
Citizens First 2000

Summary Report

George Spears
Kasia Seydegart

Erin Research Inc.

for the

Public Sector Service Delivery Council

and

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada

Readers are referred to a more detailed version of this report, by the same title, available from IPAC in English and French.

© L'Institut d'administration publique du Canada, 2001
The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2001

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED / TOUS DROITS RÉSERVÉS

Institute of Public Administration of Canada

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) is a leading Canadian organization concerned with the theory and practice of public management. Its scope covers governance from the local to the global level. It is an association with active regional groups across the country. The Institute recognizes and fosters both official languages of Canada.

IPAC/IAPC

1075, rue Bay Street, Suite/Bureau 401
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2B1 CANADA
Tel./Tél. : (416) 924-8787
Fax: (416) 924-4992
e-mail/courriel : ntl@ipaciapc.ca
Internet : www.ipaciapc.ca

L'Institut d'administration publique du Canada

L'Institut d'administration publique du Canada (IPAC) est la principale institution canadienne qui s'intéresse à la pratique de la gestion publique tant au niveau local qu'au niveau mondial. C'est une association composée de groupes régionaux actifs à travers tout le pays. L'Institut reconnaît et promeut les deux langues officielles du Canada.

This IPAC project was made possible by the following:

City of Montreal
City of Toronto
City of Vancouver

Yukon Territory

Province of Alberta
Province of British Columbia
Province of Manitoba
Province of New Brunswick
Province of Newfoundland
Province of Nova Scotia
Province of Ontario
Province of Prince Edward Island
Province of Quebec
Province of Saskatchewan

Government of Canada

and

The members of IPAC, who are dedicated to the improvement of
public administration

Thank you

[page iv is BLANK]

Foreword

Citizens First 2000 is a world-leading survey on government service delivery and a key tool for service improvement in the public sector. It is also the culmination of creative partnerships and alliances over a number of years. In 1998, the Citizen-Centred Service Network (CCSN), sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD), worked together with many federal agencies and four provinces to initiate a study on what citizens thought about the services they received from government and published a first report, *Citizens First*. The report proved to be a landmark event and a watershed for the delivery of government services in Canada. The *Citizens First* initiative was recognized nationally and internationally when the Citizen-Centred Service Network won the coveted Gold Award for Innovative Management from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), in 1999, and won the silver medal in the International Innovations Awards of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) in the fall of 2000.

Citizens First helped governments across Canada to shape more effective service improvement strategies and to establish common benchmarks. As a result, the Public Sector Service Delivery Council (PSSDC) and IPAC recognized the need to carry it forward as a regular biennial survey that will help to chart progress and to deepen understanding of service delivery in the public sector. With IPAC acting as a catalyst and project *impressario*, a number of Government of Canada departments and agencies, all provincial governments, the Yukon Territory and the cities of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal chose to participate in the 2000 survey. We are proud of this broad partnership, and of the resulting report, which will again be a major instrument for strengthening and refining public-sector service strategies across the country.

Our debts are many: to the officers in each of the jurisdictions who are passionate about improving the quality of government services to the citizens; to George Spears and Kasia Seydegart of Erin Research Inc. for their expert professional direction of the research project and analysis; to Art Daniels and Brian Marson, co-chairs of the Research Sub-committee of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council, for guiding the project to a successful conclusion; and to the staff of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada for managing this great undertaking with finesse.

Citizen's First 2000 continues where the work of the first edition ended. Bolstered by an unprecedented number of responses from Canadians in every corner of the country, the survey offers essential data, invaluable benchmarks, and important new insights that will continue to provide the foundation for policies and initiatives to improve government services.

Citizens First 2000 is not the last word on government service delivery. But it is another giant step forward by the governments of Canada: it is a powerful tool and a source of encouragement for all public servants, as they pursue their important work of improving government service delivery to Canada's deserving citizens.

Errol S. Price
President
Institute of Public Administration of Canada

Ralph Heintzman
Co-Chair
Public Sector Service
Delivery Council

INTRODUCTION

Background

The *Citizens First 2000* project is a major research initiative of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council (PSSDC) that brings together service-quality leaders from the federal, provincial and territorial, and municipal governments under the auspices of the Treasury Board of Canada and of The Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC).

The PSSDC is advancing the work of the Citizen-Centred Service Network (CCSN), a consortium of government officials that launched the *Citizens First* project in 1998. The CCSN's pioneering work in service quality was recognized in 1999 with the Gold Award for Innovative Management from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada and, in 2000, with the silver medal in the International Innovations Awards of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM).

Citizens First 2000

The 2000 study builds on the 1998 investigation and is substantially broader in scope. (See *Citizens First*, Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1998. www.ccmd-ccg.gc.ca.) Partners in the research include the Government of Canada, all ten provinces, one territory (Yukon) and Canada's three largest municipalities – Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. With over 6,000 respondents, the survey is twice the size of the 1998 research, allowing greater detail and precision of measurement.

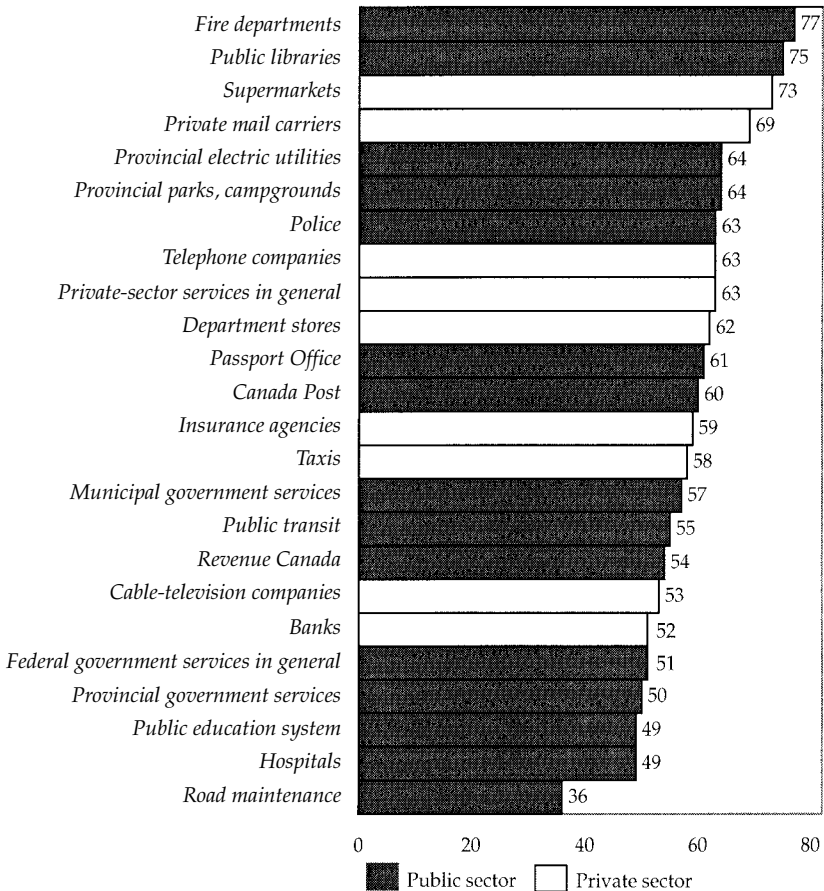
The research confirms major findings of the 1988 project, tracks trends, and extends the discussion to new areas. It further explores citizens' access to government services, and it examines the drivers of citizen satisfaction as they relate to specific delivery channels such as the telephone and Internet services.

MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

For years, Canadians have been told that the quality of government services compares poorly with those offered by the private sector. The idea is even supported by surveys showing that "government service" rates well below that of department stores, courier companies, grocery stores and other private-sector companies. Is this perception an accurate reflection of reality? In a word, no.

Figure 1

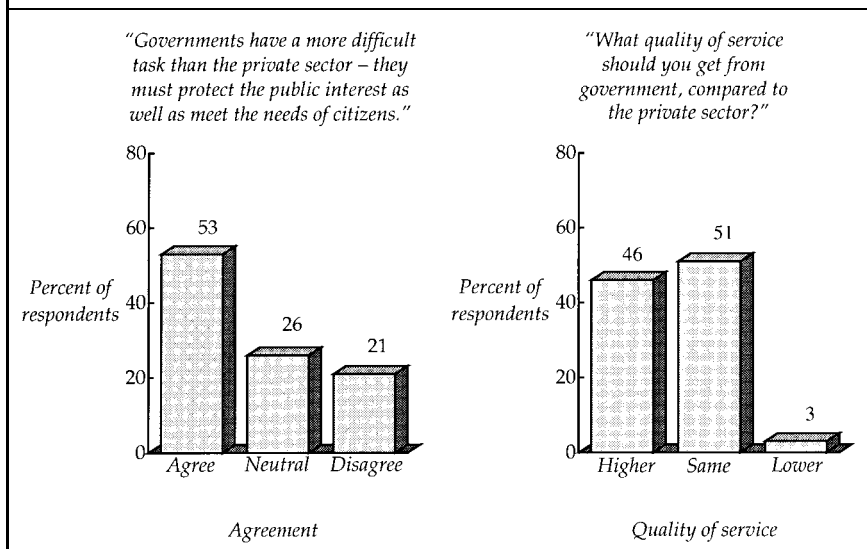
**Citizens' ratings of public- and private-sector services. *Citizens First 2000*.
(The service-quality scale ranges from 0 to 100)**



The *Citizens First* project tests citizens' views of government and private-sector service in some detail. Survey respondents rated the quality of service they receive from twenty-four public and private organizations. The selection includes widely used services that most people are familiar with and can judge from personal experience (Figure 1).

Ratings for private and public services are mixed throughout the range of services. A cluster of public services tops the ratings (fire departments,

Figure 2
Citizens' expectations of government service. *Citizens First 2000.*



public libraries), followed by alternating private and public services, singly or in small groups.

The misconception about government service quality appears to result from confusing two ways of rating services – rating *specific* services and rating *service in general*.

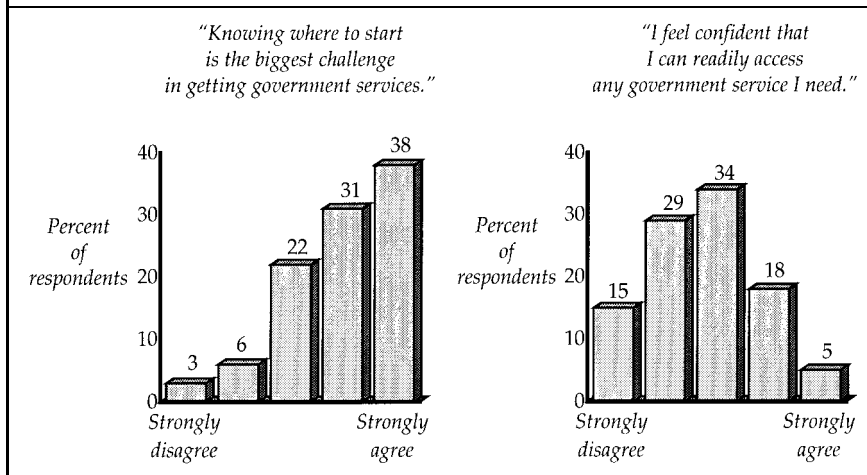
The concept of government services *in general* seems to evoke a common attitude or stereotype about government. It may be based on experiences from years or decades past, or it may derive from the accumulated information (and misinformation) that people pick up from media accounts and casual conversations with friends. In any case, the general impression of government service that most people carry around is that it is poor.

The myth of poor government service results in part from surveys that asked people to rate government services *in general*. *Citizens First* shows that it is easy to reproduce these low ratings but also that they are misleading. Citizens regard the *specific* services that governments provide more positively than they regard government *in general*.

Citizens' Expectations Remain High

Citizens *expect* government services to be as good as, if not better than,

Figure 3
Two common beliefs about access. *Citizens First 2000.*



what they can get from the private sector! Two additional survey results illuminate this finding. First, 53 percent of respondents appreciate that "governments have a more difficult task than the private sector – they must protect the public interest as well as meet the needs of citizens." Second, citizens believe that added responsibility does not diminish governments' task in terms of provision of services. Forty-six percent contend that governments should provide a *higher standard of service* than that provided by the private sector; only 3 percent think that government service can be lower in quality.

