

Customer Service Initiative



Overview:

While government operates to serve the public and not to generate a profit, there are in fact some best practices that are transferable from the contemporary business world to government. Strategic alignment is one such practice. It is the alignment of leadership, management, recruitment, policy development, training and compensation behind a key strategic emphasis. The Customer Service Initiative is a shift to a strategic alignment emphasizing customer service. It is adapting a business approach to public service.

- The Customer Service Initiative is patterned after the private sector and the most progressive organizations in the public sector.
- While businesses seek customers in order to generate profit for shareholders, government *will* have customers because of the critical public services government provides. The question is: will those customers—the public—come away from their contact with government with a sense that government really has served them?

Benefits:

- Employee turnover costs money. When leaders, managers, and employees join together in a customer-service culture, they also consider themselves as internal “customers” and the emphasis is on teamwork, cooperation, civility, support, training, and recognition. Employees are happier and less likely to leave when they have the support to serve the public and are recognized for doing so.
- With the emphasis on customer service, customers become more attuned to the service they receive. *The best companies in the private sector are raising consumers’ expectations.*
- Tying pay to performance is an efficient and cost effective way to use the same or fewer dollars and reward strong performers for their contributions.

Implementation:

The strategy should be implemented on a gradual basis, with appropriate changes to the compensation structure.

1. The Court considers adopting the Customer Service Initiative for a strategic, county-wide emphasis on customer service.
2. Departments would “align” themselves with this strategy by identifying major areas of customer-service enhancement—technology, training, leadership, customer data collection and use. *This would require extensive teamwork because enhancements (especially technology) would span multiple departments.*
3. Human Resources would implement leadership, supervisory and front-line employee training programs in customer service and performance evaluations.
4. Job descriptions and performance evaluations for department heads and employees would emphasize customer service skills and accomplishments. Department heads and elected officials would certify that all merit and incentive awards are based on performance evaluations *with a customer service emphasis.*
5. For the fiscal year beginning right after the plan is adopted, the ideal scenario would be an across the board increase plus a merit step increase, using customer-service criteria as the basis for merit increases for department heads and employees.
6. The next fiscal year, lump-sum performance payments could be awarded based on evaluations.