

## Service provision expectations

No matter what service you deliver, the satisfaction your consumers feel will be determined not only by the quality of the actual service but also by how well it meets their expectations.

In fact, the simple mathematical formula:

**satisfaction** = (quality of service) — (expectations)

tells it all – consumers will only be satisfied with a quality of service that is equal to or exceeds their expectations. Quality service therefore comes from continuously improving the service and knowing and managing the expectations of your consumers.

We have found that consumers tend to have expectations about, and judge the quality of most services along five key dimensions:

- your **tangibles** – the physical appearance of your offices, personnel and communication materials
- your **reliability** – the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- your **responsiveness** – the willingness to help the consumer and provide a prompt service
- your **assurance** – the knowledge, credibility and courtesy of your staff and their ability to convey trust and confidence
- your **empathy** – the ability to provide caring, individualised attention to the consumer which involves recognising their needs, being approachable and communicating well with them.

You need to perform well on all these dimensions to maximise consumer satisfaction with your service.

### The basic strategy

- Get to know your consumers – identify who they really are and what they currently expect of and think of your service.
- Fashion your service delivery to meet those expectations if they are reasonable and achievable.
- Put effort into meeting those things which matter the most to your consumers.
- Where you can't meet expectations, take steps to shape realistic expectations in line with what your agency can or chooses to deliver.

### What consumers expect and want

Research around the world about what consumers expect from services provided or funded by government consistently reveals some common consumer expectations:

- people want to be treated like they are valued
- they expect courtesy, respect, impartiality and honesty
- they want processes that are easy to understand
- they want timely and reliable advice and service and they don't want to be given the run-around
- they want options for where and how the service is provided
- they want clear advice in letters, forms, publications and verbal communications
- they want fair and friendly treatment.

Consumers generally view services provided or funded by government differently to those provided by the private sector. Most consumers are taxpayers, so to some extent they feel some entitlement to attentive service. In addition, consumers often have little choice or power when they come into contact with these kinds of agencies. In most cases the consumer is there to ask for something (eg, approval, assistance, information, permission) which they cannot get elsewhere.

However, aiming to maximise consumer satisfaction does not necessarily mean that the consumer should always get what they want. This may not be possible or simply not merited. It does however, mean aiming to generate a level of satisfaction where consumers know that they have been treated fairly and everything reasonably possible has been done to meet their needs.

### Ways to manage consumer expectations

- Clearly communicate the functions, services and processes of your agency. Use a variety of communication devices such as newsletters, brochures, audio recordings, website, reports, open meetings. Use formats appropriate for your target audience.
- Advertise the service standards that you can deliver and acknowledge any limitations or problems with your service.
- Check that you have understood a consumer's request before taking action.

# Service provision expectations

- Be upfront about what you can do and what you cannot do for a particular consumer. Don't make any promises that you cannot fulfil.
- Be open to complaints about your service.
- Seek and use consumer feedback to continually review your service provision to work out ways you can meet expectations and maximise satisfaction.

## Expectations of complainants

Once dissatisfaction turns into a complaint there is a more challenging set of expectations to manage. When you ask people what they expect when making complaints, they invariably say they want:

- to be listened to and understood
- to be treated with respect
- to be given an explanation and (often) an apology
- corrective action to be taken as soon as possible.

It is critical to be aware that fixing the problem alone will not necessarily lead to complainant satisfaction. You have to meet the other human communication needs as well. Complaint-handling should be approached as a special challenge and a second chance to provide satisfaction to your consumers.

## Meeting basic expectations about the complaint process

In addition to the four expectations outlined above, reasonable expectations of complainants include:

- access to a clear complaint process that is easy to understand
- reasonable assistance in making and complaint and being told how their complaint will be dealt with
- acknowledgement of receipt of written complaints, including the name and contact details of the person handling the complaint
- proper consideration being given to their concerns, including their allegations being looked at objectively and any investigation being conducted impartially
- privacy and confidentiality

## Contact us for more information

Our business hours are: Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm (*Inquiries section closes at 4pm*)

If you wish to visit us, we prefer you make an appointment. Please call us first to ensure your complaint is within our jurisdiction and our staff are available to see you.

Level 24, 580 George Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

**Email** [nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au)  
**Web** [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)

**General inquiries** 02 9286 1000  
**Facsimile** 02 9283 2911

**Toll free** (outside Sydney metro) 1800 451 524  
**Tel. typewriter** (TTY) 02 9264 8050

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS): 131 450  
We can arrange an interpreter through TIS or you can contact TIS yourself before speaking to us.

- their complaint being dealt with in a timely manner, with progress reports where the process is protracted
- substantiated allegations being appropriately addressed and remedial action being taken if appropriate (including providing an apology)
- reasons being given for decisions
- assurance being given that any systemic problem revealed by their complaint will also be fixed
- not being subjected to any reprisals for making the complaint
- being informed of any right of review or provided with appropriate referrals to alternative sources of assistance.

## Ways to manage complainant expectations

- Explain the complaint-handling process to the complainant.
- Find out what the complainant wants done. If that is not possible (or likely) tell them at the outset.
- Confirm with them that you have fully understood what their complaint is about and what they want to happen.
- Outline the possible outcomes. Let them know the limitations of your powers.
- Provide realistic timeframes for dealing with the matter.
- Make sure you follow through on any promises made.

## Agency expectations of complainants

Effective complaint handling is also dependant on fair dealing from the complainants side. It is reasonable for agencies to expect complainants to:

- provide all relevant information/evidence in their possession to the agency at the outset and not provide any information that is intentionally misleading or knowingly wrong
- clearly identify the issues that they are complaining about and what result/outcome they want, if this is possible
- provide their contact details so that the agency can respond
- treat staff of the agency with the same level of courtesy and respect complainants expect to be treated with.