

Ministry of Forests & Range

Forest Science Program Service Delivery Recommendations

February 2006



Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services

BC STATS

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES

This report builds on the *Forest Science Program Customer Satisfaction Survey 2006*. Based on the results of that survey, a number of service improvement recommendations are made.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2006: SUMMARY

The 2006 found that overall satisfaction with the services of the Forest Science Program is quite high, with 82% of respondents saying they are “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the overall quality of service delivery.

And these users are convinced of the importance of the Program. Nearly two-thirds of respondents stated that the Forest Science Program is “very important” to the mission of the Ministry, and another 28% said it was “important”.

The majority of users do not use Forest Science Program services more often than a few times a year. When individuals do seek service, 76% reported they received what they needed, 20% received part of what they needed, and 2% did not receive what they were seeking. In total, 93% of respondents view the Forest Science Program as either somewhat or very important to the overall mission of the Ministry of Forests.

While there is some variation in satisfaction levels by region and by employment class, in general, the highest satisfaction level among users is with the library services (91% very satisfied or satisfied), and the lowest satisfaction level is with training and extension services (83% very satisfied or satisfied). While research products received the second highest level of “very satisfied” (39%), this service also scored the second highest in the “somewhat dissatisfied” category (16%). Scientific advice and consultation scored fairly high when the two satisfaction categories are combined with 83% satisfied or very satisfied.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DRIVERS

Research has shown that for service delivery, a number of elements are the drivers of customer satisfaction.

The core drivers that appear to be common to all service delivery situations are:

Timeliness

Knowledge and competence of staff

Outcome (“I got what I came for”)

Extra mile

The services of the Forest Science Program are no exception. In general, Forest Science is doing a good job in meeting these drivers. The lowest-scoring driver overall was “Responsiveness of service to meet changing needs”. But even in this case, the specific aspects of the Forest Science program scored no lower than 3.58, meaning that the average response fell roughly midway between “Neutral” and “Satisfied”.

Ensuring that the drivers of customer satisfaction are being met will help improve the Program’s overall satisfaction rating in the future. The following recommendations are based on a review of satisfaction levels with those drivers, with further insights drawn from the comments made by respondents.

STRENGTHS

Based on the survey, it is clear that the Forest Science Program’s biggest strength is the credibility of the information. On the five-point scale, satisfaction levels were between “Satisfied” and “Very Satisfied”. Comments also frequently cite the knowledge and competence of staff, which is a central element in establishing the credibility of the information they provide.

Because of the credibility of the information, the Forest Science Program is viewed as a valuable resource for the Ministry of Forests.

Select Respondent Comments

“The Forest Science Program lends a great deal of credibility to this ministry, and government as a whole.”

“...they have some of the best people in the country in their employ...”

“The program has delivered high quality expertise and advice when requested “

OPPORTUNITIES

Raise the Program's Profile

A large proportion of the respondents identified themselves as not being users of elements of Forest Science's services. In particular, nearly half of the respondents stated that they had not used the library services. Even among Forest Science's client base, there appears to be a lack of awareness of the breadth of the services.

Comments from respondents lead to the conclusion that Forest Science is a hidden asset within the Ministry. Of the comments made, one out of four mentioned that the profile of the Forest Science Program needs to be raised.

Select Respondent Comments

"I am unaware of the services of the Forest Science Program. I consider a Science Program vital for the MOFR, but its services must be better advertised and be more accessible."

"Not sure what or where the Forest Science program is. If I have technical questions I call regional or branch experts."

"While I am aware of this program and appreciate its value, I seldom utilize the service. This is due to a lack of diligence on my part, but also to an apparent lack of connection between the Program and our office. I would recommend that representatives of the Program increase their "visibility" and efforts to connect with District staff. Should this occur, we will gain a better understanding of what services the Program can offer to us and who the contacts are, which should lead to increased usage of the program. The flip side benefit will be that the staff within the program should get a better sense for what the issues are at District level that they could be doing some research or extension activities to address."

Potential Strategies

Include brochure or information in any orientation package provided to new employees
Strive to find opportunities to get Forest Science mentioned in ministry-wide communications, such as Chief Forester newsletters

Responsiveness

The respondents consistently gave "responsiveness" the lowest satisfaction scores.

User comments suggest that "responsiveness" takes two forms:

- Responding to the Ministry's changing operational environment, including anticipating future research needs and shedding research areas that no longer directly support the Ministry's role (e.g. silviculture).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Relevance to the specific problems faced in other parts of the ministry, in particular regional and district operations.

