



ONE PARKLAND

Service Excellence

PARKLAND COUNTY CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Parkland County

MARCH 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Parkland County Council and administration have identified opportunities for customer service improvements across the organization, based on feedback from both internal and external stakeholders. Recognizing a desire to improve customer relations and service, and become a leader in local government, Parkland County has acknowledged that a strategy is required. A Customer Service Strategy will help focus customer service excellence and make it a part of the day-to-day corporate culture. This strategy will guide Parkland County in becoming a more efficient, effective, and innovative organization.

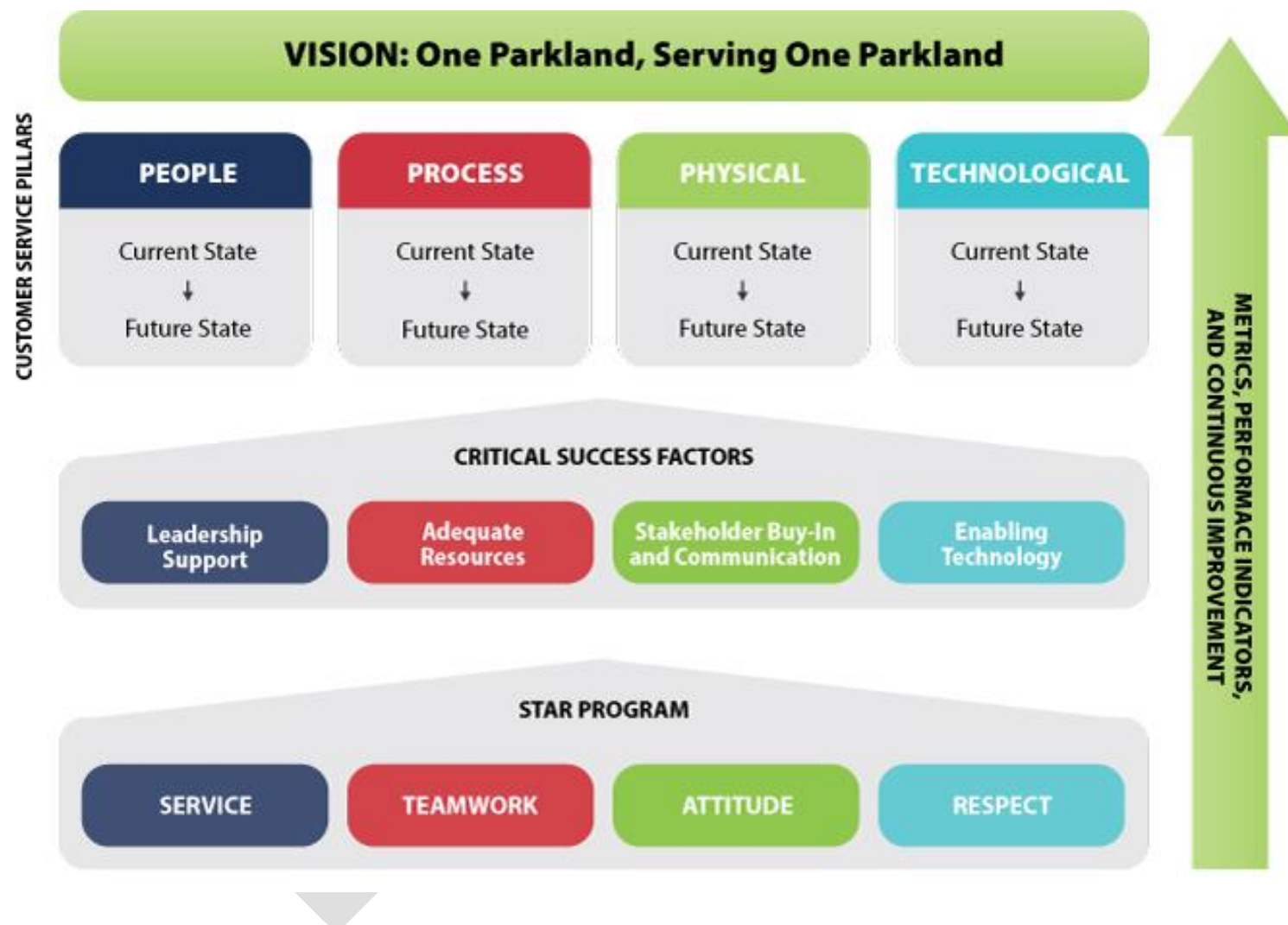
This is not a single project; this strategy will occur in multiple phases and will be implemented over several years. A transformation of this magnitude requires many small and impactful changes, culminating into a series of cultural shifts. To improve customer service and meet customer expectations, all members of the Parkland County team must come together to harness collective knowledge, innovation, and initiative to provide outstanding service. Customer service excellence

