

Citizens First

Erin Research Inc.

for the

**CITIZEN-CENTRED SERVICE NETWORK and the
CANADIAN CENTRE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT**

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Canada

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Preface

The Citizen-Centred Service Network (CCSN) was established by the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) in July 1997 to accelerate the modernization of service across the public sector in Canada. Facilitated by CCMD, the network is composed of over 200 officials from the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government as well as leading academics and outside experts in the field of public sector service delivery.

Citizens First is the inaugural publication arising from CCSN's various research initiatives. This truly intergovernmental project is based on the national survey, *Have Your Say/Prononcez-vous*, and enjoys sponsorship from the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada, Canada Post, and the governments of Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. To date, the network has held national forums in Ottawa and regional forums in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic region. The purpose of these forums is to bring together senior officials from the three levels of government to work together to develop a strategy to improve service to citizens. At these sessions network members identified a number of research projects which they saw as critical for developing their service improvement strategies.

This report represents the culmination of one such project. Unlike many past surveys which concentrate on citizens' general perceptions or attitudes towards government services, *Citizens First* is focused on first obtaining accurate benchmarks of the performance of specific government services from the citizen's perspective and then identifying what managers need to do in order to improve the service they provide to citizens.

Many people at both the regional and national levels have contributed to the success of this project. Of particular note are those who acted as chairpersons at the various regional forums. In British Columbia this included Ken Dobell, City Manager, City of Vancouver, Thomas Johnstone, Chief Executive Officer, BC Assessment Authority, and Donna Mitchell, Assistant Deputy Minister, Western Economic Diversification. In Manitoba the forum was chaired by John Cumberland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Manitoba Service First Initiatives. In Ontario, the chairpersons were Art Daniels, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Restructuring Secretariat, Barry Malmsten, Chief Administrative Officer, Municipality of Halton, and Bill Pascal, Director General, Health Canada. In Quebec the forum was chaired by Guy Lavigne (representing Simon Caron), Directeur de l'état civil, Ministère des relations avec le citoyen et de l'immigration du Québec, Gérard Divay, Directeur général, Ville de Montréal, and André Gladu, Sous-ministre adjoint, Human Resources Development Canada. Chairpersons in the Atlantic region were Jeanette MacAulay, Chief Executive Officer, P.E.I. Staffing and Classification Board, Lawrence Mawhinney, Mayor of the Town of Lunenburg, and Dennis Wallace, Assistant Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada.

Brian Marson, formerly of CCMD and presently of the Treasury Board Secretariat, deserves special mention for adeptly facilitating the forums and for the good humour, drive, and expertise he brought to bear on this initiative. The network is also indebted to Ralph Heintzman, formerly the Vice-Principal, Research at CCMD and presently Assistant Secretary, Innovation and Service Sector, the Treasury Board Secretariat, for his valuable insights and dedication to the success of this project.

The Citizen-Centred Service Network and the Canadian Centre for Management Development hope that the summary and complete versions of this report will contribute to a deeper appreciation of the importance of citizens views in developing new and improved ways of delivering public services.

Janet R. Smith
Principal

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Highlights

Citizens First reports how Canadians perceive the services of governments at the municipal, provincial and federal levels and gives clear direction for improving service quality. Major findings are:

- Contrary to popular belief, Canadians rate the quality of many government services as high or higher than many private sector services.
- Overall, citizens rate the quality of *specific* government services higher than government services *in general*. Failing to differentiate these ways of defining service has led to unrealistically low estimates of government service quality in the past.
- Citizens understand that government has a more difficult role than the private sector, balancing efficiency with the public interest. However, they still expect the quality of government services to be as high or higher than that of private sector services.
- Citizens' assessments of service quality are determined primarily by five factors: timeliness, knowledge and competence of staff, courtesy/comfort, fair treatment, and outcome. When all of these drivers of service quality are present, citizens give maximum ratings to government services, often higher than 80 on a scale of 0-100. When performance falls below threshold value on any one of these dimensions, service quality scores drop markedly. The chief constraint on achieving maximum ratings is that governments cannot always guarantee citizens the outcome they want. Setting realistic expectations is an important task in these situations.
- Telephone problems – busy phone lines, difficulties with voice mail and unhelpful phone directory listings – are the most frequent obstacles that citizens encounter in accessing government services.
- The need to contact multiple government offices for a single service issue arises most frequently around certificates, licences and registration. These contacts are often triggered by milestones in life such as such as getting a new job, going away to university, getting married, a death in the family, or moving.
- Citizens have measurable expectations around timely service. *Citizens First* reports specific standards for four types of routine transaction: telephone, counter service, mail and e-mail.
- Citizens identified priorities for improved service at each level of government:
 - *Municipal*: public health, road maintenance and public schools
 - *Provincial*: hospitals, colleges and universities
 - *Federal*: Employment Insurance, Canada Employment Centres, the justice system, Revenue Canada, Canada Post, and Canada Pension/Old Age Security.

These results are cause for great optimism. They provide a means to raise service quality scores from their present average in the low 60s toward 80 or more. Governments at all levels can use these results to develop their own action strategies and chart the path forward.

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1. Introduction

THE CHALLENGE

Citizens First is a research initiative of the Citizen-Centred Service Network (CCSN), a network of more than 200 service quality leaders from the federal, provincial and municipal governments brought together by the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD).

On behalf of CCMD and CCSN, Erin Research conducted an independent investigation of how Canadians perceive the services that their governments provide. The survey was completed by a random selection of 2,900 Canadians in the spring of 1998 and is representative of the population with respect to age, gender and region.

Citizens First defines three new perspectives on service quality:

- It challenges the widely held view that government services are second rate by showing how recent polls have underrated citizens' perceptions of government services;
- It defines the five elements of service delivery that most strongly affect citizens' perceptions of service delivery;
- It offers managers and service providers clear direction for improving services.

THE SERVICE CONTEXT

On a daily basis, Canadians use a wide array of services from the public and private sectors, beginning with the morning newspaper, the bus to work or school and the road it drives on, and then a restaurant at lunch, telephone and Internet service through the day, radio and television, water and electric utilities, and various shops and entertainment outlets. On a more occasional basis, a citizen goes to the bank, renews a driver's licence or visits the library, and, when needed, can call on the Coast Guard, an accountant or a builder.

A considerable portion of daily life is devoted to using the services that the community provides. In doing so, people form opinions about those services and evaluate them. This process is natural and easy and occurs many times each day. The movie was good or not, the restaurant meal was up to standard or not, the bank employee responded to the telephone voice mail within a reasonable period of time or not.

While these judgments are frequent and intuitive, the basis on which we make them is not well understood, especially when it comes to services provided by governments.

The goal of this research is to reach a more detailed understanding of how Canadians evaluate the services provided by their governments in order to guide efforts to improve service quality. The investigation follows several lines of questioning:

- What service quality do citizens assign to different government services?
- What are citizens' priorities for improvement?
- What happens in the course of getting a service that causes a person to evaluate service quality as good or poor? Are there elements associated with good service that can be identified and quantified? How consistent are they from person to person and from one type of service to another?
- Is it possible to identify standards for routine transactions that most citizens will find acceptable?
- Citizens must sometimes contact several government offices to get a service; what service groupings would go furthest to simplify multiple-contact experiences?

The research is citizen-centred in that each issue is approached with the goal of bringing the citizen's perspective forward. It seeks to define and quantify what citizens judge to be good service so that service providers can understand citizens better and design delivery systems that meet their needs.

The research differs from other studies of public sector service in that it examines the services of municipal, provincial and federal governments equally. To do so is entirely consistent with the citizen-centred approach. Citizens do not define separate criteria of service quality for each level of government; moreover, the sharing of costs, responsibilities and service delivery vehicles among governments blurs the distinction among them to an increasing degree.

The result of this research is a series of fresh and challenging ideas about service quality. Some of the conclusions corroborate and amplify earlier work, and some results overturn common beliefs. This is especially true of the gloomy view apparent in some circles that government service finds little favour with citizens and that the quality of government service will inevitably be perceived as low. The direction of this report, based entirely on citizens' input, is that government services can meet high public expectations and compete in quality with services provided by the private sector.

SURVEY

Erin Research designed a survey to address the following goals:

- Establish benchmarks for public and private services;
- Identify and quantify factors that contribute to perceptions of service quality;
- Define service standards for routine government transactions;
- Prioritize needs around access and single-window service;
- Identify citizens' priorities for improvement;
- Develop a framework for action.

A draft survey was reviewed by members of the CCSN and suggestions were incorporated. Survey questions were then tested in focus groups to ensure that questions were clearly worded and that all issues of importance were included.

The survey, *Have Your Say/Prononcez-vous*, was designed as a pencil-and-paper instrument because the large number of questions and the format of some questions made it too unwieldy for telephone administration.

SAMPLE

The survey was mailed to a random selection of Canadian households in early April 1998. A letter of introduction identified the survey as being conducted by Erin Research on behalf of the Citizen-Centred Service Network. The survey was distributed to 34,900 households and 2,900 usable questionnaires were returned. Allowing for a non-delivery rate of 10 percent, the return rate is 9.2 percent, a high return rate for a mail survey distributed by a private firm. In order that citizens see the results of their input, a reply card invited participants to request a summary of results. Close to 50 percent did so.

Returns were weighted by gender, age and population of province using current Statistics Canada information to produce a sample that matches Canadian demographics.

The margin of error for a sample of this size is ± 1.9 percent, 19 times out of 20. This figure applies to questions in polling format, where respondents choose between alternatives; for example, 60 percent say "Yes" and 40 percent say "No."

Much of the data reported in this study are in the form of scaled responses. For example, the mean service quality score for municipal government services is 64 out of 100. These results are analysed using regression and related procedures. Differences are reported only if a) the statistical test is statistically significant, and b) the effect in question accounts for at least 1 percent of the variance. This latter condition is necessary because, in large samples, differences can be "significant" in a narrow technical sense, but still too small to be meaningful.

When a group of comparisons is under consideration, the criterion for statistical significance is adjusted for the number of comparisons in the group. For example, if ten tests are performed, alpha becomes $.05 \div 10$, or .005.

2. Setting the Record Straight

HOW DO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES COMPARE?

It is a popular belief that government services compare poorly in quality with private sector services. The idea is backed up by surveys which show that “government service” rates well below that of department stores, courier companies, grocery stores and various other private sector companies.

This negative view of government service contributes to low esteem for public institutions and services, and erodes morale within the public service. It has gained considerable currency over the past few years, but rests on a small set of polls that provide little context or explanation for their findings. Because these survey results colour the way that both citizens and service providers think about government, *Citizens First* tests citizens’ views of government and private sector service in some detail. Results show that the negative view of government service quality is not justified, or is at least overstated, and, in addition, they offer an explanation of how the misconception may have arisen.

Public and Private Services are Intermixed

Survey respondents rated the quality of service they receive from the 24 public and private organizations listed in Figure 1. The selection includes widely used services that most people are familiar with and can judge from personal experience. Participants rated service quality using 5-point scales labelled *Very poor* to *Very good*. Results are presented, here and throughout the report, in the more intuitive 0-to-100 format.

The first result of note is that private and public services are mixed throughout the range of services. A cluster of public services tops the ratings (fire departments, public libraries), followed by alternating private and public services, singly or in small groups.

The notion that private sector services are of higher quality than government services would have government services grouped at the bottom of the list, which is clearly not the case. The evidence at hand does not support the idea that government services are inherently of poorer quality than private sector services.

This result is based on a wider range of both private and public services than previous Canadian comparisons of its kind. It is consistent as well with results of a recent UK study which showed a

similar pattern of alternating public and private organizations across a wide range of services¹ and also with U.S. research showing similar wide ranges in ratings of government services.²

This simple demonstration effectively counters the idea that government services are necessarily of poor quality. Where, then, did the idea arise in the first place? Its origin appears to lie in confusing two ways of rating service quality – rating *specific services* and rating *service in general*.

Figure 1
How Do Public and Private Services Compare?
Citizens First, 1998

Service	Service quality	Service	Service quality
Fire departments	78	Taxis	57
Public libraries	75	Canada Post	55
Supermarkets	74	Insurance agencies	55
Private mail carriers	68	Public transit	55
CTV	66	Municipal gov't. services in general	53
Provincial parks, campgrounds	64	Banks	51
CBC	64	Revenue Canada	50
Police	63	Federal gov't. services in general	47
Provincial electric utilities,	63	Provincial gov't. services in general	47
Telephone companies	63	Public education system	47
Private sector services in general	60	Hospitals	46
Passport office	60	Road maintenance	35

Service quality scale ranges from 0 to 100.

“Service in General” and Specific Services

The list of 24 services includes a designation for general services at each level of government, e.g., “municipal government services.” Each of these general services scores lower than most of the specific services in its group. Municipal services *in general* rate 53 out of 100, but fire departments, libraries, police and public transit all rate higher; only road maintenance is lower. Provincial services *in general* rate 47 out of 100, tied with education and hospitals, but provincial utilities and parks are higher. Federal services *in general* score 47 out of 100, while each specific federal service, including Revenue Canada, rates higher.

This difference between ratings of specific services and service in general is at least partly responsible for the myth of poor government service. Surveys have very often matched a

¹ ICM Research, *Citizen’s Charter Customer Survey: Research Report* (March-April 1993).

² Thomas I. Miller and Michelle A. Miller, “Standards of Excellence: U.S. Residents’ Evaluations of Local Government Services.” *Public Administration Review* 51, no. 6, (November/December 1991), pp. 503-513.

description of government service in general with a specific private service – for example, “Government service” is rated against “my bank.” It is easy to fall into this trap. Governments provide so many different services that a descriptor such as “provincial government service” is necessarily at a high level of generality. Private sector organizations tend to offer one or a few specific services, so even if a questionnaire refers to private sector organizations in a general manner, such as “supermarkets” or “fast food restaurants,” the meaning of the descriptor is far more specific than the meaning of “government.” In order to provide a fair comparison of government and private organizations, it is necessary to divide government service into its component activities. The list of services in Figure 1 does this to a certain degree, but one could argue that some of these descriptors are still too general. “Public education system” is one example: would higher ratings have resulted from using “elementary schools” or “high schools”?

Low scores for services defined generally and higher scores for services defined specifically have been common results of surveys through the 1990s. The problem that arises when general and specific ratings are mixed is now obvious. But why should general concepts be rated lower than specific ones? The general concept is essentially a stereotype, a distillation of reality that selects from the experiences that gave rise to it. Each citizen’s stereotype of government service is built on a lifetime of experiences, probably amplified by accounts in novels, misrepresentations by interest groups, news accounts of instances where the system failed, a certain influx of opinions from the political realm, and so on. Asking a person to rate government service “in general” accesses this stereotype.

Government service “in general” evokes a mixture of recent and more distant experiences, and this can contribute to the low scores for generally defined services. Other research has shown that recently used services get higher service quality ratings than services used in the more distant past³.

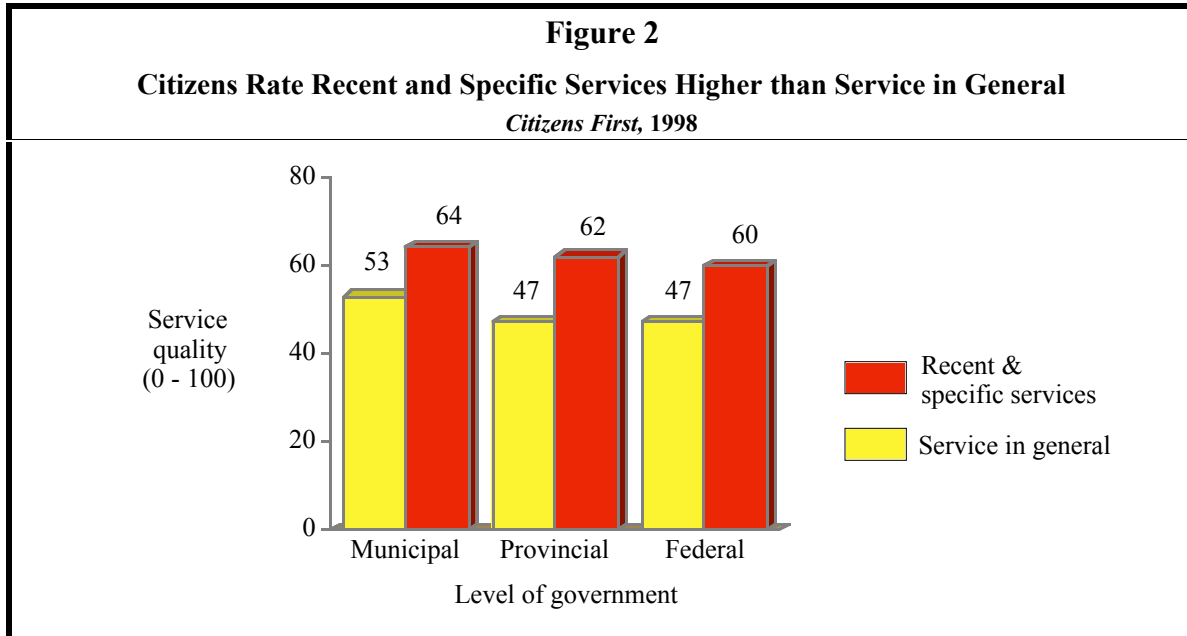
A strong test of general *versus* specific ratings derives from citizens’ evaluations of 50 specific services spanning the three levels of government (reported in Chapter 11). Citizens rated only services that they had used in the past year, so their evaluations are based on relatively recent experience.

The result is clear. The 20 provincial services in this set have a mean service quality rating of 62 out of 100, fully 15 points higher than the general rating for “provincial government services in general.” Municipal and federal governments show the same pattern, with recent specific services scoring 11 and 13 points higher than government services in general (Figure 2). Ratings for service in general give an unrealistically gloomy portrait of how citizens view their governments.

When citizens evaluate services they have used recently, they draw on particular memories of actual experiences. The result is a wide range of scores for different government services that is similar to the range of scores generated for private sector services. When citizens rate government services in general, they draw on opinions and possibly stereotypes of government, and these tend

³ Theodore H. Poister and Gary T. Henry, “Citizen Ratings of Public and Private Service Quality: A Comprehensive Perspective.” *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 2 (March/April 1994), pp.155-160.

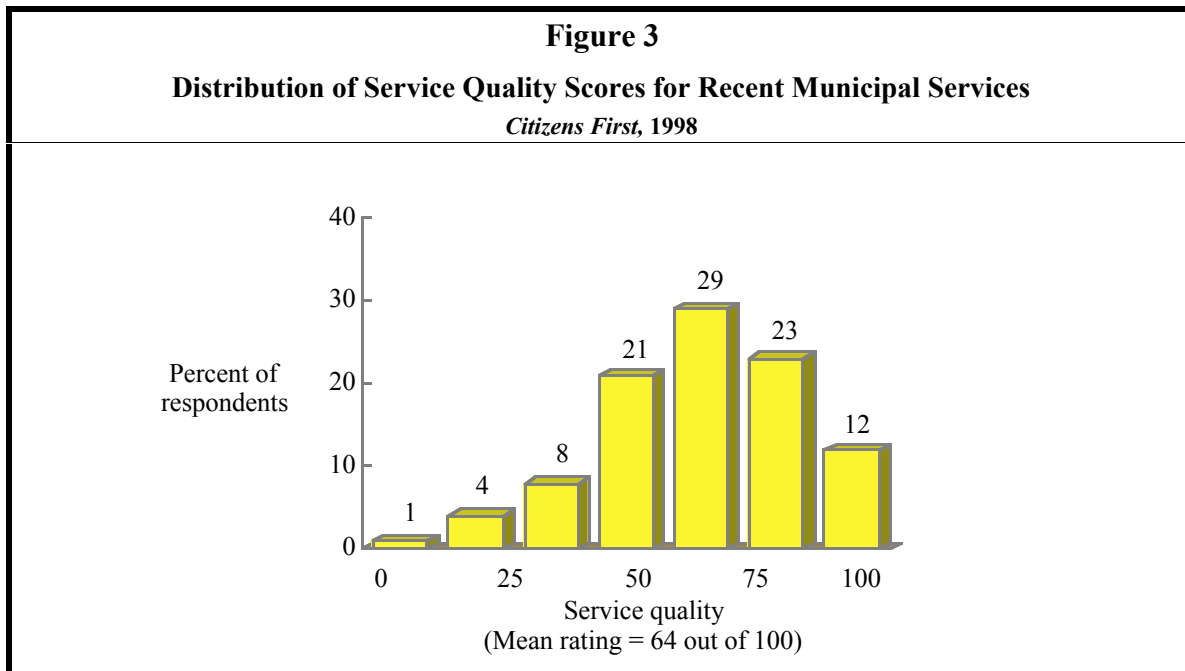
to be negative, as this research and many other surveys have amply demonstrated. A meaningful comparison of government and private sector services must account for any differences in specificity and recency of use.



Refining the way in which service quality is measured casts government service in a significantly better light. Scores in the 40s and 50s are cause for despair. Scores in the 60s are a base to build on. Still, 60 out of 100 is less than a stellar achievement. As a rule of thumb, private sector service providers hope to see ratings of at least 70, preferably 80.

Are service quality scores in the 60s all that governments should expect? Subsequent sections of this report consider this question in detail. By way of introducing the investigation, Figure 3 shows the distribution of scores that underlies the mean rating of 64 for municipal services in Figure 1. About 1 percent of respondents rated all their recent municipal services at or near 0, while about 12 percent rated all their recent municipal services at or near 100. The majority are somewhere in between.

In other words, some people had very good experiences with their municipal governments and some had bad ones. Parallel results obtain for the provincial and federal services. The research questions are these: What is it that distinguishes good service experiences from bad ones? What elements of service delivery, or what characteristics of individual citizens are responsible for this huge range of service quality scores? The answers to these questions would provide invaluable information for improving service.



To some extent, the type of service will determine service quality ratings. Public libraries may expect higher ratings than building inspectors. But this is not the entire answer by any means. Within any specific service, citizens' ratings of service quality range from very low to very high. Building inspectors and tax collectors receive high ratings less frequently than parks and fire departments but often enough to suggest that high scores are possible across a wide range of government services. This theme is discussed further in Chapter 8.

