

BALANCING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE – THE DEVELOPMENT AND UTILISATION OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Integrated Open Space Services – IOSS conducts a nation wide program involving over fifty Local Government Authorities, in measuring customer satisfaction with park maintenance. Another program involves over forty councils in Melbourne, Sydney and South Eastern Queensland in the measurement of Key Performance Indicators for street tree and park management. Considering customer satisfaction in combination with operational performance provides a framework for sustainable open space management.

The purposes of this paper are (1) to explain the rationale for developing a suite of customer satisfaction and operational indicators to assist in the measurement of performance, (2) to outline the methods used in developing customer satisfaction surveys and key performance indicators and (3) to convey how these programs have been utilised to improve sustainability in open space management.

Key Words: Open Space Management, Key Performance Indicators, Customer Satisfaction, Benchmarking, Operational Sustainability, Park Management, Street Tree Management

Introduction

Like many professionals associated with government operations, public open space managers have been faced with the challenge of showing that their work unit outputs are aligned with customer requirements, while being delivered in an efficient and effective manner. The lack of quantifiable information to assist managers in this endeavour has often prompted reactive and poorly presented responses or the need to allocate large amounts of time and funds to prepare a solid argument.

For a number of years within the park management sphere, the notion of developing a series of consistent inter-organisational measures, which reflected operational effectiveness, had been

frequently discussed. In 1998, Integrated Open Space Services – IOSS commenced working with park managers to develop cost effective benchmark programs that determined user satisfaction with park maintenance. This program was extended in 1999 to the development and monitoring of further operational performance indicators.

To date over sixty Local Government Authorities within Australia have participated in these programs.

User Satisfaction with Park Maintenance Benchmark Survey

The Benchmark Park User Satisfaction Survey has been developed to measure park user's satisfaction with the level of park

maintenance within a management area (eg Local Government Authority) and to provide a confidential means for comparison of results on an intra-regional and inter-regional basis.

The program is conducted annually within the major regions of South East Queensland, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Individual or small groups of Councils from Central Queensland, Northern Territory and Tasmania also participate in the program.

Councils have utilized the information generated from the survey to:

- Monitor specific maintenance regimes.
- Determine appropriate maintenance specifications that align with customer requirements.
- Integrate customer satisfaction with operational performance.
- Develop in-house customer satisfaction performance indicators for landscape facility maintenance.
- Identify and prioritise specific maintenance and facility provision issues.
- Confidentially compare performance with other similar organizations.
- Provide quantifiable justification for resource allocation for current levels of facility and maintenance provision and lobbying of further resources.

Parkland Categories

For the survey process, parklands are divided into the following categories based on level of amenity, usage levels, usage types and user catchment. Park user interviews within a region are conducted for a single category or a combination of categories, depending on the requirements of the local park managers within a region.

Passive High Profile Parklands (Regional Parklands). Developed parklands that offer a high level of amenity (either facilities or natural attraction), have high usage levels

and attract a significant proportion of users from outside the immediate area.

Passive Low to Medium Profile Parklands (Local/district Parklands). Developed parklands that offer a low / medium level of amenity (either facilities or natural attraction), have low / medium usage levels and primarily attract users within the immediate area.

Active High Profile Parklands (Regional Parklands). Developed parklands that are predominantly designated sporting areas, offer a high level of facilities (either number, quality or type), have high usage levels and attract a significant proportion of users from outside the immediate area.

Active Low to Medium Profile Parklands (Local/district Parklands). Developed parklands that are predominantly designated sporting areas, offer a low / medium level of facilities (either number, quality or type) and have low / medium usage levels.

Environmental Conservation Parklands. Parklands that are primarily utilised for environmental conservation. They include bushland, native grasslands, wetlands, undeveloped foreshore and waterway settings. Natural area recreational activities may also occur in these parks.

The reasoning behind the classification system is that the level of park maintenance within each category can generally be compared between local government authorities.

Survey Process

The survey program is conducted annually within a region. Although user interviews can be conducted to determine seasonal variations, the survey program generally is conducted within a region at a similar time of year. This allows for a means to track user satisfaction with maintenance regimes over time, or the implementation of new regimes.

The survey process involves conducting park user intercept interviews within parklands of a nominated category or mix of categories. A minimal sample size of 60 interviews within a LGA ensures a reasonable reliability of

results. However, a number of LGAs, due to their size and survey requirements, choose to use a larger sample size (100 – 240) in order to strengthen confidence levels and gain a greater insight associated with park usage and maintenance requirements.

While park users are chosen at random, an attempt is made to interview users undertaking a range of activities within the category of parkland. Although the activities of participants generally reflect usage patterns in the parks, it is sometimes more difficult to intercept park users involved in active pursuits such as playing sport, cycling or jogging. It is, therefore, recommended that the data on park usage supplied from the survey is reviewed in conjunction with park usage observation studies.

Additionally, while interviews are conducted during a range of park usage times, the majority of interviews are conducted during peak usage times to reflect actual park usage.

Level of Satisfaction with Park Maintenance

During the survey, participants are requested to rate their level of satisfaction, on a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being the lowest level of satisfaction and 10 the highest), with the maintenance of 25 to 30 park elements. Mean Scores for each maintenance element and an Overall Mean Score for the individual LGA and the region, as well as the highest mean scores for the region, are presented in tabular format. Inter-regional comparisons are also tabled. In this way, the individual results of all the participating organisations are not tabled, thus ensuring organisational confidentiality.

