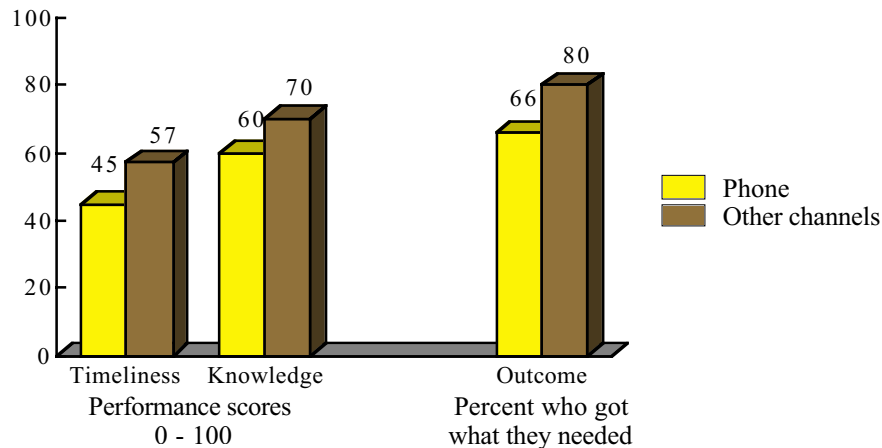
Clients who used the telephone:

• Rate timeliness lower

• Rate staff knowledge/competence lower

• Have fewer positive outcomes.

In a fascinating parallel, the telephone has a similar detrimental effect on ease of access. When customers use the telephone, either by itself or in combination with other channels, access scores are low. The pattern of access scores across channels is very similar to the pattern of satisfaction scores discussed here, but the explanation as to why the telephone affects access scores is different. These results appear in Chapter 7.

Figure 13. Differences on drivers between the telephone and other channels

Citizens First 3

Legend: Phone, Other channels

Timeliness: Phone 45, Other channels 57
Knowledge: Phone 60, Other channels 70
Outcome: Phone 66, Other channels 80

Performance scores 0 - 100 (Timeliness, Knowledge)
Percent who got what they needed (Outcome)

Channel allegiance

Respondents were asked which of the several channels available was their principal mode of contact, and which channel they would prefer to use if they were to get that same service again.[14]

Results appear in Table 11, which reads as follows: Among those whose principal channel in getting the service was an office visit, 76 percent would elect to use the office route again, while 6 percent would prefer to get the service by phone, 11 percent would prefer to use the Internet, and so on.

Overall, almost three-quarters of respondents preferred the mode of contact that they used as their principal mode of contact, while one-quarter (27 percent) would like to switch.

- The Internet has the highest allegiance by a slight margin: 81 percent of those who got the service via the Internet would prefer to use it again.

- Mail has the lowest allegiance, with just 51 percent of those who used it preferring to use it again.

Table 11. Principal and preferred modes of contact
Citizens First 3

Preferred mode
(Table entries are row percentages):

Principal mode	Office	Phone	Internet	Email	Mail	Kiosk	Row total
Office visit	**76**	6	11	2	3	1	2,132
Phone	11	**73**	9	5	2	–	1,969
Internet	5	8	**81**	6	1	–	833
Email	7	9	9	**75**	–	–	88
Mail	11	14	14	8	**51**	1	408
Kiosk	7	3	19	2	3	**65**	152

---

[14] Results omit the "Other" delivery option, which contains visits to parks or use of public transit, and where the idea of a "delivery channel" does not apply in the usual sense of the term.

Table 12 summarizes where people would like to switch to. Among the one-quarter who would like to change, half would go to an electronic method - 35 percent to the Internet and 16 percent to email.

Note that the results in Table 11 and Table 12 cannot be generalized too far. Clients who visited an office were seeking a somewhat different set of services than those who used the net or the phone. We need to keep in mind the fact that channels and services are not independent.

Preferred channel and satisfaction

Getting the service by your preferred channel has some impact on satisfaction. The two-thirds of respondents who did get the service primarily through their preferred channel gave a mean service quality score of 61 out of 100. The one-third who got the service via a non-preferred channel had a mean satisfaction score of 49.

This result argues in favour of providing customers with a choice of channels, where this is possible.

Table 12. Channel preferences of those who would like to switch
Citizens First 3

Number / percent who would switch to:

	Office	Phone	Internet	Email	Mail	Kiosk	N
Number of respondents	318	276	524	239	101	32	1,490
Percentage	21	19	35	16	7	2	100

Discretionary versus mandatory services: a further exploration

The discussion above regarding the Internet channel raised the question of differences related to discretionary services (e.g. visiting a provincial park) or mandatory services (e.g. filing taxes). Many services can have both elements, for example health, education and public transit. Not surprisingly, discretionary services garner higher ratings than mandatory services (Figure 14).

The degree of choice in the service experience is not the only factor that arises at the beginning of a service encounter – the client's degree of familiarity with the service has also been suggested as a possible variable in service satisfaction. The question here is whether the client is using the service for the first time or whether they are more familiar with it. In contrast to the issue of choice, familiarity with the service has only a very small impact on service quality, with only three points separating the service quality ratings of those using the service for the first time as compared to those more familiar with the service.

Figure 14. Quality ratings for discretionary and mandatory services

Citizens First 3
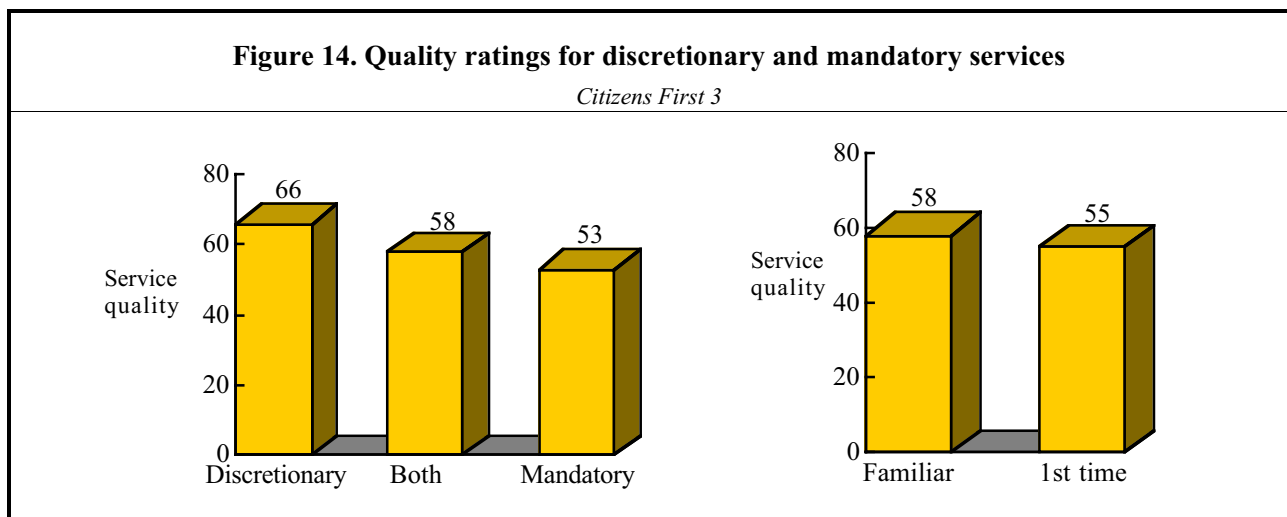
As Table 13 shows, the proportion of services that are discretionary differs across channels, being highest for Internet and email users.

In a word

Government services are complex. One-half involve two or more service delivery channels and three-quarters require more than one contact. In this mix, the telephone is the most commonly used channel and also the one with the lowest satisfaction ratings. These lower scores follow from poorer performance on three of the drivers of satisfaction: timeliness, staff knowledge/competence, and outcome. While most clients are able to get service in their preferred delivery channel, one-quarter do not. It is important to offer a range of channels due to differences in channel preference, but where multiple channels are offered, the information they provide must be consistent and the transitions between them seamless. Managing in a multi-channel world has high requirements. The Internet, the newest and least well-understood channel, adds to the complexity. Does it provide better service?

Table 13. Use of discretionary and mandatory services by principal mode of contact

Citizens First 3

Channel	Percent of respondents for whom the service was:		
	Discretionary	**Mandatory**	**Both**
Email	51	16	33
Internet	40	22	39
Kiosk	34	48	18
Fax	25	46	29
Other	26	44	30
Telephone	18	41	41
Regular mail	13	44	43
Office visit	11	56	33

6. Does the Internet improve satisfaction?

The claim that e-services lead to higher satisfaction than traditional channels is regarded as a self-evident truth by some, and is greeted with disdain by others. We will treat it as a hypothesis and attempt an empirical test, though it is a very difficult idea to test conclusively.
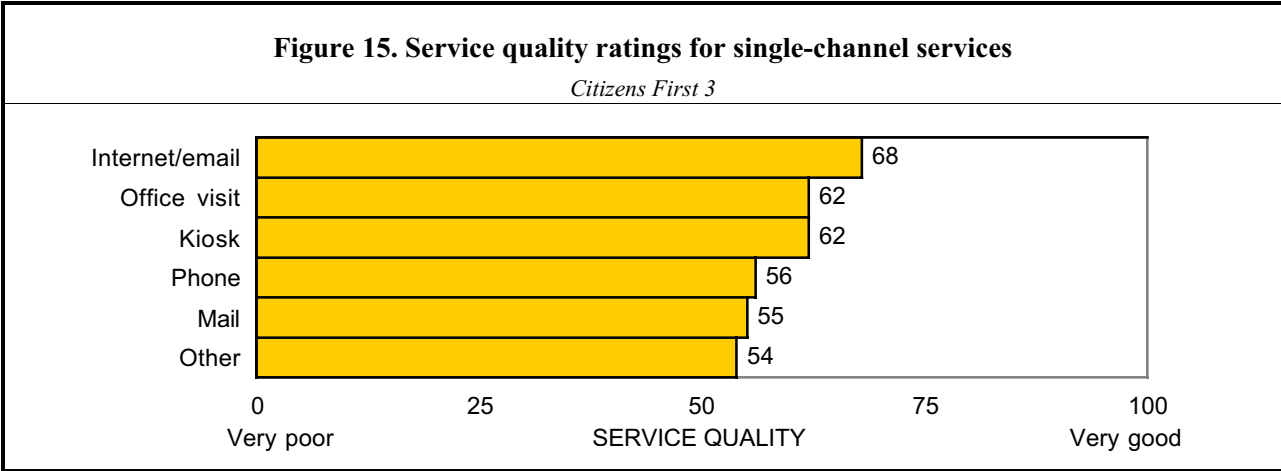
The tantalizing prospect raised by Internet services is this: if they really are better, governments could improve their service quality ratings by shifting all possible services to the Internet. There are other reasons for offering services electronically – cost, convenience etc. – but this discussion focuses on service quality.

The idea that the migration of services to the Internet would boost service quality ratings was discussed in previous *Citizens First* reports, but it was not tested then for lack of sufficient data.

In *Citizens First 3*, there is ammunition to at least begin this test. Using the "Recent Experience" data, we will compare service quality scores for people who reported the Internet as their principal service delivery mode, and for people who reported traditional channels – telephone, mail, in-person service, and fax – as their principal service delivery mode.

Across the entire spectrum of services, Internet services rate 68 out of 100 and traditional channels score somewhat less (Figure 15). The problem with this comparison is that the Internet and the traditional channels encompass different mixes of services. The Internet does not extend to hospital visits, encounters with police officers, snow removal, most of public education, and a host of other services. If the services that citizens get via traditional channels are inherently more complex or more laden than services offered on the Internet, then a difference in service quality scores would be expected.

Figure 15. Service quality ratings for single-channel services

Citizens First 3

Channel	Rating
Internet/email	68
Office visit	62
Kiosk	62
Phone	56
Mail	55
Other	54

SERVICE QUALITY (0 = Very poor, 100 = Very good)

The challenge is to untangle the overlapping effects of services and delivery channels. Three comparisons follow that offer some insight into the puzzle. They are:

- The number of contacts required to get the service,

- Whether the service is discretionary or mandatory, and

- Whether the outcome was successful or not.

Figure 16 illustrates a striking difference between Internet and traditional services. When customers get the service on their first contact, satisfaction is essentially equal on the Internet and in traditional modes. When the number of contacts required to get the service increases, satisfaction with traditional channels decreases rapidly. But there is no penalty for increased contacts on the Internet.

This makes sense – making an additional contact on the Internet is only a matter of a few clicks, while making an additional visit to an office could take hours. Even an additional telephone contact takes time if it involves negotiating an automatic answering system or waiting in a queue.

Still, the potential confounding effect of different types of service is present. The four or five contacts on the Internet are not likely to be particularly unpleasant. The contacts in traditional channels likely involve some that are difficult for the client because of the nature of the situation – a health issue, a meeting with a parole officer, or an accident.

The most revealing information in Figure 16 is the first pair of bars, which show no significant advantage of Internet services in simple situations.