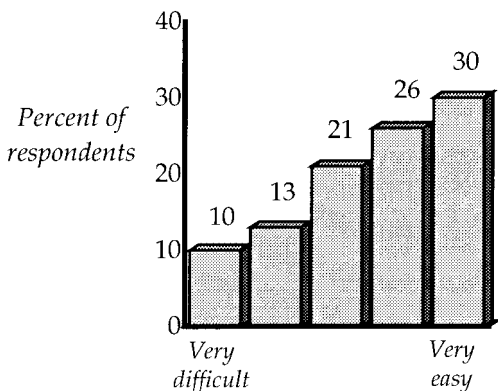
A resounding 97 percent of Canadians want government services to match or exceed the quality of private-sector services (Figure 2).

ACCESS

Many citizens perceive an overwhelming challenge when they contemplate locating a government service. Survey results are a clear illustration of just how pervasive this attitude is: 69 percent of citizens agree or strongly agree with the statement "Knowing where to start is the biggest challenge in getting government services." Only 9 percent have little or no problem finding services, and 22 percent fall somewhere in between.

Furthermore, only 23 percent agreed with the statement "I feel confident that I can readily access any government service I need." That leaves the vast majority – 77 percent – anywhere from a bit flustered to totally bewildered (Figure 3).

Figure 4
Ease of access. *Citizens First 2000.*



The challenge of knowing where to start is universal. Urban and rural Canadians share this view, as do those at both ends of the income scale. Citizens who work in the public sector perceive access to be as difficult as those who do not work in this sector.

Because many citizens approach government with doubt and trepidation, the initial contact with front-line staff is critically important. This contact – whether it’s a smile, a friendly hello, or a concerned response and offer to help – has enormous power to quickly dispel initial apprehension.

What Makes Access Easy or Difficult?

The survey asked citizens to describe in detail a recent experience with government service. Citizens chose the experience they wished to describe, and the 6,000 respondents described positive and negative experiences at all levels of government and spanning the full range of government programs.

Across the 6,000 reported service experiences, citizens rated the ease of access in obtaining the service at a mean of 63 out of 100. Some citizens found access very easy and others found access very difficult. The difference between finding access easy or difficult is primarily due to three factors. Each one contributes an increment to citizens’ ratings of ease of access. Together, they account for 36 percent of the variance in ratings of ease of access (Figure 4). They are described in order of importance below.

Figure 5
Access problems. Citizens First 2000.

<i>Access problem</i>	<i>Percent who experience the problem</i>
1. Busy phone lines	27
2. Bounced from person to person	27
3. Trouble with telephone in the Blue Pages	16
4. Could not find the service in the Blue Pages	12
5. Did not know where to look	11
6. Parking difficult	12
7. Trouble finding the service on the Internet	5
8. Had to travel too great a distance	6
9. Other (e.g., long waits)	11
<i>Percent who report one or more access problems</i>	<i>61</i>

Factor 1. Obstacles that the citizen faces getting to the service

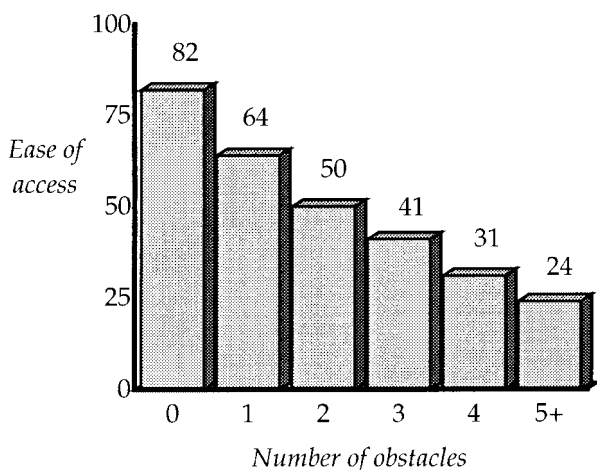
The more obstacles the person encounters getting to the service, the harder that service is to access. These obstacles are familiar, practical difficulties such as telephone issues, distance, getting bounced from person to person, etc. Sixty-one percent of respondents faced one or more obstacles, with telephone problems prominent among them (Figure 5).

These obstacles dramatically affect ease of access. Just one obstacle drops ease of access from a blue-sky rating of 82 out of 100 all the way down to a mediocre 64 out of 100 (Figure 6). Clearly, *accessible service means no obstacles!*

Factor 2. Previous experience with the service

Those who know how to get the service when they start out have an easier time. A majority of respondents stated that they knew how to get the service they were seeking, and they rated ease of access at 73 out of 100. The minority who did not know how to access the service rated it at 48 out of 100. A third group said they thought they knew how to get the service, but found that they did not: frustration caused this group to give the lowest ratings of all, 36 out of 100.

Figure 6
The number of obstacles getting to the service affects ease of access.
Citizens First 2000.



Factor 3. The total length of time it takes to get the service

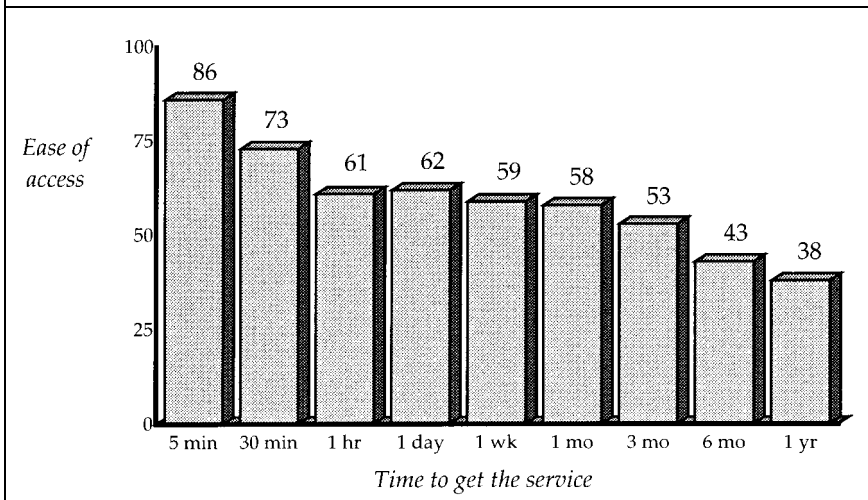
Citizens see a close link between ease of access and the amount of time it takes to get the service. About 10 percent of citizens got the service they needed in just five minutes, and this group rated ease of access at 86 out of 100. Services that take thirty minutes score well, too.

The interesting result is that services requiring anywhere from one hour to one month to complete are rated virtually the same, within a point or two of 60 out of 100. Sixty out of 100 is not a particularly good score, so the point is again clear that, across the broad spectrum of government services, *accessible service means thirty minutes or less*.

