



US Army Corps  
of Engineers

# Customer Care Kit



# Implementing the Customer Comment Card

## INTRODUCTION

The **Customer Comment Card** and procedures presented here were developed through the Natural Resources Technical Support (NRTS) program funded by CECW-O and administered by the Waterways Experiment Station (WES). This product was developed as a national effort to provide managers at all levels with key customer satisfaction indicators.

## BACKGROUND

Customer satisfaction is simply satisfaction at the customer level, **from the customer's perspective**. As we move toward a customer-centered organization, we must continually strive to better meet our customer's needs and expectations. Managers must develop a "Customer Service Loop" - inclusive of internal and external measures, experiments and changes in service delivery techniques, and customer surveys.

During times of declining budgets and manpower, customer satisfaction is a key indicator that can be used to guide managers in making critical decisions. For example, feedback from customers may indicate a willingness to pay new or higher fees, or feedback from customers could indicate that certain types of facilities or services are not important. In these examples, a manager could begin charging new or higher fees and/or eliminate facilities or services with little risk.

A high quality experience will likely lead to positive customer satisfaction, which may directly impact the customer's decision to return. The quality of the experience may be impacted by the policies, procedures, plans or people that are set in place and monitored by managers. Our best opportunities for success will be when we truly focus our management efforts on putting our **customers first**.

## CUSTOMER COMMENT CARD

The purpose of the **Customer Comment Card** is to provide managers with a simple, low-cost procedure to obtain initial feedback from customers on services and facilities. The questions included on the Comment Card are based on pilot test findings at Corps projects and interaction between WES and Operations personnel. Each question included on the Comment Card has been pre-tested and found to be useful to managers where it has been applied.

The Comment Card will not answer all management questions. However, it does provide a tool to begin measuring how well we are satisfying basic visitor needs. Our customers are asked on the card to rate a parks' performance in areas such as safety and security, staff helpfulness, condition of facilities, and availability of information. The card also provides an open-ended question for direct feedback. Most importantly, the card communicates to customers that their opinions matter.

## **GENERAL PROCEDURES FOR ALL PROJECTS**

The following procedures have been developed to ensure that the most meaningful results are obtained with the minimal burden on management staff. In addition to the Customer Care Kit user's manual, each Operations Project Manager (OPM) has been provided with an electronic copy of the Customer Comment card. Four hundred cards is the recommended amount to distribute to achieve an adequate sample size **for a single recreation area** during a single season. **OPMs are responsible for producing the actual cards.** Cards can be produced locally or by Ace Printing and Blueprint Company of Vicksburg, MS, as per instructions in the 2000 Customer Care Kit transmittal memo. Project Managers are also responsible for providing for the method of collecting completed cards.

Some managers may initially want to survey every customer, but should first consider the amount of effort required to properly collect and analyze data to ensure meaningful results. While a liberal distribution of Comment Cards may provide valuable comments from individual customers, **systematic sampling** will provide the best information without expending unnecessary effort by over-sampling. Systematic sampling also ensures that the opinions of a good **cross-section of visitors** across all or a large portion of the primary use season will be obtained. This type of sample is much more useful than one that obtains only the comments of visitors who used the area within a limited time frame (i.e., during one or two summer weekends or during a particular week). Care should be taken not to place emphasis on the overall results unless a systematic plan is used.

## **SELECTING AREAS**

Managers are encouraged to distribute the initial supply of Comment Cards **throughout the 2000 recreation season and within a single area.** The name of the area should be added to the Comment Card by project staff. Each card should also be numbered 1 through 400 so that managers can track card distribution. Selecting an area with a park attendant will ease the burden of distributing and collecting Comment Cards. It is recommended that park attendants ask customers to return the completed card to them or drop it off at the gatehouse before they leave.

Unattended areas (i.e., small day use areas, remote boat ramps) may also be

surveyed. At these areas, Comment Cards could be distributed directly (in person), through windshield placement, or by establishing a self-serve comment box similar to the user fee self-deposit vault. Procedures for returning cards distributed at unattended areas should be developed locally and must be communicated to the customer. If customers are not contacted directly, means such as a sign placed with the comment box or a slip attached to each card can be used to instruct visitors how and where to return the cards.

Additional areas may be surveyed by reproducing the Comment Cards locally. (NOTE: The Comment Card may not be expanded or modified. The Office of Management and Budget must approve all surveys administered to the public.) If additional areas are surveyed, 400 "new" cards should be used for each and the same procedures explained below should be used for Comment Card distribution. Once again, **the 400 Comment Cards should be distributed at one area only and not be divided among two or more areas.** If additional Comment Cards are printed, they should be numbered in a similar manner to the original 400. A second set would be numbered 401 to 800, a third set 801 to 1200, etc.

## **SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

Managers may select either a Systematic Distribution Plan or a Non-Systematic Distribution Plan, as described below. Please note that with either choice, the representativeness of the survey sample will be unknown and only limited statements and conclusions can be drawn from the Comment Card responses. The sample must be used as an "indicator sample" only. Statements should not be made, for example, about the **proportion** of visitors who feel that safety and security are "good" or "very good". Rather, statements such as "most visitors to Washington Irving Park seem to feel that safety and security in the park are good or very good" are supported.

