

**A FRAMEWORK FOR
ADVANCING A CULTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE
IN HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**Prepared by the Child and Family Policy Institute of California
Under the auspices of the County Welfare Directors Association of California
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“Change is the only constant.”

Heraclitus

“With advances in technology and service delivery systems in other sectors, the public’s expectations of the Government have continued to rise. The Government must keep pace with and even exceed those expectations. Government must also address the need to improve its services, not only to individuals, but also to private and Governmental entities to which the agency directly provides significant services.”

**President Barack Obama
(Executive Order 13571)**

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This report was prepared by Beth Fife, Project Director, Customer Service and Culture Change Best Practices Project, Child and Family Policy Institute of California.

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Executive Summary

On January 1, 2014, key provisions of the Affordable Care Act become effective. Overnight, almost three million uninsured Californians will be required to have health insurance coverage and can receive government help to secure that coverage. For many of them, it will be the first time they seek assistance from county human services agencies. In anticipation of this, the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), with financial support from The California Endowment, sponsored the Customer Service and Culture Change Best Practices Project. The CWDA selected the Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) to conduct the project.

The purpose of the Customer Service and Culture Change Best Practices Project is to equip county human services agencies with best practice information which can be used as a framework for achieving the project's vision:

California county human services agencies will provide first class customer service to individuals seeking help under the Affordable Care Act and will enhance local agency culture to effectively promote health care coverage and access to vital human services for all eligible persons.

Project work began with the development of a baseline, identifying those features that currently shape the consumer's experience with local human services programs, the features that shape and maintain the culture of human services agencies, and the elements that define excellent customer service practice. The project team also examined customer service delivery in the public and private sectors within California and in other states. Case studies were conducted of successful culture change in government agencies. Finally, the project team surveyed some of the current theories and research concerning organizational culture change.

Information was collected through Internet research; interviews with key individuals; structured discussion groups with county representatives and community stakeholders; focus groups of customers, staff and advocates; and customer surveys. The project also convened county human services agency representatives and key stakeholders at a symposium to examine the components of successful customer service practice, the elements for achieving a culture of customer service, and strategies for their implementation.

Through examination of this information, a basic framework was developed from which county human services agencies can prepare individualized action plans. The goal is to enhance existing customer service practices to create a culture of customer service that will enable county human services agencies to achieve the project's vision.

This Framework is composed of ten Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service and eight Core Principles for Achieving Culture Change.

The ten Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service are:

1. **Engage leadership.** Enthusiastic, articulate and constant support for customer service enhancement must come from top management and exist throughout all levels of the agency.
2. **Identify the customer.** Determining who the internal and external customers are, is the first step to understanding what it is they need from the agency and how best the agency can provide it.
3. **Organize business around the customer's needs.** The agency should seek to design and refine business practice, within the agency's mission, to provide customers what they need in the manner they prefer.
4. **Empower staff.** Empowering front line staff with decision-making authority so they can resolve problems, improves morale and engagement, speeds service delivery, and enhances customer satisfaction.
5. **Set performance expectations.** Agencies should have clearly articulated customer service goals related to the speed with which services are delivered, the quality of the service, and satisfaction with the service. These goals provide the basis for developing specific, measurable performance standards.
6. **Train staff and management.** Train for both technical knowledge and people skills.
7. **Collect and monitor data that will drive performance.** Because people respond to what is tracked and measured, measure what is important to the customer and measure it regularly. This will drive employees to deliver excellent customer service.
8. **Continuously improve business processes.** Processes and procedures should be rigorously examined and streamlined to eliminate wasted activity; this should be done repeatedly.
9. **Consistently exceed expectations.** Even if the customer is not eligible for the benefits or services originally desired, he or she should feel that the process of interacting with the agency exceeded his or her expectations for those interactions from the beginning to the end of the experience.
10. **Celebrate, reward and recognize excellence.** Recognizing staff who deliver excellent customer service helps to reinforce desired behaviors and reiterate the agency's commitment to customer service.

The eight Core Principles for Achieving Culture Change¹ are:

1. **Establish an urgency for change.** Motivate employees at all levels to desire and work for change by convincing them that enhanced customer service is better than the status quo.
2. **Form a powerful leadership team with a champion.** The leadership team should be composed of key people in the agency who share an emotional commitment to enhancing customer service and possess the power to influence

¹ These core principles are based primarily on the research and theory of John P. Kotter. For more information, see Appendix 6.

others; the team champion should be the most passionate and committed member of the leadership team.

3. **Set the vision.** The vision statement should be simple, brief, and easily understood; it should embody the values that are at the core of excellent customer service.
4. **Communicate the vision energetically and frequently.** The vision and strategies must be communicated powerfully and energetically at every opportunity, incorporated in all aspects of the operation, and modeled by the leaders.
5. **Remove obstacles and erect supports.** Empower those working for change by quickly overcoming or removing obstacles of all types; build supports to facilitate the change process.
6. **Deliver immediate results.** Create immediate, short-term successes to continue forward momentum and consolidate support.
7. **Do not stop building on success.** Real change takes time; use each success as a springboard to the next.
8. **Embed the change.** Institutionalize the changes that have been achieved so that they become the new norm.

The Framework combines these Building Blocks and Core Principles into four stages of activity labeled: Get Ready, Get Set, Go!, and Lock It In.

Get Ready incorporates the actions needed to position the agency for change. (Building Block 1 and Core Principles 1 through 4.)

Get Set focuses on preparing the agency to implement customer service delivery enhancements. (Building Blocks 2 through 6.)

Go! is the stage when the agency is fully engaged in delivering excellent customer service. (Building Blocks 7 through 9 and Core Principles 5 through 7.)

Lock It In is the final stage when the agency acts to embed the changes into the culture of the agency. (Building Block 10 and Core Principle 8.)

Much has been accomplished by individual county human services agencies in recent years to enhance customer service. However, more can be done to improve service and enrich the overall customer experience. This Framework is offered as a starting point for the next phase in the campaign to advance a culture of service in health and human services. It defines how to create a culture of customer service and how to ensure its longevity by embedding that culture into the core of the agency's belief systems, behaviors, and structure. As expressed in the project's vision statement, the ultimate goal is that this culture of service will not stop with implementation of the Affordable Care Act, but will influence service delivery in every human services program that the agency provides.

Using this Framework, the first steps are to develop the strategy and plan for moving forward, seek the resources and technical assistance necessary to accomplish the goal, and overcome the challenges that lie ahead. The concepts and recommendations, as well as an overview of the project findings, are presented in the body of the report. That discussion is followed by six appendices which contain more complete information and illustration of the points raised.

This report provides the essential information needed to start down, or continue along the path. Each county's journey will necessarily differ, based on its starting point, local needs, and end goals.

Introduction

Government, in general, and health and human services agencies, in particular, are in a state of flux. Years of budget deficits and reductions coupled with increasing numbers of families and individuals requiring assistance have created a heightened emphasis on streamlining programs and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery systems. In the wake of so much fast-paced change, government agencies have at times been slower to acknowledge the value of enhancing customer service as a factor in improving their overall program performance. Recognizing this, the federal government acted in 2011 to make customer service a priority. President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13571--Streaming Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service, stating:

“With advances in technology and service delivery systems in other sectors, the public’s expectations of the Government have continued to rise. The Government must keep pace with and even exceed those expectations. Government must also address the need to improve its services, not only to individuals, but also to private and Governmental entities to which the agency directly provides significant services.”

Nowhere is this more critical than in implementing health care reform.

On January 1, 2014, provisions of the Affordable Care Act will both mandate health insurance for all adults and children, and provide this coverage to as many as 2.8 million² previously uninsured Californians. About 1.4 million of these newly insured are expected to qualify for Medi-Cal (California’s Medicaid program). An estimated 1.2 million will receive subsidies to purchase coverage under “California Covered,” the new health insurance exchange. What this means for county human services agencies is an influx of new customers to serve and major changes in how customers apply for and are determined eligible for services. Many of these new customers will be completely unfamiliar with county human services agency practices and programs.

In preparation for this, CWDA sponsored the Customer Service and Culture Change Best Practices Project to be conducted by the CFPIC under a grant from The California Endowment. Its purpose was to examine how to create a stronger, more effective, culture of customer service within local human services agencies. It was envisioned that the project would identify best practice information that can be used as a framework by county human services agencies to achieve first class customer service for individuals seeking help under the Affordable Care Act and to enhance local agency culture in order to effectively promote health care coverage and access to vital human services for all eligible persons.

² Source: August 23, 2012, presentation to the California Health Exchange Board on the Health Benefit Exchange Service Center Recommendation.

Project Methodology

By design, the Customer Service and Culture Change Best Practices Project engaged a broad array of participants. The project was organized into three committees: a Leadership Team, an Advisory Group, and a Steering Committee. The Leadership Team was the working group. Its primary role was to identify and collect relevant information by conducting interviews of key informants, assisting with focus groups, and drawing on the expertise of the members and of their colleagues in other counties. The Leadership Team was composed of 18 individuals representing 15 counties. The Advisory Group was established to offer specific advice and suggestions to guide research and to provide a sounding board, reviewing and commenting on findings. The 24 members of the Advisory Group represented a diverse group of stakeholder entities, including customer advocacy groups, labor organizations, state government agencies, and statewide associations. The third committee, the five-member Steering Committee, was composed of representatives from CWDA, the counties, and CFPIC. It functioned to provide general direction in project planning, strategy and execution; to review and comment on work products; and to act as project champion, providing access to critical stakeholder groups and encouraging their participation. (For a complete list of the individuals and organizations involved in all three committees, refer to the “Acknowledgments” section of this report.)

The project's work plan was to identify features that shape the consumer's experience with local human services programs, as well as those features that shape and maintain the culture of human services agencies. In the process, it was envisioned that the project would examine successful culture change in government agencies and would consider customer service practices and experience in both the public and private sectors within California and in other states. The project would then identify those key elements of customer service best practices that could serve as a framework for county human services agencies and develop practical recommendations for achieving organizational culture change and customer service excellence.

To accomplish this, information was collected through a variety of means. This included Internet research; individual interviews with key informants; structured discussion groups with county representatives and community stakeholders; focus groups of customers, staff and advocates; and customer surveys. The research was conducted in the last half of 2012. On January 16, 2013, the project convened 158 county human services agency representatives and key stakeholders at a symposium to examine the elements of successful customer service practice and core principles for achieving a culture of customer service, as well as strategies for their implementation. This report synthesizes the information compiled through this research and the symposium. It summarizes the key findings and provides a vision and recommendations for customer service enhancement and culture change that can facilitate implementation of health care reform at the local level in 2014 and beyond.

Setting the Baseline

Before determining how to move forward, it is important to take note of the starting point. First, what is the baseline? That is: How do California's county human services agencies interact with and serve their customers? How do customers perceive they are being treated? What are the staff's perspectives? What have counties already put in place to improve service delivery? Second, what has been tried successfully in the past or in other venues that can inform this process of moving toward a culture of customer service? To answer these questions, data was collected about current county human service agency practices and facilities, and about recent customer service enhancements. Focus groups of customers, first line supervisors and line staff were held. (See Appendix 1 for a summary of focus group responses.) A customer survey was also conducted. (See Appendix 2 for customer survey findings.) In addition, successful examples of organizational culture change were examined using information gathered through structured interviews and Internet searches.

Given the diversity of the state's 58 counties, it is difficult to describe a "typical" California county or county experience. Counties range from very large to very small in both geographic size and population numbers. Population clusters vary from urban to rural. While all counties have diverse ethnic populations, concentrations of ethnic groups differ by county, as do requirements to provide translation services for non-English speaking customers in as many as 14 different languages. Moreover, because California is a county-administered state, county government agencies operate in conformance with state law and regulation, but report to locally elected Boards of Supervisors. Despite these differences, county human services agencies administer human services programs under the same federal and state mandates. Delivery systems vary in the details, but all share the same basic processes and requirements.

Factors That Shape the Customer Experience

Understanding how county human services agencies interact with and serve their customers helps identify those features that are most influential in shaping the customer's experience with these programs. Drawing from the collective experience of the project team, from customer surveys, and from customer and staff focus groups, the following factors were perceived as having the most impact, both positive and negative, on customer service in the human services arena. They are: staff, case practice, use of technology, the physical plant, and limitations of federal and state program rules.

Staff:

Person-to-person interactions create the strongest influence on how customers perceive their experience with the human services agency. As reported on the customer survey, "friendly, knowledgeable staff" was considered the single most important factor in making sure the customer has a positive experience with the county. A positive interaction can encourage an individual to be more tolerant and understanding about

lesser inconveniences, inadequacies, and mistakes. A genuinely negative interaction can enrage and frustrate customers to the extent that nothing the agency does is good enough to satisfy them. The quality and tone of interactions can vary greatly, as customer survey responses indicate: "I am comfortable with the treatment I was given. It was friendly, by the people that assisted me." "The workers at the windows are rude to some people.... It's like they can't wait to leave. I don't want to be looked at with less dignity..." One customer voiced the importance of positive interactions by saying, "We, the clients, would prefer not to have to apply. I'm sure if we are all greeted positively it does make a huge difference on those of us who have to be here. After all without us, the clients, there would be no need for these services."

Staff knowledge and training are just as critical. Whether staff are equipped and empowered to fully resolve a customer's problem or question upon their first contact with the agency will determine the speed with which work can be concluded and the level of confidence the customer has with the staff assisting him or her. A lack of confidence or empowerment engenders frustration and causes some customers to seek additional assistance from supervisors and managers.

Case Practice:

County case practice, including the efficiency, speed and personal connection with which services are delivered, can positively or negatively affect the individual's perception of customer service. Customers can choose various pathways to submit an application for service, including in person, by phone, by mail or online. Counties use various practices to structure their workforce and address customer needs, ranging from the traditional case-based system in which one worker manages a case through the entire process, to the task-specific system in which each worker has responsibility for a specific aspect of intake or case management. Irrespective of the system employed, how well paper is handled can and does impact customers. When customers have paperwork lost, for example, it is frustrating, slows the process, and creates more work for everyone.

Use of Technology:

The use of technology can impact the customer's experience with the human services agency both directly as the customer interacts with the technology, and indirectly as county staff use technology in the course of determining eligibility and delivering services. California's counties have much technology at their disposal. Each county uses one of three, fully integrated systems known collectively as the Statewide Automated Welfare System (SAWS).³ Counties joined together in consortia to develop these SAWS systems to support the state's human assistance programs by providing counties with eligibility determination, case maintenance, and reporting functions for

³ The Los Angeles Eligibility Automated Determination, Evaluation, and Reporting System (LEADER) operates exclusively in Los Angeles County. The Consortium IV (C-IV) operates in 39 counties, while the CaWORKs Information Network (CaWIN) serves the remaining 18 counties.

Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and CalWORKs. All three systems have made significant progress in the past few years adding self-service functionality, including online applications and the ability for customers to look up information and provide updates.

Over time, features have been added that can alleviate lobby traffic, reduce lines, and ensure faster customer service. While their use varies by county, technological innovations have been put in place, such as document scanning, document upload kiosks which permit customers to turn in verifications without being seen by a worker, and the availability of computers with Internet access in county offices for customers to search for jobs and prepare electronic applications. While all counties use document imaging, not all counties have imaged all past records. Importantly, county staff is available for in-person help for users of these technologies. Examples of other differences include the use by some counties of instant messaging, as well as the use in some counties of automated appointment and check-in systems, and electronic forms.

Other technological advances that can significantly impact the customer's experience with the human services agency are the locally consolidated telephone service center or call center with Interactive Voice Response (IVR)⁴ and Automatic Call Distribution (ACD)⁵ systems. As of this writing, 24 counties operate service or call centers. Six additional counties are planning to implement centers before pre-enrollment begins for health care coverage under the Affordable Care Act on October 1, 2013. The SAWS Consortia are each developing a network of county service centers within their consortia to receive call transfers from the Covered California Service Center for Medi-Cal eligibility determination.

It should be noted that technology is inherently neither good nor bad. Depending on how it is constructed and used, it can speed up and smooth out processes or it can frustrate customers and staff. For example, electronic applications save customers time and trouble by avoiding a trip to the county office. However, some customers find electronic applications hard to use and understand. It is interesting to note that responses on the customer survey indicated a relatively low degree of comfort using the phone, fax, mail or Internet to apply for benefits or send documents. However, about 75 percent of all customers supported having those options available.

