



October 2014

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Selected Agencies
Need to Take
Additional Efforts to
Improve Customer
Service

specifically intended to inform the public, irrespective of FSA’s position that its standards are for the service provider and are not intended to inform the public. As a result, FSA’s customers may not be fully aware of the services that are available.

National Park Service’s Standards Do Not Include Any Key Elements

The National Park Service’s (NPS) mission is to preserve “unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” According to NPS, its interpretive and educational services advance this mission by providing memorable educational and recreational experiences that help the public understand the meaning and relevance of park resources and foster development of a sense of stewardship by forging a connection between park resources, visitors, the community, and the national park system. NPS customers are the visitors using the programs, services, and facilities that NPS offers. NPS provided two sets of standards that we assessed—the “Visitors’ Bill of Rights” and visitor satisfaction survey descriptions. Neither of the standards included any key elements of effective customer service standards (see table 7).

Table 7: Assessment of National Park Service Customer Service Standards Against 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
National Park Service ^a	No	No	No

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

^aNPS provided us two sets of standards, its “Visitors’ Bill of Rights” and its visitor satisfaction survey descriptions, both of which we assessed. Based on our analysis, we determined that neither set of standards included key elements.

The first set of customer service standards, the “Visitors’ Bill of Rights,” is included in an internal training module which NPS officials stated is a

standard to which they train employees.⁴¹ The “Visitors’ Bill of Rights” is a set of qualitative standards and includes descriptions of what NPS park visitors have a right to expect during their stay, such as “have their privacy and independence respected,” (see text box). NPS officials stated that this standard was developed in 1996 and has not been updated since then. According to NPS officials, there are no performance measures linked to the “Visitors’ Bill of Rights” as the standards were intended for internal training purposes. In addition, these standards are not publicly available.

National Park Service’s Customer Service Standards for Visitor and Interpretive Services

First set of standards— Visitors’ Bill of Rights:

Visitors have the right to:

- have their privacy and independence respected;
- retain and express their own values;
- be treated with courtesy and consideration; and
- receive accurate and balanced information.

Second set of standards—visitor satisfaction survey scorecard measure definitions:

- Visitor understanding level is at least 83 percent.
- Visitor satisfaction level overall is at least 90 percent.
- Visitor satisfaction with visitor services is at least 88 percent.
- Visitor satisfaction with park facilities is at least 83 percent.
- Ratio of number of interpretive contacts per visitor is at least 0.8.

Source: National Park Service. | GAO-15-84

NPS also provided as standards its visitor satisfaction survey scorecard descriptions. The survey measures each park unit’s performance related to visitor satisfaction, visitor understanding, and appreciation. The survey is a random sample of visitors in 330 units. According to the fiscal year 2013 results of the visitor survey, approximately 97 percent of park visitors were satisfied overall with appropriate facilities, services, and

⁴¹NPS provided its management policies as another example of its standards, specifically sections outlining interpretive and educational programs, use of the parks, and park facilities. These approximately 50 pages of policies, while informative about such topics as interpretive competencies and skills, do not include any statement of what the standards are for the visitor and interpretive services and therefore we did not include the policies in our analysis.

recreational opportunities.⁴² According to NPS officials, this set of standards includes benchmark scores—standard and exceptional ratings—that the individual parks are rated against. While it is important for agencies to solicit a customer’s level of satisfaction for services provided, as is done by NPS, such feedback should be conducted in addition to having a set of predetermined customer service standards that include performance targets or goals that can be measured.⁴³ Further, the visitor surveys are conducted after customers have received NPS services; one of the purposes of standards is to inform customers of what they can expect prior to receiving the services. Without clearly stated performance goals or measures directly linked to those goals, NPS is unable to determine the extent to which the standards are being met agency-wide or strategies to close performance gaps.

Finally, these standards are not made easily publicly available. According to executive orders and guidance, standards were specifically intended to inform the public. As such, standards need to be identified as standards and made easily publicly available. However, we found the results of the visitor survey on the NPS website under the NPS Social Science Branch publications and were not identified as standards. As a result, customers may not easily be able to find the results of the surveys much less make the connection that the survey and its results reflect NPS’s standards for service.

Veterans Benefits Administration Standards Include Performance Goals and Are Measured for Performance but Are Not Made Easily Publicly Available

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) disability compensation program provides monetary support to over 3.7 million veterans with disabling conditions that were incurred or aggravated during military service. The program also provides monthly payments to about 370,000 beneficiaries including surviving spouses, dependent children, and dependent parents in recognition of the economic loss caused by a veteran’s death during military service or, after discharge from military service, as a result of a service connected disability. The Veterans’ Group Life Insurance (VGLI) program, also within VBA, allows veterans to continue their life insurance coverage after separation from the military.

⁴²According to the 2013 NPS Visitor Survey Data Report, the system-wide response rate was 35 percent with 41,643 total visitors responding to the survey.

⁴³All of the agencies in our review conducted customer satisfaction surveys. However, NPS is the only agency that provided visitor satisfaction surveys as its customer service standards.