

# Commission for a New Georgia Customer Service Task Force

## Final Report

### **I. Executive Summary**

#### **Vision Statement:**

The Customer Service Task Force adopted the following vision statement:

*Georgia will have  
the Best Customer Service  
of any State in America.*

#### **Process:**

The Customer Service Task Force Project Team conducted extensive research on the current state of citizen contact with state government. National best practices for customer service were studied and industry standards were examined. Extensive data collection focused on telephone calls, the public's primary method of interaction with government services.

#### **Recommendations Summary:**

1. Start creating the Culture and setting expectations for how we should serve our customers.
2. Imbed Process Improvement and Cultural Development methodologies in a few pilot Agencies to drive continuous improvement.
3. Create a General Information Center.
4. Improve the performance of Existing Call Handling Services.
5. Implement a Virtual Call Center (remote worker) Program.

## **II. Introduction**

Governor Sonny Perdue established the Commission for a New Georgia to engage a public/private partnership in achieving his primary goal for Georgia to become the nation's best-managed state. Among its findings was the need to elevate the level of customer service Georgians experience when dealing with state government. In January 2005, the Customer Service Task Force was established to explore the options for making access to state services easier, faster and friendlier. On Tuesday, October 11, 2005, the final recommendations were made to the Governor and the members of the Commission for a New Georgia.

## **III. Membership**

### **Joseph B. Doyle, Chair**

Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs

### **Carl Swearingen, Commission Liaison**

BellSouth

### **Jim Lientz, Executive Sponsor**

Office of the Governor

### **Tommy Hills, Executive Sponsor**

Office of the Governor

### **Tim Burgess**

Department of Community Health

### **Tom Daniel**

Board of Regents

### **Greg Dozier**

Department of Driver Services

### **Joy Hawkins**

Governor's Office

### **Noel Holcomb**

Department of Natural Resources

### **Dana Russell**

Department of Administrative Services

### **Mike Vollmer**

Department of Technical and Adult Education

**Tom Wade**  
Georgia Technology Authority

**B. J. Walker**  
Department of Human Resources

**Jerry Guthrie, Managing Director**  
Commission for a New Georgia

Project Staff: Carol Veihmeyer, Director; June Burris, Jeraldine Cloud, David Fields, Karen Hampton, Chris Hankins, Marty Hicks, Ed Melton, and Terry Newsom.

## IV. Vision

The Task Force is unaware of any state having an office dedicated to customer service for its citizens on a statewide basis that cuts across all state entities and includes all state services. States provide varying levels of website portal access that links citizens to state programs, but no centralized telephone contact center. Several major cities have implemented what is known as a 3-1-1 service, providing a single access point for municipal services. The best known are New York City, Baltimore, Houston and Miami/Dade County.

In describing its goals, the Customer Service Task Force has adopted this statement to describe its vision:

*Georgia will have  
the Best Customer Service  
of any State in America.*

## V. Scope

The scope of the Customer Service Task Force includes an examination of the statewide customer service culture and of process improvement models for customer service functions. The project gathered information about citizen telephone calls in 123 state entities, linked to 800 state programs and services. Twenty-six formal Call Centers and 468 other Call Handling operations were identified. In this data analysis, the Legislative and Judicial branches were not included, except for the Department of Audits and the Administrative Office of the Courts. The state's technical colleges, the Board of Regents, and the member institutions of the University System of Georgia were not considered, except for a cursory review of the primary information call centers at Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia.

### Definitions of key terms

A **Call Center** is an organization that manages telephone calls within certain performance standards (hold time, talk time, etc.) A call center meets these performance standards with a dedicated trained staff, technology to support processes, and most often a database or knowledge base. A call center will usually have a method of call distribution (IVR or UCD) and some level of automation.

**Call Handling** refers to any part of an organization which answers telephone calls from the public, but differs from a formal call center in that staff typically have other responsibilities, less technology is used, and performance standards for taking telephone calls are not established.