Physical Plant:

The physical condition, cleanliness, layout, furnishings, and location of county offices shapes the customer's initial and ongoing experience with the human services agency. Based on responses to the customer survey, customers take note of these items. They

⁴ As defined in an inTelegy Corporation white paper titled "A Needs-Based Service Delivery Model for Health & Human Services--Shifting from a Case-Based to Needs-Based Client Experience," IVR provides telephone callers "...the ability to select prerecorded information options such as office location, hours of operation and online application information."

⁵ An ACD system routes incoming calls to the correct program group and, if needed, places the call into a queue for the next available staff person.

report that dirty or unkempt areas make them feel devalued. Counties have made choices that at times emphasize security over comfort, such as armed guards, bullet-proof glass, and metal detectors. Some offices have uncomfortable or inadequate lobby seating options. Others take a different approach, providing an open, airy office displaying wall art by local artists. Also important is the location of county offices and satellite offices with respect to public transportation, isolated rural areas, and the co-location of county services and programs frequently used by customers.

Limitations of Federal and State Program Rules:

Existing federal and state human services program rules are generally not customer friendly. They define the circumstances under which an individual is ineligible using terminology that is often blunt. To illustrate, in the Medi-Cal program the term "failure to provide" is used when an applicant does not provide necessary material. "Failure" carries the negative connotation of being deficient or lacking. A better, more accurate term might be "did not provide." Although a certain amount of interpretive license exists as counties implement state and federal rules, by their nature, the rules restrict independent judgment and flexibility for agency staff. They establish customer reporting and verification requirements which some consider to be overly burdensome. Moreover, emphasis in past years on restricting program waste, fraud, and abuse, coupled with high caseloads and federal and state rules focused primarily on determining if a customer is ineligible for the services he or she requested, have made it harder for staff to routinely look for all benefits for which the customer may be eligible.

County Customer Service Enhancements:

In response to repeated budget and staff reductions, and ever increasing numbers of families and individuals needing assistance, county human services agencies have continued to seek ways to improve efficiency and speed up service delivery. Some counties have made improving customer service a priority, implementing different types of customer service enhancements. Examples of these include establishing call centers and service centers, employing "lobby ambassadors" to greet incoming customers and triage customers' needs, offering "same day intakes," conducting customer and staff satisfaction surveys, and so on. Additional practices that may be transferable to California's counties can be found in other public and private sector arenas as well. For descriptions of these California county human services agency best practices, as well as some examples of customer service best practices implemented by other organizations, see Appendix 3.

What Drives Organizational Culture?

Organizational culture is a collection of attitudes, beliefs and assumptions about the organization itself, its work, and the customers it serves. These permeate all levels of the organization from the leadership to the line worker. They are readily transmitted to newly hired staff and persistently passed on from one "generation" of staff to the next.

These attitudes, beliefs and assumptions affect not only how work is performed, but also how individuals interact within the organization, with outside colleagues, and, most importantly, with customers.

The first questions to examine when charting a course for enhancing an existing organizational culture are: What forces shape and maintain organizational culture? Which of these are the most influential? These questions were put to the participants at the January 16, 2013, Symposium, "Advancing a Culture of Service in Health and Human Services." The following is a sample of their responses identifying those forces that they believe to be the most influential in shaping and maintaining organizational culture. (For more information, see Appendix 4.)

- Leadership's attitudes, behaviors, priorities, degree of engagement and motivation, tolerance for innovation, etc.
- Politics and political priorities.
- Funding decisions.
- Official mission, vision and values statements.
- Established policies, protocols, rules, and law governing the programs.
- The selection of what gets measured, rewarded and punished.
- Organizational structure.
- Traditions, rituals and practices.
- Political and regional needs of the community the agency serves.
- Community expectations and reputation of the agency; media coverage.
- Labor union influence.
- Subtleties of language used (e.g., use of the term "client" versus "customer")

Case Studies in Culture Change

Because of its intangible nature, complexity and pervasiveness, it is difficult to change a culture. Traditions in thought and actions are hard to modify. The success of any organizational culture change is evidenced both by the behaviors of the organization and its workforce, and by the continuance of those changed behaviors over time.

Much can be learned about achieving successful culture change from the experience of others. What follows is a discussion of the lessons learned from examining two case studies in culture change. The first case study is of California's highly successful implementation of the CalWORKs program in the late 1990's. The second is a study of another state's efforts to implement a statewide customer service program that produced initial success, but abruptly lost momentum. (For a complete description of these two case studies, see Appendix 5.) Additional insights are provided by the example of New York City's implementation of their own customer service initiative in 2008. (For additional information on the New York City example, see Appendix 3.)

Implementation of CalWORKs:

Implementation in 1997 of CalWORKs, California's version of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, dramatically altered the old vision and paradigm of public assistance. Defining its primary goal as helping recipients achieve self-sufficiency, the new program set time limits on the receipt of aid, established stronger work requirements, and required that recipients be provided supports to enable them to obtain employment. The old expectation that welfare recipients would be able to secure employment and permanently exit welfare on their own with only minimal support proved to be in error as some became essentially long-term, almost generational, recipients of cash assistance. This was replaced by the new expectation that recipients would receive temporary support to help move them along the path to self-sufficiency. This new approach required workers to develop a more holistic view of each family's circumstances to determine what services were needed. This also required government to collaborate more closely with community partners to design those services. State law specifically mandated that all involved stakeholders have a seat at the table while developing the CalWORKs program at both the state and county levels. It also altered the relationship between the state and counties. By affording counties the flexibility to design their own welfare-to-work programs to better suit local needs, the state stepped back from its prior position of trying to enforce uniformity among counties. Instead of "approving" the details of individual county CalWORKs plans, the state's role was to "certify" that those plans were in conformance with the parameters established in law.

All this required an unprecedented amount of communication and collaboration. This started with the development and enactment of enabling state legislation involving the Governor, the state Legislature, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and other state departments, CWDA and the counties, advocates, academia, etc. It continued through the development of individual county plans and, finally, through their implementation. Numerous work groups, hearings and meetings were held. Communication with customers and their advocates was crucial. Public awareness campaigns were conducted. Hot lines were established. Communication and coordination among management and staff within agencies, and among state and county agencies and external stakeholder networks was equally essential.

Active, committed leadership was key to the success of CalWORKs. Top leadership at both the state and county levels made implementation of CalWORKs their priority. This was evidenced by the Governor's personal involvement in framing the state law. Making CalWORKs implementation the priority was clearly stated by the CDSS Director and publicly repeated over and over again by CDSS executive staff and management. In the same fashion, CWDA, County Boards of Supervisors, executive officers and high level managers were fully engaged and vocal about the importance of successful implementation within their own venues.

Development and implementation of this new program model resulted in major organizational changes at both the state and county levels. Departments were reorganized. Functions were consolidated. Program staff who needed to coordinate were co-located. New organizational entities were created. Roles were redefined for some functions. New positions were created. At the state level, CDSS created new executive level positions called "Regional Advisors." Their role was to help counties quickly get information to and from the department, resolve critical issues that involved multiple CDSS divisions and other state agencies, and remove barriers. At the county level, caseloads were restructured and intake procedures and case processing sequences were changed to incorporate employment services earlier. Some contracts were cancelled as work was shifted back to county government. Some public offices were transformed into one-stop-shops where customers could receive key, linked services at one location instead of having to apply to various programs in different offices. The look and feel of many welfare offices were transformed to resemble employment offices, influencing how customers and staff perceived their new roles, each other, and the program. An employment office environment reinforced the change that having a job was no longer just a factor that affected the customer's eligibility for cash assistance, but it was, in fact, the critical milestone toward achieving self-sufficiency.

Performance measures were developed under contract with the research and university community to evaluate program success at the state level. Individual metrics were monitored by counties and ad hoc reports were developed to examine specific features. Because of its success, CalWORKs earned federal, TANF High Performance Bonus payments as one of the top ten performing states in the nation. These awards totaled over \$157 million in 1999 through 2005⁶. By all accounts, CalWORKs was deemed a success that continues to this day.

A Statewide Initiative That Stalled

More recently, the governor of a different state⁷ declared his intent that his state would provide the best customer service of any in the country. He ordered the creation of an organization dedicated to customer service within the governor's office to oversee the transformation on three levels: speeding up service delivery, creating an organizational culture of customer service, and improving access to services. Implementation focused on six main areas. Agencies were required to produce customer service improvement plans and commit to achieving specific, numeric performance goals as part of their three-year strategic planning process. Agencies were to embrace continuous improvement by embedding Lean Management⁸ improvement strategies into agency

⁶ Source: <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/res/pdf/calhist/HPBNov05.pdf>> accessed February 22, 2013.

⁷ The particular state is not identified because the initiative discussed was the priority of a previous governor's administration and not the current administration.

⁸ Lean Management, in its simplest form, involves evaluating business processes from the perspective of the customer; separating tasks or activities that meet the customer's needs (value) from those that do not (non-value); and making changes to eliminate or reduce the activities that do not meet the customer's needs. Ideally, this is repeated until all non-value activity is eliminated.

operations. A customer focused employee culture was established through mandated training, ongoing communication, and incorporating customer service into performance appraisals. Call center performance was improved. A new toll free telephone line was initiated to triage and transfer calls. And, finally, the state began to measure service quality and employee satisfaction using statewide metrics and standardized survey tools. These improvements were supported by significant organizational changes.

Within three years, data indicated that both customer and employee satisfaction had increased substantially. However, in the following two years significant events occurred as a new governor with different priorities assumed office. The specialized office of customer service was moved out of the governor's office and its mission severely narrowed. A poor economy forced broad budget cuts that reduced the customer service budget and staffing, and caused parts of the initiative to be abandoned. Because statewide customer and staff satisfaction surveys were no longer conducted, it is impossible to quantify the impact these changes had on customer service performance. Anecdotal information indicated that the statewide initiative was essentially stalled and, in some cases, reversed.

New York City's Customer Service Initiative:

In 2008, the Mayor of New York City created a citywide customer service initiative. The Mayor established his own Customer Service Office to organize and oversee dozens of individual initiatives. All were based on a set of key strategies: demonstrating support from the top; establishing and publicizing performance standards and metrics; conducting observations and inspections to assess performance and identify gaps; securing customer input, initially through a citywide baseline survey, and later through annual, agency-specific surveys; celebrating and rewarding employees for customer service excellence; and providing communication tools, training and other resources aimed at achieving excellent customer service. This initiative has generated a number of successful customer service enhancements. Its momentum continues unabated.

Insights:

All of these case studies and examples share a number of key features that are credited by those involved in their implementation with having a powerful influence on their success. These common features are:

- Strong political leadership and active, visible engagement at the highest levels, both initially and ongoing.
- Establishing a clear and consistent vision that is expressed by the entire leadership chain and reinforced at every opportunity.
- Communicating with and engaging all stakeholders, including customers; collecting their feedback and acting on it.

- Organizational structures that support implementation and continuance of the initiative, such as a highly placed office responsible for overseeing the change and specialized, dedicated positions.
- Establishing metrics and tracking performance.
- Recognizing, celebrating and rewarding staff performance.

Additional lessons learned include:

- The importance of language in expressing the vision or message should not be underestimated. How the message for change is communicated can either motivate or offend; it should not sound like criticism of the old way of doing things.
- It is helpful to establish venues where community partners, customers, other stakeholders and the public can express concerns and pose questions.
- It is essential to keep the momentum by producing solid work with obvious, immediate results. This keeps attention on the project and reinforces the commitment to continue.
- Employing a continuous improvement regimen is beneficial to streamlining program processes.
- When engineering change across large and diverse organizations, individual agency differences need to be acknowledged; agencies need to be allowed flexibility in the details of implementing the change.
- Whenever monitoring slows down, performance is affected. It is critical to keep the focus on measuring performance.
- It takes time to transition from successful implementation to institutionalization of the new culture. Continuance of the new culture can erode quickly once the priority shifts away from it.
- Both empowering staff with information and the latitude to design their own work, and, then, celebrating successes with staff can be powerful motivators.
- In order to improve customer service it is necessary to improve employee satisfaction and morale at the same time. Staff needs to feel valued before they can engage and give good customer service.
- Mandated training for all managers and staff helps ensure full penetration of the vision, goals and skills.

The Vision Going Forward

As California's local human services agencies prepare to implement the Affordable Care Act, their vision moving forward is:

California county human services agencies will provide first class customer service to individuals seeking help under the Affordable Care Act and will enhance local agency culture to effectively promote health care coverage and access to vital human services for all eligible persons.

This vision statement has two parts. First, it establishes the commitment to provide customer service at a level of excellence for persons served under the Affordable Care Act. Because implementation of the key provisions of the Affordable Care Act is mandated by January 2014, this is a relatively immediate goal. The vision then broadens this commitment over the longer term to raise county human services organizational culture to a higher level that can be even more effective in ensuring appropriate access to essential supports across all human services programs, including health, nutrition, work support and cash assistance. Raising the overall level of local agency culture includes enhancing customer service, internally and externally, throughout the local human services agency.

In the context of human service programs, "first class" or excellent customer service entails delivering these services accurately, consistently, efficiently, equitably, timely, and respectfully (with cultural and linguistic sensitivity) so that the customer's satisfaction with the process meets or exceeds his or her expectations from the point of first contact with the agency throughout the customer's experience with that agency. This is true even if the customer did not receive the program outcome originally desired.

These components of excellent customer service apply not only to the treatment of individuals seeking services from the agency. They also apply to the treatment of staff within the agency, and to interactions with other colleagues and partners outside the agency.

"Culture" in this context is defined as a pattern of attitudes, beliefs and assumptions about the agency, its work, and customers that are generally shared by all levels of the agency workforce and transmitted to incoming staff. These attitudes, beliefs and assumptions affect how work is performed and how individuals interact with colleagues, customers and stakeholders.

Once established in organizations, habitual thinking and ways of acting are difficult, but not impossible, to alter. Culture change is evidenced by the behaviors of the organization and its workforce. Successful culture change is defined by the continuance of changed behaviors over time.

A Framework for Advancing a Culture of Customer Service

As previously described, there is tremendous diversity among California's counties. It is impossible to prescribe a single model for advancing a culture of customer service among all 58 California county human services agencies. Instead, a framework of guiding principles can act as a foundation from which counties may develop individualized, locally responsive, action plans.

What follows is a framework that can help local human services agencies advance a culture of first class customer service. It describes ten Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service and eight Core Principles for Achieving Culture Change. This framework was developed from the information collected about current research findings and theory, best practice performance, case studies of agency experiences, and individual perspectives. Information was gathered through Internet research, individual interviews, structured discussion groups, focus groups, customer surveys, and the project's January 16, 2013, Symposium, "Advancing a Culture of Service in Health and Human Services." (See Appendix 4 for a description of the discussion points examined in the symposium.)

Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service

Excellent customer service means assisting the customer so he or she is satisfied with the experience, whether the customer is a person seeking services from the agency, working for the agency or working with the agency. In short, the Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service seek to enable the agency to meet customer expectations.

What are those expectations? To paraphrase a successful California Department of Managed Health Care customer service training program (described in Appendix 3), customers want a prompt resolution of their problem or request. They want to be approached with a friendly attitude, courteous manner, and confident professional demeanor. They expect knowledgeable service. They do not want to be subjected to delays. They want to feel valued. They want respect.

In separate meetings, the project's Advisory Group and the participants at the project's symposium discussed the characteristics of excellent customer service that would be necessary to meet those expectations. Below is a sample of the characteristics that were identified. (For more information, see Appendix 4.)

- Fast, accurate, consistent, timely, and fair service.
- Respectful treatment.
- Staff that interact calmly with courtesy, professionalism, and empathy.
- Staff that communicate clearly.
- Empowering customers by providing transparency about the process; sharing with them where they are in the process and what their options are so they have a sense of control.
- Making realistic commitments

- Sufficient number of staff.
- Knowledgeable, well trained staff.
- Easy access to both offices and case workers.
- Hospitable office environment that is welcoming, attractive, and easy for the customer to navigate within.
- and fulfilling them.
- Asking customers to "tell their story" only once.
- Securing customer feedback on service delivery.
- Measuring performance.
- Continuously improving processes.

Understanding the range of what customer service entails, how does an agency enhance its performance to the level of excellence? The following is a description of ten Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service.