Figure 16. Satisfaction and number of contacts
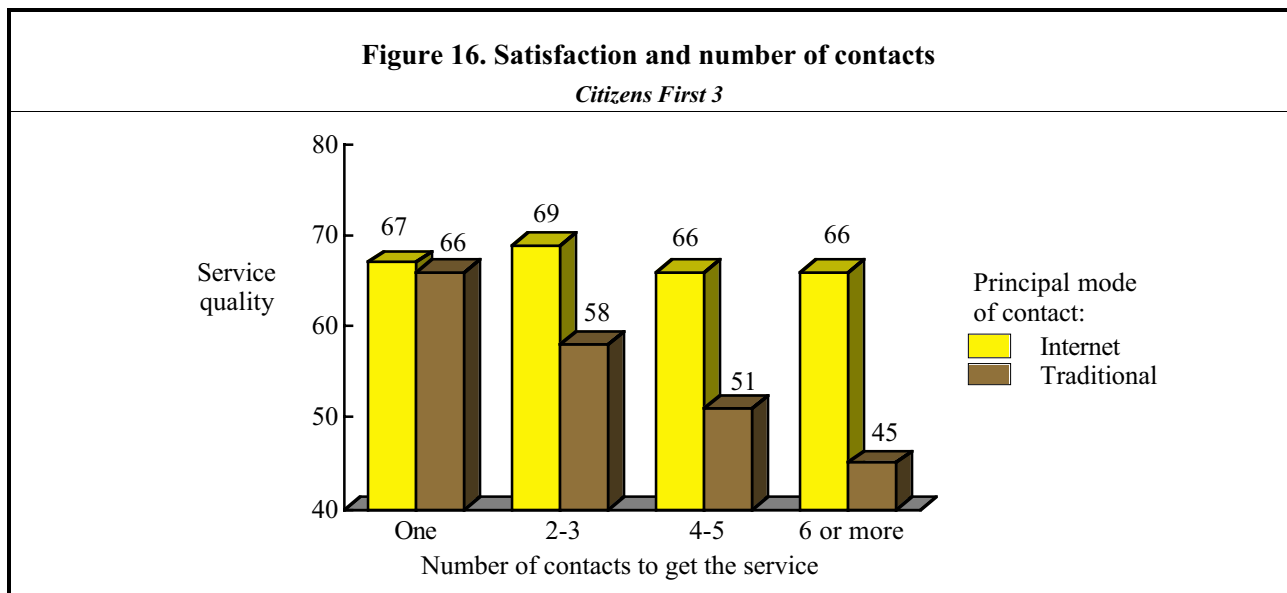
Citizens First 3

Figure 17 adds two other dimensions to the puzzle:

- Was the service mandatory versus discretionary?
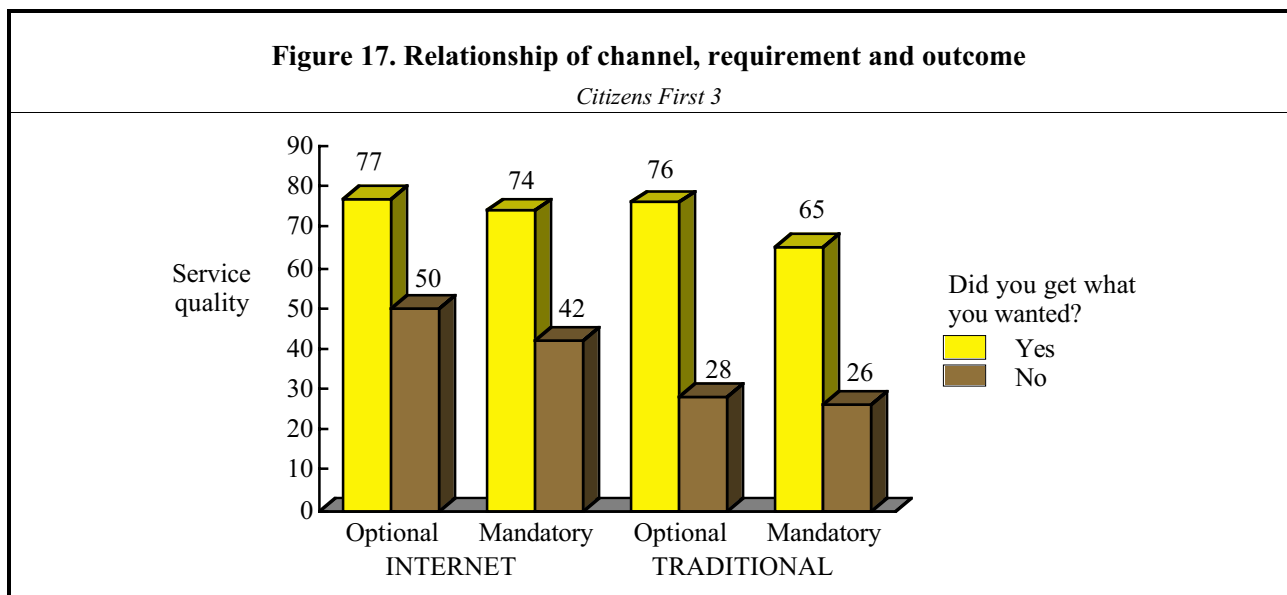
- Was the outcome successful or not?

In the happy situation where the service is discretionary and the outcome is positive, service quality scores are similar on the Internet and in traditional channels (means of 77 and 76 out of 100). When either of these elements changes, the Internet and traditional channels diverge:

- **Discretionary *versus* mandatory services:**
  Ratings for discretionary and mandatory service are similar on the Internet (means of 77 and 74 – not a statistically significant difference).

  Ratings differ significantly, however, in traditional channels (76 *vs* 65).

Why should there be a greater penalty for mandatory services on traditional channels? A possible reason is that the customer invests more time and effort in going to an office or writing a letter than when using the Internet. The requirement to obtain the service presents a greater disruption to daily life.

- **Successful *versus* unsuccessful outcome:**
  The penalty for an unsuccessful outcome is in the range of 25 to 30 points for Internet services, but it is even larger – 40 to 50 points – in traditional channels.

Why is the penalty for a negative outcome greater in traditional channels? Again, it could be because the customer has invested more time and effort in the process, and so feels the disappointment more. It could also follow from a difference in services in the two delivery modes – the traditional channels having more instances where the impact of a negative outcome was felt more keenly.

Figure 17. Relationship of channel, requirement and outcome

Citizens First 3

Service quality. Did you get what you wanted? Yes (yellow), No (brown).

INTERNET: Optional 77 / 50, Mandatory 74 / 42.
TRADITIONAL: Optional 76 / 28, Mandatory 65 / 26.

Two general conclusions follow:

1. When the service goes well in every way or when the service is simple, service quality scores are similar on the Internet and in traditional channels. The Internet does not produce higher service quality scores than traditional channels. The implication for managers is that when it is possible to anticipate a good service experience or when the service is simple the benefit of Internet delivery needs to be balanced more directly with factors such as cost, ease of delivery, and so forth since the case for the use of this channel cannot be made on the basis of satisfaction alone.

2. When there is some flaw in the service experience – many contacts, a poor outcome, etc. – or when multiple contacts are anticipated, Internet scores are not affected as strongly as are scores on traditional channels. This is harder to understand – it could mean *either* that the Internet is inherently more robust with respect to certain difficulties than traditional channels, *or* that traditional channels have a higher proportion of inherently difficult services. It seems likely that both of these are true. The Internet does not appear to produce higher service quality scores in an absolute sense, but it may insulate customers from frustrations and inconveniences that arise in the traditional channels when things go wrong.

To return to the initial question: Will moving services to the Internet increase satisfaction ratings? The answer is a qualified yes. Internet service will produce higher service quality ratings to the extent that they insulate clients from irritants that arise in traditional channels: a second trip to a service counter, difficulties getting through on the phone, and so on. Trying again on the Internet is much faster and easier than re-initiating physical contact.

In a word

The emerging message is that the Internet can improve satisfaction in some situations, but it is still a relatively young channel and further research is needed to continue to expand what we know about when and how to use it best. The Internet works well for getting information and for routine transactions. It also works for certain more complex services such as student loans. Are there limits to what technology can deliver and to what citizens will embrace? The Internet's natural sphere of activity will become much better defined in the next few years.

Part of the excitement around the use of the Internet is that it is seen as a way of making access easier. Looking at access and understanding its barriers and solutions is key to service improvement and is the next part of this report.

7. Access: Barriers and solutions

What does access mean to citizens?

Access is so important to citizens that it demands a special, in-depth exploration. Access is fundamental to citizens' satisfaction and as a distinct component of their service delivery improvements.

Access means:

- Finding information about a government service or product
- Finding the closest service location, the right phone number, the correct website address, the right person to speak with
- Finding the right forms and instructions for completion
- Finding out the criteria for eligibility for a service or product
- Getting there during the hours of operation
- Getting through the "system" – e.g. the telephone tree, the waiting line, etc.

How easy is access to public services?

Citizens say that access is one of the biggest barriers to getting government services. In their comments, citizens frequently and spontaneously express real frustration with the busy telephone lines, automated voice systems, wait times, and being bounced from person to person. It appears that once citizens get to the service, they generally experience courteous, helpful, and knowledgeable government staff – it's just getting there that can be so fraught with difficulty.

The *Citizens First 3* survey asked Canadians their view on this statement, *"I can readily access any government service that I need".* (Figure 18). One third of respondents felt they could get access easily. Yet approximately one quarter felt that they could not readily access the services they need.

Figure 18. Perceived ease of access to government services

Citizens First 3

"I can readily access any government service that I need"
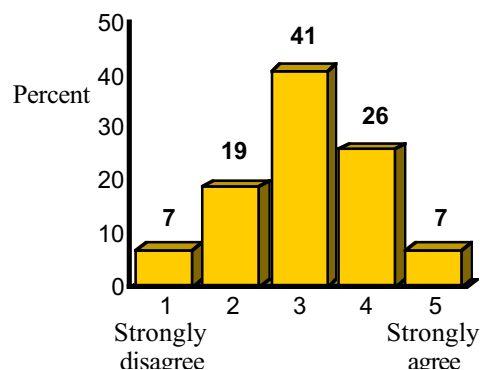
What distinguishes a service experience where access is easy from an experience where access is difficult? If we can quantify the factors that serve as barriers to access then we can work toward eliminating them.

To set the stage, Figure 19 compares ease of access scores over the three *Citizens First* surveys. These scores are based on the "recent service" data that has formed the basis of Chapters 4 through 7.

Ease of access scores for municipal/provincial/ territorial governments and for the federal government have not changed to a statistically significant degree over the three surveys.

Ratings of access for different services

Citizens were asked to rate the ease of access for one service that they had used in the past year. Respondents were invited to select any service –

it could involve a complex or simple need, it could have resulted in a pleasant or unpleasant experience and could involve any level of government. Across the six thousand respondents, well over 100 different services were chosen.

To some degree, citizens rated access to services that are intrinsically positive or unstressful (such as recreation and libraries) higher than services that involve money or are, by their very nature, stressful (such as personal taxation). Figure 20 and Figure 21 show access scores for a selection of services. They range from a low of 55 for social assistance/welfare to a high of 82 for municipal parks and recreation facilities.

There is, however, more to the access ratings than just differences among services. The remainder of this chapter explores factors that make access easier or more difficult.

Figure 19. Access over the years
Citizens First 3
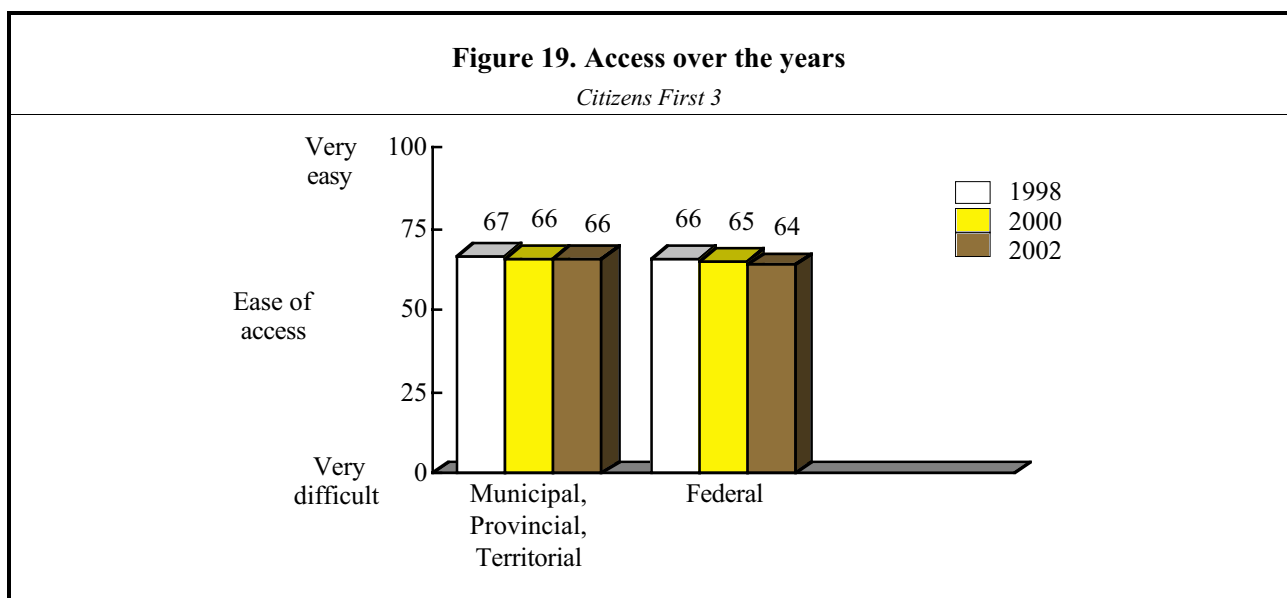
Figure 20. Ease of access - Federal services
Citizens First 3

Service	Ease of Access
National parks	76
Canada Post	72
CPP/OAS	68
Passport office	67
Customs/immigration	64
Employment insurance	63
CECs/ HRCCs	61
CCRA	61

0   25   50   75   100
Very Difficult   EASE OF ACCESS   Very Easy
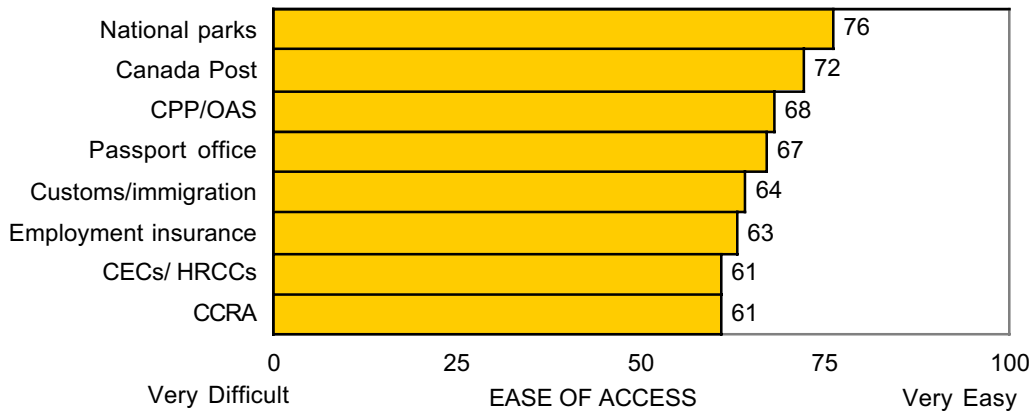
Figure 21. Ease of access - Municipal and Provincial/Territorial services
Citizens First 3

Service	Ease of Access
Municipal parks, recreation	82
Public libraries	77
Hunting, fishing licenses	74
Provincial parks	73
Motor vehicle permits	71
Public health care	68
Health card application	67
Municipal police	66
Revenue Quebec	66
Colleges and universities	65
Building permits, inspections	65
Public transit	65
Property tax collection	64
Hospitals	64
Job training, apprenticeship	63
Student loans, bursaries	59
Publicly funded schools	59
Birth, marriage certificates	58
Health care outside hospitals	58
Social assistance, welfare	55

0   25   50   75   100
Very Difficult   EASE OF ACCESS   Very Easy

Knowing how to get the service

Two-thirds of respondents knew how to get the service when they started, and they tended to find access relatively easy (73 out of 100) (Figure 22). The 13 percent of respondents who had the most difficulty started off thinking that they knew how to get the services, then discovered that they did not. They rated ease of access at 41 out of 100 – dashed expectations exact a cost.

