

FRAMEWORK OF CITIZEN'S CHARTER

Citizen's Charter is a document of commitments made by a Government organization to the citizens/client groups in respect of the services/schemes being provided to them or to be provided to them. The objective of Charter exercise is to build bridges between citizens and administration and to streamline administration in tune with the needs of citizens. This exercise, if appropriately conceived and carried out, can enthuse and enable organizations to tune their planning, policy and performance to the needs and concerns of citizens/ stakeholders/ users/ clients. For this transformative process to materialize, effective strategies of realization would have to be worked out at multiple levels and authentication of these strategies needs to be attempted at every level in the political and administrative system. These strategies must incorporate three elements. One, clarity at every level about the objectives of Charter as an instrument of policy rationalization and administrative tuning to deliver policy goals expected by the citizens. Two, designing and delivery of Charters as live instruments of citizen-administration interface and instituting citizen in public domain. Three, evolving mechanisms for Charter monitoring, Charter evaluation and Charter review. Instituting a system of acknowledging effectiveness in Charter implementation can help the process.

In a rapidly changing context where efficiency, effectiveness and competence of state institutions are being questioned, it is imperative for the state agencies to strive for improvement in performance. The Charter programme can become instrumental in promoting the objectives of responsive and accountable governance and also contribute to improvement in service delivery. This can, in turn, put organisations in shape and contribute to a change in work culture and staff satisfaction, thereby increasing the comfort level of citizens, who need to deal with these organisations. Enabling a creative space for participation of citizens in administration and policy processes is the goal towards which the Charter programme needs to be designed. However, this does not imply merely load-shedding by the state agencies on the shoulders of citizens. Rather, this has to be instrumental in enhancing the competence and capability of organisations to improve delivery of services and tune administration to the needs of citizens.

Vision Statement

The first key component of a meaningful Citizen's Charter is a clear statement of vision. Vision implies the ultimate direction in which the organisation seeks to move. Clarity of vision enables the organisation to plan and prepare itself to deliver specific outcomes. Every organisation has to be clear within as well as to the citizens as regards its vision. Vision statement may emanate from an open and consultative process, involving multiple points in the organisation as well as citizens, client groups or stakeholders. The broadening of processes for defining vision through an active interface with citizens is likely to lend way to a vision which has far greater degree of acceptability and active support in fulfillment than would otherwise be possible.

Mission Statement

The 'mission' statement provides the specific objectives which drive the organization in tune with its vision. Specificity of 'mission' is significant to enable the organisation to move towards its vision. Organisation needs to think of the manner in which the vision is to be realized. This should help it frame its mission in more concrete rather than ambiguous terms.

Identification of Services

The Charter should clearly identify the services, which would be provided by the organisation to attain its mission and vision. This should list all the services, which would be made available through its various agencies. Some Charters give information about 'Details of business transacted by the organization'. The expression is not sacrosanct, one can always use different expressions like 'Our Function', or 'Our Duties and Responsibilities' or even 'The services being provided by us'. Regardless of the expression used, all services should be clearly mentioned in the Charter.

Identification of Levels

Since organisations operate at multiple levels and within each organisation, allocation of responsibilities and authority defines their commitment to specific client groups/ users/ stakeholders. Irrespective of whether the organizations mention 'details of business', 'commitments', 'functions' or 'services' in its Charter, it is necessary to indicate the specific levels of the services or functions etc., in the Charter, there should be a clear identification of the levels at which specific services would be provided. This would enable the citizens/ clients to know the levels at which they can access a specific service and not waste their time and energy in approaching the wrong levels. It should also be mentioned if the Charter applies to all the agencies that come under the Ministry or Department or the agencies have their own specific Charters.

Identification of Client Groups/ Stakeholders/Users

A clear understanding of the client groups/ stakeholders/ users by the organisations would be necessary for an increased interface with these in matter of policy and administration. This will also enable the organisation to cater to the needs of these groups better. It is a matter of concern that most of the Charters of Union Ministries/ Departments do not identify the client groups/ stakeholders/ users with reference to the services offered. This is a serious deficiency, which should be rectified urgently. True, there may be some confusion about the relevance of these categories in case of some organizations, which do not have clearly identifiable client groups with whom organizations have a regular dealing. Some organizations may have direct clients, who pay for the service accessed. But others may have users who may access the service by virtue of being citizens. In some cases, despite not being the users of a service, citizens or groups may feel concerned about the organizational decisions as they have to bear the fall-outs of the decisions, as in case of many decisions related to industrial or mining projects, which affect the local people even if they are not users or clients. Likewise, some organizations may prefer to use the term citizens rather than users/ clients/ stakeholders as all citizens are their potential users. However, in case of some others, the term citizen may seem to carry limited value as they also have foreign clients and stakeholders. It is therefore

important for the organizations to use any of these terms while they indicate their commitments.