**Automatic Call Distributor (ACD)** is a device that distributes incoming telephone calls to specific telephone sets or stations based on the characteristics of the call. Calls are

served in order of their arrival and are routed to service positions as agents become available. It produces reports of call volume, talk time and hold time, etc.

## **VI. Guiding Principles**

The guiding principles for the Customer Service Task Force Project include:

- Treat customers with respect.
- See customer interaction as an opportunity, not an interruption.
- Ask customers what they want and act on their feedback.
- Focus on challenges, not finding fault.

Customer service should be easier—simplify access to government for Georgians; faster—speed up processes; and friendlier—create a cultural focus on customer service.

## **VII. Data Gathering**

- Primary, high-level Customer Service Contact assigned by each agency.
- Surveyed 123 state entities about citizen telephone calls and emails; 113 responded to a 20-item questionnaire.
- The responses represented 800 programs and services accessible by telephone.
- Survey results evaluated for inconsistencies and follow-up conducted to validate outliers.
- Site visits conducted at 15 of the 26 state Call Centers.
- Consulted with the Governor’s Office of Constituent Services on the nature of customer complaints and requests.
- Consulted with customer service experts in private industry.
- Consulted with Georgia Tech’s Economic Development Institute on process improvement.
- Best practice research from the National Governor’s Association and conference calls with seven cities launching 3-1-1 services.
- Benchmarked Call Center data against governmental industry standards.
- Received and reviewed 24 Call Center Vendors’ responses to an RFI (Request for Information).

National research shows that citizens prefer the telephone to the internet, in-person visits, or the mail as their method of accessing services at all levels of government.<sup>1</sup> A poll taken in July, 2005 indicates that 47% of Georgians contact government by telephone.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the initial focus of the Task Force Project was to gather data about telephone calls, rather than face-to-face contacts or use of email. The data collection was done by circulating a survey form to all state entities, requesting information about their telephone

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Horrigan, *How Americans Get in Touch with Government*, Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, May 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Peach State Poll, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, July 25, 2005.

calls. Data requested included telephone numbers, hours of operation, and staffing levels; daily call volume, call duration, and type of customer; and use of technology in handling calls.

In the majority of cases, the information keyed to telephone numbers and specific state-funded services consists of estimates, as this data had never been collected in this manner. With the exception of the formal call centers having the technology to provide detailed reports, the data collection method is a sampling of telephone answering operations, rather than a complete data set.

The survey process did identify 26 state Call Centers and additional detail was requested about their operations. Initial findings for call centers were verified with ACD (Automated Call Distribution) reports and expanded to include details about technology, quality assurance and disaster recovery processes, and staffing levels as well as call center budgets and costs. On-site visits were conducted at 15 state Call Centers; nine Call Centers are currently outsourced.

## **VIII. Major Findings**

### **General Customer Service**

Customer service varies greatly from agency to agency. There are no statewide standards or expectations to guide behavior. Processes are believed to take too long. Few formal, statewide process improvement initiatives exist. Yet, recent poll results show that citizens feel more positively about state government service than about the federal government (See public opinion poll results in Appendix A.)

There is limited or no customer input. Customers are sometimes surveyed, but there is little evidence of how that input is used to improve service.

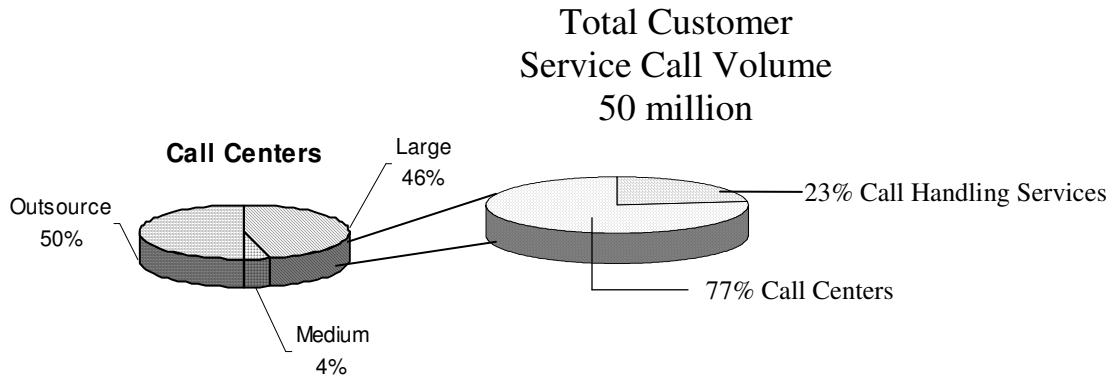
There is no screening to evaluate a person's suitability for a front-line customer service job. There is no consistent customer service training for state employees. Performance appraisals are not linked to customer-focused objectives.

