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INDEX SAYS CITIZENS HAVE LOW EXPECTATIONS OF
GOVERNMENT, BUT FIND A LOT TO LIKE

Annual Federal Government Special Report from American Customer Satisfaction Index Shows Agency Performance Varies; Timeliness and Ease of Service Need Work

MILWAUKEE, December 15, 2003---Americans are more satisfied with government than you might think, according to a special report of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) released today.

The agencies registered an average score of 70.9 on the ACSI's 100-point scale. This trails the national ACSI score of 73.8. Ratings on the Index are produced through a scientific model in which overall satisfaction scores reflect performance in areas that "customers" identify as being most important. The ACSI, produced quarterly, measures customer satisfaction with a wide range of goods and services consumed by Americans.

Courtesy and professionalism rate highly, in the 80-82 range, among the agencies measured. Expectations are low, an average of 68 as compared to 78 in the private sector. But the real sore point for citizens is timeliness of service (70) and ease of doing business (74). The timeliness score plunged downward, off by three points since last year. "Trust" in government receives a passing grade of 72, perhaps higher than most would expect.

"In general, people who actually interact with the government are reasonably satisfied," said Claes Fornell, who heads the ACSI. "There are some striking contrasts when you get citizens to assess their actual experience with government as opposed to just general attitudes. And there is evidence that interaction improves trust, which is good for our democracy."

The ACSI comes out of the University of Michigan, in partnership with the American Society for Quality (ASQ) and consulting firm the CFI Group.

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“There was a time when people wondered whether American business could truly improve quality and become better,” said the ASQ’s Jack West. “Some people say the same about government. The ACSI data should really give naysayers pause when they say government can’t do things right and trying to improve is hopeless. In general, the citizens do not agree with that point of view.”

Retirement benefit recipients, Veterans Administration (VA) clients, and users of the Federal Consumer Information Center are among the most satisfied constituents of large-volume agencies. The Pension Guaranty Corporation scored an 84. Benefit recipients of the Social Security Agency and inpatients at VA medical centers are also highly satisfied, with satisfaction levels of 81. VA outpatients, users of the VA toll-free line, and those who interact with the Pueblo, Colorado Consumer Information Center all registered satisfaction levels of 80.

The highest-scoring agency is the US Mint, with an 89. The report indicated that the Mint audience segment measured is coin collectors, who show very high satisfaction with product offerings, quality, and service. The ACSI report includes both large-volume agencies and measurement of several more specialized audience segments.

The Internal Revenue Service rates well among e-filers, earning a 77. The overall IRS score for non-business taxpayers of 63 has been rising during the five years the ACSI has been measuring government, largely because of the increasing number of e-filers. The IRS does less well among businesses, getting a 60 from small businesses and a 53 from large and mid-sized business tax filers.

“The IRS has an uphill battle on satisfaction,” said Fornell. “Very few are going to be satisfied to pay taxes. But their improvement shows that it is possible for even them to earn the approval and satisfaction of citizens.”

The findings released today also included a separate report on e-government, which shows that some online services meet or surpass private-sector performance while others are in less-advanced stages of development. The e-government ratings are also calculated using the ACSI methodology through a special application developed by online satisfaction firm ForeSee Results and managed by the Treasury Department’s Federal Consulting Group.

“E-government is turning a corner that the commercial Internet turned a couple years ago,” said ForeSee Results CEO Larry Freed. “Some agencies are surpassing the private sector in terms of satisfaction, and they are finding that citizens sometimes prefer government sites even when there is a commercial option. Health sites we measure are doing very well—partly because they are mastering private-sector approaches, but more because they are making themselves customer-driven rather than bureaucracy-driven and because people trust the government to give them reliable information and no spam.”

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December 2003 Scores:

ID	AGENCY/DEPARTMENT	CUSTOMER SEGMENT	2003 Score
	Federal Government (Aggregated)		70.9
	Benefits Recipients		
PBGC	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation	Retirees	84
SSA	Social Security Administration	Retirement benefits recipients	81
VHA	Veterans Health Administration, VA	Inpatients at VA medical centers	81
VHA	Veterans Health Administration, VA	Outpatients at VA clinics	80
CMS	Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, HHS	Medicare recipients	77
OPM	Office of Personnel Management	Federal retirees and annuitants	76
	Information Providers/Technical Assistance/Supply		
GSA	General Services Administration	Users of the Federal Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado	80
VBA	Veterans Benefits Administration, VA	Users of the VA Insurance Center's toll-free telephone service	80
NWS	National Weather Service, Commerce	Users of the National Weather Service	78
GSA	General Services Administration	Users of the Federal Supply Service	77
PBGC	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation	Pension plan participants	74
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor	Users of labor statistics	74
BOC	Bureau of the Census, Commerce	Data distributors in state and local agencies	71
PBGC	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation	Pension practitioners	69
	Specialty Retail – Collectibles		
Mint	U.S. Mint, Treasury	Buyers of numismatic and commemorative coins	89
	Financial Services		
FSA	Federal Student Aid, Education	Borrowers with federal student loans in repayment status	77
SBA	Small Business Administration	Applicants for low-interest loans through the Disaster Assistance Program	59
MBDA	Minority Business Development Agency, Commerce	Users of Minority Business Development Centers and the Phoenix matching system	57
	Recreational Land Users		
USACE	Army Corps of Engineers, Defense	Recreational visitors	76
	IRS		
IRS	Internal Revenue Service, Treasury	All individual tax filers	63
		Individual electronic tax filers	77
		Individual paper tax filers	53
IRS	Internal Revenue Service, Treasury	Small Business Corporate tax filers	60
IRS	Internal Revenue Service, Treasury	Large & Midsize Business Corporate tax filers	53
	Regulatory		
APHIS	Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service, Agriculture	Applicants for permits through the Biotechnology Regulatory Service	68
ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives, Justice	Participants in the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN)	65
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration, Transportation	Commercial pilots	64
	International Travelers		
Consular	Consular Affairs, State	Recent passport applicants/renewals	75
Customs	Customs Service, Treasury	International air travelers	65
	E-Government U.S. Agency/Department/Office	Website	2003 Q4 Scores
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	MedlinePlus main website - http://medlineplus.gov	86
FSA	Federal Student Aid, Education	Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) website - www.fafsa.ed.gov	86
OWH	Office on Women's Health, HHS	National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) main website - www.4woman.gov	83
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	MedlinePlus en español main website - http://medlineplus.gov/esp/	82
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency	Recruitment website - http://www.cia.gov/employment	80
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration	NASA main website - www.nasa.gov	79
Mint	United States Mint, Treasury	Online Catalog - http://catalog.usmint.gov/	78

NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology, Commerce	NIST main website - www.nist.gov	78
DOS	Department of State	Recruitment website - www.careers.state.gov	77
NCJRS	National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Justice	NCJRS main website - www.ncjrs.org	76
ERS	Economic Research Service, Agriculture	ERS main website - www.ers.usda.gov	74
NIAID	National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, HHS	NIAID main website - www.niaid.nih.gov	74
OJJDP	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Justice	OJJDP main website - http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org	73
DOS	Department of State	Main website - www.state.gov	72
Forest	Forest Service, Agriculture	Main website - http://www.fs.fed.us	72
GSA	General Services Administration	FirstGov.gov website - www.firstgov.gov	72
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	Main website - www.nlm.nih.gov	72
FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service, Agriculture	FAS main website - www.fas.usda.gov	70
FSA	Farm Service Agency, Agriculture	FSA main website - www.fsa.usda.gov	70
IIP	International Information Programs, State	IIP main website - http://usinfo.state.gov	69
CNS	Corporation for National and Community Service	Americorps website - http://www.americorps.org	68
OPM	Office of Personnel Management	Recruitment website - www.usajobs.opm.gov	68
Treasury	Department of the Treasury	Main website - www.treasury.gov	67
GAO	General Accounting Office	GAO main website - www.gao.gov	66
GSA	General Services Administration	GSA Advantage website - https://www.gsaadvantage.gov	66
NARA	National Archives & Records Administration	NARA main public website - www.archives.gov	66
PBGC	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation	PBGC main website - www.pbgc.gov	66
CNS	Corporation for National and Community Service	CNS main website - www.cns.gov	65
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration, Transportation	FAA main website - www.faa.gov	64
NSF	National Science Foundation	NSF main website - www.nsf.gov	64
DOS	Department of State	Scores reflective of www.geography.state.gov , now replaced by http://future.state.gov	62
ESA	Employment Standards Administration, Labor	ESA main website - www.union-reports.dol.gov	62
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service, Agriculture	NRCS main website - http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/	62
GSA	General Services Administration	GSA main website - www.gsa.gov	56
DOT	Department of Transportation	Main website - www.dot.gov	55
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce	National Ocean Service (NOS) MapFinder website - http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/mapfinder	48

Note: E-government scores are measured on a quarterly basis. Overall government scores are measured once annually and reported each December.

About the ACSI

The ACSI is a national economic indicator of customer evaluations of the quality of products and services available to household consumers in the United States. It is updated each quarter with new measures for different sectors of the economy replacing data from the prior year. The overall ACSI score for a given quarter factors in scores from about 200 companies in 39 industries and from government agencies over the previous four quarters.

The index is produced by a partnership of the University of Michigan Business School, American Society for Quality and CFI Group, and supported in part by ForeSee Results, corporate sponsor for online scores, and Market Strategies Inc., a major corporate contributor.

Company scores and other information about the ACSI can be found on the ACSI Web site: www.theacsi.org.

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