



Procurement and Property Division Customer Service Survey

In January 2001, the Procurement and Property Division (PPD) obtained the results of a Customer Service Survey for FY 2000 in accordance with the 1998 Administrative and Financial Management Strategic Plan. Customers rated PPD in the following areas:

- Professionalism and courtesy
- Promptness in answering and returning telephone calls
- Follow-up to customer questions and concerns
- Giving accurate, timely information to customers over the telephone
- Willingness to assist customers by explaining current policies and procedures relative to customer needs
- Meeting customers immediate needs and expectations
- Advising customers of projected milestone dates
- Advising customers of delays in the process, communicating the reasons, and providing revised milestone dates
- Providing timely and proactive procurement and personal property services that met the customer's needs with the desired results
- How did customers rate their overall satisfaction with the service?

The rating factors were excellent, very good, good, fair and poor. PPD's customer base consists of management officials, administrative and program personnel in CSREES, ERS, NASS, ARS, and AFM. To ensure that the survey information was useful, the survey requested that the customer identify the PPD Branch providing its services.

Why is Customer Satisfaction Important?

Customer service is extremely important to the survival of the PPD contracting activity. Drastic changes in Federal acquisition over the last decade now pose significant survival challenges to the traditional roles of the contracting officer, contract specialist and purchasing agent. The internal and external changes posing these challenges consist of the use of purchase cards, smart cards, long-term contracts (i.e., 10 years), outsourcing of functions, internet-based purchasing, and other agency or established contracts. Thus, emerges customer service. Customers appreciate prompt turnaround more than any other procurement skill and many consider it a quality indicator. Customer service also entails returning telephone calls promptly, helping customers to digest, interpret and develop required procurement documentation, or helping them determine the procurement strategies available to them. Therefore, providing excellent customer service is one of the best ways PPD can validate its importance and value to REE and all of our customers.

Highlights

Customers rated PPD highly for each of the above evaluated areas. The PPD Director and many employees were singled out for their outstanding customer service and support.

Back to the Basics

PPD learned through responses to the Customer Service Survey that paying attention to the little things is always important. Although each area surveyed obtained an average rating of "Good" or greater, focusing on the following basic business practices are likely to increase customer satisfaction even more.

- # returning customer telephone calls promptly
- # ensuring voice mail greetings are up-to-date and/or refers customers to available personnel for assistance
- # advising customers of the requirement status or projected completion date
- # being more customer oriented and proactive

How Will Survey Results Be Used?

The survey results will be used as follows:

- Identifying trends by comparing results to previous year
- Contacting individual customers to obtain additional information where lower ratings appear.
- Identifying business practices that can be improved
- Developing an action plan to improve performance, specifically in those areas below the good rating.

PPD Customer Service Goal

The PPD customer service goal is to obtain a 90 percent rating or greater in the excellent through good categories. Provided below are the ratings for the last 4 years.

Category	Goal	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000
Excellent to Good	90 %	98 %	88 %	89 %	80 %
Fair to Poor	10 %	2 %	12 %	11%	20 %

Analysis

PPD did not meet its goal to obtain a 90 percent rating in the excellent to good categories. Based upon customer comments the following service areas can be improved:

- returning customer telephone calls promptly
- ensuring voice mail greetings are up to date and refers customers to appropriate personnel for assistance
- being more customer oriented and proactive in meeting customer requirements
- advising customers of the requirement status when there are delays or involve an urgent need

Several of these potential improvement areas were identified in the FY 1999 customer survey report. To improve the above service areas and recurring issues the following action plan is proposed.

ACTION PLAN

The following action plan provides the actions PPD will execute to improve its customer satisfaction rating. To ensure that these measures are effective, a number of quality assurance measures have been developed. Provided below are five immediate actions that PPD will implement to bring attention to the importance of customer service and our commitment to excellence.

2. Send an E-mail to all of our customers annually (October) advising them of the PPD Customer Service Guide that can answer many of their procurement related questions pertaining to: purchases less than \$2,500; simplified acquisitions, \$2,501 to \$100,000; contracts over \$100,000, sealed bidding, negotiated contracts, best value source selection contracts; statements of work; government estimates; ratifications; etc. This website can be accessed at: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/afm2/divisions/ppd/ppdcsg.htm>
3. Add specific customer service expectations to PPD staff annual performance plans.
4. PPD will consider outstanding customer feedback in the PPD quarterly incentive award process.
5. To improve our ability to deal with all of our customers, Acquisition managers and employees will complete a "Customer Care Training" course.

- 6. Continue to solicit customer evaluations and feedback on individual contracts and small purchase actions and on specific projects (i.e., Discover Training, PPD Field Acquisition Workshop, etc.)

Other actions and quality assurance measures are identified below.

Returning customer telephone calls promptly.

Action	Quality Assurance
<p>Employees will be reminded of the importance of returning telephone calls as soon as possible after being received. Acquisition staff will also be advised to check their voice mail frequently and return calls immediately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # PPD management will emphasize the importance of returning telephone calls and answering voice mail messages promptly in routine Branch meetings. # Random calls will be made by PPD management, to monitor compliance.

Ensuring voice mail greetings are up-to-date and in absence refers customers to appropriate personnel for assistance.

Action	Quality Assurance
<p>PPD staff will ensure that their voice mail greetings represent their current availability (away from desk, dates of absences, etc.) are clear and refer callers to members of the Division who are currently available and can provide immediate assistance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # PPD Branch managers may monitor voice mail greetings during employee planned, unplanned or extended absences to ensure voice mail greetings reflect up-to-date information and/or refers customers to available personnel for assistance.

Being more customer oriented and proactive in meeting their requirements.

Action	Quality Assurance
<p>PPD employees will assist customers in identifying the procurement strategies available to them and provide counsel on how they can assist PPD in satisfying their requirements in a prompt and efficient manner. The limitations of PPD acquisition personnel will also be addressed. A few examples of how PPD can be more customer oriented are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Annually refer customers to the PPD Customer Service Guide to answer initial questions and to obtain information. b. When customers require further guidance, offer to review specifications, statements of work, government estimates, etc. and provide suggestions or clarification on how to make their work product acceptable to the contracting activity. Further guidance may be provided as appropriate. c. Examples of statements of work, sole source justifications, government estimates, etc., may be provided to assist customers with initial drafts and/or work products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # The importance of being customer oriented and proactive will be emphasized through PPD Branch meetings, and "All-Hands" meetings. # PPD employees will be required to report during mid- year performance reviews their significant accomplishments in this area.

Advising customers of the requirement status when there are delays or urgent customer need.

Action	Quality Assurance
<p>For actions over \$25,000 (open-market) PPD will notify customers by E-mail when their AD-700 procurement request is received and inform them that their procurement will be completed by the standard processing time (Customer Service Guide) unless advised otherwise. When the customer considers the requirement important or time is a factor, PPD may use its discretion pertaining to how often to update the customer.</p> <p>PPD will advise customers when a purchase order/contract is awarded and when delivery/performance is expected.</p>	<p>PPD management will perform random checks to evaluate compliance.</p>