It should be noted that the bars in Figure 7 represent somewhat different services. Services that take five to thirty minutes are likely to be routine transactions, while those requiring more time may, as a group, be more complex.

This perspective on access is not likely to surprise anyone. We all know from experience that familiarity with the service and obstacles encountered in getting to the service are components of access. The value of this analysis is to quantify their effects across the full spectrum of government

Figure 7
The duration of the service affects ease of access. *Citizens First 2000.*



services. Analysis confirms our intuition and it provides a rational basis for moving forward. Accessible services are fast, and they are problem-free. Now, what can we do about it?

Fixing the Biggest Problem

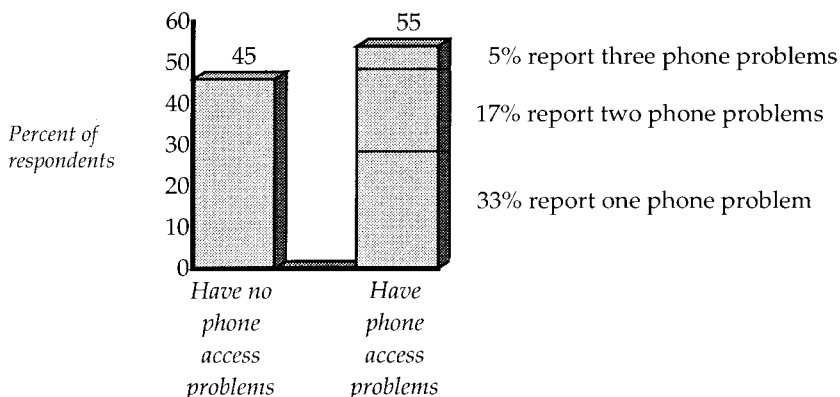
Both in the 1998 and 2000 surveys, telephone problems top the list of obstacles that citizens encountered, regardless of level of government.

A majority of citizens who contacted government by telephone experienced one or more problems getting through! The telephone is “the people’s channel” – the most frequent means of contacting government – and must be a convenient and reliable avenue to service (Figure 8).

Citizens suggested several additional solutions to problems with accessing services via telephone:

- Ninety-five percent agree that automatic phone systems should have an option to “zero out” – to exit the system and talk to a live person.
- Eighty-six percent agree that automatic phone systems should provide information that callers commonly need, such as the department’s location and hours of business.
- Eighty-two percent agree that phone systems should inform the caller how many minutes they are likely to wait in the queue before an agent answers

Figure 8
Telephone problems encountered by those who phone for services.
Citizens First 2000.



- Fifty-eight percent agree that phone systems should provide a web address, when an Internet site might be an alternate source of information.

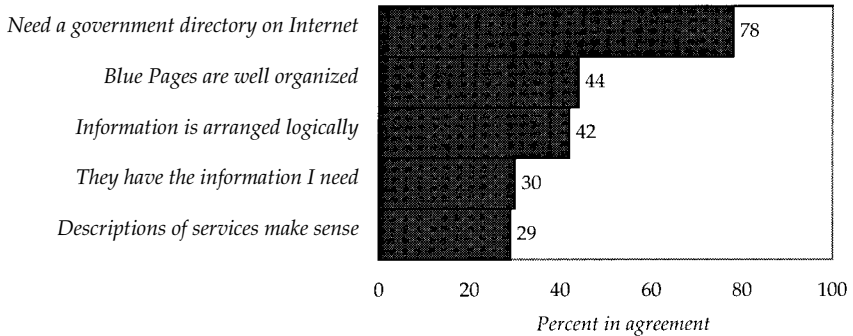
Rating the Blue Pages

Respondents were asked to rate the Blue Pages (in some areas, they are known as the Grey Pages), based on an experience they had had in the past year: 44 percent thought the Blue Pages were well organized and almost the same percentage of respondents (42 percent) thought the information was arranged logically. However, only 30 percent found the information they needed, and only 29 percent thought the descriptions of services made sense. A majority of respondents (78 percent) agreed that there needs to be a government directory on the Internet (Figure 9).

Many governments are working to improve the Blue Pages, but clearly citizens have yet to register the result.

There are several reasons for this. Revised Blue Pages have been introduced in some communities and not others; the new version will be a novelty for some time to come. There will also be a lag in citizens' perceptions, as some people do not use the Blue Pages frequently. There may also be a transition period where, for example, a person has one type of Blue Pages at home and another at work. Improvements in ratings may not be apparent until the changeover nears completion.

Figure 9
Blue Pages.* *Citizens First 2000.*



*In some areas they are known as the Grey Pages.

DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION

The empirical question is this: some citizens get government services and come away highly satisfied; others get the same services and are greatly dissatisfied. What makes the difference?

If you ask ten people for their insights on this issue you might well get ten different explanations. Ask thirty or forty people (a typical scenario for focus-group research) and patterns begin to emerge. Ask several thousand citizens, and it is possible to reach a precise quantitative answer.

The 1998 *Citizens First* research asked people a detailed set of questions about a single recent experience they had with government. Canadians described their experiences getting different kinds of services from all three levels of government, and from this emerged five “drivers of satisfaction” – the elements that make the difference between high and low ratings of client satisfaction: timeliness, knowledge/competence, “the extra mile/the extra smile,” fairness, and outcome.

The 2000 research repeated this analysis to determine whether the original five drivers stand the test of time, and they do. They account for 69 percent of the variance in satisfaction ratings, meaning that they tell 69 percent of the whole story about what differentiates satisfied from dissatisfied customers.¹

The Extra Mile, The Extra Smile

The 2000 research has helped clarify the third driver, originally defined as

Drivers of Citizen Satisfaction.
Citizens First 2000.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Timeliness | <i>"I was satisfied with the amount of time it took to get the service."</i> |
| 2. Knowledge, Competence | <i>"Staff were knowledgeable and competent."</i> |
| 3. The Extra Mile, The Extra Smile | <i>"Staff went the extra mile to make sure sure I got what I needed / I was treated in a friendly, courteous manner."</i> |
| 4. Fairness | <i>"I was treated fairly."</i> |
| 5. Outcome | <i>"I got what I needed."</i> |

"courtesy." In developing the 2000 survey, a number of focus groups were held, and participants indicated that satisfaction is greatly increased when staff "go the extra mile" to ensure that citizens get what they need. This adds a critical proactive dimension to the basic friendly and courteous presentation that citizens expect. It means reaching out to ensure that the client attains the best possible outcome and has the best possible service experience.