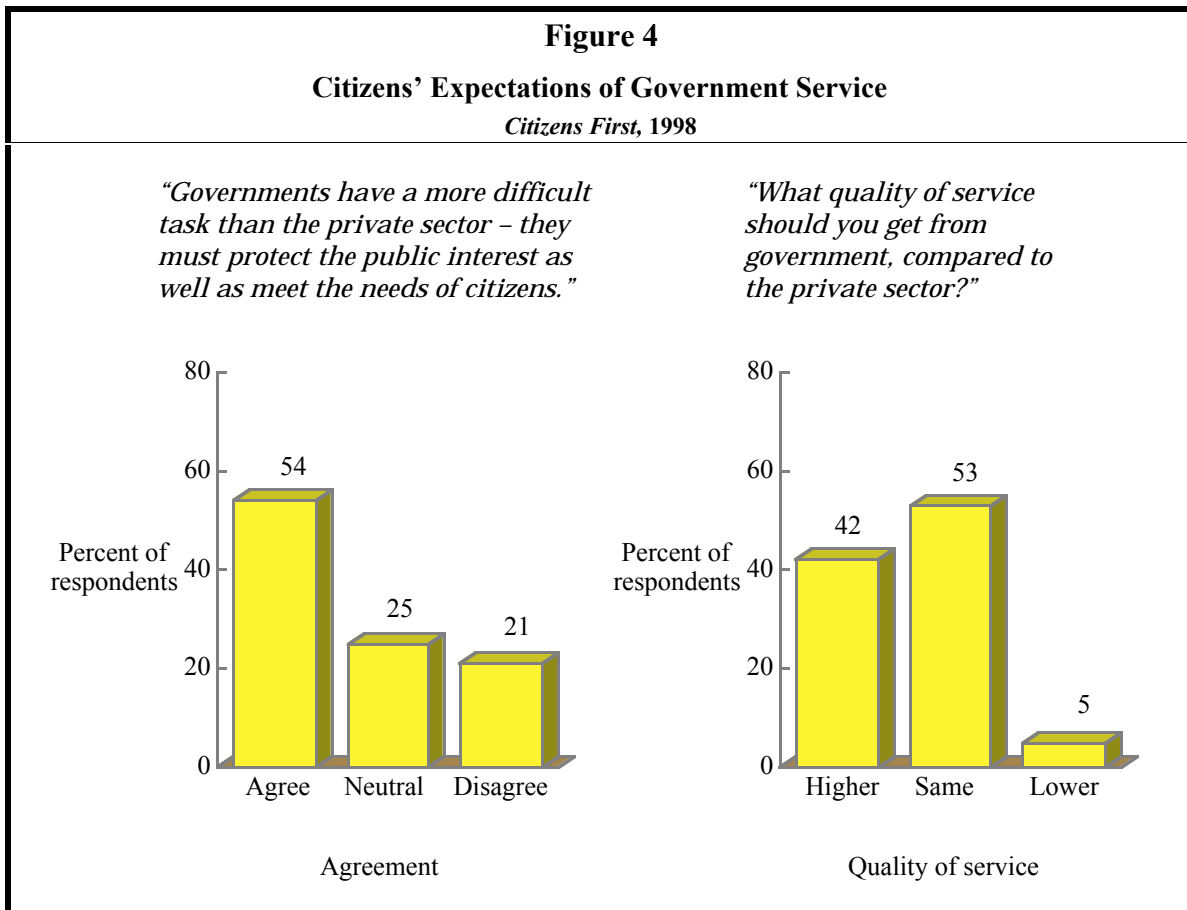
CITIZENS' EXPECTATIONS

Two additional results provide an important context for understanding how citizens view government services. In the first place, a slight majority, 54 percent, 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."

But added responsibility does not diminish government's task in terms of its provision of services. Forty-two percent of respondents believe that governments should provide a *higher standard of service* than the private sector; only 5 percent think that government service can be lower in quality.

These results stand as a mandate from citizens to improve the quality of government services. Ninety-five percent of Canadians want government service to match or exceed the quality of private sector services. With mean scores in the low 60s, government services probably rate lower

overall than the private sector, though not nearly as low as one would be led to believe from surveys that define “government service” in general terms!



3. The Service Model

The service model that grew out of the research results has five phases, summarized in the diagram on the next page.

CITIZENS FIRST SERVICE MODEL

1. Citizens' service needs and expectations

When citizens approach a government service they bring expectations based on earlier service experiences and also on more general attitudes toward government.

2. Access to service

To get the service, the citizen must know where to find it. This may be difficult if it is the citizen's first experience with the service or if the service has changed as a result of government restructuring.

After making initial contact, access problems can continue if, for example, the phones are busy or the citizen receives conflicting information.

3. Service delivery

When obtaining service, citizens assess government performance along many dimensions. Service delivery is timely or it is not, staff are competent or they are not, and so on. Citizens' responses to questions about service delivery point to five key elements that drive service quality ratings. When all five drivers are in place, citizens rate many services in the 80s; when one or more drops below a threshold level, service quality ratings fall accordingly.

Timely service is the single strongest determinant of service quality across all services and across the three levels of government. The research provides standards for timely service delivery in routine phone, counter-service, mail and e-mail transactions.

4. Perceptions of service quality

Specific service experiences lead to detailed perceptions of service quality. These provide useful information for improving service.

Specific service experiences may also contribute to citizens' perceptions of government service *in general*. These are considerably more negative than perceptions of most specific experiences. The widely held belief that governments provide poor quality service rests largely on polls that measure service at this general level.

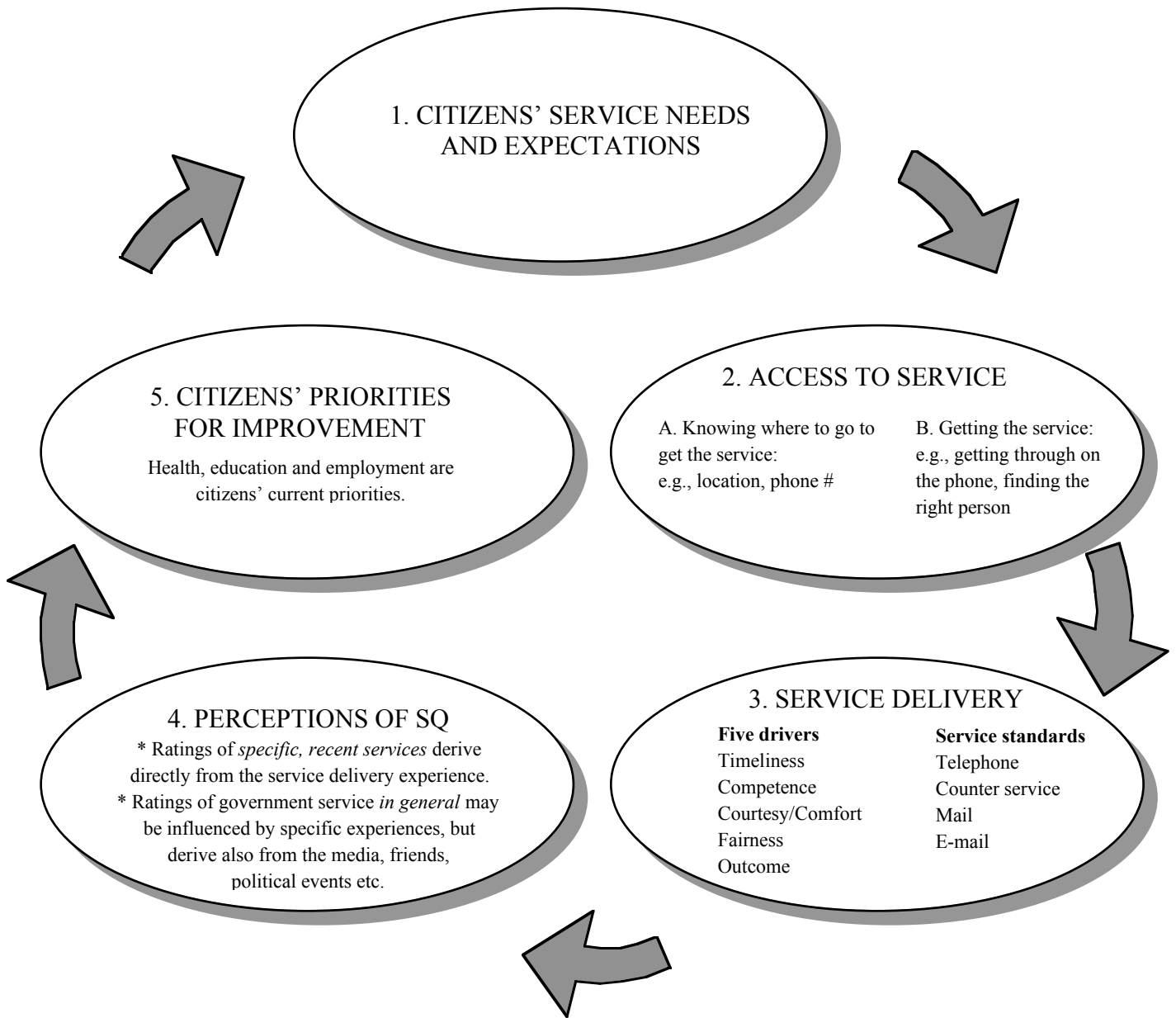
5. Citizens' priorities for improvement

Perceptions of service quality contribute to citizens' priorities for improving service.

Priorities for improvement may also be influenced by the larger arena of public discourse, including politicians, opinion leaders and the media.

Priorities for improvement, in their turn, help to shape citizens' expectations when they next encounter government services.

Figure 5
Citizens First Service Model

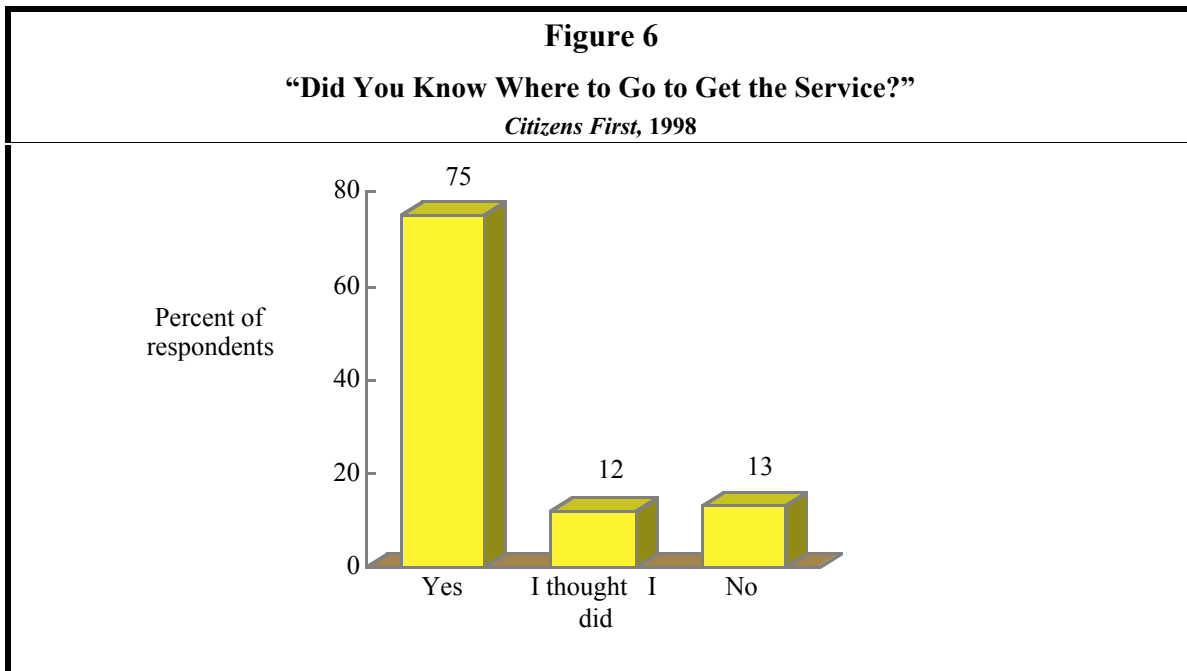


4. Access to Service

It is not difficult to think of reasons why accessing government services can present a problem. Many government services are used infrequently, so the citizen seeking service is faced with a new or hazily remembered process. Many government services are not available in the storefront manner that is typical of private sector services. Citizens may not know which level of government provides the service they are after and so do not know where to start looking. With reorganization of governments an ongoing process, the names of services, agencies and departments can change, making it difficult to find the service in the phone book. Not surprisingly, when citizens are asked to rank the problems they have with government services, access often stands near the top of the list.

This research asked a number of questions about access. The questions are all in the context of the specific service that citizens described in detail. The results therefore reflect citizens' direct experience rather than general attitudes or stereotypes about accessing government.

A first question was, "Did you know where to go to get the service?" Given all the potential problems that can arise, it may seem surprising that a good majority of respondents, 75 percent, knew how to access the service they were after (Figure 6). The remaining quarter are evenly divided between those who did not know, and those who thought they knew, but found out that they did not.

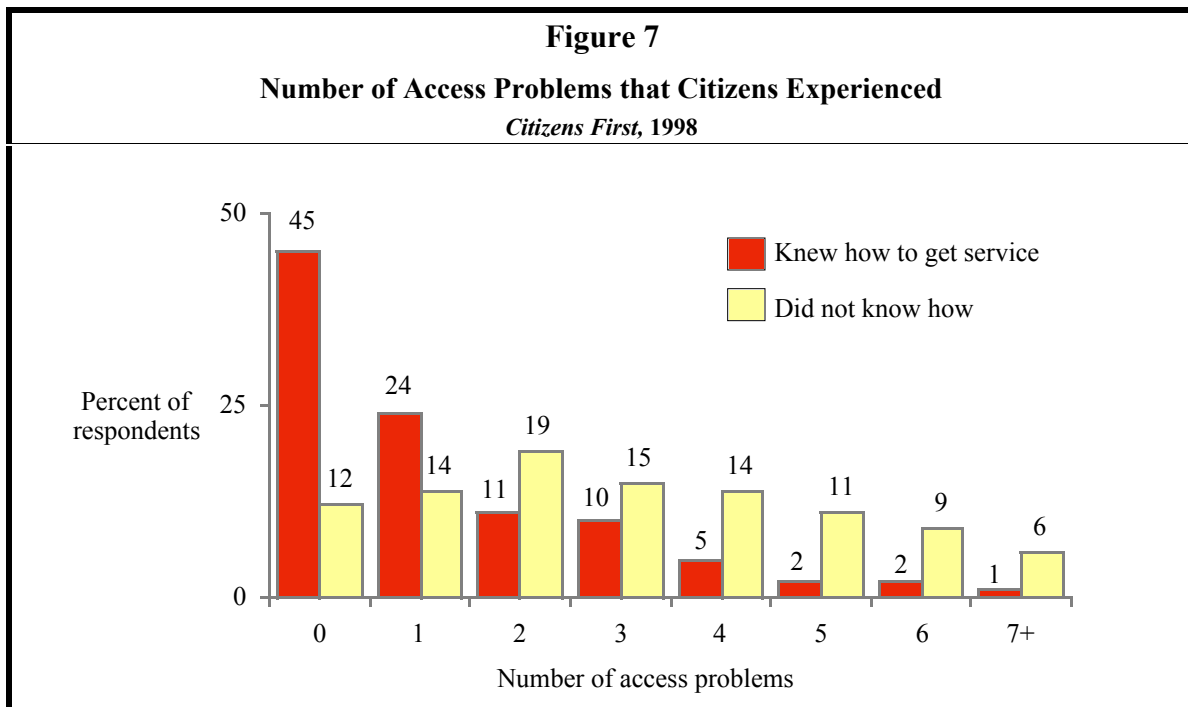


NUMBER OF PROBLEMS ACCESSING THE SERVICE

Knowing where to go to get the service does not eliminate problems of access, but it certainly cuts down their number. Among citizens who knew how to get the service, 45 percent had no problems at all, and another 24 percent had just one problem.

When citizens did not know how to get the service (or thought they did but found out otherwise), only 12 percent had no problems with access. An additional 14 percent had a single problem, leaving three quarters of this group with two or more difficulties accessing the service.

The issue can also be expressed in terms of the mean number of problems that citizens report. Those who knew how to get the service reported a mean of 1.3 problems, while those who did not reported a mean of 3.0.



BARRIERS TO ACCESS

The survey listed ten common access problems and respondents checked any that applied to their own service experience.

Overall, busy telephones tops the list. It is clearly the leading difficulty among those who knew how to get the service (24 percent of this group encountered busy phones), and is in a near tie with “getting bounced” among those who did not know how to get the service.

The list includes three phone-related issues:

- Busy phone lines;
- Trouble with voice mail or automatic answering systems;
- Being unable to find the service in the phone book.

Forty percent of all respondents identified one or more of these telephone issues as a problem in the context of the specific service experience they described.

Figure 8			
Access Barriers			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Barrier to access	Percent of respondents		Total
	Knew how to get service	Did not know	
Telephone lines were busy *	24	43	28
I got bounced from one person to another *	17	46	25
I got conflicting information *	15	39	21
Trouble with voice mail or answering system	15	39	21
I received incorrect information *	10	26	14
No one took time to explain things *	9	24	13
Parking was difficult	12	14	13
I couldn't find it in the phone book *	4	24	9
I didn't know where to look *	3	28	9
I had to travel too far	6	9	7
Other	12	16	13

* Statistically significant difference between groups.

ACCESS IN DIFFERENT SERVICE AREAS

The number of access problems encountered varies considerably from one service area to another. It is lowest in police and fire services and pleasure services where the majority reported no problems, and highest in financial assistance and employment, where nearly three quarters encountered problems.

Figure 9			
Access in Different Service Areas			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Service area	Number of problems		
	None	One	Two plus
Police and fire	56	22	21
Pleasure	52	25	23
Registration	42	21	37
Health	36	22	42
Taxation	34	23	43
Financial assistance	28	18	54
Employment	27	10	63
All other services	37	25	39

The type of access problem that citizens encounter also varies with service area. In brief:

- “I got bounced” was identified as a problem by about 15 percent in each of the police and fire, pleasure and registration services. In other areas, 25 percent or more found it a problem.
- Busy telephone lines is relatively infrequent in police and fire (10 percent) and pleasure, and ranges up to more than 40 percent in financial assistance, employment and taxation.
- Trouble with phone answering systems is relatively infrequent in police and fire (6 percent) and pleasure (9 percent), and ranges between 20 and 30 percent in most other areas.
- “I was given incorrect information” is an issue for just 2 percent of respondents in the pleasure area, and ranges from 10 to 20 percent in other areas.

- “I got conflicting information” is a problem for 8 percent in the pleasure category, and for 16 to 35 percent in other areas.
- “No one took the time to explain things to me” rated as a problem in three areas, financial assistance, health and employment, where 16 to 25 percent had difficulty. In most other areas, fewer than 10 percent had difficulty.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF ACCESS

Do older citizens have greater difficulty than younger citizens in accessing services? Do rural residents have more problems than urban dwellers? In each of the analyses of access reported above, tests were run to assess these and other demographic variables. The overall conclusion can be very simply stated: demographic variables predict very little about problems in access.

One of the stronger relationships is between the number of access problems experienced and age. Those aged 18–25 reported an average of 1.9 access problems, and the figure decreases steadily with age, with those over age 65 experiencing an average of 1.2 problems. This result presumably reflects younger citizens’ lack of experience with government – as one grows older, familiarity with the ways of government increases. This age effect, however, is not particularly important. Age accounts for only 1 percent of the variance in the number of problems that people report. There would be little value in basing a service delivery strategy on age.

Other demographic variables that have no meaningful bearing on access are gender, size of community (this includes a test for urban-rural differences), education and family income.

5. Multiple-Contact Services

Single-window access is a quintessential feature of the citizen-centred approach. It organizes service delivery around the needs of citizens rather than around the administrative structures of governments.

Governments have been using the single-window approach throughout the 1990s, and have many remarkable successes to demonstrate its effectiveness. Single-window service has three broad purposes:⁴

1. Single-window information and referral, where, for example, citizens call a single telephone number for referral to the appropriate government office;
2. “One-stop shopping” where related or unrelated services of a government may be obtained at a single location (horizontal integration of services);
3. Single-window access to related services of several governments (vertical integration of services).

A central question in designing single-window service of the second and third types is to define the clusters of services that should be grouped together to provide optimum benefit and convenience to citizens. This research employs a new method of analysing citizens’ needs regarding single-window service. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of the method and provide general direction for the clustering of services.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The traditional method of answering the question, “What services should go in a cluster?” has been to list a group of services and ask, “Is this a useful cluster?” The method is appropriate in many circumstances, but it assumes that the content of the clusters is known at the outset.

⁴ Stephen Bent, Kenneth Kernaghan and Brian Marson, *Single-Window Service Delivery, Interim Report*, Citizen-Centred Service Network Project 5 (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1998).

The goal of this research was to make no assumptions at all about the services that make up a cluster. Instead, the survey question was designed to generate service clusters based on citizens' actual experiences. It asked:

“Sometimes you need to contact more than one office or agency to get a service.
Have you contacted two or more different government offices around a single service in the past two years?

- Describe the service you were trying to get.
- Which offices or agencies did you contact?”

The question was not multiple-choice. Citizens wrote point-form answers and these were analysed by the research team. Sixteen percent of respondents completed this section of the survey. This compares with completion rates exceeding 90 percent for other sections of the survey, and implies that most citizens did not have recent multiple-contact experiences. There are at least two reasons why the 16 percent figure may be a low estimate of the actual number of multiple-contact experiences that citizens have. First, the survey question on multiple contacts is more difficult to answer than most other questions in the survey. The respondent must recall a sequence of separate events and organize them into a coherent whole, structuring a narrative to describe services (such as passports and birth certificates) that are not closely related either conceptually or in terms of their physical locations. In contrast, other sections of the survey present carefully structured questions that require relatively little effort to answer. Second, responses are in the form of written answers which take more effort to complete than multiple-choice responses. Both these factors may have reduced the response rate to this section of the survey.

WHAT TRIGGERS MULTIPLE-CONTACT EXPERIENCES?

Responses to the question, “Describe the service you were trying to get” were analysed in two ways. Figure 10 shows at a general level the types of service need that triggered the experience. Figure 11 shows more specifically the services that were involved.

Figure 10 shows that the leading trigger, by a wide margin, is the need for a certificate, licence or other type of personal paperwork. In all, 39 percent of the multiple-contact experiences resulted from a need for certificates! Some respondents specified the event that led to the need for service. Many of these were major milestones in life, such as getting a new job, going away to university, getting married, a death in the family, or moving, especially between provinces. These events engender changes of address, changes of name, or the need for passports, birth certificates, SIN cards, new health cards, and so on.

A few examples illustrate the range of situations that citizens described:

- *I needed information about my mother's GST cheque which we received after she passed away. Do we keep it and deposit it in her estate, or do we return it?*
- *Welfare/student aid: I was sent from EI to human resources to student aid. And everyone told me I wasn't eligible even though I was unemployed for over 1 year.*
- *I was married and needed to change my last name.*
- *I was trying to get help for a senior citizen in my complex in an abusive situation.*
- *Revenue Canada does not know where Pond Inlet is regarding living expenses. They need several documents to prove Pond Inlet is [in] northern Canada.*
- *Problem around waste water discharge.*
- *Information on treaty rights.*
- *I became a senior – OAS and supplement, no problem. Health card – serious problem.*
- *I had to get a birth certificate for my niece before I could get a health card and social insurance number.*

Figure 10	
Triggers for Multiple-Contact Experiences	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Trigger	Percent of respondents
1. Certificates, personal records	39
• Change of address	6
• Change of name	5
• Death	3
• Lost or stolen ID	2
• Other need for certificate, or reason not specified	23
2. Information	16
3. Financial assistance	13
4. Tax issues	6
5. Health issues	4
6. All others	22
Total	100

Given that 39 percent of respondents needed a certificate of some sort, what certificates did they need? Figure 11 shows that birth, marriage and death certificates were at the root of 13 percent of all multiple-contact service experiences. Passports account for a further 10 percent.