1. Engage leadership.

There is no substitute for enthusiastic, articulate and constant support for customer service enhancement from top management. That said, commitment at all levels of the management team is equally important. According to HowTo.Gov⁹, "Your leadership team must provide vision, inspiration, and governance to ensure your customer experience goals move from concept to reality. A Customer Experience Officer can help to integrate these goals into your organization's strategic priorities. Leaders need to articulate and enforce high standards for exceptional customer service." In addition, leaders need to model behavior that exemplifies and promotes excellent customer service. They need to aggressively monitor progress and make adjustments to support customer service goals. They also need to encourage innovation, allowing staff to propose and test alternatives. Finally, leaders need to manage resources (money, people, technology, etc.) to support achieving customer service goals. As indicated in all the case studies previously discussed, leadership engagement was crucial to successful implementation, both initially and over time. In one case study, the abrupt reduction of leadership commitment, starting from the top, triggered retreat from hard-won successes.

2. Identify the customer.

It is important to note that the "customer" is not just the person seeking human services from the agency. Agency staff, colleagues in other agencies, and community partners of all types also can be considered customers of the agency. For instance, to advance the work of the entire organization, the agency's information technology office should provide excellent customer service to other agency offices just as a caseworker should provide first class customer service to members of the public. Specific customer service standards and expectations need to be built with this in mind. Identifying who these

⁹ HowTo.Gov is the website of the United States General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies. Information for this report was accessed through <<http://www.howto.gov/customer-service/models/customer-experience-model>> on October 7, 2012.

internal and external customers are, is the first step to understanding what it is they need from the agency and how best the agency can provide it.

3. Organize business around the customer's needs.

Organizing business around the customer's needs means setting customer-centered goals and aligning business practice to achieve them. To do this the agency must identify what its customers need that is within the mission of the agency to provide. The agency needs to also learn how the customer wants to exchange information and receive services (e.g., in-person, telephone, online, etc.), as well as which services are the most critical to the customer. This information should come primarily from the customer, although the insights of the staff that serve them can be equally helpful. Feedback can be collected through conducting surveys and interviews, tracking questions and complaints arising from regular business interactions, monitoring performance metrics, and so on. Because customer needs and preferences are dynamic, feedback should be regularly collected and evaluated to help the agency adjust appropriately. The agency should seek to design and refine business practice, within the agency's mission, to provide customers what they need and in the manner they prefer.

As stated by HowTo.Gov, it is important to manage customer expectations by distinguishing for customers those services that are within the agency's mission from the services the agency cannot provide. This is especially relevant when agency programs are closely aligned with programs administered by other organizations. Educating customers and helping them access the right programs are essential customer services.

4. Empower staff.

Researchers Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer studied the "inner work lives" of employees at seven companies. They concluded that "...people are more creative and productive when they are deeply engaged in their work, when they feel happy, and when they think highly of their...organizations."¹⁰ Staff empowerment fosters engagement; engagement results in better performance and higher morale. Wendi Pomerance Brick, keynote speaker at the January 16, 2013, Symposium, "Advancing a Culture of Service in Health and Human Services", lists empowering staff as the third element in her model for creating a culture of customer service.¹¹ In her presentation, Brick discussed the value of pushing decisions as much as possible to the front line level and removing layers of decision-making so long as the team is "calibrated" through training. This means that every member of the team operates from the same knowledge base and all act consistently. Brick asserted that allowing staff to

¹⁰ Quotation was taken from "The Progress Principle: Optimizing Inner Work Life to Create Value" by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer published in Rotman Magazine, Winter 2012.

¹¹ For more information, see The Science of Service: Six Essential Elements for Creating a Culture of Service in the Public Sector by Wendi Pomerance Brick. CoCo Publishing, 2010.

use independent judgment builds loyalty, energizes and motivates staff, fosters learning, and improves performance. From the perspective of the customer, empowering front line staff with decision-making authority so they can resolve problems speeds service delivery and engenders customer confidence in the process.

5. Set performance expectations.

Agencies should have clearly articulated customer service goals related to the speed with which services are delivered, the quality of the service, and satisfaction with the service. Based on the information collected from customers, counties and other stakeholders, the following is a sample of customer service goals for California's county human services agencies to consider:

- Provide timely and efficient service.
- Deliver accurate and consistent information.
- Provide respectful, equitable and consistent treatment across all channels of interaction (e.g., in-person, telephone, etc.).
- Ensure customers understand the current status of their case, what needs to happen next, and what the customer can do to facilitate the process.
- Ensure public offices are welcoming and hospitable with appropriate accommodations for children.

Once established, customer service goals provide the basis for developing specific, detailed and measurable performance standards (metrics) defining how staff and management should interact with both internal and external customers. Performance standards should be public knowledge. Staff and management should be fully aware of what is expected of them. Customers should know how they can expect to be treated. Standards should be written, quantifiable, and unambiguous so their meaning is universally understood. As concluded by private industry leaders at the White House Forum on Modernizing Government held on January 14, 2010, "Service standards (e.g., call wait times and claims processing times) should be clearly defined and publicly available. This definition helps motivate employees and helps manage customer expectations. When service standards cannot be met, customers must be informed--a non-negotiable best practice in the private sector."¹²

Performance expectations should be reinforced continuously. This can occur at many points, including written and verbal communications between management and staff,

¹² On January 14, 2010, the White House convened a gathering of 50 CEOs from private industry, Cabinet Deputy Secretaries, labor union leadership, and senior White House staff to discuss private sector best practices on technology and customer service that could be employed by the Federal government. This quotation was taken from the paper titled "White House Forum on Modernizing Government: Overview and Next Steps," dated March 2010. It was accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/modernizing_government/ModernizingGovernmentOverview.pdf> on October 2, 2012.

management reports, agency goal statements, contracts with outside entities, staff and management performance evaluations, business problem solving discussions, etc.

6. Train staff and management.

At some point, every discussion of customer service identifies the need for staff and management to possess strong technical knowledge and sound people skills. Emphasis should be placed on developing both aspects through formal and informal training and mentoring. Staff and management should be trained to understand the agency's specific customer service performance expectations and metrics for measuring performance, so they know what they need to do to succeed and how that will be evaluated. They also need to be motivated and excited about their roles in fulfilling the agency's mission and delivering outstanding customer service, even if they serve in an internal support function. Participants at the White House Forum on Modernizing Government emphasized that "Agency leadership must communicate the importance of customer service and ensure that even employees without direct customer-facing activities understand how their work serves customers."¹³

7. Collect and monitor data that will drive performance.

There are two axioms to follow when monitoring customer service performance: Measure what is important to the customer. Measure it regularly.

Whether collected from surveys or statistics, the purpose of performance measurement is to identify how well the agency is performing and what the customer thinks of its performance. Measuring performance also helps to pinpoint where improvements can be made. The challenge is to identify those metrics that are performance drivers, linked to the agency's mission and customer service goals. To quote HowTo.Gov, "Employee behaviors will be shaped by the metrics you implement, since people will pay attention to things that are tracked and reported 'up the chain'. Measure things that encourage employees to deliver a great customer experience."¹⁴ For instance, metrics can collect data on such things as how easy it was for the customer to complete a required step, whether the customer's problem was resolved on the first contact with the agency, whether information given was accurate, and so on. Once a problem area is identified, metrics can be targeted to those areas to track the success of improvements initiated. Metrics should also identify trends that can forecast problems in advance so adjustments can be made to mitigate or prevent them.

¹³ This quotation was taken from the paper titled "White House Forum on Modernizing Government: Overview and Next Steps," dated March 2010, accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/modernizing_government/ModernizingGovernmentOverview.pdf> on October 2, 2012.

¹⁴ This quotation was taken from <<http://www.howto.gov/customer-service/models/customer-experience-model/exceed-expectations>>, accessed on October 7, 2012.

HowTo.Gov offers this checklist to test the quality of a metric. "Does each metric:

- Support customer needs?
- Focus on effectiveness and/or efficiency?
- Include a clear statement of expected end results?
- Include qualitative milestones and indicators?
- Support objective measurements that allow for meaningful statistical analysis?
- Follow appropriate industry standards?
- Challenge your organization to succeed?"¹⁵

The second axiom is to collect performance data on an ongoing basis. Without this, the agency is "flying blind." Customer service, especially within human services program delivery, is a dynamic enterprise. Having current data is essential to assess present performance, predict future needs, and evaluate the results of continuous improvement practices.

Finally, consideration should be given to making existing data collection uniform across the organization so that an agency-wide view of customer service performance can be produced. As expressed in the research report "Re-Imagining Customer Service in Government"¹⁶ prepared by GovLoop in collaboration with Oracle, "Managing data is challenging enough, but when data rests in silos...data becomes nearly impossible to mine for results. Agencies should work to centralize their customer service data and work towards standardizing their metrics agency wide to measure customer service."

8. Continuously improve business processes.

Enhancing customer service inevitably necessitates improving business processes. In order to improve efficiency and speed up operations, processes and procedures should be rigorously examined and streamlined to eliminate wasted activity. This is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process that should be repeated on a continuous basis. There are a number of strategies for accomplishing this. Foremost among them are Kaizen¹⁷ and Lean Management¹⁸. In addition, proven best practices from both the

¹⁵ This quotation was taken from <<http://www.howto.gov/customer-service/models/customer-experience-model/exceed-expectations>>, accessed on October 7, 2012.

¹⁶ "Re-Imagining Customer Service in Government" is a report prepared by Pat Fiorenza of GovLoop (an online community for public sector professionals to share resources and tools to improve government) in collaboration with Oracle. The report was based on information collected through an online survey, interviews with 11 government staff, and a roundtable discussion held on May 15, 2012.

¹⁷ Kaizen, a Japanese concept meaning "change" (kai) "for the good" (zen), is the belief that everything can be improved through incremental, continuous change. Each individual change may appear tiny, but over time the cumulative effect is considerable. The process of conducting a kaizen exercise requires staff and managers at all levels in the organization to meticulously and systematically dissect every part of a process to identify gaps and inefficiencies for correction.

¹⁸ Lean Management, in its simplest form, involves evaluating business processes from the perspective of the customer; separating tasks or activities that meet the customer's needs (value) from those that do not

public and private sectors should be shared, examined and adapted, as appropriate, for implementation.

There is danger in believing that more or better technology is the solution for outdated or inefficient business processes. Technology projects should never begin without first streamlining the processes being automated. Failure to take that first step can be costly in both time lost and dollars spent. Moreover, employing advanced technology to make it faster and easier for individuals to access services without first ensuring the staff that serve them are prepared to offer good customer service and are fully proficient in using the technology will only further frustrate customers. As concluded in the GovLoop research report previously mentioned, "...technology will enable agencies to improve customer service delivery, but agencies need to focus on the correct strategy, staff accordingly and train end users how to use the new technology."¹⁹

For human services agencies, changes to program policies, rules, procedures, and forms should be undertaken to the extent such changes are within the control of the agency, so that customers spend less time and effort repeating descriptions of their personal circumstances, completing paperwork, providing documentation, etc. Moreover, with such changes, agencies can better utilize staff and other resources. Similarly, co-locating frequently used programs in one office site can create efficiencies and save customers time and travel.

Any proposed solutions for improving program practices should be grounded in good data. Where data is not available, every effort should be made to develop and collect relevant data that can inform decision-making.

9. Consistently exceed expectations.

Unlike private industry, government holds a monopoly over the programs and benefits it administers. It is because customers cannot receive this help elsewhere that government has an ethical responsibility to provide exceptional customer service. Even if an individual cannot qualify for the services or benefits desired, he or she should feel that the process of interacting with the agency exceeded his or her expectations from the beginning to the end of the experience. Those that receive the services or benefits they sought should feel equally satisfied with the process every time they interact with the agency, regardless of how or why they interact (e.g., in-person, by telephone, online, etc.). The goal is to achieve consistently exceptional customer service across the entire organization.

(non-value); and making changes to eliminate or reduce the activities that do not meet the customer's needs. Ideally, this is repeated until all non-value activity is eliminated.

¹⁹ This quotation was taken from "Re-Imagining Customer Service in Government," a report prepared by Pat Fiorenza of GovLoop.

10. Celebrate, reward and recognize excellence.

Human beings respond to positive feedback. Celebrating, rewarding and recognizing staff who deliver excellent customer service helps to reinforce desired behaviors and reiterate the agency's commitment to customer service. Celebrations and recognition can take many forms, but to be meaningful, rewards should be directly connected to outstanding performance as defined by the agency's customer service standards and expectations. Giving recognition, whether formally or spontaneously, should be encouraged at all levels within the organization; that is, between coworkers, between organizations, and between management and staff.

Core Principles for Achieving Culture Change

There are numerous theories offering models for creating organizational culture change. The premier theory was proposed by John P. Kotter, a former Harvard Business School professor who is now the Chief Innovation Officer at Kotter International. His articles and books, including Leading Change (published in 1996) and The Heart of Change (published in 2002), are considered definitive works on the subject. (See Appendix 6 for a summary of Kotter's eight-step model for achieving change.)

The discussion that follows uses Kotter's research and theory as the foundation for suggesting these eight Core Principles for Achieving Culture Change that will advance a culture of customer service in health and human services. Additional information is added from other sources as appropriate.

1. Establish an urgency for change.

Motivate employees at all levels to desire and work for change by convincing them that enhanced customer service is better than the status quo. Start an open and authentic dialog contrasting the negative consequences, both now and in the future, of not changing with the potential benefits of improving customer service. Make the "business case" that enhanced customer service can help the agency achieve its mission, speed services, reduce conflict, improve morale, save resources, etc. Despite the significance of leadership engagement and advocacy, change cannot be achieved solely because it is mandated from the top. Employees at every level of the organization need to engage in the dialog. When that occurs, the sense of urgency will accelerate. According to Kotter, at least 75 percent of the managers have to be convinced for it to be successful.

One potential hazard at this stage is moving too quickly. Careful preparation and execution is needed to coax people out of their comfort zones and into new ways of doing things.

Another hazard is failing to honor the strengths of the existing culture and build on what is already working. In their paper, "Cultural Change that Sticks: Start with What's

Already Working",²⁰ Jon R. Katzenbach, Ilona Steffen, and Caroline Kronley state that "...any company culture has assets. The secret is to make the most of its positive elements--to work with and within the culture, rather than against it." They continue to assert that "Acknowledging the existing culture's assets will also make major change feel less like a top-down imposition and more like a shared evolution."

2. Form a powerful leadership team with a champion.

The leadership team should be composed of key people in the agency who share an emotional commitment to enhancing customer service; the team champion should be the most passionate and committed member of the leadership team. These leaders must possess the power to influence others and direct the change. Their power can be for any number of reasons, including job status, expertise, political value, etc. Leaders should be selected because of their personal influence and without concern for the traditional chain of command. Selecting people for this team strictly on the basis of their position in the normal chain of command can result in the wrong people being included. They should be encouraged to perform as a team on this effort despite their normal work roles and allowed to operate outside the organizational hierarchy. According to participants at the White House Forum on Modernizing Government, it was concluded that an agency should "...dedicate an organization's best talent to change efforts, even if that means removing them completely from their line jobs..."²¹ Because enhancing customer service for both external and internal customers is an agency-wide endeavor, these leaders should originate from different levels and parts of the agency. Similarly, they should function at both the political level and at the project management and administration level.

3. Set the vision.

Have the leadership team create a vision statement and set of basic strategies to achieve the vision. The customer service vision statement should be simple, brief, and easily understood. It should embody the high level principles and values that are at the core of excellent customer service.

²⁰ Quotations were taken from the article, "Cultural Change that Sticks: Start with What's Already Working,"²⁰ Jon R. Katzenbach, Ilona Steffen, and Caroline Kronley, published by Harvard Business Review, July-August 2012.

²¹ This quotation was taken from the paper titled "White House Forum on Modernizing Government: Overview and Next Steps," dated March 2010, accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/modernizing_government/ModernizingGovernmentOverview.pdf> on October 2, 2012.

4. Communicate the vision energetically and frequently.

The vision and strategies for achieving the vision must be communicated powerfully and energetically at every opportunity, including formal meetings, small staff discussions, and one-on-one conversations. Agency leadership should display enthusiasm for excellent customer service and voice the clear and constant message that this is the priority. Leaders should continue to articulate the business advantages of achieving excellent customer service for the agency, management, staff, and customers. The vision and strategies should become a routine consideration when making decisions and solving problems. They should be incorporated in all aspects of the operation and modeled by the leaders at all levels of the agency.

