Fairfax County Customer Service – Engagement Initiative
Group Charter

This charter of the Fairfax County Customer Service – Engagement Initiative Group is intended to promote a common understanding among members of the group's purpose, goals, membership, and method of operation.

Background

Fairfax County is embarking on a major initiative to evaluate and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of customer service systems across all agencies to promote public engagement and interaction with governmental processes; to support transparency in governance by providing easy online access to information and documents; and to identify strategies and tools to enhance the overall customer experience and integrate the currently stovepiped systems, contact/call centers and hotlines across all agencies so members of the public can easily access timely, accurate information.

This effort will help facilitate an informed and engaged community.

One of the county's vision elements is to create a culture of engagement:

> "Individuals enhance community life by participating in and supporting civic groups, discussion groups, public-private partnerships and other activities that seek to understand and address community needs and opportunities. As a result, residents feel that they can make a difference and work in partnership with others to understand and address pressing public issues."

Today, a convergence of websites, mobile devices, public information, online services, technology tools, and social media focuses on how to best serve the customer – which means county residents and businesses. The county already has some options for the public to request information and get things done, fixed or reported:

- Last year, the Office of Public Affairs unveiled a new, single phone number, email address, and Twitter account that is easy to remember -- 703-FAIRFAX. The public can call, email or tweet 703-FAIRFAX to get assistance.
- Residents can now submit a series of complaints – both from a computer and mobile device – to multiple county departments.
- DPWES' Land Development Services redesigned its customer service area in the Herrity Building to create a new Customer and Technical Support Center.
- The Library has made access to ebooks easier for tablet devices.
- Fairfax Connector actively responds to riders on social media to answer concerns and allay confusion.
- The Department of Neighborhood and Community Services allows the community to apply for field or gym space online, as well as manage schedules, submit rosters and pay fees.

But it is clear that there remains more to do in order to provide a culture of engagement.

These efforts only begin to tackle what many in the region and across the country are currently providing. Many jurisdictions already have or will soon boast dedicated call centers, tracking numbers, mobile apps, and intuitive websites focused on a more unified approach to customer service.

The county should not expect busy parents or tired commuters to navigate the organizational chart to determine the best contact for a county service. They shouldn't have to review the 500 entries in the county's current online phone directory when needing information or services.

Additionally, many of the county's services overlap departments or even levels of government. There is the need to make the customer service experience of government more intuitive and easy for the one million plus residents and visitors. A more coordinated approach would allow the county to track trends and act quickly to meet the needs of county residents and businesses.

We are in an era of tremendous change, where the structures and practices of government are evolving to a more open conversation among government agencies and the public. Today's government must create new and better structures and systems focused on community engagement with emphasis on the user experience. This means that a culture of engagement must also exist within the county government and we need to improve how we partner with the community. Communicating this vision of partnership and the changing role of government as well as promoting best practices in communication, engagement, and civic participation will be key to our success.

The Board of Supervisors has requested that the Office of Public Affairs create a countywide cross-agency group to:

- Study how to improve the customer service experience, covering all platforms – mobile apps, texting, email, websites, phone, and other new options that may deliver services better, more efficiently and more cost effectively.

- Investigate best practices from across the country, especially the use of new technological tools like Open311.

- Provide recommendations to the Board before the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 Carryover Review to move forward in providing a cohesive, consistent, and integrated customer service approach to better serve the public.

To provide for a system that will work effectively to ensure quality customer service experiences, county leaders will need to comprehensively address the challenges -- including stovepiped processes, lack of integration across and within agencies, old, outdated business models, countywide norms and protocols, and staffing and organizational resources -- inherent in the county's current customer service and engagement systems, not just treat the "symptoms."

Goal

The goal of the overall initiative is to meet community needs for improved communications, engagement, customer service and civic participation that optimally uses county resources, achieves measurable results and provides for accountability.

To accomplish this goal, a group comprised of employees from some of the agencies involved in customer service and public engagement has been created. This group will regularly meet to review best practices and make recommendations to create an efficient, responsive, adaptable customer service system of platforms that will address the current challenges while anticipating future needs.

The group will provide recommendations to the Board on ways to move forward, some of which may require funding investments, while concurrently, some immediate improvements will be identified to better integrate the current disparate customer service systems countywide.

The group will:

- Comprehensively list all customer/call centers and all major methods and ways that the public currently contacts the Fairfax County government

- Investigate best practices from across the country by comprehensively assessing customer service platforms, to include:
  - reviewing the organizational systems, processes, philosophy, and user experiences
  - benchmarking other jurisdictions' approaches.

- Discuss how to improve the customer service experience, covering all platforms – mobile apps, texting, email, websites, phone, and other new options that may deliver services better, more efficiently and more cost effectively.

Purpose

The group will provide recommendations to the Board on steps that can be taken to guide a change management process for improving customer service and engagement systems and instituting ways to better integrate county platforms. The final product will be a set of recommendations for new processes and practices that will result in better customer service and engagement, greater efficiency, and clear accountability.

Membership

The Director of Public Affairs will serve as the convener, executive sponsor and chairperson of the Customer Service – Engagement Initiative group.

The group will be comprised of representatives of the following agencies/organizations:

- DTA
- DMB
- Libraries
- DIT
- CEX office
- Chairman's office
- Human Services
- Department of Code Compliance
- DPSC
- Visit Fairfax
- DOT
- OEM
- OPA's external communications team

Technical and resource specialists from other agencies will provide support to the group as needed.

Method of Operation

The group as a whole will meet monthly, with subgroups identified as appropriate on an ad-hoc basis.

Group members will strive to achieve consensus on decisions or recommendations made by this group. For the purpose of this charter, consensus is defined as active participation and agreement of all members so that a decision is acceptable enough that each member can support it. Where time or the nature of the decision precludes building consensus, decisions will be made by the Director of Public Affairs.

After the group has presented the recommendations to the Board, it will disband and implementation will then be handled by other groups, not yet named.