

PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST

EPA Rises to the Challenge of Executive Order 12862

September 8, 1994

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Service
Steering
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Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
I. Mission	2-3
II. Vision, Customer Service Policy, and Customer Service Approach	3-4
III. Reinventing EPA: Customer Service Moves Ahead	4-6
IV. Pilot Customer Service Projects	7-9
V. Next Steps	10
VI. Customer Service Action Plan	11

Mission

The people who work at the Environmental Protection Agency are dedicated to improving and preserving the environment in this country and around the globe. Highly skilled and culturally diverse, we work with our partners to protect human health, ecosystems, and the beauty of our environment using the best available science. We value and promote innovative and effective solutions to environmental problems. We strive to protect and sustain the productivity of the natural resources on which all life and human activity depend.

Our Primary Customer — The Public. EPA's primary customer is the general public — all of us who live and breathe and share the earth's environment.

Serving Our Intermediary Customers — Essential to Success. To serve the public, we work on a regular basis with a variety of intermediary customers. Our ultimate success depends on how effectively we work with and influence the actions of the many other parties that deliver environmental protection to the general public — including international, federal, state, tribal and local governments; industry, agriculture, small businesses, and other for-profit enterprises; and environmental and other nonprofit organizations and individuals.

Key to our effectiveness is understanding these intermediary customers — their circumstances, where they get their information, the constraints they face, and what motivates their decision-making. With that understanding, we can then provide the information, products, and services needed to support our customers in their efforts to protect the environment.

Customer Service in a Regulatory Agency

As a regulatory agency we often need to promote actions, activities, and attitudes to businesses, government, and individuals that they would not opt to take on their own, even when they understand it to be in the best interest of the general public. Our goal is to build a cooperative and supportive relationship with these customers, supplying them with the information and tools they need to be able to pursue their business and personal activities in a way that protects the environment, and ensures — for all of us, for our children, and for future generations — a prosperous, sustainable, and healthy world.

To achieve compliance it is sometimes necessary to work with businesses, government, and individuals in an enforcement mode. We also often have the challenge of balancing competing interests in carrying out our regulatory and enforcement responsibilities. In all our relationships, voluntary and nonvoluntary, cooperative or enforcement-related, our goal is to handle all interactions in a fair, courteous, and professional manner. Our goal is also to provide affected parties with a clear understanding of the reasons for our actions.

Our Commitment to Building Customer Service

EPA is working to align the organization, strategies, people and systems to strengthen communication with the customer and be more responsive to customer needs. We are committed to carrying out all our work in a way that reflects a respect for our customers and an understanding of their needs and circumstances.

Vision

EPA envisions a world in which:

- All individuals and institutions value the environment and choose to act in a manner that ensures achievement of sustainable environmental and economic goals.
- The natural balance of all living things is no longer threatened, and all individuals — rich and poor, young and old — share in the benefits of a healthy environment.

EPA will strive to become an Agency recognized for:

- Leadership in environmental protection and environmental science — domestically and worldwide.
- Strong and effective working relationships with its partners in environmental protection.
- Integrity in the stewardship of its resources and the management of its programs.

Customer Service Policy

We are committed to achieving customer service equal to the best in industry. We carry out our mission through increased public participation, increased public access to information and increased public access to decision-makers.

Customer Service Approach

Our approach to improving customer service is through the following:

Public Access. We are committed to increasing the participation of our customers in the policy and decision making processes of the Agency.

Listening to Our Customers. We must improve our understanding of our customers' motivations and circumstances so that we can provide them with environmental products, services, and information that they value. Through the use of public roundtables, focus groups and formal surveys, we will listen to what our customers tell us about the quality and value of the products and services we provide, and adjust our activities and resource allocation decisions accordingly.

Communicating with our Customers. We must communicate with our customers so that those who need environmental information know where they can obtain the information they need in a form they can use.

**Reinventing
EPA:
Customer
Service
Moves
Ahead**

Our reinvention efforts are designed to achieve greater environmental results, improve communication with our customers, and involve affected parties much more directly in informing our decision-making processes. These include:

Common Sense Initiative. Designed to achieve greater environmental protection at less cost by creating pollution control and prevention strategies on an industry-by-industry basis, rather than the current pollutant-by-pollutant, medium-by-medium¹ approach. This approach will strengthen our ability to understand and support key intermediary customers in their delivery of environmental protection.

