



THE FUTURE

CSSP believes that the customer satisfaction model can improve almost any service and is particularly valuable for community development approaches that target specific neighborhoods.

For more information on the CUSTOMER SATISFACTION PROJECT, please contact: Phyllis R. Brunson at 202.371.1565 or phyllis.brunson@cssp.org.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) is a public policy, research and technical assistance organization. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., CSSP works with state and federal policymakers and with communities across the country.

It relies on data, extensive community experience and a focus on results to promote smart policies that improve the lives of children and their families and achieve equity for those too often left behind.

CSSP's CURRENT WORK

ATLANTA

The CUSTOMER SATISFACTION approach has been adopted by residents of three low-income Atlanta neighborhoods. They conduct research, analyzing their experiences with service and business quality. Accomplishments include:

- A Customer Satisfaction Network, where residents participate in forums that allow them to report about service experiences and expectations and to receive advice. The network is monitored and supported by a Consumer Advocacy Group.
- A partnership with the Morehouse School of Medicine that has produced data illustrating the discrepancies in service provisions to residents in these neighborhoods.
- A series of checklists for residents to use to ensure they are receiving high quality child care services and nutritional goods and products.
- Initial work to look into the quality of education in community schools, using Georgia Department of Education standards as quality benchmarks.



CSSP partnered with community residents, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Atlanta initiative and Consumers Union, publisher of Consumer Reports, to launch this effort. CSSP continues to provide technical assistance and guidance.

MARYLAND

In Montgomery County, CSSP worked with the Department of Health and Human Services to design and implement a pilot project that expanded to all of the county's service centers, which provide emergency services, food stamps, housing and rental assistance, child care and employment services. More than 300 service center workers were trained using a CSSP-created curriculum. In an evaluation, staff and customers said the project:

- Improved workflow for staff (73%)
- Helped residents access services (77%)
- Improved customer experience (88%)

NATIONAL PRODUCTS

- The Consumer Advocacy Implementation Guide (developed in partnership with the Consumers Union)
- Improving the Quality and Access to Services and Supports in Vulnerable Neighborhoods: THE FRAMEWORK



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THE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION PROJECT

In the private sector, customer satisfaction is a key indicator of success. Consumers determine which companies thrive and which don't. In vulnerable neighborhoods, community residents don't always have the same input. But the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) thinks they should.

That's why CSSP, a Washington, D.C.-based public policy, research and technical assistance organization, developed the CUSTOMER SATISFACTION PROJECT, a tool for communities to improve the quality and delivery of services to residents most in need.

The initiative is aimed at training residents to become empowered consumers who demand quality services, such as healthy food choices in grocery stores and quality child care centers. As residents become informed, they shape the marketplace by communicating preferences and experiences to the schools, businesses and organizations that deliver those services in their neighborhoods.

This work has three main components:

1. Engaging and educating residents as consumers
2. Developing a neighborhood consumer advocacy group to capture consumer feedback
3. Creating partnerships between public and private agencies to use this feedback to improve services

These strategies make service providers more responsive and accountable in vulnerable neighborhoods and encourage residents to take action in their communities.



What We Have Learned

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION creates a culture of accountability linked directly to consumer feedback, something that is often absent in vulnerable communities.

This approach goes beyond traditional methods of resident engagement, motivating residents to become activists and pursue a self-directed pathway to results.

When residents act as customers, they become more astute about their rights as well as their own responsibility to change their circumstances.

Educating residents about service expectations and high standards and seeking their opinions, bolsters self-confidence. It helps individuals realize that even with relatively little money, they deserve quality services and have the right to seek redress if they are not getting them.

It is initially a challenge for public sector workers to see clients as consumers with rights instead of people in need who should be "happy with whatever they get." However, when the shift is made, everyone benefits.

Agencies and businesses that initially show little interest in customer feedback begin engaging with consumers once their services, and those of their competitors, are ranked and assessed.

When organizations adopt a customer focus, workers are more successful in their jobs as feedback allows them to be more precise in meeting families' needs.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION aligns residents' insight, voices and activism with agency resources to improve service quality and achieve better results for all.

THE RESULT

A New Accountability

Residents are asked if they got what they needed and if the services were effective and delivered with respect. They are asked what changes would improve service quality.

Publicly reporting these experiences holds agencies and businesses accountable. In addition, residents are transformed.

Instead of being resigned to accepting what they are offered, residents feel they deserve better services – and then ask for them.



Creating strategies . Empowering communities . Delivering results

Find out how you can make a difference. www.cssp.org