Access problems

Approximately one-third of respondents reported problem-free access, while the rest faced one or more difficulties. The problems are similar among federal, provincial/ territorial, and municipal services.

People who encounter more problems getting to the service find access more difficult (Figure 23). This result seems obvious enough, but the repercussions of this simple finding are striking.

Figure 22. Access is easier when you already know how to get the service

Citizens First 2000
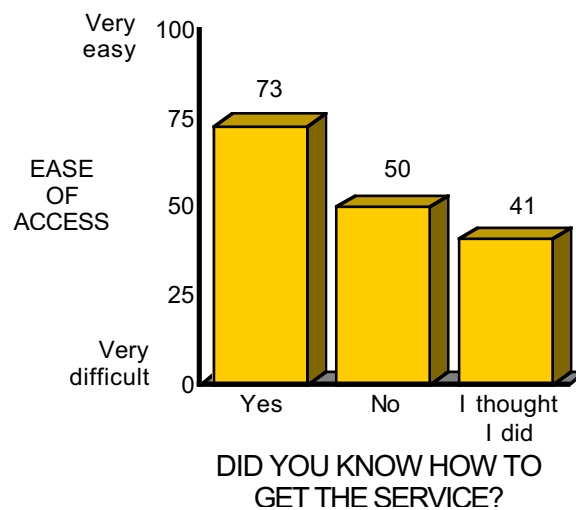
When there are no problems, Canadians find government services very easy to access – the mean rating for no-problem services is 84 out of 100. About one-third of respondents found themselves in this fortunate position.

A *single problem* drops the ease of access score from 84 to 65 out of 100. Since 30 percent of respondents are members of this single-problem group, it is worth enquiring what their problem might be. Three of the 11 problems are about equally likely in this group; they are, not surprisingly, the three most common problems overall (from Table 14):

• Busy phone lines

• Getting bounced from person to person

• Trouble with telephone answering systems or voice mail.

The telephone is clearly implicated here: busy lines and answering systems are exclusively telephone issues; getting bounced from person to person is often a telephone phenomenon, though it can also occur with in-person service.

Each additional problem is associated with a further drop in ease of access.

The relationship between problems and access illustrated in Figure 23 is important in understanding why some service delivery channels are more difficult to access than others. This topic is pursued in the following section.

Figure 23. The number of problems encountered affects ease of access
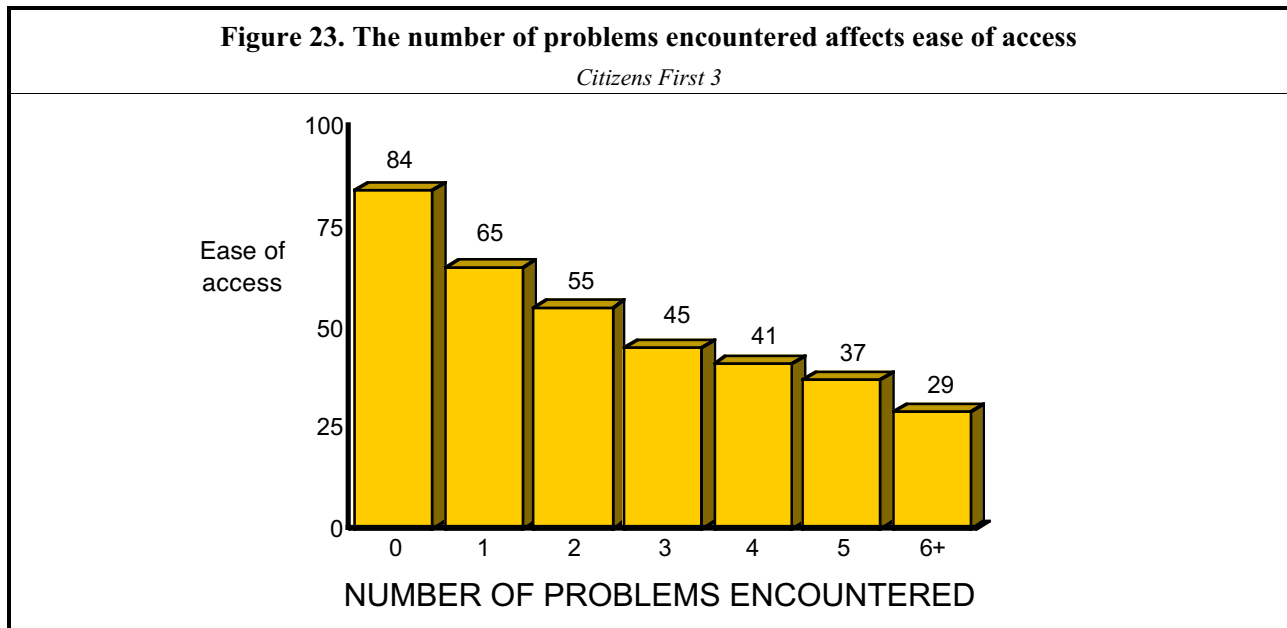
Citizens First 3

Table 14. Access problems at each level of government			
Citizens First 3			
	Percent who experience the problem		
Access problem	**Federal**	**Prov/Terr**	**Municipal**
Busy phone lines	32	24	27
Bounced from person to person	24	23	27
Trouble with telephone trees or voice mail	23	19	23
Could not find the service in the Blue Pages	13	11	11
Did not know where to look	15	11	10
Parking difficult	12	11	9
Trouble finding the service on the Internet	8	6	6
Had to travel too great a distance	6	6	4
Concerned about security	6	6	5
Could not get there by public transit	3	4	2
Other (e.g., long wait, reached a dead end)	18	20	15
Percent who report one or more access problems	71	65	66
Percent who report no access problems	29	35	34

What channels are easiest to access?

Figure 24 shows ease-of-access ratings from respondents who used a single channel to get their service. Clients who used in-person services and kiosks rated access the easiest, while clients who used the telephone found access most difficult.

Our question is this: do these differences reflect inherent characteristics of the channels, or is there some more prosaic explanation?

Figure 25 provides further evidence. The top chart shows access scores for clients who used two channels. Any combination of two channels that involves the telephone is relatively difficult

to access (scores of 59-64), and any combination of two channels that does not involve the telephone is relatively easy to access (scores of 68-77).

The lower chart solidifies this result: any combination of three channels that involves the telephone is relatively difficult to access (scores of 55-61), while the only combination of three channels that does not involve the telephone is relatively easy to access (score of 73).

There is just one four-channel combination (not illustrated), which of course includes the telephone. Its mean access rating is predictably low – 57 out of 100.

Figure 24. Ease of access for single-channel service experiences

Citizens First 3

Channel	Ease of Access
Office	75
Kiosk	74
Other	70
Internet/Email	69
Mail	65
Telephone	63

Difficult — EASE OF ACCESS — Easy (scale 40 to 90)
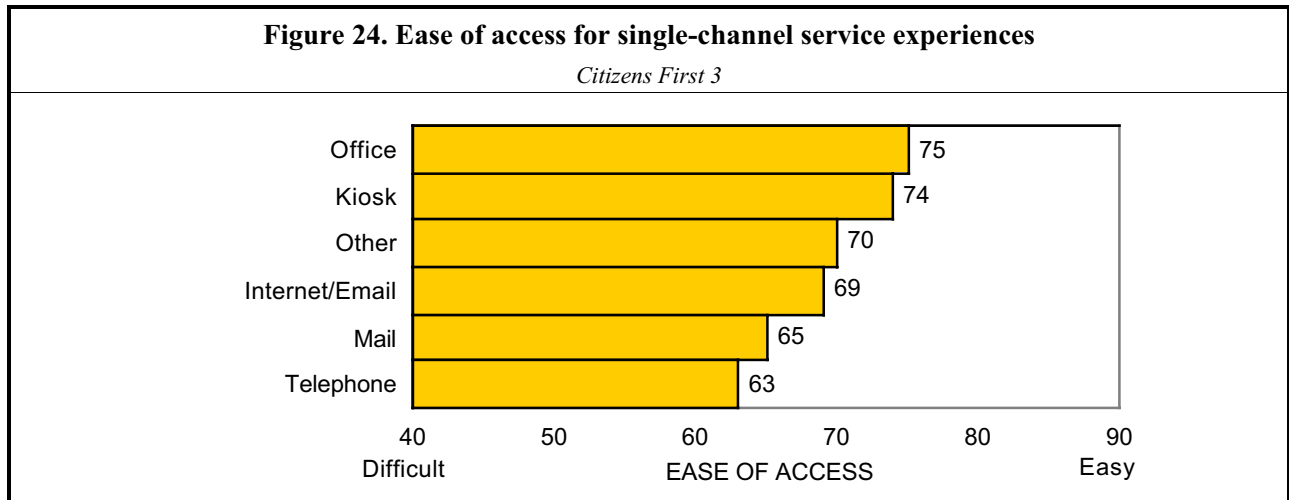
Figure 25. Ease of access for two-channel and three-channel service experiences

Citizens First 3

Combinations of two access channels

Channel	Score
Internet/email and mail	77
Office and mail	76
Internet/email and office	68
Phone and office	64
Phone and mail	63
Phone and Internet/email	59

Difficult EASE OF ACCESS Easy

Combinations of three access channels

Channel	Score
Office, net/email, mail	73
Phone, net/email mail	61
Phone, office, mail	57
Phone, office, net/email	55

Difficult EASE OF ACCESS Easy
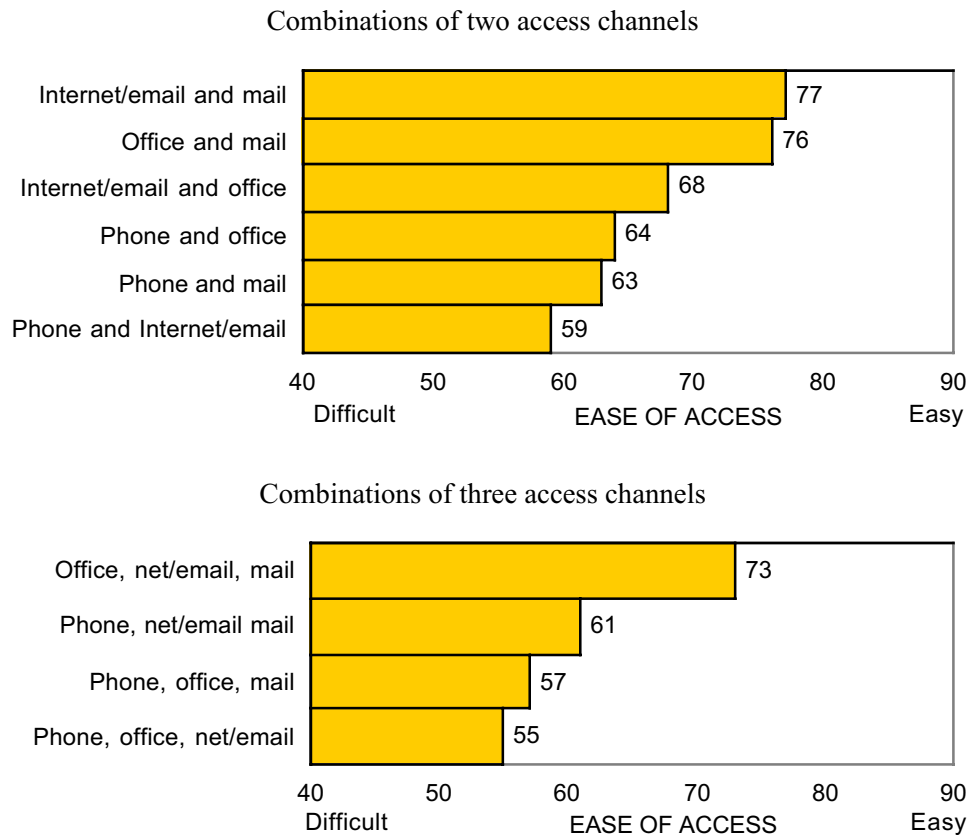
What's wrong with the telephone? The answer is simply that people who use the telephone encounter more access problems than people who use other channels. Each problem makes access more difficult, as was shown in Figure 23. The low overall scores for the telephone reflect the number of problems that telephone users have.

Figure 26 makes this relationship clear.

• Among clients who got the service via a single channel, telephone users had an average of 1.4 access problems, while users of other channels experienced 0.8 problems or fewer.

• Among clients who used two channels, combinations that include the phone had 1.7 to 1.8 problems, on average, while combinations that do not include the phone had an average of 1 problem.

• In the three-channel situation, the telephone is associated with 1.9 or more problems and the non-telephone situation with just one problem.

Figure 26. Number of access problems encountered in different channels

Citizens First 3

Service obtained through a single channel

Channel	Number of problems
Office	0.8
Kiosk	0.8
Internet/email	0.9
Mail	0.7
Telephone	1.4

Service obtained using two channels

Channels	Number of problems
Office and mail	1
Internet/email and mail	1
Internet/email and office	1.1
Phone and office	1.8
Phone and Internet/email	1.7
Phone and mail	1.8

Service obtained using three channels

Channels	Number of problems
Office, net/email, mail	1
Phone, net/email, mail	1.9
Phone, office, net/email	2
Phone, office, mail	2.4

Number of problems

Is the number of problems a complete explanation of the differences in access between telephone and other channels? It appears to be. Telephone users who encounter no access problems rate access at 84 out of 100, essentially the same as the 85 rating for people who used other channels.

A more formal statistical analysis, reported in the Conclusion section following, yields the same result: when access problems are factored out, there is no remaining difference between the telephone and other channels.

To conclude: The telephone is the most difficult channel to access today because of busy lines, automatic answering systems, difficult telephone directories, and getting bounced. If these issues are remedied, telephone access would improve substantially and telephone access would not be more difficult than access in any other channel.

Demographics and access

A discussion of access would not be complete without a look at possible demographic influences.

Variables that *do not* have a meaningful impact on ease of access include age, gender, income, size of community, and level of education.

Two demographic variables have small but significant effects, each accounting for between 1 and 2 percent of the variance in ease of access:

- Access is rated easier in Quebec and Atlantic Canada (71 out of 100) than in points west, where it averages 62 out of 100.

- People with disabilities rate access at 57 out of 100, compare to non-disabled people at 65 out of 100.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated several factors that affect ease of access – delivery channels, familiarity with the service, and so on. How do they fit together?

Four of these factors have independent and substantive impacts on ease of access.[15] They are, in descending order of importance:

- The number of access barriers one encounters: Every problem that a customer encounters increases difficulty.

- Knowing in advance how to get the service: Knowing how makes access easier.

- Initial attitude: The belief that you can readily access services that you need increases ease of access (Figure 18). This belief is presumably influenced by past service experiences.

- Region: Residents of Quebec and Atlantic Canada rate access easier than residents of Ontario and Western Canada.