Environmental Goals Roundtables. This year we conducted a series of 9 roundtable meetings around the country to listen to our customers — government, industry, community, and nonprofit representatives — about our proposals for national environmental goals. Follow-up meetings are planned in the coming year.

Ecosystem Approach to Environmental Protection. We have adopted Ecosystem Protection as one of seven guiding principles² that apply to all programs and activities of the agency. This calls for integrated priority-setting and action by federal, state, tribal, and local agencies; between government and private enterprises; and most importantly, between government and the public. Customers will be involved in shaping environmental goals for their communities, developing strategies to reach these goals and measuring progress.

Streamlining and Increasing Access to the Regulatory Development Process. Among our primary products our regulations. We have developed a streamlined process for regulation development designed to reduce the cycle-time for product delivery. Moreover, we are committed to increasing involvement with those who will be affected by a regulation early on in the rule-development process. This emphasis on early communication has been underscored by the President's Executive Orders on "Regulatory Planning and Review" and on "Enhancing the Intergovernmental Partnership."

¹ "Medium" refers to environmental medium - air, land, water.

² See The New Generation of Environmental Protection: A Summary of EPA's Five-Year Strategic Plan, July 1994

Increasing Emphasis on Public Access to Environmental Data and Information. Our Information Resource Management (IRM) strategic plan calls for focusing EPA's IRM efforts on ensuring public access to information. In addition to states, a Federal Advisory Committee was created to solicit comments and guidance from a wider range of customers, including industry, environmental groups, local governments, and the general public.

Increasing Emphasis on Citizen Involvement. Many of our efforts and legislative proposals call for increased community participation in decision-making, to ensure that the citizens most affected by our actions are able to inform the decision-makers at an early stage in the process. For example, proposed changes to the Superfund law call for the creation of Community Work Groups and Citizen Information and Access Offices to serve the customer better in delivering a key EPA product — contaminated site cleanups.

State, Tribal, Local Advisory/Operating Committees. Over the past year, we held meetings involving several key intermediary customers. These included federal advisory committees, dialogues with state environmental communities and a tribal operations committee.

The Customer Service Subcommittee of the Local Government Advisory Committee. The Customer Service Subcommittee of the Local Government Advisory Committee recently met and identified several key customer relations issues it felt we should address, including: local government reluctance to call us with questions for fear of reprisal, the need for us to communicate our environmental information and regulations more effectively to local governments, and the need for technical support.

Office of Pesticides Programs Customer Survey. The Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) completed a series of customer surveys to initiate its new effort to improve the quality of services it provides to the public. OPP learned that key areas needing improvement were: "timeliness of the services provided" and "telephone responsiveness." Also, OPP learned that its survey instrument needed to be shortened, clarified, and targeted more specifically to different audiences.

Reinventing the Management of Research and Development. We completed a study of our research and technical support laboratories, which included an analysis of customers served by each laboratory. Based on the study, we have directed the Agency to undertake several major changes including several measures designed to institutionalize the connection with those who use our research. These include increased emphasis on peer-review of EPA-funded research by those outside the agency, and introduction of a competitive grant process both for internal

and external research. In addition, we have committed increasing funding for external research. All of these measures will increase laboratory interactions with our customers in a way that informs the research agenda so that ultimately, the public will be better served.

New Emphasis on Compliance Assurance. We recently completed a reorganization of the Office of Enforcement by creating the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA). A key element includes a new emphasis on compliance assurance to parallel strengthened enforcement capabilities. This will shift the Agency toward working with our intermediary customers in a supportive manner whenever possible to assist them in understanding how to provide greater environmental protection for the public.

Permit Improvements Team. We established a Permits Improvement Team in July 1994 to improve our environmental permitting processes, while maintaining high quality enforceable permits. The Team will implement recommendations from the Vice President's and EPA's internal National Performance Reviews. Activities will fall into three major categories: 1) identifying specific permitting improvements that will shorten the time necessary to issue a permit; 2) identifying ways to improve public participation in the permitting process by providing for earlier involvement and mechanisms to address environmental justice issues; and 3) identifying how to encourage pollution prevention and the use of innovative technologies through the permitting process.