Big organizations having a number of client groups may have different services for different client groups. In such a situation, it is obvious that the Charter should list out the services for each client group and the 'commitments' for each of such services. This can be fine tuned further by listing out the specific 'commitments' at each level and the 'commitments' in terms of the special client groups like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious minorities and other weaker sections. Steps taken by the organization to implement the commitments and listing out such steps in the Charter is desirable.

Specification of Time-Frames for Each Service

There should be a clear commitment about the time-frame for delivery of specific services in the Charter. This would save the organisation from undue expectations as also enable it to project its capacity to commit delivery of service as well as to work towards it in its own organisational plans. Awareness of time-lines will also enable the citizen to opt for specific providers where options are available and better understand the capacity of organisation to deliver a service in a specific time-frame. True, some organisations provide certain services of perennial nature. For example, there may not be any time-frame for certain services provided by Department of Telecommunications, Indian Railways, Department of Posts, Department of Drinking Water Supply etc. However, in such cases also there can be specific time-frames, as, for instance, for redemption/final payment of postal deposits, installation of telephone connections, reservation/cancellation of reservation of Railway tickets etc.

Specification of Time-Frames at Each Level

It is important that time-frames for service delivery are provided for each level at which specific services are delivered. Adherence to these needs to be ensured too. This may require an obligation to provide reports on the extent of adherence to time-frames at each level. Public sharing of a comparative picture of various levels in the organisation may introduce competition to improve performance.

Specification of Service Quality Standards

Charter must indicate the specific quality standards to which the organisation is committed. This will enable the citizens/ client groups to exercise choice where available and raise voice where necessary to ensure that quality service is made available. Organisation can also exercise internal controls once standards are publicly specified. There is the added advantage for the organisation to do a comparative assessment of performance on meeting service quality standards. Undue expectations from citizens can also be averted if the citizens understand the quality standards, which the organisation is in a position to commit to. Service standards must also respect public policy objectives and not simply client interest in case of a conflict as can be seen in case of the interest of interest conflicts over passport delivery. Clients prefer speed, but public policy interest requires proper scrutiny.

Specification of Service Delivery Standards

Charter should provide clear commitment on service delivery standards such as timeliness, access, accuracy, reliability, affordability, responsiveness, fairness, sensitivity, and courtesy in the delivery of service. These standards should be stated as clearly as possible and should be in the form of commitments and not simply targets. These should be measurable and enable the organization to present performance in terms of these. These may vary for different levels of organization, or different services and different regions- uniformity should not be insisted but a model framework should be provided. In case of variations, the specific commitments should be publicized and a comparative picture should be presented in order to enable appreciation of the better-performing regions and to create pressure on others for improvement. Standards should be made as visible as possible and organization should think of possible strategies for publicizing these.

Clear Information about Processes/ Procedures to Access Service Benefits

It is important that the Charter provides information about the procedures etc. involved in obtaining the service and facilitates the citizen/ client to obtain it. Information about the forms, which may have to be submitted or the payment required to access a specific service should be provided in the Charter.

Clear Information about Contact Points for Obtaining Service Benefits

The names and addresses of the contact persons for obtaining specific services should be mentioned in the Charter. When they can be contacted should also be stated. This should be done with reference to the specific levels of organisation/ agencies at specific levels and locations.

Clear Information about Information Facilitation Counters

The specific location of the IFC must be mentioned in the Charter. This will enable citizens know how they can get their queries settled. Surprisingly, most of the Charters of Union Ministries/Departments do not make any mention of their IFC even if they have one. This needs to be corrected. In case the IFC has not been set up the Charter should commit by when this can be set up.

Clear Information about the Functions of Information Facilitation Counters

The IFC computer should be connected to the computers of the unit-heads or section-heads of the organization to facilitate its functioning and this should be mentioned in the Charter. The IFC should also have a photocopier and preferably a touch-screen. Copies of the organization's Information Handbook brought out under the RTI Act, 2005 and the scheme booklets should be made available at the IFC, which should be manned by well-informed employees. A Visitor's Register should be kept at the IFC. The person in charge of IFCs should be able to provide the information sought and not simply direct the visitor to consult the web-site. It should be mentioned in the Charter that all publications, scheme-booklets and copies of Information Handbook of the Department are available in the IFC.