5. Remove obstacles and erect supports.

Speed the change process and empower those that are working in support of the vision by identifying and quickly eliminating obstacles. Barriers can be created by any number of things, including the structure of the organization, processes, systems, policies, etc. These should be examined for any challenges they may pose. Individuals who oppose the vision or simply resist change can also present a formidable obstacle, depending on their personal influence. Failing to deal with them effectively can slow progress. Responding positively to critical feedback and using that feedback constructively can help co-opt detractors.

Supports for achieving the vision should be erected. These supports can also take many forms, such as establishing customer service offices within the agency and/or specialized positions, and customer service recognition programs. As illustrated in the case studies and best practices previously examined, dedicated "customer service champions" within each division of the agency can proactively promote customer service initiatives, monitor performance, and troubleshoot problems. Formal recognition programs have also proved valuable in motivating customer service excellence.

6. Deliver immediate results.

It is critical to deliver concrete results in the early, fragile stage of the change effort. Doing solid work so that everyone can recognize change is occurring, continues forward momentum and consolidates support for the vision and strategies. According to Kotter, the goal should be to demonstrate clear progress toward achieving the vision within the first 12 to 24 months. Participants at the White House Forum on Modernizing Government would shorten that timeframe to 12 to 18 months.²² The point is to target

²² Information was taken from the paper titled "White House Forum on Modernizing Government: Overview and Next Steps," dated March 2010, accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/modernizing_government/ModernizingGovernmentOverview.pdf> on October 2, 2012.

short-term efforts that are visible and certain to be successful, leading to the attainment of the longer-term goal. In the process, those who helped achieve these improvements should be recognized and rewarded.

7. Do not stop building on success.

While these quick wins are important and satisfying, real change takes time. It is achieved through carefully building on each individual success, using one as a springboard to the next. The agency should keep persistently focused and committed to ongoing improvement, employing some of the continuous improvement strategies discussed above. Attention should be given to the need for refinements in philosophy, policy, infrastructure, processes, systems, and technology. An easy mistake at this stage is to proclaim victory before the change has become fully entrenched and allow the focus to shift to other priorities.

8. Embed the change.

Institutionalize the changes that have been achieved so that they become the new norm -- embedded in the agency culture. Ensure that the customer service values, and the changes resulting from acting on these values, are visible throughout the agency's operations on a day-to-day basis. Make certain they are continuously articulated and promoted by the leadership, and constantly reinforced. Reinforcement can occur through inclusion in agency mission and goals statements, training, mentoring, and modeling behaviors, etc. It is especially important that these values be included as criteria when evaluating performance, considering candidates for hiring or promotion, and developing management development and succession plans. Avoid the mistake of adding new staff and managers who cannot fully embrace the new approach. Finally, consistently act from a culture of customer service so that customers and staff come to expect satisfaction of their needs. When excellent customer service is an expectation, rather than a pleasant surprise, the transformation will have been complete.

Putting The Framework Together

The preceding sections described ten Building Blocks of Excellent Customer Service and eight Core Principles for Achieving Culture Change. Together they form the Framework that can be used by local human service agencies to enhance their existing customer service practices. The goal is to achieve a lasting culture of customer service in which providing excellent customer service is the expected norm for every interaction. The Framework combines the Building Blocks and Core Principles into four stages of activity under the headings: Get Ready, Get Set, Go!, and Lock It In.

Get Ready incorporates the actions needed to position the agency for change. It includes establishing an urgency for change, forming a powerful leadership team and engaging the leadership, setting the vision for change, and communicating the vision.

Get Set focuses on preparing the agency to implement customer service delivery enhancements. The actions include identifying the customer, organizing business around the customer's needs, empowering staff, setting performance expectations, and training staff and management.

Go! is the stage when the agency is fully engaged in delivering excellent customer service. This entails collecting and monitoring data that will drive performance, continuously improving business practices, consistently exceeding expectations, removing obstacles and erecting supports, delivering immediate results, and continuing to build on success.

Lock It In is the final stage when the agency acts to embed the change into the culture of the agency. One tool for doing that is celebrating, rewarding and recognizing excellence.

The following is a chart that illustrates how the pieces of the Framework fit together.

| <p style="text-align: center;">BULDING BLOCKS OF EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">THE FRAMEWORK</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">CORE PRINCIPLES FOR ACHIEVING CULTURE CHANGE</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Engage leadership.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">GET READY.</p> | <p>1. Establish an urgency for change. 2. Form a powerful leadership team with a champion. 3. Set the vision. 4. Communicate the vision energetically and frequently.</p> |
| <p>2. Identify the customer. 3. Organize business around the customer's needs. 4. Empower staff. 5. Set performance expectations. 6. Train staff and management.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">GET SET.</p> | |
| <p>7. Collect and monitor data that will drive performance. 8. Continuously improve business processes. 9. Consistently exceed expectations.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">GO!</p> | <p>5. Remove obstacles and erect supports. 6. Deliver immediate results. 7. Do not stop building.</p> |
| <p>10. Celebrate, reward and recognize excellence.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">LOCK IT IN.</p> | <p>8. Embed the change.</p> |

Next Steps

Since the implementation of CalWORKs in the late 1990's, much has been accomplished by individual county human services agencies to enhance customer service. Still, as shared by Wendi Pomerance Brick, keynote speaker at the January 16, 2013, Symposium, "Advancing a Culture of Service in Health and Human Services," every organization can take steps to improve its customer service. Implementation of the Affordable Care Act provides a further imperative to do so. The foregoing Framework is offered as a starting point for the next phase in the campaign to advance a culture of service in health and human services. It enumerates the actions needed to create a culture of customer service and to ensure its longevity by embedding that culture into the core of the agency's belief systems, behaviors, and structure. As expressed in the project's vision statement, the ultimate goal is that this culture of service will not stop with implementation of the Affordable Care Act; it will eventually influence every aspect of county human services agency operations, enhancing service delivery in every program that the agency provides.

Participants at the Symposium offered their thinking about what actions need to be taken first in order to enhance the current culture in a way that would better support a culture of service within the context of implementing the Affordable Care Act. They discussed categories of activity that need to take place. These include the actions necessary to define exactly how the state will implement the Affordable Care Act; the types of considerations that need to be incorporated into state and county implementation plans, the broad and frequent communication that needs to take place, the fact that technology enhancements and changes should be considered, the ways in which the public needs to be educated, how the labor unions need to be included in the process, and the imperative to hire and train customer-service-friendly staff. (For more detailed Symposium discussion points, see Appendix 4.) In short, the first steps are to develop the strategy and plan for moving forward, including identifying the direction and who needs to be involved.

Symposium participants also discussed the help that would be needed to implement these actions. They listed technical assistance on a wide range of topics, along with many of the items previously addressed, such as:

- Money, staff, resources received timely.
- Making this a political priority.
- Active support of the leadership, including both political and administrative leaders.
- Breaking down the silos to permit full collaboration among state and county entities.
- Data.
- Better and faster communication among the state and counties.
- Simplification of program requirements.
- An effective public awareness/public education campaign.
- Technology to support the caseload growth.

Finally, Symposium participants were asked to consider what obstacles will need to be addressed in the more distant future in order to sustain the forward momentum once an enhanced culture of service is established. They named:

- Staff exhaustion with change.
- Pressures from persons inside and outside the county agency who are critical or skeptical of the change.
- Maintaining leadership commitment in the face of competing priorities.
- Maintaining funding.
- Failure to achieve program simplification (especially in the complex Medi-Cal program).
- Changes in legislation and program rules that affect customer service practice.
- Lack of timely and clear policy instruction from the state as changes occur.
- Not having counties involved in the program development process.
- Updating labor agreements.
- Keeping all staff trained and up to date.
- Ensuring counties have the flexibility to operate in ways that are most successful for them.
- Unintended consequences and unanticipated changes in the environment.

Many of these challenges to sustaining a culture of service would also apply to the initial establishment of the enhanced culture of service. One final consideration should be added to this list of potential obstacles. That is the fundamental challenge posed by each individual's personal perspective.

Dick Armstrong, Director of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, made a presentation on the successful transformation of Idaho's service delivery model for their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. He did this at the 2012 "Modernizing CalFresh: Improving Program Performance, Processes and Participation" conference in Sacramento, California. In his comments, Director Armstrong emphasized the importance of perspective when he announced with pride: "We have a leadership that is innovative enough to see the world differently and motivated enough to believe they can make a difference."

The fundamental challenge to successfully instituting a culture of customer service is *perspective*. Agency leaders and staff, community partners and other stakeholders, need to be willing and able to step out of their personal comfort zones, allowing them to adopt a fresh perspective from which they may identify and embrace changes that can advance health and human services delivery. The old perspective of viewing the role of human services program staff as gatekeepers, protecting the programs from waste, fraud and abuse, has to morph into the new perspective of working to meet the family's full array of human services needs (e.g., health, nutrition, work support and cash assistance) within the parameters of the programs' rules and resources -- and to do this in an enthusiastic, customer-friendly manner. There is no limit to what can be achieved when people are open to seeing new possibilities and motivated to believe they truly can make a positive difference.

Focus Group Responses

Separate focus groups were conducted for customers, first-line supervisors and eligibility workers to collect information for the Customer Service and Culture Change Best Practices Project. A special structured discussion was also convened with an advocacy group.

Customer Focus Group Responses

Two customer focus groups were held on September 25, 2012. They were composed of CalWORKs, CalFresh and Medi-Cal recipients. One group of 15 customers was held in a medium-sized central valley county. The other group of eight customers was conducted in a smaller mountain valley county.

Customer responses were generally positive to questions about whether they experienced helpful and courteous treatment, comfortable waiting and interviewing rooms, and convenient office locations and hours. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Protecting customer privacy better by not calling out names in the waiting room, having more space between individuals when completing forms, and not asking people to talk loudly through a window at the reception area.
- Setting up the lobby such that customers may sit while waiting their turn to be served at the window.
- Having receptionists/ greeters/ navigators to guide people through the lobby process.
- Having play areas and movies to occupy children, and magazines and other non-county literature for adults.
- Opening offices at least one Saturday each month for specific purposes like access to job club computers or submitting documents.

There were mixed responses when asked if program requirements were easy to understand. Customers cited the need for workers to explain the requirements thoroughly and early in the process.

When asked about wait times, responses were mixed, based on the county. The suggestion was made that the county triage customers when they come in so that there would not be a need to wait in a long line just to hand in a document or pick up a blank form. This group felt that a triage desk or kiosks with human assistants would be ideal.

Most responded that completing forms was difficult. They stated that once forms were explained to them, the forms made sense. They suggested the county provide classes for customers in how to complete the forms.

When asked if they would prefer more options of where to go to apply for benefits and provide documents, such as shopping malls and locations where they typically do other business, the majority indicated they would not be interested in doing that. They cited breach of privacy and embarrassment as the main concerns. However, some indicated that having drop boxes for documents in various locations would be helpful.

When asked if they would be comfortable applying for benefits and sending in requested documents by phone, fax, mail or online, responses about whether they would use those methods varied by individual. However, most customers liked the idea of having choices.

When asked what draws them to frequent a particular business, the almost unanimous response was the way they perceive they are treated by the employees at that business. They emphasized the attraction of doing business with people who are professional, have a welcoming personality, and seem to be willing to exceed expectations. Customers commented about the value of having one-on-one customer service and a personal connection with the individual helping them.

Supervisor Focus Group Responses

On September 25, 2012, a separate focus group was also held in the central valley county for first-line supervisors. It was composed of 16 supervisors working in the CalWORKs, CalFresh and Medi-Cal programs.

When asked to describe the current office culture, most first-line supervisors agreed that it is a mixture of first trying to assist customers in getting the benefits they need and, second, protecting against program abuse. Variations in emphasis depended on the program in which the supervisor worked:

- A CalWORKs employment services supervisor commented that the culture is “all about servicing the client” to achieve self-sufficiency.
- In contrast, one supervisor who was part of a recently implemented call center made the following comment referring to call center performance measures and goals: “We used to be more client driven and now we’re more data driven. We are responsible for our clients, but also meeting data requirements and deadlines.”
- Another call center supervisor stated, “Customer service is much different over the phone. ...Sometimes clients get lost in the technology. Supervisors are so busy trying to review cases that in order to work with staff on customer service you have to neglect other things. Performance measures, data driven culture hurts clients.”
- Another supervisor stated, “Customer service is at the core of what we all want to do, but at the end of the day you have limited time to get things done.”

When asked if they had participated in efforts to change or improve workplace culture and what seemed to work and not work, supervisors responded that it was unproductive and discouraging to bring issues to the table that were out of their control to fix. They cited union issues as an example. Other lessons learned included the need to:

- Implement changes based on available data and periodically revisit the data to tweak or revise the new systems over time.
- Bring the people most affected by the proposed change to the table to discuss possible solutions.
- Provide sufficient staff and supervisor training.

When asked about the flow of work, the general agreement was that work flow is not as big an issue as insufficient capacity. Supervisors stated that the program requirements are becoming more complex, the caseloads are too high, and there are too few workers. In addition, they observed that the customer group has expanded with the recession to include individuals with no prior experience with human services programs and “no idea how things work.” These customers require more help to navigate the system. Supervisors asserted that the work flow improves when workers are allowed the control to customize their own work patterns so that they can decide when to see customers and when to complete paperwork.

When asked if they have the equipment, technology and training they require, supervisors’ comments varied by the program in which they worked. Generally, they would like more training on how to maximize their use of the tools they have.

When asked if program requirements were reasonable to operate within, comments included:

- The requirements and paperwork are too cumbersome for customers.
- Regulatory requirements for CalFresh and Medi-Cal seem to be “totally opposed,” with CalFresh being less stringent while Medi-Cal is very strict.
- Program rules change too frequently.

Suggestions to improve the situation included the use of telephonic signatures, additional translation services, and efforts to address the problem of illiterate customers.

Eligibility Worker Focus Group Responses

Four focus groups were held with eligibility workers in early January 2013. The groups were convened by two Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) locals and two Service Employees International Union (SEIU) locals. A total of 39 eligibility workers from six counties participated in the focus groups. They worked for counties located in northern and southern California, and in the central valley. Identical questions were posed to participants in each eligibility worker focus group. These were the same questions posed to the focus group of first-line supervisors described above.

When asked how they would describe their office culture, the majority of eligibility workers felt that there is a tension inherent in their offices between the need to identify and provide customers the benefits for which they are eligible, while also acting as a gatekeeper to preserve program integrity. Particularly with the implementation of call centers causing them to switch from a case-based services system to a task-based one, workers believed the system now tips too much toward the gatekeeper aspect. The eligibility workers felt that while they are committed to helping people get the benefits they need, program requirements, rules, regulations, and office policies often lead to gate-keeping superseding benefit delivery. One participant noted, "The workers are frustrated because we're not able to give the benefits. Clients are frustrated because they're not getting the benefits they deserve."

Eligibility workers elaborated on their concerns regarding the implementation of a relatively new call center and the transition it required from a case-based system to a task-based system. They asserted that this transition, coupled with a lack of training and rules limiting which programs call center eligibility workers may assist customers with, result in individuals becoming frustrated by being transferred from one eligibility worker to another. The workers believed one of the problems was that there are different rules for each program. The eligibility workers recommended, to the extent possible, streamlining program requirements and permitting them to assist customers in multiple programs. They believed this would reduce consumer frustration.

Focus group participants noted the high volume of cases compared to the number of workers. They asserted that the gate-keeping culture is exacerbated because the system seems quota driven. Eligibility workers stated that more emphasis is placed on how many cases a worker handles in a day rather than how many cases a worker handles correctly. Recognizing that some cases and tasks are easier than others, they recommended that time allotments be re-calibrated to ensure that workers have enough time to complete more difficult tasks and cases.

When asked if they had participated in efforts to change or improve the culture in their workplace, focus group participants responded that when there had been an opportunity to bring issues to the attention of the department director, the director addressed those issues swiftly and conscientiously. The example given was when workers raised the issue of unacceptable telephone wait times at the call center. The problem was remedied to ensure consumers did not have to wait on hold an unreasonable amount of time. This not only benefited consumers, but also the workers who then did not have to bear the brunt of angry consumers who had been placed on hold for too long.

However, focus group participants indicated that results had not been as positive when issues and suggestions were brought to the attention of immediate supervisors. Workers in one focus group mentioned that previously there were monthly meetings of eligibility workers and management during which problems were discussed and solutions vetted. Workers gave positive feedback about these meetings and felt they should be reinstated.