Citizen Information Center Opens in Denver. EPA opened a service center for citizens in Denver in the fall of 1993. The Environmental Information Service Center (EISC) serves as a central, one-stop shopping point of contact for visitors and callers; runs a database to link subject areas with EPA individuals responsible for those areas; serves as a central repository for publications; and tracks public calls and visits. During the three month period ending in June 1994, Denver-based EISC received, handled, tracked, and analyzed over twelve thousand calls and visits.

The activities described here demonstrate our commitment to work with and listen to our customers so we can deliver greater environmental protection.

**Pilot
Customer
Service
Projects**

We are committed to :

- Reaching out to our customers to provide them with the information they need to make environmentally sound decisions and to involve them in our decision-making and priority-setting processes.
- Setting clear performance standards for our products and services, to assessing how well we are meeting those standards, whether they are the right ones, and to adjusting our activities based on what we learn from those assessments.

We have identified several key product lines that will ultimately build a customer-oriented approach for all of our core business processes and product lines. For each pilot, we will test the performance standards in one office, and then, based on the results, expand adoption of the standards throughout EPA.

Our pilots selected fall into several categories:

- Responding to public inquiries
- Increased public access to information to improve environmental decisions
- Strengthening our intermediary customers ability to protect the environment

Pilots 1, 2 and 3. Responding to Public Inquiries. The first set of pilots is focused on improving the way EPA handles incoming inquiries from the public. We have learned from Baldrige award-winning companies that by listening and responding to the customer, we can improve product quality, improve service, and reduce costs.

Our pilot projects in handling incoming calls, correspondence and managing a hotline are designed to help the agency develop better protocols and staff training for responding promptly, courteously, accurately, and understandably. In addition, more systematic analysis of the inquiries may suggest opportunities for improved service delivery. For example, a one-time analysis of incoming calls to EPA Region 2 suggested that as many as 60 percent of the calls received have to be redirected to other city and state environmental agencies.

The first phase of these pilot projects will focus in responding to general inquiries; a second phase will develop customer service standards for responding to case specific inquiries.

Pilot 4. Increased Public Access to Information to Improve Environmental Decision Making: the Toxics Release Inventory and Community Right to Know. One of the most important products EPA provides is information about environmental conditions that other governments, business, and the public can use to make more informed decisions.

Many of our databases have been criticized by users of the data as user-unfriendly (criticisms which the IRM Strategic Plan is designed to address.) The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), in contrast, is viewed as a much more user-friendly approach to data collection and dissemination. Moreover, some argue that the user-friendliness of the publicly available data has influenced toxics-releasing companies to reduce their emissions. Similarly, EPA mileage ratings of cars appear to have influenced buyer's decisions to purchase more environmentally responsible cars.

These "success" stories suggest important lessons for EPA-generated data, and the value of providing it in a user-friendly manner. They demonstrate the importance of publicizing the availability of information, as well as ensuring its accessibility, timeliness, usefulness, and understandability. Our pilot projects on increasing public access to environmental information — focusing on the TRI and Community-Right-to-Know programs — will look at these and private sector examples to set performance standards. The pilots will also develop standard operating procedures for evaluating how well we are meeting those standards and for using the results of those evaluations for improving what and how the agency provides information. We anticipate that these standards and procedures will then be transferrable to many of our other programs and information products.

Pilots 5, 6 and 7. Strengthening our Intermediary Customers' Ability to Protect the Environment; Water Grants to States, the Permits Improvement Team, and the Common Sense Initiative. As discussed earlier, we rely on several sets of intermediary customers to provide environmental protection to the public. One set of customers includes those who receive grants from the Agency, such as state governments, many of whom are delegated authority by EPA to implement federal environmental protection laws and to whom we provide federal grant money to support that implementation. A second set of customers is the regulated community, including private companies that seek permits from and are inspected by either EPA or by states with delegated authority.

The Water Grants to States Pilot will strengthen customer service to our intermediary customers. It will focus on the award of water grants to states. Draft performance standards are being established in consultation with the states, to ensure fast, simple, and timely grant awards, allowing flexibility, wherever possible, to adapt to local circumstances. To develop

our performance standards, we are looking at previous efforts to streamline the grant process already underway in some programs, at the grant-making processes of other federal agencies, and grant-making procedures at private foundations.

