



Republic of Mauritius

Guidelines for the ELABORATION OF CUSTOMER CHARTER in the Public Service



Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms
...for a professional public service committed to excellence

Guidelines

for the elaboration of
Customers' Charter
in the Public Service

***Ministry of Civil Service and
Administrative Reforms***



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Introduction

The guidelines aim at assisting public organisations in the preparation of their respective Customers' Charter to ensure provision of effective, efficient and high quality services to the customers. It will enable the various government organisations to translate quality service standards into Customers' Charter after taking into account the relevant processes involved, existing resources and technology available to organisations.

2) Objectives of Customers' Charter

The mission of the public service is to provide timely, and constantly enhanced quality services. The public service which acts as the government administrative machinery also includes a regulatory framework, and translates into practice the policy decisions of the government to meet some of the fundamental needs of the citizens. An efficient and effective public service is vital to, *inter-alia*, maintain law and order, security, build modern infrastructure, provide high quality education, health services and support a social security system.

The introduction of the Customers' Charter will emphasize on the commitment of your Ministry/Department towards the provision of services to the citizens according to pre-determined quality standards. This will usher in a new era in quality management in the public service and to the demands and needs of customers and meet their expectations.

3) **Concept of Customers' Charter**

A Customers' Charter is a written commitment made by an organisation towards its clients. It spells out the quality standards, which are predetermined and set by the organisation. It also provides for a system of redress where the organisation fails to deliver at the expected level or fails to fulfill its obligations. The aim of a Customers' Charter is to provide total customer satisfaction. Hence, it should only comprise information considered useful and necessary to the customer, such as the defined time-frame required for processing a license/permit application; information required; documents to be submitted; operating hours of service and customers' rights and responsibilities etc.

4) **Rationale and Benefits of Implementation**

The implementation of a Customers' Charter will lay emphasis on the central role of customers in the delivery of services. Developed as a mechanism for the implementation and the assimilation of customer driven features in the delivery of services, the Charter brings about numerous improvements to the public service. It showcases the public service in a different perspective with a changed image and new lens, that is, a public service where customers will get value for money.

(a) Benefits to the public

- ▶ Enables the public to know beforehand the quality and standard of services expected from Ministries/ Departments.
- ▶ Enables the public to evaluate the standard of services provided.
- ▶ Allows the customer to participate in the process to improve delivery of services.
- ▶ Facilitates both internal and external benchmarking with those offering similar services.

(b) Benefits to the Ministry/Department

- ▶ Acts as a performance indicator and enables the department to evaluate its own outputs/services.
- ▶ Enhances discipline, responsibility and accountability for a more transparent public service,
- ▶ Improves image and promotes positive perception of government organisations.

5) Characteristics of a Customers' Charter

Clarity and Simplicity

The Customers' Charter should be clear, concise, easy to understand and should include essential and accurate information only.

Dissemination

The Customers' Charter should provide information on the activities and services of the organisation. The dissemination can be made through the production of brochures, handouts or posters that must be displayed at prominent areas within the premises of the organisation and on its website.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of a charter, the organisation concerned must match its pledge with its ability to deliver. The expectations should not be set too high.

Practicability

A practical charter requires planning and testing to determine that a service can be delivered as per standards set. For example, an impracticable guarantee would be *"All building plans submitted to the Port Louis Municipal Council would be approved within a day"*.

Specific

A specific assurance would be an undertaking that specifies time, numbers, venue or cost of an output or service given. For example, *"An international passport will be ready within a week from the date of receipt of the application"*.

Continuous Improvement

The delivery of service should be dynamic with room for continuous improvement of the standard and ability to adapt to new technological environment.

6) Development of a Customers' Charter

(a) Step one

Identifying customers and their requirements

The customers are users of the services provided by various Ministries/Departments in the Republic of Mauritius.

Hence, it is of utmost importance for every organisation to identify their external and internal customers. Internal customers are clients from a division/unit/section of the same Ministry/Department. External customers may comprise the citizens, other departments, the private sector, voluntary organisations and others.

(b) **Step two**

Identifying the major services of the organisation

The organisation should identify the major services that it provides. This can be carried out through a re-evaluation of programmes to ensure that they are in line with the objectives of the organisation.

In some cases, it may require the organisation to re-allocate its resources such as manpower, finance and equipment in the production of services according to its priority.

(c) **Step three**

Highlighting the responsibilities of customers

The responsibilities of customers should be clearly spelt out by indicating the different documents/clearances required to avail of the services being provided.