is no longer just the responsibility of the front-line staff. It's a commitment required at all levels within Parkland County.

By using best-practices, leveraging technology and maximizing existing resources, Parkland County will adopt an innovative approach to customer service that can adapt to the changing needs and expectations of our community.

For Parkland County to better serve our customers, stakeholders, and internal staff, the establishment of a centralized customer service model should be developed. Residents and businesses perceive government as one entity. It does not matter which department performs a service, as long as it is performed well.

Centralizing service delivery would simplify access across multiple channels, and deliver consistent and efficient service. Customer requests would be funneled into one centralized location that would focus on first contact resolution, track interactions and dispatch to the appropriate department, if necessary. To be successful, this model must be supported by the appropriate human and financial resources, technology, building infrastructure, and corporate culture.



Strategy Development

In 2016, Council identified customer service as a key strategic priority for Parkland County. As a result, a steering team was established and consultation commenced.

This strategy is the result of extensive consultation, both internally and externally; a review of best practices in the public and private sector; and, a holistic look at how Parkland County can better meet the needs of all stakeholders.

BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

- Review of industry best practices in both municipal and private sectors
- Review and engagement with a number of municipalities in early 2017 on their customer service strategy, tools, implementation, and success. The municipalities toured included Strathcona County, City of Leduc, Town of Oakville, Hamilton, Brantford, Region of Waterloo, Burlington, and St Catharine's
- Engagement and analysis with municipal partners indicated that there are clear and consistent best practices in municipal service delivery and customer service, scalable to organizational size and maturity

EXTERNAL REVIEW

- Obtained public feedback through resident and business priorities surveys in early 2017
 - Approximately 500 resident respondents
 - Approximately 170 business respondents
- 80% of residents who had contact with County Staff in the past year rated the service they received as “excellent”, “very good” or “good”
- 84% of business respondents who had contact with County Staff in the past year rated the service they received as “excellent”, “very good”, or “good”
- Staff were recognized for being polite, knowledgeable, and quick to respond
- Areas for improvement include taking action/following through quickly; referring customers to the correct individual; and, first contact resolution (this has been reflected in the strategy development)

- Follow-up focus groups will be conducted with both residents and the business community

INTERNAL REVIEW

- An internal steering committee was formed to gather initial information on areas for improvement, strengths, public feedback, and suggestions on customer service at Parkland County
- Interviews were conducted with managers and front-line staff from each department within Parkland County to further identify key pressure points and opportunities across the organization
- The level of service we provide to one another internally has a direct impact on the end service provided to our citizens

Future State of Customer Service at Parkland County

Parkland County will evolve to become a customer-centric organization that views service delivery from the customer's perspective. Staff will be empowered to prioritize customer service and think beyond the silos to the success of the entire organization.

Service excellence requires an investment in people, including staff resources, training, and recognition for those that deliver superior service. Staff will be given the right tools, training, and development to ensure the customer feels important and is satisfied with the service received by the County. Customer service expectations will be clearly established and communicated to all staff to ensure consistency in service delivery.

Key Areas of Focus

CULTURE

Vision

A collaborative environment where employees are empowered and have the tools and resources to deliver a high-standard of customer service. Quality customer service will be achieved primarily through having well-trained and professional staff that ensure a consistent approach to service delivery.

