



**“THE LAND TAX DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES THE FIRST
NATIONAL CUSTOMER CHARTER IN THE BARBADOS PUBLIC
SERVICE”**

The Land Tax Department launched the first National Customer Charter in the Public Service as part of an overall plan for improved service standards for Barbadians. Customers visiting the Land Tax Department can now expect improved standards of service whenever visiting the Land Tax Department with regards to service deliverables.

The Customer Charter was launched Thursday 30th October, 2003 at the Land Tax Department, National Insurance Building, Bridgetown, where, Senator, The Honourable John Williams, Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s Office, unveiled the Charter during a special ceremony. The Charter represents preset service standards designed to assist in improving service delivery to the public.

The conceptualization of the National Customer Charter Programme began in May 2001 at the Almond Bay Conference Centre. This occasioned the first Customer Charter Action Planning Workshop attended by public officers from the Grantley Adams International Airport, Land Tax and Immigration Departments. These officers were presented with the challenging task of creating Customer Charters in the Public service; these officers understood that the public service will only achieve top quality service when its customers *perceive* that the public service is *giving* top quality service.

The Customer Charter programme represents but one of the tools which the government has decided to employ in order to establish national service standards in the public service. A service

standard is essentially a promise to ourselves and to our customers that we will define specific performance standards and most importantly adhere to these standards while recognizing that there is always room for improvement. This task is not an easy one, and required the Land Tax Department to actively assess, review, reengineer, reorganize, refocus and reform almost every aspect of what it does. It undertook this task with the aim of making the customer the central focus of its operations.

This exercise was based on already determined and realistic service standards which Barbadian customers now demand. These demands are driven by the customers' belief, that service should be courteous, efficient and delivered in a timely manner. It is also driven by the customers' belief that service will be reliable, responsive, consistent and cost effective. Today's savvy customers expect that service will be delivered in a culture of professionalism. Senior Managers of the land Tax Department indicated that one of the major challenges faced by the organization was that prior to the creation of the charter no system was in place to get feedback or contributions from staff or customers. Their participation was seen as essential for the creation of realistic and meaningful goal setting.

The overall benefits of this improved approach cannot be underestimated. It is envisioned that the establishment of service standards will herald in an era of openness, transparency, and fairness to all those seeking to utilize the services offered by government. The Charter programme makes every public officer accountable for the standard of service rendered.

The government is also aware that while it seeks to establish service standard indicators, formal and informal measures will be put into place that will speedily address complaints, queries and suggestions from customers and clients, and as such, it is vital for Departments to monitor and review their service standards.

Whilst we acknowledge the importance of the launch of the Land Tax Department's first Customer Charter, we must seek to develop ways to continually improve our service standards by constantly monitoring our performance; this will enable us to quickly identify problems with customer and client services. Continuous examination of government policies and procedures will allow us to set higher and higher service standards, thus enabling us to minimize operational cost while enhancing customer satisfaction.

Benefits of a Customer charter

Customer Charters bring an assortment of benefits to both the customer and the public service, these include:

- Defined specific performance standards that every member of staff will have to achieve on a day-to-day basis;
- Pre-set, realistic service standards to suit customer expectations;
- Openness from public officers in the manner in which they serve customers;
- Dissemination of information to give customers an appreciation of the available services;
- More convenient services suited to the needs of the customer;
- Improved responsiveness to customer complaints queries and suggestions; and
- Policies based on fair and public rules that ensure customers receive appropriate redress, should service standards not be met.

The Office of Public Sector Reform facilitated the creation of Customer Charters within the Public Service by providing the infrastructural and theoretical background for their establishment. This was done by coordinating customer oriented workshops, seminars and training programmes, thus enabling the Land Tax Department to setup a framework for the improvement of the Department's services to taxpayers, government agencies and other non-resident clients.

Other Customer Service Initiatives

The Department has also embraced other reform initiatives such as the creation of the department's web page [Http://www.landtax.gov.bb](http://www.landtax.gov.bb). The website gives general information about the establishment of the department, and the services offered. It also outlines current tax rates, payment of land Taxes and has the facility to download forms. Top Management of the organization has stated that they are actively pursuing the possibility of payments by debit and credit cards and online payments via the internet in the not too distant future.

At the launching of the Charter the Commissioner stated that within recent times, the organization has received many positive comments in regard to the high level of customer service offered by the department. He has attributed this to the department's focus of putting the customer first. He stated that, "We have learnt to listen to all taxpayers and to render assistance and advice whenever they

seek help for what they perceive to be a problem. As far as we are concerned rendering such assistance is just as important a function as the collection of taxes.”

The customer charter program is but one initiative of Public Sector Reform that seeks to transform the Barbados Public Service into a culture that is customer friendly and results driven, thereby improving the quality of life for all Barbadians. Its development at the Land Tax Department is clear evidence of public sector reform in action, and is a clear indication that the reform process has truly moved to another level.

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