Providing Information about the Public Grievance Redressal Procedures

Awareness of grievances is the first step which an organization can take towards introducing correctives in its functioning. Charter should encourage the citizens/ clients to ventilate their grievances and organizations should aspire to redress these. Charter should clearly lay down the grievance redressal procedures in case citizens/ users/ clients/ stakeholders have any grievances and would like to seek redressal. Procedures for inviting and addressing grievances within the organization may also be taken up seriously as the performance and image of the organization is often adversely affected by the persistence of grievances of clients/ stakeholders/ users or citizens at large. The centralized PGRAM of the DARPG should be mentioned. The same needs to be publicized as a general window for submitting grievances to the Department of Administrative Reforms. It is desirable that the Charter provides information about the committee for taking complaints about sexual harassment, which has been set up by the organization.

Providing Information about the Public Grievance Redress Mechanisms

Charter must clearly inform about the grievance redress mechanism available to the citizens/ clients at various levels in the organization. A sufficiently senior officer should be made responsible for inviting and processing 'grievances' for redressal. His/her name, designation, office room and telephone numbers and e-mail id should appear in the Charter. The officer in charge of the 'grievances should ensure that grievances are received, diarised, acknowledged in a day or two and examined. Mechanisms should be evolved by the organization to provide redressal, such as, a committee for review, weekly or monthly meetings with concerned officers at various levels, reports on the number and type of grievances received.

Information about the Time-frame for the Public Grievance Redress

Information about the time-frame of the grievance redressal should be an essential feature of all the Charters. The time-frame laid down for grievance redressal should be realistic and implementable by the employees and secondly, the organization has to ensure that the time-frame is actually honoured and acted upon. Final reply should be sent to the aggrieved person within the specified period indicating the action the organization has taken on his grievance. In case the aggrieved person has been informed that his/her grievance has been accepted, he/ she should also be informed of the action taken by the organisation on acceptance of his/ her grievance. In case of the rejection, the reasons for rejection should be communicated to the person. In case of dissatisfaction of the aggrieved, a provision for appeal should be made and the contact person for appeal should be mentioned.

Information about the Time-frame for Acknowledgement

Since grievance-redressal may take some time, acknowledgement should be sent on receipt of the grievances. Time-frame for sending acknowledgement on receipt of a grievance should be clearly indicated in the Charter.

Information about the Time-frame for Response

The time-frame for settlement of a grievance should be indicated to the person seeking redress. The Charter can indicate the time-frame for different type of grievances and also

commit to inform the citizen about how the specific grievance has been classified and how much time it will take them to redress it.

Information about Systematic Review of all Public Grievances:

All grievances should be analysed and reviewed periodically and information about the periodicity of such reviews as well as the levels at which these reviews are undertaken should be mentioned in the Charter.

Information about Outcome of Review of Grievances

Information about the outcome of reviews and initiatives taken to carry out the recommendations which emerge from the review should also be shared with the citizens. This generates confidence among the citizens and client groups or stakeholders who may have submitted their grievances, even when they were not happy with the outcome of their personal complaint or grievance. This also creates interest among the rest to submit their grievances for redressal and retain their faith in the organisation.

Information about Procedures for Inviting Suggestions/ Inputs

Charter should invite suggestions from the public about the activities and functioning of the organisation. If the Department is implementing programmes and schemes, the citizens may be requested to give their suggestions for retaining or changing the provisions/scope/coverage of the programmes or schemes. They may also be requested to suggest on ways of improving the delivery mechanism. The organization should also request the citizens to send suggestions on the ways to improve its own functioning and brighten its transparency. The organizations should also invite suggestions from their clients and stakeholders, such as, the State/UT Governments, Autonomous Bodies, R&D Institutions, Multilateral/Bilateral Donors, Public Institutions and civil society groups on how far its services are effective or deficient, how they can be improved and whether any new services should be introduced. The client groups may be requested to give suggestions regarding changes needed in the provisions and coverage of the schemes and services, improvements necessary in the delivery mechanism, and whether new services/schemes should be introduced, particularly to cater to the sections of the client groups hitherto uncovered. The Charter can very well extend this invitation.