CURRENT STATE

Strengths

- Staff are friendly, courteous and believe in the value of customer service
- The initiation of the strategy has been driven by senior leadership and Council

Opportunities for growth

- A corporate wide customer service strategy and implementation plan does not formally exist
- Employees do not feel empowered to make customer service a priority
- Human resources are not aligned with priorities for a centralized customer service model
- Organization-wide customer service standards for timely response to emails and telephone calls do not exist

WHAT WE OBSERVED

- The vision, strategies and plans for customer service were driven by Executive Administration and Council and developed prior to implementation
- Centralized customer service models with dedicated staff at both strategic and operational levels
- Established service standards for emails, telephone calls, and other points of contact
- Staff were empowered with customer service training and workshops

FUTURE STATE

- Organization-wide support for customer service strategy and vision
- Training and workshops on customer service best practices delivered to all staff
- Dedicated and empowered staff providing centralized customer service
- Employee incentives for customer service excellence, tied to rewards and recognition program
- Recruitment based on key competencies
- Customer Service Standards are developed and communicated
 - Some typical customer service standards are:
 - The telephone will be answered within XX amount of rings
 - Customers will receive acknowledgement of voicemail messages within XX hours
 - Customers will receive acknowledgement of email messages within XX hours
 - Update staff voicemail message daily indicating date and availability

PROCESS

Vision

A centralized and integrated service delivery model that enables the County to be more responsive, accountable and provide ease of access to County services. Processes serve a purpose, are efficient and effective, and meet the needs of our customers.

CURRENT STATE

Strengths

- Staff do their best with the processes that currently exist and have been able to provide suggestions for streamlining
- A phased in approach to formal process mapping has been initiated

Opportunities for growth

Parkland County currently follows a decentralized customer service model. Customers are required to know the internal structure of Parkland County in order to reach the correct department for assistance. Each department is organized in such a way that services are only provided according to areas of responsibility which leads to challenges for our citizens:

- Customers may be required to visit multiple locations to find the services they need
- Transferring customers to multiple staff members is common practice
- There are many reception areas and counters across the organization that are fragmented and provide unintegrated service delivery
- Information sharing between departments and frontline staff is limited, and as a result, there is little option but to transfer calls to subject matter experts

Most departments are closed over the lunch hour with the exception of the County Centre front desk and Enforcement Services, which causes frustration for customers that would like to receive services over their lunch hour.

WHAT WE OBSERVED

- Centralized service models with dedicated customer service representatives with processes designed with the customer in mind first.
 - Customer service standards for first contact resolution ranged between 70-80%
 - Front-line staff were provided with information through a knowledge base, and clear roles and responsibilities were developed for customer interactions
- Processes were mapped and streamlined, online services were offered, where feasible
- Customer service counters remained open during the lunch hour, some offered extended hours

FUTURE STATE

- Establish an integrated, centralized customer service area with dedicated customer service representative staff which are equipped with a knowledge base, tools, and training to strengthen first contact resolution metrics and reduce the need to transfer calls or direct customers to other locations
- Requests are funneled in through customer service experts and fanned out to subject matter experts, only if necessary.
- Streamlined, mapped processes that are customer-centric exist and are understood
- Explore the idea of offering extended office hours and remain open through the lunch hour

PHYSICAL DESIGN OF COUNTY OFFICES

Vision

Parkland County's buildings, primarily the County Centre, support positive customer interactions. Visitors are greeted upon entry by professional and knowledgeable dedicated customer service staff focused on first contact resolution.

CURRENT STATE

Strengths

- There is adequate space in the County Centre front lobby for future improvements, if required
- The County owns a beautiful municipal art collection that could be showcased in public areas
- All County buildings are clean, welcoming and beautifully maintained with flowers, mowed grass, and seasonal decorations, etc.

Opportunities for growth

- Customers must visit multiple locations for simple services (County Services building, County Centre, Agriculture annex etc.).

- County Centre: Lobby area signage is unclear and confusing, and lacks an area for privacy for when handling sensitive matters. The switchboard operator/receptionist is hidden behind a pillar and computer screens. Other staff situated at the front are required to perform other duties which prevent them from focusing their attention exclusively on customer service.
- County Services building (Enforcement Services): While the entrance is secure, it only allows for one customer to be served at a time, and there is no private area for sensitive matters.

