

# Customer Service Guidelines

**1.2.9**

## PURPOSE

To define expectations and provide guidance to departments, call centers and employees related to providing excellent customer service.

## GUIDELINES

The City of San José recognizes that successful customer service reflects a quality organization. Departments and employees at all levels are required to be mindful of their individual responsibility to provide excellent customer service. These guidelines are to be applied to internal as well as external customers. Internal customers include other City staff, elected and appointed officials, and vendors and contractors hired to perform work on behalf of the City.

Excellent customer service requires that:

- City products and services are easy to locate and use;
- City employees and representatives are responsive, knowledgeable, and capable of assisting or connecting customers with others who can assist;
- City employees treat everyone with respect; and
- Customers receive excellent and appropriate help.

Excellent customer service is a natural result when all levels of the City embrace the values identified in the City's [Code of Ethics, City Administrative Policy Manual Section 1.2.1](#), and [Employee Values, City Administrative Policy Manual Section 1.2.4](#). These include but are not limited to:

- Integrity – upholding the highest work ethic and being open, honest, and accountable;
- Respect – treating internal and external customers fairly; and
- Excellence – focusing on all customers and providing outstanding service

## Department Guidelines - General

1. **Processes:** There are many processes within the City that require following specific procedures. Departments are expected to make such processes as simple as possible. Easy-to-understand instructions, simplified forms, plain language, and up-to-date and accurate information are examples of efforts that will help ensure a positive customer experience.
2. **Website Maintenance:** Departments are responsible for ensuring their webpages are current, accurate, and regularly updated. Additionally, departments must ensure that links in the City's webpages are working or accurately and readily refer customers to appropriate and functional links.

Departments are required to review their website content regularly and make corrections where appropriate. More information about City website management is outlined in the City's [Web Governance, City Administrative Policy Manual Section 1.7.9](#).

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- 3. Department Telephone Directories:** The role of an up-to-date citywide directory for ensuring quality customer service cannot be overstated. Customers are frustrated when they are directed to a wrong or non-functional phone number.

Departments are required to review and update directories periodically to ensure that, at a minimum, their staff's direct business phone numbers and proper departments are correctly and completely listed.

- 4. Telephone Trees and Interactive Voice Response (IVR):** Telephone trees and IVR can be effective tools for providing fast routing options and popular information to customers. Departments that maintain telephone trees and IVR solutions are required to conduct periodic reviews to ensure they are making proper referrals and that the phone numbers and other information are correct.

- 5. Self-Service Options:** Self-service options can enhance and improve the customer experience. Departments should identify situations where access to some of the most frequently used services can be automated or accelerated through online, mobile, and voice methods, such as telephone trees and messaging, IVR, online forms, CRM, and/or specialized mobile applications.

Upon deployment of self-service options, departments are expected to develop ongoing ways to let customers become aware of these convenient features, as well as to maintain these responsive methods over time.

- 6. Setting Standards for Responding to Inquiries/Requests for Service:** Departments should set minimum standards for responses to inquiries/requests. Department standards may vary depending on staffing and function.

a. Ideally, responses to customers should be made within one business day, even if that means merely acknowledging receipt of an email and committing to following up with a substantive response later. Departments should take into consideration staffing resources and the nature of the services provided when establishing internal response time standards, and communicate those expectations to departmental staff.

b. Departments should set standards to ensure that when a phone number or email account will not be staffed to answer calls or emails, then there is a referral message to a staffed phone or email, and/or provide information about approximately when someone will be staffing the phone/email account.

c. Email, whether complaints, compliments, or suggestions, should be acknowledged in an appropriate manner.

- 7. Information and Referral:** Often people will inquire about issues that are not within the contacted department's or City's domain. Every effort should be made to refer these callers to the entity that is best able to handle their concern. All referrals should include a phone number or location of the suggested agency.

Internal referrals should be handled in a similar manner. If a person on the phone or through email is being referred to a different department or employee, the individual

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should be given direct contact information for future reference and then be transferred. Customers should not have to call back for assistance with the transfer.

If a referral is made to another City department, every effort should be made to ensure the referral is correct and, if transferring by phone, that the call is indeed being delivered to the appropriate entity.

8. **Compliments/Complaints:** Each department shall designate a specific location to direct complaints and compliments. The department will track such records in accordance with applicable City policy or laws. When there is a compliment, employees who are the subject of the praise should be copied or notified of the compliment by their supervisor.