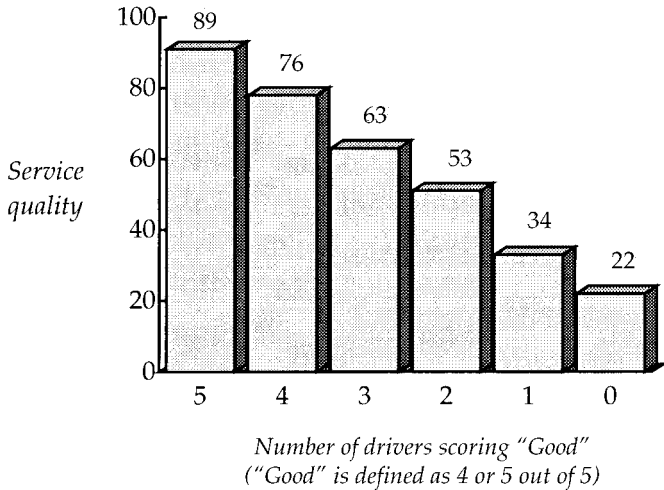
"Going the extra mile" applies to senior management and to governments as a whole, as well as to individual service providers. The provision of services involves design, resources, policy development, personnel, support services and overall management. It demands commitment at every level of the organization and a shared vision of building services around the needs of citizens. When the organizational culture from top to bottom goes the extra mile, citizens will truly take notice.

Impact of the Drivers

What kind of a difference do the five drivers of satisfaction make? When governments perform well on all five – when competent staff provide timely service and reach out to citizens, treat them fairly and deliver the needed outcome – satisfaction scores are an incredible 89 out of 100. Nearly one-fifth of encounters with government service met the standards on all five drivers and got this high satisfaction rating.

If government delivers on four of the five drivers and misses out on any one, satisfaction slips to 76 out of 100. If service providers deliver

Figure 10
Impact of drivers. Citizens First 2000.



good service on three of the drivers and miss two, overall ratings slip another notch to 63 out of 100 (Figure 10).

Providing – or not providing – good service in these five ways defines the spectrum of service-quality ratings, from 22 out of 100 to 89 out of 100.

What can governments do to deliver good service? First, it is necessary to recognize that governments *do* deliver excellent service on many occasions. The real issue is to deliver good service consistently, and the five drivers define how this can be achieved.

Having made this bold, general claim for the drivers of satisfaction, it is important to set some boundary conditions:

Government Responsibilities

Governments are not always able to deliver service that meets citizens expectations. A positive outcome, for example, is not guaranteed. Your property assessment may go up, or the judge may find that you really were going 40 km over the speed limit. Citizens may not get what they consider a timely decision, in matters such as zoning applications, where rights of different parties must be considered. Some programs and departments encounter these issues more often than others – tax departments more frequently than public libraries. Some services have built-in constraints that will limit client satisfaction. Eighty-nine out of 100 may

not be a realistic goal at all. Service providers should therefore assess their performance against other providers of similar services, rather than against any overall aggregate.

Differences among Services

Because government services are so varied, it is reasonable to suppose that drivers of satisfaction will differ across services. Good service may not mean the same for public transit, hospitals and taxation agencies.

Two examples illustrate the potential benefit of studying specific services. Several hundred respondents to the *Citizens First* survey recounted experiences with hospitals and with police. For police service, there are just two primary drivers of satisfaction: the first is fair treatment and the second is timeliness. For hospitals, there were four drivers: timeliness, followed by going the extra mile, providing clear accurate information, and competence. "Hospital services" is a broad category, and it is likely that different types of hospital experience – inpatient, outpatient, long-term care and so on – might produce somewhat different results. The more specifically defined the client population, the more precise will be the guidance gained.²

Characteristics of Service-Delivery Channels

Service-delivery channels have unique characteristics as well. Drivers for telephone and walk-in services differ in that courtesy and fairness number among the drivers for walk-in services, but not for telephone services. The interpersonal element is apparently more important in face-to-face situations. This makes sense; it is easier to pick up cues about courtesy and fair treatment in the walk-in setting. Facial expression and body language play a part, and the client observes how she or he is treated in relation to other clients. The entire physical dimension of walk-in service is absent on the telephone, and the analysis of drivers shows how important

Drivers for Telephone and Walk-in Service-Delivery Channels

<i>Telephone</i>	<i>Walk-in</i>
Timeliness	Timeliness
Knowledge, competence	Courtesy
Extra mile	Extra mile
Outcome	Knowledge, competence
	Fairness
	Outcome

it is for walk-in services. (Internet services, where quite a different set of factors underlie satisfaction, will be discussed below.)

THE MEASUREMENT OF PROGRESS

Comparing results for 1998 and 2000, service-quality ratings for a selection of public and private services did not change to a significant degree. Ratings for 2000 are within a point or two of 1998, either upward or downward (Figure 11).

The change that has occurred over the two years is that ratings of services “in general” go up by 3 to 4 points. Why should this happen when scores for specific services remain unchanged? One possibility is that both governments and the private sector are experiencing a “rosy glow” effect of good economic times.

Of more immediate concern is why specific services have remained largely unchanged. During this time, many governments have been actively working to improve service delivery. Have their efforts been in vain? It is much too early to make this gloomy conclusion. Many large organizations, both public and private, have found that change in client perceptions of service quality comes slowly.

One reason stems from the sheer number of governments and services involved. One province, for example, may make a dramatic improvement in its tax information services. The national picture, however, will not change appreciably until the majority of provinces undertake similar initiatives.

A second reason is that citizens access some services infrequently – once a year for tax issues, less often to renew passports. There is, therefore, a built-in time lag: service improvements go unnoticed until the next time a citizen requires that service.

A third reason is that major innovations may require changes to policy or legislation. Municipalities depend on provinces for enabling legislation. All levels of government are struggling with policy and legislation that will facilitate implementation of the new generation of electronic services. Issues such as how citizens will identify themselves online in a secure way (authentication) and the coordination of related services across jurisdictions present difficult policy decisions within governments and among them.

Finally, a single good experience may not be sufficient to change a person’s opinion of that service. It may require repeated good experiences before the change registers as a new way of doing business and not just as a lucky exception to the norm.

Figure 11
Service-quality ratings for public and private providers.
Citizens First 2000.

