

ACSI E-GOVERNMENT SATISFACTION INDEX, Q4 2011

E-GOV PERFORMANCE STABILIZES

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INTRODUCTION:

The Changing Landscape of E-Government in 2011 and Beyond

Today's release of ForeSee's quarterly report of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) E-Government Satisfaction Index provides a look back at the state of citizen satisfaction with e-government over the last quarter and the last year. This report is released in conjunction with the ACSI's annual U.S. Federal Government Report, which analyzes citizen satisfaction with the overall federal government.

The ACSI's 2011 study on government satisfaction reports that satisfaction with the federal government rebounded slightly while citizen satisfaction with e-government remained near its all-time high.

While citizen satisfaction with the federal government as a whole is sometimes affected by the actions of elected officials or personal beliefs, citizen satisfaction with e-government can be largely credited to federal webmasters and their support staff. These "unsung heroes" of government often work within limited budgets to create an online experience that matches citizen expectations shaped largely by the private sector, as shown in this report. When federal webmasters succeed in creating sites that meet or expectations, citizens benefit in time and cost savings and the government becomes more efficient.

In addition to the efforts of agency webmasters, improving the citizen experience on federal websites has the backing and support of the executive branch as we head into an election year. During 2011, the .gov reform effort, part of the Campaign to Cut Waste, took some important steps toward achieving the ultimate goal of reducing costs and improving the quality of service federal websites deliver to the American public. In April, President Obama issued [Executive Order 13571](#), "Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service." This Executive Order requires federal agencies to save taxpayers money and time by eliminating or consolidating redundant websites and improving outdated, difficult to use, or poorly maintained sites.

In December, the .gov Reform Task Force issued a report on the [State of the Federal Web](#) which presented a summary of data and findings collected in compliance with Executive Order 13571. The Task Force and its partners say they will use this data to develop a federal Web Strategy and create tools, best practices, and other resources that will make Federal websites more efficient and useful for citizens.

On January 13, 2012, [President Obama announced](#) that he would call on Congress to reinstate the authority past Presidents had to reorganize the government, stating his first proposed use of that authority would be consolidating six federal agencies (the U.S. Department of Commerce's core business and trade functions, the Small Business Administration, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Export-Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency) into one more efficient department with one website, one phone number, and one mission – helping American businesses succeed.

These recent developments should give citizens reason to be hopeful for the future of e-government. This report's findings show the state of e-government is strong; however, there has been little change to citizen satisfaction levels since 2009. Will the continuing efforts of federal webmasters, the .gov Reform Task Force, and the President's support increase satisfaction in the future?

The following report analyzes the state of e-government satisfaction using the methodology of the ACSI to identify trends and provide a benchmark for website performance in the eyes of "customers" which, in this case, are the citizens of the United States.

- **Citizen satisfaction with e-government remains near its all-time high.** E-government had a strong 2011 and ends the year at 75.1 on the ACSI's 100-point scale. This score is slightly down from its all-time high of 75.5 achieved in the second and third quarters of 2011 but is on par with last year's fourth quarter score. The E-Government Satisfaction Index has scored 75 or higher for six consecutive quarters.
- **Satisfaction with e-government beats satisfaction with overall government.** The internet continues to be a preferred channel for customer interactions with the federal government, and citizens rate their satisfaction with websites much higher than their satisfaction with overall government. In fact, there is an eight point satisfaction score gap between online and overall government.
- **Satisfaction with e-government also rivals satisfaction with private-sector sites.** Several government websites on this Index score similarly or higher in satisfaction than than the best private sector websites.
- **High satisfaction increases participation and trust in government, key objectives of the President's Open Government Initiative.** Citizens who are highly satisfied with a federal government website give 64% higher trust scores to the government agency and they report being 48% more likely to participate in government by expressing their thoughts to the government unit than citizens who are less satisfied.
- **The actions of highly satisfied citizens align with the objectives of the .Gov Reform Effort.** Highly satisfied web visitors are 87% more likely to use federal websites as a primary resource, 53% more likely to return, and 90% more likely to recommend the website than dissatisfied visitors. Maintaining high levels of satisfaction for federal websites could therefore drive more citizens to use the less costly web channel for their interactions with government, decreasing costs and meeting one of the primary goals of the .Gov Reform Task Force.
- **Websites' Search, Functionality and Transparency are top priorities for improvement.** On an aggregate level, government websites can realize the most

improvement in user satisfaction by improving key online performance in areas that have the most impact on satisfaction with the user experience.