Similarly, Figure 10 shows that 13 percent indicated that financial assistance was their primary reason for seeking service. From Figure 11, this group includes the 6 percent with Canada Pension Plan issues, the 4 percent seeking Employment Insurance, and the 2 percent seeking student loans.

Figures 10 and 11 present alternative ways of categorizing the services that trigger multiple-contact experiences. They do not necessarily map perfectly onto each other. For example, the assumption was made in the preceding paragraph that people contacting the Canada Pension Plan were seeking financial assistance. It is possible that some had tax issues instead. By their nature, the experiences that citizens described in this section tend to be complex; no one way of categorizing them will completely capture their content.

Figure 11	
Services that Lead to Multiple-Contact Experiences	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Service	Percent of all multi-contact experiences
1. Birth, marriage, death certificates	13
3. Passports: get or renew	10
2. Revenue Canada	8
4. Canada Pension Plan	6
7. Customs and Immigration	6
6. Employment Insurance	4
5. Federal government registration, e.g., SIN	4
8. Health card application	3
9. Motor vehicle registration	3
10. Provincial health care	2
11. Small business start-up	2
12. Provincial courts	2
13. Student loans	2

OFFICES CONTACTED

The preceding section described the experiences that initiated multiple-contact experiences. On this basis alone, we might be tempted to design a single-window system that provided access to all certificates and registrations of a personal nature. This would be premature, because the need behind the service request does not indicate each different department where the search for service will eventually lead.

Figure 12 shows the most frequently contacted offices and agencies. Revenue Canada is the single most frequently contacted office: 29 percent of all multiple-contact experiences include Revenue Canada in the process.

Some but not all of these Revenue Canada contacts result from people seeking certificates. Births, marriages and deaths all have tax implications, as do the purchase and sale of motor vehicles and other certificate-related transactions. Revenue Canada contacts can also be associated with requests for financial assistance, health problems, estate matters, and a myriad of other issues.

On average, respondents reported contacting just over two different offices or agencies, although 3 percent listed as many as six.

Figure 12	
Offices Contacted during Multiple-Contact Experiences	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Office	Percent of respondents contacting the office
1. Revenue Canada	29
2. Birth, marriage, death certificates	19
3. Canada Pension Plan	13
4. Passports: get or renew	12
5. Employment Insurance	11
6. Motor vehicle registration	10
7. Health card application	10
8. Customs and immigration	8
9. Provincial health care	6
10. Canada Employment Centres	6
11. Information services	6
12. Other provincial registration services	5
13. Canada Post	4

Results provide a glimpse as to the means by which citizens access these various services. Figure 13 shows that, across the whole set of government offices/agencies that were contacted, 22 percent of offices were contacted in person, 60 percent by phone, mail or fax, and 18 percent by both methods. The six most frequently contacted offices are listed to illustrate the amount of variation in this pattern. Passport offices have the highest level of personal contact, with 61 percent (46 percent plus 15 percent) of citizens making a personal visit. Canada Pension Plan has the lowest proportion of personal visits with a total of 30 percent of citizens walking through the door.⁵

Figure 13			
Method of Contact for Selected Services			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Office	Percent of respondents contacting...		
	In person	Phone, mail, fax	Both
Passports	46	39	15
Health card applications	41	55	4
Motor vehicle registration	35	45	20
Birth, marriage, death certificates	31	56	13
Revenue Canada	16	75	9
Canada Pension Plan	11	70	19
All services	22	60	18

⁵ Note that these results apply only to multiple-contact experiences; more routine encounters may not follow the same patterns.

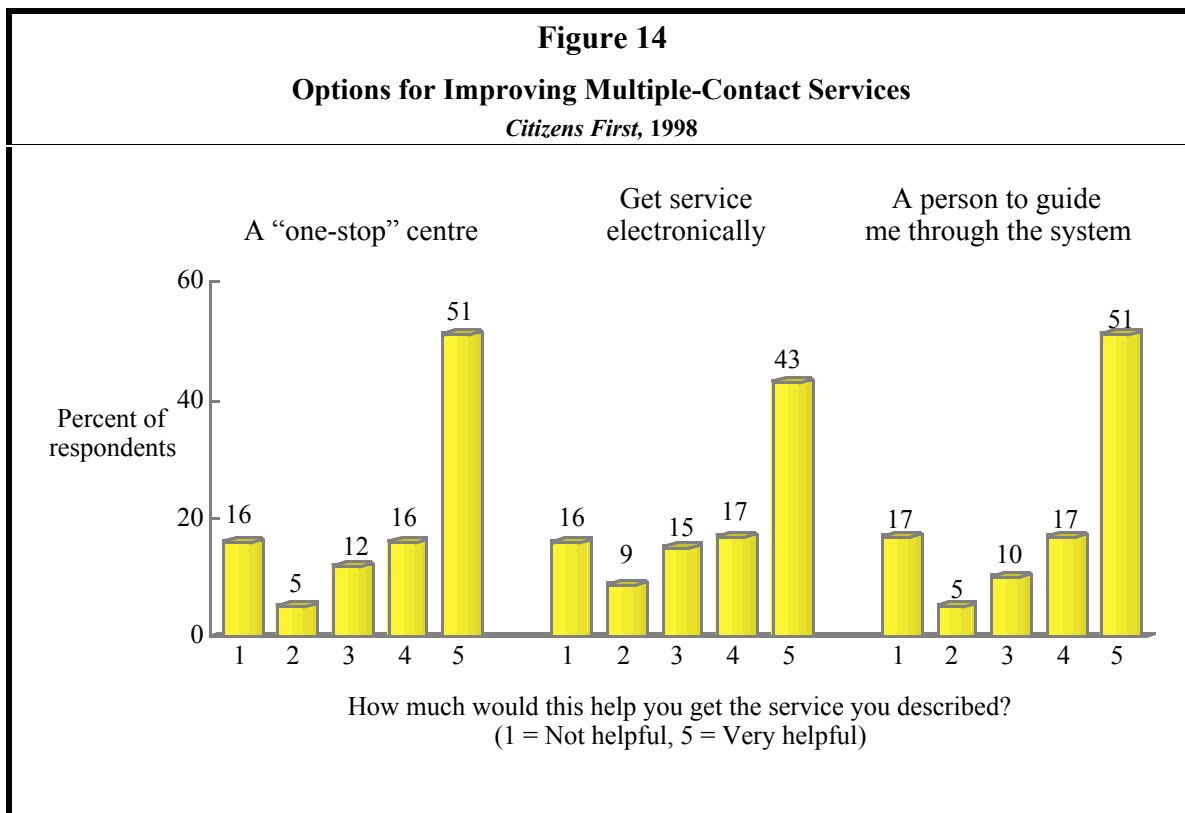
OPTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

What do citizens see as helpful in multiple-contact experiences? The survey asked whether each of three options would be helpful in getting the multiple-contact service that the respondent had just described. Each received considerable support:⁶

- A “one-stop” centre that offers all the services you need in one location;
- The ability to do all or most tasks by mail, phone, Internet, etc., without visiting government offices;
- One person to guide me through the system and help if I have a problem.

As Figure 14 shows, up to two thirds of respondents considered each option helpful (combining the 4 and 5 out of 5 scores). Up to one quarter considered each option to be unhelpful in their specific situation.

The three options can be seen as complementary. A single-window centre can be accessed by phone or Internet, and can assign one person to assist the citizen with different phases of the service request.



⁶ It should be noted that while this chapter has been presented as a foundation for single-window service delivery, the survey questions themselves were asked neutrally, in terms of “services that involve several government offices.” The deck was not stacked in favour of the one-window option.

This section of the survey demonstrates a citizen-centred method of assessing service clusters. It makes no assumptions about what services should be packaged together, but rather takes citizens' experiences as the starting point.

This analysis provides an overview of multiple-contact services – from the perspective of all governments and all services. In this context, a service cluster centred on certificates and personal records, and strengthened by Revenue Canada, emerges as a leading candidate.

The same approach can be applied to more specific contexts. For example, a government may wish to develop a single-window delivery system around services for seniors. Using the present method to question seniors about their multiple contacts with government would address two questions. It would confirm whether there was, in fact, a need for a single-window cluster focused on seniors: if the service needs of seniors differed materially from those of other citizens, then a single-window approach focused on seniors would be supported. Second, it would identify services that should be included in the cluster.

6. Drivers of Service Quality

This chapter conveys some of the most important results of the research. The mode of inquiry, however, is different from most surveys and is at times somewhat technical. For those interested in the key results rather than the analysis, the main conclusions are summarized here.

1. Five factors determine, in large measure, whether citizens rate the service they receive from governments as good or poor.
2. The five factors, termed “drivers” of service quality, are:
 1. *Timeliness*
 2. *Knowledgeable, competent staff*
 3. *Courtesy/comfort*
 4. *Fair treatment*
 5. *Outcome (getting what you need).*
3. When citizens experience good service on *each* of these dimensions, they rate overall service quality at 85 out of 100. “Good” service is defined here as either 4 or 5 out of 5. Perfect 5s are not required.
4. When service drops below the level of 4 out of 5 on *any one* dimension, overall service quality scores fall an average of 25 points, to 60 out of 100. If two drivers score less than 4 out of 5, service quality scores fall further.
5. The strong implication of these results is that providing “good” service on these drivers – service that citizens will rate 4 out of 5 – will result in service quality ratings in the range of 85 out of 100 in most contexts.
6. The research provides a solid foundation for optimism: high service quality ratings are possible for governments. They also issue a challenge: to find ways of delivering the level of service that will guarantee these high service quality scores.

A RECENT EXPERIENCE WITH GOVERNMENT SERVICE

The survey asked respondents to choose a single experience they had had with government service in the past year. The choice was introduced as:

- A service from any level of government;
- A simple or complex experience;
- A happy experience or not;
- Any experience where you were directly involved, for example, you visited a provincial park, or helped your child get a student loan.

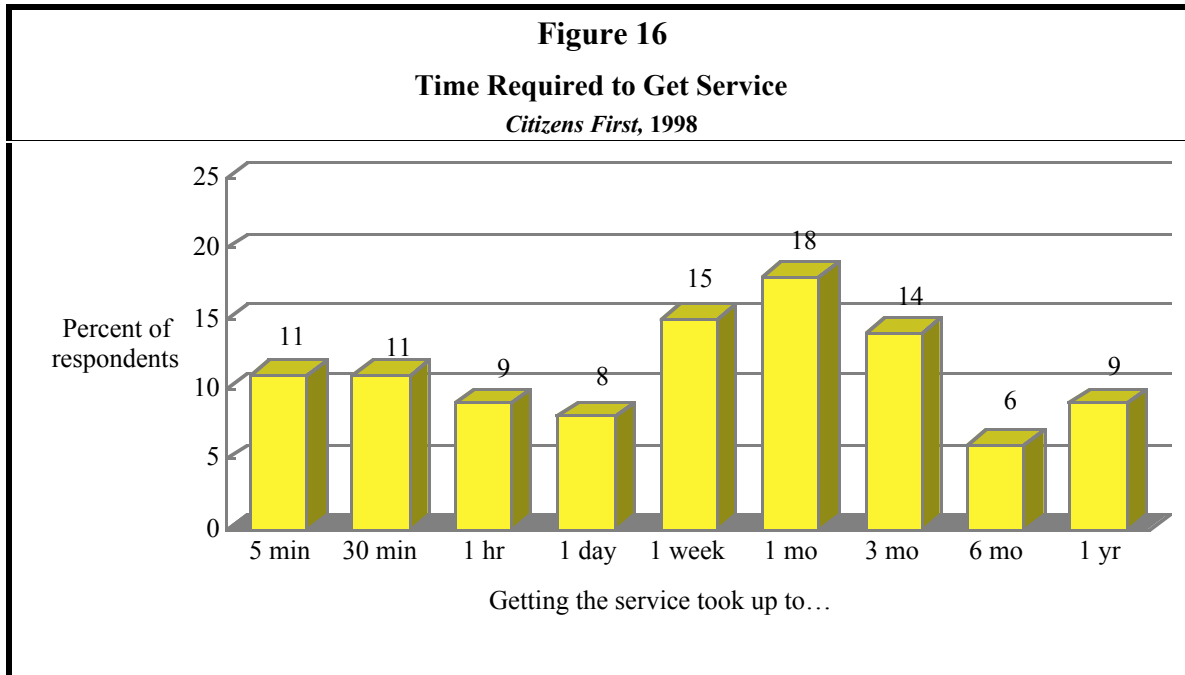
Respondents described the service, then answered a set of more than 30 questions dealing with access to the service, their treatment by staff, the amount of time the process took, fees and other issues. The intent of this comprehensive series of questions was to include every issue of conceivable relevance in service delivery. The subsequent statistical analysis would then disclose which variables were of greater and lesser consequence in determining service quality.

The expectation in designing the survey was that the experiences that citizens chose would be wide-ranging, and this is indeed the case. They include each of the 50 services listed in Chapter 11 (except for provincial jails), plus numerous others. Figure 15 presents a brief profile. Services are distributed over the three levels of government, with provincial government services, at 41 percent of the total, being the largest share. Not quite half were legally required; the majority were discretionary. For about two thirds, the outcome of the experience was positive: they got what they needed, while one third did not.

Figure 15
Profile of Citizens' Recent Experience with Government Services
Citizens First, 1998

Question	Options	Percent
Level of government	Municipal	24
	Provincial	41
	Federal	27
	Mixed	8
Was it a legal requirement?	Yes	42
	No	58
Is it completed or continuing?	Completed	73
	Continuing	27
Did you get what you needed?	Yes	68
	No, or part of what I needed	32
Did you pay a fee?	Yes	36
	No	64
If fee was paid: Was it reasonable?	Yes	55
	No	45
When you started, did you know where to get the service?	Yes	75
	I thought so - but it turned out I didn't	12
	No	13

To complete the profile of reported experiences, Figure 16 shows the range of times required to get the service. Just over one third of the services took up to one day, another third took up to one month, and just under one third took longer than one month. Services of higher levels of government tended to take more time. For example, 52 percent of municipal services took one day or less, compared to 38 percent of provincial services and 29 percent of federal services.



WHAT DETERMINES SERVICE QUALITY?

The question that this survey is designed to answer is this: What distinguishes good service experiences from poor ones? Respondents rated overall satisfaction with their recent experience on a 5-point scale, ranging from “very poor” to “very good.” Figure 17 shows the result – similar proportions of responses fall at each point along the scale.

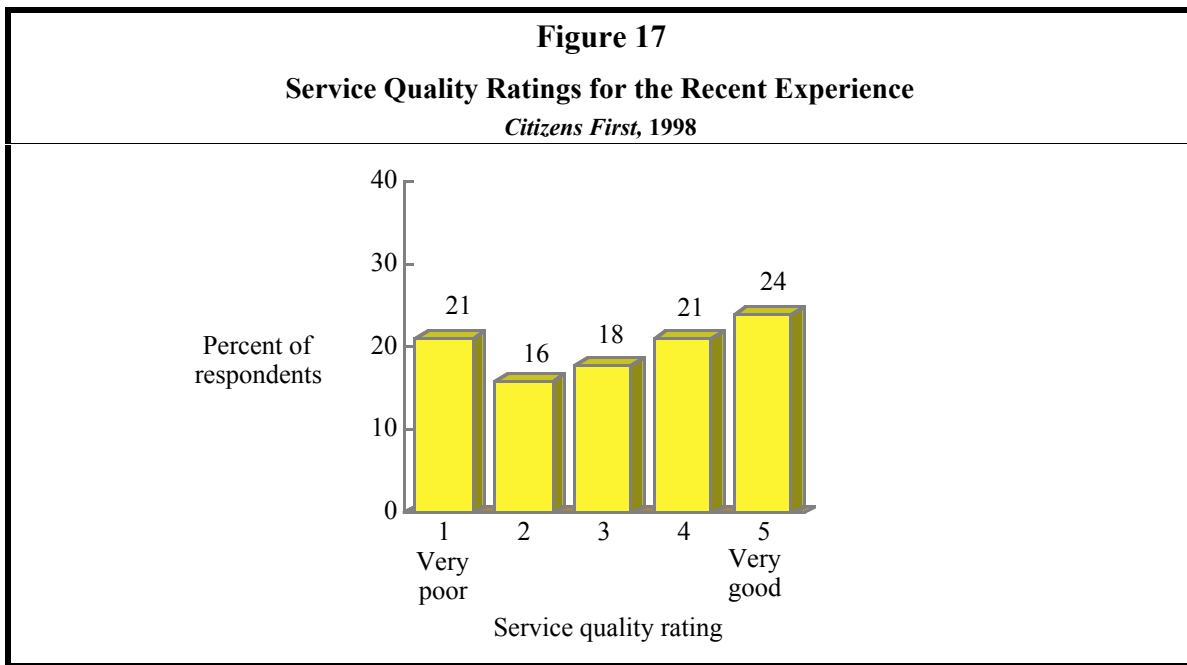
There will be many reasons why the service quality ratings in Figure 17 differ. They were made by citizens with varying backgrounds and life experience from across the country, they include all three levels of government, and they involve services ranging from public transit, to provincial parks, to income tax.

In searching for the reasons that underlie the differences in service quality ratings, the analysis examined three categories of potential explanation.

1. *Demographic characteristics of the person receiving service:* This tests whether ratings of overall service quality vary with age, gender, education, income and other personal characteristics.

2. *Elements of the service experience*: This tests whether ratings of overall service quality are affected by problems accessing the service, the kind of treatment the citizen received from staff, etc.
3. *Citizens' opinions of government*: It is possible that pre-existing attitudes about government will influence how citizens perceive service.

As described in the following pages, the analysis proceeds systematically through each of these three categories to establish whether it serves to drive service quality ratings. In all, more than 30 elements were investigated.



1. Demographic Characteristics of the Person Receiving Service

It is customary to examine survey data along demographic lines. In this instance, there is no meaningful effect of any demographic variable on service quality ratings for the recent experience. Age is the only variable to have a statistically significant relationship to service quality (older respondents tend to rate service slightly higher), but the effect is so small as to be unimportant. In a large sample such as this, differences that are too small to be meaningful can still be statistically “significant” in the sense that they are unlikely to have occurred simply by chance. In this case, age accounts for less than one-half of one percent of the variance in service quality scores. It does not go far to explain why citizens rate service quality as good or poor.

As a matter of record, the demographic factors that do *not* have a statistically significant impact on ratings of service quality are gender, language spoken (English/French), region of Canada, size of community, status as a visible minority or aboriginal Canadian, level of education, length of residence in Canada, employment by a government or publicly funded agency, and family income.

2. Elements of the Service Experience

The questions that respondents answered in describing the service experience in detail were chosen to encompass the full range of citizens’ expectations and the events they deal with when obtaining government services. Questions were tested in focus groups to ensure a complete and comprehensible set.

The set of more than two dozen questions includes those in Figure 15, as well as questions on:

- the number of separate contacts with government (phone calls, office visits, etc.) that were required to get the service;
- the length of time taken to complete the service (Figure 16);
- satisfaction with the time taken;
- problems accessing the service (e.g., getting conflicting information, trouble with voice message systems, getting bounced from person to person);
- aspects of the service delivery process (e.g., were procedures easy to understand, were staff knowledgeable, was it clear what to do if a problem was encountered).

Analysing how these variables affect the overall rating of service quality yields a set of five elements that determine service quality ratings more strongly and consistently than all others. They are:

DRIVERS OF SERVICE QUALITY	
Driver	Survey measure
Timeliness	“How satisfied were you with the time it took to get the service?”
Knowledge, competence	“Staff were knowledgeable and competent”
Courtesy, comfort	“Staff were courteous and made me feel comfortable”
Fair treatment	“I was treated fairly”
Outcome	“In the end, did you get what you needed?”

Together, these five elements account for 72 percent of the variation in overall service quality. This is a very large amount of variance to have accounted for – getting 25 to 30 percent would be sufficient to confidently define a service improvement strategy. Accounting for 70 percent is

approaching the practical limit of explanation in social scientific research, as “noise” factors such as differences in understanding questions and differences in interpreting response scales keep the maximum figure well under 100 percent.

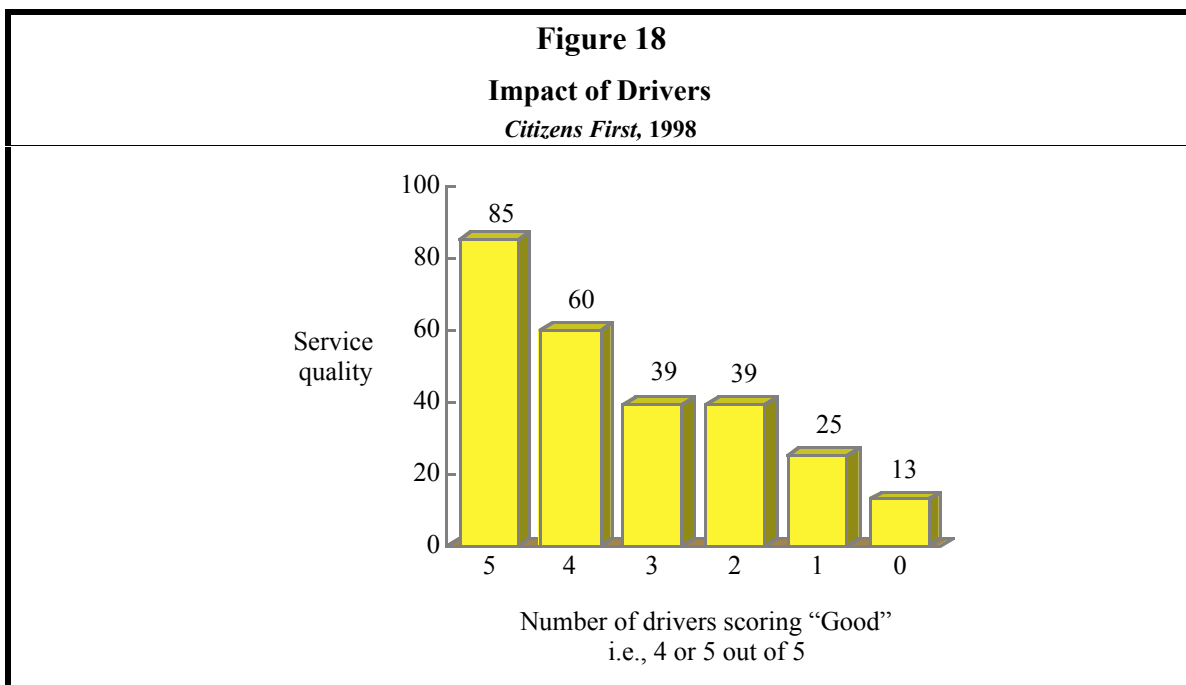
The effect of these five elements is dramatically illustrated in Figure 18. In creating this chart, respondents’ scores on each of the five drivers were categorized as “good” or “not good.” Rating service quality at 4 or 5 out of 5 gives a score of *good* for that driver. Rating service quality at 1, 2, or 3 out of 5 gives a score of *not good* for that driver. The “outcome” question has just two options: “Yes, I got what I needed” is classed as *good* and “No, I did not” is classed as *not good*.

