
Service Excellence Standards Policy



1. This Policy is entitled the "Service Excellence Standards."

2. Objective:

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's identifies exceptional service and governance as a strategically priority to build and foster a strong customer service culture. The Municipality is committed to providing a high standard of service to all customers. Customers include staff, residents, business owners, visitors, tourists, investors and other stakeholders. The standards outlined in this document are a reflection of "Exceptional Service and Governance" and the Municipality's commitment to:

- Provide a consistent and exceptional customer service experience
- Enhance communications with customers and staff
- Reduce calls and inquiries from being "bounced around" internally
- Provide service excellence at all levels within the Municipality and focus on the client experience.

Key drivers of customer satisfaction to:

- Respond and acknowledge receipt of customer contact within a reasonable time frame
- Provide accurate information and/or the avenue for the customer to receive it
- Provide fair and consistent treatment
- Be polite and respectful
- Provide a response and ensure completeness of service or request

These guidelines set minimum standards to communicate with customers efficiently and respectfully.

3. Authority:

Municipal Government Act, as it is amended.

4. Definitions:

Employer refers to the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's

Employee refers to all part-time, full-time, seasonal, and temporary staff

5. Channels of Communication:

The customer service standards provide guidelines for quality delivery of services through the following customer communication channels:

- Telephone
- Electronic/Written Correspondence
- In Person

5.1 Telephone:

Telephone Response Time

Customer calls are returned as soon as possible when they are received. As a general rule, telephone calls will be returned within two (2) business days. Staff's response, within two business days, may not provide a complete resolution, but will be an acknowledgement that the message has been received. Even in the event that an answer is not available, staff will indicate to the interested party that research will be done, and an appropriate response will be provided in the future. Staff should also provide an indication of any further action that will be taken to address the issue.

5.2 Answering Calls

When answering an external phone call a consistent greeting should be used.

Include a greeting, departmental office and first name. i.e. "Good morning, Planning Department, Cathy speaking."

When answering an internal call, or call to a direct line, a greeting and first name is sufficient. i.e. "Good afternoon, Tanner speaking."

5.2.1 When the caller is asking for a specific person

Speak to the party whom the caller is being transferred to first. Speaking to the next party to relieves the caller from having to re-explain their situation. It will also give the other person time to prepare for the call. Now is also the time to pass any "insider" information that might expedite the situation. The receiver will then take the call or ask reception to take a message. Reception should advise the caller that the individual is not available at the moment, is there a message they could give when the person becomes available.

5.2.1.1 Transferring Phone Calls

Step 1: Do not put the call on hold

2. Press Conference
3. Dial the 10 digit phone number Wait for answer, tell the person you are transferring the call toward who is calling and a brief description of the call.
5. Press conference to transfer the call.

5.2.3 Leaving a Voicemail Message on a Customer's Phone:

When you leave a voice message for a customer, it is important to leave a call-back number; most callers have call display and often call reception asking who called from the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's. Leaving details for the customer will eliminate confusion on who to contact in the Municipality.

Guidelines:

- Indicate that you are calling from the Municipality of St. Mary's and leave a phone number
- Leave your name, position/department
- Indicate the time and date of your call
- Indicate the reason for your call
- Repeat the call-back number as a common courtesy
- Speak slowly and clearly, and keep the message as brief as possible

5.3 Voicemail Structure:

5.3.1 In Office

Include your name, department, position, as well as a prompt to have the caller leave a detailed message containing their name, number, and reason for their call. State that if their call is urgent. Messages should be checked on a daily basis, throughout the day.

"You've reached Sarah the Economic Developer in the Planning Department with the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's, I am unable to take your call at this moment. Please leave a detailed message with your name, number, and brief reason for your call and I will return your call within 2 business days. If you require immediate assistance, please dial (902)522-2049 and someone will help you."

It is also acceptable to request callers to send an email, if available and to provide your email address in your voice message responder, as an alternative option to leaving a voicemail, should the caller be open and able to do so.

5.3.2 Out of Office:

Include your name, department, extension, as well as a prompt to have the caller leave a detailed message containing their name, number, and reason for their call and that you will respond upon your return. In addition, staff can provide callers with an alternate contact while they are away from the office or have them dial (902)522-2049 to reach reception for assistance.

I.E. "You've reached Shirley in the Finance Department with the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's, I will be out of the office until June 15th at 8:00 a.m. Please include your name, number and reason for your call and I will respond upon my return."

"If you require assistance, please contact reception at (902)522-2049."