(d) **Step four**

Determining the quality standards of the services

The identified needs of customers have to be translated to standard outputs of quality services. The established standards of services have to be realistic and achievable. Standards and expectations must be made known to the provider as well as to the recipients of the services. As far as possible, these standards should:

- ▶ Be measurable in terms of timeliness, numbers of outputs produced within a stipulated time frame. Examples of such standards are as follows:

Passport and Immigration Office

"New passports will be issued within seven working days from the date of receipt of the application."

Civil Status Division

"Birth Certificates will be issued in three days."

- ▶ Ensure that the provision of outputs are always consistent. Apart from the standards characterized by time factor or numbers or outputs as measures, other less quantifiable characteristics can still be used such as descriptions like a friendly, considerate, easy to understand and safe service.

Examples of such standards are:

Registrar General's Department

To provide pleasant and clean waiting area.

To provide and ensure safe custody of documents.

In general, standards should be:

Relevant

They should clearly relate to the needs of users, and focus on key issues of interest.

Meaningful

They should look at the service from the customers' viewpoint and therefore, avoid management targets.

Challenging

They should be challenging but realistic.

Simple

Written in plain language.

Measurable

They should be measurable quantitatively and/or qualitatively either directly as part of normal procedures or by a customer survey.

Monitored

Systems should be in place to support regular monitoring.

Published

Performance against standards should be widely published, following, wherever possible, independent validation.

Reviewed

Their effectiveness should be regularly reviewed and standards updated.

Setting Standards

To attain standards for services, organisations may use any of the following techniques:

- ▶ Time and motion studies.
- ▶ Consultation with customers/stakeholders.
- ▶ Discussion with public officers involved.
- ▶ Conformance with service standards of other organisations providing similar services.
- ▶ Conformance with established international standards.

These service standards are important, as they will become benchmarks for performance measurement of the organisation within a specified time.

(e) **Step five**

Preparing the Customers' Charter

The organisation has to establish its Customers' Charter based on the standards of services. As a guide, the Charter can be developed based on the following standards set by some departments in Mauritius:

When you telephone us

- ▶ We will do our best to answer your calls within three rings. Our staff will be courteous and identify themselves by name/section.
- ▶ We will ensure that we provide you with correct information.

When you write to us

- ▶ We will acknowledge your letters within five days of receipt.
- ▶ Our letters will be clear and easy to understand.
- ▶ Our replies will indicate the reasons of our decisions.

When you have an appointment with us

- ▶ The customer will not have to wait for longer than ten minutes.
- ▶ Queries will be attended immediately and any delay or negative reply would be explained.

The organisation has to ensure that every member of staff understands and upholds the Customers' Charter. This will induce further commitment from the members of staff in the provision of excellent services to achieve the standards stipulated in the Charter.

7) Promotion of the Charter

The organisation has to ensure that the information on the Customer's Charter is disseminated to the public. The dissemination can be through the production of brochures or pamphlets. Information contained in the brochure must be concise, clear and easy to understand. In addition, the organisation has to display posters of the Charter at a prominent place within the premises of the office to ensure that they are visible to the customers and can also be displayed on the organisation's website.

8) Service Recovery

There may be instances where the organisation may not be able to fulfill the pledges contained in the Charter. This will adversely affect the image and credibility of the organisation concerned. As such, the organisation has to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to restore faith of the customers in the capability of the organisation to deliver services as pledged in the Charter.

Service recovery can be carried out by organisations in two ways:

(i) Reactive Service Recovery

A reactive service recovery means that an organisation will take immediate remedial action when an unsatisfied customer lodges a complaint.

(ii) Proactive Service Recovery

In a proactive service recovery, an organisation will contact the customer to inform of its inability to comply to the stated standards in the Charter even before the customer lodges complaints. For example, Passport and Immigration Office has assured that it will issue a passport within one week from the date of receipt of the application. When the organisation

realises that it cannot fulfil its commitment then the onus to inform the customer on the status of the matter lies on the organisation.

The following steps can be taken by an organisation to ease the situation and restore the trust of citizens.

- ▶ *To apologise to the client involved either verbally or in writing.*
- ▶ *To provide explanation on the reasons preventing the service to be delivered as stated in the Charter.*
- ▶ *To inform the citizen on the follow-up actions being taken to overcome the problem.*

9) Legal Status

A Customers' Charter contains commitments made by public sector organisations to deliver quality services based on set target to the public. Thus, a service charter DOES NOT confer any legally enforceable rights to customers. A charter should define the legal parameters relevant to the charter's contents. A legal disclaimer should prominently be attached to the documents in the following terms:

Legal Disclaimer Notice

The statements of commitments in this Charter do not confer any legal rights contractual or otherwise. This Charter is published for information purposes only.