The first column in Figure 18 represents people who rated service as *good* on each of the five drivers. Their mean rating of overall service quality is 85 out of 100.

The second column represents respondents who rated service quality as *good* on any four of the five drivers. Their overall rating of the service experience is 60 out of 100. In other words, a lack of good service on just one of the drivers results in a 25-point drop in the service quality rating!

As the number of drivers rated less than *good* increases, service quality ratings continue to decline. Five scores of *not good* yield an overall service quality score of 13 out of 100.

In other words, there is a strong linear relationship between the number of drivers scoring *good* and service quality. This result is extremely well grounded. It is based on responses of 2,900 Canadians to an enormous range of services at three levels of government. The generality of the finding cannot be questioned. It is important to emphasize the soundness of the result because of its far-reaching implications: *If governments provide an acceptable level of service – 4 or 5 out of 5 – on these five drivers, they will achieve service quality ratings of 85 out of 100.*



These results are cause for great optimism. They offer the key to excellence in government service. Ratings in the 50s and low 60s are not necessarily government's destiny. The discouraging attitude that government service delivery is inherently below the private sector standard can be put aside.

Are service quality scores that exceed 80 out of 100 really possible? There are three issues to consider by way of validating the claim.

1. The claim must be examined critically to determine whether there are limitations to its scope. One that stands out immediately is that governments cannot always give citizens what they want, and so driver number 5, outcome, will sometimes get low scores. In most other instances, there seems to be no a priori reason why a satisfactory level of service cannot be achieved. This discussion is pursued in Chapter 8.
2. A second set of checks that must be done before accepting this claim is to examine drivers in different service situations. The result holds as a general fact for all government services taken together, but there may be differences when health, taxation or recreational services are examined in isolation. This is explored in Chapter 9.
3. There may be additional variables that affect perceptions of service quality. Citizens' pre-existing attitudes toward government were proposed as a possible factor. This is examined next.

3. Citizens' Opinions of Government

The five drivers account for an impressive proportion of the variance in service quality ratings. It is still possible, however, that citizens' opinions of government could add a driver to this set, or even replace some of the five present drivers. This latter event could occur if some opinion about government were related more strongly and consistently to service quality than one of the five original elements.

The survey presented citizens with seven classic opinion statements about governments and policies. They can be considered as four groups (Figure 19).⁷

⁷ Groups 1 and 2 emerge from a factor analysis, and factor scores are used in the statistical analysis following.

Figure 19	
Opinions of Government Service	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Statement	Agreement (0 - 100)
1. Support for government and its practitioners	
• <i>In general, public servants do an excellent job.</i>	45
• <i>Given available resources, governments do an excellent job of serving the public.</i>	41
• <i>In general, politicians do an excellent job.</i>	32
2. Opposition to government policies	
• <i>Governments have cut services too much in recent years.</i>	66
• <i>Governments have lost sight of the needs of most Canadians.</i>	67
3. Support for reducing government	
• <i>Governments should provide a few core services such as the court system and national defence – and let the private sector do the rest.</i>	40
4. Appreciation of government role	
• <i>Governments have a more difficult task than the private sector – they must protect the public interest as well as meet the needs and expectations of individuals.</i>	62

The statistical analysis that produced the five drivers was run again with the four opinion groups included. This is the result:

- None of the five original drivers is displaced;
- The first opinion variable, “Support for government and its practitioners” can be added to the equation as a sixth element, weaker than the original five.⁸

What these results say is that a person’s support for government (or lack of it) as defined by the three survey items in group 1 has a consistent effect on service quality scores. Citizens who believe that governments do an excellent job rate service quality higher than those who do not.

⁸ Variables are added to the equation as long as they increase its explanatory power significantly, and as long as they do so cleanly, without muddying the statistical waters. This can occur under several circumstances, for example when variables are highly correlated with each other. With the six predictor variables, the regression equation has a maximum condition index of 14.

Should this attitude be included as a driver of service quality? Logically, it very well could, but practically, it may not be useful to do so. The five original drivers are all part of the service delivery fabric. They are completely or at least partially within the control of service providers. If there is a problem with one of the five, steps can be taken by governments to improve service. But a citizen's belief that government does a good or poor job is beyond the immediate control of service providers in the same way as a citizen's age or income level. As a matter of strategy, it seems better to restrict the idea of drivers to matters that can be changed and refined.

U.S. Vice-President Al Gore, through his National Performance Review (NPR), suggests an interesting hypothesis in this regard. He turns the present result around, suggesting that if governments improve service, then citizens' attitudes toward government should become more positive – that is, as a result of better service they should have more trust and confidence in government.⁹ This idea has intuitive appeal, and if true, it would provide yet another reason to improve services. This survey cannot test the Gore hypothesis directly, but in establishing a correlation between attitude toward government and service quality ratings it provides evidence that it *could* be true. Certainly, if there were no correlation between attitude to government and service quality, it would be unlikely that changing one would have much impact on the other.

DRIVERS AND PERFORMANCE

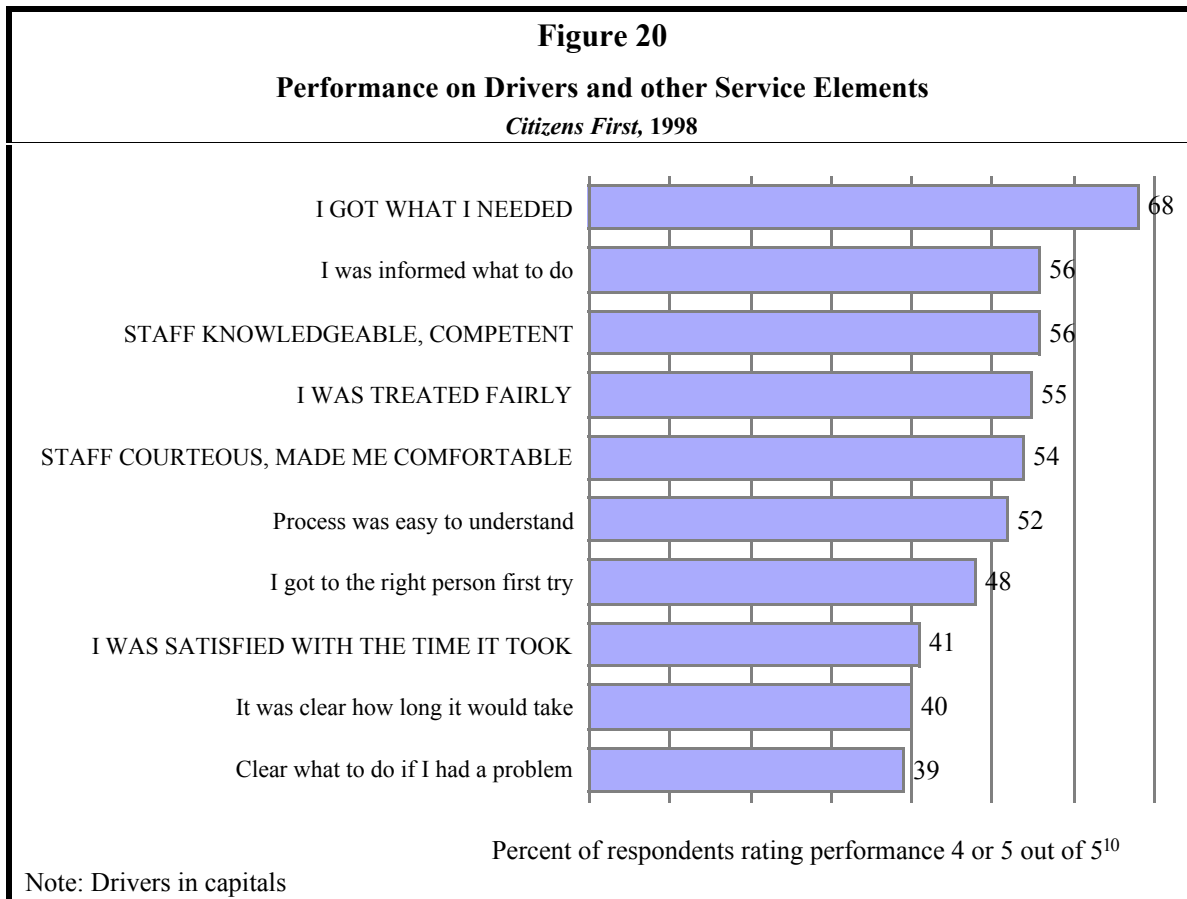
The analysis so far has established that the five drivers are the cornerstones that determine service quality ratings, and that other variables are less important. It has not looked at how citizens rate government performance on any of these variables. This raises the following question: Is there any relationship between drivers and performance? For example, do the worst aspects of government service end up as drivers?

The question can be simply answered by again dividing scores into two groups, *good* scores being either 4 or 5 out of 5, and *not good* being 1, 2 or 3 out of 5. Figure 20 shows the proportion of citizens who rated government performance *good* on the five drivers and on five other variables that do not affect service quality scores as strongly as the drivers.

Performance on the five drivers ranges from mediocre with respect to timeliness (41 percent gave this a *good* rating) and slightly better with respect to fairness, knowledge and courtesy (54 – 56 percent rated service *good*). The fifth driver, outcome, is not really a performance measure, but is included to complete the picture – 68 percent had a favourable outcome.

Across the board, performance on the drivers is neither better nor worse than on the other service elements. In fact, there is no necessary connection between being a driver and any particular level of performance. Drivers can have good performance scores or poor ones. This raises three worthwhile points on survey methodology.

⁹ See Stephen Barr, "Gore Turns to Making Reinvention Deliver," *Washington Post* (Tuesday, March 3, 1998), A15; see also John M. Kamensky, "Role of the 'Reinventing Government' Movement in Federal Management Reform", *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 3 (May/June 1996), p. 247.



1. Performance Ratings

Surveys often present respondents with a list of service elements such as those in Figure 20 and obtain performance ratings on them. It is then *assumed* that the items with the lowest performance scores indicate where service improvement strategies should begin. In this case, the service improvement strategy would start with making sure that citizens knew where to go when they encountered a problem. Of the five elements with the poorest performance ratings, only one, timeliness, is a driver.

Clearly, focusing on service elements with low performance scores would be inappropriate. Most of the drivers – the dimensions that really affect service quality – would receive relatively little attention.

¹⁰ “I got what I needed” is a Yes/No variable; all others are 5-point scales.

2. Importance Ratings

Going a step beyond the simple use of performance ratings, some surveys include parallel performance and importance scales. It is assumed that those elements that rate high in importance and low in performance present the clearest opportunities for improving service. The analysis of gaps between performance and importance scores is a standard research procedure that can provide valuable information.

Gap analysis is useful in many contexts, particularly when the scope of the investigation has been narrowed. For example, a specific service may use performance/importance scales to track performance from year to year.

3. Analysis of Drivers

The present research did not ask for parallel importance and performance scores for two reasons. In the first place, the gap method requires that the respondent go through the list of service elements twice – once for performance and again for importance. Given the length of the survey, this procedure was not practical.

In the second place, gap analysis requires that all questions be framed in terms of parallel importance and performance scales. Questionnaire items such as “Staff were knowledgeable” fit this format well. The respondent can answer, for example, “Yes, it was important that staff were knowledgeable – 5 out of 5,” and “Yes, their knowledge was reasonably good – 4 out of 5.”

On the other hand, the gap format does not admit certain elements that may be relevant to service quality. Does gender contribute to perceptions of service quality? No meaningful importance/performance question can be framed to assess this possibility. Do citizens’ attitudes toward government affect service quality ratings? Again, this cannot be determined using the gap method.

The present approach is wider in scope than gap analysis. It allows any quantifiable dimension to be included in the analysis – performance scores, performance/importance gap scores, demographic variables, responses to opinion questions, etc. It is not necessary to ask respondents to rate importance directly. The “important” elements are determined empirically; they are those that best predict ratings of overall service quality.

7. How Service Gets Derailed

The massive impact of the five drivers on service quality scores has been established. If performance is acceptable on all five drivers, service will score close to 85 out of 100. If performance is unacceptable on all five, service will score about 13 out of 100.

This chapter explores the order in which problems with the drivers arise. It is not random. If just one driver falls below the acceptable threshold of 4 out of 5, it is most likely to be timeliness. If a second driver falls below threshold, it is most likely to be outcome. Knowledge, courtesy and fairness generally receive low scores in the context of “multi-problem” situations, where timeliness or outcome or both are already identified as unsatisfactory. Results of this analysis carry strong implications for improving service.

For about one third of all respondents, nothing about their chosen recent experience was seriously amiss. Service was at or above the acceptable threshold of 4 out of 5 on each of the five drivers. As was shown previously, this group’s mean rating of overall service quality was 85 out of 100 (Figure 18).

For the other two thirds, one or more of the five drivers had a rating of 3 out of 5 or less. Figure 21 shows the mean service quality rating for each group and the proportion of respondents in it. There are similar proportions of people, 11 to 16 percent of the total, in each group.

Number of drivers rated 3 out of 5 or lower	Mean service quality	Percent of respondents
None	85	33
One	60	16
Two	39	13
Three	39	11
Four	25	14
Five	13	12

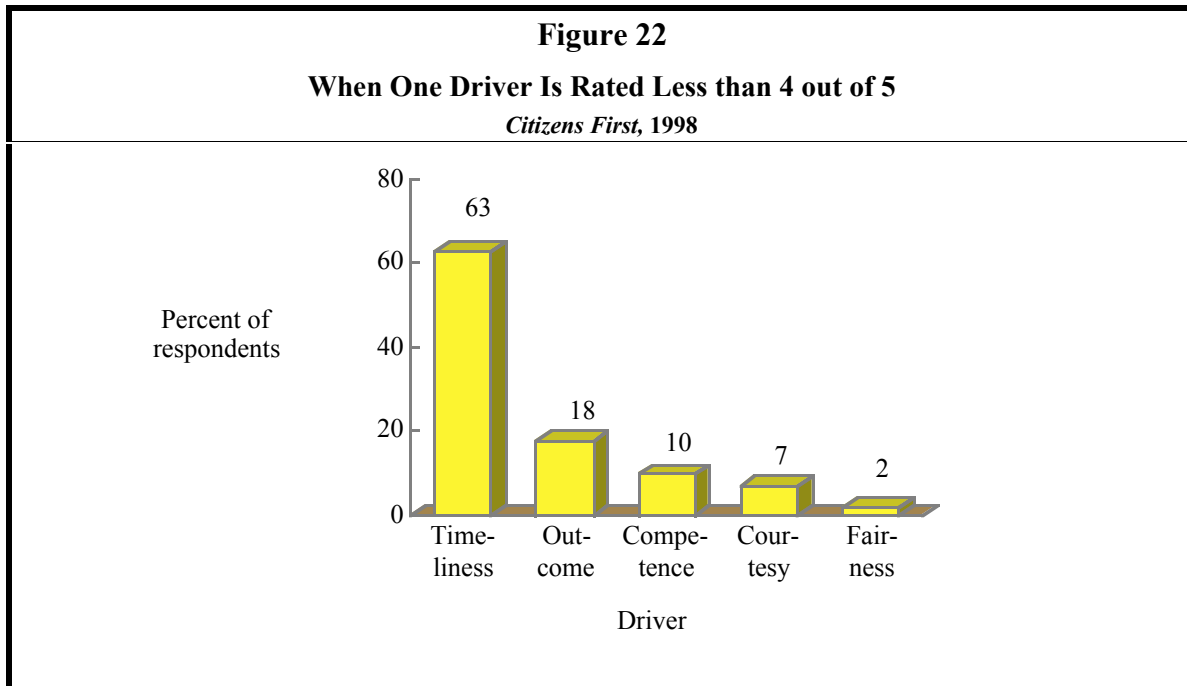
ONE DRIVER FAILS

Figure 22 profiles those citizens who rated just one of the five drivers below 4 out of 5. *When there is a problem with just one driver, that driver is timeliness in 63 percent of the cases!*

Outcome was below threshold in 18 percent of this group and is the second most likely issue to register as a single-driver problem. At the other end of the spectrum, fairness is reported as the single driver to go wrong in just two percent of cases.

Timeliness is frequently the only problem that citizens face. It is a “simple” problem in this sense, one that is not bound up with other issues. By contrast, it is very rarely that fairness, courtesy and competence are the only problem to be identified. They emerge as problems in combination with other drivers in more complex circumstances.

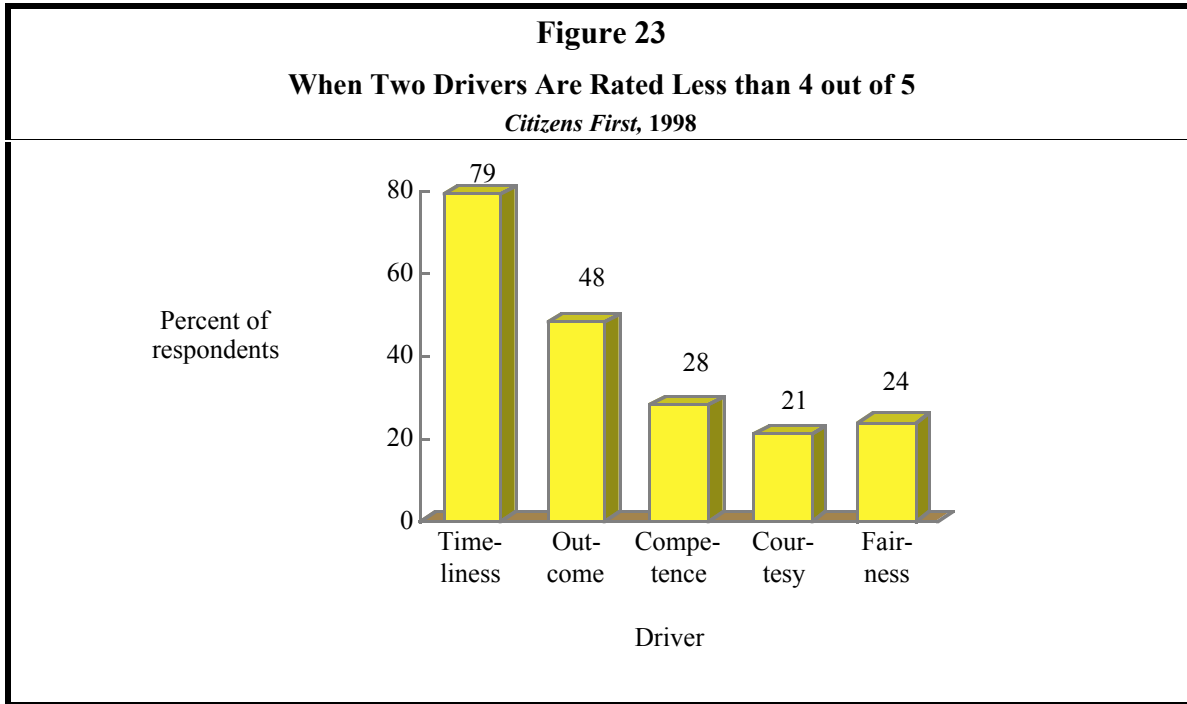
One can interpret these results either as a reflection on government services (that they tend to be slow) or as a reflection on Canadian citizens (that they value their time above most other things). The truth may be a combination of both. The implication for service improvement is the same in both cases – improving timeliness is the surest single strategy to move service quality ratings from the 60 range to the 80 range. Eliminating timeliness as a problem for just the 16 percent of citizens who rated one driver low would increase the number of problem-free service experiences from 33 percent of the total to 43 percent.



TWO DRIVERS FAIL

When two drivers fail, Figure 23, the pattern is similar to the one-driver situation. Timeliness is again the most likely to be a problem, followed by outcome. Respondents for whom *both* timeliness and outcome were problems account for 39 percent of the people in this group.

When three or more drivers fail, the prominence of timeliness and outcome recedes. All five drivers become strongly implicated in the problem.



In the ideal case, all five drivers score 4 out of 5 or better. Problems begin, first, when citizens spend too much time obtaining a service, and second, when they do not get what they want. It is then that staff treatment becomes an issue. When the process takes too long, citizens may judge staff as lacking competence. People who do not get their desired outcome may accuse staff of being unfair.

This chronology seems only natural, at least with the benefit of hindsight, having empirically established the order in which problems arise. It is worth emphasizing, however, that this analysis provides a new way of looking at service delivery problems. To the authors' best knowledge, no other investigation has described this sequential process in the development of low service quality ratings.

8. Constraints on Improvement

The five drivers point the way to heights of service quality that would be the envy of any private sector organization. Theoretically, ratings of 85 out of 100 are possible, but how realistic is it to hope for this level of service?

The performance threshold required to produce these high ratings is 4 out of 5 on each of timeliness, competence, courtesy and fairness, and “getting what you need” in terms of outcome. This section considers the practical obstacles that might stand in the way of delivering service at this level.

1. Governments cannot guarantee the desired outcome.

Governments regularly deal with competing claims for resources, and cannot satisfy everyone. Applications for financial assistance may not meet requirements. Parole may not be granted. The tax levy may be larger than anticipated. The re-zoning application may be denied. Governments’ inability to provide the desired outcome imposes a ceiling on service quality scores for those who are denied the outcome they want. The desired outcome will be denied more often in service areas such as financial assistance, employment and taxation than in services such as national parks or public libraries, and this fact implies that the practical ceiling on service quality ratings will vary across different services.

2. Expectations regarding timeliness may not be met.

While there are many government processes that can probably be speeded up, the need for fairness and accountability imposes limits on speed, more in some services than in others. It is important to note that timeliness as a driver is defined as *satisfaction with the time* it takes to get service, and not as the *absolute length of time* it takes. If service must be delayed beyond what citizens would normally expect, providing reasons for the required time frame may serve to maintain acceptable ratings of timeliness.

3. Courtesy and comfort depend in part on the citizen’s expectations.

Despite the best efforts of government staff, citizens may feel distinctly uncomfortable in certain encounters with government. They may approach the situation with so great a feeling of unease that staff are unable to overcome it. Stephen Leacock’s story of the young man dissolving into anxiety as he makes his first bank deposit captures this irrational dread.