The Permits Improvement Team will support our intermediary customers by focusing on the permitting process. In some states, EPA issues permits directly to regulated entities. As noted earlier, EPA delegates to states and occasionally to local governments authority to issue permits under federal law. Permit-writing authority is delegated to over half the states for more than half of EPA's programs. In this situation, direct customer interaction occurs between the states and the regulated community.

We are assembling a team of EPA and state representatives to review all permits issued by EPA, states, and localities. From September through November 1994, this group will conduct focus groups both with those on the front-line of service delivery within the agency and to our customers and other affected parties to identify appropriate performance standards. A variety of performance standards may be appropriate for permitting including: standards that ensure those who should be permitted have a good chance of understanding that a permit is required, that permit applicants understand the conditions that must be satisfied to submit an approvable permit, that those whose permits are turned down understand the reasons for permit denial, that permit applicants are provided an accurate estimate of the time required for permit review that permits are reviewed in a timely manner, and that the permit review staff will handle all interactions with applicants in a courteous manner.

The group will explore the viability and desirability of setting performance standards in these and other areas — looking at recent state activities to improve the permitting process, as well as other government and private sector application processes. The group will also look at if and how we ought to include customer service concerns in state-EPA grant agreements.

A detailed implementation plan will be prepared by December, 1994. The plan will identify those activities that will be implemented by the Permits Improvement Team, the time schedules associated with each activity, and procedures and opportunities for continued input from interested parties.

The Common Sense Initiative's goal is to achieve greater environmental protection at less cost by looking at whole industries and involving a wide range of customers in developing a new generation of environmental solutions. This initiative is being phased in over the next several years.

* * *

Next Steps

For these product lines, we have tentatively identified initial customer service standards. These accompany this plan, in the form of individual publications describing each of the pilots and our draft customer service standards commitments.

Over the next few months, the agency will use focus groups with front-line employees and customers to test the validity of these standards and establish benchmarks. Performance standards will then be revised based on the results of the focus groups.

We are developing an implementation plan for each of our pilot product lines. Each plan will include:

- Specific measures and benchmarks
- Dates for conducting customer and employee focus groups on standards and benchmarks
- Method for tracking performance and surveying customers
- Dates for survey preparation and dissemination, where appropriate
- Dates for establishing tracking systems, where appropriate
- Methods for receiving and tracking customer complaints
- Plans for using survey/tracking information in management decisions and performance evaluations
- Plans for training staff
- Date for evaluation and plan/decision regarding pilot improvements and expansion throughout agency (rollout)

In addition, by December 1994, EPA will publish customer service standards and develop implementation plans for several additional key agency-wide product lines: responses to letters, rules, and electronic bulletin boards, inspections, and compliance assurance.

Finally, by February 1995, the Agency will identify its core business processes, and in consultation with its customers, will establish performance and customer service measures. Also by February 1995, each office will be asked to develop and initiate a customer service plan that is aligned with the Agency's strategic plan and customer service approach. By September 1996, in conjunction with our other reinvention efforts, we will have published customer service standards for all of our remaining core business processes, product and service lines.

Customer Service Action Plan

Leadership

- Educate all EPA employees on the Agency's Customer Service Plan, importance and relation to our Strategic Plan and other reinvention efforts.
- Incorporate Customer Service into all EPA employees Performance Agreements.
- Educate all EPA Senior Executives on their roles as advocates of customer service and bringing the voice of the customer into the planning and evaluation functions of their organizations.
- Identify, map and establish improvement goals for Agencywide Core Business Processes.
- Integrate Reinvention Plans into Strategic Plan with Action Steps.

Human Resources Development

- Align personnel systems with customer service, including, awards, recognition and promotion.
- Train senior and front line employees on benchmarking, customer-centered process reengineering to support improved service delivery.

Information Systems

- Adopt the NPR 800 Benchmark Study recommendations on Telecommunication in support of improved customer service.
- Improve public access to information through the Information Resources Management Strategic Plan.