<i>Service</i>	<i>Service quality (0–100)</i>	
	1998	2000
<i>Fire departments</i>	78	77
<i>Public libraries</i>	75	75
Supermarkets	74	73
Private mail carriers	68	69
<i>Provincial electric utilities</i>	63	64
<i>Provincial parks, campgrounds</i>	64	64
<i>Police</i>	63	63
Telephone companies	63	63
Private-sector services in general*	60	63
Department stores	–	62
<i>Passport Office</i>	60	61
<i>Canada Post*</i>	55	60
Insurance agencies	55	59
Taxis	57	58
<i>Municipal government services*</i>	53	57
<i>Public transit</i>	55	55
CCRA*	50	54
Cable-television companies	–	54
Banks	51	52
<i>Federal government services in general*</i>	47	51
<i>Provincial government services*</i>	47	50
<i>Public education system*</i>	47	49
<i>Hospitals</i>	46	49
<i>Road maintenance</i>	35	36

*Statistically significant difference between 1998 and 2000

Note: Government services appear in italics. Department stores and cable-television companies were not included in the 1998 survey.

SERVICE STANDARDS

Service standards are used in two main ways:

- to provide staff with performance targets (e.g., “Phone must be answered within three rings.”)
- to inform clients what to expect (e.g., “Waiting time is less than 10 minutes”).

The dimensions that *Citizens First* has investigated, in both 1998 and 2000, involve the time that is required to complete routine transactions. Timeliness is the strongest driver of satisfaction, and time is easily quantified (much more so than other drivers such as fairness, competence and so on).

The measures that follow represent citizens' expectations for timely service in routine situations. On every measure, citizens demonstrate quite a range of opinion, and setting a standard is an exercise in cutting the curve: choosing a point near the left-hand end of the continuum will satisfy the expectations of more citizens, but it also creates a tougher performance target.

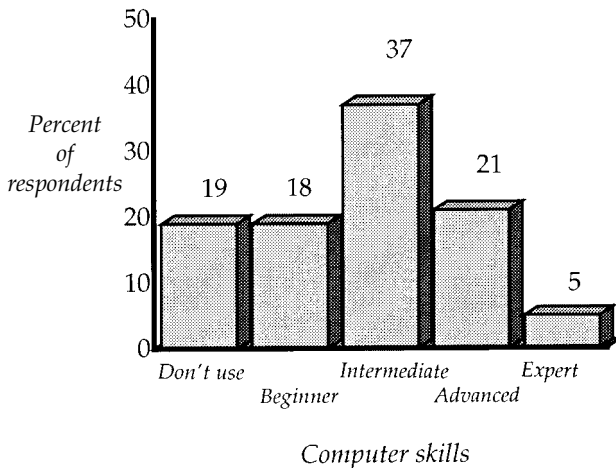
The actual standards that an organization sets will depend on its resources, its clientele, and other factors. (Emergency services would not base their targets on the present results, which are only for routine situations.)

Many organizations have seen performance improve dramatically as a result of implementing a program of service standards. The simple fact of measuring performance that was not previously quantified is a powerful tool in itself. It lets both staff and management know how they are doing, and it provides positive proof of improvement. It can also serve as a basis for accountability and staff recognition programs.

Service expectations for routine situations

<p><i>Telephone service</i></p> <p>In an automated telephone system, what is the maximum number of options you should hear at any one time?</p>	<p>86% find three options acceptable.</p>
<p>When you telephone with a routine request, how many minutes is it acceptable to wait for a government representative?</p>	<p>97% find a thirty-second wait acceptable.</p>
<p>When you telephone with a routine request, what is the maximum number of people you should have to deal with?</p>	<p>85% find two people acceptable.</p>
<p>If you leave a telephone voice mail message at 10:00 am, what is an acceptable time to wait for a return call?</p>	<p>75% find four hours acceptable.</p>
<p><i>Walk-in service</i></p> <p>When you visit a government office, how many minutes is it acceptable to wait in any line?</p>	<p>68% find five minutes acceptable.</p>
<p>When you visit a government office, what is the maximum number of people you should have to deal with?</p>	<p>82% find two people acceptable.</p>
<p>When you visit a government office for a routine service, what is a reasonable amount of time to spend travelling (one way)?</p>	<p>68% find thirty minutes acceptable.</p>
<p><i>Correspondence</i></p> <p>When you write to a government office, what is an acceptable time to allow for a mailed reply?</p>	<p>87% find two weeks acceptable.</p>
<p>When you mail a letter between two Canadian cities, what is a reasonable number of days for the letter to arrive?</p>	<p>62% find three days acceptable.</p>
<p><i>E-mail</i></p> <p>When you email a government office at 10:00 am with a routine request, what is an acceptable time to get a reply?</p>	<p>90% find same day acceptable.</p>

Figure 12
Canadians' self-ratings of computer skill. *Citizens First 2000.*



INSIGHTS INTO DELIVERY CHANNELS

All three levels of government offer Internet-based services, and the available range of these services increases almost daily. While this revolution in service delivery moves ahead with great speed, many providers rightly question whether the population is keeping up. Do citizens possess the know-how to effectively use services delivered through the Internet (Figure 12)?

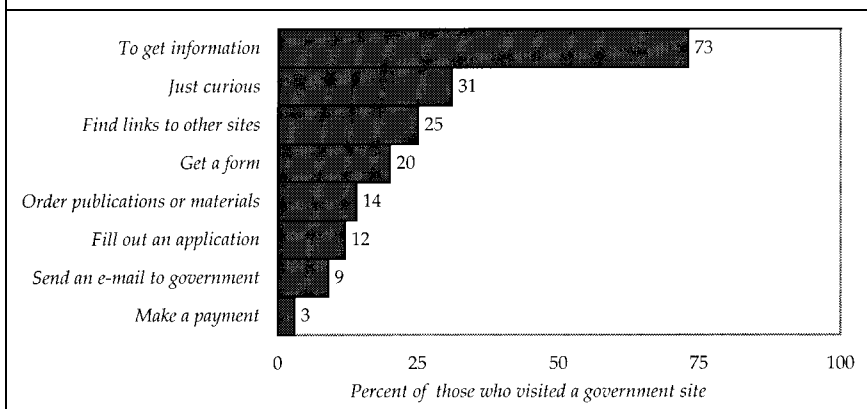
Eighty-one percent of Canadians profess to have at least beginner-level computer skills. This represents the upper limit on Internet use as of summer 2000, the time of the survey. Most Canadians already use the Internet:

- Twenty-six percent use it "almost every day."
- Fifty percent use it at least once a week.
- Sixty-two percent use it at least once a month.