4. Knowledge and competence rest on internal supports.

Maximum levels of performance on this driver result from a well-functioning system, including adequate staffing, proper training resources, and good internal services including management support, technical facilities, personnel services, and so on.

5. Fair treatment can be defined differently by citizens and service providers.

Governments give great care to ensuring fairness in service delivery, but problems arise when opinions differ as to what is “fair.” From the perspective of government service providers, fair is what legislation and regulations prescribe. Citizens who hold opposing views may well regard treatment as unfair. Examples are not difficult to come by, especially in areas where social issues are being actively debated – gun control, procedures that are or are not covered under provincial medicare programs, environmental assessment processes, eligibility for financial assistance, and so on.

CEILINGS ON SERVICE QUALITY RATINGS

In the ideal case, all five drivers rate 4-plus out of 5, and overall service quality is 85 out of 100. For each type of service, there is a practical ceiling to service quality scores. This upper limit will be close to the practical ideal of 85 in some services. For example, a computerized weather report might achieve near-perfect scores if data lines were never busy and reports updated frequently.

If, however, a service delivers the desired outcome to 75 percent of its clientele, the theoretical maximum for service quality ratings will drop about 5 points to around 80 out of 100. (Having one driver below threshold drops the individual’s score 25 points; applying this to 25 percent of clients is an overall 5-point decrease.) Then, if due process dictates that service will be slow for another 25 percent, the theoretical maximum drops another 5 points to 75 out of 100.

This analysis carries a clear implication for understanding and measuring service quality: it is not sufficient to gather a single global measure of service quality. Rather, it is important to separate factors that service providers can control from those that they cannot control. Client surveys should distinguish perceptions of the service delivery process itself from the understandable disappointment and anger that may result from a negative outcome. Just because a government office must deliver bad news to some citizens is not reason to say that it delivers bad service, yet this is what regularly occurs when service measures fail to break service quality ratings into their component parts.

Citizens First has identified the five drivers as components of service quality ratings on the macroscopic scale of all services of three levels of government. The following chapter shows that the same drivers appear, with a few exceptions, in each of six more specific areas of service delivery. While this is an indication that the five drivers are relatively stable, it will be necessary to conduct additional tests in individual programs and agencies to establish the components of service quality measures with complete precision.

9. Consistency of the Drivers

The preceding analysis of what drives service quality scores was framed at the most general level, incorporating all services and all governments. This chapter examines drivers of service quality scores in six separate clusters of service:

1. *Financial assistance*: Social assistance, welfare, student loans, CPP, Farm Credit, etc.
2. *Employment*: Job training programs, Canada Employment Centres, EI¹¹
3. *Police*: Local, provincial, RCMP
4. *Taxation*: Municipal, provincial taxes, Revenue Canada, GST/HST
5. *Registration*: Birth, marriage, death certificates, SIN cards, health cards, passports, etc.
6. *Pleasure*: Public libraries, museums, galleries, provincial and national parks, National Film Board.

These service clusters have been selected for the practical reason that a relatively large number of respondents described each area and a meaningful analysis is possible. The number ranges from about 120 to 400 citizens per cluster.

The analysis will show whether the five drivers appear consistently in different areas, or whether each area has its own set of unique drivers. The question is an important one: if each service area has a unique set of drivers, then the five that emerge from the overall analysis represent something of an abstraction – an interesting statement on government in general, but not of much practical value when determining how to improve the delivery of any specific service.

On the other hand, if there is great consistency to the five drivers,¹² then service providers in any area can use them with confidence as a guide to improving service.

The overall result of these analyses is that the original five drivers appear, in different combinations, in each of these six service areas. There is some variation in the pattern. In each specific service area, either three or four of the original five drivers are present, while the influence of the other one or two drops below statistical significance (this may result from the fact that the analyses of specific services are conducted with rather small subsets of the sample). In two service areas, employment and registration, a new driver emerges. In all, 20 of the 22 drivers that are defined in these new analysis are members of the original set of five. This provide strong confirmation of the drivers' consistency.

¹¹ Employment insurance could logically be part of financial assistance, but in terms of drivers it is closer to other employment services than to financial assistance and so is included here.

¹² This is not to say that the five drivers should be applied uncritically. If one is able, there is no substitute for testing the determinants of service quality with the population being served.

To provide a point of reference, Figure 24 begins with the original five drivers for all services.

Figure 24			
Drivers for Service Clusters			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Service type	Drivers	Service quality (0 - 100)	beta
All services (Mean SQ=55)	Timeliness	49	.40
	Fairness	62	.17
	Knowledge, competence	63	.16
	Courtesy, comfort	61	.15
	Outcome	Positive for 71% *	.13
Financial assistance (Mean SQ=46)	Knowledge, competence	54	.35
	Timeliness	42	.35
	Fairness	52	.19
	Outcome	Positive for 53%	.18
Employment (Mean SQ=53)	Timeliness	41	.32
	Courtesy, comfort	57	.30
	Informed what to do to get service	58	.26
	Outcome	Positive for 63%	.22
Police (Mean SQ=56)	Courtesy, comfort	58	.59
	Timeliness	50	.22
	Outcome	Positive for 50%	.21
Taxation (Mean SQ=59)	Timeliness	57	.55
	Courtesy, comfort	63	.27
	Informed what to do to get service	59	.18
Registration (Mean SQ=60)	Timeliness	52	.43
	Knowledge, competence	70	.25
	Courtesy, comfort	64	.18
	Knowing how long it will take	56	.15
Pleasure (Mean SQ=75)	Courtesy, comfort	73	.38
	Knowledge, competence	72	.31
	Timeliness	71	.22
	Outcome	Positive for 84%	.13

* This means that 71 percent got the outcome they wanted.

It shows, first, that the mean service quality rating across all the services that citizens described was 55 out of 100. It then lists the five drivers and, for each one, gives the service quality rating for that driver. Timeliness scored lowest, at 49 out of 100, and fairness scored higher, 62 out of 100. Outcome has only two possibilities – 71 percent got what they wanted while 29 percent did not. The column labelled “beta” displays a statistic that indicates the relative strength of each driver. Timeliness, with a beta of .40, is the strongest of the five drivers. The other four drivers, ranging from .13 to .17, are all of about the same magnitude.

Financial assistance has a rather low service quality rating overall, with a mean of 46 out of 100. Staff competence and timeliness are both strong drivers; fairness and outcome are less so.

For registration services, timeliness is the strongest driver of service quality ratings. Respondents who described registration services gave timeliness a rather low score of 52 out of 100. It is clearly a good choice as the focus of service quality initiatives. One might ask why outcome is not a driver: surely it must matter that you get the motor vehicle licence or passport or SIN card that you need. The answer is that a great majority of those who described this service *did* get what they needed. Eighty-nine percent had received what they needed, and for another 7 percent the service request was still in progress, leaving just 4 percent with a negative outcome.

This illustrates once again that drivers do not describe what is important in service quality, but rather what will improve service quality. More timely service will have the biggest impact on service quality in the area of registration.

An assessment of all service clusters shows clearly that the original five drivers appear in different combinations throughout. There are only three instances where a new driver surfaces, “Knowing how long the process will take” in the area of registration and “I was informed of everything I had to do to get the service” in employment and taxation. This gives some confidence in the generality of the five drivers. By focusing on the five original drivers, one is likely to cover most of the important bases. If service providers want to be 100 percent certain of identifying the variables that drive service quality for their clients, then they must conduct the appropriate research with their own clients.

DRIVERS CAN CHANGE OVER TIME

The five drivers are the variables that differentiate good from poor service experiences *at this point in time*. They can change, and indeed, if service improvement strategies are put in place, they *should* change. For example, the fact that timeliness is the strongest driver across the set of all government services today is only possible because many citizens do not feel that they get timely service. If governments focus on improving timeliness, citizens' experience will change: fewer will experience slow service, and timeliness will no longer be as strong a driver. Improving service quality will change the set of drivers that are active.

Carrying the above example one step further, imagine that governments' efforts to provide timely service were so successful that citizens universally experienced timely service. With timely service a fact of life for all, it would no longer be a factor that differentiated good service from poor service. Timeliness would entirely disappear as a driver of satisfaction.

This is not to say that timeliness would be unimportant, only that timeliness was no longer a service delivery problem. If service providers let their standards slip, timeliness could once again emerge as a driver.

To reiterate, the drivers indicate how service can be improved; they do not necessarily define the essential features of service quality in any absolute sense.

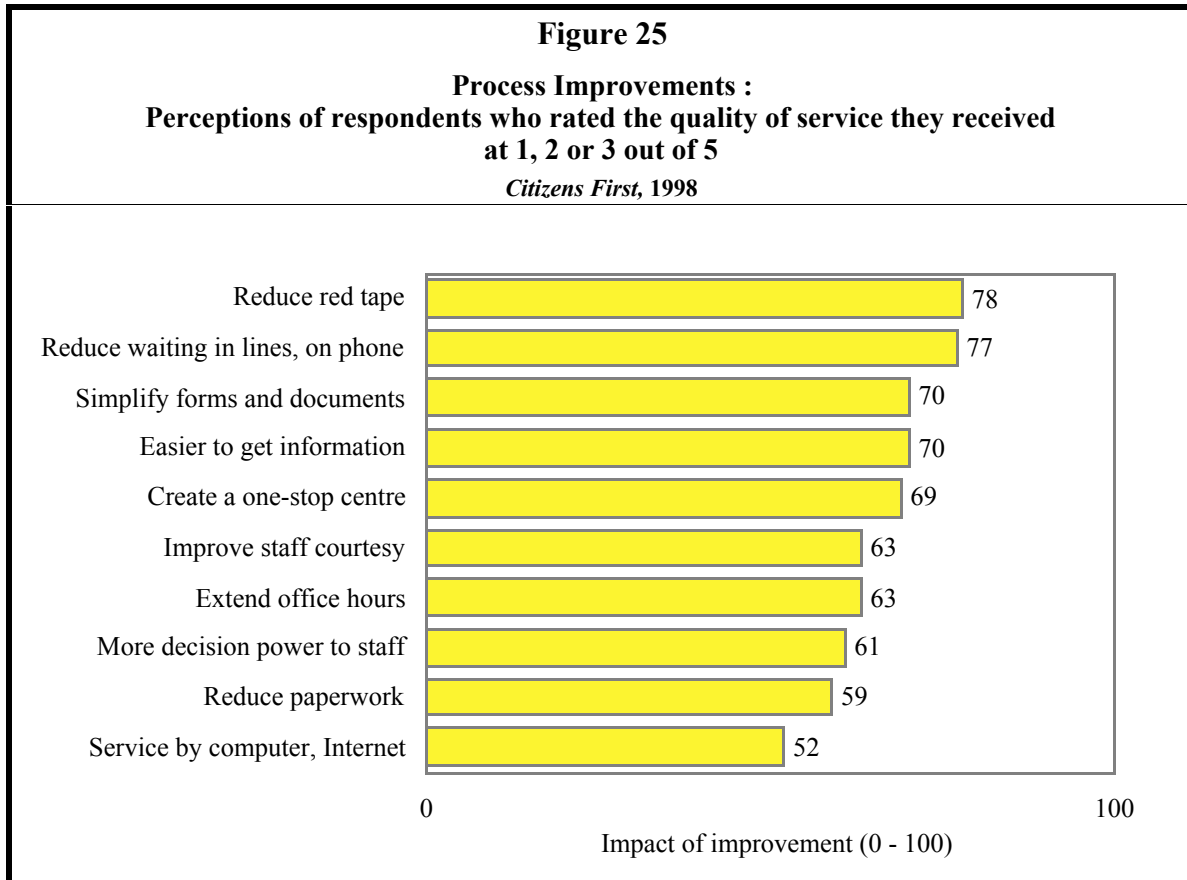
PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

To conclude their description of the recent service experience, citizens indicated the impact that ten process improvements would have on the service.

These ten options are "classic" issues in government service. Several are included because other surveys had identified them as top priorities for service improvement. "Reduce red tape," "Improve the courtesy of staff" and "Create one-stop centres" are among this group.

The options do not map directly onto the five drivers of service quality. In the first place, the drivers had not been identified when the survey was designed, and in the second, process improvements tend to be at a more specific level than drivers. For example, "timeliness" is what drives service ratings at a general level, and options such as reducing waiting time and extending office hours are means to this end.

Figure 25 shows the overall ranking of the options for respondents who did *not* give their service experience a good overall rating. Those who experienced good service are less likely to require improvement; it is the opinions of those who found service fair to poor that are more important in guiding improvement.



10. Service Standards

It began a decade ago when a certain pizza company proclaimed 30 minutes or free. Or perhaps that pizza company just hit on a message that caught the temper of our times.

Today, bragging about service standards is routine. A stock brokerage advertises that 90 percent of calls get through to a broker within 20 seconds. An electronic supply company boasts that calls to its technical support line will be answered in 30 seconds. Messages like these serve two functions: they set a standard that customers will presumably find attractive and reassuring, and they also serve to manage customer expectations, for example, by gently saying “No” to the client who wants to get through in 3-seconds flat.

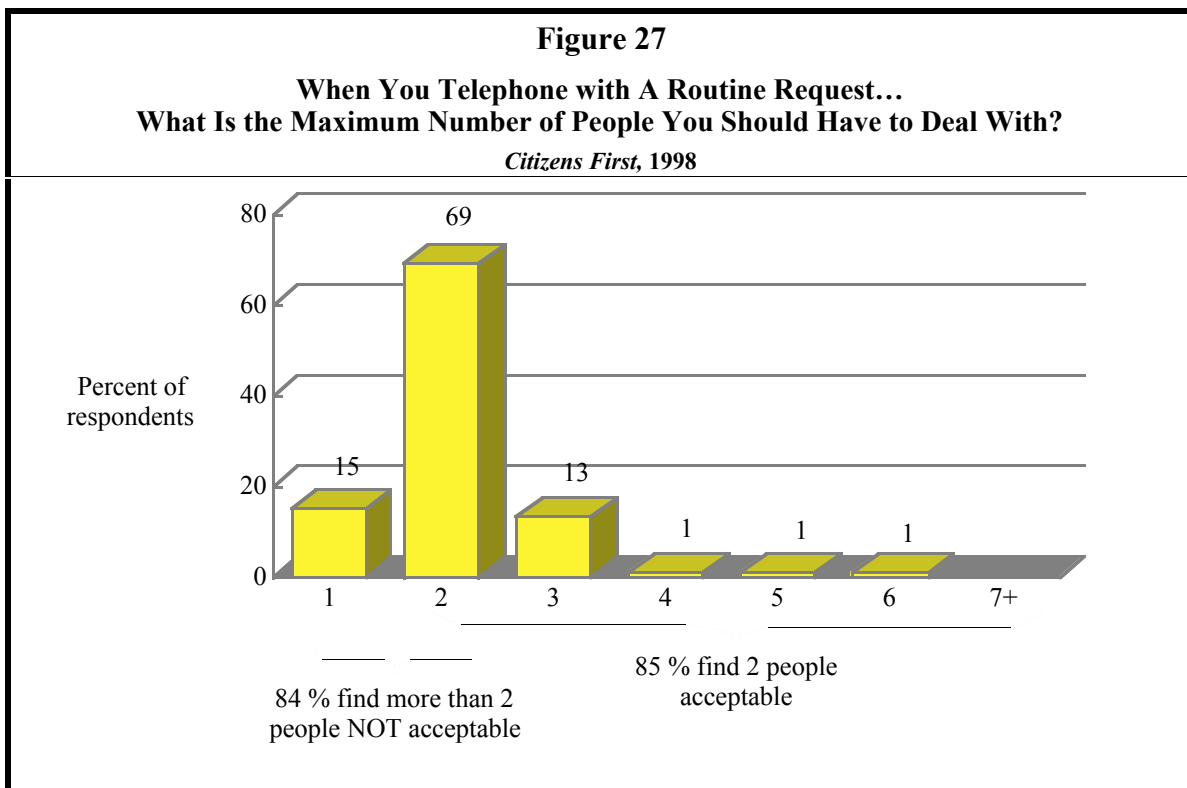
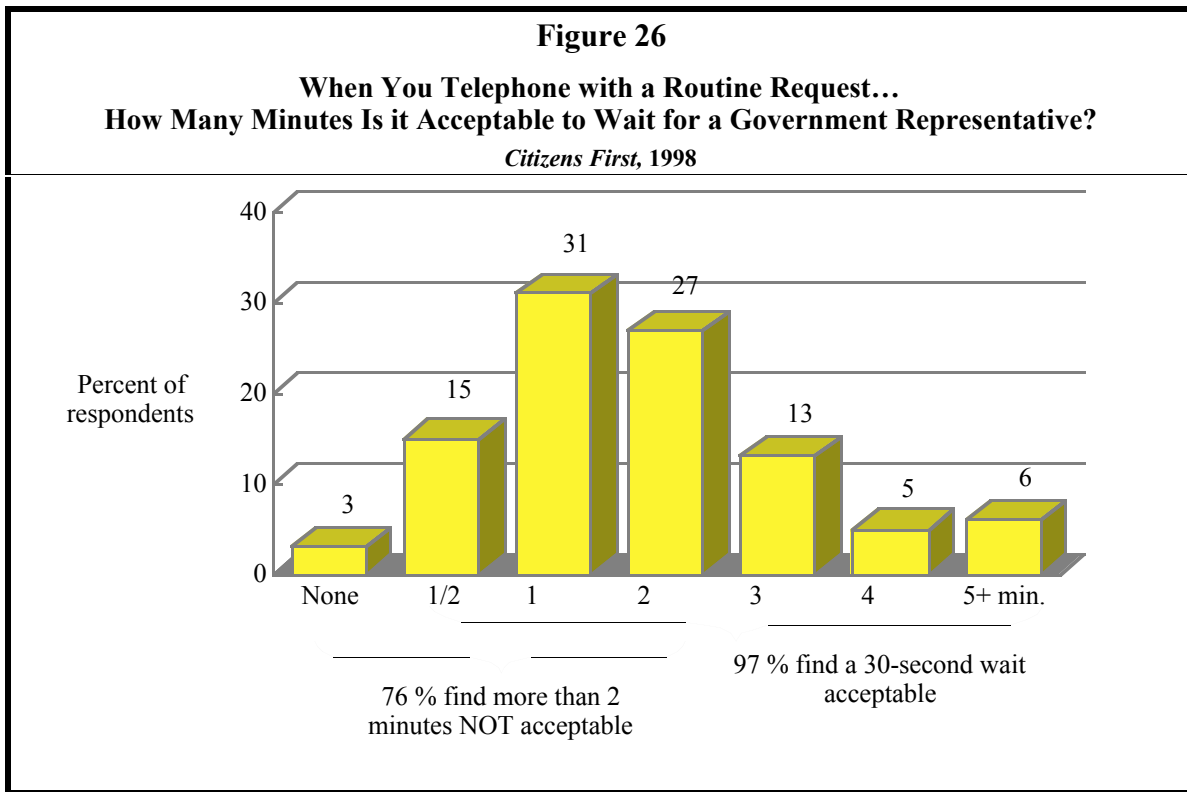
Whether an organization publicizes service standards is a matter of strategy. But knowing what clients expect in the way of routine encounters is critical intelligence: you cannot design a successful service system without it.

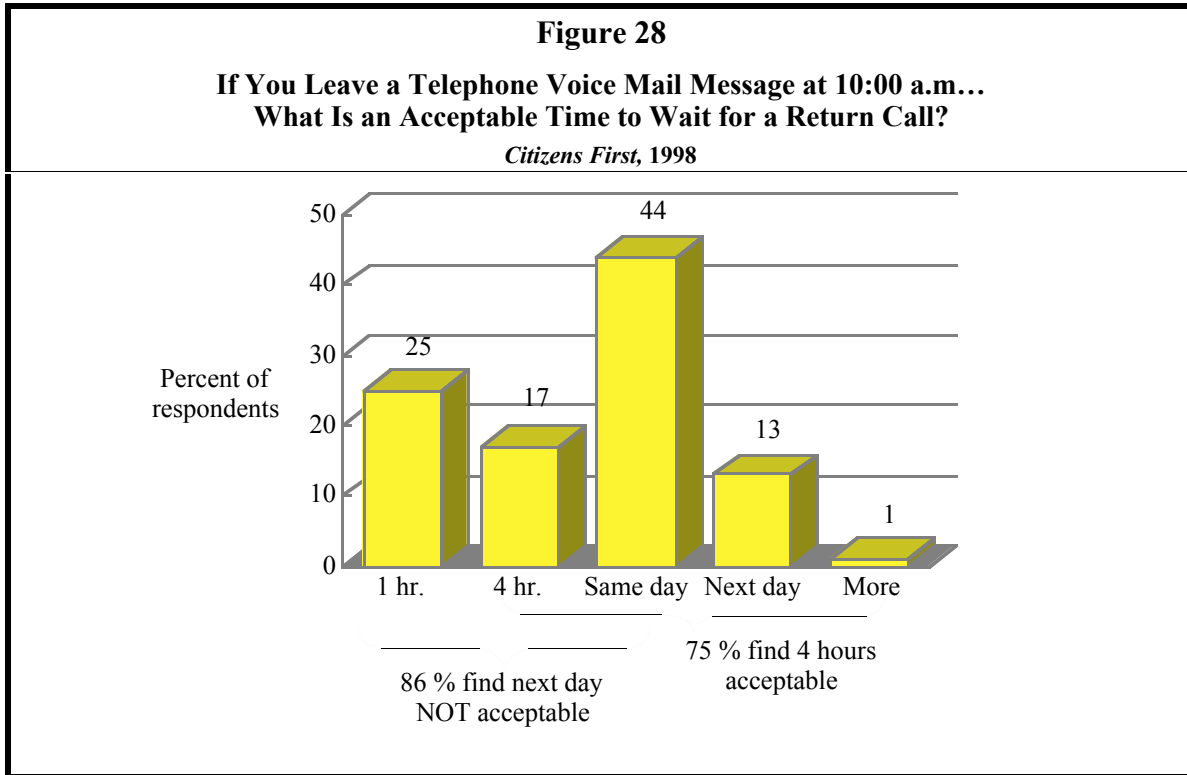
The survey asked citizens to register their expectations of service in seven routine situations. Results provide a general guide to expectations of government service. Two points are important to note. First, the questions were framed in terms of “routine” service transactions. Emergency situations and complex problems are not the issue here. Second, it would be interesting to compare expectations in the government context to those that citizens hold of private sector organizations. The data to do this are not available here, but as Chapter 2 reported, almost half the population expects better service from governments than from the private sector, so the standards that citizens propose are probably high.

The types of transaction described in the survey are universal, such as how long it takes to answer a phone call or how long one should wait in line at a service counter. The questions were asked in general, without reference to a specific service context. Service providers, in examining these results, will of course want to know whether they apply to their particular context. There is no guaranteed answer to this. In the absence of more specific research, these results should serve as a good framework. If there is an indication that the service in question might depart from the general norm, then there is no substitute for asking a representative sample of citizens to state their service expectations.