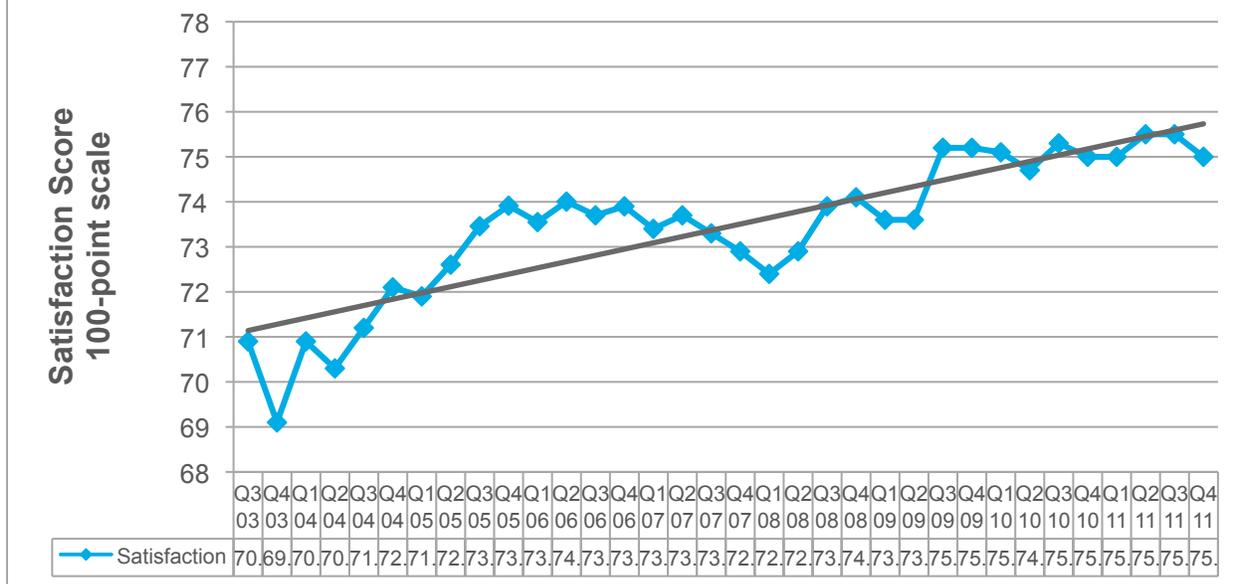
Each of these findings is discussed in more detail in the following report.

Satisfaction with E-Gov Remains Strong

The ACSI E-Government Satisfaction Index is a critical checkpoint for evaluating the success of the federal government's online initiatives and is one of the most comprehensive and representative reflections of the citizen experience with federal government websites. The Index uses the methodology of the ACSI, which is unique in its consistency across public and private sectors, and across industries, allowing for benchmark comparisons of the consumer and citizen experience, both online and offline. In the quarterly ACSI E-Gov Index, each participating website is rated on a 100-point scale, allowing for comparisons among agency and department websites, and even comparisons to offline government and the private sector. More than 282,000 surveys were collected during the fourth quarter of 2011, and more than one million surveys were collected on federal government websites over the course of 2011.

When ForeSee and the ACSI first started issuing research on citizen satisfaction in 2003, the Index was comprised of 22 federal agency websites. It has since grown to 100 websites in Q4 2011. The growth in participation shows that more federal agencies see the value of measuring citizen satisfaction online and are willing to be held accountable. These efforts have been paying off; in the 34 consecutive quarters during which ForeSee and the ACSI have been reporting citizen satisfaction with federal websites (see chart), the trend over time shows consistent improvement.

ACSI E-Gov Index Satisfaction by Quarter 2003-2011



Satisfaction Stabilizes in 2011, but .Gov Reform Efforts Move Forward

As the above chart shows, e-gov satisfaction climbed fairly quickly in the early years of the index. Despite ups and downs in satisfaction over the course of 2011, the year closes out at 75.1, a bit lower than the last two quarters, but a tenth of a point higher than it was exactly one year ago (75.0) in the fourth quarter of 2010.

Although satisfaction is still very high (especially as compared to satisfaction with the government overall), government agencies must continue to evolve and respond to the changing internet landscape. Because the overwhelming majority of citizens' online experiences occur on private sector websites which are constantly embracing new technologies and trends, federal websites must strive to do the same to maintain and improve citizen satisfaction.

