

## 2.1.5 Public Relations



YOUR ORGANIZATION  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES

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**APPROVED BY:**

X

Preparer

X

Approver

These SOPs/SOGs are based on FEMA guidelines FA-197

### 1.0 POLICY REFERENCE

CFR	
NFPA	
NIMS	

### 2.0 PURPOSE

This standard operating procedure/guideline addresses customer service strategies, building/maintaining departmental image, dealing with citizen complaints, member contacts with municipal/elected officials and media representatives.

The intent of this procedure is to document a common starting point for the execution of standard customer service behaviors in fairly standard situations. When standard situations do not exist, this procedure is intended to serve as a basis for the organization to creatively invent solutions through customer service empowerment.

### 3.0 SCOPE

This SOP/SOG pertains to all personnel in this organization.

### 4.0 DEFINITIONS

These definitions are pertinent to this SOP/SOG.

## 5.0 PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES & INFORMATION

### 5.1 Customer Service Strategies:

#### HISTORY / VALUE OF OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM

##### Our History in Customer Service

The City Fire Department has a long history of providing quality service to our customers, the citizens of City each year. We respond to over 100,000 calls each year, some calls may seem routine to us but, for the person who called, it is *not routine*. As professionals we must provide excellent service on each and every call, to each and every customer. Our customer service begins with our respect for and how we treat each other, it never ends. We have an obligation to carry on the tradition of providing the best service possible to those who need our assistance. That philosophy must be continued by each successive generation of City Fire Department members.

**Definitions** Webster's New World Dictionary defines the term "customer" both formally and informally. "**Customer**" is formally defined as "one who buys goods or services," and it's informally defined as "any person with whom one has dealings." Our organization traditionally adopts an informal approach and our organizational vocabulary is simple and informal. The fire department no longer limits its organizational definition of the term "customer" to only its formal interpretation. We have expanded our definition to include any person who receives our services and anyone with whom our members have dealings. Examples of this expanded definition of our "customers" include:

- The actual service recipient,
- Anyone who knows or is closely related to the service recipient (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, pets, etc.),
- The people we encounter, directly and indirectly, during our workday (e.g., members of agencies we routinely do business with, residents/vacationers who visit our work place, who see us during our work day, or we pass on the road.).

These people are an integral part of our workday. We want to treat them in a positive way and include them in our customer service action plan. Every interaction with our "customers" is an opportunity to solve their problem and leave an impression that we are proud of.

It's the City Fire Department's mission and number one priority to deliver the best customer service possible. "**Customer service**" is generally defined as "the ability of an organization to consistently give their customers what they want." It is the goal of the City Fire Department to go beyond traditional customer service and provide exceptional customer service - where we exceed our

customer's expectations. "Exceptional customer service is the result of an explicit, long term, planned out, acted out, and refined organizational approach to service delivery. It requires a personal commitment, as well as, organizational support and leadership.

"Added value" is a phrase we attach to our organizational definition of exceptional customer service. "**Added value**" occurs anytime we go beyond our standard quick, effective, nice, customer-centered service to create a feeling that they were the most important customer we served all day. Added value only requires a little extra effort and leaves our customers with the opinion that we care and we're nice. It's the philosophy of the City Fire Department to provide "added value service" whenever we have the opportunity.

Our customers, and their problems, do not come with an instruction manual. Exceptional customer service and added value customer service are the result of a refined system where members of the City Fire Department are empowered by the organization to operate between the lines to provide caring service with both quality and value. "**Empowerment**" means "the organization delegates official authority and trusts its members with the power to provide customer service to the level of their abilities and imagination." To determine if you are empowered to perform exceptional added value customer service, ask yourself:

- Is it the right thing for the customer?
- Is it the right thing for the department?
- Is it legal, ethical, and nice?
- Is it safe?
- Is it on your organizational level?
- Is it something you are willing to be accountable for?
- Is it consistent with our department's values and policies?

If the answer to these questions is "yes," then don't ask permission. You are empowered by the organization to "JUST DO IT!"

### **The Value of a Customer Service Program**

The organizational benefits of providing exceptional customer service, with added value, are numerous. Benefits include:

- Builds positive relationships and trust within our fire department

- Builds positive relationships and trust in our community
- Secures and maintains adequate resources and benefits
- Happy customers, bosses, workers.
- Positive job satisfaction
- Places us in the best position to compete
- It's fun to be nice and do nice things
- Doing it right eliminates bad press, liability, and extra paperwork
- It saves lives and property - that's important to our customers
- It's the right thing to do

### **Our Mission**

The City Fire Department is committed to providing the highest level of public safety services for our community. We protect lives and property through fire suppression, emergency medical and transportation services, disaster management, fire prevention, and public education. Our priority is to deliver the very best Customer Service to our customers. Our human and technical skills are the foundation of the City Fire Department. The balance required to provide all the services our department is committed to delivering is rooted in being well trained and skilled. The value we place on technical and human skills is the same. Membership in the City Fire Department Family carries with it a host of responsibilities and expectations. The awareness and commitment to meeting all of them will ensure the fulfillment of our mission.

Our awareness begins with viewing everyone as our customer. It is our job to respond to the needs of our customers. The people who call us with their needs cannot be viewed as interruptions to our work, they are our work. This philosophy will be supported as we develop a simple Customer Service plan, train all our members on that plan, and then trust and depend upon our members to directly execute the plan properly, whenever opportunity occurs.