Select Respondent Comments

“There seems to be nearly a complete lack of recent research available to meet our needs. There is a definite need for research on current issues facing the Forest Service.”

“There is a need to review the relevance of the program to the ministry's changing mandate and public concerns. There is a stronger need to be in the forefront in strategically identifying future trends and directing research efforts there, rather than just answering only yesterday's issues. For example, this ministry has known for many years about the potential issues - engos and public - regarding harvesting in the CDF. However, it appears that little, if any, research has been directed towards this issue, and now district and region staff are embroiled in operational issues with engos/ public/ other agencies, without the benefit of good science.”

“It is very important that the Forest Science Program become tailored to the needs of all forest management clients under the new FRPA model. The role that non-legal information will play in the new model will be very important which will require an appropriate response in terms of the Forest Science Program's goals and resources.”

“As the FRPA Stewardship world evolves, the MOFR will need independent research to validate achievement of the gov't's objectives.”

“This program should provide extension services relevant to field operations. Any other research that does not directly support this belongs outside the MoFR.”

“I feel they need to continue to re-evaluate their priorities to ensure they meet the evolving priorities of operations.”

Further analysis

Before being able to make specific recommendations as to what might improve responsiveness, it is necessary to take a closer look at how “responsiveness” is seen across the organization and compared to other driver elements.

The first thing to note is that satisfaction with “responsiveness”, although given the lowest scores, is still relatively high. Across the four areas of the Forest Science Program, “responsiveness” averaged satisfaction scores between 3.5 and 4.4 on a five-point scale.

Second, there were only two cases where either region or employment classes differed on the topic of responsiveness. Headquarters respondents gave higher satisfaction ratings on responsiveness to library services, while Executive were more satisfied with responsiveness of Training and Extension services than Senior Managers and Staff – and Senior Managers were more dissatisfied than Executive and Staff.

Third, and most importantly, other drivers appear to be more important in determining overall satisfaction scores. Although importance of the drivers was not specifically asked, it is possible to assess a driver's importance using "derived importance analysis", a regression modelling method that imputes the importance based on the strength of the relationship between the overall satisfaction score and the scores of the individual drivers.

For all four areas of the Forest Science Program, drivers other than "responsiveness" were found to be stronger predictor of overall satisfaction scores. The table below shows the ranking of the predictors of overall satisfaction, for each of the program areas.

Table 1: Ranking of drivers in predictive strength of "Overall Satisfaction"

Driver	Scientific Advice and Consultation	Training and Extension Services	Research Products	Library Services
	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
Accessibility to information and services	1	-	-	1
Credibility of information and services received	2	2	-	3
Accessibility of program staff	3	-	2	2
Responsiveness	4	3	3	4
Timeliness	-	1	1	-

Note: "-" indicates that the driver was excluded from the stepwise regression model. This does not indicate that the driver is not important to clients, but that it is of relatively less importance than the others.

The implication of this analysis is that while responsiveness has a low satisfaction rating, focussing on drivers other than responsiveness will have a greater impact on the overall satisfaction score. What the driver should be will depend on which area; for instance, for Scientific Advice and Consultation, an improvement in accessibility to both information and staff, as well as the credibility of the information, will have a greater impact on the overall satisfaction score than the same percentage improvement in responsiveness. At the same time, improvements in timeliness will have a greater impact on overall satisfaction with Training and Extension Services and Research Products.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Importance of Drivers

The current research in to client satisfaction focussed on the satisfaction levels. As noted above, it is possible to impute importance scores, but these may not be as accurate as a direct question on the topic.

In future iterations of client satisfaction surveying, it may be worthwhile to also measure the importance levels with the various satisfaction drivers. The satisfaction levels can then be compared with the importance assigned by the respondents, to identify where gaps between expectations (as defined in the importance question) and actual service experience (as defined in the satisfaction scale) may lie.

Employee Engagement

Empirical research is beginning to draw explicit links between levels of employee engagement and client satisfaction. The Forest Science Program is encouraged to examine the engagement levels of their staff, to identify strengths and potential areas of improvement.

BC Stats is currently conducting a cross-government employee engagement survey, and results will be forthcoming. The Ministry of Forest's Strategic Human Resources group will be the lead contact for in-depth analysis of the Ministry's results.