



# Citizen Charter

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**For Prelims:** Citizen Charter – Significance, Basic Principles

**For Mains:** Citizen Charter – Significance, Shortcomings in India, Basic principles of the citizens charter movement, Citizens' Charter and organizational transparency and accountability

## What are Citizen Charters (CC)?

- **About:** A Citizen Charter is a document which **represents a systematic effort to focus on the commitment of the Organisation towards its Citizens** in respects of Standard of Services, Information, Choice and Consultation, Non-discrimination and Accessibility, Grievance Redress, Courtesy and Value for Money.
  - This also includes expectations of the Organisation from the Citizen for fulfilling the commitment of the Organisation.
  - A CC emphasizes on citizens as customers by ensuring that public services are responsive to the citizens they serve.
  - It comprises of the Vision and Mission Statement of the organization, stating the outcomes desired and the broad strategy to achieve these goals and outcomes.
  - A Citizen's Charter is not legally enforceable and, therefore, is non-justiciable.
- **Origin:** The concept was **first articulated and implemented in the United Kingdom** by the **Conservative Government of John Major in 1991** as a national Programme with a simple aim:
  - To continuously improve the quality of public services for the people of the country so that these services respond to the needs and wishes of the users.
- **Nodal Department:** The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India, to provide a more responsive and citizen-friendly governance, coordinates the efforts to formulate and operationalise Citizens' Charters.
  - **The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011 (Citizens Charter)** was introduced to create a mechanism to ensure timely delivery of goods and services to citizens.

## What are the Principles of Service Delivery?

The concept of Citizens' Charter enshrines the trust between the service provider and its users. Six principles of the Citizens Charter movement as originally framed, were:

- **Quality** - improving the quality of services
- **Choice** - for the users wherever possible
- **Standards** - specifying what to expect within a time frame
- **Value** - for the taxpayers' money
- **Accountability** - of the service provider (individual as well as Organization)
- **Transparency** - in rules, procedures, schemes and grievance redressal

- **Participative-** Consult and involve

## What About CC in India?

- The DARPG initiated the task of coordinating, formulating and operationalising Citizens' Charters.
  - Guidelines for formulating the Charters as well as a list of do's and don'ts are communicated to various government departments/organisations to enable them to bring out focused and effective charters.
- The Charters are expected to incorporate the following elements:
  - Vision and Mission Statement
  - Details of business transacted by the organisation
  - Details of clients
  - Details of services provided to each client group
  - Details of grievance redress mechanism and how to access it
  - Expectations from the clients

## What are the Shortcomings of CC in India?

- **Devoid of Participative Mechanisms:** In a majority of cases, CC is not formulated through a consultative process with cutting edge staff who will finally implement it.
- **Poor Design and Content:** There is a lack of meaningful and succinct CC and absence of critical information that end-users need to hold agencies accountable.
- **Lack of Public Awareness:** Only a small percentage of end-users are aware of the commitments made in the CC since effective efforts of communicating and educating the public about the standards of delivery promise have not been undertaken.
- **Charters are Rarely Updated:** Making it a one-time exercise, frozen in time.
- **No Proper Consultation: End-users, civil society organizations and NGOs are not consulted** when CCs are drafted.
  - Since a CC's primary purpose is to make public service delivery more citizen-centric, consultation with stakeholders is a must.
- **Measurable Standards of Delivery are Rarely Defined:** Making it difficult to assess whether the desired level of service has been achieved or not.
- **Lack of Interest: Little interest is shown by the organizations in adhering to their CC** since there is no citizen friendly mechanism to compensate the citizen if the organization defaults.
- **Uniformity in CC: Tendency to have a uniform CC** for all offices under the parent organization. CCs have still not been adopted by all Ministries/Departments. **This overlooks local issues.**

## What Reforms can be Brought to CC to Make Them Effective?

- **One Size Does Not Fit All:** Formulation of CC should be a decentralized activity with the head office providing only broad guidelines.
- **Wide Consultation Process:** CC be formulated after extensive consultations within the organization followed by a meaningful dialogue with civil society.
- **Firm Commitments to be Made:** CC must be precise and make firm commitments of service delivery standards to the citizens/consumers in quantifiable terms wherever possible.
- **Redressal Mechanism in Case of Default:** Clearly lay down the relief which the organization is bound to provide if it has defaulted on the promised standards of delivery.
- **Periodic Evaluation of CC:** Preferably through an external agency.
- **Hold Officers Accountable for Results:** Fix specific responsibility in cases where there is a default in adhering to the CC.
- **Include Civil Society in the Process:** To assist in improvement in the contents of the Charter, its adherence as well as educating the citizens about the importance of this vital mechanism.

## What Should be the Way Forward?

- A Citizens' Charter cannot be an end in itself, it is rather a means to an end - a tool to ensure that the citizen is always at the heart of any service delivery mechanism.

- Drawing from best practice models such as the Sevottam Model (a Service Delivery Excellence Model) can help CC in becoming more citizen centric.

## Sevottam Model

- **Sevottam** is a generic framework for achieving excellence in public service delivery. It comprises of 3 modules namely:
  - Citizen's Charter
  - Grievance Redressal Mechanism
  - Capability Building for Service Delivery
- The first component of the model requires effective charter implementation thereby **opening up a channel for receiving citizens' inputs** into the way in which organizations determine service delivery requirements.
- The second component of the model, **'Public Grievance Redress'** requires a good grievance redress system operating in a manner that leaves the citizen more satisfied with how the organization responds to complaints/grievances, irrespective of the final decision.
- The third component **'Excellence in Service Delivery'**, postulates that an organization can have an excellent performance in service delivery only if it is managing the key ingredients for good service delivery well and building its own capacity to continuously improve delivery.

### For Mind Map

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### **Mains**

**Q.** Explain the basic principles of the citizens charter movement and bring out its importance. **(2019)**

**Q.** The Citizens' Charter is an ideal instrument of organizational transparency and accountability, but it has its own limitations. Identify the limitations and suggest measures for greater effectiveness of the Citizens' Charter. **(2018)**