Focus group participants were then asked to consider the flow of work and what the department does especially well. The following points were raised:

- All of the eligibility workers agreed that face-to-face time with the customers provides the greatest level of customer satisfaction. Eligibility workers acknowledged that there are indeed situations in which the consumer feels they are better and more efficiently served via call center service; however, they asserted that consumers who are provided the opportunity for in-person contact where they desire it, have a much better consumer experience.
- Participants agreed that there is a high level of customer satisfaction when employees have been cross-trained so that they can serve multiple needs of individual customers without having to transfer them from worker to worker.
- Participants felt that triage offices and specialty positions (e.g., those that deal with the homeless population) have worked especially well.
- Participants felt that smaller offices achieve better results when it comes to processing tasks and distributing work equitably within limited resources.
- Participants encouraged holding joint work groups or monthly meetings of staff and management to exchange ideas for improvement. They felt that implementation of those ideas resulted in increased worker and consumer satisfaction.

When asked about equipment and technology, eligibility workers concluded that they did not have what they need. They indicated that they require more connectivity and access to other services and agencies (such as DMV, Juvenile Hall, homeless shelters, and hotels) in order to better serve customers.

Similarly, when asked if they have sufficient training, eligibility workers expressed a desire for more training. They offered positive feedback about training programs which were provided and produced positive results. Conversely, they expressed frustration when there was insufficient training or when worthwhile training was discontinued without explanation or when training was provided, but participants were later instructed not to use the skills learned. The example given of the latter was a call center training in which eligibility workers were cross-trained to be able to respond to multi-program questions from consumers, only to be advised later that they were no longer allowed to respond to multi-program questions.

Suggestions for improved training included:

- The amount of cross program training and video training programs should be increased.
- Refresher training would be most helpful.
- Workers should be trained on both the new technology and on the programs served by the technology. This was viewed as particularly important when there

appear to be glitches in the technology and an understanding of the underlying programs is required.

Finally, when asked if the individual program requirements are reasonable to operate within, eligible workers expressed frustration with program requirements which they felt created unnecessary hurdles for consumers and resulted in benefits being denied. They suggested this is particularly frustrating when one program has less restrictive requirements (such as CalFresh) than another (Medi-Cal), leading to confusion and frustration among consumers who do not understand why they can easily qualify for one program and not another. Workers suggested streamlining program requirements to eliminate unnecessary hurdles. They explained that providing easy access for qualified consumers would lead to less frustration.

Covering Kids and Families Coalition Structured Discussion Group Comments

A special structured discussion group was held on November 13, 2012, with 16 members of the Community Health Councils' Covering Kids and Families Coalition. The purpose of the coalition is to reduce the number of eligible, but uninsured, children and adults through enrollment in Medi-Cal or Healthy Families (California's State Children's Health Insurance Program).

The discussion topics for this group were more general than in the focus groups described above. Participants were asked to consider only two questions: In thinking about establishing or enhancing a "culture of customer service", what would you want the local human services agency to look like? How can we make this vision a reality?

In discussing the "ideal" local human services agency situation, a number of ideas were generated. The first set could be categorized under the concept of demonstrating respect and a sense of value for the customer. Various ways of doing this were discussed:

- Participants emphasized making the experience of coming into an agency office pleasant and family friendly. This includes providing diversions for children (such as toys and electronic entertainment) and clean, well appointed lobbies and interview rooms.
- Sensitivity about language was mentioned; the impact of using terms such as "customer" versus "client" was discussed.
- Providing excellent customer service was emphasized. Examples included staff exhibiting friendly attitudes and providing accurate information; guiding people so they can smoothly navigate through office protocols and systems; and openly and positively educating customers on their rights and what to expect from the experience.
- Another important feature was respecting people's time by having short wait times and providing quick, accurate, efficient service. Participants envisioned agencies providing checklists so people can bring the correct documents into the

office and know the steps they must complete. Participants also discussed the value of having kiosks and lobby navigators as ways to help people quickly move through the in-person office visit. Online capability was discussed as a means of speeding up service and making it easier for people, but only if appropriate training and access to computers were provided. Efficient telephone service was also mentioned.

The second area of emphasis was to operate from a "culture of coverage." That is, making the first priority identifying the family's full range of needs and pursuing eligibility for all appropriate programs rather than emphasizing the need to protect the programs from abuse by focusing on whether an applicant is ineligible for services. Similarly, the participants imagined a system with "no wrong door." This meant that regardless of which program the person applied for or office at which the application was made, there would be a system in place that would connect the person to the correct program or programs to meet his or her needs.

Some discussion centered on the recognition that agency staff must be made to feel important to the process and valued as individuals. Staff should be given training to comfortably deal with difficult customers and the stresses of heavy caseloads.

The need for and benefits of simplified policies, systems and forms were also discussed.

When asked how this overall "ideal" vision could be achieved, the discussion was equally robust.

With regard to staff, participants listed the need to:

- Set an overall vision and goals.
- Provide training, rewards and incentives.
- Introduce more metrics and performance standards, engaging with labor unions in the process.
- Educate staff to the advantages for them of improving service and convincing staff that these changes will not cause additional work.

Switching focus, participants talked about the need to:

- Identify and share best practices among counties.
- Cross-train workers on multiple programs.
- Build collaborations with local community partners.
- Engage in marketing and outreach.

The overriding recommendation was that the critical test for all decisions needs to be "What does this mean for the consumer?"

Customer Survey Data

In the first half of October 2012, six county human services agencies conducted a survey of customers waiting in the counties' lobbies. Survey instruments were provided in both English and Spanish. Each county was asked to collect up to 100 English language surveys plus a number of Spanish language surveys that roughly approximated the percentage of mono-lingual Spanish speakers in that county's caseload. In some cases, more than 100 English surveys were collected, but no more than 100 were counted for each county in order to prevent a single county's input from having undue weight. Individual counties determined the specific days the survey was conducted, how customers were selected to participate, and which of their offices were involved. This survey was not designed to produce a statistically valid sample.

The following table provides the number of completed surveys that were included for each county.

| Participating Counties: | # English Surveys: | # Spanish Surveys: | Total: |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| Inyo | 96 | 7 | 103 |
| Placer | 100 | 4 | 104 |
| Sacramento | 100 | 23 | 123 |
| San Bernardino | 97 | 50 | 147 |
| San Mateo | 100 | 39 | 139 |
| Solano | 100 | 40 | 140 |
| Total: | 593 | 163 | 756 |

The survey instrument was constructed in four parts. The first part asked customers to identify which program services they currently receive. This question was not always completed by the respondents. However, of those that did complete it, the majority indicated that they were receiving services from more than one program. The second part was designed to capture customers' perceptions about their experience with the human services agency. It also asked for their preferences about using possible alternative locations for county human services offices and conducting business with the county by phone, fax, mail or online. The third part asked customers to rate the importance of different factors in ensuring a positive experience with the human services agency. The final section was an open-ended question asking for suggestions to help the agency improve its service delivery. The 190 comments received were a mix of suggestions for improvement, general critiques of performance, both positive and negative, and case-specific complaints.

Survey responses were tabulated and aggregated as displayed in the table below. Several key findings were identified:

- A majority reported that they were treated with courtesy (93% English; 98% Spanish) and that staff would do whatever it takes to help them (85% English; 96% Spanish).
- Seven percent more Spanish speaking customers thought the program requirements were easily understood than did English speaking customers. A higher percentage of Spanish speaking customers also thought the forms were easy to complete. However, most would prefer to see fewer forms to complete (78% English; 77% Spanish).
- Office hours and locations were acceptable to a majority of customers (83% and 89% English; 94% Spanish).
- Alternative satellite offices in malls, etc., were not favored. Only 51% English and 42% Spanish surveys reported a preference for alternative sites. Among the survey questions, this one received the strongest negative reaction (27% English and 29% Spanish reported Disagree).
- County offices and interview rooms were considered by the majority to be comfortable and welcoming with Spanish surveys reporting a higher percentage agreement than English surveys (75% English; 93% Spanish).
- English and Spanish surveys reflected different levels of acceptance for wait times. Wait times for customers with an appointment were reported as reasonable in 65% of English and 81% of Spanish surveys. Wait times without an appointment were reported as reasonable in 55% of English and 75% of Spanish surveys.
- Customers reported a relatively low degree of comfort phoning, faxing, mailing or using the Internet to apply for benefits or sending documents (68% English; 59% Spanish). However, about 75% of all respondents supported having that option.
- Customers placed the greatest importance on friendly, knowledgeable staff; clear instructions; easy to complete forms; convenient office hours and locations; and quick, efficient service. Each of these factors was ranked Very Important by at least 91% of respondents. The single most important factor was friendly, knowledgeable staff with 97% of English and 98% of Spanish surveys reporting it as Very Important.
- Less importance was placed on reducing the number of forms and documents to complete and on the option to handle business over the phone or online. However, these factors were still reported as Very Important by at least 75% of respondents.
- English and Spanish survey responses differed on the importance of clean, attractive offices with 93% Spanish reporting it as Very Important while only 78% English shared that opinion.

CUSTOMER SURVEY CONDUCTED IN OCTOBER 2012 IN SIX COUNTIES

| | QUESTION | # Cal WORKs | | # Cal Fresh | | # Medi- Cal | | # Other | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|--------------|---------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | What program services do you currently receive? | 172 | | 303 | | 304 | | 58 | |
| | | % Agree | | % Disagree | | % No Opinion | | % Left Or More English | Blank Checked Than 1 Spanish |
| | | English | Spanish | English | Spanish | English | Spanish | | |
| 2 | I was treated with courtesy by every staff person I talked to. | 93 | 98 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | Staff is willing to do whatever it takes to help me. | 85 | 96 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4 | The program requirements are easy to understand. | 80 | 87 | 12 | 10 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 5 | The forms are easy to complete. | 83 | 86 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 6 | Services are available at times that are good for me. | 83 | 94 | 9 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 7 | The county office locations are easy for me to get to. | 89 | 94 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 8 | Instead of going to the main county offices, I would prefer to have small county offices in shopping malls and other places of business that I use often. | 51 | 42 | 27 | 29 | 21 | 25 | 1 | 5 |
| 9 | The county waiting rooms and interview rooms make me feel welcome and comfortable. | 75 | 93 | 10 | 3 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 10 | When I come into the office <u>with</u> an appointment to meet with my worker, the wait times are | 65 | 81 | 15 | 8 | 18 | 10 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| | reasonable. | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | When I drop into the office <u>without</u> an appointment to meet with my worker, the wait times are reasonable. | 55 | 75 | 23 | 11 | 20 | 12 | 2 | 1 |
| 12 | I would be comfortable using phone, fax, mail and online to apply for benefits and send in requested documents. | 68 | 59 | 17 | 21 | 13 | 18 | 2 | 1 |
| | Please tell us how important each of the following is in making sure you have a good experience with the county. | % Very Important | | % Somewhat Important | | % Not Important | | % Left Or More | Blank Checked Than 1 |
| | | English | Spanish | English | Spanish | English | Spanish | English | Spanish |
| 13 | Friendly, knowledgeable staff. | 97 | 98 | 3 | 1 | <1 | 0 | <1 | 1 |
| 14 | Clear instructions on what you must do. | 95 | 95 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 | <1 | 2 |
| 15 | Forms that are easy to complete. | 91 | 96 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 16 | Fewer forms and documents to submit. | 78 | 77 | 17 | 12 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 4 |
| 17 | Clean, attractive offices. | 78 | 93 | 18 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 18 | Convenient office hours and locations. | 91 | 91 | 7 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 19 | Quick, efficient service. | 93 | 95 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 20 | The option to handle business with the county over the phone or online. | 76 | 75 | 18 | 15 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 |

Note: Percentages above may not equal 100 due to rounding.

| | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 21 | <p>If you have a suggestion to help us improve our service, please write it here.</p> <p>[Note: Below is a representative sampling of the 190 responses collected. They are presented as written by the respondent with grammatical and spelling errors uncorrected. Spanish language comments have been translated into English. Case-specific complaints and those containing personal identifying information have not been included.]</p> |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Just to insure that the staff are more helpful and friendly towards clients, we don't want to be here any more than they do.

Very knowledgeable and helpful. Only took a minimal amount of time. Informative and answered all my questions. Left very pleased with my visit.

Clarification on what needs to be completed and submitted to ensure benefits in a timely manner.

Child care. Thank you.

So kindly if the requirements could be told in a simpler way would appreciate.

When I called I SPECIFICALLY asked if there was any paperwork I needed to bring. I was told no. when I got here I was told I needed proof of residency. This delayed my application and caused extra effort unnecessarily. All this could have been avoided if I had been told beforehand.

I have turned in the same shared housing statement 3 times it would be nice if you didn't miss place my paperwork please and thank you

I think the county needs more workers so that when we try to contact our workers they are easy to contact instead of when every time there is a problem use coming to the office. Because some of us don't have ways to get to the office.

The county might want to impress on its employees the need to hear a client out, particularly if the client is being respectful.

If a client is denied services (as in Medical) it would be MOST beneficial if one were to receive CLEAR alternative services that may be available.

Have more worker so the time wait isn't so long! The worker do their job instead of just talking around.

It would be nice if you had a person who did a little PR work. Speak with people in the lobby, get information about business that might be hiring, give referrals to others who are willing and able to work.

Please explain the options and wait time for client. Take more time to help clients with procedure, etc. More workers in the front office. Maybe a play area for children or even a TV. Workers that really care about people like me. The wait is way too long. Maybe add a start window where clients can check on wait times, etc. Please do something this is a shame.

Better phone service. Left 4 messages and not 1 call back. I'm 36 weeks pregnant and on bed rest but had to go into the office to get somewhere.

Although the workers have basically been decent to deal with, the overall appearance of the office is very disturbing. Dirty bathrooms and tacky taped signage on the walls really leads to a degrading experience. Many of us needing assistance take personal pride in hygiene and presentation. The dingy upkeep of the office adds to an already unpleasant situation. Not suggesting anything more than maybe a fresh coat of paint and remove the torn and falling off flyers taped to the walls.

I have none thank you guys for everything you do for me and my family.

Coffee shop!

A little more organization would be nice. I've had several times my files and paperwork lost! Paper I had brought physically to the office myself!!

I think that because of some postal issues you should allow more time for documents to be returned.

Fast more jobs snack machine better tv.

More understanding paper work. Workers come faster when I am waiting. I do not like that my paper work gets lost once it get to the county office. My worker does not answer my phone calls. I have to come in and wait almost 1 hour to see her. I do not understand why I have to renew my information every other month. I hope someone who cares and understands reads this and trys to make improvements. Also that the county and state understands we are people as well we may just need a little help to get by in life. Times are hard on us.

Better customer service from the receptionist as well as security guards are requested. It's the front lobby staff that create negative energy.

You guys are doing great but the wait times could be improved.

The workers at the windows are rude to some people seen at me sometimes. Its like they can't wait to leave. I don't want to be looked at with less dignity not just some people are trying to get free money or anything from the system.

Transportation mandatory services

Everything is professional

They should have separate and faster service for the elderly and for people who have disabilities and cannot stay waiting for the long periods of time they are made to.

Have sign that say requirements.

I would like if the time to wait for in intake either walk in and appointment be not long because of taking children to school and picking them up to be sufficient when waiting on something that takes a minute to something that takes more time it should have water fountains in the waiting room and a place for kids to play while waiting for appointment.

Timed airfresheners in the restrooms and lobby. TV shows played on the flatscreens or news or soft music. Vending machines and trash cans in the lobby area so we don't have to keep going outside. Workers please answer or at least return calls. Use every window in the lobby. More people can be helped at once if there are more people available. There are 4 closed windows with a long line.

It would be more beneficial for me if I'd be able to communicate with my worker via email. It would increase the speed of processing and then reviewing my case.

My suggestion is that you have more personnel that speaks Spanish.

I don't like the place. It seems ugly and dirty. I would hope the building and office were better and cleaner. The colors and floors seem depressing to me. Maybe because the help we get, it is a good thing. I am here out of necessity and it is embarrassing to ask for help. I always worked to support my family, but now I need the help. This place is depressing, other buildings I have visited are better. Thank you.

No suggestions, reception and workers are very helpful.

Service good no complaints.

To have area for the children's to play.

