

## CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTERS

Many businesses, organisations and government departments have a customer service charter that sets out what its clients can expect. A quick Google search shows that many Australian libraries also have customer service charters. Far from being a declaration of clichéd exorbitant promises, a charter can, along with other key corporate documents, help library staff plan how to utilise its resources, set parameters in which a team will operate, and monitor its performance.

In the process of its development or review, a charter can serve as a reminder to all staff of their library's *raison d'être*. It can also identify the need for change. For example, a guarantee of timely electronic document delivery might highlight the need for new software and ICT systems, training of staff in the new technology, streamlined processes or altered rosters for some staff.

A charter doesn't just apply to frontline service staff. Each section of a library has its part to play. For example, library technical services might have a policy of processing and cataloguing new items within a certain timeframe; acquisitions staff might aim to order ample copies of an anticipated popular work or consider how accessibility may be improved by purchasing electronic licenses versus one hard copy subscription of a journal.

So how do you go about writing a customer service charter? Look at your governing organisation's mission, objectives, annual report, corporate plan, etc. — the bigger picture. Determine what the core business of your organisation is and how your library contributes to that. Then look at things such as key performance indicators, outputs and outcomes, balanced scorecard, existing quality assurance measures, library rules and conditions of use. Can some wording in these be included in your charter?

Look at service basics — opening hours, the number of loans or reference staff on and the length of time they are rostered on, to how long it takes for document delivery requests or enquiries to be filled. Look at your statistics, your customer feedback, FAQs, requests and survey results. Why? A charter should be realistic and

achievable — don't overpromise and underdeliver. Charters such as this don't help anyone — they ultimately disappoint the customers and stress the staff.

Start to sketch out the charter: look at the charters of libraries similar to your own type (e.g. special, government, academic, public). Many are available on the internet; if not, make a request to a library manager or on an e-list. They can provide a framework or template on which to build yours. Of the many excellent examples out there, here are just a few:

- the State Library of Western Australia's customer service charter at <http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/custserv.html>
- Macquarie University Library's client service charter at <http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/policies/client-service-charter.pdf>
- University of Wollongong Library's client service charter at <http://www.library.uow.edu.au/planning/UOW026252.html>
- the State Library of Queensland's comprehensive information and hints about customer service as well as a charter template at [http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/file/5981/gen\\_customer.doc](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/file/5981/gen_customer.doc)

As well as being consistent with your organisation's other guiding documents and principles, your charter should be consistent with any relevant laws in the jurisdiction in which your library operates, for example, privacy legislation, and of course, copyright. Articulating this awareness in your charter could prevent legal action.

Look at best practice. Standards Australia's publications include: *AS 3906 Quality of Service Guide to Customer Expectations*; *HB 251-2004 Customer Satisfaction Measurement*; *AS ISO 10002* and *HB229-2006* on complaints handling; *HB 90.2-2000 The Service Industry Handbook Guide to ISO 9001:2000*; *CB-020-2005 International Customer Service Standard*. While these may be primarily aimed at industries which are selling commodities,

their principles can selectively apply to libraries. See <[www.standards.org.au](http://www.standards.org.au)>.

Ensure that all staff have an opportunity to contribute or comment during its development, because customer service is the responsibility of all staff.

A charter may include a list headed 'how you can help' or 'we expect you to'. These 'client obligations' could include things like treating staff with basic courtesy and respect, observing library rules and conditions of use, observing copyright laws, participating in surveys, understanding that others may have priority at busy times. This can reinforce that customer service is a two-way street.

Make the charter readable and concise, ideally in bullet points. Use engaging language. For example, say 'We will ensure the confidentiality of your personal information', rather than 'Confidentiality of personal information of users will be ensured by this library'. Include details of how clients can provide feedback.

Make it visible and available to your staff and clients in the library and on your website. Include it in staff induction packs and when giving library tours or short courses to clients. Review it in conjunction with statistics and feedback.

And finally, Wollongong University Library has come up with a novel way of compensating its customers when it is not meeting a service standard — free coffee vouchers.

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### Correction

August *inCite* featured a photo montage celebrating ALIA's 70th anniversary. The captions on page 17 included a number of typographical errors. The photograph of the Fellows of the Library Association was held in **1987**, not 1897; the conference in 1998 was **biennial**, not bienneal. The editor apologises for any disappointment and embarrassment caused to members, staff and the Board.