WHAT WE OBSERVED

- Centralized customer service areas with security staff that were cross-trained in order to assist customers as required
- Welcoming front-lobbies with live plants and municipal art proudly displayed
- Dedicated spaces for private meetings

FUTURE STATE

- Remodeling of County building(s) to include a space for a welcoming centralized customer service area, as well as meeting space to handle sensitive matters

TECHNOLOGY

Vision

Scalable and integrated processes and technologies in place that capture customer interactions, organize information and streamline processes to enhance customer service. Service excellence is supported by providing staff with current, easy to access, relevant data and information.

CURRENT STATE

Strengths

- The new website and intranet are excellent resources for the sharing and receiving of information for staff and customers. They are user friendly, accessible, and aesthetically pleasing.
- Staff have access to a variety of technology and receive good support from Information Services

Opportunities for growth

- An organizational-wide system does not exist for tracking interactions with customers
- A virtual knowledge base does not exist

- Online services offered are limited, payments cannot be made online
- Customer service tracking metrics do not exist

WHAT WE OBSERVED

- A holistic, corporate-wide approach was applied to technology
- Customer relationship management software was either being used or under development
- Virtual knowledge base and scripting existed or was under development to support all staff
- Customer service metrics and tracking were key components of the development and implementation of strategies and plans

FUTURE STATE

- Alignment of technology including a corporate customer relationship management (or equivalent tracking software) and knowledge base
- Explore the feasibility of streamlining or expanding online services and payments that are available

Critical Success Factors

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Cultural change is required to move Parkland County to a customer-centric organization. This requires complete support from the management team, Executive Committee, and Council, who are identified as project champions.

Risks:

- Changes in leadership
- Political changes
- Differences in priorities among leadership team
- Lack of buy-in and support from leadership team

Mitigation:

Ensure leadership team remains informed of development of strategy and implementation plan through the provision of ongoing workshops and opportunities for input; work with any new management team members or members of Council to ensure understanding of the initiative.

ADEQUATE RESOURCES

For customer service initiatives to be successful, adequate human and financial resources must be provided.

Requests for resources must be supported by research, analysis, and evidence. The leadership team must be supportive of the reallocation of human and financial resources.

Risks:

- Changes in priorities that affect resource allocation
- Inability to obtain adequate human resources
- Limited financial resources

Mitigation:

Ensure all requests for resources are supported by clear justification; ensure customer service projects and activities are integrated into annual budget initiative and business plan development.

STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN AND COMMUNICATION

Transitioning to a focus on customer service with new service delivery processes and standards requires staff and stakeholders to have a good understanding of rationale and organizational priorities. They must know and share in the vision for a transformed organization. If change is to be embraced, then it must be communicated to staff and stakeholders and they should be actively involved throughout the strategy and its implementation. Proper change management is imperative.

Risks:

- Lack of buy-in from staff
- Inadequate focus on change management

Mitigation:

Clear change management strategy; comprehensive staff communication and engagement plan.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGY

The right tools and technologies have to be in place and integrated with the appropriate business systems in order to deliver the most value.

Risks

- Technology is implemented without proper examination of integration with other systems
- Inadequate financial resources to support technology
- Technology not used by staff

Mitigation

Continue to engage Information Services throughout implementation; holistic approach to technology.

Implementation

The Service Excellence Strategy will be implemented in phases, as resource requirements and financial implications are examined and determined. It will constantly evolve and continuously improve. A shared organizational commitment is essential for success, driven by Council and Executive Administration. Dedicated resources will be needed to implement the initiatives that are part of this plan. Successful implementation will require a major time commitment from staff and departments to develop new processes to support new tools.

Performance Measurement

Key Performance Indicators will be developed as part of the implementation plan. They will be reported to Council on a regular basis to communicate our progress towards the objectives of the strategy and associated plans.

Successful implementation of the strategy will result in significant improvements in service efficiency and quality. The benefits to our customers will be specific and measureable. Customers will receive timely, responsive service that's convenient and easy to access, resulting in increased satisfaction levels. The customer experience will

be streamlined and consistent regardless of what channel the customer chooses to access.

Communication

A communications plan will be developed and implemented to build awareness of the initiatives and to communicate the importance of quality customer service.

Next Steps

- Follow-up focus groups with internal and external stakeholders to refine strategy, if necessary
- Finalize strategy, with Council approval
- Develop high-level implementation plan, with short-, medium-, and long-term milestones and key components
- Commence implementation of any priority action items (i.e. email and phone standards)