Assessment of Service Canada's "Service to Seniors" Pilot Project
Survey among citizens and interviews with staff

Highlights presented to
Service Canada

July 2006

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SURVEYS, OPINION POLLS AND MARKETING

Background, objectives and summary of methodology (survey)

Background
- On September 14, 2005 the federal government launched Service Canada, a one-stop window where the citizen can obtain various government services, all under the same roof. For each service that it wants to offer, Service Canada (SC) has developed a service offer and is currently experimenting it my means of pilot projects. Consequently, SC wants to evaluate these projects in order to ensure proper delivery of the service to all citizens. Part of the information needed to evaluate the project will be obtained from citizens through telephone surveys. This pilot projects took place at various places in Quebec.

Objectives
- The main objective of this survey is to measure the level of satisfaction of citizens who received services at the pilot sites.

- This report presents only the results for people who obtained services in one of the three Service Canada Centres experimenting, by means of a pilot project, the service offer of Seniors (Lasalle, Bas-Saint-Laurent, Outaouais).

Target population
- Citizens serviced by the Seniors service offer.

Sampling
- 107 respondents from the 553 citizens recruited responded to the survey.

Collection
- Telephone surveys conducted between May 24 and June 7, 2006.
- Survey response rate: 19 %
- Response rate for the telephone interviews: 74 %

Weighting
- No weighting was done.

Maximum error margin
- 8.8% (at a confidence level of 95%)

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Objectives and summary of methodology (interviews)

Objectives
- The main objective of the interviews with staff was to obtain their impression about the delivery of the service offer, including an evaluation of the quality of the documentation and tools available, of service modes, of impacts on their work and suggestions about good practices that could be implemented in view to a large scale roll-out of the offer.

Recruiting
- The recruiting for the in-depth telephone interviews was done by SOM from May 25 to 30, 2006 using a list of contacts provided by Service Canada.

Interviews
- Twelve telephone interviews with Service Canada staff, during between 30 and 45 minutes, were conducted from May 31 to June 8, 2006 by a SOM interviewer. The interviews were conducted in French and recorded with the respondent's authorization. They were subsequently transcribed. The interviews are broken down as follows:

  - Agents d'aide à la clientèle (AAC):   6 interviews
  - Consultantes, prestation de services (CPS) :   3 interviews
  - Directrices, prestation de services (DPS) :   3 interview

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Highlights integrating the survey and the interviews with staff

Aspects evaluated by citizens and staff

Overall service provided to citizens

- Overall, most citizens declare themselves very satisfied with the services they received, despite the fact that the service is only being executed partially. There is a high level of satisfaction with the time spent in order to obtain the services received, the politeness and courtesy of staff, the competency and level of knowledge of staff, the information provided, the layout, and the coaching on using the service modes. Furthermore, the large majority of citizens consider that they were treated fairly and equally.
- The wait time to meet with a AAC, although generally perceived as satisfactory, created more dissatisfaction than the preceding aspects.

Providing the Service for seniors offer

- All citizens polled received the services in the official language of their choice. However, just over half were offered to use the Internet or telephone service and most citizens, although they preferred the telephone service to the Internet, used neither. Some were coached on these rare uses, almost all satisfactorily. What the citizens feel they learned by using the service modes is however very variable. In fact, some did not learn at all while others learned a great deal. Furthermore, a distinct minority of citizens are considering using one of the service modes autonomously in the future.
- Only half of citizens feel they received service that goes beyond what they asked for, while the majority feels important to be given service that exceeds the request made (which is what the offer is supposed to do). Furthermore, the general information on Government of Canada programs and services is not always provided. Here as well, most citizens consider useful to receive this type of information.
- According to staff, the service offer may not always be properly executed due to insufficient staffing, but also because citizens have a limited knowledge of the Internet. This may also even apply to certain AACs.