Nice is the essence of this whole Customer Service philosophy. The addition of "Be" makes it an action plan and allows us to take it to the street. This becomes our mission statement in action. Be nice to customers, to each other, and to yourself. This must become the most powerful value we create.

At an internal level it simply means that we treat everyone with respect, kindness, patience, and consideration. Our diversity must continue to be one of our greatest strengths. On the external

level we respond quickly, skillfully, and most important positively to every customer need.

The City Fire Department's Customer Service expectation is that everyone and every part of the system handle the customer's situation as an urgent event, from the time we know about it until it's over.

A set of guidelines designed to create a positive public impression include the following:

- Follow SOPs, mission statement, organizational values
- Be professional
- Give the customer your undivided attention
- Take a moment to educate the community about what we do

### **Customer Service Opportunities**

The City Fire Department has expanded its view of the customer to include those observing our actions indirectly. Family members, friends, police, and those in the bleachers watching the show are all potential customer opportunities. This expanded view includes the less-obvious customers such as those we encounter en route to and from our incidents as well as our daily activities.

Members can consider a standard service delivery plan for dealing with these extended customers such as; driving in a courteous manner, describing situations-when appropriate to do so, explain actions, determine needs, and provide services necessary to assist customers in reconnecting their lives. Additionally, prior to leaving a scene, members must perform a re-con to ensure all customer service opportunities are met.

We have endless opportunities to consistently create a positive impression, and a memory of added value customer service wherever we are and with whomever we encounter.

This can be best accomplished by attempting to execute a standard problem solving approach to every incident to encounter. Since our members are empowered to provide "added value" level Customer Service, we are only limited by our imaginations and ability to creatively problem-solve.

We are human and will find ourselves challenged by tough events and customers at these times we must put on our game face and then orchestrate a standard service delivery performance. In the real world, for those occasions when we don't feel nice, we must act nice. It's our responsibility as professional to solve the customer's problem, even in tough situations. To our advantage, we work in teams and always have the help of each other.

The most important element has not changed - The relationship and feelings that occur between the

customer who has a problem or need and the Fire Department member who responds to that need should be encouraged. We hire people who want to help others, assist them in accomplishing that.

### **MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Basic organizational behavior must become customer oriented.
- Need to continue to invest in Human Resources. Customer Service is part of our ongoing developmental process.
- Bosses must take responsibility themselves, expand authority in others, and set the stage for good things to happen.
- The basic management objective is to have our team win because of the coaching and not in spite of it.
- Good coaching is almost invisible to the customer. Good service is enormously obvious.

### **Support Personnel**

The importance and impact of internal support, resources and relationships is enormous. It is easy to lose track of all the people who work in areas removed from our own. The location of our fire stations allows us to provide great service to every inch of our city. Sometimes it is easy to lose perspective on how Fire Department support services actually makes a lot of what we do in the streets possible. Administrators, Resource Management, training, secretarial staff, medical services personnel, Dispatch and Deployment, and volunteers are working together to enhance the service we deliver to everyone. It is important to remember that how we treat each other is linked to the external service we deliver to our customer.

### **Awards and Recognition Program**

Awards and rewards have long been associated with the positive motivation of both individuals and teams. They can help motivate an individual or team to perform a task, complete a goal, excel in job performance, and perform outstanding and exceptional customer service. Recognition does not have to be extravagant to be effective. The small ways we say “good job” and “thank you” to each other and our customers goes a long way.

The true rewards come in the way of job satisfaction, continued improvement of work conditions, benefits and wages, political clout and pride in being associated with a quality organization. Over the course of a career, customer service allows us another opportunity to tap into the spirit of doing

the right thing and job satisfaction.

Positive reinforcement is simple and extremely effective. Positive feedback, even when it merely reinforces that we are doing our jobs helps us feel appreciated and valued. It sends the member the message that the service you provide is important to the City Fire Department and the customer. The City Fire Department has a variety of resources that allow our members to reward positive behavior and performance at every level, as well as, outside our organization. Telling one another and our customers that they are valued and what they do is important, when genuine, promotes good will – a form of recognition everyone needs for continued success.

The City Fire Department wants to promote the spirit of telling each other and others that what they do makes a difference and is valued. For this reason, our rewards and recognition program provides a variety of resources, allowing each individual to personally choose the award. It allows creativity when escalating the award and keeps our focus on celebrating the spirit and goodwill of recognition.

The following are current rewards. Please don't be limited by only the items listed. Contact your District Customer Service Representative or Public Affairs for assistance.

- Green sheets
- Leave Time
- Letter of Commendation
- Certificate of Appreciation
- Crew Citation
- Service Excellence Pens

### **Labor's Role and Input**

The most valuable resource of the City Fire Department is our membership. It would not be possible to deliver exceptional customer service, with added value, if not for the trust, loyalty, commitment, and unity demonstrated by our members. The Local xxx plays an extremely important role in both our membership and our organization's ability to deliver exceptional customer service.

### **Summary**

Customer Service Excellence is the goal of the City Fire Department. Accomplishing this goal requires leadership, commitment, planning, practice and creativity, smart application, networking and continual refinement. Our customer experience, insight and expectations help us identify how we can expand, grow and improve. Customer service excellence in concert with being fast, well trained and nice is the only way we can stay on top.

**5.2 Building/Maintaining Departmental Image:**

**5.3 Dealing with Citizen Complaints:**

**5.4 Member Contacts with Municipal/Elected Officials and Media Representatives:**