5.3.3 Absences:

Voicemails are the responsibility of staff. If you are out of the office for more than a day and unable to update your voice message, inform your Supervisor that it needs to be changed. Staff are not expected to change voice messages while they are away for brief periods during the day (i.e. away for a 2-hour meeting). If you are out of the office for an extended period, voicemail should reflect the vacancy. This will be similar to the email autoresponder policy detailed below.

If an employee is off sick, the Supervisor is responsible to determine the best option to address calls that are left on voicemail during absences (i.e. retrieve messages, call forward the calls, change voicemail message, etc.)

5.4 Electronic and Written Correspondence:

General Guidelines for Correspondence:

- All correspondence should be written and formatted in accordance with accessibility standards and regulations to ensure accessible content for users
- Utilize the spell check tool whenever necessary for all corporate documents
- If you are unable to provide a complete resolution to the issue, respond to the customer and outline the next steps
- If you have received a written/verbal request in error, re-direct the request to the appropriate employee/department as soon as possible for resolution
- All correspondence should include staff contact information for the customer to contact you directly

5.4.1 Email Correspondence:

Only email accounts assigned to staff by the Municipality shall be used to conduct and respond to Municipal business.

5.4.2 Email Signature:

A standard email signature is required by all Municipal staff for emails and should include the following information:

[Your Name]
[Position Title]
The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's
[LOGO]
[Phone and Ext. Number] [Fax Number]
[Disclaimer]

Example:

David Hutten
Chief Administrative Officer
Municipality of the District of Saint Mary's
8296 Highway 7 P.O. 296
Sherbrooke, NS B0J 3Co
O: (902) 522-2432
C: (902) 328-4047
F: (902) 522-2309
david.hutten@saint-marys.ca

*The content of this email may contain confidential information, information that is protected under the Protection of Privacy Act, or other sensitive and specific material and is intended for the recipient specified in the message as addressed. No content or other material within should be shared at any time with others outside of those intended to be considered privy to this information. If you have received this message by mistake, please notify me, the sender, and delete the message immediately following – this would be greatly appreciated. The message should in no way be disseminated, distributed, published or otherwise circulated outside of the intended purposes and addressed recipients.

Thank you for your cooperation.

5.4.3 Disclaimer:

*The content of this email may contain confidential information, information that is protected under the Protection of Privacy Act, or other sensitive and specific material and is intended for the recipient specified in the message as addressed. No content or other material within should be shared at any time with others outside of those intended to be considered privy to this information. If you have received this message by mistake, please notify me, the sender, and delete the message immediately following – this would be greatly appreciated. The message should in no way be disseminated, distributed, published, or otherwise circulated outside of the intended purposes and addressed recipients.

Thank you for your cooperation.

5.4.4 Electronic and Written Correspondence Response Time:

The following indicates the standard response time for staff to respond to electronic and written correspondence. Please note that during periods of high volume and increased departmental demands, customers may experience a longer than normal response time.

Letters:

Customers will receive a response to a general inquiry within five (5) business days.

Email:

Customers can expect to receive an initial response to an email inquiry within two (2) business days. This refers to both internal and external communication. Email out of Office Assistant:

Staff are expected to utilize their "Out of Office Assistant" when away from the office and unable to check messages for a period of time longer than a single day. The message should include duration of absence, appropriate message and alternative staff contact details. Samples as follows:

Thank you for contacting the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's.

Currently, I am out of the office until Monday, February 14, 2021 and will be responding to emails upon my return. If you require immediate response, please contact reception at council@saint-marys.ca or by calling 902-522-2049.

John Smith

(include email signature)

In the event of an unexpected absence (i.e. illness, emergency, etc.), and depending upon the nature of the position and duration of absence, a member of the Senior Management team is to apply the appropriate message to the employee's "Out of Office Assistant".

Social Media:

The Clerk's Department is responsible for monitoring and responding to social media on behalf of the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's. Messages as such will receive a response within two (2) business days.

6.0 In Person:

The Municipal office is open and ready to serve the public during the following business hours Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. The front reception area should be open and ready to receive customers by 8:30am; doors unlocked and computer programs ready.

A member of Municipal staff will be available at the front to greet and assist customers. Should staff be required to attend to the telephone and counter enquiries simultaneously, counter enquiries shall take priority with telephone enquiries attended to as soon as possible afterward. Callers have the option to leave voice messages, which should be returned promptly after the customer at the counter has departed.