Process Management

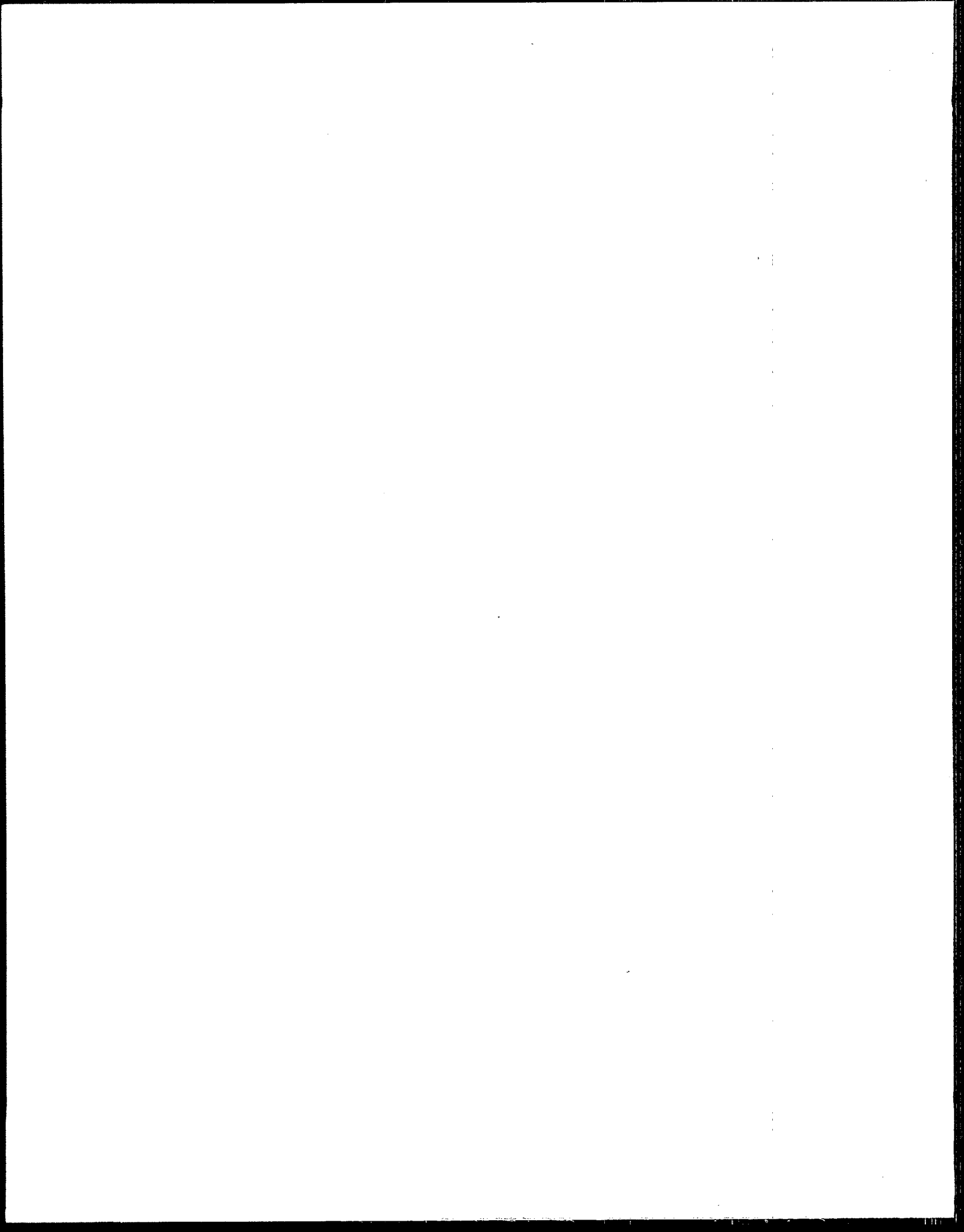
- Reengineer key core business processes in support of our Strategic Plan and in response to Customer Surveys.
- Benchmark core processes against the best in business for dramatic improvement.

