



CITY OF PROVIDENCE

1.2 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear standards and guidelines for the delivery of high-quality customer service and to ensure that all interactions with the public reflect the City's commitment to professionalism, courtesy, and efficiency.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the City of Providence.

Definitions

Internal Customers: City employees, elected and appointed officials, volunteers, interns, and fellows

External Customers: Residents, constituents of the City of Providence, private and/or public entities conducting business with the City, vendors and contractors hired to perform work on behalf of the City

Policy

Employees at all levels are required to be mindful of their individual responsibility to provide exceptional customer service through productivity, action, communication or otherwise. These standards are to be applied to internal as well as external customers.

1. Customer Service Standards

- A. **Respect and Courtesy:** Employees must treat all customers with respect, courtesy, and professionalism. This includes addressing customers by name when possible and using polite and respectful language.
- B. **Responsiveness:** Employees should respond to customer inquiries, concerns, or requests in a timely manner. Employees are to acknowledge receipt of requests within 24 hours or as soon as operational procedures and/or standards allow; provide a resolution or update as quickly as possible.
- C. **Accuracy and Clarity:** Ensure that information provided to constituents is accurate and clear. Avoid using jargon or technical language that may cause confusion.
- D. **Empathy and Understanding:** Employees should listen carefully to customers without interruption, confirm understanding by summarizing their concerns and asking follow-up questions if needed. Exercise patience and provide appropriate solutions or alternatives.
- E. **Follow-Up:** After addressing a customer's issue or request, follow up to ensure their needs have been met.

2. Handling Complaints

- A. **Acknowledgment:** Acknowledge and apologize for any inconvenience or issue the constituent is experiencing. Let them know their complaint is taken seriously.
- B. **Resolution:** Work to resolve complaints promptly and effectively. If the issue requires further investigation, inform the customer of the expected timeline and keep them updated on the progress when possible.
- C. **Escalation:** If a complaint cannot be resolved at the initial point of contact, escalate it to a supervisor or designated escalation point. Ensure that the customer is informed of the escalation and the next steps.

3. Accessibility

- A. **Inclusivity:** Provide equal access to services for all constituents. Ensure that services are accessible and that reasonable accommodations are made as needed, and where possible without posing undue hardship on the City.
- B. **Language Assistance:** Offer language assistance services to constituents who may have limited English proficiency or require translation services.

4. **Training and Development**

- A. **Ongoing Training:** Employees will receive periodic training offerings in customer service skills, including but not limited to communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.
- B. **Feedback and Improvement:** Departments are encouraged to seek feedback from customers and peers to continuously improve their customer service skills.

5. **Department Guidelines**

- A. **Processes:** There are many processes within the City that require following specific procedures. Departments are expected to make such processes as simple as possible and known to employees. Easy-to-understand instructions, simplified forms, plain language, and up-to-date and accurate information are examples of efforts that will help ensure a positive customer experience.
- B. **Website Maintenance:** Departments are responsible for ensuring their webpages are current, accurate, and regularly updated. The Webmaster/Information Technology Department can be contacted to assist and/or update your department's web page. Additionally, departments must ensure that links in the City's webpages are working and/or accurately and readily refer customers to appropriate and functional links.
- C. **Department Telephone Directories:** Departments are required to review and update directories periodically to ensure that, at a minimum, their staff's direct business phone numbers and proper departments/divisions are correctly listed.
- D. **Information and Referral:** When people inquire about matters that are not within the contacted department(s) or City's domain, every effort should be made to refer these individuals to the entity that is best able to handle their needs.
 - 1. All referrals should be provided accurately and include a phone number and/or location of the suggested employee, department, and/or division.
 - 2. Internal referrals should be handled in a similar manner. If a person is referred to a different department or employee, the individual should be given direct contact information for future reference prior to being redirected.
- E. **Difficult Customers:** Although it is ultimately the City's goal to provide constituents with excellent customer service, employees may terminate a conversation with any constituent/customer who demonstrates threatening, aggressive, or other clearly inappropriate behavior or language. Where possible, the constituent should be informed that continued inappropriate behavior will result in a termination of contact. Supervisors should be notified about such cases if this happens.

6. **Safety Considerations**

- A. On occasion, an employee may deem there is a risk to people or property in a customer or public interaction. When employees determine there is a need to contact the police or security personnel because a constituent/customer exhibits aggressive and/or threatening behavior, they should do so immediately. Employees are valuable members of our City team and are not expected to put themselves at risk during such any interaction with a constituent/customer.
- B. Additional information for reporting and documenting such issues is available in the City's Workplace Violence Policy.

7. **Compliance**

- A. **Monitoring:** Customer service interactions may be monitored to ensure adherence to these guidelines. Feedback will be used for performance evaluations and training purposes.
- B. **Violations:** Failure to comply with these customer service guidelines may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Related Policies:

Code of Ethics
Code of Conduct
Workplace Violence Policy
Discipline Policy

Other Related Information:

Local 1033 [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#)