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**Toward
Citizen-Centred
Service:**

**The Government of
Canada's Service
Improvement
Strategy**

Toward Citizen-Centred Service: *The Government of Canada's Service Improvement Strategy*

BY RALPH HEINTZMAN

In March 2000, the President of the Treasury Board of Canada, the Hon. Lucienne Robillard, tabled the Government of Canada's management agenda in the House of Commons. Entitled *Results for Canadians*, this important document made "Citizen-Centred Service Delivery" one of the top priorities in the government's change agenda.

Since 1998, Canada has been developing an integrated citizen-centred service strategy, based on detailed surveys of citizens' needs and expectations. Listening carefully to Canadians, then focusing actions on their service needs and improvement priorities are the foundation of Canada's new citizen-centred service strategy.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the Government of Canada's service strategy:

- Listening to Canadians
- Improving Service Access
- Improving Service Performance
- Getting Government On-Line, a key enabler to improve both access and service performance
- Improving the other service channels, especially the telephone channel.

Strategy One: Listening to Canadians and Responding to their Service Delivery Needs

In 1998, CCMD published *Citizens First*, the most comprehensive survey of Canadian's attitudes about public sector service delivery ever mounted in Canada. Two years later,

a second national survey, *Citizens First 2000*, was conducted under the sponsorship of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council, with the participation of all 10 provincial governments and the three largest metropolitan governments (Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal), as well as the Yukon Territory and many federal departments and agencies. *Citizens First 2000* has recently been

published by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada and is available on the IPAC Web site (www.ipaciapc.ca).

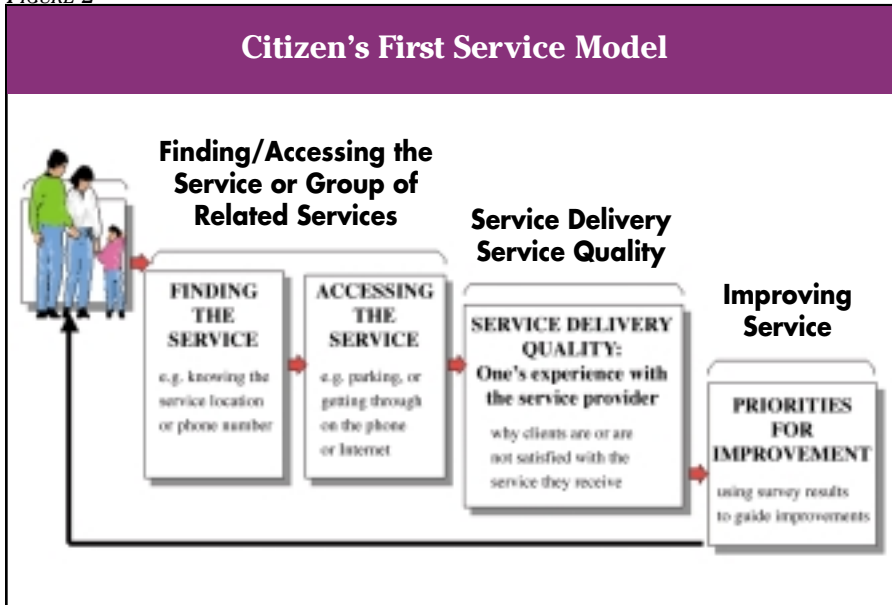
This award-winning research has helped us to pinpoint that Canadians have two essential service needs: the need for improved and more seamless access to government service; and the need for improved service performance by government departments and agencies.

Figure 2 outlines the way Canadians experience public sector service delivery. The surveys have discovered that 69% of Canadians think "knowing where to start is the biggest challenge in getting government services." Only 23% of Canadians feel confident they can "readily access any government



FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2



service they need." Even when they think they know how to get to a government service, almost two thirds of the time Canadians can have difficulty actually reaching the service they need, because of poor telephone service, automated phone systems, or just being bounced around from person to person.

Once Canadians reach the point of service delivery, they then expect high quality of service and are able to rate the delivery of federal services in comparison with those of other levels of government and other sectors. In 1998 a basket of seventeen federal services was rated at 6.0 out of 10, compared to 6.2 for provincial services and 6.4 for municipal. However, the Government of Canada has gained ground in the last two years.

Moreover, both *Citizens First* studies have allowed us to identify the five major "drivers" of satisfaction with public sector services: timeliness, competence, courtesy, fairness and outcome. When all five of these drivers are performed well, public sector services can achieve service satisfaction scores of 8.0 out of ten or higher. When one of these drivers is not done well, it is most often timeliness that fails.

Of the four service channels (telephone, mail, in-person and Internet), the telephone channel is the most

widely used, and preferred, channel for obtaining services from government. But it is also the one that contributes most to Canadians' dissatisfaction with government service delivery.