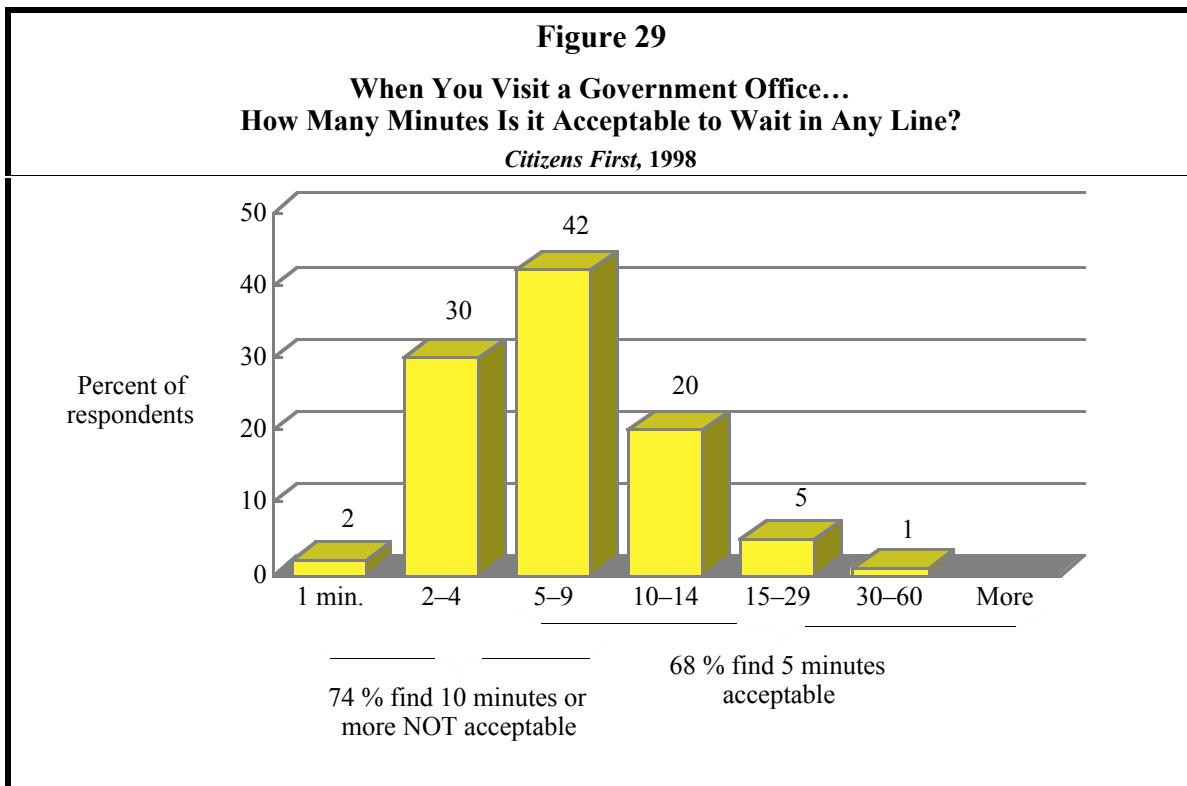
Results for seven routine situations appear in the following charts.

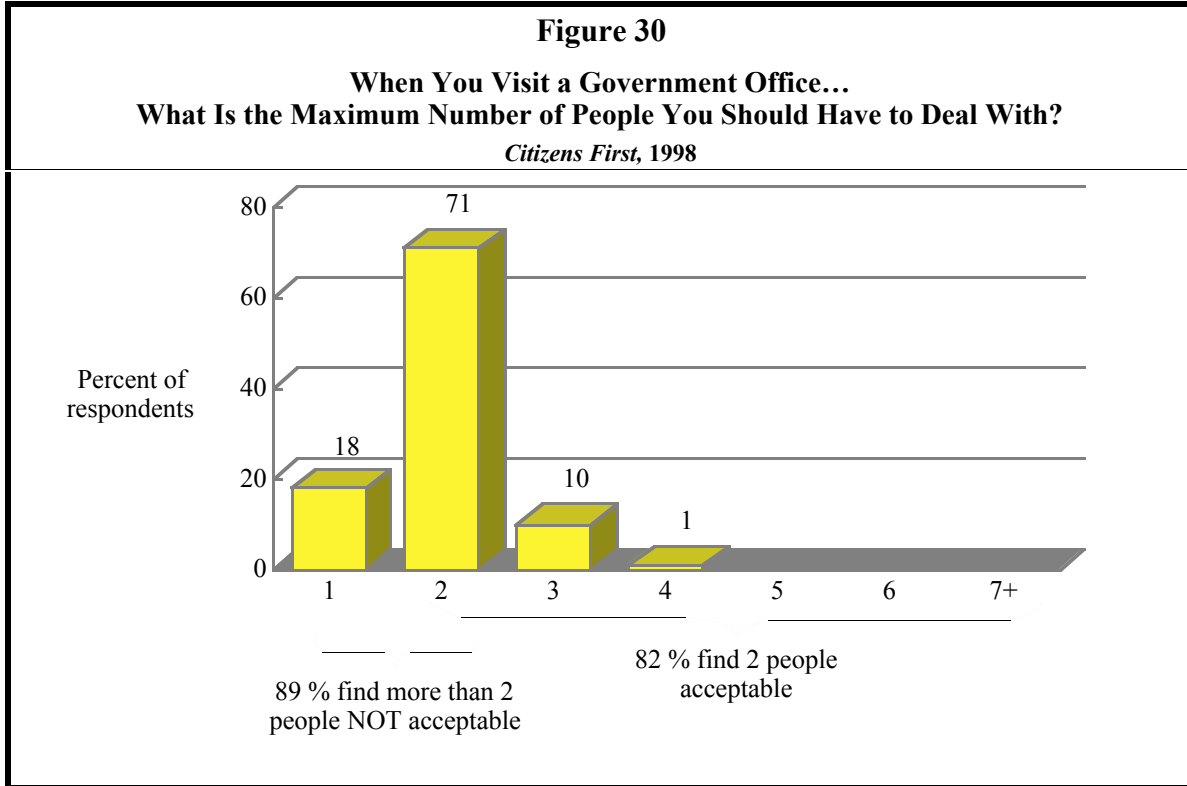
1. TELEPHONE STANDARDS



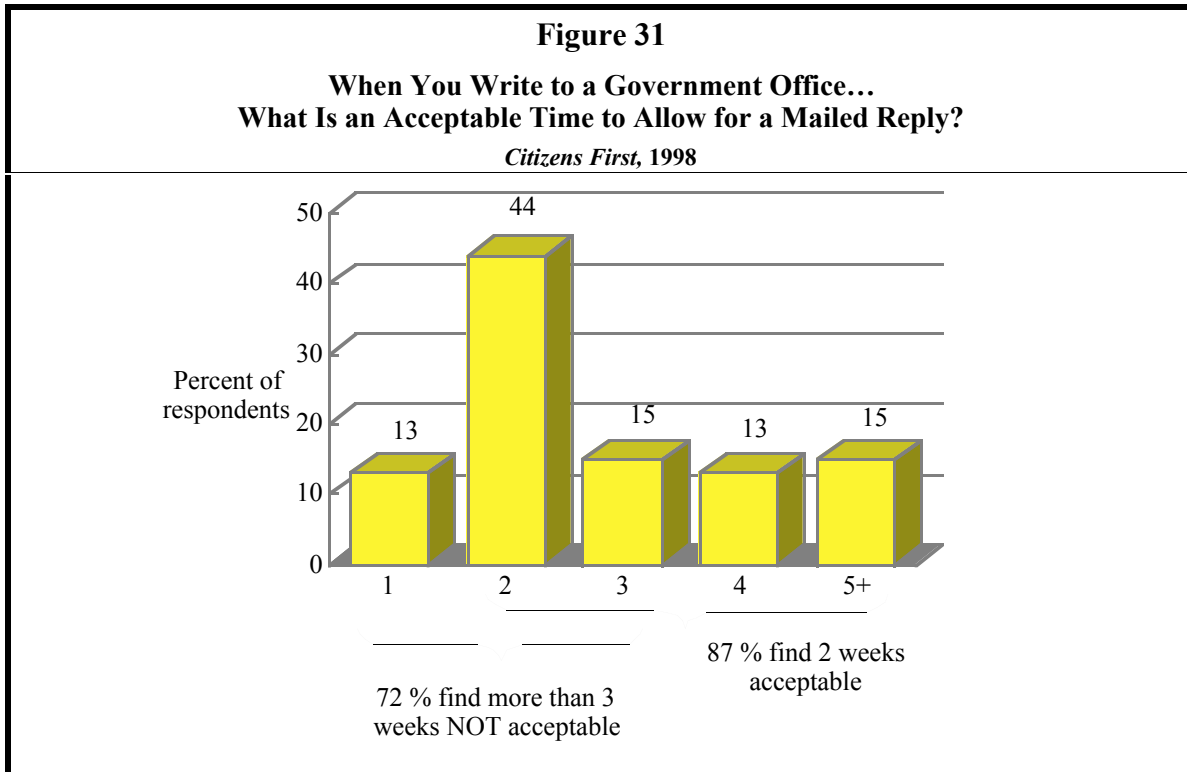


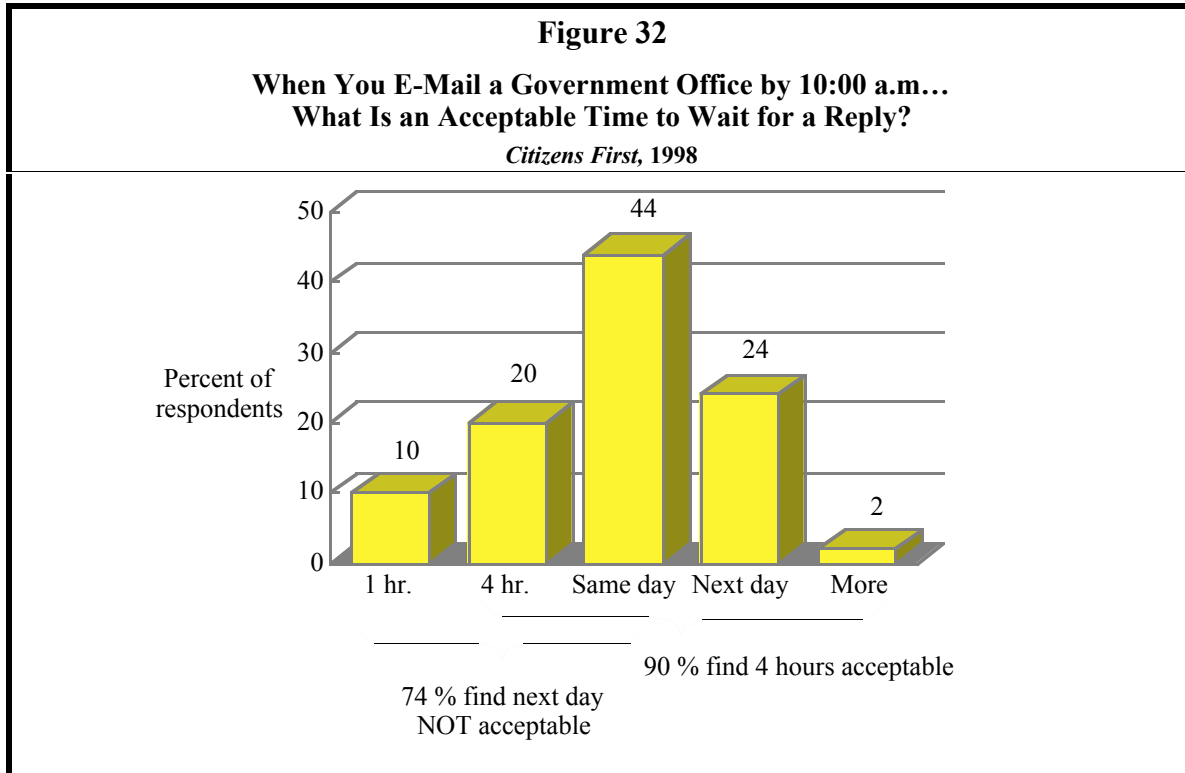
2. STANDARDS FOR OVER-THE-COUNTER SERVICE





3. WRITING AND E-MAIL STANDARDS





DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN SERVICE STANDARDS

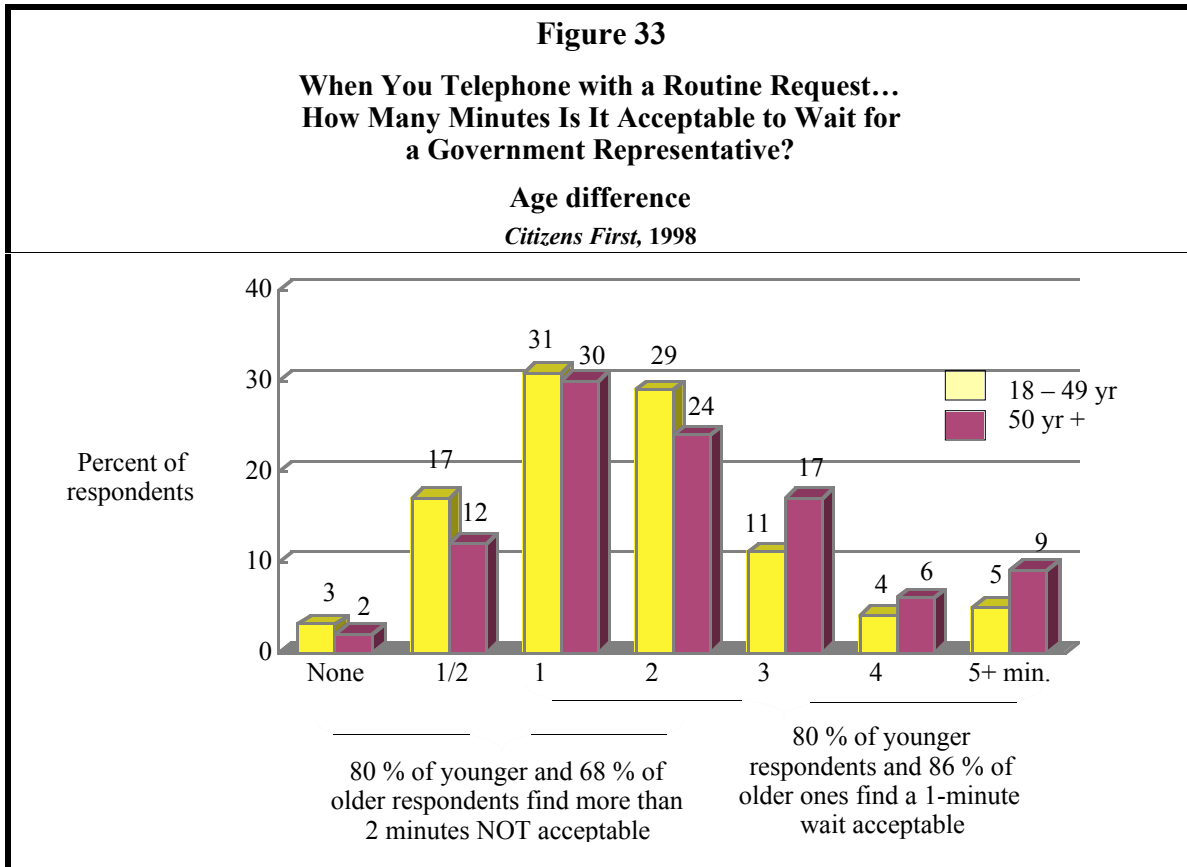
How universal are service standards? For each standard there is a considerable range of opinion as to what is acceptable. For example, the number of minutes that citizens are willing to wait on the telephone ranges from 30 seconds to three minutes or more. This does not lend very precise counsel to those who are planning service delivery. One must set the standard near 30 seconds to avoid irritating large numbers of people, but the effort spent in doing this is unnecessary to others.

It is important to ask, then, whether the ranges in service standards can be attributed to client characteristics such as age, size of community, or region. If so, service providers may be able to optimize resources by defining standards that reflect the demands of their client base.

The set of service standards were therefore tested against a set of variables including gender, age, size of community, education, income, and region of the country.

In a word, these client characteristics play only a minimal role in defining perceptions of good service. There are statistically significant differences on the basis of several demographic characteristics, but they are relatively small in magnitude – small enough that they will not be an important consideration in determining appropriate service levels in most situations.

Age differences in response to the question, “How long is it acceptable to wait on the phone to speak to a government representative” appear in Figure 33 by way of illustration. This is one of the stronger demographic differences that emerged from the analysis; it shows that only a few percentage points separate the two age groups at each level of the continuum.



DO SERVICE STANDARDS CHANGE OVER TIME?

Service standards are affected little by demographics. Are they also slow to change over time? A limited test is possible using results of a 1992 survey of the Ontario public.¹³

Some of the questions in today's survey were not possible in 1992. In that distant era, voice mail was a new technology, too unfamiliar to include in a survey on "routine" service standards. E-mail was the province of a very small set of computer specialists, and was available only as a mainframe technology within organizations. The World Wide Web, providing e-mail to every desk-top computer, became widely available only in 1995.

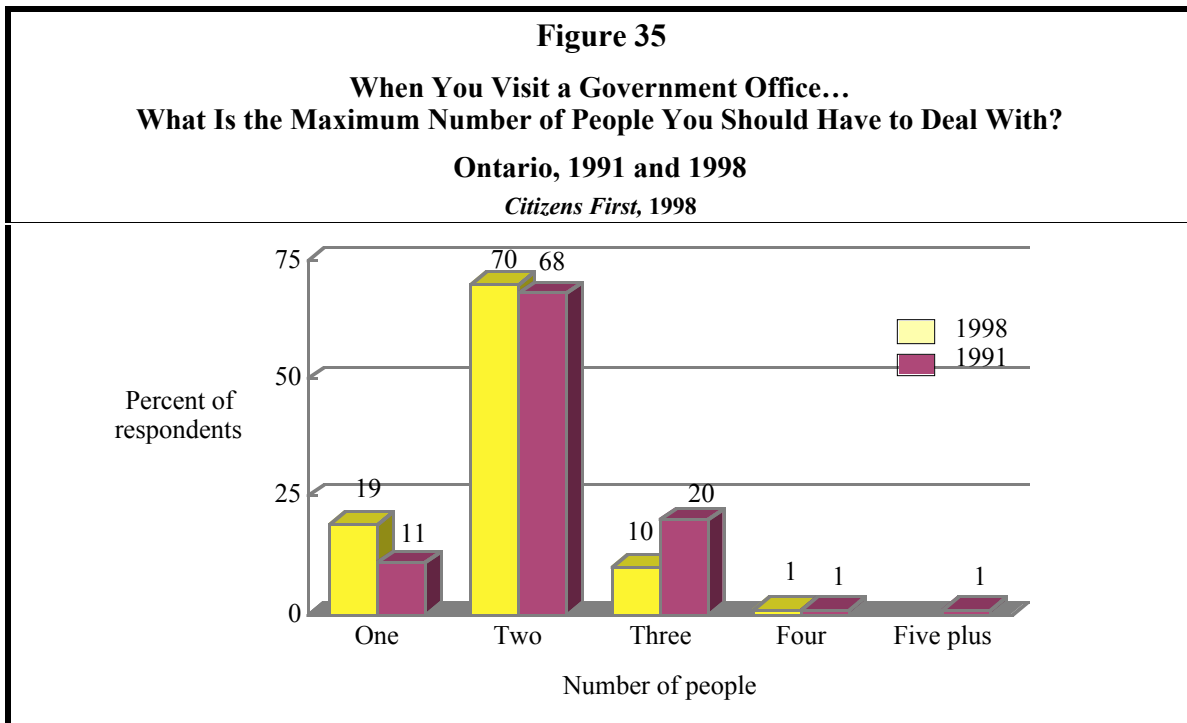
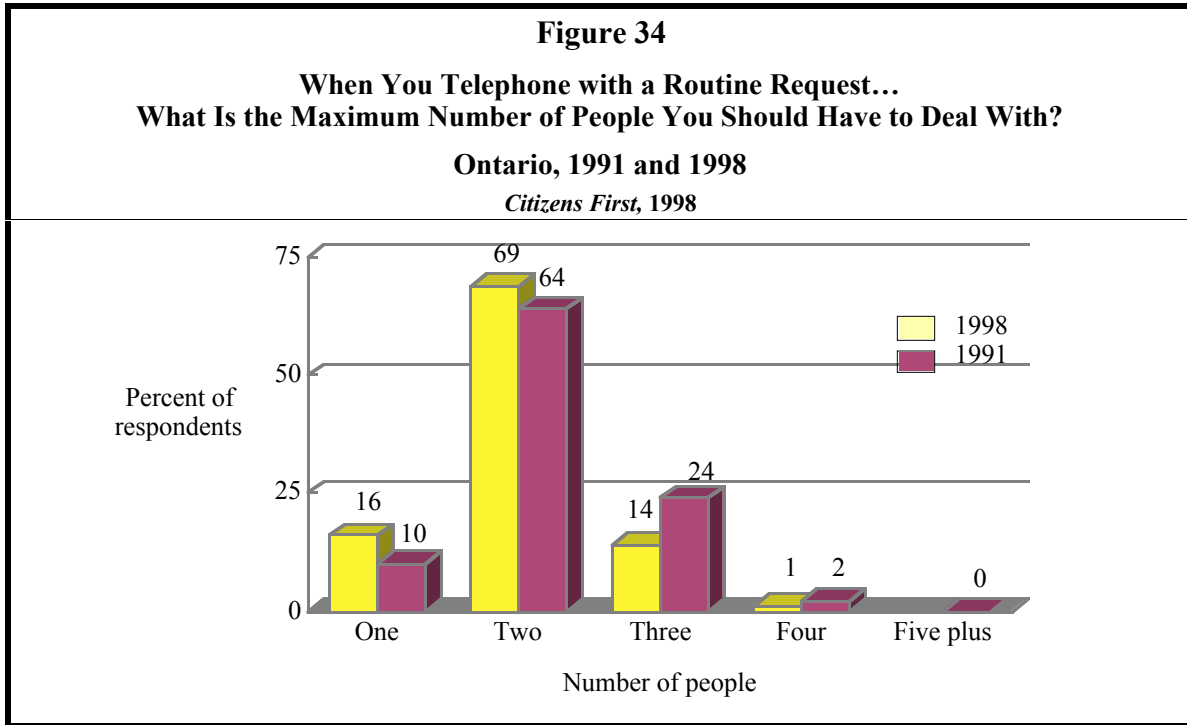
The 1992 survey asked three questions on service standards in the same format as the present survey, so an exact comparison can be made. In two cases, standards have changed from 1992 to 1998. The 1998 standards are tighter in both instances:

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

The third question, the length of time that it is acceptable to wait in line, shows no statistically significant change, although the trend is also toward tighter standards.