### **Systematic Distribution Plan:**

The objectives of this plan are to spread out the sample over all or most of the primary use season rather than within a limited time frame, and to calculate response rates over the sampling season. Advantages of using a systematic plan include an increased chance that a wider range of visitors will have the opportunity to comment, and a reduced chance that the results will be unduly affected by factors such as wet or very hot weather, special events, or other non-typical conditions.

Comment Cards should be distributed one weekday and one weekend day per week to every other vehicle coming into an area. A 12-week survey season is recommended running from just after Memorial Day weekend to mid-August, avoiding the Independence Day holiday. This would include a total of 24 survey days - 12 weekend days and 12 week days. Starting and ending dates may be adjusted based on local conditions, but a minimum of an eight week survey period is recommended.

The two days on which Comment Cards will be distributed each week should be chosen systematically by drawing a number from 1 through 5 to select the weekday (1=Monday, 2=Tuesday, etc.), and by flipping a coin to select the weekend day (heads=Saturday, tails=Sunday). Distribution days could be marked on a calendar to be provided to gate house personnel, as shown at Attachment 1.

Projects should also number the Comment Cards (1 through 400) and keep a distribution log sheet (Attachment 2) to provide accountability and further assist in identifying when specific comments or complaints were made.

### **Non-Systematic Distribution Plan:**

Managers may also want to distribute Comment Cards at areas where using a systematic plan would not be feasible or on a schedule that will not be systematic (i.e., during a special event or holiday period). Conclusions and statements on the results of these comments would be even more limited than described above, but still provide for valuable customer feedback. As with the systematic plan, the simple steps of numbering the cards and keeping a distribution log will allow projects to make the best use of the information and to compute a response rate.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF COMMENT CARDS**

**Every other vehicle or group entering an area for the first time** should be provided one Comment Card, **up to a maximum of 50 cards distributed on a single day**. Park attendants should be instructed that response rates often depend on a warm greeting and encouragement to complete the survey. The 1996 Comment Card surveys, and other recent surveys at Corps parks, have strongly confirmed the importance of communicating to visitors our interest in their opinions and our appreciation of the time they invest in completing the card. **This initial contact is often the key to achieving a good response rate!**

Given the importance of this contact to the survey, we strongly encourage a special meeting with gate attendants. The purpose is to explain how their role is vital in establishing a friendly relationship with each customer who receives a card. Reminding visitors to return their cards will require their attention and dedication.

The return rates for Comment Cards distributed at unattended areas will vary based on use patterns and the method of distribution (i.e., personal, windshield, or comment box). The most important point here is to keep good records of the number of cards distributed so that response rates can be calculated. Experience has shown a much lower return rate when using non-personal distribution (projected 10-25%), than when using personal distribution (projected 50%).

**Cards should be distributed over an eight hour period (up to the maximum of 50 cards per day) that best matches the traffic flow into the area.** A shorter period would be appropriate for parks that receive intensive visitation. It is recommended that a four hour period be used at areas where more than 100 vehicles per eight hour period would be expected. If the time period is shortened to four hours, care should be taken to vary the hours on each survey day to ensure the full day is covered. High-use areas may implement a distribution schedule similar to that shown at Attachment 2, with four-hour (a.m. or p.m.) survey periods on weekends and eight-hour survey periods on weekdays.

## **CALCULATING RESPONSE RATES**

The "response rate" is the percentage of Comment Cards distributed that were returned completed and usable. When calculating response rates by recreation area, it is important to have good records on the number of Comment Cards distributed in and returned from that area. By numbering the Comment Cards (1-400) and using the log sheet provided at Attachment 3, accurate distribution records can be kept for each area. The calculation of the response rate is done by simply dividing the number of cards returned by the number distributed. (NOTE: RRDU projects should not include the number of blue national Comment Cards distributed in response rate calculations.)

Response rates may be calculated using the Systematic Distribution Plan or the Non-systematic Plan, but only if good records are kept for each area. The ability to calculate response rates is important, for example, in making management decisions based on 65% returned, versus only 25% returned. The higher the response rate, the more confidence managers can have that the survey responses approximate those of the overall visitor population for an area. Response rates also give some indication of visitor's receptiveness to customer satisfaction surveys.

## DATA ENTRY, ANALYSIS AND REPORTS

Software: The enclosed compact disk is compiled for ease of operation, and so that a data base and graphics programs are not needed to enter data and run the analysis. You will need a minimum of Windows 95/98 and a VGA monitor. The package contains the following items:

- 1) Comment card compact disk
- 2) Data storage diskette

### Instructions:

- 1) Make a copy of the original data storage diskette on a blank disk.
  
- 2) Create a separate disk for each additional area where surveys will be conducted.

### To Enter, View, or Graph Data

- 3) Insert the compact disk into a CD reader.
- 4) From Windows Explorer change to the CD drive and click on setup.exe.  
Follow the on screen instructions.