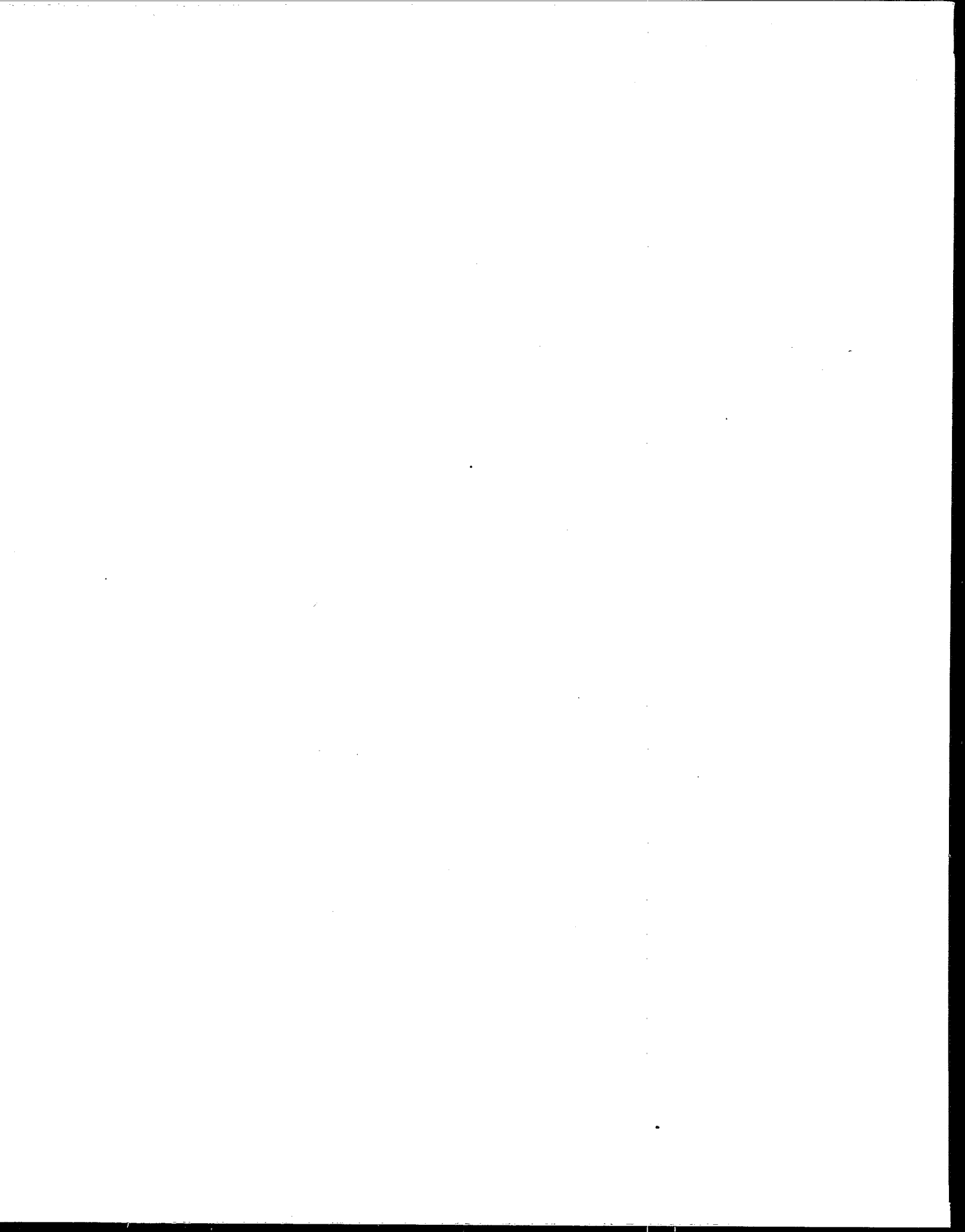
Strategic Quality Planning

- Adopt and apply the Malcolm Baldrige Award Criteria as an assessment tool for measuring EPA performance and effectiveness.
- Increase people and resources to positions that serve our external customers (Streamlining Plan)
- Move from media specific service delivery to Ecosystem and Common Sense Approach.
- Incorporate Environmental Goals, Indicators, and Customer Service Measures into FY 96 Strategic Plan.

Customer Focus and Satisfaction

- Develop Customer Service Complaint System
- Develop capacity and conduct Customer Survey's in support of our Strategic Planning Process.





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