The comparisons appear in Figures 34 and 35. For consistency with the earlier survey, they show only Ontario data. In fact, Ontario does not differ significantly from other provinces in the 1998 survey, and essentially the same results would obtain using national figures.

¹³ Continuous Improvement Services and Erin Research Inc., *Best Value for Tax Dollars: Improving Service Quality in the Ontario Government* (February 1992).



11. Citizens' Priorities for Improvement

This chapter explores Canadians' perceptions of 50 municipal, provincial and federal services. Respondents answered three questions:

1. *How good is the service you get in this area?*
2. *What services are done best?*
3. *What services most need improvement?*

In answering Question 1, respondents rated only the services that they had used within the past year. (These recent and specific ratings are the data on which Figure 2 was based.) Across the full set of 50 services, respondents indicated that they had used, on average, 13 services during the previous year: 5 of the 13 municipal services, 4 of the 20 provincial services and 4 of the 17 federal services.

In answering questions 2 and 3, the respondent's task was to choose up to three services that most needed improvement and up to three services that each level of government did best. The choice was not restricted to services the person had used; their priorities are based on the entire set of 50.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

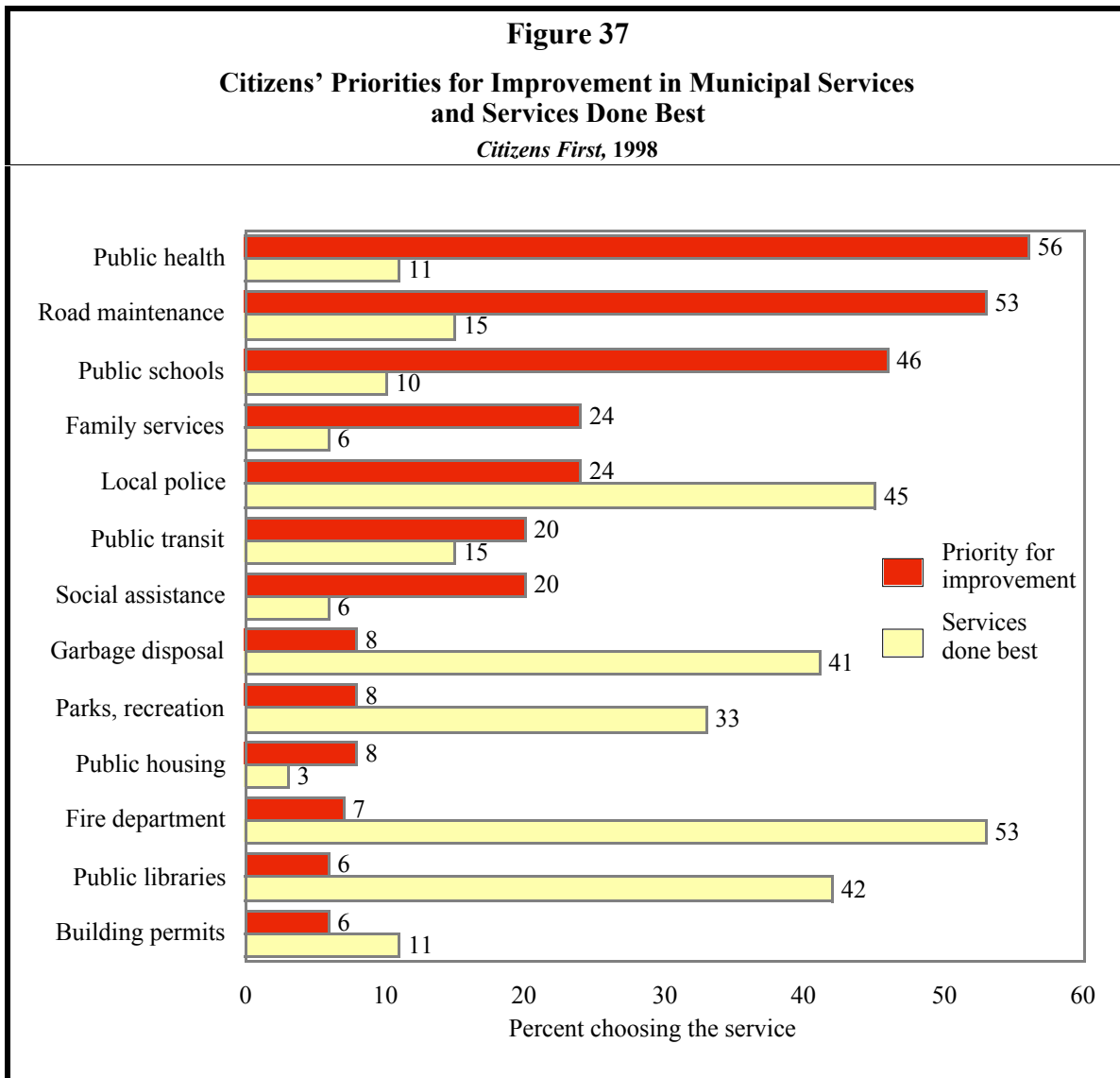
Well-known and widely used municipal services were selected for inclusion. In some instances, responsibility for a service is shared with other jurisdictions. For example, responsibility for public health is divided among the three levels of government, and responsibility for public schools varies from province to province, usually shared between local and provincial levels.

The rating for municipal service in general, discussed in Chapter 2, is included for comparison. It is well down in the list of specific services, illustrating once again that general ratings of service quality are typically lower than ratings of specific and recently used services.

Figure 36	
Quality of Municipal Services Used in the Past Year	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Service	Service quality (0 – 100)
1. Fire department	86
2. Public libraries	77
3. Garbage disposal	74
4. Parks and recreation programs	70
5. Local police force	68
<i>Mean rating of these 13 municipal services</i>	64
6. Building permits and planning services	58
7. Public transit: bus, streetcar, subway	58
8. Family services, counselling, children's aid	56
9. Public health	55
10. Publicly funded schools	54
<i>Rating of municipal services "in general"</i>	53
11. Public housing	52
12. Road maintenance and snow plowing	45
13. Social assistance, welfare	44

There is a clear consensus as to the three top priorities for improvement at the municipal level. Public health and road maintenance were both identified by more than half the respondents, and public schools follow close behind.

For the most part, services that are done well are not priorities for improvement, while the high priorities for improvement get rather low service quality scores. This inverse relationship is not necessary; for example, it would be possible for a service to be well done yet still need improvement. Or, as public housing indicates, a service can be judged as neither well done nor a high priority for improvement.



Note: Participants chose up to 3 priorities for improvement and 3 services done best.

Demographic Differences in Local Priorities for Improvement

Demographic differences in municipal priorities for improvement are noted in Figure 38. Some are intuitive enough; for example, public schools are a higher priority among people aged 18–49, many of whom have school-age children, than among people over 50. Social assistance decreases as a priority as family income goes up. One interesting result is that the youngest age group, 18–24 years, rates public health higher than others. One can only guess at the reason: it may represent greater interest in certain issues that have a high profile among young people, such as birth control, STDs, needle exchanges and tobacco use policies. Also contributing to the result are the relatively low levels of interest among young people in family services and policing¹⁴.

There is an inverse relationship between road maintenance and public transit. Road maintenance is most important in smaller centres, where public transit is limited or non-existent, while transit is a greater priority in larger cities. Despite this, road maintenance remains one of the top three priorities even in cities with populations of one million or more.

¹⁴ Given three priorities to choose from the set of 13, if some are less relevant to young people, the others stand a higher chance of being selected. The same logic follows for any demographic group.

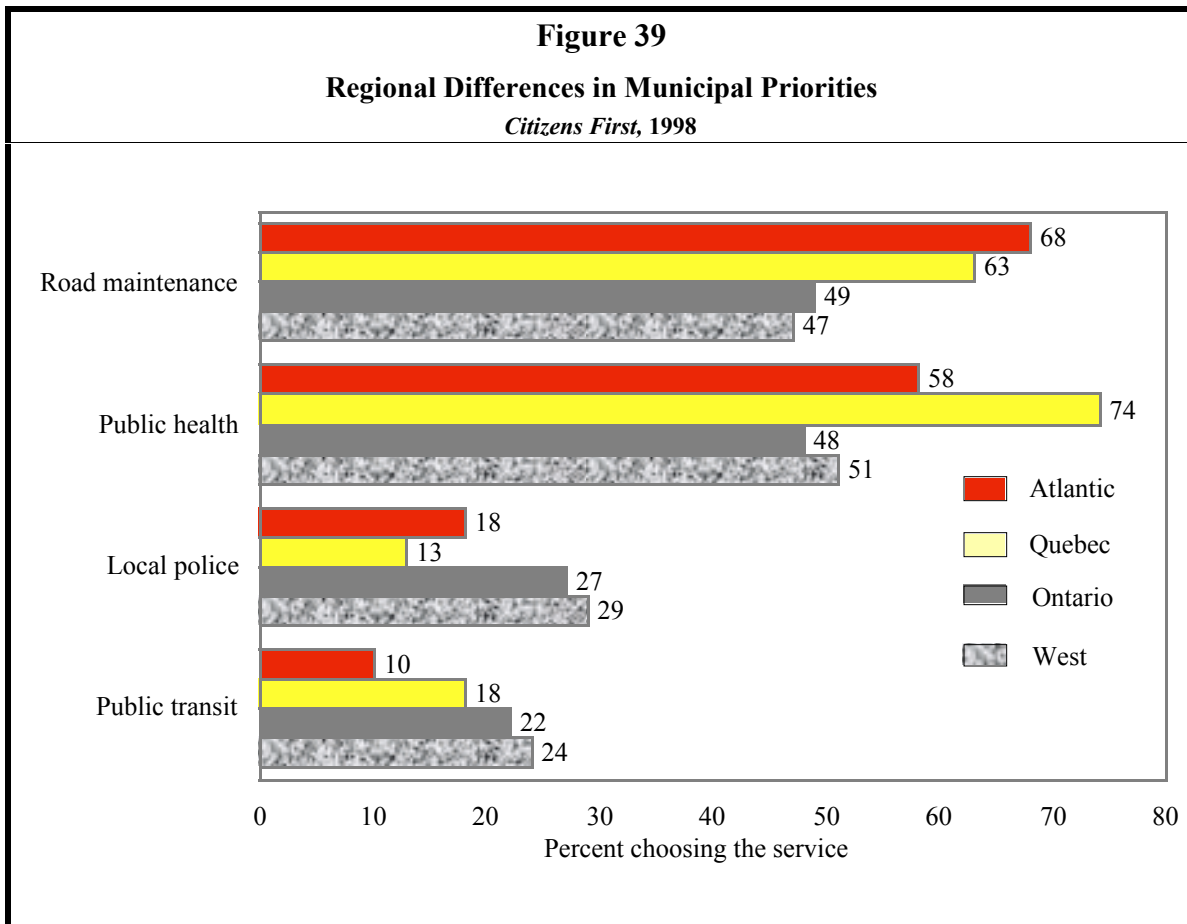
Figure 38			
Demographic Differences in Municipal Priorities			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Service	Dimension	Group	Percent choosing
Public health	Age	18 – 24	67
		25+	54
Road maintenance	Population	One million +	37
		10,000 – one million	52
		Under 10,000	66
	Education	Public, high school	62
		College, university	51
		Graduate, professional	43
Public schools	Age	18 – 49	51
		50+	35
	Education	Public, high school	36
		Post secondary	51
Family services	Gender	Women	31
		Men	17
	Age	18 – 24	16
		25+	25
	Income	< \$20,000	29
		\$20,000 – \$70,000	25
		> \$70,000	18
Local police	Age	18 – 24	14
		25+	25
	Income	< \$30,000	19
		\$30,000 – \$50,000	21
		> \$50,000	28
Public transit	Population	One million +	30
		10,000 – one million	23
		Under 10,000	9
Social assistance	Income	< \$20,000	33
		\$20,000 – \$50,000	21
		> \$50,000	14

Note: Demographic differences are shown where there is an 8-point spread or greater.

Regional differences occur in four of the municipal service areas.

The relative priorities of road maintenance and public transit again make an interesting comparison. Road maintenance decreases as a priority from east to west, while public transit increases as a priority.

Quebec’s emphasis on public health is consistent with its high ranking of hospital care, reported in the following section on provincial priorities.

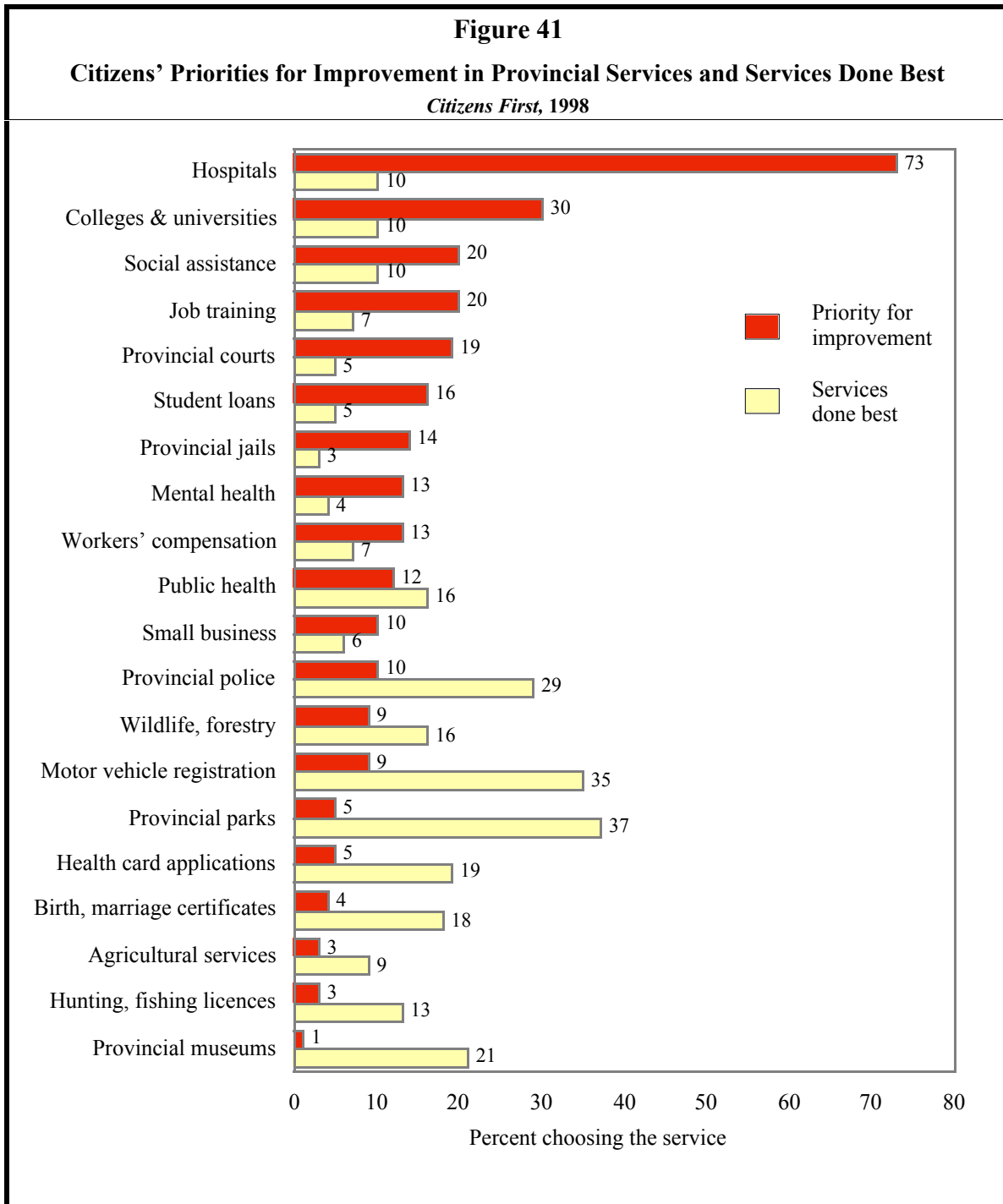


PROVINCIAL SERVICES

Ratings for provincial services, like those for municipal and federal services, are remarkable in the great range of service quality that citizens perceive within a single level of government. It again illustrates the need to measure service quality in terms of specific services, and not government in general.

Figure 40	
Quality of Provincial Services Used in the Past Year	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Service	Service quality (0 – 100)
1. Provincial museums, art galleries, etc.	71
2. Provincial parks, campgrounds	71
3. Provincial Police (Ontario, Quebec)	68
4. Motor vehicle registration, drivers licences	66
5. Public health: information, vaccinations, lab test	66
6. Hunting, fishing, firearms licences	63
7. Agricultural services	63
8. Health card application or renewal	62
<i>Mean rating of these 20 provincial services</i>	62
9. Birth, marriage registration and certificates	60
10. Colleges and universities	58
11. Wildlife, forestry, conservation services	56
12. Mental health services, e.g. counselling	55
13. Hospitals	51
14. Job training/retraining, apprenticeship programs	47
<i>Rating of provincial services "in general"</i>	47
15. Social assistance, welfare	42
16. Provincial jails, probation and parole	41
17. Small business start-up services	41
18. Student loans	40
19. Provincial courts	38
20. Workers' compensation, injured worker programs	34

Figure 41 contrasts priorities for improvement with services done best. (Respondents chose up to three services of each type.) Hospitals are the highest priority by a wide margin. With 73 percent identifying hospitals as a priority for improvement, this outweighs the second choice, colleges and universities, by more than 2 to 1. This emphasis holds with only minor variation for all demographic groups and for all regions of the country.



Note: Participants chose up to 3 priorities and 3 services done best.

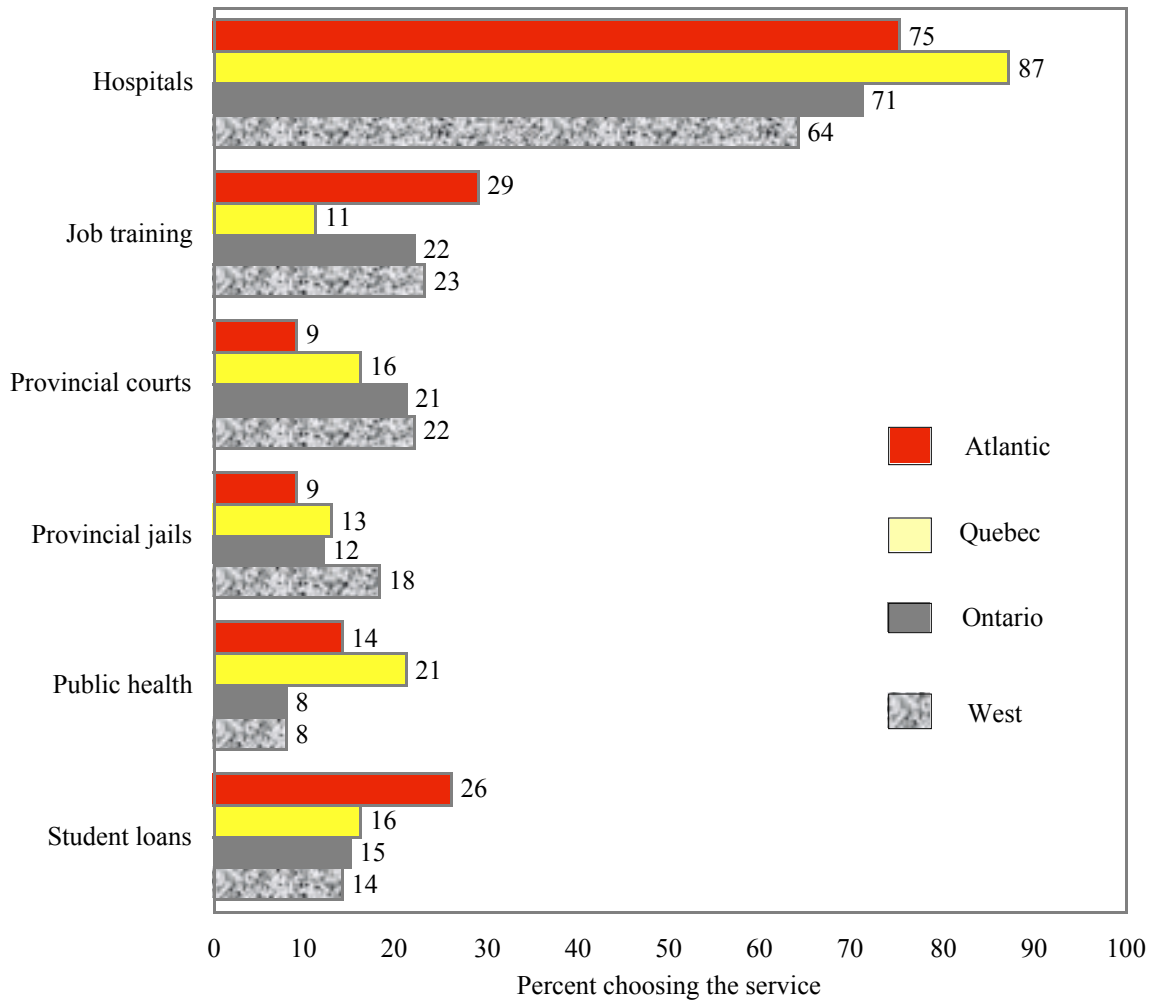
Figure 42

Demographic Differences in Provincial Priorities			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Service	Demographic	Group	Percent choosing
Hospitals	Age	18 – 24	68
		25 – 49	74
		50 – 64	77
		65+	70
Colleges and universities	Age	18 – 24	46
		25 – 49	32
		50 +	21
	Population	100,000 +	37
		Up to 100,000	26
	Education	Public school	10
		Some post-secondary	26
		Completed college, univ.	38
	Income	Up to \$70,000	28
		\$70,000+	39
Social assistance, welfare	Gender	Women	25
		Men	16
	Age	18 – 24	29
		25 – 49	20
		50 +	16
	Income	Up to \$20,000	34
\$20,000+		18	
Mental health service	Gender	Women	18
		Men	8
Workers' compensation	Education	Public school	22
		Some post-secondary	16
		Completed college, univ.	9

Note: Demographic differences are shown where there is an 8-point spread or greater.

The 18–24 age group differs from the rest of the population on several additional dimensions. This age group defines five other services as lower in priority: job training, mental health, provincial courts, provincial police and workers' compensation. They see two other services as higher priorities: motor vehicle registration and student loans.