10) Monitoring

Monitoring is to be carried out continuously by every organisation. This is inherent in measuring how far organisations are able to adhere to the pledges made in their respective charter. The monitoring activities can be carried out as follows:

(a) Using Existing Internal Mechanisms in the Organisation

Existing mechanisms such as a Management Committee, Reforms Unit Committee in Ministries/Departments or even a Quality Control Circle (QCC) or a Work Improvement Team can be used to gauge the performance of outputs or services. This can be carried out by studying the weekly/monthly/quarterly/annual performance reports prepared by each division/unit/section.

(b) Establishing an Effective Feedback and Response System

Customers' expectations change, therefore an organisation has to establish a channel to allow them to express their opinions on the expected levels of output or service. This feedback mechanism will be an important element of input for the evaluation of standards of services.

- (i) Feedback can be obtained through the following means:
- ▶ Customer feedback forms
 - ▶ Suggestion box
 - ▶ Press cuttings
 - ▶ Hot line [telephone] services
 - ▶ Customers satisfaction survey
- (ii) Effective management of feedback can be carried by:
- ▶ Setting up of counters to facilitate the public to lodge complaints. These counters are to be prominently located to ensure that they are clearly visible to the public. Appropriate and adequate facilities such as complaint/feedback forms and a list of officers/divisions for referral are to be provided.
 - ▶ Training of staff on the techniques of handling and resolving problems faced by dissatisfied citizens based on the existing complaint resolution procedures.
 - ▶ Organisations which handle numerous public complaints have to take necessary measures to equip their response system with appropriate facilities such as hot line telephone services.

- (iii) Every organisation should ensure that immediate action is taken on every complaint received as follows:
- ▶ Creation of a system which records all feedback received and issue acknowledgement slips.
 - ▶ Negative feedback should be addressed to the respective divisions/units/sections for immediate remedial action. To counteract any unintended effects from the negative feedback, action must be taken to ensure that positive feedback is also conveyed to all the staff through the publication of Newsletters, reports or via other means. This will ensure that motivation level for the staff is not adversely affected.
 - ▶ To inform the complainant on the status of remedial action taken.

11) Evaluation and Improvement

Every organisation should use the appropriate mechanism/s to evaluate the feedback. The mechanisms that could be used are:

- ▶ Management Committee
- ▶ Heads of Divisions Meetings

- ▶ Reforms Unit Committee Meetings in Ministries/ Departments
- ▶ Work Improvement Team (WIT) or Quality Control Circles (QCC)

The establishment of a Departmental Committee on Quality will ensure that all resolution processes will be handled systematically. Concurrently, the WIT or QCC will be committed to work towards the improvement of quality.

The involvement and commitment from all quarters are necessary to mobilise these mechanisms. The top management should lead and determine the direction of the organisation or elaborate policies, which can clearly and precisely define the emphasis on quality improvement efforts. Therefore, the function of the Departmental Committee on Quality whose members comprise the Head of Organisation and senior officers are to plan, determine policy and implementation strategies, co-ordinate, monitor, evaluate and determine further improvement efforts to be undertaken in order to enhance the quality of outputs or services at the organisational level.

Commitment at top management level is critical and will be a strong motivating factor. This will compel all members of staff to work as a team in achieving the organisational vision and objective.

Besides, it is the responsibility of the Head of Organisation, together with the Management Committee to:

- ▶ Identify services which have not achieved the pre-determined standards and their related problems.
- ▶ Redefine standards of services to ensure that they are more realistic and achievable.
- ▶ Identify types of services that can be expanded, curtailed or deleted without affecting the achievement of organisational objectives.
- ▶ Identify methods that could be used to further enhance the existing standards of outputs or services.

12) Implementation Strategy

The Implementation Strategy can be summarised as follows:

- ▶ To create awareness on the concept of Customers' Charter
- ▶ To get everyone committed on the Ministry's or the Department's Charter
- ▶ To set a working team to draft the Charter
- ▶ To seek the approval of Top Management/Honourable Minister
- ▶ To promote and publicise the Charter
- ▶ To implement the Ministry's or the Department's Charter
- ▶ To monitor and obtain feedback

13) Conclusion

The Customers' Charter is a dynamic concept and its implementation will bring a positive change in the way that government organisations perform. There is commitment on the part of government to implement Customers' Charter in the interest of the Citizens as well as to institutionalise the elements of efficiency, accountability and transparency in the public service.

The above guidelines and strategies will help all Ministries and Departments in the elaboration of their Customers' Charter, thus making meaningful progress in the institutionalisation of a quality culture in the public service.

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