

Workbook
e-Citizen Charter
of:

e-Citizen Charter (version 2.1)

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The Hague, November 2005

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What do e-Citizens expect from e-Government?

Modernising government

The aim of the Dutch e-Government policy is to improve information exchange, service delivery and interactive participation by introducing a new partnership between citizen and government. This is to be achieved by giving more responsibility and choice to citizens. As far as the Dutch cabinet is concerned, the required empowerment is being supported by ICTs. To help citizens in their new role, the e-Citizen Programme has developed an instrument: the so called e-Citizen Charter.

e-Citizen Charter

This charter is deliberately written from the citizens' perspective and consists of 10 quality requirements for digital contacts. Each requirement is formulated as a right of a citizen and a corresponding duty of government. This is not to say that a citizen has no duties. A citizen is not only a customer of services, but also a user of provisions, a subject of law and a participant in policy-making.

The charter is meant for both citizen and government. It allows citizens to call their government to account for the quality of digital services. Government can use the charter to examine external quality of its public performance.

The e-Citizen Charter is based on research into existing quality systems and several surveys of citizen's expectations. The findings were consolidated and presented for public scrutiny in 2004. At the beginning of 2005, a version 1.0 of the charter was introduced. On the basis of the many comments and suggestions received, an improved version 2.0 has been drafted.

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Development

The charter summarizes a general future view on government as a whole. It is not meant to dictate strict conformity but should be adaptable to different government levels and policy areas. Administrations should decide themselves which requirements they can meet now and which they will meet in the future. Citizens will request why this is the case.

At present the charter is not mandatory, but is based on the principle: Comply or Explain. In the foreseeable future, the charter might be turned into a benchmarking system or even quality mark. Although conceived of in the Netherlands, the e-Citizen Charter can easily be adapted and implemented in other countries.

Workbook

The e-Citizen Charter is to be further developed in order to make the quality requirements measurable and tangible. To that end the e-Citizen Programme started an open development procedure in which anyone interested can take part. The instrument is not a manual that should only be studied, but instead a workbook that invites thinking.

The current personal workbook allows the owner to write down his or her remarks and criticism. The e-Citizen Programme collects all those commentaries to make a new version. More information can be found on www.burger.overheid.nl

Matt Poelmans

Director, e-Citizen Programme

Notes:

The 10 topics of the e-Citizen Charter

The charter deals with the major topics of e-Government, which are categorised as follows:

1. Choice of Channel
2. Transparent Public Sector
3. Comprehensive Rights and Duties
4. Personalised Information
5. Convenient Services
6. Comprehensive Procedures
7. Trust and Reliability
8. Considerate Administration
9. Accountability and Benchmarking
10. Involvement and Empowerment

The 10 quality requirements are summarised at the end of this workbook. Each requirement is first explained in more detail.

1. Choice of Channel

As a citizen I can choose for myself which way to interact with government. Government ensures multi channel service delivery, i.e. the availability of all communication channels: counter, letter, phone, e-mail, internet.

Explanation

In the modern world, the website has become the real "shop window" of an organisation. Even for government organisations it is true that their digital office gets more visitors than the physical one. Accordingly, attention is rightly paid to the development of electronic contacts (e-mail, internet). However, this should not detract from other, more traditional channels. The reason for this is not only because some people are not familiar with the technology, as anybody can need personal help in certain circumstances, but also because grabbing the phone sometimes is more practical than starting your computer.

It is a matter of principle that the choice of channel is the prerogative of the customer.

Commercial service providers like banks and insurance companies have rightly understood that this is what their customers expect. That's why they have discontinued their policy of phasing out physical shops, after having persuaded large numbers clients to shift to internet banking. Likewise government bodies should introduce smart ways of channel management. An example could be visiting the elderly in their homes with a laptop computer to help them fill out application forms.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

2. Transparent Public Sector

As a citizen I know where to apply for official information and public services. Government guarantees one-stop-shop service delivery and acts as one seamless entity with no wrong doors.