I think it should be a line to stand in just if your turning in documents or paperwork to receive a recipet for the papers turned in.

Less paperwork.

I am comfortable with the treatment I was given. It was friendly, by the people that assisted me. I feel that it takes too long when I call my worker to get assistance for them to return my call. It takes too long to return my call.

We, the clients would prefer not to have to apply. I'm sure if we are all greeted positiveliy it does make a huge difference on those of us who have to be here. After all without us, the clients, there would be no need for these services.

It seems that many workers have different information some accurate – some not. This makes it harder for clients to actually understand what they need in order to receive their benefits. Also, although some forms seem easy for many to understand it is important to consider that not all people are literate.

(1) More instructions on what to bring to our appointment. (2) maybe a couple more front desk attendants. (3) Decreasing the waiting period for appointments.

Answering the phones in a timely manner, there is TOO much paperwork!

Have a staff that are more persenable

The 1-800 # is always busy, it is hard to get a hold of any one.

Need more staff

A place where kids can play or be entertained while waiting

Issue bus passes or tokens.

I feel that all applicants with children should have a separate/private area SEPARATE from applicants who may need a quiet area to wait AWAY from stress and LOUD NOISE.

All the workers never assist/attend me well. And it is very difficult to understand the forms we must fill out. Also, I feel there are too many forms to fill out, I feel as if sometimes this is a waste of time.

Everything is well. The times I have come to get assistance I have been treated well. Thank you.

I think that the social workers should be more gentle/kind with the clients because I am going through a difficult situation at the moment because of a lack of understanding by my worker.

A coordination of application and information needed would be helpful as in one general app for CMSP, Calfresh and Cal Works.

Put everything online.

It would be nice if there would be more workers but it's a good service.

I have had trouble contacting my worker.

Customer Service Best Practice Examples

Examples of customer service best practices that can inform California county human services agency practice can be found both within and outside California. Below are brief descriptions of just a few examples.

California County Customer Service Enhancements

Call centers and, more recently, service centers have been established in 24 counties to serve the Medi-Cal, CalFresh (food stamps), and California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) programs. Six additional counties are planning to implement centers before pre-enrollment begins for health care coverage under the Affordable Care Act on October 1, 2013. The SAWS Consortia are each developing a network of county service centers to receive call transfers from the Covered California Service Center for Medi-Cal eligibility determination.

According to materials prepared by inTelegy Corporation, a company assisting a number of counties in implementing and supporting telephone service centers, the impetus to establish service centers is driven by four circumstances: the recent economic crisis which forced greater numbers of the public to seek human services; the availability of technology, such as Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) systems; the advent of health care reform pressing for changes in service delivery; and the fact that more of the public both expects to and is comfortable with conducting business by telephone. As described by inTelegy, call centers add telephone technology to an existing business model in which one worker handles all aspects of a case. Service centers, on the other hand, typically balance workload among teams of workers, each handling a specific task or aspect of a case.

One such service center was established in Sacramento County in 2010 to handle continuing Medi-Cal and CalFresh cases; it was expanded in 2012 to process intake cases for those programs. According to the county, this system has "allowed the county to improve services to customers by extending hours of service, provide on-line and automated services for clients, provide services remotely, improve timeliness of response to clients, improve and monitor quality of service, reduce processing times and balance workloads among staff." Continuing customers can use the IVR to get answers to specific case questions 24 hours per day seven days per week. Services can be provided by phone and mail. Successful implementation of the service center involved converting all paper files into scanned, electronic files; networking the IVR and automated voice response systems and server infrastructure; developing task-based business processes and procedures; training; developing management reporting and monitoring processes; and implementing a Task Management Tool that linked with appointment and lobby scheduling to balance assignments across individual staff, staff teams, and facilities, using workforce management forecasting and scheduling.

San Bernardino County implemented a similar Customer Service Center in 2011 to respond to customer inquiries on continuing CalWORKs, CalFresh and Medi-Cal cases. The service center IVR is available 24 hours per day seven days per week while staff is available to handle calls during business hours. The ACD system distributes, routes and queues calls based on caller responses to the IVR. The service center system is fully integrated with the county's C-IV computer system so that the case automatically appears on the worker's computer screen as soon as the customer's call is transferred to the worker. System software monitors real time call volume, forecasts call volume, manages task groups, schedules staff, and monitors staffing. The county's policy is "one and done", meaning that the service center worker strives to fully complete whatever work is necessary while the caller is on the phone, avoiding the need for additional contacts with the county to resolve the same issue.

In 2012, Kern County opened their Customer Assistance Telecenter using the task-based, processing team method of handling continuing CalFresh and Medi-Cal cases. They, too, employ a "one and done" approach. Successful transition to the system entailed overcoming initial staff resistance in three areas: discomfort with the task-based case management model which diffuses "ownership" of the case among a team of workers; suspected inequities between call center worker duties and processing team worker duties; and the need to move staff to a different office building. However, training and instituting a plan to rotate staff between call center and processing teams resolved many of the workers' concerns. Extensive community outreach addressed customer and community partner agencies' concerns about being treated equitably under the new model. According to the county, the success of the transition was evidenced by early stories of customers calling the service center on their cell phones while standing in long lines at the county's main office, only to step out of line because their issue was resolved through that phone call.

Without a service center, some counties have instituted task-based case management systems to speed up case processing. One county, Nevada County, returned to individual case-based caseloads from a task-based system for the same reason.

Another customer service best practice implemented in several counties is the use of "lobby ambassadors." These staff greet customers as they enter the office lobby, triage their issues, and direct them to appropriate staff for issue resolution. In the case of Riverside County, lobby ambassadors are Eligibility Services Clerks. This is a hybrid job classification encompassing both clerical and eligibility functions. These staff are equipped to perform simple eligibility functions, including explaining basic eligibility rules and verification requirements, responding to customer inquiries and case status requests, assisting customers with form completion, screening new applications, reviewing documents and verifications for completeness and accuracy, conducting phone appointments, etc. The use of lobby ambassadors has helped shorten wait times and reduced lobby congestion. It has also freed eligibility workers from simpler tasks to allow them to focus on completing the difficult work more quickly.

Several counties offer "same day intakes." In the case of San Diego County, this means that all intake applications received before 3:00 p.m. are handled that day. Applications received after that time are scheduled for an appointment on the following work day.

Many counties regularly conduct customer surveys to assess customer satisfaction and identify areas that are working well or can use improvement. Changes are then instituted and/or specific training provided based on the results. Customer surveys typically examine factors such as timeliness of services and wait times, courteous treatment, staff knowledge and helpfulness, clarity of information provided, ease of forms completion, comfort of offices, etc. Some counties also survey staff satisfaction in such areas as employee wellbeing, teamwork, available resources, and positive work environment to confirm whether staff is receiving the support they require in order to provide more complete and accurate service to the customer. In the case of Tehama County, community partners are also surveyed as part of their customer base.

Making New York City Customer Friendly

On May 15, 2008, Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City issued Executive Order No. 115. This created a Customer Service Office with broad authority in "developing, implementing and assuring the quality of a citywide customer service strategy to establish standards and policies for customer-facing functions within City agencies..." Dozens of successful customer service initiatives followed as the result of executing a six-part strategy. That strategy entailed support from the top; standards and metrics; observations and inspections; customer input; reward and recognition; and tools, training, and resources.

Mayoral support was essential. In addition to issuing the Executive Order, the Mayor continued to personally participate, especially in public venues such as speaking at customer service employee award ceremonies. In addition to the emphasis from the Mayor's Office, each agency was required to establish a Customer Service Liaison to serve as the conduit to and from the Customer Service Office for all customer service related issues and activities within that agency.

Metrics were established for customer service activities, starting with simple standards and moving to more complex ones. For example, the performance standard to respond within 14 business days was set for inquiries received through email and formal correspondence. Telephone calls were to be answered in less than 30 seconds. A rating scale was established to evaluate walk-in center wait times (i.e., under five minutes wait is excellent, five to 10 minutes is good, 11 to 19 minutes is fair, 20 minutes or more is poor). Once implemented, it was determined that a single scale could not reasonably apply to all types of services provided by the city, so this metric required rethinking.

New York City employed creative techniques for observing performance. In 2008, a one-time "mystery shopping program" was conducted in which staff pretended to be customers seeking information or services at the city's 300 walk-in centers operated by its 28 agencies. These centers provide diverse services ranging from issuing handgun licenses to providing income support to collecting parking ticket fees. This monitoring activity was institutionalized by shifting it in 2009 to the city's team of inspectors who previously were assigned to identify problem street conditions (e.g., pot holes and graffiti). The new program was titled "Customers Observing and Reporting Experiences" (CORE). Since 2009, CORE inspectors have regularly visited walk-in centers to evaluate facilities and customer service. Corrective action is required whenever a center earns a fair or poor rating.

Customer input is collected primarily by survey. To get started, in June 2008 a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey was conducted of 100,000 randomly selected households. Going forward, all city agencies are required to survey customers at least once per year. Agencies report their findings through the Citywide Performance System. In addition, agencies are encouraged to make the NYC Feedback form available for customers at their walk-in centers. This card contains just five questions. Feedback from these sources is used to make process changes and revise policies.

The city government established reward and recognition programs. Annually, selected staff persons are recognized for providing excellent customer service at a public event with the Mayor. Both this award and the opportunity for a photograph with the Mayor are highly prized. At the 2012 ceremony, over 50 staff were honored. In addition, New York City holds National Customer Service Week events in October of every year, using this as another opportunity to recognize and celebrate customer service performance. During the year, agencies hold various recognition events, parties and special trainings.

The Customer Service Office has produced a number of training resources and tools to promote customer service practice. Working with trainers from the city's 311 call center that provides centralized access to 90 percent of the city's services and with the city's welfare benefits agency, the Customer Service Office prepared a customer service training tool kit that included both training courses and promotional materials. In addition, the NYC Customer Service Newsletter is available online, showcasing articles written by both the Customer Service Office and the city agencies.

When interviewed, the New York City Customer Service Policy Advisor shared a number of insights gained from implementing the city's customer service initiative:

- Executive level support is the key to overcoming barriers to establishing a customer service program.
- A strong organizational structure (such as a highly placed office focused solely on customer service and dedicated positions in each agency) is necessary to ensure the plans become practice.

- Other factors that a successful transition to customer service cannot do without are establishing standards and metrics to set expectations and evaluate performance, conducting observations and inspections, and providing staff rewards and recognition.
- It is essential to keep the momentum by producing solid work with obvious, immediate results. This keeps attention on the project and reinforces the commitment to continue.
- It takes time to transition from implementation to institutionalization. In New York City's case, one indication that customer service had become standard operating procedure was when staff stopped questioning the need to enforce performance standards and shifted their focus to debating the details of whether a particular standard should be 14 days or 10 days. Another indication was when public reaction demonstrated that they had come to expect excellent service.

Oregon's Rapid Process Improvement

The Oregon Department of Human Services provides services under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through Self Sufficiency field offices. The problem was that each field office utilized different case processing and paperwork systems. This resulted in fragmented and inconsistent service delivery among offices, document flow issues within offices, difficulties transferring documents between offices, and processing delays that resulted in longer wait times for customers to access benefits. To resolve this, Oregon embraced the principles of Lean Management²³ to conduct eight Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) events to identify and eliminate system waste, and streamline the ongoing paperwork process. Changes developed as a result of these RPI events benefited their staff, improved service delivery, and increased quality of service. Some of the specific benefits Oregon cited, included improved staff morale, workers experiencing reduced stress levels, customers' priority paperwork being processed the day received or the following day, recertifications completed timely to avoid a break in assistance, clear processes and accountability for staff and management, consistent statewide paperwork process, and less rework for customers and staff.

Re-engineering the Service Delivery Model in Washington State

Washington state provides an example of a successful service delivery redesign through its re-engineering of the service delivery model for its human services programs. In 2008, Washington was experiencing inconsistent practices across offices, local offices that asserted their own autonomy, excessive policies and procedures, and a case management model. This resulted in families waiting longer than necessary for benefits, reworking cases, staff burn-out and low morale, and a high risk of incurring

²³ Lean Management, in its simplest form, involves evaluating business processes from the perspective of the customer; separating tasks or activities that meet the customer's needs (value) from those that do not (non-value); and making changes to eliminate or reduce the activities that do not meet the customer's needs. Ideally, this is repeated until all non-value activity is eliminated.

federal penalties. With a mix of government and philanthropic financial support, Washington turned this around by developing the online Washington Connection Benefit Portal. The Portal was implemented in stages between December 2010 and August 2011. Through this system, low income families and individuals can access program information and apply online for a broad array of services and benefits, including SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, child care subsidies, long-term care services, and drug and alcohol treatment. This service delivery re-design was implemented by first setting the vision and, second, ensuring broad stakeholder involvement and commitment such that all parties shared a stake in its successful outcome. Development and implementation required strong project management, a robust internal and external communication strategy, expert consultant guidance, and the active engagement of staff, stakeholders and customers. Washington employed Lean Management concepts and principles to manage their processes, as well as instituting ongoing improvements and aggressively monitoring performance. The results included reduced interview wait times, increased same-day determinations, increased timeliness, reduced complaints, improved accuracy, increased community partnerships, performance accountability, ability to monitor in real-time, and the ability to better manage work flow.

California Managed Care Quick Resolution Process and Active Listening

The California Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) "Quick Resolution" process is used by their call center staff to resolve routine issues that arise between health plans and enrollees in an effort to avoid the need to engage the formal grievance process. Call center staff work to bridge the communication between the caller and his or her health plan by utilizing specific active listening skills learned through department training. This training covers topics such as discovering what your consumer wants, common consumer expectations, steps to being a better listener, how to ask probing questions, the use of open-ended and closed-ended questions, keeping control of the call, maintaining professionalism, and guidelines for handling different types of consumers (e.g., abusive, over confident, talkative, distraught, etc.). In addition, DMHC call center practice and training emphasizes informing consumers about alternate resources available in various local, state and federal programs for issues not under the jurisdiction of DMHC. They have discovered that staff responds well to using these techniques because staff is empowered by seeing positive results to their efforts. Moreover, the DMHC ensures continued success through their employee selection standards. As explained by one DMHC trainer, "When we have to replace staff, we look for people who enjoy helping others, enjoy call center work, and who have an interest in health care."

Alabama's Service Center Staff Training

Alabama's Medicaid agency instituted intensive staff training as part of their transition to a consolidated customer service center model from a service delivery model based on distinct District Offices serving primarily nursing home cases and out-stationed workers at more than 120 locations serving pregnant women and children. The goal was to

bring these staff and programs together into 11 regional service center sites. At the same time this reorganization was occurring, the agency was also transitioning from paper-based records to electronic case management. Alabama contracted with the Auburn University Center for Government (AUM) to assist with this transition. As an AUM Senior Consultant explained, "None of these workers had ever received customer service training. The definition of good customer service, which was held by many of the workers, was based on how quickly they were able to process cases and determine eligibility. Some of the workers held the opinion that people were interruptions to their real work of processing applications and renewals." Comprehensive customer service training was provided to staff who had never had it before. Its focus was to convince staff to view themselves, not as "paper processors", but as professional public servants responsible for meeting the customer's needs. A refresher course was provided six months after initial training. Each training module was evaluated individually with the entire course evaluated at its conclusion. Success was measured through regular follow-up with managers. Standards were maintained through employee evaluations of performance.

**January 16, 2013, Symposium
"Advancing a Culture of Service in Health and Human Services"
Discussion Points**

On January 16, 2013, 158 people gathered in Sacramento, California, at a symposium titled "Advancing a Culture of Service in Health and Human Services." Participants included California county human services agency executives and managers from 44 counties, along with representatives from California state government agencies, customer advocacy groups, labor unions, and various statewide associations. They heard presentations by Wendi Pomerance Brick, President and Chief Executive Officer, Customer Service Advantage, Inc., and Stacy Dean, Vice President for Food Assistance Programs, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Participants engaged in structured, small group discussion sessions. They were encouraged to share their own experiences and perspectives as they examined issues focused on how to achieve a culture of excellent customer service within human services agencies.

Presentations

The keynote address presented by Wendi Pomerance Brick was titled "Six Essential Elements for Creating a Culture of Service." It discussed the importance of excellent customer service in the public sector, what it is, and how to build the infrastructure to support it using what is already in place as a starting point. In her presentation, Brick delineated six essential elements to create a culture of service:

1. "Set expectations and customer service standards.
2. Train staff.
3. Empower and value staff, and include them in the success of the organization.
4. Measure success and gather customer feedback.
5. Reward and recognize people who meet and exceed expectations.
6. [Implement] Improvement projects -- repair and/or remove any obstacles to great service."²⁴

The presentation also addressed how to provide excellent customer service within the service center model.