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE

- *When you finally get to a person on the phone, they are there to help.*

- *The service is generally good by telephone after you get past the automated system and find a real person.*

- *I was pleasantly surprised when I called one of the government 1-800 numbers and had no wait time at all. I almost immediately was speaking with a real live human being (not a recording) and that person promptly answered any questions I had. He was also extremely clear to understand and pleasant to speak with.*

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[15] All produce strong statistical effects in a 4-way analysis of variance.

These four factors account for 35 percent of the variance in access scores. This is a considerable amount, but only about half of what the drivers of satisfaction account for. It is possible that there is no universal answer to the question of what makes access easy or difficult. In the case of satisfaction, the drivers – timeliness, competence and so on – function as building blocks across a wide range of government services. The things that contribute to access, on the other hand, may be more situation-specific, varying with service delivery channels and types of service.

The lack of a complete explanation of access at this universal level – all services and all jurisdictions – means that service providers need to investigate the impediments to access that exist in their individual service environments. If ease of access is service-specific, then the clients of each service need to be consulted to identify problems and solutions.

A final but important difference between the drivers of satisfaction and the determinants of access:

• In the case of satisfaction, service organizations can act to improve their performance on the drivers of satisfaction. They can make service faster, train staff to a high level of competence, and so on.

• With access, the determining factors are not always easy to manipulate. Service organizations *can* reduce the number of problems that customers are likely to face, but they cannot easily change customers' initial attitudes or their initial knowledge of how to get the service.

Government pages in the telephone directory

Because the telephone is the most frequently used means of contacting government, it is important to give special attention to one of its key access vehicles – the listing of phone numbers in the telephone book (which in much of Canada appears in the "Blue Pages").

Many governments have made efforts in recent years to improve the government listings in telephone books. Citizens seem to have noticed a change. Thirty-nine percent state that the design of the government directories are better now than two years ago (Figure 27). Agreement with the statements, "The Pages are well organized" and "The Pages have all the information I needed" are still rather low (Table 15), however current scores on these items are slightly higher than the 2000 scores. The increase is just two points out of 100 in each case, but the trend is statistically significant.

Figure 27. "Is the overall design of the Blue pages better or worse than it was two years ago?"

Citizens First 3

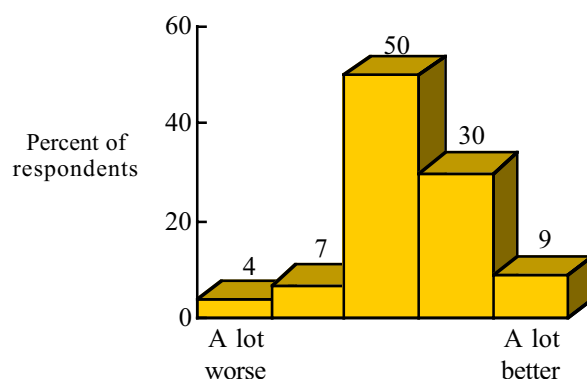**Table 15. Statements about the government section of the telephone directory**

Citizens First 3

Statement	Agreement (0 – 100)
Governments should have a complete directory of their services on the Internet	83
The Pages should list the Internet addresses of government services	80
The Pages are well organized	57
The Pages have all the information I needed	49

Suggestions for improvement

What can be done to improve access? The voice of the citizen in the written comments received from respondents is a good place to start to see where improvements can be made: These comments contain rich ideas – ideas that are consistent with the more rigorous results coming from the statistical analysis of the results. Table 16 lists suggestions for improvement in order of the impact they will have on the service experience.

These suggestions are stated from the client's perspective – reducing the time they have to wait, dealing with less process or red tape, getting services in a single place, understandable forms, and so on. They emphasize the need to design services, delivery processes and materials from the perspective of the user so that the users' needs are well met. Too often government services are designed from the perspective of what the system needs – the kind of language needed to ensure that legal issues are covered, office hours that are easiest to manage, and so on. Keep these suggestions in mind when making changes and clients will benefit.

| **Table 16. Suggestions for improvement** | |
| *Citizens First 3* | |
Suggestion	**Amount of improvement that is likely to result (0=None, 100=A great deal)**
Reduce waiting: in lines, on the phone, in the mail, etc.	74
Reduce red tape	68
Create a "one-stop" service where people can get a group of related services in one place	68
Simplify forms and documents	65
Extend office hours	63
Make it easier to get information about the service	62
Use plain language	60
Make the service available electronically	60
Give more decision-making power to staff	53
Improve the courtesy of staff	53

In a word

As was said in a previous *Citizens First* report, access is as important to public services as location is to real estate. No matter how good your services are and how much you excel at the key drivers, it won't matter much if people can't access your services.

Clearly, there are many problems with current access of government services and much that the data tell us about how to improve it. One solution is to put services online, thereby solving traditional access problems such as busy telephone lines, long waits at service counters, and limited office hours. Easy access is one of the reasons for increased use of on-line services.

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE

- *Get rid of or lessen the number of telephone options for service and also the number of levels that these telephone options give.*

- *Simplify language of service delivery (written or verbal).*

- *I dislike the delays getting through on the telephone.*

- *I really like the 1-800-O-Canada number. It is very helpful and quickly directs you to the correct service or person.*

- *As the population is aging, please print all forms we are required to fill out in larger letters as we aren't getting dumber just weaker in the eyes.*

- *Be more flexible in the hours of operation…open one evening a week, or be available until 6:00 every evening for people who work 8-4.*

- *Eliminate ambiguity. Explain with examples.*

- *I like that they are making more and more available on the Internet and I like the consolidation of service centres in New Brunswick.*

- *The blue pages have made it a little easier to readily find the location of the office I need to call.*

- *I like the kiosk approach for renewing stickers and paying parking fines. Office hours are not always convenient for people who work full-time.*

8. Patterns in Internet use

THE CITIZEN'S VOICE

- *The provincial website is really good at providing information and forms. It was much more advanced (and useful!) than I expected.*

- *I like the access from the Internet, however this is not the answer to all matters, sometimes you have to talk to an individual.*

- *I like the flexibility of being able to use the Internet to arrange for government services on my time. I also like the ability to pay for government services over the Internet, as it means less postage costs or waiting for results.*

- *I very much like the Internet services as I am deaf.*

- *CCRA's tax filing application is VERY easy to use and has very knowledgeable staff on hand (electronically) to deal with problems as they occur. Very positive experience - almost forgot main purpose of site is to make sure they collect money from me!!!!*

- *It's nice to be able to find most, if not all, the information I need on the Internet before I pick up the phone or go to a government office.*

- *I like the increase in the paperless approach to information.*

- *The Internet access is very good. I have had many positive experiences with this system. It allows you to find the information you need without the computerized system telling you to press one for this and two for that. I as well have had an immediate response via email when I need further clarification. Well Done!*

- *The Internet is very helpful, but trying to find government sites is sometimes hard to do.*

- *They have done a fabulous job at EI, of training staff to be courteous and respectful (even friendly!). Really good personal contact. Please do not replace people with Internet sites.*

- *Websites are starting to be intentions-based as opposed to being organized according to how the departments see themselves. At least at the federal level. There is still much work to integrate with provincial and municipal. How am I supposed to know which department I need to go to get a certain service? As a citizen, I should not have to worry about that.*

Internet usage

The third constant of our times (no need to dwell on the first two) is that Internet use increases year by year. There are various measures of Internet use, and *Citizens First 3* defines a frequency measure: "How often do you use the Internet for personal reasons?"

Since the year 2000:

- The proportion of people who never use the Internet for personal reasons is down sharply (from 39 percent to 28 percent of the population).

- The proportion who use the Internet more than 5 times a week is up sharply (from 26 to 35 percent).

- The groups in between show little change.

This does *not* imply that non-users have suddenly become very frequent users. The increase has worked its way up the categories, inchworm fashion, with the overall effect being apparent at each end of the scale.

Figure 28. Use of the Internet for personal reasons

Citizens First 3
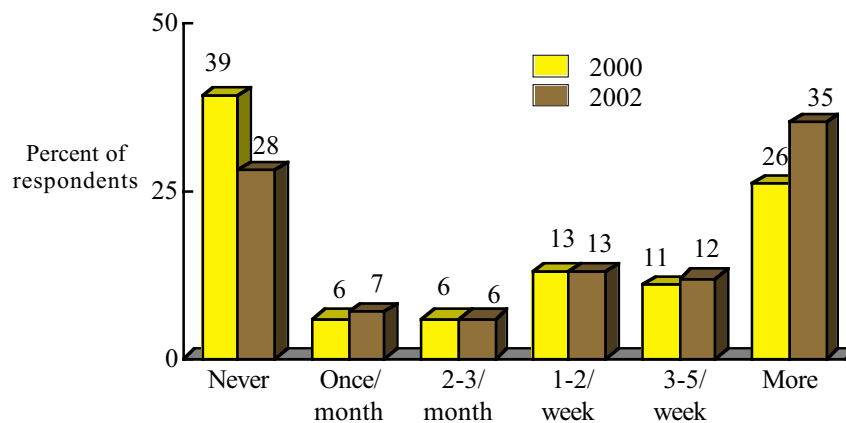
Citizens' use of government websites is up, mirroring the overall increase in Internet use (Figure 29). The 2002 survey asked respondents whether they had visited municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal sites in the past year. The proportion of Internet users who visited each of these sites is up strongly in 2002.

The actual figures are likely an underestimate, if anything, of the actual usage of government sites, given that survey respondents might easily fail to recall sites that they had visited some months in the past.

Figure 29. Proportion of Internet users who visited government sites

Citizens First 3
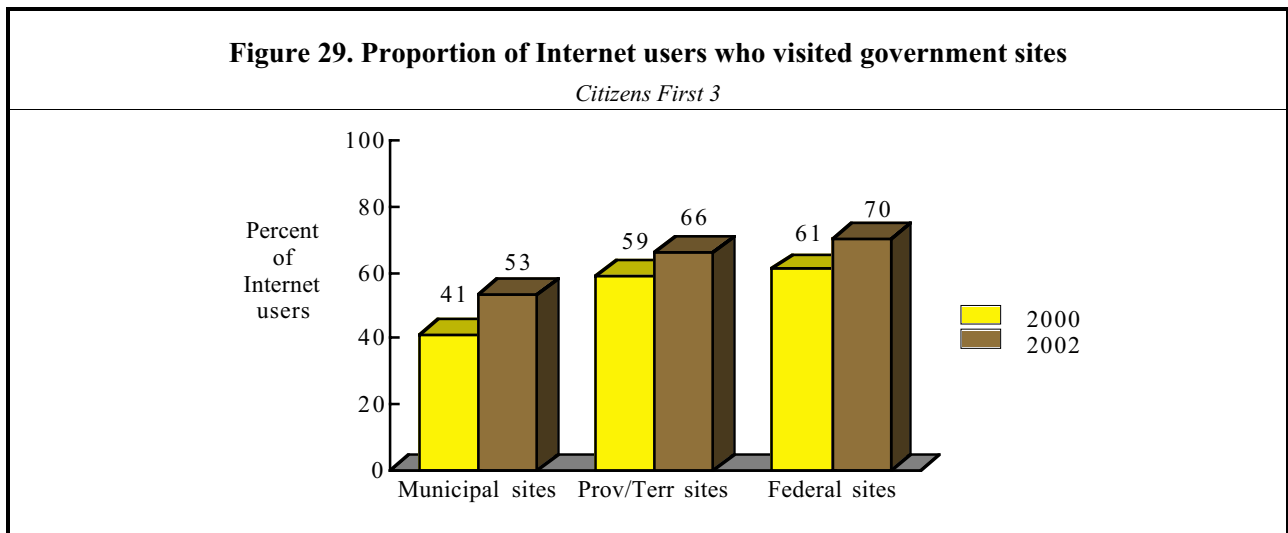
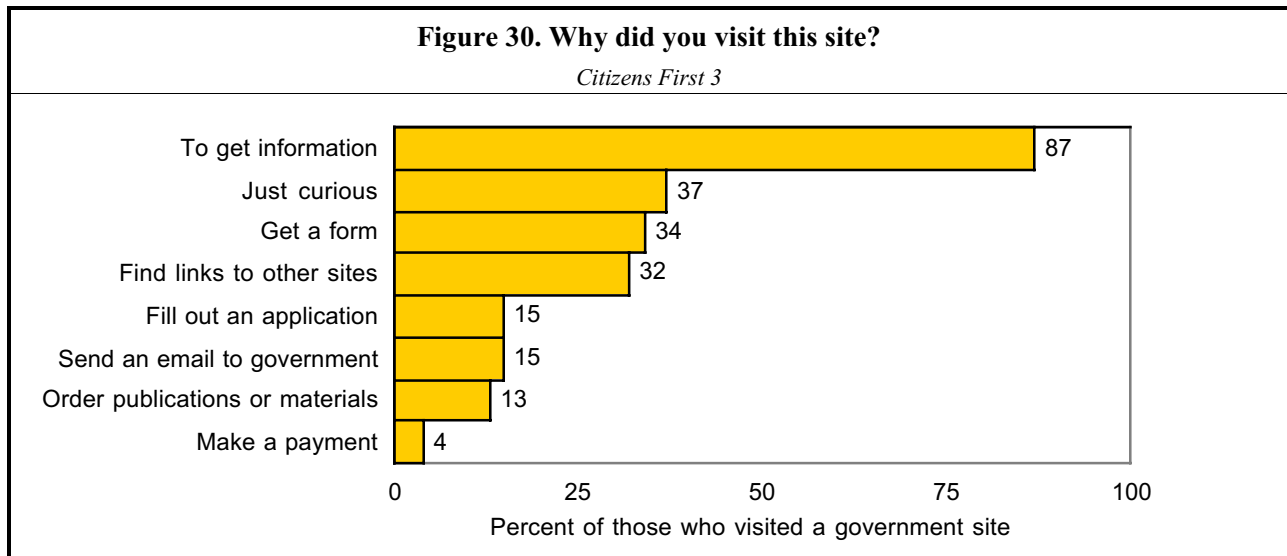# Analysis of a specific Internet service

The remainder of this chapter focuses on Internet users who could recall using some specific government site in the past year.

These respondents were asked to choose a single government website that was familiar to them. They then answered a series of questions about that site. The sites chosen were predominantly federal (44 percent) followed by provincial/territorial (27 percent) and municipal

(17 percent). A further 12 percent of respondents were not sure which jurisdiction they were describing.

Respondents' reasons for visiting the site appear in Figure 30. "Getting information" tops the list of uses. Transactional uses, defined broadly, include getting a form, sending email, ordering materials, filling out applications, and making payments. The proportion of people who did one or more of these activities is 51 percent, up slightly from 45 percent in 2000.