Explanation

When a citizen needs information, a permit or a subsidy, he is supposed to find his way to the competent government body. But citizens tend to think of government as one concern and don't want to be bothered by administrative divisions and segmented differences. Even skilled people get lost in the bureaucratic wilderness. Internet enables seamless government, i.e. administrations working virtually together without losing their autonomy and identity. Such a one-stop-service delivery is possible provided that politicians and officials are prepared to change from a supply focus to a demand orientation.

A good example is the Fully Integrated National Database (called FIND). This is an integrated catalogue of public services, which gives descriptions and access to all of the existing 2500 products of national, regional and local government. The next step being undertaken is combining several products of different administrations into one new integrated service, such as a geographic permit (instead of separate building, spatial planning and environmental permits).

Likewise the combination of digital maps of several scales can create a so-called "What is allowed where" map which gives access to relevant regulations in the field of spatial planning.

Another good practice is a single call centre, accessible in multi channel ways, for either directly rendering the required service or referral to the competent agency.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

3. Comprehensive Rights and Duties

As a citizen I know which services I am entitled to under which conditions. Government ensures that my rights and duties are at all times transparent.

Explanation

Each citizen is supposed to know the law, but in everyday life it is not at all easy to be sure what your duties and rights are. That's why lots of citizens do not get what they are entitled to, i.e. a housing grant. In an area like social security there exists a jungle of regulations and institutions in which people easily might get lost. This problem increases in those instances where collective services are privatised and citizens are forced to make individual choices (i.e. in the field of pensions).

Digital government can lower thresholds by way of one-stop-shop models, clustering services around life events, and so on. A further step is introducing a personalised site "My Government", containing personal data and information about one's own transactions with administrative units of government.

A recent survey in the Netherlands concluded that people are very much interested in this kind of service, provided that their personal data are stored in a safe way and that they themselves can decide in which cases this information is to be used. It's been called an e-file with access to a secure digital safe.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

4. Personalised Information

As a citizen I am entitled to information that is complete, up to date and consistent.

Government supplies appropriate information tailored to my needs.

Explanation

Simply converting paper bureaucracy into digital bureaucracy will not satisfy many people.

On the contrary, it emphasises the very problem of accessibility. Public information should

be available in several forms. First of all, the basic information in a democratic society (like

laws, regulations and proceedings) should be digitally available in full text. As of 2007, in the

Netherlands the ordinary method of official publication will be the digital way. The central portal

www.overheid.nl provides access to all government agencies and their services. Interestingly,

the Treaty of Aarhus stipulates that government publish environmental information actively in a digital form.

Apart from distributing digitally published original documents, e-Government makes it possible

to shift from a supply driven way of information provision to a demand oriented method. By

registering certain profiles, information can be distributed in a personalised way (i.e. according

to one's own criteria or needs). Several municipalities are introducing the system of subscribing

to local information on the basis of a given topic or zip code.

Government information should be trustworthy. A disclaimer stating that the provider cannot be

held responsible for mistakes or omissions is not acceptable from the point of view that public

information should be accurate and up to date at all times.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

5. Convenient Services

As a citizen I can choose to provide personal data once and to be served in a proactive way. Government makes clear what records it keeps about me and does not use data without my consent.

Explanation

The complaint which is most often heard is that citizens have to supply the same data time and again. The citizen in fact is forced into the role of an (underpaid) mailman, running from one counter to another (as well as having to wait in line). By combining data and converting many separate databases into a limited number of so called authentic registers, it should no longer be necessary to fill in forms with much of the same particulars. However, this will only be possible if an organisation is ready to apply electronic customer (citizen) relationship management and workflow management.

A first step in this direction is supplying web forms which can be electronically returned. Next is sending pre filled forms, containing data already known by the agency, which can be completed if necessary and digitally signed. This kind of self-service is both reducing mistakes and saving time. The Inland Revenue in several countries is an example.

A final step is proactive service delivery. In this case the service is rendered on the basis of known data, without a citizen having to ask for these services (provided he agrees). An important prerequisite is that procedures are transparent and people can easily find out what data is stored by government, and for what purpose. A website describing all sorts of exchanges between government agencies will be operational as of January 1st, 2006 (in connection with introducing a unified citizen number).