Citizens frequently do not know which agency to call for the services they need. Callers are transferred multiple times before they reach the correct office; an estimated 6% or 1.2 million calls coming to state entities are misdirected. Callers are frustrated by automated menus and an inability to speak to a live person; and sometimes calls are not returned.

Improving service requires that state government create a customer-focused culture; speed up processes; simplify access; and improve all call handling whether in a small office or a large call center.

**Current Telephone Call Handling**

An estimated 50 million telephone calls are reported by state entities each year. Of those, 77% are received in Call Centers. Of that 39 million calls, half are handled in outsourced Call Centers. (See Appendix C for listing of state call centers)



The other one-fourth of the estimated calls are handled in various state offices by staff that typically have other responsibilities. In these situations, methods of distributing calls are not automated, and no technology exists to accurately count the number of calls received, calls unanswered or the duration of calls. It is in these call handling operations that the most misdirected telephone calls are experienced; that is, calls have originated with the incorrect agency and must be transferred to another number.

<b>Existing Call Center Performance</b>	<b>Annual Calls</b>
Annual Calls	50 million
Answered by a machine	28.5 million
Answered by a person	20 million
Misdirected	1.2 million
Not answered	1.5 million

The state directory assistance function within the Georgia Technology Authority answers 350,000 calls annually. Of the total calls received within the state, approximately 1.5 million go unanswered. It is estimated that 6% of all calls coming in to state agencies and answered by a person must be transferred elsewhere at least once.

The state of Georgia spends approximately \$256 million a year answering telephone calls. The quality of telephone answering service varies widely: hold times range from 1 second to 56 minutes; abandonment rates vary from 2% to a high of 62%. It is estimated that the cost of answering these calls ranges from \$3.50 in an efficient automated call center to \$10.50 in a small call handling office. Precise costs are difficult to isolate because other services in addition to taking phone calls may be provided by the same staff; furthermore, some outsourced Call Centers also provide services other than call handling, such as case management, for example.

<b>Call Handling Costs</b>	<b>Annual Costs</b>
Informal (468)	\$ 90 M
Internal State-Staffed Call Centers (17)	\$ 34 M
Outsourced Call Centers (9)	\$132 M
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$256 M</b>

## **IX. Recommendations**

### **Recommendation One**

This recommendation refers to the improvement of all citizens experiences in accessing state government services, whether in person or by telephone.

- Instill Governor Perdue’s vision of customer service excellence in every agency.
- Kick-off efforts with the Customer Service Summit scheduled for January 2006.
- Establish a statewide Customer Service Steering Committee to support the effort.
- Adopt broad statewide standards to measure performance.
- Designate a statewide Customer Service Coordinator.
- Identify Customer Service Champions within each agency.
- Create a formalized process for getting feedback from customers.
- Develop best practices for customer service staff including training, recognition and reward programs, and performance management systems.
- Continue the focus of the Leadership Institute, conducted through the Merit System.
- Communicate results, opportunities and successes.

## **Recommendation Two**

This recommendation is based on the belief that agencies can get better results with the same people, for the same money.

- Adapt a Rapid Process Improvement methodology for agencies to speed up service delivery. This process uses existing personnel to drive continuous, rapid improvements.
- Imbed process improvement and comprehensive cultural development in 3-4 pilot programs, choosing services that impact a significant number of customers and that are currently experiencing customer dissatisfaction. Kickoff scheduled for SFY06.
- Engage front-line employees along with management to create and implement improvement plans.
- Make continuous improvement a goal and way of management.