Figure 30. Why did you visit this site?
Citizens First 3

Reason	Percent
To get information	87
Just curious	37
Get a form	34
Find links to other sites	32
Fill out an application	15
Send an email to government	15
Order publications or materials	13
Make a payment	4

Percent of those who visited a government site

Other sources of information

When people seek government services, they often use more than one channel – Chapter 5 reported that one-half of service experiences involve two or more separate channels (see Figure 12).

The same is true here, in regard to what we are loosely referring to as "Internet services". The survey asked respondents to identify other channels that they used to get the service in question, in addition to the government website. More than half, 54 percent, used additional sources of information:[16]

- 41 percent called on the telephone
- 22 percent went to a government office
- 15 percent sent or received material by mail or fax
- 14 percent visited other government sites
- 11 percent used email
- 2 percent report using other means.

The above sources combine both electronic and traditional channels. Separating the two modalities reveals that:

- 50 percent of respondents used electronic channels exclusively (Internet and email)
- 50 percent used some mix of electronic and traditional channels.

These results emphasize the fact that many "Internet services" are not obtained exclusively via the Internet. As often as not, respondents make use of other channels at some point in the process.

Citizens appear to use the Internet in a way that is similar to their use of traditional channels. The Internet is one of several possible modes of contact, and citizens mix channels as often as they rely on a single channel.

Quality of the site & key drivers of satisfaction

Respondents rated the overall quality of their chosen site, from very good to very poor. They were instructed to make the rating in comparison with "other sites that you know, both government and private sector". As Figure 31 shows, 35 percent rated their chosen site as similar to Internet sites in general, 55 percent rated it better, and 10 percent rated it worse.

This rating is very broadly based, encompassing more than 4,300 respondents, and hundreds of different sites. About half the sites chosen were federal, one-third provincial/territorial, and one-sixth municipal.

The ratings for sites of different governments are similar. Expressed as means out of 100, municipal sites rated 62, provincial/territorial sites 64, and federal sites 66.

Given that some respondents found their sites good while others found them poor, we can ask what factors contribute to the quality of government websites. Are there features of government Internet sites that drive users' assessment of their overall quality?

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[16] Percentages in this column add to more than 100, since some respondents used several other sources of information.

Figure 31. Overall quality of the government Internet site compared to others

Citizens First 3

Percent of respondents

Bar chart values (left to right): 3 (Very poor), 7, 35, 40, 15 (Very good)
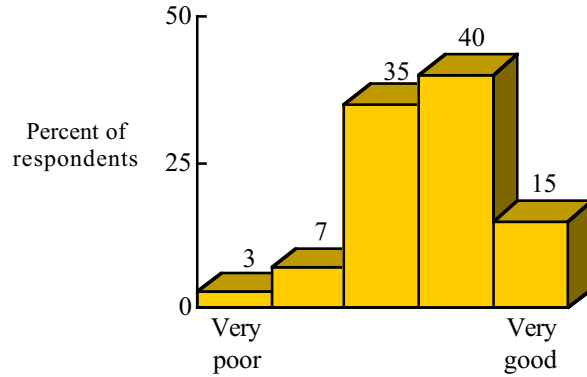
An analysis of many potential dimensions shows that four make important contributions to the overall quality of the site. Together, these dimensions explain 47 percent of the variance in respondents' rating of the site. Table 17 lists the dimensions that drive quality ratings and shows how clients rate government sites on them.

Performance scores for these dimensions are not particularly high. Agreement with "It is easy to find what I'm looking for" is 57 out of 100 and agreement with "It has all the information I need" is 56 out of 100. This would help explain why a majority of respondents used sources of information in addition to the website to get their service.

Table 17. Drivers of quality ratings for government Internet sites

Citizens First 3

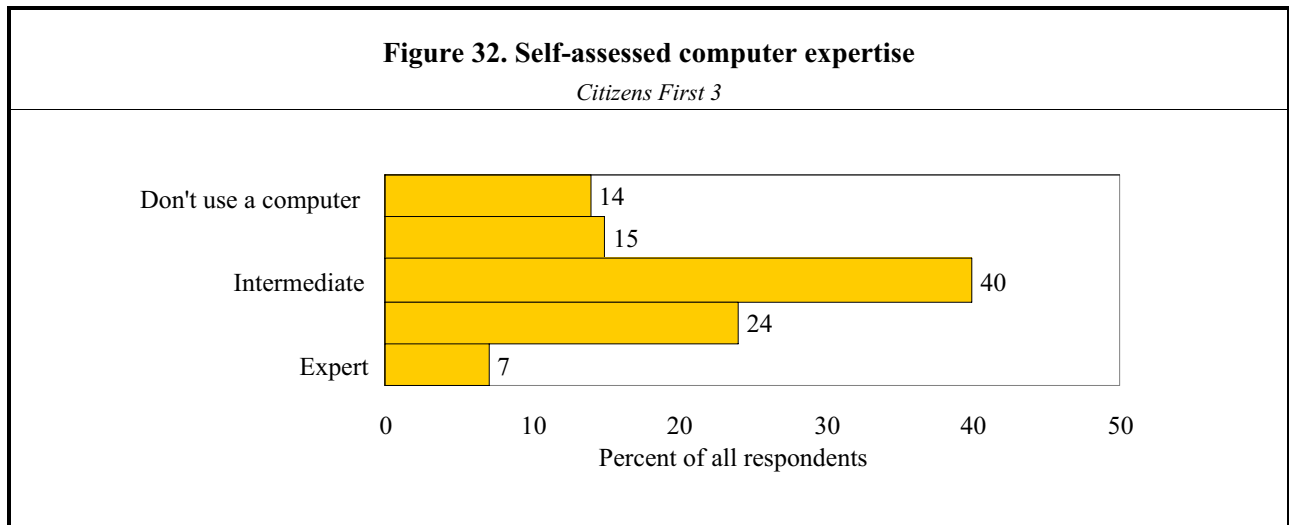| Driver		Current performance on the driver
1. It is easy to find what I'm looking for	→	Agreement with statement is 57 out of 100
2. Outcome	→	57% got what they wanted
3. It is visually appealing	→	Agreement with statement is 61 out of 100
4. It has all the information I need	→	Agreement with statement is 56 out of 100

The 2000 *Citizens First* project conducted a similar analysis and also reported the four drivers described above. The 2000 research, however, identified an additional driver, "Pages load quickly". While this item was included as a candidate in the most recent survey, it no longer contributes to respondents' ratings, and it is worthwhile discussing why this might be so. In the first place, the perception of how quickly pages load is very relative. It is a function of the computer and browser being used, the speed of the connection, and the amount of traffic on servers along the way. The actual size of the page being loaded is one small element in the overall speed. Secondly, the on-line experience is getting faster, due to computer users upgrading their hardware, the increasing availability of high-speed access, and improvements in Internet infrastructure. Fewer people experience lengthy waits, and they do so less often.

Computer expertise

It is important to ask whether the use of e-services is related to expertise with computers generally. Are e-services equally accessible to all computer users, or do they tend to appeal to the more sophisticated?

Figure 32 shows how Canadians rate their computer skills. Leaving aside the 14 percent who do not use a computer, we can combine the beginner/intermediate users and the advanced/expert users to see if they differ in their use of government e-services.

The advanced/expert and beginner/ intermediate groups do not differ significantly in their assessment of the overall quality of government sites. This is a positive result, in that site designs include both communities equally.

Figure 32. Self-assessed computer expertise

Citizens First 3

	Percent
Don't use a computer	14
	15
Intermediate	40
	24
Expert	7

Percent of all respondents

The advanced/expert group visits government sites more often than beginners and intermediates. They are more likely to make transactions than to just search for information. Finally, the drivers of site quality differ slightly for the two groups.

- For the advanced and expert group, "Visual appeal" drops from the list of drivers. It is replaced by "Search engines work well".

- For the beginner and intermediate group, "It has all the information I need" drops from the list. It is replaced by "Information is up-to-date".

In a word

Canadians use of the Internet is growing, and their use of government sites to perform transactions (as opposed to simply getting information) is also increasing.

There is a common tendency to think of the e-channels as one means of accessing government services, and to think of the traditional channels as a different or alternative means. Citizens do not take this view. They are happy to use any convenient combination of traditional and e-channels in getting a single service. Multiple channels are the rule rather than the exception.

9. Service standards

Service standards are increasingly becoming key to service improvement strategies in the public sector. They are the published levels of service an organization promises to deliver to its clients and they play an important role in shaping client expectations. Most often, service standards are set for a range of objective factors, such as the amount of time a client should have to wait to get a service or other similar service aspects.

Indeed, it is not surprising that timeliness is one of the most common service standards. Timeliness is a critical aspect of good service. Moreover it is quite straightforward to ask people what their expectations of timely service are. One can ask, for example, "How many minutes is it reasonable to wait in a queue at a service counter?"

Quantifying the other drivers is more difficult. Knowledge, fairness, and going the extra mile are not easily defined at a general level, though it might be possible to define expectations in the context of specific services.

Since 1998, *Citizens First* has measured expectations of timely service in the context of telephone service, counter service, mail, and email. The questions are always phrased in terms of "routine services". In the *Citizens First 3* survey, several dimensions of timeliness were revisited to determine whether standards had changed. Comparisons with earlier years appear in Figure 33 through Figure 39.

Visit an office

An interesting finding in the 2002 data is presented in Figure 33 through Figure 35. Respondents are more willing to wait for in-person service, but willing to spend less time traveling to the service location. The reason behind this is not obvious and there were no questions in the survey to help explain these new trends.

While it is purely speculation, one possible reason is that the events of September 11 2001 changed citizens' expectations in ways we still do not fully understand. We have seen that citizens expect - and seemingly accept - longer waits at airports. It is possible that there is a spillover effect from this onto other services.

It is also possible that citizens visit offices for somewhat different reasons today than in the past. Routine services are increasingly available via Internet and telephone. If office visits involve less-routine services, then a slightly longer wait may be tolerable (Figure 34).

Whatever the reason, the changes in this area suggest that it needs to be tracked in subsequent studies to test whether a new trend has emerged.

Figure 33. When you visit a government office, what is a reasonable amount of time to spend traveling (one way)?

Citizens First 3

Percent of respondents

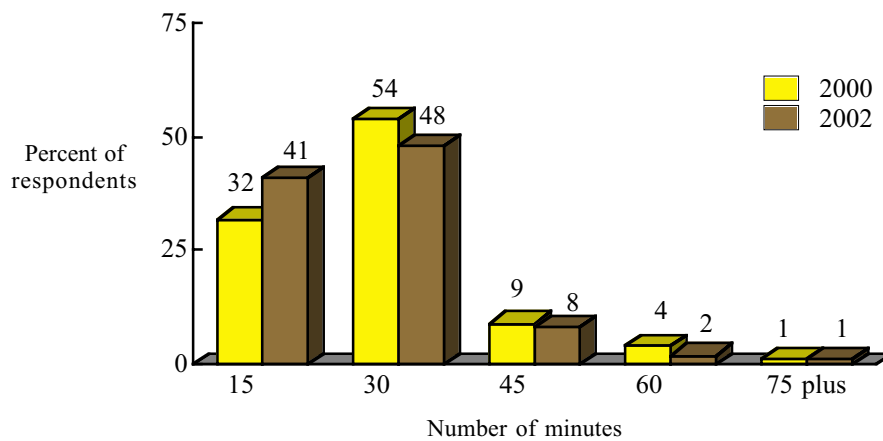| Number of minutes	2000	2002
15	32	41
30	54	48
45	9	8
60	4	2
75 plus	1	1

Figure 34. When you visit a government office to obtain a routine service, how many minutes is it acceptable to wait in any line-up?

Citizens First 3

Percent of respondents

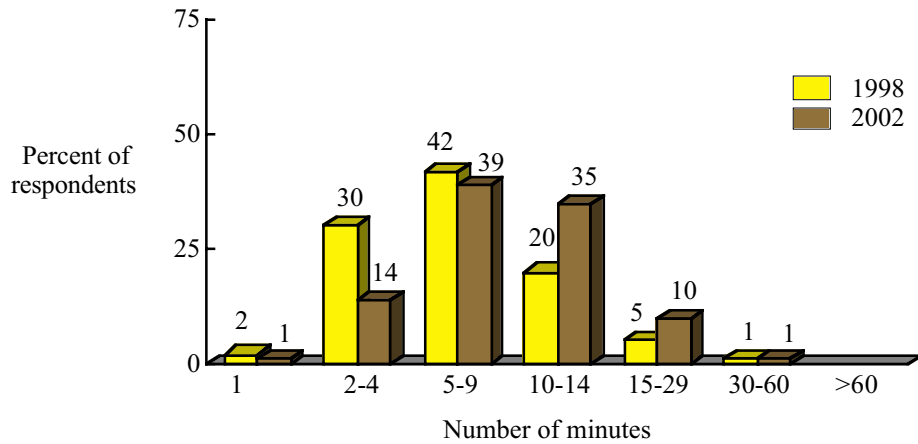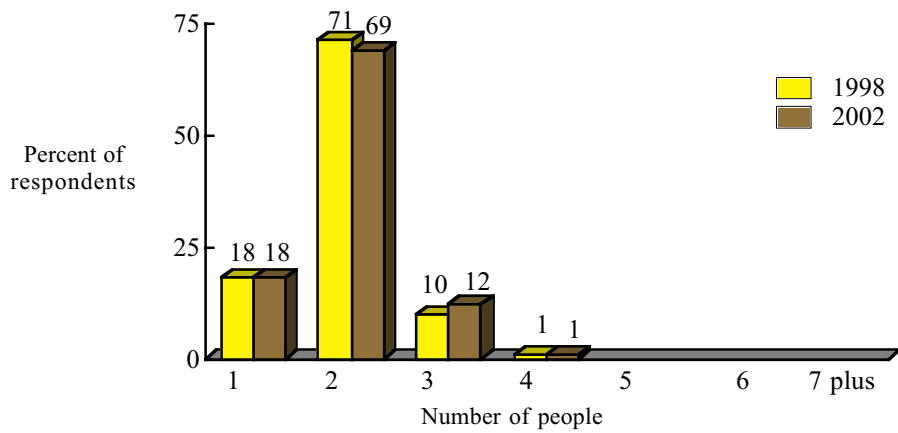| Number of minutes	1998	2002
1	2	1
2-4	30	14
5-9	42	39
10-14	20	35
15-29	5	10
30-60	1	1
>60		

Number of minutes

Figure 35. When you visit a government office for a routine service, how many different people is it reasonable to deal with to get what you need?

Citizens First 3

Percent of respondents

Number of people	1998	2002
1	18	18
2	71	69
3	10	12
4	1	1
5		
6		
7 plus		

Number of people

Telephone

Service standards for phone service are used in many public organizations. The data in Figure 36 and Figure 37 address two of the key elements in most phone standards – how long it takes to answer the phone, and how many people are dealt with to get the service.