**Employee Guidelines - General**

1. **Helpful, Courteous, and Responsive Service:** Common courtesy and respect form the foundation of exceptional customer service. City employees will treat customers with respect, dignity, and courtesy as described in the City's [Code of Ethics, City Administrative Police Manual Section 1.2.1](#). Examples of responsive and courteous customer service include but are not limited to:
  - a. ***Give full attention to the customer.***
  - b. ***Communicate clearly and effectively.*** Help the customer understand the issue and the City's processes, and provide useful information. Use plain language and minimize jargon as much as reasonably possible.
  - c. ***Understand and empathize with the customer's point of view.*** While recognizing that customer compliance with the City requirements, codes, and policies is mandatory, staff should work with the customer to understand the problem and goals, and then when possible, identify practical alternatives and solutions.
2. **Professionalism:** All employees are expected to present a professional, informed, and commonsense approach to City customers, members of the City Council, residents, businesses, and other customers, as well as to other City employees.

Customers expect City employees to be knowledgeable in matters related to their work classification. Although employees cannot be expected to be all-knowing, they do have a responsibility to maintain a solid understanding of their work responsibilities and how they relate to the overall effectiveness of the City's core values as described in the City's [Employee Values, City Administrative Policy Manual Section 1.2.4](#).

When an employee is unable to answer a question or concern raised by a customer, the employee should facilitate connecting the customer with a City expert who can answer the question or provide the service requested.

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3. **Voice and Electronic Communications Standards:** Voicemail and email are effective tools for excellent customer service when managed effectively.
- a. **Personal greeting:** City employees with direct telephone numbers are required to use the voicemail greeting system. It is expected that employees use a personal greeting for their outgoing message that includes the employees' name and department to allow for confirmation that a call has been transferred or routed to the intended person/department.
- i. The voicemail pocket guide with instructions for changing voicemail is available at: [www.sjcity.net/documentcenter/view/2792](http://www.sjcity.net/documentcenter/view/2792).
  - ii. To access voicemail, dial your direct number from any phone or press the envelope icon on your assigned phone.
  - iii. Press the "\*" button when the auto attendant answers.
  - iv. Enter your PIN.
  - v. To work with greetings, press "3."
  - vi. To work with your personal greeting, press "1." This is your day-to-day greeting.
- b. **Alternate/Holiday greeting:** City employees with direct telephone numbers are expected to provide an alternate greeting when they will be out of the office for an extended period of time, such as for holiday closures, vacations, or other leaves of absence. At a minimum, the greeting should identify the name and phone number of an alternate contact for callers during the employee's absence and note the period of absence. Alternate greetings should be cleared upon the employee's return to the office.
- i. See 3.a. i-v above.
  - ii. To work with alternate greetings, press "2" and follow prompts. This greeting would be activated for extended absences.
  - iii. If you have difficulty setting your "Out of Office" greeting using the instructions provided, please contact IT for assistance.
- c. **Email:** City employees are expected to provide an "Out of Office" automatic reply when they will be out of the office for an extended period of time, such as holiday closures, vacations, or other planned leaves of absence. At a minimum, the response should identify the name, email address, and/or phone number of an alternate contact during the employee's absence. "Out of Office" greetings should be cleared upon the employee's return to the office.
- i. For Outlook, click "File" in the upper left corner of the email window.
    1. Click "Automatic Replies".
    2. Click "Send automatic replies".
    3. If you click "Only send during this time range:" the automatic reply will only go out during the time specified. If not clicked, it will send automatic replies until manually turned off (deselect).
    4. In the narrative box, type in the information you want to convey, such as: dates of absence and who to contact during this time.
    5. You will need to do this for responses to both internal and external responses by clicking the tabs.
    6. Click "OK"
  - ii. For Office 365 Outlook, click the "Settings" wheel.
    1. Click "Automatic Replies"

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2. Click "Send automatic replies"
  3. Enter the date range and times
  4. Provide the information you want to convey in both narrative boxes for inside and outside responses.
  5. Click "OK".
- iii. If you have difficulty setting your "Out of Office" automatic reply using the instructions provided, please contact IT for assistance.
- d. **Directory Information:** City employees are required to update their contact information in the Citywide Directory accessible via the City intranet site and PeopleSoft.
- i. From the City Intranet ([www.sicity.net](http://www.sicity.net)), click "Employee Directory" in the left window.
  - ii. Click "Update Profile" – if you get a "session expired" notice, click the link "Sign in as a different user".
    1. User log-in information is the same as the computer log-in (FirstName.LastName). Use your computer log-in password.
  - iii. Update fields as needed.
  - iv. If you make changes, a "Save" button will appear below your name to save changes.
  - v. If you have difficulty changing your directory information using the instructions provided, please contact IT for assistance.