Results presented in the remainder of this section describe the 62 percent of Canadians who use the Internet. Among these Internet users,

- seventy-one percent have accessed the online services of at least one level of government;

Figure 13
Why did you visit the government site? *Citizens First 2000.*



Note: Respondents could indicate several reasons for the visit, so percentages add up to more than 100.

- fifty-four percent have used the online services of two levels of government; and
- thirty-one percent have used the online services of all three levels of government.

Use of Government Internet Sites

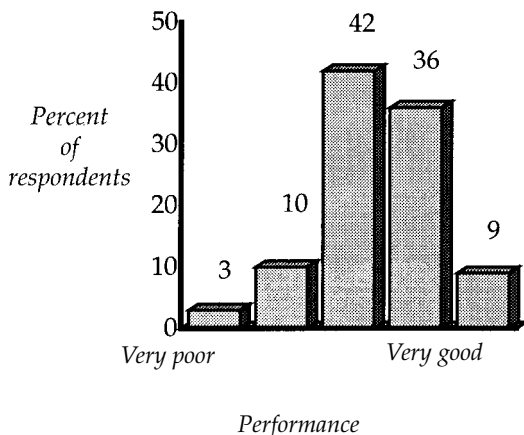
Not long ago, most government Internet sites offered information and little else. Citizens could view program descriptions, get telephone numbers, and perhaps print some standard forms, but they could not conduct much actual business. Today, most governments are putting transactional capabilities online at a rapid pace, and within the next two to three years most citizens will be able to conduct most of their routine business from home.

Mid-way through this transition, the citizen who wants to use online services is constantly checking with several levels of government to see what is available. Last month it was not possible to pay taxes/get a dog licence/book a camp site online: what is the status today?

There will be a lag after the implementation of any service while citizens discover that it is available. Security issues will also have to be balanced between convenient authentication and protection of privacy. Nonetheless, 45 percent of Canadians report performing at least one type of transaction online. Interest among citizens is plainly there (Figure 13).

Figure 14

Rate the overall performance of this site compared to other sites you know, both government and private sector. *Citizens First 2000.*



Perceptions of the Site

What contributes to the impression that the site is good or not? Respondents rated the performance of their chosen site on a scale from "Very good" to "Very poor" (Figure 14). Five factors determine 45 percent of the variance in these performance ratings, thereby giving quite a solid answer to this question.

Drivers of Satisfaction for Internet Sites. *Citizens First 2000.*

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Ease of Navigation | <i>"It's easy to find what I am looking for."</i> |
| 2. Outcome | <i>"I got what I wanted."</i> |
| 3. Visual Appeal | <i>"It is visually appealing."</i> |
| 4. Informative | <i>"It has the information I need."</i> |
| 5. Fast | <i>"Pages load quickly."</i> |

These Internet drivers differ from those for services delivered through traditional channels such as the telephone. Outcome is the only element that is common to both Internet and traditional modalities, but its meaning may diverge in the two contexts. At this time, most Internet experi-

ences are information-seeking rather than transactional (although this is changing).

The difference in drivers between traditional channels and the Internet is not surprising. Traditional delivery modes are mediated by human service providers, who talk to you directly on the telephone, at a service counter, or indirectly through correspondence. The concepts of staff knowledge, fair treatment, and timely delivery have meaning in this context, but with Internet services, they hardly apply. There are no staff to display either knowledge or the lack of it, or to treat the citizen fairly or unfairly. The meaning of timeliness changes completely in the Internet context: in traditional modes, it refers to the time the citizen must wait for the service provider to act, but in the Internet context, the user decides how to allocate his or her time. Ease of navigation and pages loading quickly bear only a distant resemblance to timeliness in the traditional context.

Comparing Private and Government Sites

The problems faced by citizens using the Internet to access services are problems common to all sites, private as well as government. It is encouraging, then, that citizens rate government sites on the whole as being as good as or better than private-sector sites.

The Internet Promise

Several reasons were presented earlier as to why rapid change in service-quality ratings is unlikely to occur. The advent of e-services introduces one reason to expect that improvement *may* occur a little faster.

For Internet services to bump up service-quality scores generally, they will have to get higher ratings than the services they replace. Is this realistic?

For routine services, the e-channel promises easy access; it can bypass the busy phone lines and long distances and queues at service counters. It avoids impediments to good service, such as lack of timeliness, lack of fairness, and staff who lack competence or courtesy, that can occur in the traditional channels.

The e-channel will have less direct effect on services such as garbage collection, public transit, road maintenance and policing, though even in these examples there may be peripheral benefits, from online information on recycling and garbage pick-up schedules, transit schedules, information on road and lane closures, and so on.

One aspect of this vision is misstated above: the e-channel will not replace traditional channels but will coexist with them. The channels will

likely become increasingly interdependent. Today's service-delivery strategies encourage citizens to use multiple channels to access services. The Internet often functions as a precursor to a phone call or a mailed request or an office visit. Call centres and information lines are handling more and more contacts, many of which lead the citizen on to a further channel. When this works effectively, citizens are able to access a wide range of services easily and quickly. (The "lost wallet" programs that some governments offer are a good example. Birth certificate, driver's licence, health card and SIN card can be replaced from one location using various channels.)

The challenge in this new model is coordination among channels. The citizen needs to make the transition easily from one channel to the next and, upon arriving at a new channel, needs to find consistent information. Just as in a bank, you expect your account balance to be the same at the ATM and at the service counter, so with government services the citizen will expect details of their file to transfer accurately and effortlessly from Internet to telephone to walk-in counter. Citizens deal with governments on a much wider and more complex range of issues than they do with financial institutions, so this challenge is considerable.

CITIZENS' PRIORITIES FOR SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

What services do citizens want to see improved? Citizens chose their top three priorities at each level of government from a list of fifty widely used services. There is a change at the municipal level, where public health drops from first place to a tie for third place. The proportions choosing road maintenance and police are virtually unchanged.

At the provincial/territorial level, hospitals are again the priority for more than 70 percent of citizens. "Health care outside hospitals" is a new item in the 2000 survey, added to allow respondents to differentiate health care into components. The change did not reduce the number choosing hospitals and instead promoted non-hospital health care into second spot, replacing colleges and universities.