An example of such a pilot program is the rapid process improvement work done at the Department of Driver Safety (DDS) to streamline services at selected locations visited by the public. This pilot demonstrates successful process improvement in action.

## **Recommendation Three**

This recommendation focuses on effectively answering telephone calls from Georgia citizens by implementing a General Information Center (GIC).

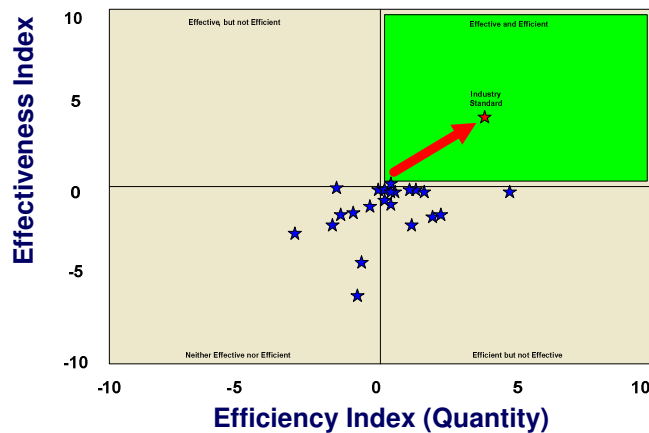
- Establish a single point of access for all state services:  
CALL GEORGIA 877-411-PEACH  
Phones will be answered by a live person who will answer frequently asked questions and transfer calls to the correct office within an agency for calls requiring subject matter expertise. Where possible, a “warm transfer” will be accomplished. This will help people who do not know who to call. Systems procurement scheduled for SFY06.
- The information database used by agents in the General Information Center will also be available to the public on the Internet. Overall call volume will be reduced by increasing citizen self service.
- The General Information Center will track calls and follow-up with callers to provide a customer satisfaction report for the GIC and for those agencies receiving calls from GIC.

- The GIC will be operational in a pilot mode 10 months after funding. It will be deployed statewide within 12 to 15 months. The GIC will be integrated with *www.georgia.gov* within 18 to 24 months. The goal is to move all calls currently managed as call handling services into the GIC.

**Recommendation Four**

This recommendation covers existing Call Centers and other offices handling numerous telephone requests. It provides improved performance in tandem with the General Information Center. Improved service and cost efficiencies are accomplished by improving processes and utilizing technology to reduce talk time for calls.

- Improve Call Center performance to meet newly-established statewide standards. Leverage existing and future technology investments across Call Centers. On the graph below, get every state Call Center into the “green,” i.e. meeting a new Georgia standard. Initial improvement of 2 existing Call Centers in SFY06.
- Create a forum for Call Center Managers to provide input on proposed changes, to identify areas for improvement and to share successes. Kickoff scheduled for January, 2006.
- Implement focused Call Center improvement plans for 4 major Call Centers each year. This may involve a combination of people, process or technology to solve specific problems.
- Evaluate improvement opportunities for outsourced Call Centers, as contracts near renewal.



*The Efficiency Index is based on research by Purdue University and is available at [BenchmarkPortal.com](http://BenchmarkPortal.com).*

The graph measures twenty-three state of Georgia Call Centers against the industry standard for government call centers. The index plots efficiency and effectiveness: call quantity (efficiency) is plotted on the x-axis; call quality (effectiveness) is plotted on the y-axis. Combined, these provide a high-level view of call center performance.

In plotting a call center on this graph, a variety of data is used. In addition to call metrics (call volume, hold and talk times, and customer feedback), information about staffing (levels, salaries and turnover) and budget is used. Centers that are able to optimize customer-centric results while containing costs are “best practice centers,” found in the upper-right quadrant.

The majority of the state’s Call Centers are clustered in the center of the grid, showing that with some improvements, they can reach the higher performance standards envisioned by Georgia in adopting a new statewide goal for serving its citizens via the telephone.

### **Recommendation Five**

This recommendation addresses an opportunity for the state to utilize current technology to provide employment for various populations and gain cost efficiencies in operating Call Centers.