Response options to the question in Figure 36 were changed in 2002 and, as a result, the data are not comparable with 1998 results (and the question was not asked in the 2000 survey). As about one-third expect to speak to a person in 30 seconds or less and another third will accept a minute, it is important that telephones be answered quickly and that IVR systems facilitate quick access to a "real person".

Figure 36. When you telephone a government office, what is an acceptable length of time to wait before you speak to a person?
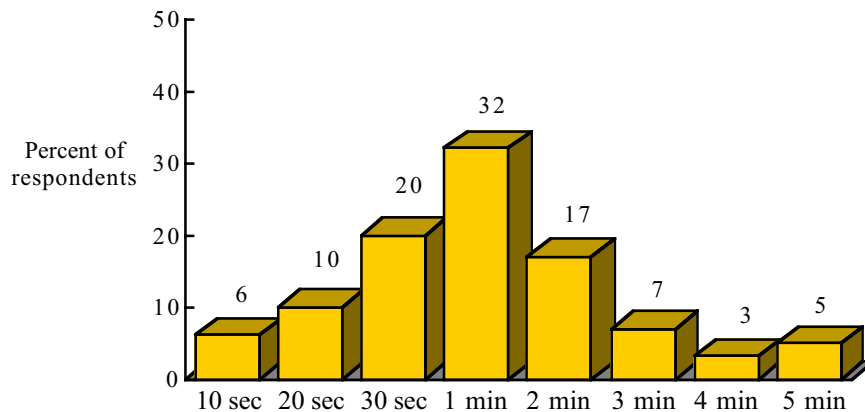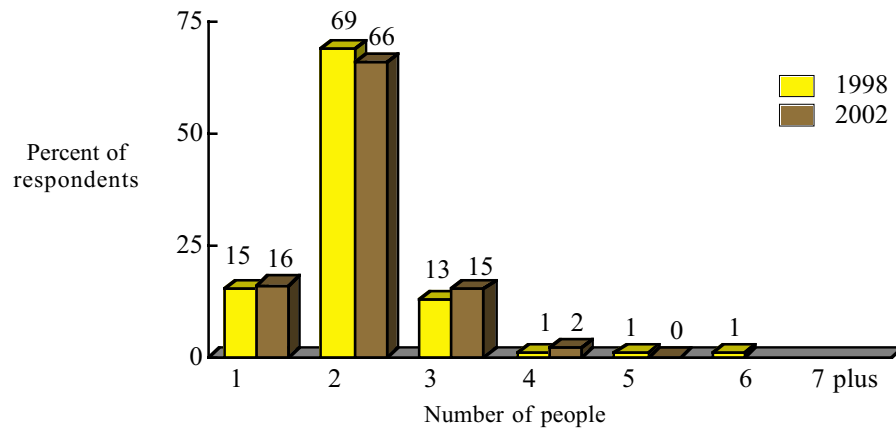
Citizens First 3

**Figure 37. When you telephone a government office with a routine request,
what is the maximum number of people you should have to deal with to get the service?**

Citizens First 3

Percent of respondents

Number of people

Legend:
- 1998
- 2002

Values:
- 1: 15, 16
- 2: 69, 66
- 3: 13, 15
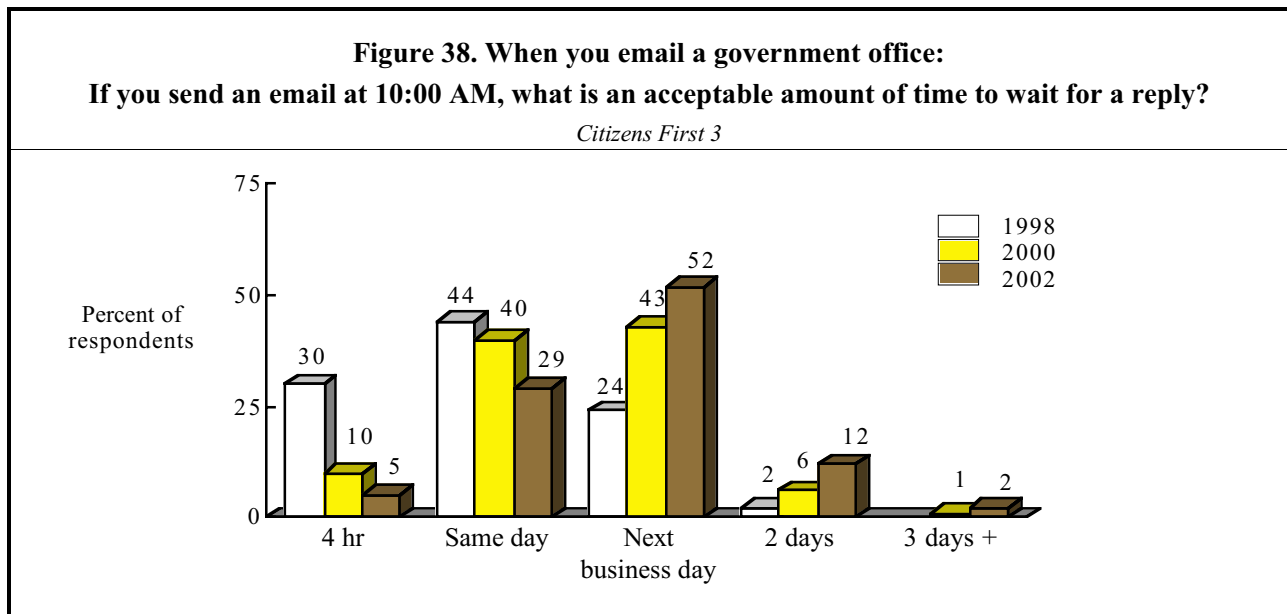- 4: 1, 2
- 5: 1, 0
- 6: 1
- 7 plus:

Email

Email was a new communications tool in 1998 and was unfamiliar to many people. The fact that email messages move almost instantly led many respondents to the 1998 survey to expect a very fast 4-hour response.

In each succeeding year expectations have moderated. There appear to be two reasons for this. One is that people recognize that response time involves more than just transmission time – someone must compose a message in reply. Stories about the increasing email burden are common enough that even people who don't use email very much are likely aware of the issue. The second reason follows on the first: people who use email regularly do not expect as fast a response as people who do not use email – and email users are a growing proportion of the population.

Figure 38. When you email a government office:

If you send an email at 10:00 AM, what is an acceptable amount of time to wait for a reply?

Citizens First 3

Note: The 1998 survey defined response options differently. It presented "2 hours" as well as "4 hours" – these two options are combined here. As well, "3 days plus" was not a response option in 1998.

Regular mail

While expectations for in-person service show a trend toward accepting slower service, expectations for mail are the reverse. As compared to 1998, more respondents now expect replies to routine requests in 1 or 2 weeks. The change is statistically significant.

This change has implications for service providers as well as for Canada Post. If a mail transaction is to be completed in two weeks, and if the return mail process takes one week (5 business days), then a service organization has just five days to process the request.

In a word

Service standards are a key element in the relationship between an organization and its clients. They communicate expectations and they help to shape them. As the results of *Citizens First 3* show, standards are not static. While clients will wait longer for in-person service, they expect mail to be faster than it has been. The need to track changes in service standards is not the only area where change needs to be monitored. Tracking overall progress in satisfaction levels is also central to the service agenda.

Figure 39. When you mail a letter to a government office with a routine request, what is an acceptable time to allow, from the day you send the letter until the day you receive the information or documents you need?

Citizens First 3
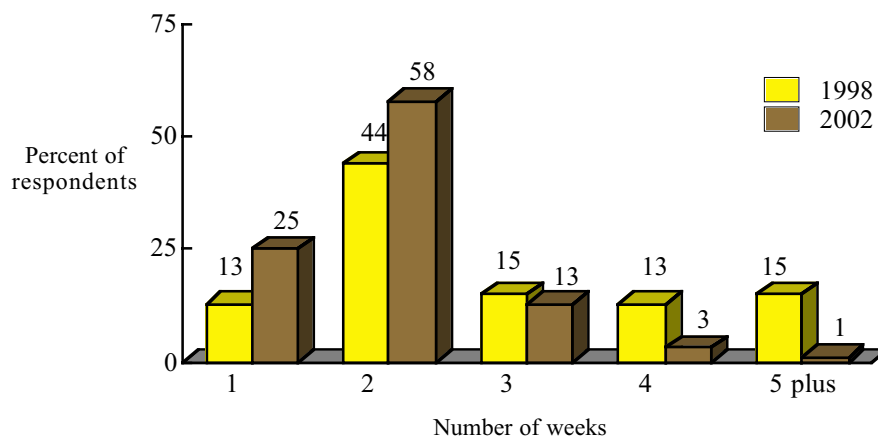
10. Tracking progress

Citizens First employs two distinct types of service quality measure: service reputation and service experience. As was shown in Chapter 2, both are important components of confidence in government. They are also the cornerstone measures for tracking how well the public sector is doing in improving their services and generating client satisfaction. For managers responsible for service delivery, these measures are at the heart of gauging success with the service agenda.

Both measures show a significant upward trend from 1998 to 2002. This is good news for service deliverers.

Service reputation

"Service reputation" is a global summary measure. *Citizens First* asked Canadians for an "overall rating of the services of your municipal government", and the same for "your provincial or territorial government" and "the federal government". From 1998 to 2002, service reputation scores increased significantly for each sphere of government (Figure 40).

Figure 40. "Service reputation" scores
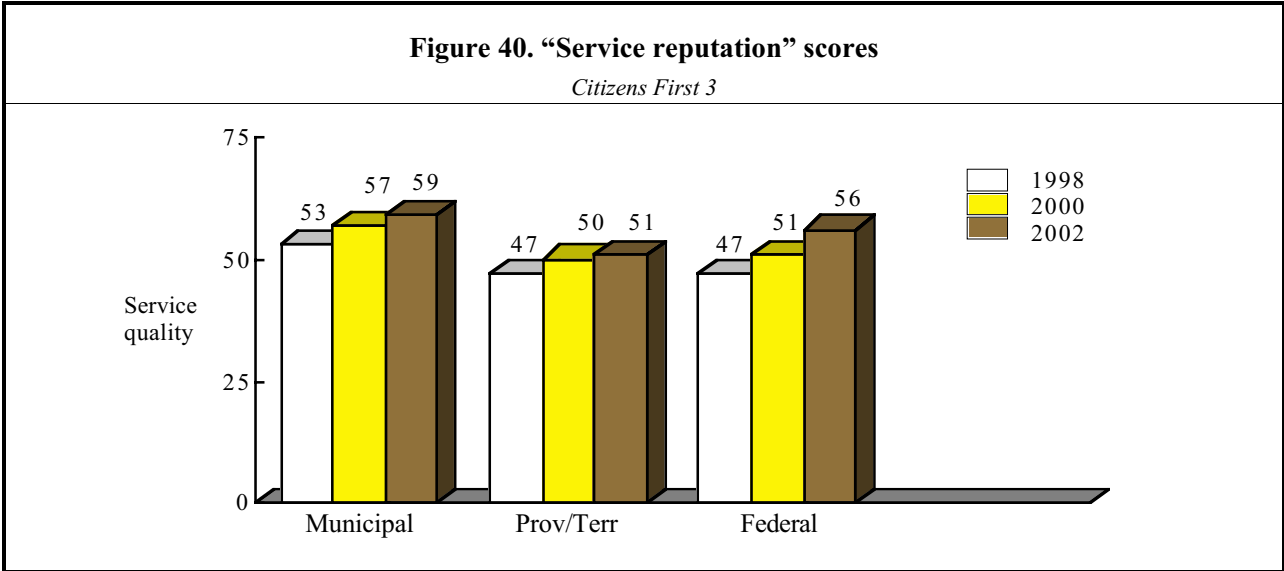
Citizens First 3

The need to understand service reputation scores was one of the primary motivating factors behind the initial *Citizens First* research in 1998. A series of polls conducted in the 1990s had shown that service quality ratings of federal government services stood at less than 50 out of 100, while provincial, territorial, and municipal governments scored only slightly higher.

In striking contrast, these polls reported that private sector services such as department stores, restaurants, and couriers scored in the 60s, 70s and higher.

A 1996 Deputy Ministers Task Force reported on citizens' apparent disaffection with government, concluding that, "In spite of efforts to improve service to citizens, the recurring theme in public opinion surveys is an unprecedented level of public mistrust, antipathy, and even hostility towards government." [17]

As *Citizens First* discovered in 1998, the great divide between public and private sector service scores in these earlier surveys was due partly to their methodologies. The polling questions on government services had asked the very global service reputation question, e.g. "How would you rate the quality of services provided by the federal government?" The questions on private sector services were phrased in more specific terms as *service experience questions.*

The difference in the question may seem small, but when citizens are asked to rate *specific government services* and *specific private services*, the picture changes entirely. Some private services rate high (couriers, supermarkets) and some low (banks, insurance companies). Some government service rate high (fire departments, libraries) and some low (road maintenance, workers' compensation). [18]

On average, service experience scores are about 10 points higher than service reputation scores. The two measures provide different perspectives on service quality, and it is important not to substitute one for the other.

Service experience

To obtain service experience scores, respondents are asked whether they have used a given service in the past year, and if so, to rate the quality of that service. The services appear in Table 18 through Table 20.

Taken as a whole, the service experience ratings show a significant overall increase from 1998 to 2002. This increase occurs across the set of 28 municipal/provincial/ territorial services for which comparative data are available, and also across the set of 18 federal services.

Not all services improved: for some there is not a statistically significant change, and for several, ratings decline. The overall trend, however, is upward.

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[17] Deputy Ministers' Task Force on Service Delivery Models (1996). *Discussion Paper on Service Delivery Models*. Canadian Centre for Management Development.

[18] *Citizens First* 1998 contains a more detailed discussion of this issue.

In reviewing the municipal/provincial/ territorial results, it is important to keep in mind that they are aggregate ratings of ten provinces, three territories, and hundreds of municipalities. It cannot be assumed that the results for any single province or municipality align with the overall result.

This said, results show several strong trends.

The increases in each of the four education services is perhaps the most dramatic. Education and training have been a focus in several jurisdictions recently, with changes to school administration, revamped curricula, and a greater emphasis on testing and accountability.

Similarly, services involving documentation and registration (e.g. issuing fishing licences, renewing health cards) have been at the centre of service improvement efforts in many Canadian jurisdictions. These efforts appear to have had a positive impact on satisfaction ratings.

Concerted service improvement efforts have also been made at Canada Post and with the administration of Employment Insurance in recent years, and improved ratings are a result.