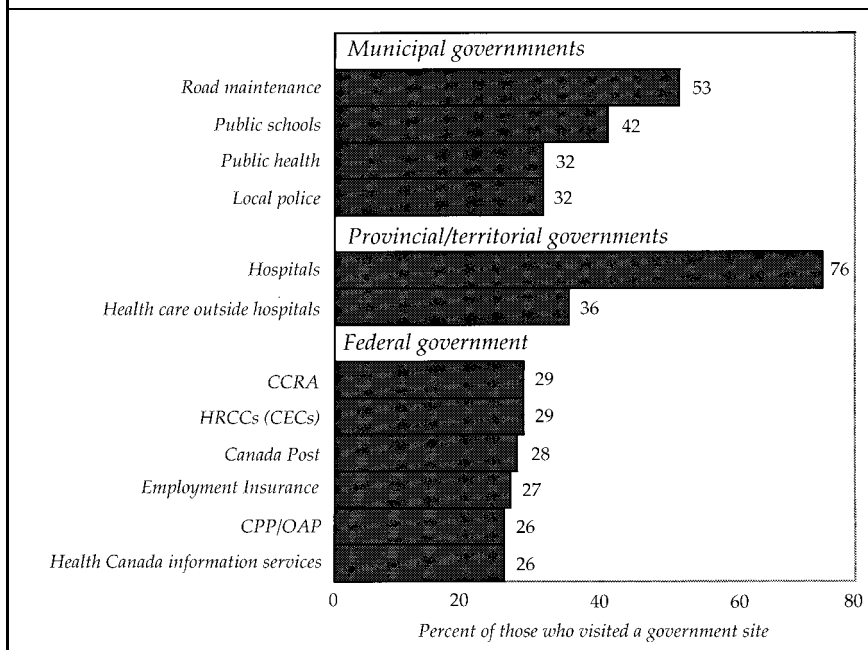
At the federal level, six agencies and programs are virtually tied as priorities. Five of these are the same as in 1998; Health Canada information services rose 5 points to join this cluster in 2000 (Figure 15).

CITIZENS FIRST: FROM VISION TO RESULTS

Building on the momentum

The evidence is clear: citizen-centred government service is becoming a reality. The silos that once seemed to be inevitable structures of government

Figure 15
Citizens' priorities for service improvements. *Citizens First 2000.*



Note: Respondents chose up to three priorities, so percentages add to more than 100.

are rapidly disappearing. This change has developed from several sources:

- outstanding leadership and commitment to citizen-centred service delivery
- research from *Citizens First* and related work/tools provides an intellectual foundation for attaining results
- significant achievements in reorganizing service-delivery systems around citizens' needs
- partnering with private and not-for-profit sectors to deliver integrated, accessible services
- strategic use of technology – computers and the Internet – to link services that were once separated geographically and institutionally
- an accumulation of experience and “best practices” that now appears to have reached critical mass

The next few years will be exciting for government service providers and citizens alike.

The Path Forward

The results of *Citizens First 2000* are based on the perceptions and direct experiences of a representative cross-section of Canadians and speak to critical service-delivery challenges at all three levels of government. With these results in hand, governments can undertake a focused and concerted plan of action that will help build the momentum for positive change and create service-delivery systems that are truly responsive and citizen-centred.

A focus on six critical areas of citizen-centred service will accelerate the momentum:

1. Changing the face of government:

- Sustain top leadership and commitment to citizen-centred service throughout the public service.
- Use *Citizens First* results as the intellectual foundation for innovative policy and practice.
- Overcome destructive myths and stereotypes by communicating accurate information about government excellence to the public.
- Use *Citizens First* findings to improve staff confidence and build competencies.
- Provide training and tools to increase staff knowledge and competence and to empower service providers to “go the extra mile.”
- Continue to foster advanced research as a basis for improving service delivery.

2. *Access, access, access:*

- Foster a proactive, go-the-extra-mile approach to the access of government services at the institutional and technological levels as well as in all direct, personal interaction with citizens.
- Focus improvement on the telephone, the “people’s channel,” currently the most frustrating point of access and yet the most commonly used channel.
- Streamline multiple channels into cost-effective, citizen-centred single gateways to service; ensure there is “no wrong door” for the citizen to access service.

3. Focus on the five drivers of citizen satisfaction in high-priority service areas:

- Incorporate the five drivers of citizen satisfaction into every line of government business.

- Integrate regular measurement of service drivers and service standards and give staff feedback on their performance.
 - Determine drivers of satisfaction for specific programs (e.g., drivers for Revenue Canada may differ from those for a library or for a health information site on the Internet).
 - Organize, measure and refine services based on citizens' priorities.
4. Make seamless service the norm:
- Break down silos of service delivery between and inside governments to provide seamless service.
 - Forge partnerships and collaborate with other governments and the private, voluntary and academic sectors to develop optimal delivery systems.
 - Establish a Canadian Centre for Citizen Centred Service outside government to foster interjurisdictional, intersectoral and international citizen-centred research, innovation and service.
5. Deliver e-government intelligently:
- Harness new technology so that it is user-friendly and responsive to the citizen.
 - Ground development and improvement of channels (e.g., telephone, Internet) in the specific drivers and service standards identified by *Citizens First*.
 - Ensure citizens have a choice of channels and provide consistent information across all channels.
6. Lead by vision and manage by results:
- Establish clear, measurable objectives and criteria for service-quality improvement and citizen-centred service.
 - Ensure accountability for results in performance /service-delivery agreements.
 - Identify, share and showcase "best practices."
 - Establish awards for best innovators and on-the-ground practitioners in important categories:
 1. Access
 2. Drivers of satisfaction
 3. Single gateway service
 4. Seamless service delivery
 5. Citizen-centred technological solutions

The next frontier in citizen-centred research will be to survey internal service providers and to integrate these findings into pan-government service-delivery strategies.

NOTES

- 1 This is major achievement. Social science research never explains 100 percent of the variance. The remaining 31 percent in this instance is a combination of 1) differences among people – good service to one person is a bit different from good service to someone else, 2) differences among services – good service at a provincial campground may be different from good service resolving a difficult tax issue, 3) random differences – a person having a bad day may take a dyspeptic view of the whole service encounter, and 4) error of measurement – a five-point response scale may not allow respondents the degree of precision they need to describe nuances of the experience.
- 2 The Common Measurements Tool, available from CCMD, www.ccmd-ccg.gc.ca., provides research templates that government agencies can apply to investigations of service quality.