Most of the Charters of Union Ministries do not make any mention of the mode of obtaining suggestions from citizens/ client groups/ stakeholders or having any interaction with them. The Charter must indicate how the citizens would communicate their suggestions to the Department. If there is an on-line facility for this, it may be mentioned and the web-site address should be provided. To invite suggestions from the citizens who lack access to the inter-net, the option of submitting written suggestions to a particular officer (Contact Officer for Suggestions), either by hand or by post as well as the option of dropping suggestions into the suggestion boxes placed at specific locations should be provided. Full name, office room number and office telephone number of the Contact Officer should appear in the Charter. It is felt that either the Contact Officer's e-mail address or the Department's website may be indicated in the Charter in order that suggestions can be sent by e-mail also. The Charter should also indicate the location of the 'Suggestion Boxes'.

It is felt that the ‘Contact Officer for Suggestions’ should be a senior person in the organization, who is familiar with the functioning of organization at various levels and is in a position to take up the suggestions for implementation.

Information about Time-frame for Review of Suggestions

The Contact Officer for Suggestions should be made responsible for letting the suggestion-maker know whether his suggestion has been accepted or rejected and if rejected, the reasons for rejection. For suggestions received on-line, replies/ responses can also be provided on-line.

Information about Mechanisms for Processing of Suggestions

The ‘Contact Officer for Suggestions’ should ensure that the Suggestions Boxes of his Department are emptied daily and all suggestions are diarized in a separate register on a daily basis. The same register should have columns to indicate disposal of each suggestion and the number and date of the letter by which the suggestion-maker was informed of the acceptance or rejection of his suggestion. The Contact Officer should be made responsible for acknowledging each suggestion, letting the suggestion-maker know whether his suggestion has been accepted or rejected and if rejected, the reasons for rejection. All on-line suggestions should also be processed and responded to on-line by the contact officer and a record of progress made on these should be maintained.

Information about Systematic Review of all Suggestions

All suggestions, whether these are obtained regularly or as a result of special survey, should be reviewed systematically in order to examine their significance for improving administration and service delivery. Insights obtained from the suggestions regarding policy changes should be analysed too. This should be shared with the citizens and how the organization intends to share it should be available in the Charter.

The Charter should also provide contact points for ‘Interface with Citizens’ indicating the surveys the organization conducts periodically to ascertain the needs of its client groups, the extent to which such needs are being met by the organization, the citizen’s perceptions about its performance and image, the level of satisfaction of client groups and the quality and efficiency of the delivery of services/schemes. The agencies which may do the independent surveys on all-India basis and regional basis should be selected and their list annexed to the Charter. The periodicity of the surveys should also be indicated in the Charter. The organization should also decide what it would do with the survey findings. The findings of a review of these may lead to systemic changes, reforms in the services/schemes, procedural improvements and improvements in accessibility of the client groups to the schemes/services?

Information about Outcome of Review of Suggestions

If a review of suggestions is undertaken, sharing it with the public can add credibility to the organisation as well as enthuse citizens to provide valuable inputs to the organisation

for improving its performance. Many times the solutions to a problem are within reach, yet these are beyond the imagination of officers in the organisation. Many such ideas reach the decision-makers through suggestions of citizens and therefore should be encouraged and duly analysed. In case any citizen surveys are done, and the outcome of the review of these should also be shared with the public.

Information about Monitoring Mechanism to Ensure Compliance with Commitments

There should be clear information in the Charter about the monitoring mechanisms created by the organization in order to ensure that Charter does not remain merely a superficial document, with little capacity to ensure its own implementation. This monitoring mechanism may include people from the organization as well those outside-the clients/ stakeholders or civil society groups.

Information about the Web-site and Relevant Information

The Charter should indicate the information/ services, which can be obtained through the web-site of the Ministry along with the address of the web-site. Forms and other processes available on-line should also be mentioned.

Information about On-line Charter

On-line Charter should also provide as many services as possible on-line and enable interface with citizens by creating windows in this regard. The Charter should be made interactive and information about that should be provided to the citizens through the Charter, which is printed or through other communication methods including display at the outlet level, at IFCs and at the headquarters.

Information about Right to Information

Every Charter should inform the citizens about their 'Right to Information'. With the enactment of the RTI Act, 2005, implementation of the provisions of the Act has become mandatory. In the organization's Charter there should be a brief statement on how it facilitates implementation of the Act's provisions. The names, room numbers and office telephone numbers of the Coordinating Central Principal Information Officer/CPIO/APIO and the First Appellate Authority of the organization should also be provided.

Information about Information Handbook

Charter should also contain information about the Information handbook, what it contains, the place where it is available and charge, if any, which has to be paid to obtain it. The date when the 'Information Handbook' has been brought out by the organization, and when it is scheduled to be updated should also be mentioned.