This sentiment is reflected by the .gov Reform Task Force in the [2011 State of the Federal Web report](#), which presents a summary of data and findings about the state of Federal websites collected as part of the .gov Reform Initiative. The report states that the .gov Reform Task Force and its partners will use this data to develop a federal web strategy and create tools, best practices, and other resources that will make federal websites more efficient and useful for citizens.

If the .gov Reform Task Force delivers on its promises and truly works to improve federal websites to meet citizen expectations largely shaped by the private sector, the state of e-government stands to improve. If federal government websites fail to keep up, and satisfaction falls, citizens may turn to other, costlier channels to interact with the government. The more

attractive the government can make the online channel, the more it stands to gain in cost savings, citizen participation, and citizen trust.

Citizens Prefer Interacting with the Government Online

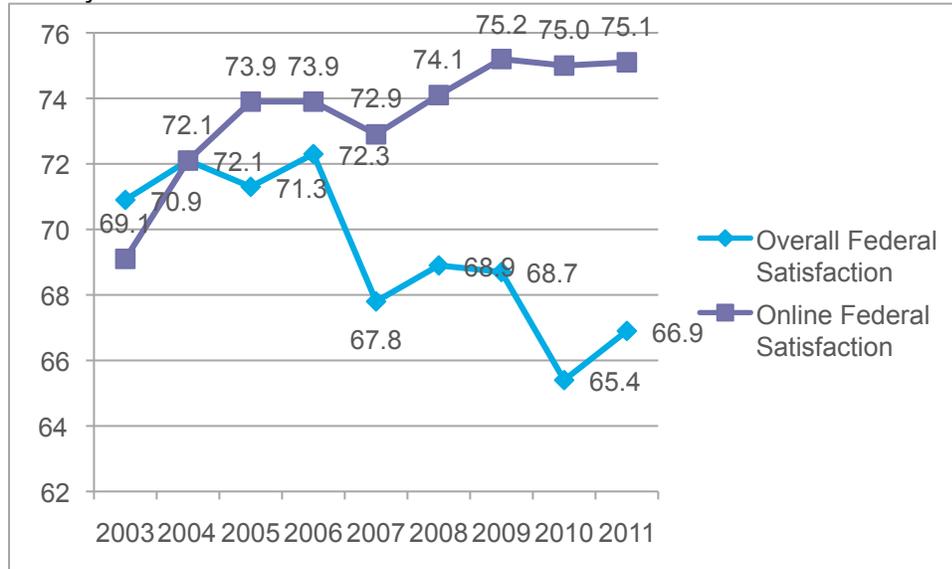
Along with the Q4 2011 E-Government Satisfaction Index report, which measures satisfaction specifically with the online channel, the ACSI is releasing the 2011 U.S. Federal Government Report, which measures citizen satisfaction with agencies and departments overall. The ACSI reports that satisfaction with the overall federal government increased 2% (1.5 points) to 66.9, which is 11% below satisfaction with e-government. Citizens overwhelmingly prefer to engage the federal government online.

E-Gov vs. Overall Gov	Aggregate Satisfaction Score
E-Government Q4 2011	75.1
Overall Government Q4 2011	66.9

The gap is significant, and although there has been very little change in e-gov scores in the last few years, e-gov satisfaction has increased six points since 2003, while satisfaction with the government overall has increased less than one point over the same time period.

Satisfaction Over Time: Online vs. Overall

Caption: E-gov satisfaction scores listed in the previous table reflect fourth quarter scores from these years.



SATISFACTION SCORES

Top Performers

On the ACSI's 100-point scale, a satisfaction score of 80 or higher is considered a superior score and can only be achieved if the organization is doing a good job of meeting or exceeding customer expectations. More e-gov sites (37 sites out of 100, or 37%, score 80 or higher) reach the threshold for excellence than do private sector websites (five of the 29 private-sector websites measured annually by the ACSI, or 17%, score 80 or higher). See Appendix A for a full list of online scores for both the public and private sectors.