The results of the 1998 *Citizens First* survey helped the Government of Canada (and many other governments) to develop a "citizen-centred" strategy for responding to Canadians' priorities for service improvement: the need for improved and more seamless access to government service; and the need for improved service performance and quality, including improved timeliness and better telephone service.

The success of the *Citizens First* 1998 survey in identifying the service needs of Canadians resulted in a commitment by the Government of Canada to repeat the survey every two years, in collaboration with the Provinces and major cities.

By regularly listening to Canadians in order to identify their levels of service satisfaction and their service improvement priorities, the Government of Canada will continue to anchor its citizen-centred service strategy in Canadians' real service needs and expectations – an "outside-in" approach to the service improvement challenge.

Strategy Two: Improving Access via the Service Canada Initiative

If many Canadians have difficulty finding and accessing the services they need, how can the Government of Canada make the process easier? In response to this challenge of improving access, the Service Canada initiative was launched in 1999. Its vision and aim is to develop a new "one-stop" service face for the Government of Canada to make it easier for Canadians to find their way through the maze of departments and programs and, eventually, to obtain a wide range of those services in one place, or through their choice of three integrated one-stop access portals:

- The 1 800 O-CANADA call centre
- The new Canada Site – the Government of Canada's Internet Portal and its associated gateways and clusters;
- a network of in-person access centres across the country (120 pilot sites to date).

1 800 O-CANADA gives Canadians friendly, personal, one-stop information about how and where to obtain the government services they need.

The new Canada Site Internet portal has been designed around clusters of services, rather than around departmental structures. Information and services are now organized around the subjects that matter most to Canadians, to businesses, and to people from outside Canada. Some times service is even organized around actual "life events." For example, you can click on the "lost wallet" service cluster and find out where to go to replace all the identification you may have lost. The site even gives you "hot links" to other Provinces so that you can order a replacement birth certificate from the Province of your birth over the Web.

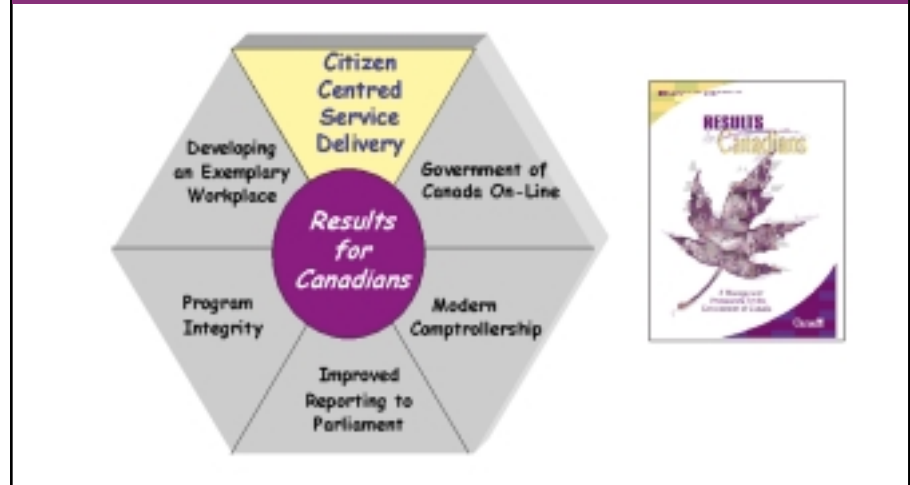
Canada's Citizen-Centred Service Delivery is Key to Achieving "Results for Canadians"

Also, 120 in-person access centres have been established as pilot projects across the country. They are located in government offices such as Human Resources Development Canada and the Canada Place sites developed by Canadian Heritage, as well as in community-based networks. The staff are backed by information systems that document the whole range of government programs and services and points of service. Satisfaction surveys show that Canadians love these "single window" service counters, which are sometimes co-located with provincial or even municipal single windows, thus offering convenient access to the services provided by other levels of government as well.

Strategy Three: Measurably Improving Service Performance through the Service Improvement Initiative

Results for Canadians announced that the Government of Canada has decided to make improving Canadians' satisfaction with government service delivery a "new focus and measure of success." The Government has set ambitious targets for this objective. In May 2000, the Treasury Board approved a Service Improvement Initiative, requiring all departments and agencies to set a target of improving client satisfaction with key services to the public by a minimum of 10% by 2005, and to report to Parliament each year on the targets set and the results achieved. The targets are to be achieved through annual service improvement plans based on clients' top service improvement priorities.

The Service Improvement policy was developed by the service delivery Assistant Deputy Ministers across the federal public service, in collaboration with the Service and Innovation Sector of the Treasury Board Secretariat.



