Customer service is a core function of state government

**Highlights**

- **Prioritize excellence in customer service.**
- **Create and evaluate agency specific customer service objectives.**
- **Develop customer service based performance indicators.**
- **Require customer service based knowledge and skills for all agency staff.**

When you first meet someone, they may ask you: So, what do you do?” While you might answer with your job title, every state employee could respond with: “I work in customer service.” Customer service is a core function of state government and is inherent in every state agency mission.

Excellent customer service from state agencies builds public trust and confidence in state government. It also decreases overall agency risk. For example, one risk of poor customer service is the diversion of resources from key agency processes. When agency management has to address customer service deficiencies, core agency responsibilities may be impacted.

Excellent customer service makes good business sense and it’s what Minnesotans expect.

As agencies strive for continuous improvement in customer service, it’s wise to also build upon internal control infrastructure. You can do this with a few key actions.

Prioritize excellence in customer service. The control environment is the set of standards, processes, and structures that provide the basis for carrying out internal controls across the agency. Within the control environment, senior management establishes the “tone at the top.” When senior leaders communicate their expectations and value around excellence in customer service it helps staff align their work with this key agency priority.

Create and evaluate agency specific customer service objectives. Sound customer service objectives come from listening to customers. Consider implementing mechanisms to capture customer input when you create agency specific customer service objectives. Customers want to be heard and they want agencies to act on their input.

Identify and develop customer service based performance indicators. Performance indicators are a mechanism to investigate and analyze agency outcomes for specific customer service objectives. Monitoring performance indicators over time can help identify and assess agency risk.

Require customer service based knowledge and skills for all agency staff. Senior management defines the knowledge and skills needed to perform assigned tasks. Commit to customer service competence for all agency staff to strengthen your agency control environment.

**Suggested Action Steps:** Excellent customer service is a cost-effective and high impact strategy to achieve your agency mission and enhance internal controls. Consider how you can prioritize customer service in your daily work. Try focusing on one customer service skill each week: (1) Providing timely service responses; (2) Listening carefully to what customers are communicating; (3) Keeping your promises; (4) Being patient; and (5) Fixing mistakes; and (6) Putting yourself in “their shoes.”

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