E-Gov Top Performers (Sites Scoring over 80)

Department	Website	Satisfaction
SSA	SSA iClaim: www.socialsecurity.gov/applyonline	91
SSA	SSA Retirement Estimator: www.ssa.gov/estimator	90
SSA	Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs: www.socialsecurity.gov/i1020	88
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Español: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis-es	86
GSA	GobiernoUSA.gov website: www.gobiernousa.gov	86
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Resource Center: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/citizenship	86
HHS	MedlinePlus: www.medlineplus.gov	86
HHS	MedlinePlus en español: www.medlineplus.gov/esp	85
HHS	National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) main website: www.4woman.gov	84
HHS	NIAMS public website: www.niams.nih.gov	84
HHS	HHS Healthy People: www.Healthypeople.gov	83
SSA	Social Security Internet Disability Report: www.ssa.gov/applyfordisability	83
PBGC	MyPBA: https://egov.pbgc.gov/mypba	83
HHS	National Cancer Institute Site en Español: www.cancer.gov/espanol	83
SSA	Social Security Business Services Online: www.ssa.gov/bsb/bsowelcome.htm	83
HHS	CDC main website: www.cdc.gov	83
DOD	DoD Navy: www.navy.mil	83
HHS	National Cancer Institute main website: www.cancer.gov	83
FTC	FTC OnGuardOnline: www.onguardonline.gov	82
HHS	National Library of Medicine: www.aidsinfo.nih.gov	82
CIA	CIA recruitment website: www.cia.gov/careers	82
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis	82
HHS	NIDDK: www2.niddk.nih.gov	81
DOS	Recruitment website: www.careers.state.gov	81
NASA	NASA main website: www.nasa.gov	81
DOJ	NIJ main website: www.ojp.gov/nij	81
HHS	SAMHSA Store: www.store.samhsa.gov	81
HHS	AHRQ Effective Health Care Program: www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov	81
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: www.uscis.gov/e-verify	81
DOC	National Geodetic Society, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	81

	website: www.ngs.noaa.gov	
HHS	AHRQ Health Care Innovations Exchange: www.innovations.ahrq.gov	81
DOJ	FBI main website: www.fbi.gov	80
HHS	National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research: www.nidcr.nih.gov	80
DOD	Pentagon Channel: www.pentagonchannel.mil	80
HHS	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development: www.nichd.nih.gov	80
DOD	DoD Air Force: www.af.mil	80
DOI	National Park Service main website: www.nps.gov	80

Table footnote: This table reports scores for the 37 sites scoring 80 or higher; individual scores for the remaining 63 sites are included later in the document, and all 100 federal website scores are listed in Appendix A, on page XX.

The preceding table lists all 37 federal agency websites that scored 80 or higher. A score in this range is a remarkable achievement and shows that public-sector websites can live up to or even exceed customer expectations that are shaped in large part by private-sector experiences. In 2003, when ForeSee and the ACSI first measured satisfaction with federal websites, only one out of 22 measured sites achieved a superior score. In the fourth quarter of 2011, that number has grown to 37 out of 100 sites, meaning that 37% of federal websites have superior customer satisfaction by private-sector standards.

Remarkably, two websites from the Social Security Administration (iClaim and Retirement Estimator) scored 91 and 90 respectively and beat out all other private-sector companies measured by the ACSI, including perennial satisfaction champions HJ. Heinz (89), Clorox (88), and Amazon (87). The ACSI measures more than 250 private-sector companies. The only ACSI-measured entities to score over 90 are two of the Social Security sites included in this report.

Top E-Government Websites		Top Private Sector Companies*	
SSA iClaim: www.socialsecurity.gov/applyonline	91	HJ Heinz	89
SSA Retirement Estimator: www.ssa.gov/estimator	90	Clorox	88
Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs: www.socialsecurity.gov/i1020	88	Amazon	87
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Español: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis-es	86	Toyota	87
GobiernoUSA.gov website: www.gobiernousa.gov	86	Cadillac	87
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Resource Center: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/citizenship	86	Apple	87
MedlinePlus: www.medlineplus.gov	86	Lexus	87
MedlinePlus en español: www.medlineplus.gov/esp	85	Lincoln	86

*Top private sector company scores come from ACSI reports, www.theacsi.org. Each score is the most recent reported for that company.

E-Commerce/Transaction Sites Continue to Top Functional Categories, but Gap is Narrowing

Federal government websites can be organized by both functional category and organizational structure, allowing for benchmarking against very relevant peers. The functional categories include news and information websites, portals and department main websites, e-commerce and transactional websites, and career/recruitment sites. It can often be more instructive for a government website to benchmark their score against others in their category rather than the overall aggregate, since missions vary so much by category.

Functional Categories over Time

Category	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	% Change Since Last Year
E-Commerce/Transaction (14 sites)	73	75	75	75	78	82	80	77	-4%
Portals/Department Main Sites (32 sites)	72	74	75	73	75	75	75	75	0%
News/Information (49 sites)	71	73	73	72	73	74	74	75	1%
Career/Recruitment (5 sites)	77	76	77	78	77	77	78	72	-8%

* This table reflects fourth quarter scores each year.