This is the most ambitious service improvement policy ever undertaken by any industrialized country. If these satisfaction targets are achieved, the federal government will narrow the gap with provincial and municipal governments, and perhaps with the private sector, or even move ahead.

To ensure that client satisfaction and improvement priorities are measured in a uniform way, departments and agencies are required to use questions and metrics drawn from the Common Measurements Tool (http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/si-si/sii-ias/home_e.shtml). The CMT is also being used by the other jurisdictions that helped develop it, including Manitoba, BC and Ontario.

The Treasury Board of Canada has developed a How-To Guide, based on best practices, to help government managers successfully implement the Service Improvement Initiative. This publication and other helpful tools can be viewed on the Service Improvement Initiative Web site noted in the previous paragraph.

Strategy Four: Implementing Government On-Line

Canada is an acknowledged leader in using the Internet as a strategic enabler to improve both access and service performance. Government

On-Line is the Government of Canada's bold strategy to have a critical mass of key government services on-line by the end of 2004.

Sixty percent of all Canadians already use the Internet, and, according to Erin Research, two thirds of current Internet users have looked up information about government services on the Internet. The power of the Internet makes it easier for citizens to access the government services they need.

There is also accumulating evidence that the Internet channel, intelligently designed, can substantially raise citizen satisfaction levels. In the United States, the Internal Revenue Service has discovered that citizens who file their tax return via the Internet have service satisfaction levels 20 points higher than those who file by mail. *Citizens First 2000* shows that citizens rate government Web sites higher than comparable private sector Web sites; moreover, 45% of e-government clients are already using the e-channel for some form of service transaction – such as getting a form, ordering publications, or filling out an application – not just for accessing information.

The significance of Government On-Line was underscored by the announcement in March of \$120 million in additional funding for 2001-02, bringing the total to date to \$280 million. This funding is being used to build a common technology infra-

structure, get key transactions online (including services such as employment insurance, tax filing, business registration, electronic procurement, citizenship applications, and so on), and build the gateways and service clusters to provide truly integrated, citizen-centred service.

Strategy Five: Improving Telephone Service

While expanding the use of the Internet for service delivery, the Government of Canada is also focussed on improving service on the telephone channel. The telephone is the “people’s channel”, because it is universally available, and is easy for Canadians to use. About fifty percent of citizens’ service transactions with the federal government are currently via the telephone. While usage of the Internet channel is expanding quickly, it is still far outstripped by the telephone, and evidence suggests that citizens often use both the Internet channel and the telephone channel in completing a single service transaction.

How is the Government of Canada improving telephone service? First, by researching best practices for the design and management of call centres, which are the main avenue for citizens to obtain service by telephone. Second, by developing policies that respond to citizens’ expectations for telephone service. For example, interactive voice response systems are a major source of Canadians’ dissatisfaction with government phone service. They would like such “IVR” systems to be designed from the users’ point of view, such as having the ability to “zero out” to a real person, and never having more than a few choices at each stage in the decision menu.

Government call centres are already making significant progress; the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, for example, has dramatically improved its service to clients

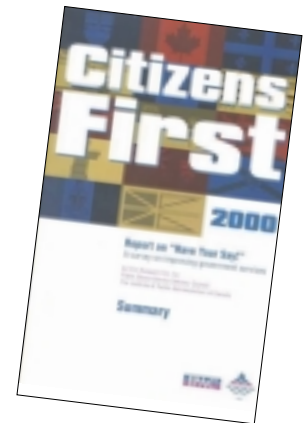
during the past two filing seasons. Now, 95% of callers are able to get through on their first try, compared to fewer than 50% two years ago. Likewise, the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Pension call centres at Human Resources Development Canada have improved their service levels dramatically through benchmarking with the US Social Security Service call centre system, one of the best in the world. Recently, another department, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, has had its call centre performance benchmarked against public and private centre call centres across Canada.

The federal Blue Pages redesign project is another important element of the Government of Canada’s telephone strategy. This project involves the redesign of the blue pages on the basis of key words, and actual services, rather than by departmental name and structure. The redesign has already been implemented in 97 of 145 telephone directories across Canada. In addition, the governments of Ontario, PEI, and Yukon, and some municipalities such as Metro Toronto, have worked with the Government of Canada to develop integrated Blue Pages for two or three levels of government. All federal Blue Pages will be redesigned by 2002. As a result, Canadians are able to find passports under “passports” and pensions under “pensions” rather than having to hunt through a maze of government departments and agencies to find the correct telephone number to call. And if someone still has a problem, the 1 800 O-CANADA operator is there to help.