At the main menu screen, six options are presented:

- 1) Enter Data
  - 2) View Graphs
  - 3) Print Graphs
  - 4) Print Comments
  - 5) Print Zipcodes
  - 6) Exit
- 5) To start the program a comment card data diskette **must** be in the A: drive.  
From the start menu select **Program/Comment Card/Comment Card Program**.
  - 6) A different Comment Card Data Diskette must be used for each recreation area. Always exit the program before changing diskettes.

Reports: The program will generate separate bar charts for each Comment Card item (i.e. safety and security, restroom cleanliness, etc.) and a printout of customers' written comments on improvements desired for the area surveyed. Attachment 4 contains a sample of the report that can be generated from the program.

ATTACHMENT 1

**Sample Schedule**

**June 2000**

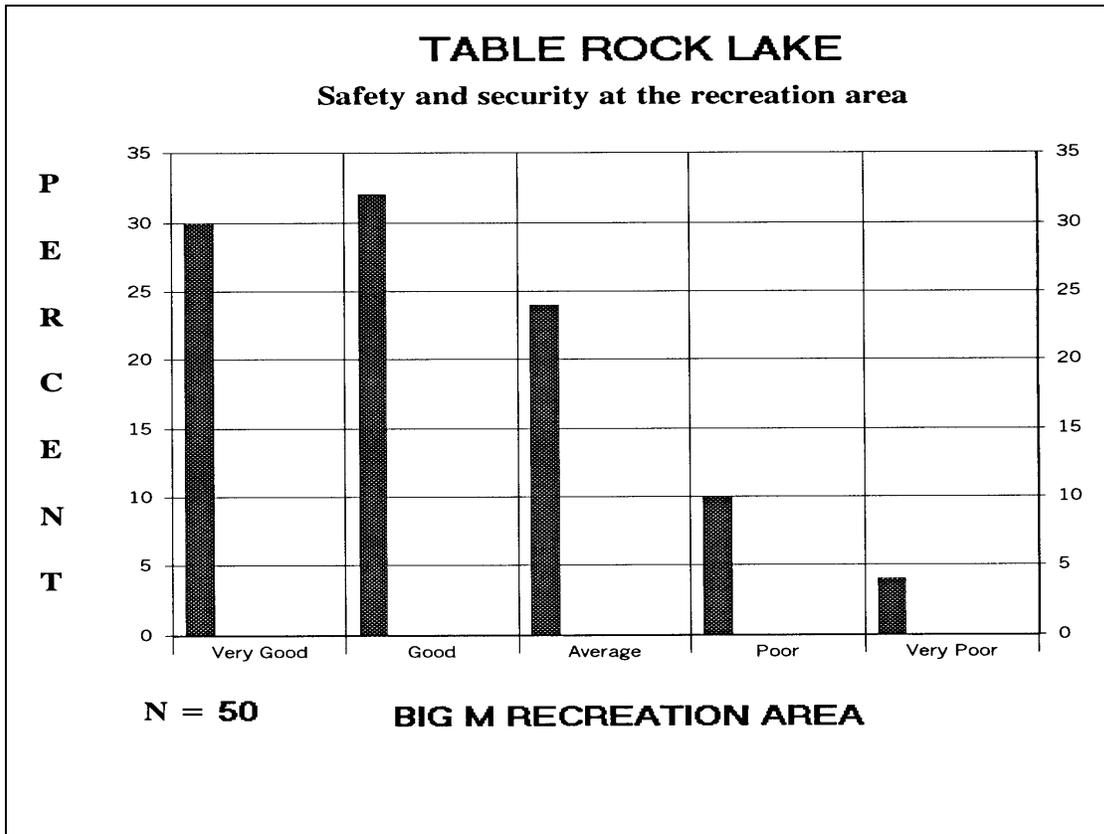
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7 Comment Cards	8	9	10 Comment Cards (8am to noon)
11	12	13	14	15 Comment Cards	16	17 Comment Cards (noon to 4 pm)
18 Comment Cards (8 am to noon)	19 Comment Cards	20	21	22	23	24
25 Comment Cards (noon to 4 pm)	26	27	28	29 Comment Cards	30	

## ATTACHMENT 2

<b>COMMENT CARD DISTRIBUTION LOG SHEET</b>						
Survey Location:						
Survey Day	Date	First Card Out (#)	Initial	Last Card Out (#)	Initial	Number of Cards Distributed
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
<b>Total:</b>						

## ATTACHMENT 3

**SAMPLE GRAPH AND CUSTOMER COMMENTS GENERATED  
FROM DATA ENTRY PROGRAM**



**Improvements visitors would like to see in the management of Big M Recreation Area, Table Rock Lake:**

- I "Add more Boat docks"
- "Want picnic tables with covers / need roof over tables"
- "Ice machines / a place to buy ice"
- "More children's activities"
- "Trim tree over road to stop rubbing motor homes"
- "Need Lifeguards in swimming area"
- "More water patrols"

**These are examples of improvements desired by customers.**