Overview
The NSW Rural Assistance Authority (the Authority) recognises the importance of excellence in customer service and is committed to improving the quality of the services it offers. Improving client and customer satisfaction is about identifying the needs of clients, ensuring that the service offered is relevant to those needs, and that the mode of delivery is appropriate for individual circumstances.

In pursuit of Improving Client and Customer Satisfaction the Authority is committed to:

- providing information about the types of financial assistance available
- assessing applications fairly and impartially
- under normal circumstances, making an initial decision within 28 days of receiving an application
- providing clear decisions
- keeping personal information confidential as required by law
- not discriminating against a client who has difficulty understanding English and, if necessary, providing access to a free interpreter or translator
- being honest, courteous and respectful at all times
- being available for inquiries from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays

Background
Improving customer satisfaction with government services is a major public sector reform introduced by Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) Memorandum M2010-11 - Improving Client and Customer Satisfaction with Public Services and remains a priority of the NSW Government under NSW 2021: A Plan to make NSW Number One.

This policy was originally developed following receipt of DPC Memorandum M2010-11 and has now been reviewed to reinforce principals implemented at that time.

Scope
This policy applies to all staff of the NSW Rural Assistance Authority.

Policy
1. There are four practical steps that the Authority can take to improve services to its customers, clients and consumers:
   a) Customer Feedback

      Having an accurate picture of what really matters to customers provides departments with a clear view of how well their services are operating, whether the services are meeting their objectives, and how to improve upon them.

      Areas of the public sector that benefit from seeking Customer feedback include:

Planning
- Helps identify and understand the needs, wants and expectations of customers; the quality of experience with public services; and the results that services have delivered for customers and the community.
- Informs departments of where there are gaps in service delivery.

**Service Delivery**

Helps services to become:
- Better targeted
- More relevant
- Easily accessible
- User friendly
- And reduce complaints; re-work and waste

**Service Evaluation and Innovation**

- Helps identify ways to improve and redesign services no longer meeting customer needs.
- Helps development of service innovations, including early intervention and prevention programs and new ways of delivering some services (for example, over the internet).

**Reporting**

- Provides data that can be reported by CEOs in their annual Performance Agreements.
- Helps departments measure and report on how well services are meeting customer needs and delivering on government commitments.

Obtaining customer feedback also demonstrates to the customer that service providers are listening to their views and experiences.

Communication between the customer and the departments also needs to convey that while the feedback is welcomed to better understand customer needs and provide relevant targeted and value added services, the delivery of public sector services also needs to be balanced with public interests such as regulating and protecting the community.

Detailed information on customer feedback techniques is provided by Department of Premier and Cabinet in: *Improving Customer Satisfaction with Government Services – Customer Feedback*.

b) **Redesign Services**

Services can be redesigned for many different reasons – to cut costs, to improve coordination with other services, or to meet emerging social, environmental and economic needs, for example.

Customer-focused service redesign delivers these results and more.

Service redesign will be improved if it is based on the views and experiences of:
- Customers who are currently using the service.
- Past customers who have used the service previously, but who are not currently using the service.
- People who are eligible to receive the service but who have not done so.
- Likely future customers.

Services that are redesigned to meet customer needs and to improve the service experience and service outcomes for customers commonly deliver greater customer satisfaction with the way the service is provided; better outcomes for customers; greater employee satisfaction; more effective services; reductions in costs, delays, waste, rework and congestion; and better economic, social and environmental outcomes for the community.
c) Customising Services

In general customers want services to be accessible; to be provided in a timely way, fairly and efficiently, in comfortable locations and by professional staff; and they want to be fully informed about the service.

However there is no general customer – all customers are different.

It is important that government services are customised to meet the needs of these different types of customers.

Customising services involves modifying how services are provided so they better meet the needs of individual customers.

The following provides practical suggestions on how to customise services – by making sure services are:

- Tailored – where services are provided in ways that involve customers from all backgrounds (irrespective of their socio-economic status, where they live etc).
- Equitable – where services are provided in ways that treat customers fairly (irrespective of their gender, age, cultural identity, level of disability etc).
- Personalised – where services give customers a choice in how the service is developed, provided and evaluated.

d) Supporting Frontline Employees

Modern public sectors rely more than ever on their frontline employees, the people who provide government services to the public.

Being a frontline employee is not easy – it involves balancing customer expectations for responsive and relevant services, department requirements to provide services efficiently and effectively, and their own personal needs to provide professional standard services to the public.

Furthermore, frontline employees cannot deliver quality services alone – they need a customer-focused culture, leadership, management and systems.

The benefits of supporting frontline employees are enormous:

- Increased customer satisfaction.
- Increased employee satisfaction, lower employee turnover, and reduced expenditure on recruitment and training.
- More efficient and effective services, with better outcomes for the people of NSW.

2. Tips to improve customer service:

- Listen. Take time to truly listen to what your customers say, and if they don’t volunteer information - ask for it.
- Don't be part of the ‘customer-run-around-refer-them-to-someone-else’ team. Be the one to get answers for your client, and get those answers in as timely a manner as possible.
- Develop a personal relationship with your customer. Treat your client as if he is a person.
- Make realistic promises - and be consistent. It is far better to promise something in a week and deliver in three days than the other way around.
- Be knowledgeable. Know the facts about the Authority’s products and services. Understand Authority policies. In addition, know as much about your client's business and needs as you can.
- Anticipate your client's needs. Take the extra step, and be ahead of your customer.
- If you are wrong, apologise.
• Pay attention to the obvious. Mind your manners. Use please and thank you. Be on time for meetings. Promptly return phone calls and e-mail messages.
• Look for ways to treat customers as you would like to be treated

How staff communicate with customers is just as important as what they communicate.

- **How are customers being greeted?** - Put them at ease and make them feel comfortable. This sets the tone for the rest of the transaction.
- **Demonstrate that your customers are valued** - Let them know you think they are important. Your sincerity makes them feel good about you and the organisation.
- **Ask how to help your customers** - Find out what they want. It is important that each customer encounter makes them feel satisfied.
- **Don’t challenge disgruntled customers** - Listen, reassure them that you’ll escalate or act on their complaint and follow through until resolution.
- **Help customers** - Help them get what they want. Make it easy for customers to locate or obtain the information they need. Answer their questions in a timely manner.

- Ask for feedback.
- Thank your clients for their business.

**Definitions**

**Customers** - members of the public who use public services. Depending on the type of service, customers may also be called clients, passengers, patients, visitors etc.

**Stakeholders** - people who have an interest in the service (its objectives, operation, funding and outcomes) but who do not directly use the service. They include groups such as the NSW Farmers Association, Local Land Services.

**Customer Feedback** – the process or specific instance of providing information to businesses about products, services and customer service.

**Related Policies**

- Code of Conduct
- Guarantee of Service
- Apologies
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult clients

**Procedures**

- Managing Unresolved Complaints
- Feedback received via the Authority Website

**Related Documents**

- NSW 2021: A Plan to make NSW Number One
- M2010-11 – Improving Client and Customer Satisfaction with Public Services – NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet – August 2010
- ISO 10002 – Customer Satisfaction, Complaints – Standards Australia
Revision History

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