Other Elements of the Citizen-Centred Service Strategy

While these five strategies are key elements of an overall citizen-centred service strategy, there are other important building blocks. For example, a new Alternative Service

Delivery policy, now in its final stage of development, will address the organizational and structural dimension of service improvement. Interdepartmental working groups are also looking at the HR and people dimensions of service improvement, service transformation, and GOL. New Government Communications and Consultation and Engagement policies are in the works, to strengthen the links between Canadians and the Government of Canada. And new policy approaches to organizational effectiveness and innovation are under development.



Making and Measuring Progress

Citizens First 2000 shows that the federal service delivery community is achieving results and that the Government of Canada is making progress in relation to other governments and sectors. In 2000, Canadians’ satisfaction with federal service delivery increased to a mean of 6.1 out of ten, while provincial services rose to 6.3, and municipal services remained steady at 6.4.

These figures are based on recent service experiences. The figures for general service “reputation” (not necessarily based on an actual recent service experience) show even more dramatic increases. The Government of Canada’s overall service reputation rose four points, from 4.7 to 5.1

in two years. In this category, the Government of Canada now slightly leads provincial governments.

Moreover, as far as service reputation is concerned, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA), Canada Post and the Passport Office are now more highly rated by Canadians than the country's chartered banks.

Summing Up: A Powerful Citizen-Centred Service Strategy

What are the differences between the Government of Canada's service strategy and those of other countries?

- The strategy is based on thorough research about Canadians' service expectations, satisfaction, and priorities for improvement.
- It is comprehensive, focussing on both access and service performance improvement.
- It is channel conscious, paying attention to improving the two key service channels for the 21st century – Internet and telephone – while enhancing service integration within and across all channels.
- It focuses on ends or measurable objectives, and not just on means or tools.
- It sets real targets for improvement in citizen satisfaction, and holds managers accountable for achieving results.

Based on progress achieved in the past two years, Canada is now a leader in citizen-centred service improvement policy. If the strategy can be successfully implemented over the next four years, Canada will solidify a position of international leadership in public sector service.

Concluding Thoughts: Why a "Citizen-Centred" Strategy?

Why should service delivery in the public sector be "citizen-centred," and why do we use this term? There are at least five reasons.

First of all, the delivery of government services should be conceived and executed from the "outside-in" – not inside-out – with the needs, perspectives, improvement priorities, and satisfaction of Canadians foremost in mind.

An "outside-in" perspective will lead us to pay attention both to Canadians' service improvement priorities and needs, and to their levels of satisfaction with individual services. It also helps to remind us that citizens have to work through the maze of public sector organizations and services to get what they need, and that we can only truly meet their complex service needs by working together across organizations and governments to provide seamless, integrated service to Canada's citizens.

Second, and even more important, the clients of government services are not "just" clients, as they might be in the private sector. They are not just consumers of government services: they are usually also taxpayers and citizens – bearers of rights and duties in a framework of democratic community. As taxpayers and members of a civic or democratic community, citizens "own" the organizations that provide public services, and have civic interests that go well beyond their own service needs. While clients of the Government of Canada are usually citizens of this country, they may also be potential citizens of Canada, or citizens of another country with a business, professional, or personal interest in Canada.

Third, many of the clients of government are "involuntary clients," whose service relationship with government derives not from choice but rather from their obligations as citizens, or from the rights of other citizens. That is one reason why "fairness" is among the five top drivers of Canadians' satisfaction with the quality of government service delivery.

Fourth, those who deliver government services may have to balance the distinct interests and needs

of different categories of citizens, within the broader framework of the public interest. They may also have to balance the interests of immediate or direct clients with those of the citizens of Canada as a whole. The satisfaction of immediate clients must go hand in hand with the confidence of all citizens in the institutions of government.

Which brings me to the final and most important point. Service delivery in the public sector should be citizen-centred because every act of service is a "moment of truth" in which Canadians form an impression – positive or negative – about the effectiveness of public institutions and about the potential of democratic government. The service experience either increases or decreases Canadians' confidence in public institutions, and in the degree to which they are capable of fulfilling their democratic missions. It thus enhances or diminishes Canadians' confidence in the potential of their own democratic citizenship.

Those who deliver government services should always bear in mind that the quality of government service delivery can and should contribute to strengthening democratic citizenship and the bonds of confidence and trust between citizens and their democratic institutions.

That may seem a large burden, but it is also an exciting and meaningful one – and one that corresponds to the deepest sources of motivation for public servants. It causes us to remember, at all times, that our clients are also citizens, whose pride and belief in their own democratic citizenship can be strengthened or weakened by the service experience.

That is both the challenge and the glory of service delivery in the public sector. 🍁

Dr. Ralph Heintzman is Assistant Secretary for Service and Innovation at the Treasury Board of Canada, Secretariat..