- Implement a Virtual Call Center (Remote Worker) Program. The pilot effort would target 20% of the General Information Center agents as remote workers in SFY07.
- The results would be verified, the Remote Worker Program refined, and expanded to other Call Centers. Remote workers are already standard in the telecommunications industry.
- Georgia Merit System will develop policies and procedures for remote workers. Expected benefits from Remote Call Centers include low turnover rates (4%) and provide flexibility to provide expanded service hours. During emergencies work can still be carried out from remote sites.
- Remote work attracts new labor sources—homebound caregivers, military families—and allows workers to be located anywhere in the state.

## **X. Conclusion**

In making its recommendations, the Customer Service Task Force has identified significant benefits for Georgia in improving service for its citizens. The measurable results of implementing these recommendations include speeding up processes and reducing the number of contacts required for the customer to get what is needed, thus

resulting in improved customer satisfaction. Quantitative results include a reduction in the cost per telephone call, in the time to handle contacts, in call hold times, and in call volume by increasing access to self service. Performance across all state Call Centers will be benchmarked against industry standards, providing a key tool for managers.

Qualitatively, the focus is on continuously improving performance through implementation of consistent statewide standards for customer service, targeted training for front-line employees, and recognition of high performance. The benefits of a remote worker program include reduction of commute times and improvement of employee morale. Overall, a focus on the customer keeps government in touch with its citizens and reinforces the goal of excellent service. The benefits of enhanced access to state agencies along with consistent communication and evaluation will enable Georgia to provide the best customer service of any state in the nation.

- Appendix A Peach State Poll Results
- Appendix B Call Handling Statistics
- Appendix C Listing of State Call Centers
- Appendix D Listing of Outsourced Call Centers

## Appendix A

### Peach State Poll

#### Measuring Customer Service by State Government Agencies

The Peach State Poll is a quarterly public opinion telephone survey of 800 Georgia residents, sponsored by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. First conducted in Fall 2001, respondents are selected at random and asked questions pertaining to social, economic, and political life in the state of Georgia.

Beginning with the poll taken the week of July 25, 2005 and continuing each quarter, data will be collected to assess trends in customer service by State government agencies. Although initial results are of interest, the value of this poll is the ability to gauge trends in satisfaction over time.

#### Key Findings:

- In response to the question which gauges general impressions of services, Georgians are either very satisfied (12%) or somewhat satisfied (39%) with the delivery of government services by the state of Georgia. Those dissatisfied total 20% with just 7% very dissatisfied.
- For Georgians, the telephone is the primary method of contacting state government (47% of respondents). Other means are in person (27%); through a website (12%); by mail (8%) and by email (4%).
- The majority of Georgians who contacted their state government in the past six months express satisfaction with that experience: 36% were very satisfied and 29% were somewhat satisfied. About ¼ of those who contacted state government were dissatisfied: 10% somewhat dissatisfied and 17% very dissatisfied.
- In general, Georgians remain satisfied with the way things are going in their state. In the current poll, a total of 64% of respondents expressed satisfaction. Since the inception of the poll in September 2001, a majority of Georgians in every poll have expressed satisfaction with the way things are going in their state.
- Positive responses to the way things are going in the state are higher than respondents' impressions of how things are going in the country; An Associated Press Poll taken during the same time period showed that just 36% believed the country was headed in the right direction.
- The poll revealed no statistically significant differences between Georgians in urban and in rural areas in terms of level of satisfaction with state services, although the methods of contact differed somewhat. More people in the Atlanta region used the mail, and more in the rest of the state appeared in person. The total use of website and email was similar as was preference for contact by telephone.