Privacy and layout

- The majority of citizens polled feel that their personal information was protected by Service Canada staff and that the layout is appropriate with respect to protecting personal information. However, even though few citizens are aware of the problem, AACs consider that open office space is not appropriate with respect to privacy. Moreover, it was suggested to move the dedicated phone lines further away from the waiting area or to put them in closed offices. Also worth noting is that citizens sometimes feel there is a lot a movement from place to place at certain offices, without this being considered a major problem.

Aspects evaluated by staff only

Human resources

- AACs feel that the documentation and reference tools available in electronic format help them in executing the service offer. However, the activity table and the use of the forms seem to be a problem in certain cases.
- The introduction of the Service for Seniors offer had a positive impact on several employees who are eager to help and provide better service to citizens. As for negative aspects, we note the compiling of statistics and having to manage several different offers using several different procedures at the same time. As for management, they feel that considerable work is needed to bring AACs not to underestimate seniors' proficiency in using the Internet.

Operations and processes

- CPSs and the DPS are satisfied with the supervision provided by the region. The tracking requested by the region is not a problem for CPSs, as the work is done mostly by AACs.
- According to CPSs and the DPS, the Service for Seniors offer integrates well into the existing offers, although not all AACs share this view.

Exportability of the pilot project

- Here are the main suggestions or practices to consider according to staff in view to a potential roll-out of the offer:
  - Ensure having sufficient staff to execute the offer.
  - Improve the attitude and training of AACs, as well as follow-up of the offer execution.
  - Leave the choice of the mode to the citizen.
  - Make the Internet system more user-friendly.

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Conclusions

About the services provided to citizens:

Citizens generally very satisfied with the services

- The large majority of citizens polled declare themselves very satisfied with the services they received (and obtained what they needed) in regards to all aspects except the wait time to meet a AAC, which created a significant level of dissatisfaction.

- All citizens received the services in the official language of their choice, but the service offer is not executed as it should be. Indeed, the information about Government of Canada programs and services is not systematically provided, citizens are offered to use the service modes only half of the time, and only half of citizens feel that the service goes beyond what they asked for. Another significant clue to the partial execution of the service offer is that a small minority of citizens are planning on using one of the service modes autonomously in the future. Therefore, there is nothing conclusive for the time being.

AACs aware of the problems

- Other than the problems with wait time and privacy, the partial execution of the service offer would stem in large part from the perception shared by several AACs that seniors are not comfortable with using the Internet, and from the AACs' reluctance to help seniors become more autonomous in this respect. Therefore, a change of mindset would be necessary. Furthermore, certain AACs would also have difficulty themselves browsing comfortably on the Internet, which emphasizes the importance of training. Shortcomings were also noted with respect to the documentation available about the services as a whole.

Conclusions - cont'd

About the layout and confidentiality:

Open office space is not appropriate with respect to protecting personal information

- Although most of the citizens polled feel that the layout is appropriate with respect to confidentiality, some of them are concerned about the proximity of other people. The staff also emphasized that open office space, the absence of partitions between computer workstations, partitions that are too low, the proximity between computers workstations and the lack of areas strictly dedicated to the Income security program were hindering privacy. It was suggested to move the dedicated phone lines further away or to put them in closed offices.

About the service modes:

The website could be more user-friendly

- The website is not user-friendly enough according to several respondents, especially when using the forms, which are not interactive and have a font size that is too small. Also worth noting is that despite the wealth of information, it takes a lot of time and several clicks of the mouse to find it. Considering the reluctance of citizens and staff to use the Internet, it appears critical to create an environment that facilitates as much as possible the use of this service mode. As for the telephone service, other than the privacy issues, we find that the IVR system is off-putting for some, hence the importance for AACs to inform citizens about the possibility of talking directly with a representative by pressing zero.

About the internal aspects of the service offer's implementation:

Internal processes are adequate

- The local follow-up mechanisms, which consist mainly in meetings, as well as supervision and tracking by the region, do not pose any problems. However, more support visits to verify the quality of the AACs' work on an individual basis would be desired.

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