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

6. Comprehensive Procedures

As a citizen I can easily get to know how government works and monitor progress. Government keeps me informed of procedures I am involved in by way of tracking and tracing.

Explanation

Even well educated citizens who know their way around in government, can get lost in the bureaucratic wilderness. Many times procedures for registration or application are utterly incomprehensible or unnecessarily complicated. Therefore, by providing insight as to which steps have to be taken and how decision making is organised, government might enable better understanding and inspire trust. In commercial services the principle of tracking and tracing has proven to be very successful (ordering books, buying tickets on line, sending parcels, and so on). It prevents extra phone calls, saves time (and money) and enhances consumer satisfaction. These procedures offer the possibility to make appointments on line or update entries in databases. Such a kind of self service can very well be introduced in government procedures. When the full process is transparent, it does not seem to take as much time as when government merely is a black box. Transparency not only enhances citizen satisfaction. In countries with a less stable political system, web enabled services along open and transparent procedures prevent or reduce the risk of irregularities, bribery and corruption. Examples of good practices are digital procurement and customs declarations on line.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

7. Trust and Reliability

As a citizen I presume government to be electronically competent. Government guarantees secure identity management and reliable storage of electronic documents.

Explanation

The shift of contacts from traditional to virtual ways implies that we become more and more dependent on the availability and continuity of electronic networks. While it is taken for granted that public authorities are responsible for roads, such a responsibility is not usual as far as the digital highway is concerned (even now that this is a real alternative). In electronic banking a certain percentage of fraud is accepted as an inevitable phenomenon and actually compensated for collectively. However, fraud or abuse in public matters (imagine electronic voting), is not acceptable and certainly should not be treated lightly.

Continuity and trust are to be assured. A recent so called DDOS-attack on Dutch government websites was treated light-heartedly. After protests by citizens action was taken to remedy this. Next year in the Netherlands the digital signature will be rolled out nationwide, so care has to be taken that the digital exchange of critical information is secure. Government organisations and civil servants should be trained to treat digital files carefully. This also holds for knowledge about what to do against hacking, phishing and spam. A government agency monitors and alerts (www.govcert.nl). Finally, digital longevity should be part and parcel of workflow management and archiving.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

8. Considerate Administration

As a citizen I can file ideas for improvement and lodge complaints. Government compensates for mistakes and uses feedback information to improve its products and procedures.

Explanation

A complaint is an advice which you don't have to pay for. A learning organisation uses mistakes to prevent them next time. It is not only that a citizen has the right to be taken seriously; customer friendliness also helps to improve performance. However, thinking and organising from the perspective of a customer is still a major culture change for the public sector. Because government lacks the discipline of the market which forces business to act when circumstances change, other incentives are necessary.

A first step is a digital complaints procedure which lowers barriers compared to submitting complaints in writing. Quality charters are another instrument. Unfortunately only a very small number of agencies do apply a quality charter. Moreover, quality charters deal mostly with quantitative issues, such as reducing response time or waiting time. Preventing waiting in line altogether by issuing services on line is a more sophisticated satisfier. A direct way of getting feedback is developing new interaction designs for services which incorporate a complaints procedure. Although this might lower the threshold for complaints, handling the possible larger quantities is easier done electronically.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

9. Accountability and Benchmarking

As a citizen I am able to compare, check and measure government outcome. Government actively supplies benchmark information about its performance.

Explanation

For many collective services (like pensions, job search, health care, energy supply) which are being privatised, the market mechanism only works when people have the information to make choices themselves. To be accountable to clients, public feedback mechanisms need to be in place.

In commercial services a number of methods to compare products and prices are available.

These should also become normal practice in the public sector, including information about quality and service in the form of consumer ratings. School report cards are an example to help parents to select education institutions. Nowadays this is done in the Netherlands to support the major privatising operation of health insurance and care.

Performance data also support a kind of citizens' role which is called horizontal checking.

Instead of civil servants monitoring whether companies abide by the rules, private citizens having an interest can check for themselves in public registers whether a given company has the required permits or acts according to imposed limitations. Unfortunately this kind of vigilance has suffered because of the fear of terrorism and the accompanying focus on safety and security.