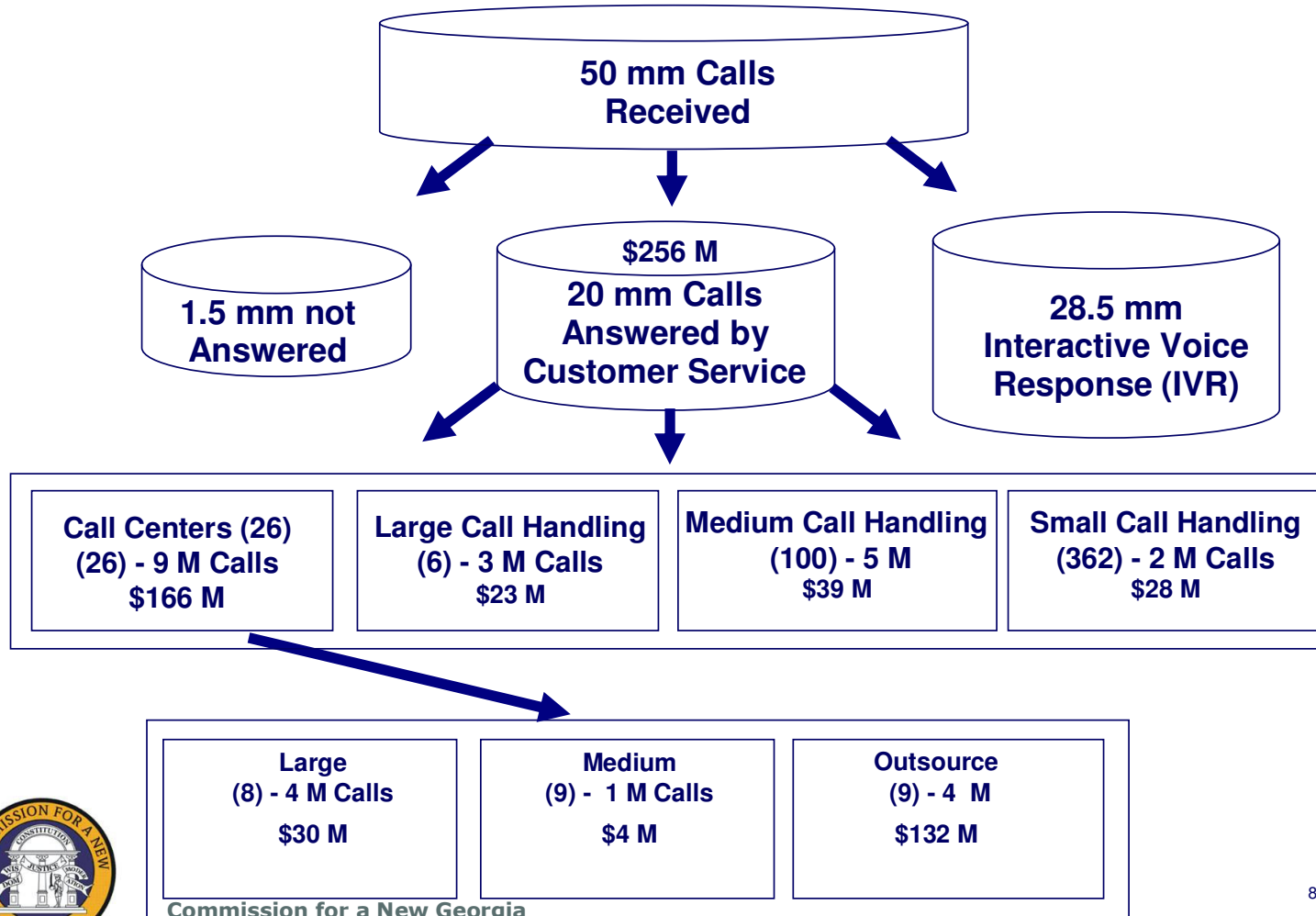
- Although data about specific agencies of government are now being collected, the numbers of contacts with particular agencies in this poll are too few to be significant. Previous Peach State Polls, however, have tracked impressions of state entities, including the Georgia legislature, police, university system, public schools, courts, and the median, among others.