**Department Guidelines - Call Centers, Information Counters & Department Main Telephone Contact Numbers**

1. **Performance Standards:** Departments responsible for call centers, public counters, telephone answer points, and/or information centers should establish performance goals identifying expectations such as for optimal answer rates or wait times based upon the nature of the services provided.
2. **Staffing:** Staffing levels for call centers and information counters should be arranged to ensure the most effective coverage given the available resources. Techniques to ensure effective staffing include modifying schedules based upon call volume or customer wait time and using short-term staffing relief where possible.
3. **Equipment Requirements:** Call center equipment and systems should include at a minimum:
  - a. Components that allow for review of calls for quality assurance and/or addressing complaints. This would include telephone recording and recording notification systems.
  - b. Call management capabilities that automatically track wait times and route calls to the next available operator.
  - c. Analytic tools to track demand by day of week, hour of day, length of call, as well as other measures required for reviewing overall performance.

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- d. The ability to add self-service options and telephone trees that can be programmed by in-house systems administrators.
- e. The ability to switch service over to back-up systems and/or add lines quickly and with ease.
- f. Other features as may be identified in requests for bids, qualifications, or proposals.

For assistance with bringing equipment requirements up to the standards listed above, please contact the Information Technology Department.

4. **Backup Plans:** In the event of a situation that interferes with the operation of the call center, there must be a backup plan in place to ensure that calls can be delivered and/or answered. Plans should be regularly tested to ensure that backup equipment is in working order and the staff members assigned to provide service understand their roles and knows how to operate the equipment where applicable.

Backup plans should identify staff to handle general voicemail boxes and email accounts when the primary person is not available.

**Employee Guidelines – Call Center, Information Counter & Staff Answering Department’s Main Telephone Line(s)**

1. **Acknowledge Customers:** Acknowledge customers arriving at public counters promptly. Employees should strive to meet performance goals established for their Call Center, Information Counter, and/or department.
2. **Log in at Assigned Time:** Starting on time ensures customers can receive services when the City has stated they are available. Departments and employees should be prepared to handle customers throughout posted business hours.

For call centers using activity or call management systems, logging in ensures that customers and calls can be properly distributed for prompt attention. Employees are also required to follow department guidelines for notifications when late or sick, and to log out for designated breaks or upon conclusion of their shift, so customers and calls are not directed to stations where no one is available to provide assistance. Contact center supervisors and managers in the City have the important responsibility of ensuring staff availability, training, and tools are organized to maximize positive customer experiences.

3. **Use Effective and Professional Customer Contact/Telephone Protocols.**

- a. Greet all customers immediately and welcome them.
- b. Answer telephone calls, return calls, and ensure customers are not waiting any longer than the established performance goals set by your department or by these guidelines if no department policy exists.

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- c. Identify yourself by name, if not displayed or visible.
  - d. Refrain from using profane or inappropriate language.
- 4. Information and Referral:** In addition to the requirements set forth in Employee Guidelines General, Call Center employees are responsible for entering requests for tracking, following up on requests to ensure prompt service, escalating issues properly, and documenting resolutions to improve future response.

**Difficult Customers**

1. When dealing with a difficult customer, employees shall remain professional at all times and inform customers that staff will do their best to assist in resolving the customer's request. City employees will attempt to work through the customer's concern. If employees cannot resolve the issue, they will inform the customer that the matter needs to be referred to a supervisor.
2. Although it is ultimately the City's goal to provide customers with excellent customer service, employees may terminate a conversation with any customer who demonstrates threatening, aggressive, belligerent, or other clearly inappropriate behavior or language. Where possible, the customer should be informed that continued inappropriate behavior will result in a termination of the contact.
3. A customer who demonstrates an inability to conduct themselves in a civil manner ceases to be a "customer." If such a situation arises, an employee should discuss this issue with a supervisor, who may consult with the Department Director and others, as needed.
4. On occasion, an employee may deem there is a risk to people or property in a customer or public interaction. When staff members determine there is a need to contact the police or security personnel because a customer exhibits aggressive or threatening behavior, they should do so immediately. Employees are valuable members of our City team and not expected to put themselves at risk during such any interaction with a customer. Additional information for reporting and documenting such issues is available in the City's [Workplace Violence Policy, City Administrative Policy Manual Section 1.3.1.](#)

Approved:

/s/ Norberto Dueñas  
City Manager

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Date