At times, the front staff member may be required to step away momentarily, at which point the public service area will be monitored by another designated staff member. We ask that customers who require a consultation with specific staff members or departments book an appointment in advance to ensure staff are available and equipped to serve the needs of the customer

7.0 The Customer Service Experience:

7.1. The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's is dedicated to providing an exceptional 'Customer Service Experience' by providing customers with consistent and high-quality customer service delivered in a timely, courteous and respectful manner.

The Municipality aims to implement these standards at every point and at every stage of interaction with customers, whether in-person, on the phone, or by email or social media, Customers can expect the same consistent level of service each and every time.

Tips for a Positive Interaction

- Acknowledge someone as soon as they walk through the door, if you are on the phone with a customer, smile, wave recognize the waiting client, so the client knows you have seen them and will help them next.
- When dealing with a customer and the phone rings, treat the in person customer as the priority, back up staff will answer the phone, if none are available a voicemail can be left.
 - Return voicemail call immediately after finishing with your in person customer.
- Listen intently; be positive
- Listen to unspoken body language
- Respect cultures and diversity
- Treat clients respectfully
- Evaluate and clarify customer expectations; ask questions to understand, explain your answers
- Understand that each customer's need is different and respond promptly and professionally

- Treat every client as a priority
- Anticipate needs and offer assistance
- Show understanding and empathy, and be diplomatic
- Ensure your words, voice, tone, body language and facial expressions are aligned, project a positive image and energy
- Remember that customers are contacting the Municipality for assistance. Focus on the drivers of customer satisfaction:
 - Timeliness and acknowledgement
 - Knowledge
 - Fairness
 - Courtesy
- Internally, staff should not interrupt a fellow staff member when dealing with the public. If assistance is needed by a fellow staff member, assist the customer together with the first point of contact.

7.2. Tips to Deal with:

Verbal abuse: Stay calm; be firm and respectful with the customer and advise that verbal abuse will not be tolerated. Inform your Department Head/Supervisor immediately as indicated in Dealing With Difficult Customers Policy.

Threats: Inform your Department Head/Supervisor immediately

Complaints about Municipal employees should be directed through the Municipality's Complaints Handling Policy (see "Appendix A" at the end of the policy)

7.3 Unreasonable Customer Behaviour

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's endeavours to provide exemplary service to all members of the public and aims to address customer service requests equitably, comprehensively, and in a timely manner.

Unreasonably persistent requests may compromise the Municipality's ability to deliver good customer service in an equitable, efficient and effective manner. The Municipality's Dealing With Difficult Customers Policy guides staff in identifying and managing these situations, with the intent of dealing with customers in ways that are consistent, fair and reasonable while acknowledging that there may be a need to shield staff from unreasonable behaviour.

7.4 Front-line Staff are able to:

The Municipality's front-line staff are available to:

- Provide information on Municipal services and programs

- Respond to questions or concerns
- Record and/or facilitate customer service requests, compliments, and complaints
- Accept payments and program registrations

7.5 Customer Service Requests:

Customer Service Requests are issues that cannot be resolved at the first point of contact. These types of requests are processed through the Municipality's customer service management system. Once a Customer Service Request Form (see "Appendix B" at the end of this policy) is submitted via one of the Municipal outlets (in-person, phone, email or on our website) the system captures and forwards these requests to be assigned to a staff member. The system then allows staff to efficiently manage requests and communication with both staff and customers.

7.6 Complaints:

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's is committed to a consistent and uniform process to respond to complaints received from members of the public regarding programs, facilities, municipal services, municipal staff and procedures. All complaints are managed in accordance with the Municipality's Complaints Handling Policy.

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's recognizes the importance of public feedback and welcomes constructive complaints as a valuable form of feedback regarding our services, operations, and facilities. The information gained from complaints helps improve the quality of the services provided by the municipality and the client experience of residents. The information provided is a summary of the Municipality's Complaints Handling Policy. For more information, please view the full policy.

8.0 Compliance:

In cases of policy violation, the Municipality may investigate and determine appropriate corrective action and in accordance with the Code of Conduct and other applicable policies of the Municipality. At all times the Municipality of the District of Saint Mary's expects staff to ensure a pleasant customer experience is offered, and any tense or sensitive matters are met with professionalism and where emotions are involved staff are expected to de-escalate the situation into a calm conversational setting. Should a customer refuse to act civilly or respectful, staff are welcome to request respect or refrain from engagement and approach a senior level manager to help in the situation.

Mallory Fraser
Municipal Clerk

Dec. 13, 2021
Date