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Citizen Satisfaction with Federal Government Improves, Correlation between User Satisfaction and Trust in Government, According to ACSI

Research Finds e-Gov a Preferred Channel for Government Services

Ann Arbor, Mich. (December 16, 2008)—Citizen satisfaction with federal government services improves this year, according to the annual federal government report from the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). The federal government index gains 1.6% to 68.9 on the ACSI 100-point scale. Despite the improvement, government services still lag significantly behind the private sector, which currently scores 75.0 on the national ACSI.

New ACSI data suggest that a satisfying experience with a specific government agency can improve trust in the government as a whole. The positive correlation extends beyond trust with the agency itself to citizens' overall perception of the government.

"The research shows that the quality of services government provides has a direct impact on trust," said Professor Claes Fornell, head of the ACSI and author of *The Satisfied Customer*. "In a time of economic turmoil and uncertainty, where approval ratings of Congress and the president are at or near record lows, ACSI research shows that government can create somewhat higher levels of trust by improving the quality of the services it provides.

The survey of citizens who have accessed or used government services over the last year finds that users value efficiency over customer service. While citizens gave federal services high marks for courtesy and professionalism, scores are negatively impacted when users do not get results or have trouble accomplishing their tasks.

"Citizens that interface with the government have goals they want to accomplish, and they will be satisfied to the extent that they are able to accomplish their goals," said Prof. Fornell. "Friendly service certainly has some impact, but it is evident that ease of access and timely execution are the most important factors to the overall user experience."

Among federal departments, the Department of Interior has the highest user satisfaction for a second straight year (78). Health and Human Services registers a 6% increase to 74. Departments that provide entitlement benefits typically score better than the government-wide average. The Social Security Administration scores 73, and its web services rank among the highest in all of ACSI, private or public sector.

Even at the bottom of the list, there is improvement. The Department of Homeland Security makes the biggest gain of any department, surging 16% to 57. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has benefitted from migrating larger numbers of tax filers to

online filing, a much more efficient channel for submitting tax returns and getting refunds. IRS e-filing (78) scores 31% better than paper filing (54).

As is the case in the private sector, government services delivered online provide the most satisfying experiences. In the third quarter, federal government websites improved 1.4% from the previous quarter to 73.9, just 1% below the national ACSI. Though the range in performance of government web services remains wide, several federal websites score as well as the best private sector websites. Three of the Social Security Administration's websites top the list, with scores between 87 and 90.

"Citizens want the same efficiency from government services that they experience from the private sector, and the best way to get it is by going online," said Larry Freed, president and CEO of ForeSee Results, the ACSI's e-Government partner. "Online services from the government generally rate as better quality than offline services, and ACSI research shows higher quality services lead to higher satisfaction and greater trust in government. Therefore, an investment in improving federal services online is about more than just increased efficiency and cost savings. It is an investment in trust and in the government's relationship with its citizens."

ABOUT THE ACSI

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is the only uniform, national, cross-industry measure of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available in the United States. In 1999, the federal government selected ACSI to be a standard metric for measuring citizen satisfaction. Over 100 Federal government agencies have used ACSI to measure citizen satisfaction of more than 200 services and programs. The Index is produced by the University of Michigan, in partnership with the American Society for Quality (ASQ) and CFI Group, an international consulting firm. ForeSee Results sponsors the e-government index.

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