Figure 43
Regional Differences in Provincial Priorities
Citizens First, 1998



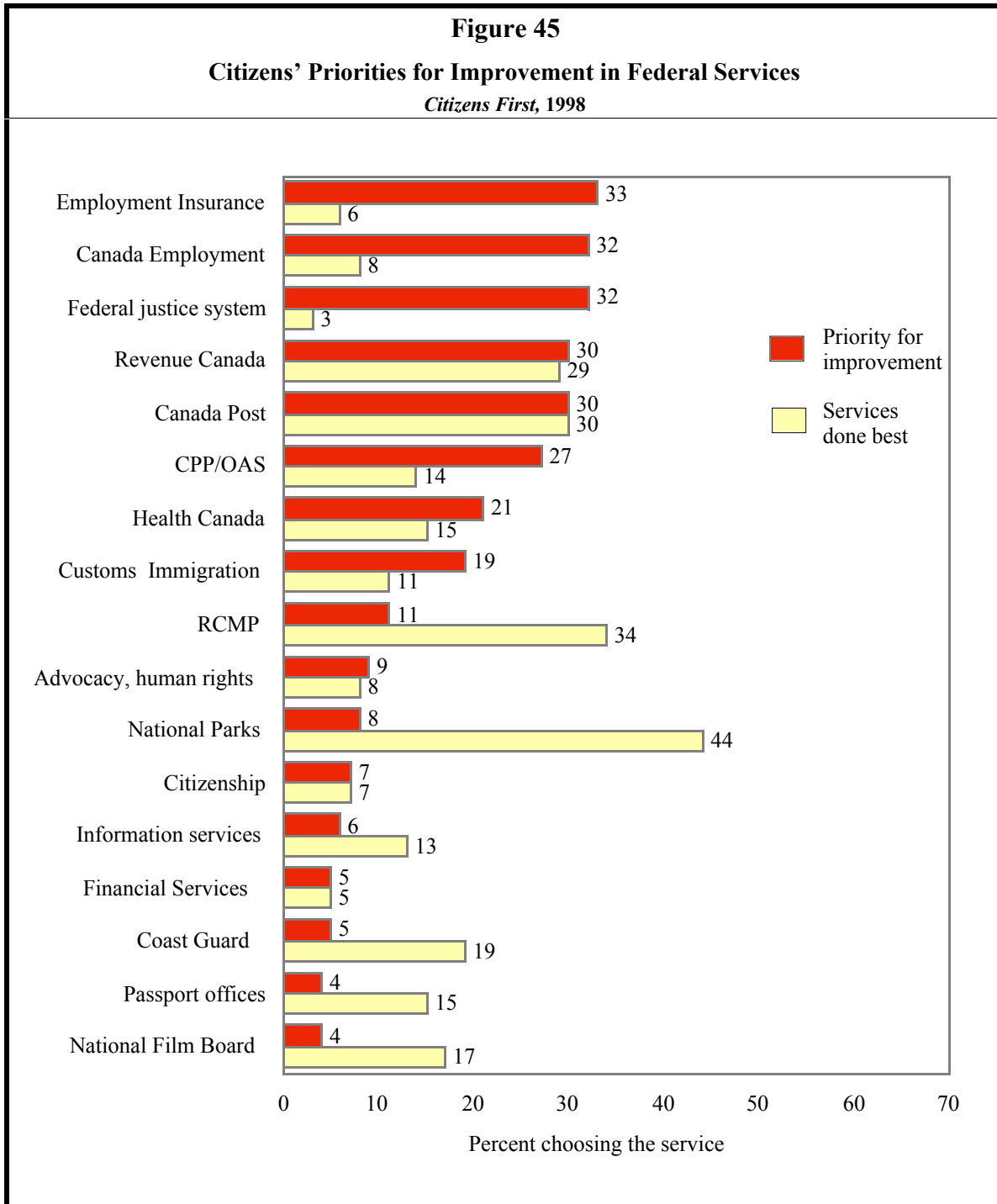
FEDERAL SERVICES

The 17 federal services occupy the same range of quality ratings as municipal and provincial services. Only fire departments, at 86, scored materially beyond this range.

Figure 44	
Quality of Federal Services Used in the Past Year	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Service	Service quality (0 – 100)
1. National Parks	73
2. National Film Board, National Museums, National Arts Centre	70
3. Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Pension	69
4. RCMP	68
5. Canadian Coast Guard / Search and rescue	66
6. Passports: get or renew a passport	66
<i>Mean rating of these 17 federal services</i>	60
7. Customs and Immigration border services	58
8. Citizenship services	57
9. Revenue Canada - Income tax	57
10. Canada Post	57
11. Information services: Statistics Canada, Government publications	55
12. Health Canada	55
13. Financial Services	52
14. Canada Employment Centres	47
<i>Rating of federal services "in general"</i>	47
15. Employment Insurance	45
16. Advocacy services	40
17. Federal justice system: Courts, National Parole Board, prisons	36

Among federal services there is no single outstanding priority for improvement. Six services all rank within a few percentage points. It is interesting that two of these, Canada Post and Revenue Canada, are rated high among both the best services and the priorities for improvement.

It was not possible in this survey to ask citizens why each service needed improvement. For services such as hospitals it is probably safe to conclude that most respondents would like to see a higher level of service. For some other services, improvement probably implies contradictory paths of action. “Improving” Employment Insurance could mean either extending benefits or reducing them. Given that services were rated only by those who had used them recently, extending benefits seems the likely interpretation.



Note: Participants chose up to 3 priorities and 3 services done best.

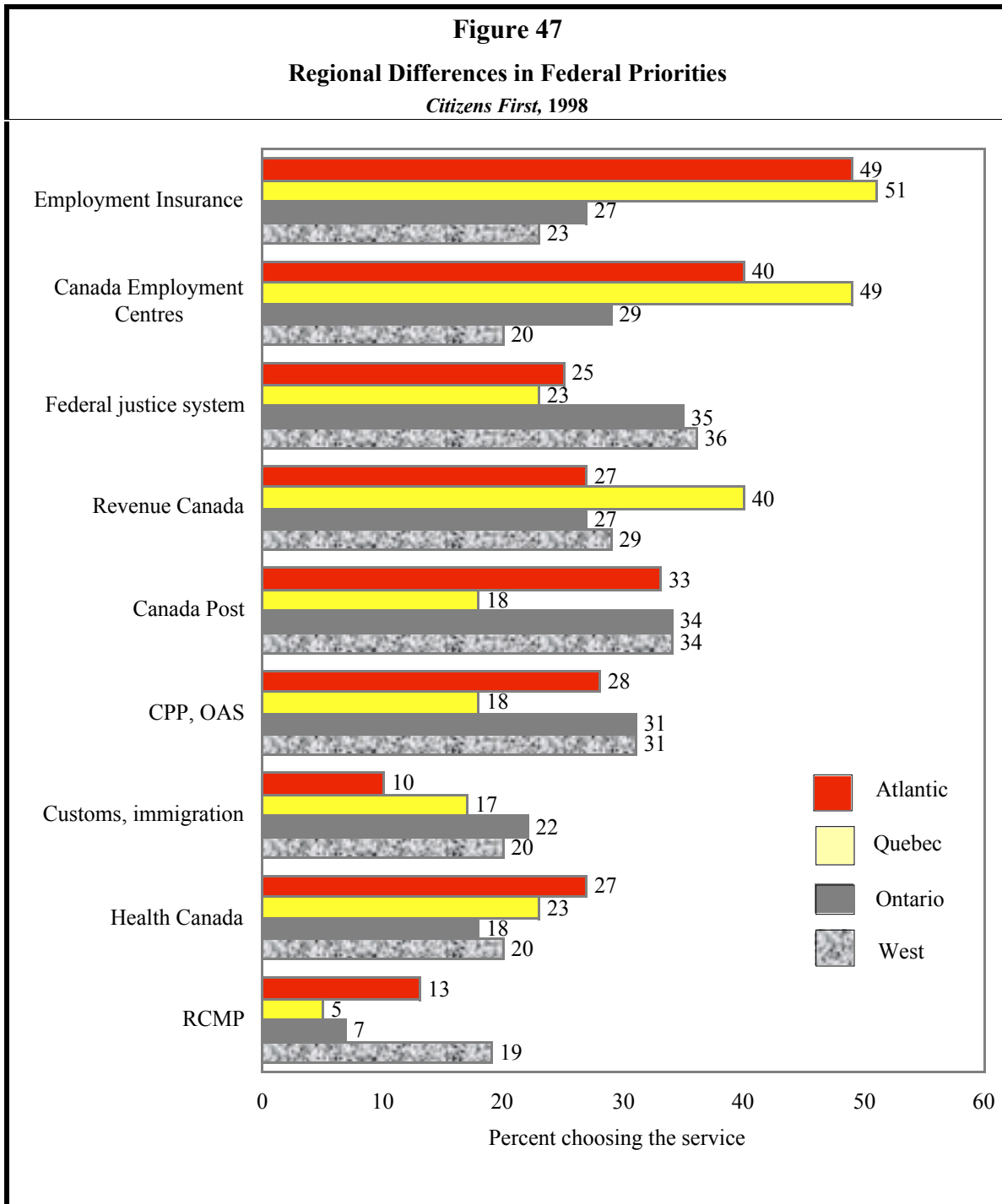
The age difference associated with CPP/OAS is of interest in that those 65 and older see it as less of a priority than those under age 65. This may reflect worries of younger citizens that the Canada Pension Plan will be less able to provide for the needs of coming generations.

Figure 46			
Demographic Differences in Federal Priorities			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Service	Demographic	Group	Percent choosing
Employment Insurance	Gender	Women	37
		Men	29
	Age	18 – 24	43
		25 – 64	37
		65+	22
	Income	Up to \$29,000	40
\$30,000 – \$70,000		33	
\$70,000 +		24	
Canada Employment Centres	Age	18 – 34	32
		35 – 49	36
		50+	28
CPP, OAS	Age	18 – 64	28
		65+	19
Health Canada	Age	18 – 64	19
		65+	33
	Income	Up to \$20,000	26
		\$20,000 – \$70,000	20
\$70,000 +		15	
Canada Post	Age	18–64	28
		65 +	40

Note: Demographic differences are shown where there is an 8-point spread or greater.

The federal justice system is a higher priority in Ontario and Western Canada, reflecting interest in provincial courts and jails in these regions.

Employment-related services are a greater priority in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces as a result of greater unemployment in those regions. The RCMP is a lower priority in Ontario and Quebec, since provincial police forces mean there is less RCMP involvement in those provinces.



SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES

Figure 48 reviews citizens' top priorities, based on results shown earlier in this chapter. Health, education and employment are leading themes across Canada. With the exception of CPP/OAS, these priorities for improvement rate relatively low in service quality.

Figure 48		
Summary of Priorities		
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>		
Priority	Service quality	Percent choosing as priority
<i>Municipal</i>		
Public health	55	56
Road maintenance	45	53
Public schools	54	46
<i>Provincial</i>		
Hospitals	51	73
Colleges and universities	58	30
<i>Federal</i>		
Employment Insurance	45	33
Canada Employment Centres	47	32
Federal Justice System	36	32
Revenue Canada	57	30
Canada Post	57	29
CPP/OAS	69	27

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

Citizens were invited to write comments on any government service and were provided with two pages at the end of the questionnaire for this purpose. Half of the respondents took this opportunity. Their comments have been analysed to identify issues of concern.

Some respondents addressed a single topic in their written comments and some discussed several different topics. The average number of issues addressed was 2.8. Comments can be divided into two broad categories: those that relate directly to service quality, the focus of the survey, and those that bear on government in a more general sense, from problems in the fishing industry to gambling, foreign affairs and the structure of political systems.

Comments on service quality addressed the entire range of service areas. Figure 49 groups the comments into categories to show the emphasis on different services. Health, with 15 percent of the comments, received more attention than any other single area. However, the largest proportion of comments, 40 percent, were general in nature and were not specifically related to any particular program.

Figure 49	
Distribution of Comments by Type of Service	
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>	
Topic	Percent of comments
Health	15
Roads, utilities	8
Taxes	8
Education	6
Social services	6
Emergency services	3
Financial assistance	3
Employment	3
Registration	3
Justice	2
Pleasure	2
Natural resources, fisheries, agriculture	1
Information	1
Other or non-specific	40

The following comments illustrate the range and tone of citizens' suggestions on service delivery.

- *Federal and provincial health ministries should work together to close the gaps in our health care system, most notably those in the diagnosing and treatment of cardiac patients. The unacceptably long waits in obtaining these services across Canada are a disservice to its peoples. Perhaps it is time for our politicians to recognize and admit that financing health care has become a burden no longer sustainable in its present form. Realistically health care users should be making co-payments, geared to income, for services rendered. This would generate a cash flow available for use in expansion of existing services and/or establishing new ones.*
- *I find information on provincial and federal services very difficult to get by phone – elaborate webs of recorded information have not provided the info I have needed, and reaching a human who has the information has been difficult.*
- *Government communications have improved quite remarkably in the last 20 years or more, especially at Revenue Canada, while services have declined in health and education. Technology has made information easier to convey, but perhaps more difficult to understand. The complexity and the efficiency of communications intimidates, rather than clarifies.*
- *People working for the government should be just as accountable as the private sector.*
- *After having answered this questionnaire, I find that we do not use very many government services. For that reason I sometimes think that perhaps there should be minimal user fees. There must be others like us who pay for these services but never seem to need them. We are quite pleased with the quality of government services that we have used.*
- *Any services which can be supplied by machine or Internet are very desirable.*
- *Federal government services could be combined and offered in local communities, i.e., taxation and passports. Some of these services could be combined together with provincial and local government offices (i.e., one-stop service). Government service hours should be offered after 4:00 p.m. – for example from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.*
- *My pet peeve is the lack of one-on-one service today. Voice mail is not a good solution.*
- *Given all the cuts to eliminate deficits, it is extremely hard for any public servant to remain courteous and committed.*

Figure 49 presented the types of services that citizens wrote about. A second way of organizing the same comments is in terms of the nature of the suggestions offered. These suggestions, grouped into 14 categories, appear in Figure 50.

General comments on the quality of service make up the largest component – 27 percent of comments. Of these, one third were positive and two thirds were negative. Two examples of this type of general comment follow, one positive and one negative:

- *Given our time of restraint I feel our public workers do well as a whole.*
- *The government has to get its act together and get back to what the people of Canada want: "quality service for their hard-earned dollars."*

The second issue, "Cost of government services" was addressed in 10 percent of comments, and 88 percent of these were negative. An example of a positive comment on this subject is:

- *I have no problem paying taxes for the provision of high quality, universal social programs to the people of Canada by governments (local, municipal, provincial and federal) which are held accountable by Canadians. I pay a ton of taxes and find I get good value for my money.*

Issue number 3, "Funding and resources," also focuses on cost, but it differs from issue 2 in that it refers to funding of specific services. Health and financial assistance programs were frequent examples of perceived under-funding.

Figure 50			
Issues Addressed in Comments on Service Quality			
<i>Citizens First, 1998</i>			
Service issue	Proportion of comments	% Negative	% Neutral, positive
1. General comments on service quality	27	67	33
2. Cost of government services, tax burden	10	88	12
3. Funding and resources	10	84	16
4. Access to service	9	66	34
5. Courtesy, friendliness	9	75	25
6. Time required to get service	7	87	13
7. Voice mail, telephone systems	6	98	2
8. Fair treatment	5	77	23
9. Competence, training of staff	4	73	27
10. Outcome	4	73	27
11. Abuse of services, fraud	4	76	24
12. Forms, paperwork	2	90	10
13. Staff initiative, responsibility	2	61	39
14. Single-window service	2	31	69
Total	100	76	24

12. Research Implications

Most research on service quality has been conducted at the level of individual government services. Examining service quality on the macroscopic scale of *Citizens First*, which encompasses all services at three levels of government, is a rare opportunity and has produced useful results. In particular, the finding that service quality rests on the same elements at each level of government and across many different service areas lends support to a more unified approach to service delivery. It is consistent, for example, with the thrust toward horizontal and vertical integration of services that has found success in a number of Canadian jurisdictions.

Research that focuses on specific service areas can build on and refine techniques and measures introduced in this project. Suggestions are presented within the framework of the *Citizens First* service model.

CITIZENS' SERVICE NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Comparisons of Public and Private Sectors

Comparisons of service quality in public and private sectors are always intriguing. Meaningful comparisons must meet two requirements: because services that are identified specifically score higher than services that are defined in general terms, the comparison should include services defined at the same level of specificity; and because recently used services score higher than services used in the more distant past, the comparison should take into account the freshness of the experience.

In addition, a complete analysis of citizens' ranking of public and private sector services would include factors such as outcome that impose ceilings on some services in both sectors.

ACCESS TO SERVICE

Multiple-Contact Services

Citizens First provides a useful method for studying multiple-contact experiences. By identifying the different services that citizens contact during a single, complex encounter, *Citizens First* provides a rational basis for designing effective single-window service delivery.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Measuring Service Quality

An overall rating of service quality is a combination of two components, one that service providers can control and another consisting of factors such as outcome that are not at the discretion of service providers. Recognizing this distinction and being able to measure the two components separately is critical in the government sector. It allows service providers to set realistic targets that take into account the ceiling imposed by factors beyond their control. Quantifying these components helps in navigating between two unhealthy extremes. On the one hand, an unpopular job is not an excuse – tax collectors should give as much heed to service quality as anyone else. On the other hand, service providers need not feel that their own performance is poor just because the service they deliver gets a relatively low score.

Timeliness

Timeliness is the strongest single contributor to service quality ratings and is a key to any service improvement strategy. *Citizens First* provides a demand-side model of the service delivery process. To complete the picture, research is necessary on the supply side as well. What elements within service delivery systems impede timely service? What resources, training, management support, etc., are needed to improve delivery? The question could be addressed in a manner similar to the present research, with a broad-spectrum study of service providers at all levels of government. This could be complemented by research in individual service areas.

Best Practices

Numerous examples of innovative and successful service delivery systems can be found in Canada.¹⁵ It would be useful to document citizens' perceptions of these systems in order to learn what sets them apart from traditional service delivery. Studies of client satisfaction are most often conducted for internal use – to track service quality and help guide improvements. In contrast, outside organizations need to know how citizens perceive these model organizations in relation to traditional models. What are the key factors that differentiate excellence from the norm? Research on best practices can examine citizens' experience in order to provide solutions of wide interest.

Service Standards

This research addressed citizens' expectations for service only in the context of routine transactions which apply on a universal scale. The approach can be applied to any service area, routine or not. Knowing citizens expectations around timeliness, access and other elements allows service providers to adjust service accordingly. If service cannot be provided at the expected

¹⁵ See, for example, Stephen Bent, Kenneth Kernaghan and Brian Marson, *Single-Window Service Delivery, Interim Report*, Citizen-Centred Service Network Project 5 (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1998).

level, accurate knowledge of expectations allows service providers to minimize disappointment by managing expectations appropriately.

PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Attitudes Toward Government and Service Quality

Results show that some attitudes toward government affect perceptions of service quality while others do not. What about the reverse? If service quality changes, do changes in attitudes toward government follow? If so, which attitudes?

This issue is of more than academic interest. If it is true that service quality affects attitudes toward government, it would create a powerful reason for providing the best possible quality of service. The rationale for improving service quality would cease to be (at least in some circles) a peripheral issue, something that governments might do when time and resources permit for the sake of pleasing citizens. Rather, it would be regarded as a central element of public policy, something that responsible governments must pursue to ensure citizen engagement.

It seems obvious that some service improvements would affect some opinions to some degree. Measuring how strong and direct these links actually are will establish the importance of service quality in the public sector.

CITIZENS' PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Need for Regular Monitoring

In the final analysis, efforts to improve service quality need to be guided by feedback from citizens. The face of government services is changing rapidly, with greater emphasis on electronic delivery methods and greater integration of services. Changes in private sector service delivery also help to shape the way that citizens perceive government services. Even if a particular service does not change, the world around it does, and this can affect how the service is perceived. It is important, therefore, to assess citizens' priorities for improving government services on a regular basis. Such assessments give managers and service providers confirmation of successful improvements, and they track changes in citizens' expectations. *Citizens First* provides one important baseline against which future progress can be measured.

13. The Path Forward

The following *Path Forward* flows from the principle that government services should address citizens' needs and priorities. The results are specific and far-reaching. They are grounded in the experience of a representative cross-section of Canadians with all three levels of government in every province and territory.

The *Path Forward* is built on the assumption that government services must be delivered in a fair and equitable manner, and that governments must protect citizens and be their advocate, as well as deliver services efficiently and effectively.

THE PATH FORWARD

Results of *Citizens First* point to the seven goal areas. Governments can select from, adapt, and build on the array of strategies suggested under each goal.

1. Build strong leadership to champion citizen-centred service delivery throughout the public sector.

- Promote the vision and principles of a citizen-centred public service.
- Establish senior inter-governmental teams committed to implementation of citizen-centred service.
- Engage all managers and staff in the service delivery challenge by integrating citizen-centred service principles and activities into business plans, accountability measures and performance evaluations.
- Recruit partners from the private sector and organizations outside government to build momentum.

2. Improve citizens' access to services.

- Pilot innovative solutions to access barriers such as the telephone.
- Pilot partnerships between and within governments to provide single-window access in high priority areas.
- Publish successful single-window solutions.
- Continue to build solutions and best practices around access that optimize the use of human resources and technology.

3. Focus service delivery improvements on the five cornerstones of service quality, namely timeliness, knowledge/competence, courtesy/comfort, fair treatment and outcome.

- Conduct pilot projects particularly to improve timeliness by making optimal use of technology and by partnering with the community.
- Investigate barriers to providing timely service, such as cost cutting, lack of training, lack of technology or insufficient internal support services.
- Develop model training programs to deliver timely, competent, courteous and fair service, and to manage citizens' expectations around outcomes.
- Seek staff recommendations and empower staff to deliver on the five key service elements.

4. Establish service standards for routine transactions.

- Establish standards for routine telephone, mail, e-mail and in-person transactions to staff and to citizens.
- Pilot public-public and public-private partnerships to develop innovative and cost-effective solutions to service standard challenges, e.g., technological solutions in high transaction areas.
- Reward staff excellence in attaining and exceeding standards.
- Establish effective mechanisms for resolving citizens' problems.
- Measure performance on service standards and report back to staff and citizens.
- Establish individual standards for major non-routine services.

5. Target improvement efforts on citizens' top priorities in high transaction areas.

- Conduct innovative pilot projects in high transaction and high priority areas such as health care, employment and education.
- Communicate successful case studies of municipal, provincial and federal governments in the high priority areas.
- Monitor public and private sector services against benchmarks established in the 1998 survey.

6. Communicate the results of this and other research to build morale and promote action on citizens' priorities.

- Communicate results of *Citizens First* research to citizens and service providers.
- Disseminate research tools, such as the Common Measurements Tool developed by the Citizen-Centred Service Network, that can be readily applied to many service areas.

7. Become a global leader in citizen-centred service and research.

- Conduct regular research to identify changing needs and priorities, and measure against the 1998 baseline.
- Establish a sustained capacity to pioneer research, training and promote broad implementation.
- Develop management tools that provide best practices, successful case examples and specific guidance in measurement, e.g., video, quick reference guide, etc.
- Establish an Internet clearing-house for innovative service solutions and research.
- Support the CCSN practitioner network in developing and sharing innovative solutions to citizen service.
- Pilot linkages with Canadian university, private and volunteer sectors and internationally to advance citizen-centred service.