

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-84](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

Providing customer service has been a long-standing challenge for federal agencies. GPRAMA requires that agencies establish a balanced set of performance indicators to be used in measuring progress toward performance goals, including customer service. This report is part of GAO's response to its mandate to evaluate the implementation of GPRAMA. It evaluates (1) the extent to which selected agencies and their services are using customer service standards and measuring performance results against these standards, and how selected agencies are communicating standards and using customer feedback to improve customer service; and (2) the extent to which OMB and the PIC are facilitating federal agencies' use of tools and practices to improve customer service. GAO selected five agencies and their services based on prior work in which it surveyed 12 federal agencies that are among those with the most widespread contact with the public. GAO reviewed and compared agency customer service documents to federal legislation and guidance, and interviewed agency officials about customer service.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the five agencies update their customer service standards and that Forest Service, NPS, FSA, and VBA's VGLI implement formal feedback mechanisms to improve customer service. CBP, Forest Service, FSA, NPS, and VBA all agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-15-84](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov

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MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Selected Agencies Need to Take Additional Efforts to Improve Customer Service

What GAO Found

GAO reviewed the customer service standards at Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Forest Service, Federal Student Aid (FSA), the National Park Service (NPS), and two services in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)—disability compensation and Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI). GAO found that none of the agencies' standards included all of the key elements of customer service standards (see table). GAO identified key elements of effective customer service standards by reviewing the requirements of the GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) and executive orders that focused on providing greater accountability, oversight, and transparency. Without all of the key elements present, agencies may not be able to easily communicate performance targets or goals to customers, measure their progress towards meeting those goals, and pinpoint improvement opportunities.

Extent to Which Agencies' Customer Service Standards Met Key Elements

Agency	Customer service standards that include targets or goals for performance	Customer service standards that include performance measures	Customer service standards that are easily publicly available
CBP	No	No	Yes
Forest Service	No	No	No
FSA	Yes	Yes	No
NPS ^a	No	No	No
VBA's disability compensation	Yes	Yes	No
VBA's VGLI	Yes	Yes	No

Source: GAO analysis of agency documentation. | GAO-15-84

^aNPS provided GAO two sets of standards, its "Visitors' Bill of Rights" and its visitor survey descriptions, both of which GAO assessed and determined that neither included key elements.

GAO found that all five agencies provide customers with opportunities to submit feedback, including comments and complaints. CBP and VBA's disability compensation had formal mechanisms for reviewing customer feedback, but the other agencies did not. For example, Forest Service and NPS do not have guidance for when to elevate customer comments from the local level up to the agency level. As a result, these agencies may not be effectively reviewing and addressing customer concerns across the agency.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has taken steps to facilitate the improvement of agencies' customer service initiatives. For example, OMB issued guidance to assist agencies in their implementation of Executive Order 13571, *Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service* which was issued to strengthen customer service and require agencies to develop and publish a customer service plan. OMB formed a task force to assist agencies with the development of customer service plans. Moving forward, OMB has identified customer service as a cross-agency priority (CAP) goal in 2014 in an effort to elevate the importance of customer service by the federal government and intends to have the Performance Improvement Council (PIC) play a role in the CAP goal implementation planning for customer service.