The presentation by Stacy Dean, titled "Lessons Learned from Year 1 of the Work Support Strategies Project", discussed observations about the key challenges experienced and insights gained from the Work Support Strategies Initiative that could inform California's own customer service enhancement efforts. The Work Support Strategies Initiative is a multi-year demonstration project. It offers six competitively

²⁴ Quotation taken from Wendi Pomerance Brick's book, The Science of Service: Six Essential Elements for Creating a Culture of Service in the Public Sector. CoCo Publishing, 2010.

selected states the opportunity to design, test, and implement more effective, streamlined, and integrated service models that could dramatically improve the delivery of key work support benefits (such as health coverage, nutrition benefits, and child care subsidies) to low-income families.

Participant Discussion Sessions

After each plenary presentation, symposium participants met in five discussion groups of about 30 persons each to examine a pre-determined set of questions intended to promote an exchange of perspectives and experiences, and to trigger creative thinking. The following lists the key points raised by participants under each topic. Not every comment is captured below. Instead, those comments that were voiced in most or all of the five small group discussion sessions are summarized and included in order to reflect the majority perspective.

Question: What currently shapes and maintains culture in your environment? Which of these are the most influential?

Participant Responses:

- Leadership's attitudes, behaviors, priorities, degree of engagement and motivation, tolerance for innovation, etc.
- Politics and political priorities.
- Funding decisions.
- Official mission, vision and values statements.
- Established policies, protocols, rules, and law governing the programs.
- The selection of what gets measured, rewarded and punished.
- Organizational structure.
- Traditions, rituals and practices.
- Political and regional needs of the community the agency serves.
- Community expectations and reputation of the agency; media coverage.
- Labor union influence.
- Subtleties of language used (e.g., use of the term "client" versus "customer")
- All of the above were determined to be highly influential in shaping and maintaining culture.

Question: What are the common, key elements of excellent customer service?

Participant Responses:

- Providing fast, accurate, consistent, timely, and fair service. Participants discussed the need to "get it right the first time" and to always provide the same answer or result regardless of the person or office providing the service.
- Easy access to both offices and case workers.

- Staff that interact calmly with courtesy, professionalism, empathy and respect.
- Staff who are flexible enough to help facilitate the process for people, while maintaining program integrity.
- Staff with a positive outlook who work to make customers eligible, and are able to offer some kind of support when they are ineligible.
- Selecting and hiring employees with good customer service attitudes.
- Staff that listen and communicate clearly.
- Hospitable waiting and interview rooms that are welcoming, attractive, and easy for the customer to navigate within; public spaces that lack overt security features (such as bullet-proof glass, armed guards, etc.); accommodations for children.
- Having sufficient number of staff to handle the workload.
- Knowledgeable, well trained staff that are up to date on rules and regulations, as well as trained in providing customer service.
- Empowering line staff to make decisions.
- Including staff in planning for changes.
- Empowering customers by providing transparency about the process; sharing with them where they are in the process and what their options are so they have a sense of control.
- Making realistic commitments and fulfilling them.
- Asking customers to provide personal and case information only once.
- Securing feedback from customers on how they were served and if they received the service they needed.
- Measuring performance and training staff to meet performance standards.
- Having the tools and technology to provide fast, efficient service.
- Constantly troubleshooting protocols and improving processes.

Question: What promotes or inhibits excellent customer service?

Participant Responses:

Each of the following can either promote or inhibit excellent customer service, depending on its presence or absence, quantity, or quality. For instance, an extremely high caseload volume was identified as a threat to providing excellent customer service, while it was also argued that a manageable caseload would allow staff to focus on how they provide service. The following is a list of what participants viewed as significant features that can impact customer service delivery:

- Caseload volume.
- Fiscal, personnel, and other resources available.
- The priority assigned by leadership to providing excellent customer service; leadership modeling customer service principles and practices.
- Staff attitudes about customer service.
- Staff flexibility and adaptability to change, especially with regard to rules and regulations.

- Staff morale.
- Level of employee skills, particularly people skills.
- Training.
- Degree of empowerment of line staff to make decisions.
- Degree of staff and management understanding of customer service performance expectations.
- Clarity of communication of agency vision, mission, performance expectations.
- Quality of supervision.
- Performance measurement, tracking, and feedback to staff and management.
- Customer feedback on delivery of service and expectations.
- Application of performance rewards for excellence and consequences for errors.
- The agency's reputation in the community and relationships with community partners.
- Amount of agency commitment to streamlining processes and eliminating wasted activity.
- Use of technology; condition of technology.

Question: What is a "culture of service"?

Participant Responses:

Time did not permit development of a single definition of "culture of service" that fully captured the thinking of all five discussion groups. The most representative definition presented by one of the groups was: "A set of beliefs and behaviors collectively shared that create and support an environment of customer service."

Participants in the five groups spent much of the time discussing what having a "culture of service" in human services agencies would mean to them. The following are some thoughts that reflect the tone of the discussions. Where possible, direct quotes are indicated. In other instances, the participants' comments are paraphrased.

- "We aren't a store. We are a government entity. Human beings are relying on us for services they need." What is needed is a unique definition of customer and a specialized definition of services.
- Health care reform will drastically change the county human services customer base. These new customers' needs will change how counties do business.
- The real job of the human services agency is not to screen people out, but to provide them the services for which they are eligible.
- The goal is to create an environment to serve the customer.
- That environment has to include trust. Customers have to trust that the agency and staff will help them.
- The internal customer is also important. How staff and colleagues are treated impacts how employees treat customers. Staff must be treated the way the

agency wants them to treat the customer. The agency that is responsive on all levels will have a "culture of customer service."

- A culture of customer service "...is not an event; it's ongoing, like breathing."
- It is a place where every employee knows what is expected of them and they are rewarded for providing prompt and accurate customer service.

Question: To enhance the current culture in order to better support a "culture of service" within the context of implementing the Affordable Care Act: What actions need to be taken? Which actions need to be taken first?

Participant Responses:

In response to the first question, the individual discussion groups identified essentially the same sets of actions that they believe need to be taken to support establishment of a "culture of service" under the Affordable Care Act. When addressing the second question, one discussion group determined that all the actions they had identified needed to take place first, while other groups tried to offer rankings. The following is a composite of participant input with clusters of action steps listed in a sequence that reflects the collective input.

Define the direction:

- State and county agencies need to work together to determine how the Affordable Care Act will impact current caseloads, programs (including alignment among programs), processes, etc.
- The state should provide a "blue print" to address changes in health care, where the state is going and how to get there. Counties need to know what their roles and responsibilities will be and how they will be required to coordinate with each other to serve customers. It's not clear yet what the counties will be doing when, how the systems communicate with one another, roles with regard to the commercial health plans, etc.
- Federal, state and county timelines for implementation need to be made clear, including when state allocations will be released. Money needs to be available for county use sooner rather than later.
- Accurate caseload estimates are needed to inform Boards of Supervisors for budgeting and staffing augmentations.

Make a Plan:

- Leaders need to articulate a clear vision that promotes change to achieve a "culture of customer service" and how that change should roll out.
- The state and local plans should consider how best to support case workers under the changes wrought by the Affordable Care Act (e.g., program changes, new customer base, caseload increases, etc.).

- Engage the unions early when planning to implement changes.
- In terms of customer service, plans should include how to support the case workers in changing their role from welfare eligibility worker to health care worker.
- Plans should also address the alignment of programs under the new rules (e.g., "horizontal integration") and simplification of program rules. If counties do not have money to hire more people, then regulatory requirements should be streamlined and simplified.
- Agencies need to determine how to organize to support customer service enhancements (e.g., assign responsibility to each existing work team or establish a specialized customer service office or staff).

Communicate:

- Communication needs to occur early, often and at all levels (e.g., staff, management, labor and other stakeholders, Boards of Supervisors, the public).
- Staff should be involved in all conversations about changes that effect them.

Examine Technology:

- Investigate and enhance technology as appropriate.
- Involve labor throughout this process.
- Resolve IT issues, programming, etc., related to changed program rules and process steps.

Educate the Public:

- Market the new program services.
- Remove the welfare program stigma from Medi-Cal and re-brand it as a health insurance program.
- Inform the public how and where to access services. (Implement a "no wrong door policy" and "one stop shopping.")

Negotiate with Unions:

- Begin negotiations for changes needed to labor agreements as appropriate.

Hire and Train Staff:

- Staff need to be trained in all changes, including customer service delivery.

Question: To enhance the current culture in order to better support a “culture of service” within the context of implementing the Affordable Care Act: What help would be needed to implement the actions described above?

Participant Responses:

- Money, staff, resources received timely.
- Making this a political priority.
- Active support of the leadership, including both political and administrative leaders.
- Breaking down the silos to permit full collaboration among state and county entities.
- Better and faster communication among the state and counties.
- Simplification of program requirements.
- Data.
- An effective public awareness/public education campaign.
- Technical assistance on everything from best practices within and outside California to peer mentoring to hiring processes to customer service delivery, etc.
- Technology to support the caseload growth.
- An initial "hold harmless" period in which persons could be enrolled without all the required verifications for their first year and county agencies would not be penalized for errors.

Question: What needs to be done to maintain the enhanced culture over time?

Participant Responses:

Constantly Provide Excellent Customer Service:

- Keep providing excellent customer service.

Maintain Customer Service as the Priority:

- Ensure that maintaining the enhanced culture continues to be a priority.
- Recognize that the culture of service will evolve with time.
- Keep adequate funding.
- Enlightened leadership is crucial.
- Assign someone to be accountable for maintaining the focus and forward momentum.
- Empower individuals to institute changes to support the enhanced culture within their own realms.

Continue Measuring and Tracking Performance:

- Conduct surveys; track performance measures; use peer reviews; etc.
- Create common bench marks.
- Learn from successes and failures.

Engage in Continuous Improvement of Systems, Processes, Etc.:

- Seek a waiver to look at regulations that get in the way of good customer service practice.
- Share best practice information among counties (e.g., call center practices and technology, training curricula and materials, etc.).
- Streamline existing programs (especially Medi-Cal).
- Set up a program simplification work group.
- Build on the strengths of the organization.
- Establish administrative structures that support and move the enhanced culture forward.

Support Staff:

- Train new staff in the enhanced customer service culture.
- Provide reinforcement training for continuing staff.
- Involve staff in the development of process changes and ongoing enhancements.

Communicate With and Coordinate Among Stakeholders:

- Keep all parties aligned and talking. Counties need to maintain a continuous feedback loop with advocates, providers, community-based organizations, etc.
- Engage advocates, unions, providers to ensure they work together with counties to best serve the customers.

Celebrate Successes:

- Recognize and reward excellent performance. Applaud victories. Address failures as opportunities to learn.

Question: To maintain the enhanced culture over time, what obstacles will need to be addressed in order to sustain the forward momentum?

Participant Responses:

- Staff exhaustion with change.
- Pressures from persons inside and outside the county agency who are critical or skeptical of the change.

- Maintaining leadership commitment in the face of competing priorities.
- Maintaining funding.
- Failure to achieve program simplification (especially in Medi-Cal).
- Changes in legislation and program rules that affect customer service practice.
- Lack of timely and clear policy instruction from the state as changes occur.
- Not having counties involved in the program development process.
- Updating labor agreements.
- Keeping all staff trained and up to date.
- Ensuring counties have the flexibility to operate in ways that are most successful for them. For example, counties may need to structure aspects of their local call centers differently, even though they may be part of a consortia-based service center system.
- Unintended consequences and unanticipated changes in the environment.

Case Studies in Culture Change

Below are two examples of large-scale culture change within government organizations. The first provides an example of lasting culture change that was successfully implemented. The second describes a culture change effort that showed initial success, then abruptly lost momentum when other priorities took precedence.

Implementation of California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)

In 1996, the traditional welfare system was transformed with implementation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. No longer could welfare be perceived as a long-term entitlement. TANF was revolutionary in its goal of moving families from long-term reliance on cash assistance to self-sufficiency by mandating time limits on the period recipients could receive aid, coupled with stronger work expectations and the provision of support, such as job counseling and training opportunities and child care. With implementation of CalWORKs as California's TANF program, California state and county government staff had to embrace this new way of thinking about and serving welfare customers. This new approach would require government to develop a more comprehensive picture of the families' circumstances in order to determine the services needed to move the family to self-sufficiency. It would also require more extensive, ongoing collaboration and coordination with stakeholders.

Shared Vision:

With the urgency for change established by enactment of TANF at the federal level, stakeholders at all levels had to collaborate to implement CalWORKs. The first step was to establish a shared vision of the change through the drafting and enactment of state enabling legislation. That vision had to define how the change would be accomplished and, in the process, overcome widely held doubts that these changes would achieve the goal of moving people to self sufficiency within the timelines. The emphasis had to shift from considering customers as passive recipients of aid to persons needing transitional services and supports in order to achieve employment and no longer require cash assistance. From the recipient's perspective, this entailed establishing a position of mutual obligation in which he or she would need to satisfy stronger work expectations and the government would have to provide supportive services. From the perspective of government, the vision was "flexibility with accountability." That is, local county government would design individual program implementation and management plans while being held to certain performance measures tied to fiscal penalties.

State law, Assembly Bill 1542, was enacted in 1997 after a year of intense collaboration involving then-Governor Pete Wilson, the Legislature, state and county agency

representatives at high levels (including social services, employment services, mental health, substance abuse, child care, etc.), customer advocates, academicians, and other external stakeholder groups. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) hosted numerous work groups with county executives and managers, customer advocates and other stakeholders to frame the vision for implementing the changes. The University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University jointly sponsored discussions using the "Las Vegas rule" in which no one was permitted to publically attribute a comment to a specific speaker, thereby giving everyone a safe environment to openly examine all options. Meanwhile, public meetings were held in many venues to present and discuss provisions. Innumerable Legislative hearings were conducted as the bill moved to passage. In the final weeks before passage, intense bipartisan negotiations were held to shape the details and reach the necessary compromises. What made the process of developing the shared vision successful was transparency and inclusiveness.

Implementation Plans:

The law set the basic requirements and provided a framework for the new program model, but afforded counties flexibility in determining the specifics. The law also dictated how plans would be developed and who would be included in that process by mandating the involvement of affected stakeholder groups at both the state and county levels. Eligibility factors and assistance payments had to be uniform and consistent, but counties were given flexibility in developing employment services to fit their specific local circumstances.

Counties were required to develop county-specific plans for implementing CalWORKs in collaboration with their local stakeholders. Counties were afforded considerable flexibility in the design of their program plans. The state reviewed and certified the plans, not as an approving authority, but to provide assurances that these plans were not in conflict with the law. In the process of developing their individual plans, counties mirrored the collaboration, transparency and inclusiveness that was occurring at the state level. Broad, collaborative work groups were formed crossing county agency lines and engaging customer advocates, community partners, and other stakeholders that might not normally have been involved. External, public advisory and steering committees were established to engage the public, and government and community partners in planning and program development. Internal working committees were created with representatives from the top executive levels to the line staff. Regular, frequent staff meetings were held to review progress, revise policies, and devise strategies.

Communication:

How was alignment of the new CalWORKs vision achieved among all stakeholders at the state and county levels? The answer is, through communication involving every

level in the organization, starting with the highest leadership positions. The message was consistently framed and repeated at every opportunity.

At the state level, the CDSS hosted workgroups with county directors and managers to discuss what was needed to implement the vision. The department promulgated regulations, and issued written policy and procedural instructions for counties. CDSS executive, management and analyst staff communicated constantly with their counterparts in the counties to ensure the state and counties were moving on parallel tracks, all the while reinforcing the basic themes of the vision. CDSS conducted a public awareness campaign, including television and bill board advertisements; setting up a type of speakers bureau that provided briefings and presentations; issuing informational notices and fact sheets; and providing materials for counties to use locally. Within CDSS, an implementation task force was established, led by the CDSS Director, that included executive, management, and analyst staff from all the affected program and support divisions within the department. Meeting regularly, the CDSS Director used this venue not only to direct implementation tasks and monitor their progress, but also to re-enforce with staff the vision and its priority.

