

Are you getting the most out of your Customer Satisfaction Measurement Program?

GSA's Best Practices Study can help.

Last year, the General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services engaged Pacific Consulting Group to identify best practices currently in use for measuring customer satisfaction—in both government and private sectors—and to recommend collection techniques, tools, and metrics that best address the needs of different types of agencies. The resulting report, *Customer Satisfaction Measurement Best Practices Study*, provides guidance and insights to agencies interested in initiating or enhancing their cus-

tommer satisfaction measurement (CSM) programs, including recommendations on how to develop a meaningful program as well as how to use the results to develop a customer-driven improvement process.

The report was derived from interviews with knowledgeable managers in nine diverse private-sector companies, interviews with CSM practitioners in 20 federal agencies, and input from selected experts who provide CSM services. Below are some highlights of the study's findings.



Successful Customer Satisfaction Measurement Program Design

Companies and agencies that have been most successful select the feedback methods that will be most cost-effective in helping them achieve their customer satisfaction or business objectives; then they work hard to make sure that the ensuing data are used effectively. Therefore, the ultimate best practice is to focus on improvement—either customer satisfaction or business results—first, and then select the most appropriate measurement tools and techniques for achieving these goals. Successful organizations also recognize effective CSM as a dynamic process—adding, subtracting, or modifying data collection and analysis techniques as their needs and situations change over time.

The planning and design process is key. Critical decisions inherent in the successful design of a CSM program include:

- > Clarifying goals
- > Identifying the scope of the initiative
- > Determining survey type
- > Evaluating in-house resources vs. outsourcing
- > Focusing the scope of data analysis
- > Ascertaining data collection method(s)
- > Determining sample size and reporting needs

This research revealed that the ultimate best practice is focusing first on improvement and innovation and then selecting the most appropriate measurement tools and techniques for achieving your goals.

Participating Organizations

Private Sector

California State Automobile Association
Charles Schwab Corporation
Costco Wholesale Corporation
eBay
Intuit
Pacific Gas & Electric Company
Southwest Airlines
Vangent
Zappos.com

Public Sector

Department of Agriculture
Department of Commerce, Commercial Service
Department of Commerce, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, Next Generation Weather Radar
Department of Education, Federal Student Aid Information Center
Department of Energy, U.S. Energy Information Administration
Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife, National Wildlife Refuge System
Department of Justice
Department of Labor
Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration
Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service
Department of Veterans' Affairs, Web Communications
Environmental Protection Agency
General Services Administration, Federal Acquisition Services
General Services Administration, Office of Citizen Services and Communications, USA.gov, Web Best Practices Team
General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service
Office of Personnel Management, USAJOBS.gov
Social Security Administration
United States Postal Service, Business Service Network Group

Pacific Consulting Group specializes in the design and execution of actionable customer and employee research that helps create innovations to improve business performance. For more than 30 years, we've worked with public and private service organizations to accurately and effectively measure customer satisfaction and to translate survey results into easy-to-understand, directional findings that can drive management action.

To learn more or to discuss your organization's needs, contact Melanie Barton at PCG: 703.237.4939 or mbarton@pcgfirm.com.

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A Road Map to Success in Customer Satisfaction Programs

1. **Use executive support to establish the goal of continuous improvement.** Executive support opens doors and removes barriers. Engage an executive champion (or champions), preferably from senior management, to provide support and validity for customer-focused improvement throughout the organization.
2. **Understand the agency's objectives for its customers.** Every agency's goals differ; articulating them helps build consensus. Reflect upon the agency's overall mission and goals, and develop specific customer satisfaction measurement (CSM) research objectives: What is the agency measuring/improving, and which customers are pertinent?
3. **Understand customers' perspectives.** Customers may have a different understanding of issues than people inside the organization; the most accurate and useful customer feedback is obtained when surveys are framed to reflect their experience. Determine who the customers are; learn how they understand and acquire knowledge about the agency; and incorporate their perspective and language into surveys.
4. **Design and execute best-survey methodology.** One size does not fit all; the best methodology is based on an agency's unique objectives and resources. Determine resource availability and constraints to narrow the range of possible research methods. Determine what internal resources are available, and outsource survey activities where internal capacity is insufficient. Use easy-to-understand measurement to more readily gain support of executives.
5. **Create action plans to make improvements.** Measurement alone is not enough; engaging in customer research sets expectations that improvements will follow. Use survey results to prioritize improvement ideas. Determine who within the organization will be involved. Obtain a broad base of support, and engage all agency participants for buy-in and ownership at the start of the survey process.
6. **Take action to improve.** Specific improvement initiatives will energize those participating in CSM efforts. Move from measurement to action as quickly as possible to maintain momentum and continuity. Engage executive champions to help overcome inertia as a barrier to change. Pilot action projects to test specific improvement ideas when budget or resources are constrained or success is uncertain.
7. **Evaluate improvement effectiveness.** Determine if actions are actually making improvements or if changes are necessary. Employ follow-up surveys targeted to specific improvement initiatives. Then, develop an ongoing plan for repeating these steps to create a cycle of CSM and action to ensure constant improvement.

Other Key Findings

The FAQ section in the report provides detailed insight into some of the challenges agencies face in choosing a CSM approach—including dealing with OMB requirements—and promoting investment in customer service in their organizations. Questions addressed include:

- > *Do customer satisfaction ratings measure customer service?*
- > *Should performance ratings be based on customer satisfaction scores?*
- > *Why don't my customer satisfaction ratings change?*
- > *When does comparing survey scores make sense?*

The report also incorporates summaries of key themes from private and public sector interviews and examples of successful measurement approaches/improvement efforts and how leadership has effectively used CSM to drive improvements.

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