This means for my organisation:

This requirement is only feasible when:

10. Involvement and Empowerment

As a citizen I am invited to participate in decision-making and to promote my interests.

Government supports empowerment and ensures that the necessary information and instruments are available.

Explanation

E-Government is not only useful to improve service delivery, reduce administrative burdens and enhance internal efficiency. It also holds promises in matters of involvement and participation.

The very methods which improve service delivery can surely be used to promote empowerment.

The successful Voting Assistant (www.stemwijzer.nl) helps voters to compare the election programmes of political parties and make a well founded choice. Electronic voting could increase turnout at the polls. Chatting and blogging also can help to make the political process more transparent. However, the mere availability of instruments is no guarantee for actual use. Both government and citizens should imagine what it could add to their present relationship. Although citizens on the one hand seem to lose interest in party politics, they on the other hand explore collective action and new ways of lobbying via the internet. The Internet can be a platform to empower citizens. From this point of view bridging the digital divide remains a task for all of us.

This means for my organisation:

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e-Citizen Charter

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4. **Personalised Information** - As a citizen I am entitled to information that is complete, up to date and consistent. Government supplies appropriate information tailored to my needs.
5. **Convenient Services** - As a citizen I can choose to provide personal data once and to be served in a proactive way. Government makes clear what records it keeps about me and does not use data without my consent.
6. **Comprehensive Procedures** - As a citizen I can easily get to know how government works and monitor progress. Government keeps me informed of procedures I am involved in by way of tracking and tracing.
7. **Trust and Reliability** - As a citizen I presume government to be electronically competent. Government guarantees secure identity management and reliable storage of electronic documents.
8. **Considerate Administration** - As a citizen I can file ideas for improvement and lodge complaints. Government compensates for mistakes and uses feedback information to improve its products and procedures.
9. **Accountability and Benchmarking** - As a citizen I am able to compare, check and measure government outcome. Government actively supplies benchmark information about its performance.
10. **Involvement and Empowerment** - As a citizen I am invited to participate in decision-making and to promote my interests. Government supports empowerment and ensures that the necessary information and instruments are available.



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Burger@overheid

The e-Citizen Programme is an independent platform which stimulates the development of e-government from the citizen's point of view. To that end it involves citizens, advises government bodies and monitors progress. Burger@overheid regularly conducts surveys with its own People's Panel, annually grants the Web Wise Awards for good practices and at present develops the e-Citizen Charter with quality requirements for e-government. Burger@overheid is an initiative of the Ministry of the Interior. The bureau (Director: Matt Poelmans) is part of ICTU, the Dutch implementation organization for ICT and government. A Steering Committee representing citizen's interest groups supervises the proceedings.

e-Citizen Charter

What can citizens expect when e-government is finally implemented? The e-Citizen Charter provides the answer. This charter consists of quality standards that define the digital relationship between citizen and government (both in the field of information exchange, service delivery and political participation). These standards are formulated as rights citizens are entitled to, and matching obligations by government bodies. They are in the interest of both citizen and government. It allows citizens to call their government to account for the quality of online contacts. Government can use the charter to examine the external quality of e-government. Thus the charter is an instrument to stimulate the further development of e-government from the citizen's perspective.

e-Government Award

Burger@overheid annually grants awards for the best government websites. There are two awards: one granted by the public, and the other is granted by a jury. The award stimulates government institutions to continuously improve their website. The 2005 winner was the national Student Grant Authority for meeting best the requirements of the e-Citizen Charter. There is also an award for the worst government website, the so-called 'webflop'. In 2005 it was given to the Second Chamber of Parliament for not succeeding in bridging the gap between citizen and government.

e-Citizen Panel

A citizen's panel is used to gather the experiences and opinions of citizens on Dutch e-government programmes. This panel consists of 2300 citizens that represent the Dutch population concerning age, education and geographical location. The panel is set up by a specialized research institute and is consulted several times a year using online questionnaires. Recent topics were: e-mail response, internet security, transparency, e-voting, e-file. Citizens can also get involved through the website www.burger.overheid.nl where they can send in ideas and take part in online discussions.

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