Counties approached this need for broad and frequent communication in the same way. The transparent and inclusive process for designing the local plans served to also promote a shared vision at the county level for the specific model to be implemented. Members of local Boards of Supervisors and county executive officers were personally engaged, along with department heads and their executive staff. Through their involvement on work groups and advisory bodies, advocacy organizations were involved in establishment of the shared vision and design of the local programs. Speakers bureaus were established in many counties to communicate the program changes and vision to the community and to address customer fears and concerns about the new requirements. Community based organizations were contacted and given information to share with the public. Informative videos in various languages were made for non-English speaking populations. Handbooks, brochures, and notices were mailed or given to customers. Group orientations were conducted for customers. In some counties, telephone hot lines were set up for persons to more quickly access information. In addition, face-to-face and telephone conversations between county workers and customers addressed this topic in the months preceding and following implementation. Finally, training was provided to county staff.

Leadership:

Top leadership at both the state and county levels made implementation of CalWORKs their priority. This was evidenced by the Governor's personal involvement in framing the state law. It was clearly stated by the CDSS Director and repeated over and over again by CDSS executive staff and management. In the same fashion, County Boards of Supervisors, executive officers and high level managers were fully engaged and vocal about the importance of successful implementation within their own venues.

Organizational Changes:

Development and implementation of the CalWORKs program both necessitated and was facilitated by massive restructuring in CDSS and in the county agencies. The CDSS division responsible for the old public assistance program was renamed and reorganized to facilitate CalWORKs implementation. Functions were consolidated; organizations that needed to coordinate were co-located; new organizational entities were created. Roles were redefined for some functions. Under the old program rules, there was less county discretion; the state played a more directive role intended to enforce statewide uniformity among the 58 counties' programs and practices. Under CalWORKs, the state-county relationship changed so that the state assumed more of a consultative role while a new priority was placed on affording local discretion in program design and delivery. Within CDSS, coordination between program and administrative divisions was intensified. Moreover, new, executive level positions were created called "Regional Advisors." These positions were filled with carefully selected, well respected, and experienced staff known to the counties. Their role was to serve as CDSS liaisons to assigned counties and solve problems. They had access to the CDSS Director and Deputies, and worked with county directors. They existed to help counties quickly get information to and from the department, resolve critical issues that involved multiple CDSS divisions and other state agencies, and remove barriers.

Counties also instituted large-scale reorganizations within their agencies. Depending on the county, caseloads were reorganized and intake procedures and case processing sequences were changed to incorporate employment services earlier (e.g., job search, work readiness assessments, etc.). This resulted in contracts for employment and training services under the old welfare program to be cancelled and that work returned to the human service agency. New positions were created. Organizations were relocated. Functions were redefined and, in some cases, contracted to other entities. Information technology structures were changed. New communication methods were established (e.g., between county eligibility workers and employment services workers). Eligibility roles morphed into case management roles as workers needed to identify and understand more comprehensively those factors in the family that impacted the recipient's ability to secure and keep a job. With that, accountability also shifted from production (processing cases for eligibility) to outcomes (providing supports that enable employment and self sufficiency). In many counties, a one-stop-shop model was instituted in which customers could receive key, linked services at one location instead of having to apply to various programs in different offices. Efforts were also made in most counties to transform the look and feel of the welfare office into one resembling an employment office, influencing how customers and staff perceived their own roles, each other, and the program. An employment office environment reinforced the change that having a job was no longer just a factor that affected the customer's eligibility for cash assistance, but it was, in fact, the critical milestone toward achieving self-sufficiency.

Performance Monitoring:

State law required a third party evaluator to assess project success. State funding was set aside to contract with the university and research community to generate performance metrics and evaluate program performance. Because a randomized study with a control group had recently been done on the old welfare system, a set of metrics had already been developed. The evaluator built on those, focusing on the immediate program performance. The primary performance indicator was the Work Participation Rate or WPR. Still in use today, the WPR represents a complicated formula involving a number of variables. It is used to determine the overall program performance at the state and county levels. Other performance metrics were collected, monitored and evaluated. For example, the number of recipients exiting CalWORKs because of employment was coded into the Statewide Automated Welfare System. Individual metrics were monitored by counties and ad hoc reports were developed to examine specific features.

Because of its success, CalWORKs earned federal, TANF High Performance Bonus payments as one of the top ten performing states in the nation. A total of \$157,460,251 was awarded to California in 1999 through 2005²⁵. The awards in 1999, 2000, and 2001 were granted as a result of high job retention among adult recipients; the 1999 award was also due to an earnings gain rate for recipients. In 2002 through 2005, awards were received for access to childcare for low income families. Also in 2005, an award was received for family stability as measured by the percent of children who were living with married parents.

Institutionalizing the Changes:

The culture changes that were ushered in with CalWORKs continue today. They were institutionalized by a number of features, the most powerful of which are the mandates in state law. Other factors that support their continuance are the organizational changes at the state and county levels that continue, the ongoing collaborations and communication channels that were forged, and the changed beliefs and assumptions that continue to form the foundation of staff and customer behaviors.

Insights:

The preceding information was gathered from interviews conducted with 13 individuals who had participated in the implementation of CalWORKs. They included current and former state and county executives, managers, and staff, as well as representatives of a community based organization. When asked to name the most significant strategies that contributed to the successful implementation of CalWORKs, they emphasized the following:

²⁵ Source: <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/res/pdf/calhist/HPBNov05.pdf>> accessed February 22, 2013.

- Active, visible involvement by high level leadership, including not just the Governor and CDSS Director and county directors, but also top leaders in each of the key stakeholder networks.
- Clear and consistent messaging from the top leadership that was repeated and reinforced at every opportunity.
- Organizational changes like the co-location of functions to facilitate communication and coordination.
- Communicating with and engaging all stakeholders from the initial development of the strategic vision through program design and implementation.
- Having a detailed statute that framed the vision and mandated involvement of all stakeholders.
- Establishing venues (e.g., Advisory Committees) where community partners, customers, other stakeholders and the public could express concerns and pose questions.
- Empowering staff with information and the latitude to design their own work, then celebrating successes with staff.
- Recognition of the importance of language in expressing the message (e.g., the state was not "approving" county plans, but was "certifying" the plans' conformance with law).

When the interviewees were asked what, if anything, they would have done differently, the list was shorter:

- Begin engaging with stakeholder partners even sooner and communicate more with customers.
- Place equal attention on streamlining the eligibility side of the program as on the employment side.
- Continue the Regional Advisor positions.
- Define more specific metrics and outcome expectations.
- Conduct longitudinal studies of recipients who secured employment and left CalWORKs to determine if they, in fact, achieved long-term self-sufficiency.

A Statewide Initiative That Stalled

Recognizing the need to improve the delivery of public services, a state²⁶ partnered with private industry to identify strategies to achieve this shared goal. A task force was formed that recommended speeding up service delivery by incorporating process improvement practices, creating a customer-friendly culture, and enhancing access to services by improving call center management and systems. This three-part strategy became the cornerstone of a statewide customer service initiative. The project was publically launched when the governor proclaimed that his state would offer the best customer service of any in the country. The governor then created within the

²⁶ The particular state is not identified because the initiative discussed was the priority of a previous governor's administration and not the current administration.

Governor's Office a special organization dedicated to customer service that would oversee the transformation.

Shared Vision and Communication:

The governor established the urgency for immediate change and the vision for that change. The governor's customer service office then worked to communicate to staff the project's core values. These became the foundation of a statewide communications campaign, a massive statewide training program, and a newly instituted governor's employee recognition program. Statewide communication tools included a website, newsletter, and marketing materials. The governor's employee recognition program held annual and quarterly events. Another significant strategy in establishing a shared vision was promotion of the concept of a single state government "team" in which agencies and staff would view themselves, not as separate entities, but as part of a team incorporating all state agencies and state universities.

Leadership:

The customer service initiative was endorsed actively and publicly at every level from the governor through all department heads and managers. Agency executives were expected to lead their organizations in embracing a consciousness of customer service, spend time personally listening to customers and employees, communicate the vision, actively support the various components of the initiative, and publicize progress. The specialized customer service office, as an agent for the governor, acted to provide guidance, develop tools for agencies to use, support dedicated customer service project staff placed into each agency, encourage the commitment and enthusiasm of agency heads, and communicate best practice information among all state agencies. Management and staff performance was evaluated based on success in implementing the project. With this support, the customer service initiative quickly became the expected way to do business throughout state agencies.

Implementation Plan:

The project was designed to roll-out sequentially, starting with an initial pilot project in one state department. Following that success, all agencies were asked to volunteer to pilot the new approach. Most agencies voluntarily responded to this call. In the next round, participation was mandated for all executive branch agencies, comprising 95 percent of the state workforce.

Implementation was focused on six areas:

- Establish a customer service focus in executive branch agencies: Agencies were required to produce customer service improvement plans and commit to achieving specific, numeric performance goals as part of their three-year strategic planning process.

- Create a culture of continuous improvement: This was done by implementing Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) events using Lean Management²⁷ techniques to streamline processes in order to better satisfy customers' needs.
- Develop a customer focused employee culture: This was done primarily through mandated training for all managers and staff, and ongoing statewide communication tools; incorporating customer service performance standards into annual performance evaluations; and rewarding excellent performance through the governor's customer service recognition program.
- Improve call center performance: A vendor-based enterprise-wide system was put into place with continuous technology updates, and call center manager and staff skills were improved so that performance in all of the state's call centers was brought into conformance with industry standards.
- Ensure the public can connect to the right office on the first call: A new toll free telephone line was initiated to triage and transfer calls, ensuring that the public need only call one number to access the right agency on the first call.
- Measure service quality and employee satisfaction: Metrics were established to measure customer and employee satisfaction.

Organizational Changes:

The most significant organizational changes instituted as a result of this project were establishment of the governor's customer service office (previously described); restructuring of the call center system, including instituting the new toll free telephone line (also previously discussed); and creation of a new state position dedicated to promoting customer service.

These new state positions were placed into every agency for the specific purpose of driving implementation of the initiative within the agency. They were responsible for developing and implementing customer service improvement plans containing performance metrics and goals; managing the RPI process; identifying and sharing best practices; and acting as catalysts for change.

Performance Monitoring:

Researchers from the state's university assisted in developing the metrics used to establish performance goals and monitor performance. All state agencies were measured using the same standards. Standard instruments were developed for tracking customer satisfaction, and agency and university employee job satisfaction. A survey was also developed to rate satisfaction for external stakeholders, such as service providers, teachers, judges, etc. The statewide customer survey indicated that overall customer satisfaction increased from 74 to 76 percent in the first two years.

²⁷ Lean Management, in its simplest form, involves evaluating business processes from the perspective of the customer; separating tasks or activities that meet the customer's needs (value) from those that do not (non-value); and making changes to eliminate or reduce the activities that do not meet the customer's needs. Ideally, this is repeated until all non-value activity is eliminated.

Employee job satisfaction was rated at 75 percent; this represented a 10 percent increase over the same two years.

Institutionalizing the Changes:

Many important features of the initiative were expected to support continuance of the changed culture. The most significant were the changes to the state's call center system and establishment of the central toll free number. Other important examples include, development of a systematic way of measuring service quality and customer satisfaction; embedding the continuous improvement process within each agency with specially trained and certified staff; mandating that customer service improvement goals and plans be incorporated into each agency's three-year strategic plan; incorporating customer service as a core component in all leadership development programs and a required competency to be evaluated in all employees' annual performance reviews; ensuring the continuance of customer service training through train-the-trainer dissemination; and establishment of an internal website to inform staff, celebrate excellent performance, and otherwise promote customer service.

Despite this effort to institutionalize the customer service culture change, significant events occurred which thwarted further progress and eroded some of the advances achieved. The governor's term was ending. The specialized office of customer service was moved under the state's human resources agency. Although done in an attempt to shelter the office so it could continue under a new administration, this move diminished the office's power and influence. Key staff left for private sector employment. After the new governor assumed office, a poor economy forced statewide budget cuts in many programs, including the customer service program. With the customer service budget and staffing reduced, its mission was severely restricted. The dedicated customer service positions continued to exist only to the extent their individual agencies chose to continue that function. Statewide customer and staff satisfaction surveys were stopped, although some individual agencies continued to use the survey instruments on an ad hoc basis. The requirements to address customer service in agency strategic planning and employee evaluations did continue, however, as did the website, call center and central toll free telephone line.

Without statewide comparative data it is impossible to quantify the impact these changes had on customer service performance overall. However, anecdotal information indicated that the full statewide initiative was essentially stalled and parts of it were reversed.

Insights:

Based on interviews with four staff who were involved in implementing the customer service program, the following are their observations about achieving culture change:

- Political leadership and support from the highest level is essential, both for initial implementation and to maintain momentum.
- A strong oversight agency to lead administration of the change is also very important.
- How the message for change is communicated can either motivate or offend. The message should not sound like criticism.
- When engineering change across large, diverse organizations, individual agency differences need to be acknowledged; agencies need to be allowed flexibility in the details of implementing the change.
- In order to improve customer service it is necessary to improve employee satisfaction and morale at the same time. Staff need to feel valued before they can engage. Happy people give good customer service.
- Whenever monitoring slows down, customer service performance is affected. It is critical to keep the focus on measuring performance.
- Collecting and utilizing customer feedback is crucial to identifying how to enhance service delivery.
- The rigorous practice of continuous improvement is beneficial to streamlining processes.
- Mandated customer service training for all managers and staff helps ensure full penetration of the vision, goals and skills.
- Employee recognition and rewards can be powerful motivators.

The Kotter Change Model

There are numerous theories offering models for creating organizational culture change. The premier theory was proposed by John P. Kotter, a former Harvard Business School professor who is now the Chief Innovation Officer at Kotter International. His articles and books, including Leading Change (published in 1996) and The Heart of Change (published in 2002), are considered definitive works on the subject. The following is a brief summary of Kotter's eight-step model for achieving change.²⁸

Kotter's premise is that transformational change does not happen all at once. Instead it builds in stages. Each step requires certain actions that if skipped altogether or not done well can jeopardize success.

Step 1: Establish a Sense of Urgency

Motivate people to accept, desire and work for change by convincing them that the status quo is not working well and that the consequences of doing nothing are potentially more negative than the uncertainties inherent in changing. To be successful, at least 75 percent of the managers need to embrace this. A potential hazard at this stage is moving too quickly through this step by underestimating the entrenchment people have with what is familiar and comfortable.

Step 2: Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition

Assemble this coalition from key people in the organization who share a deep commitment to achieving the change and possess the power and personal influence to lead the change effort. Form this team irrespective of the normal organizational hierarchy and let it operate outside that hierarchy. Adhering strictly to the normal chain of command when selecting these leaders can cause the wrong people to be included.

Step 3: Create a Vision

Create the vision and strategies that will guide the change effort. Avoid defining a vision that is either too complicated or too fuzzy.

Step 4: Communicate the Vision

The vision and strategies for achieving it must be expressed powerfully and at every opportunity. They must be incorporated and modeled in all aspects of the operation and

²⁸ This information was taken from the Harvard Business Review, January 2007, reprinting of John P. Kotter's article, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail."

in the behaviors of the leaders. The risks at this stage are not communicating enough and allowing the leaders to act in a manner that is inconsistent with the vision.

Step 5: Empower Others to Act on the Vision

Identify and remove barriers to achieving the vision and strategies, including barriers created by organizational structures, processes, systems, and influential individuals who resist the change. A hazard at this stage is overlooking the influence of those that oppose the change and failing to deal with them effectively.

Step 6: Plan for and Create Short-Term Wins

Identify and achieve targets within a short timeframe that are visible and certain to be successful. Reward the people who help achieve these improvements. The risk is not achieving these short-term successes early enough; the goal should be to visibly demonstrate concrete progress toward achieving the vision within the first 12 to 24 months. Failure to do this provides support to detractors and retards momentum.

Step 7: Consolidate Improvements and Produce Still More Change

Consolidate and build on each success, using it as a springboard to the next target. Engage in continuous improvement, achieving new milestones and progressing toward the ultimate goal. Refrain from proclaiming victory too soon.

Step 8: Institutionalize New Approaches

Anchor the change as the new norm. Be sure it is visible in every aspect of the organization's culture, constantly articulated, and reinforced through the values applied in the training, hiring, and promotion processes. One critical mistake at this stage is promoting staff into leadership positions who do not fully embrace the new norm.