**The following questions will be included in the Peach State Poll each quarter:**

1. Consider for a moment all the many services provided by state government. In general, are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the delivery of services by Georgia government?
2. How many times in the last six months have you contacted a Georgia state agency?
3. What department or agency did you contact most recently?  
(Note: Many citizens do not distinguish among federal, state, county and municipal services, requiring additional interpretation of the responses.)
4. How did you make this most recent contact: through the website, by email, by telephone, by mail, or in person?
5. How satisfied were you with the result of that particular contact? Would you say you were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

Appendix B

# Call Handling Statistics – Appendix B



Commission for a New Georgia

8/25/05

## Appendix C

Appendix C					
State Operated Call Centers					
Agency	Service	Location	Annual Calls	Answered By Machine	Answered By Person
Department of Human Resources	OCSE - Office of Child Support Enforcement assists callers with case status and payment information	Macon	11,075,124	10,710,444	321,840
Department of Driver Services	Customer service handles general information and questions about a revoked or suspended driver's license, automated renewals or Internet address changes and reservations for appointments.	Conyers	1,936,956	484,008	1,209,852
Department of Revenue	Taxpayer Services handles inquiries regarding sales and use, motor fuel, business, and individual taxes including refund inquiries and assessment notices.	Dekab	1,681,879	1,042,393	427,314
Department of Revenue - Motor Vehicle Division	Tag and title information	Fulton (Tradeport)	465,972	100,080	138,924
Georgia Technology Authority	State of Georgia Directory Assistance provides up-to-date listings for state departments, authorities, commissions, colleges, universities and elected officials.	Atlanta	460,728		441,636
Department of Natural Resources	Fishing, Hunting and Boating Licenses	Tucker	378,000		378,000
Georgia Public Broadcasting	Information on GPB programs	Atlanta	353,904		316,584
Georgia Dept. of Transportation	NaviGator Transportation *DOT Call Center Operations	Atlanta	349,044		341,820
Secretary of State	Professional Licensing Boards, applications, renewals, complaints	Atlanta	276,000		276,000
Dept. Of Human Resources	Department of Family and Children Services. Food stamp recipients report changes factors affecting food stamp payments	Macon	270,660		168,540
Secretary of State	Corporations Division Information and registration forms for business entities	Atlanta	181,680		169,608
Teachers Retirement System of Georgia	Call Center Operations	Atlanta	129,012		126,324
Department of Community Health	State Health Benefit Plan - Eligibility	Atlanta	123,228		119,700
Georgia Professional Standards Commission	General Telephone Calls	Atlanta	106,692		105,024
Georgia Student Finance Commission	Planning, applying, paying for college	Atlanta	100,848		94,104
Employees' Retirement System	General Telephone Calls	Atlanta	76,464		66,144
Real Estate Commission	General Telephone Calls	Atlanta	63,780		48,480

## Appendix D

Appendix D						
Outsourced Call Centers						
Agency	Outsource	Service	Location	Annual Calls	Answered By Machine	Answered By Person
Department Of Human Resources	JP Morgan	Electronic Benefits Transfer clients can get account information, report lost card, get PIN number. Elig info must go to DFCS.	97% handled by machine (IVR). 3% go to Mexico for Spanish, India for other	16,890,192	16,383,486	484,008
Department of Community Health	Affiliated Computer Services (ACS)	Claims Payment for Medicaid/PeachCare member and provider services	Georgia	1,354,908		941,064
Department of Community Health	Policy Studies Incorporated (PSI)	PeachCare for kids applications	Florida	806,702		738,612
Department of Community Health	Southeastern Trans	Non-Emergency Transportation Medicaid Members (Outside Atlanta Area)	Georgia	796,156		740,425
Department of Community Health	LogistiCare	Non-Emergency Transportation Medicaid Members (Atlanta Area)	Georgia	791,544		736,500
Department of Natural Resources	Spherix	State Park Reservations	Maryland	291,312		272,220
Department of Community Health	Express Scripts (ESI)	Pharmacy Benefits questions about prior approval requirements	Minnesota	278,290		264,376
Economic Development	Answer Fort Smith	Georgia Travel Guide and tourism questions	Arkansas	34,656		33,624
Office of Treasury & Fiscal Services	TIAA-CREF	Georgia Higher Education Savings Plan assistance	North Carolina, California	21,420		21,420