Conversely, the 5-point drop in satisfaction with passport applications likely reflects the slower turnaround times that occurred because of increased security requirements following September 11.

Some of the observed changes (e.g. police services, agricultural services) are harder to explain from a service delivery perspective. Recalling the idea advanced in Chapter 2 – that there is an interdependency among service quality scores, government policies, and political figures who stand for them – some of these changes may reflect events or decisions at the policy level.

The pace of change

With a four-year baseline, the *Citizens First 3* research clearly shows a number of trends that were beneath the statistical radar in 2000. There was some frustration after release of the 2000 survey with the seemingly glacial pace of change in citizens' perceptions despite the effort that had been made to improve services.

While some progress is evident in 2002, it is worth reiterating why change registers slowly. Service quality ratings are national in scope. If one province or municipality makes a service quality breakthrough the national figures will change only slightly. It takes a broad-based change in service to register nationally.

One must also keep in mind that factors other than service quality can affect these scores. A widely publicized policy or event can spill over and affect service quality ratings. Recalling again the idea advanced in Chapter 2, there is an interdependency among service quality scores, government policies and the political figures who stand for them. It would require other information in addition to the service quality ratings that *Citizens First* has available in order to draw out the relative contributions of each.

Table 18. Citizens' ratings of municipal and provincial/territorial services

Citizens First 3

Service	Service quality (0 – 100)		
	1998	**2000**	**2002**
Education			
Colleges and universities *	58	60	66
Job training/retraining, apprenticeship programs *	47	51	61
Publicly funded schools *	54	57	60
Student loans, bursaries *	40	43	52
Health and emergency services			
Ambulance services	–	–	80
Fire department	86	80	82
Health card application or renewal *	62	67	69
Hospitals *	51	55	55
Health care outside hospitals	–	62	63
Mental health services, e.g. counselling	55	51	57
Public health care: information, vaccinations, lab tests, inspections, emergency lines such as poison information	68	66	68
Justice and enforcement			
Municipal police force *	68	64	58
Provincial/Territorial Courts *	38	46	46
Provincial/Territorial jails, probation and parole	41	39	40
Provincial Police (OPP, Sûreté du Québec, RNC) *	68	60	58
Licenses and permits			
Birth, marriage, death registration and certificates	60	60	59
Building permits and inspections: building, plumbing, gas, electrical etc	58	56	57
Hunting and fishing licences *	63	58	73
Motor vehicle registration, drivers' licences *	66	65	69
Planning and land development	–	–	49
Property tax collection	–	–	66

* Statistically significant linear trend, 1998 to 2002.

Table 19. Citizens' ratings of municipal and provincial/territorial services (continued)

Citizens First 3

Service	Service quality (0 – 100)		
	1998	2000	2002
Social Services			
Emergency shelters and hostels	–	–	49
Family services, counselling, children's aid *	56	55	45
Public housing	–	–	46
Public or subsidized day care	–	–	60
Social assistance, welfare	42	44	51
Workers' compensation, injured worker programs *	34	37	49
Recreation and culture			
Municipal parks, recreation and heritage	70	71	71
Provincial/territorial museums, art galleries, etc. *	71	73	75
Provincial/territorial parks, campgrounds	71	69	71
Public libraries	77	77	79
Utilities and transportation			
Automobile insurance (Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia)	–	–	63
Drinking water treatment and distribution	–	–	66
Garbage collection, waste transfer	–	–	72
Recycling	–	–	70
Public transit: bus, streetcar, subway *	58	58	61
Road construction, maintenance, snow removal	45	47	47
Sewage and waste water treatment	–	–	66
Other			
Agricultural services	63	61	55
Small business startup services	41	44	49
In Quebec only			
Régie des rentes du Québec (RRQ)	–	–	75
Revenue Quebec	–	–	61
Centres locaux d'emploi (CLE)	–	–	61
Communication Quebec	–	–	71
Mean of municipal and provincial/territorial services			
a) Based on services measured in all three years *	62	63	65
b) For all services measured in 2002	–	–	66
c) For municipal services, as defined in 1998 and 2000	64	64	65
d) For provincial/territorial services, as defined in 1998 and 2000 *	62	63	66

* Statistically significant linear trend, 1998 to 2002.

Table 20. Citizens' ratings of federal services			
Citizens First 3			
	Service quality (0 – 100)		
Service	**1998**	**2000**	**2002**
Access to information: 1-800-O-Canada, Canada.gc.ca, Service Canada	–	–	60
Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) (formerly Revenue Canada)	55	57	59
Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) *CPP applies only to residents outside Quebec only*	69	71	68
Canada Post *	57	62	66
Canadian Coast Guard/Search and rescue	66	63	66
Citizenship services	57	54	56
Customs and Immigration border services	58	57	59
Employment Insurance (EI) *	45	51	53
Federal Courts	–	44	44
National Parole Board, federal prisons	36	38	34
Financial Services: Farm Credit Corp, CMHC, CDIC	52	52	54
Health Canada: Information on health issues	55	55	59
Human Resource Centres of Canada, HRCCs (formerly CECs), *Residents outside Quebec only* *	47	54	54
Information services: Canada Information Office, Statistics Canada, Canadian Government Publications	55	57	58
National Film Board, National Museums, National Arts Centre, National Gallery *	70	73	75
National Parks	73	71	73
Passports: Get or renew a passport *	66	65	60
RCMP	68	59	62
Mean of 18 federal services *	60	61	64

* Statistically significant linear trend, 1998 to 2002.

Comparative scores

Many organizations conduct their own client research and will compare their results to those published here. Occasionally there are dramatic differences between *Citizens First* and an organization's own numbers. When differences occur, there are usually sound reasons. Two examples illustrate this point.

Patient satisfaction

Citizens First's score of 55 out of 100 for hospitals stands out in light of patient satisfaction scores in the range of 80 or more that are regularly reported by hospitals and by provinces.[19] This is a startling discrepancy and begs for an explanation. There are at least three important methodological differences between *Citizens First* and most hospital patient satisfaction surveys. Each of these practices contributes to lower scores in *Citizens First* and higher scores in the hospital satisfaction survey.[20]

- Sample selection:
  - Hospital surveys typically sample only from in-patients. They often omit out-patients.
  - Hospital surveys usually sample from patients who have been discharged, not those who are undergoing treatment or awaiting admission.

- Some of the major hospital surveys are not anonymous or confidential. They are printed on hospital stationery and numbered to identify the patient.

- Hospital surveys sample opinions of patients only, not those of relatives or caregivers.

Citizens First includes a much wider range of hospital contacts than do the hospitals' own patient satisfaction surveys, and it is completely anonymous and confidential.

Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security (CPP/OAS)

The score of 68 for CPP/OAS contrasts with scores in the 80 range obtained in surveys of CPP/OAS recipients. The difference arises from sampling. *Citizens First* asks for a rating of the service by any who have used it in the past year. A certain proportion of respondents say, "Of course I use CPP/OAS – I contribute to it every paycheck". (Most respondents, it must be said, did not make this connection.) Contributors and recipients are separated easily enough on the basis of age. Those under 50 years of age rate CPP/OAS service quality at 54 out of 100 – the payoff is still a long way away. For the 50-64 year group the rating climbs to 65, and for CPP/OAS recipients, those aged 65+, service quality stands at 79 out of 100.

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[19] See, for example, *Health Care in Canada, 2001*. Canadian Institute for Health Information. www.cihi.ca, and *Hospital Report 2001: Acute Care*. Ontario Hospital Association and the Government of Ontario, www.oha.com/.

[20] Further discussion of these factors appears in the *Erin Research Health Report 2002*, available at www.erinresearch.com.

In a word

The results are in and the news is good – service scores for the public sector in Canada have improved steadily since 1998. This is true for both of the key measures in *Citizens First* – service reputation (overall views of government services) and service experiences (ratings of specific services experienced). But, as many other parts of this report have suggested, there are still areas in need of attention. Figuring out where to focus improvement efforts is – like all the other elements in service improvement where planning is needed - best done using a citizen-centred approach. That is, it is best to ask clients and citizens to state what their priorities for improvement are.

11. Citizens' priorities for improvement

For busy public service managers a key element in establishing an effective service improvement strategy is knowing what things should be targeted to get the biggest result from their efforts. The information in *Citizens First* on the key drivers of satisfaction provides part of this picture. Another critical element in making effective citizen-centred improvements is finding out which services clients want the public sector to focus on as improvement priorities.

Citizens First 3 again asked respondents for their top priorities for improvement. Note that municipal and provincial/territorial services are combined, as the distribution of services between these jurisdictions varies across the country. In addition, the *Citizens First 3* survey adds a number of new services to better represent the range of activities addressed by the public sector. Drinking water and recycling are two examples of these new services.

These changes in *Citizens First 3* help to provide the most accurate and complete information possible. But the advantages of the changes come with a price – it is not possible to compare provincial/territorial-municipal priorities with the specific percentages for each from previous years. As a result, the 2002 data reported here represents a new baseline for these groups.

While absolute comparisons to past *Citizens First* data are not always possible, it is possible to compare the rank ordering of the improvement priorities from past years. The rank ordering is stable since 1998, with hospitals and roads leading the way.

Table 21. Municipal and provincial/territorial services – Priorities for improvement

Citizens First 3

Service	Percent choosing the service as a priority
Hospitals	57
Road maintenance & snow removal	40
Health care outside hospitals	31
Drinking water treatment	23
Publicly funded schools	22
Public transit	19
Public housing	16
Colleges and universities	15
Recycling	14
Family services, counselling, children's aid	14
Emergency shelters and hostels	12
Municipal police force	12
Public health care	12
Social assistance, welfare	11
Sewage & waste water treatment	11
Public or subsidized day care	10
Garbage collection	10
Job training	9
Workers compensation	8
Motor vehicle registration	8
Mental health services	7
Student loans, bursaries	7
Ambulance services	7
Municipal parks	7
Public libraries	7
Automobile insurance	6
Provincial parks	5
Fire department	4
Provincial courts	4
Small business startup services	4
Provincial jails	3
Property tax collection	3
Health card applications	3
Birth, marriage, death registration	3
Provincial police	3
Planning and land development	2
Agricultural services	2
Building permits	2
Provincial museums	1
Hunting & fishing licences	1

Table 22 shows priorities for improvement in federal services for both 2000 and 2002. Customs & Immigration border services is much higher in priority, perhaps not surprising in our post September 11 world. A change that is harder to understand is the drop in the priority rating for Human Resource Centres Canada (HRCC). It is possible that this is linked to economic performance but it could also be an artifact arising from the name change from Canada Employment Centres (CEC). The new name may still be confusing to respondents.

Table 22. Federal services - Priorities for improvement

Citizens First 3

| Service	Percent choosing the service as a priority	
	2002	2000
Employment Insurance	29	27
Customs & Immigration border services	26	16
Canada Post	25	28
Health Canada: Information on health issues	24	26
Canada Customs & Revenue Agency (formerly Revenue Canada)	24	29
CPP/OAS	23	26
Human Resource Centre Canada (HRCC)	16	29
RCMP	14	17
National parole/prisons	14	12
Federal Courts	12	12
Access to information	12	–
National Parks	11	12
Passports	10	7
Citizenship services	7	6
Information Services	6	7
Financial services: CMHC, farm credit	5	6
Coast Guard	4	5
NFB, museums, art galleries	3	5

In a word

It is obvious where citizens and clients want the Canadian public sector to focus their improvement efforts. For municipal and provincial/territorial levels the focus needs to be on hospitals, health care, roads, and schools and at the federal level it should be on Canada Post, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (formerly Revenue Canada), and Employment Insurance. Managers creating service improvement plans can move forward in these areas with confidence, knowing that they are critical in the eyes of their clients. How they proceed can be guided by the information in all chapters of this report. The information on views of government, channels, drivers, satisfaction scores, access and so on can all be used effectively to move ahead along the service improvement path – along the road to excellence.

12. The road to service excellence

Each edition of *Citizens First* has focused on providing managers with the insight and directions they need to improve government services and products. The model in Figure 41 summarizes what has been learned to date.

The four lower ovals are the components common to every service delivery process: client needs and expectations, how clients access services, the quality of services they receive, and the improvement priorities that flow from their experiences. Two of these components affect confidence in government. Service quality affects confidence directly, in that citizens who experience a higher quality of service have greater confidence in government. The "needs and expectations" component has two parts. Citizens who feel that government services meet their needs have greater confidence in government, and citizens who perceive that they have benefited from government services have more confidence in government.

Figure 41. The *Citizens First* Model

Citizens First 3
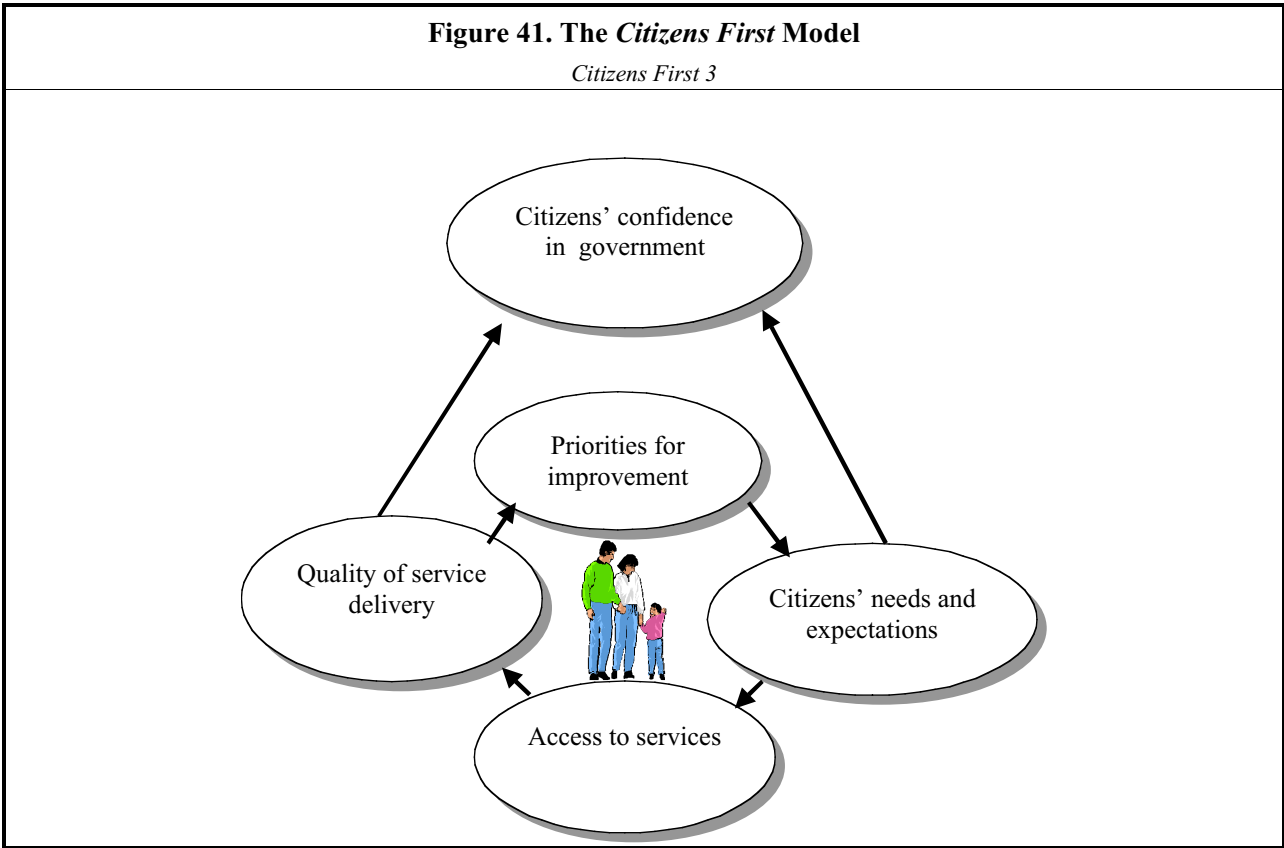
Build confidence in government

Confidence in government flows directly from the quality of present services and from the benefits that citizens have gained from past services. Demonstrating the strong quantitative relationship between service quality and confidence in government is a central contribution of *Citizens First 3*. Good service not only makes clients happy, it strengthens the institutions of government.