Additional Data

Although the survey focuses on the park users perceived standard of maintenance, the following data is also obtained and reported back to each organisation:

Demographic information about the survey participants (age, gender, place of residence).

Primary activity of participants at time of interview.

Park users requirements/desires regarding provision of facilities and services. (Note: this does not include importance of facilities or priority for development.)

Perceived safety levels in the park.

General comments about the park.

The qualitative material is tabled to provide a broader understanding of the quantitative information (ie participants' mean scores on maintenance elements).

Confidence in Using the Survey Data

Confidence levels can be used to determine the reliability of survey results in relation to the expected responses from a total population. The confidence intervals either side of an average score can be calculated when the sample size and standard deviation are known. The sample size needs to be large enough to demonstrate a satisfactory interval of confidence.

For a survey program, based on 60 interviews, the satisfactory range of confidence levels for the various mean scores have been determined as:

- +/- 3% to 10%, at a 95% confidence level – for Individual LGA Mean Scores on Individual Maintenance Elements (confidence levels tend not fall within this range when there is less than 20 responses for an element).
- +/- 1% to 7%, at a 95% confidence level – for Regional Mean Scores on Individual Maintenance Elements.
- < +/- 2%, at a 95% confidence level – for Individual LGA Overall Mean Score & Regional Overall Mean Score.

Statistically, 60 survey participants per local government authority give a reasonable measure of confidence in the results. However, utilizing a larger sample size per LGA understandably strengthens confidence levels.

Regardless of sample size, as the surveys are conducted on a regular basis, the logging of trend data is achievable which further strengthens the validity of the sample size.

The information in the survey reports is presented to support/assist park planners and managers in the carrying out of their duties, and is not recommended as a sole source for strategic decision-making, or for showcase purposes.

Street Tree and Park Management Key Performance Indicators

“Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) represent a set of measures focusing on the aspects of organisational performance that are most critical to its current and future success.” (AusIndustry 1995). A performance measure must be feasible and attainable; acceptable to everyone; clearly understood; and measurable.

The monitoring of operational performance for Street Tree Management and Park Management commenced in 1999 with the development of a standard survey and report format, which was utilised by a number of Local Government Authorities in the Melbourne and South-eastern Queensland regions. During 2000/2001 the program further evolved to develop a series of KPIs for each region. In each case, the following process steps were undertaken.

- Existing Street Tree & Park Management KPIs and measurement systems obtained from participant organisations.
- Collation of KPIs currently in use distributed to participant organizations. (Organization confidentiality retained in the reporting format).
- 4 to 7 KPIs and their measurement systems for Street Tree & Park Management identified at a workshop.
- Methods for measurement circulated to participant organisations.
- Participant organisations calculated their baseline measurements for each KPI.
- Participant organisations processes audited by IOSS.
- Participant organizations individual reports prepared by IOSS - Comparison of individual organizations on a regional basis. (Organization confidentiality retained in the reporting format)
- Review of process. Confirmation of protocols for continual measurement and the development of the next year's measurement methods.

After the KPI development process, Steps 4 to 8 are undertaken within each region on an annual basis.

Currently, organisations in South East Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne are involved in the program.

KPIs currently in use include:

- Cost of mowing per hectare for sportsfields, high profile developed parklands and medium/low profile developed parklands.
- User satisfaction with park maintenance.
- Resident satisfaction with LGAs street tree and park management.
- Cost of management of establishing, maturing, mature and over mature street trees per linear kilometre, resident, ratepayer and tree.
- Percentage of park facility asset current value to replacement value.
- Client satisfaction with the action taken on service requests.
- Percentage of Street Tree & Parks budgets to council budgets (capital and recurrent).

Improving Sustainability through Utilisation of these Programs

Sustainability is seen from a number of perspectives, depending on our background. Words such as growth sustainability, investment sustainability, economic sustainability, ecological sustainability, environmental sustainability, development sustainability or resource sustainability conjure up different dimensions to how this word is used.

Sustainability also encompasses issues associated with justice, thrift, and risk aversion. The term expresses a concern for both present and future needs (Young, 1992).

For the purposes of this paper, sustainability is associated with retaining or enhancing the delivery of open space services in a manner that can ensure operational viability and reflect the requirements of open space users. The information generated from the KPI and benchmark survey programs feeds into formal and informal continuous improvement cycles and provides a means for resource identification during business planning and budgetary processes.

Authors Biography



David Vial is a co-director of Integrated Open Space Services – IOSS, a firm that specializes in the planning and management of open space. From the 1970's to mid 1980's David worked in the public and private sector of the parks and recreation industry in southeastern Australia. Between 1986 and 1989 David served as an academic at Charles Sturt University, presenting internal and external curriculum in recreation, landscape design, soil science and amenity horticulture. From 1989 to 1997, when IOSS was formed, David worked with the Brisbane City Council in a number of positions associated with open space planning and management.

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Conclusion

The benchmark park user satisfaction survey and the street tree and park management KPI programs enable open space planners and managers to constructively compare their service delivery and economic performances in a proactive and confidential environment.

The programs have promoted a collegial culture amongst open space professionals and have contributed to improving the management of public open space throughout Australia.

References

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