Understand citizens' needs and expectations

The citizen is at the heart of the public service agenda and is the single most important element in service improvement. Hearing citizens' voices and presenting their agenda is the task of *Citizens First*. Needs and expectations can be defined at many levels. At a high level, they take the form of priorities for action. At a micro level they take the form of service standards such as how long one should expect to wait in a queue. They are also expressed through preferences for service delivery channels, through the identification of barriers to access, and through specific suggestions for improving service.

Facilitate access

Coordinating multi-channel service delivery is the new frontier in public sector services. The dramatic numbers of clients who access services through more than one channel shows how the face of service delivery is changing. Managers must find ways to ensure their delivery channels are integrated. They must develop a better understanding of how clients use the different channels that are available to them, and how each channel contributes to client satisfaction.

The Internet, the newest channel, is going through a period of rapid development and change. The finding that its use can improve satisfaction suggests a need to continue to learn as much about it as possible and use this information to drive forward toward higher levels of service excellence.

The telephone continues to be the most frequent means of accessing government, however citizens rate telephone access as particularly difficult. Telephone service is a particular priority for creative solutions.

Drive service quality higher

The five drivers of satisfaction are as important today as they were when they were first identified in 1998. They are the foundation for improving service and a guide for managers as they make decisions about standards of service. Providing good service with respect to each of the five drivers will create satisfied clients. To focus things even more finely, improving timeliness presents the greatest single opportunity for improving government services.

The drivers differ somewhat across services and across channels. Organizations will benefit from doing their own research to identify the drivers that are specific to their services and clients.

Prioritize improvements

The good news is that service quality scores are increasing, but this does not mean that the public sector can relax its efforts to improve. Citizens' expectations of public sector services are also increasing, and service quality scores still average in the mid 60s. Because service is critical in shaping citizens' confidence in government, it is vital that the focus on the service agenda increase, not diminish. The challenge for the public sector may be bigger now than ever before.

Results of *Citizens First 3* provide practical guidance on meeting this challenge, by increasing understanding of citizens' expectations and by defining the elements of the service delivery process that drive satisfaction.

The news that service quality is improving needs to be widely communicated, and practitioners need to be encouraged and supported in their service improvement activities. Service improvement awards, sharing of best practices, and breaking down the barriers within and between jurisdictions to encourage more seamless service need to be more common across the public sector.

Citizens First has focused on governments' external clients. There is much to gain by a parallel focus on the service needs and expectations of internal clients. No organization serves its external clients well without also attending to internal service needs. Inside every organization the work of each group is linked in some way to the work of another. Everyone in an organization is either serving an external client or serving someone inside so that the external client can be served. One useful starting point would be to identify drivers of satisfaction within the public service.

Internal service delivery is only part of what goes on within organizations. It is also necessary to consider the culture of an organization and to measure its organizational health (e.g., concerns with communication, relationships with managers, compensation, and the degree to which employees feel their organization is client-centred). Attention to both internal service quality and organizational health can help create an environment in which excellent service is the norm. The Public Sector Service Delivery Council (PSSDC) could make a significant contribution to the public sector by developing a tool that organizations can use to measure organizational health, perhaps based on the model it developed for the *Common Measurements Tool.*

In conclusion

While the conclusions of this report flow from a simple model, they have implications for action across the public sector. The history of the work by PSSDC and the creation of the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service (ICCS) all suggest that the public sector in Canada is not only willing, but ready to meet these challenges. The road to public service excellence may be a challenging one, but it is one that Canada is traveling along with success.

Appendix A: Method

The previous *Citizens First* surveys in 1998 and 2000 have been conducted by mail, and the majority of responses to the 2002 survey were obtained in this manner as well. An Internet component was also added in 2002 for two reasons, the first is that mail surveys are becoming increasingly expensive, while Internet surveys cost considerably less, and the second is to diversify the sample base.

Differences in method can produce small differences in result. For this reason, ***all comparisons of 2002 results with the 1998 and 2000 surveys use only the mail returns.***

It was decided in advance that the mail sample would contribute five-sixths of the total data and the Internet sample would contribute one sixth. Future surveys may blend in a larger proportion of Internet responses. The Internet survey was administered in two parts, as the entire survey was judged to be too lengthy for Internet administration. Respondents were randomly assigned to either Part I or Part II.

Response rate

Response rate to the mail survey is calculated using the number of surveys mailed, the number of completed returns and the number of surveys that were undelivered. The number of completes (6,464) and the number mailed (58,250) are known exactly. Two estimates are available for the number undelivered.

Since the survey was sent as first class mail, envelopes with incorrect addresses were returned to the sender. The number returned was 5,008, or 9 percent of those mailed. Based on this figure, the response rate is 12.2 percent. For various reasons, not all undeliverable envelopes are returned. This estimate of the return rate is therefore somewhat low.

A more accurate estimate of undeliverable surveys was obtained by making telephone calls to 1,100 randomly selected individuals on the mailing list and verifying their addresses. The proportion of incorrect addresses was 22 percent (wrong postal code, wrong or incomplete address, or person had moved). On this basis, the response rate for the 2002 survey is 14.3 percent.

Weighting

The raw returns from a mail survey do not exactly match the demographics of the population. Typically, for example, people under the age of 25 respond at a lower rate than those who are older. In the case of *Citizens First*, the distortion is increased by the requirement to provide a sample of approximately 400 for each of the 15 partner jurisdictions. This results in an over sampling of smaller provinces and municipalities.

To correct for these distortions, returns are weighted, using current Statscan figures, to match the sample to the Canadian population with respect to age, gender and territory or province. Participating municipalities are included in the weighting calculation in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. The mail and

Internet samples were weighted independently in order that results can be reported for either sample separately. The weighted sample is slightly smaller than the original sample for two reasons. First, weights were capped at 4.0 in order that no individual could exert undue influence on the results. In addition, on the Internet side, the sample had more than the required number of respondents.

Table 23. Overall response
Citizens First 3

Method of administration	Raw responses	Weighted responses
Mail	6,464	6,283
Internet: Survey sections A, B, C, E, G	1,540	1,229
Internet: Survey sections A, D, F, G	1,721	1,247
Total	9,701	8,759

WEIGHTING

Imagine a survey that interviewed 1,000 men and 500 women. Its findings would clearly not reflect public opinion very accurately. It is possible to improve this imaginary survey by making the sample reflect the population more closely. If the responses of each woman are multiplied by 1.5 and the responses of each man are multiplied by 0.67, the results will approximate a sample of 750 women and 750 men, giving a much more accurate reading of opinion.

A mail survey cannot control who responds, and inevitably some groups will be over-or under-represented.

Weighting in *Citizens First* begins by taking the actual composition of the Canadian population (with regard to age, gender and province/territory) from Statistics Canada. Each segment of the sample is then multiplied by a number such that the sample as a whole accurately reflects the Canadian population.

Appendix B: Model of service and government

The parameter values following are associated with the schematic model that appears in Figure 6.

Definition of latent variables

Confidence	Overall view of government
Munic/Prov SQ	Quality of services received from municipal, provincial and territorial governments
Federal SQ	Quality of services received from federal government

Definition of observed variables

Good job	I believe governments do a good job
Responsive	Governments are responsive to the needs of citizens
Open&accountable	Governments in this country conduct their business in an open and accountable manner
Value for taxes	I get good value for my tax dollars
Reputation-Municipal	Service reputation of municipal government
Reputation-Prov	Service reputation of provincial/territorial government
Reputation-Federal	Service reputation of federal government
Top munic/prov	Service quality rating of 4 priority municipal and provincial services
Top federal	Service quality rating of 6 priority federal services
Benefit	Government services have had a positive effect on me and my family
Sufficiency	The services that I get from governments meet my needs

Standardized Regression Weights

Confidence ← Federal SQ	0.249
Confidence ← Munic/Prov SQ	0.117
Confidence ← Benefit	0.354
Confidence ← Sufficiency	0.271
Top Federal ←Federal SQ	0.733
Reputation-Municipal ← Munic/Prov SQ	0.715
Top munic/prov ← Munic/Prov SQ	0.639
Reputation-Federal ← Federal SQ	0.914
Reputation-Prov ← Munic/Prov SQ	0.789
Open&accountable ← Confidence	0.682
Value for taxes ← Confidence	0.792
Good job ← Confidence	0.877
Responsive ← Confidence	0.720

Correlations

Federal SQ ←→ Munic/Prov SQ	0.701
Munic/Prov SQ ←→ Sufficiency	0.608
Munic/Prov SQ ←→ Benefit	0.484
Federal SQ ←→ Benefit	0.484
Federal SQ ←→ Sufficiency	0.569
Benefit ←→ Sufficiency	0.590

Squared Multiple Correlations

Confidence	0.669
Responsive	0.519
Reputation-Prov	0.622
Reputation-Federal	0.836
Good job	0.770
Top munic/prov	0.408
Reputation-Municipal	0.511
Open&accountable	0.466
Value for taxes	0.628
Top Federal	0.538

Goodness of fit statistics

Goodness of fit index (GFI)	.984
Goodness of fit index adjusted for df (AGFI)	.971
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	.047
90% confidence interval for RMSEA	.043 – .052

# Appendix C: Explaining variance

The 5 bars in Figure 42 show how people differ in their response to the idea that government service is difficult to access. These differences can also be represented mathematically, and the statistical term that describes these differences is *variance*. Variance is a measure of how people differ in their response.

A research study such as *Citizens First* seeks to understand why people differ – in mathematical terms it seeks to *explain* the variance in response. For example, suppose that in Figure 42, every person aged 18-24 answered "strongly disagree" (1 out of 5) to the statement. At the same time, every person aged 25-34 answered 2 out of 5, all people 65 and older answered 5 out of 5, and so forth. Age would then account for 100 percent of the variance in peoples' response

to this question, i.e., age would provide a complete explanation of people's response.

In fact, this did not happen. Some people in all age groups said that they had no difficulty accessing government services, likewise, some people of all age groups said that they had a hard time.

Age did play a small role. A slightly larger proportion of older people took the position that services are difficult to access. But the effect is very small: age accounts for just 2 percent of the variance in response. Is it advisable to develop access strategies for different age groups? Probably not. We should have a much better understanding of the access issue before committing time and money to a solution.

Figure 42. Access to government services

Citizens First 3

"I can readily access any government service that I need"
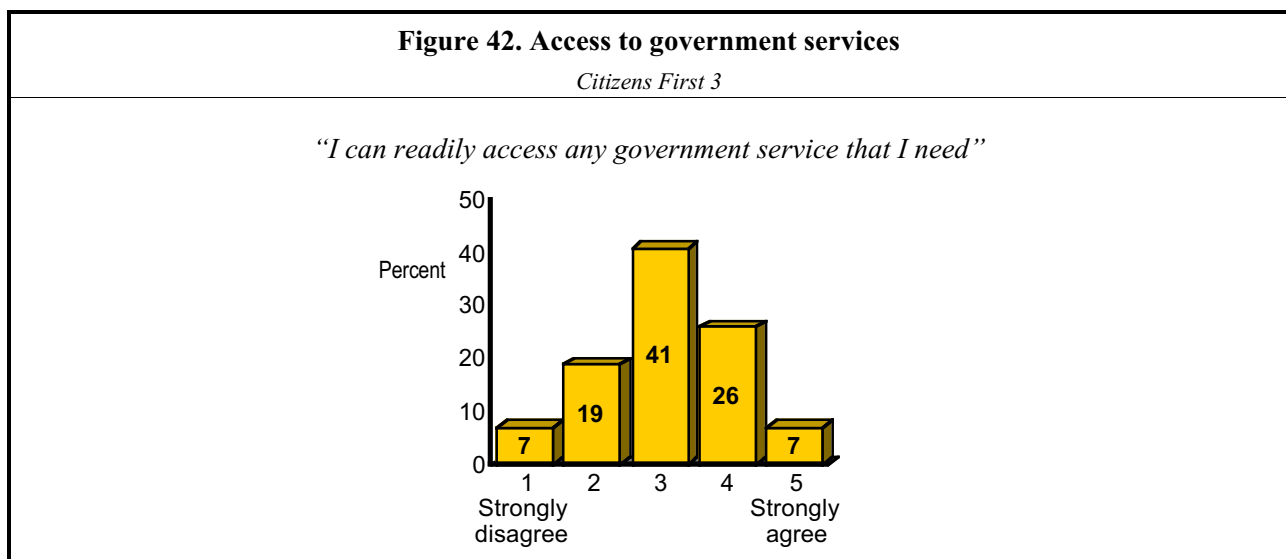
As a rough guide, those who design service improvements should pay close attention to research results that explain about 20 percent of the variance in a given situation. If results explain 30 or 40 percent of the variance, the case is that much stronger.

The "Drivers of Satisfaction" explain almost 70 percent of the variance in satisfaction ratings of government services. They therefore establish an extremely solid basis for policy formulation and service strategy development. (Drivers are discussed in Chapter 4.)

Statistical significance

The more respondents that a sample contains, the smaller the differences that are likely to generate a "statistically significant" outcome. With a sample in the thousands, exceedingly small differences can be statistically significant – differences that are not meaningful in any practical sense. In this report, differences are noted only if they are a) statistically significant and b) account for at least one percent of the variance in the measure at hand. This screens out some of the clutter.