E-Commerce/Transaction Sites

The E-commerce/transaction category contains the two top-scoring federal websites in the entire Index (both Social Security sites).

Improvements for e-commerce/transaction sites could have a huge impact on e-government efficiency and cost savings overall, and some benefits have already been realized. The [“Report to Congress on the Benefits of the President’s e-Government Initiatives Fiscal Year 2011,”](#) shared some examples: more than 80% of reservations at Federal recreation sites are made online (resulting in savings of time, money, paper, printing, and other expenses related to conducting transactions via more costly channels) . Items sold through the GSA’s GovSales site generated proceeds totaling nearly \$5 billion. In addition, the Government Accountability Office noted in their [December, 2010 report](#) that the IRS estimated savings of \$3.10 per return for returns filed electronically versus paper in fiscal year 2009. This directly translates into cost savings for taxpayers: 70% of 142 million individual returns were filed electronically in 2010, up from only 20% in 2000.

Dept.	Website	Satisfaction
E-Commerce Aggregate		77
SSA	SSA iClaim: www.socialsecurity.gov/applyonline	91
SSA	SSA Retirement Estimator: www.ssa.gov/estimator	90

SSA	Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Cost: www.socialsecurity.gov/i1020	88
SSA	Social Security Internet Disability Report: www.ssa.gov/applyfordisability	83
PBGC	MyPBA: https://egov.pbgc.gov/mypba	83
SSA	Social Security Business Services Online: www.ssa.gov/bsowelcome.htm	83
HHS	SAMHSA Store: www.store.samhsa.gov	81
PBGC	MyPAA: https://egov.pbgc.gov/mypaa	78
Treasury	Online Catalog: www.catalog.usmint.gov	74
USDA	Recreation One-Stop: www.recreation.gov	73
GSA	Official Site to Buy U.S. Government Property: www.govsales.gov	72
GSA	GSA Auctions: www.gsaauctions.gov	71
GSA	General Services Administration GSAXcess: www.gsaccess.gov	63
Treasury	TreasuryDirect: www.treasurydirect.gov	52

Career/Recruitment Sites

There are five sites in the career/recruitment category this quarter. On average, citizen satisfaction with the career/recruitment category is 72. The scores range from a high of 82 for CIA's recruitment website to a low of 56 for the Office of Personnel Management's recruitment website (the U.S. Government's official site for Federal jobs and employment information). USAJobs has experienced a score decline, mainly because it has undergone a major transition this quarter. Scores are already rebounding as site kinks have been worked out and as site visitors become more accustomed to the website changes.

Dept.	Website	Satisfaction
Career Sites Aggregate		72
CIA	CIA Recruitment website: www.cia.gov/careers	82
DOS	State Department Recruitment website: www.careers.state.gov	81
DOL	Department of Labor Job Listings: www.doors.dol.gov	75
OPM	OPM Veterans Employment website: www.fedshirevets.gov	63
OPM	www.Recruitment website: www.usajobs.gov	56

Portals/Department Main Sites

The 32 portals/department main sites score 75 as a category, with individual scores range from a low of 62 to a high of 86 - a 24-point difference between the highest scoring site and the lowest scoring site. Ten sites (over 30% of the category) achieve the notable distinction of superior performance, scoring 80 or higher.

Dept.	Website	Satisfaction
Portal and Department Main Sites Aggregate		75
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Español: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis-es	86
GSA	GobiernoUSA.gov website: www.gobiernousa.gov	86
HHS	NIAMS public website: www.niams.nih.gov	84
HHS	CDC main website: www.cdc.gov	83
HHS	National Cancer Institute main website: www.cancer.gov	83
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis	82
NASA	NASA main website: www.nasa.gov	81
DOJ	FBI main website: www.fbi.gov	80
HHS	National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research: www.nidcr.nih.gov	80
DOI	National Park Service main website: www.nps.gov	80
HHS	National Library of Medicine main website: www.nlm.nih.gov	78
GAO	GAO main public website: www.gao.gov	75
DOD	Department of Defense portal: www.defense.gov	75
NIST	National Institute for Standards and Technology main website: www.nist.gov	75
DOS	Department of State main website: www.state.gov	75
FDIC	FDIC main website: www.fdic.gov	74
GSA	GSA main website: www.gsa.gov	74
GSA	USAGov website: www.usa.gov	73
NARA	NARA main public website: www.archives.gov	73
SBA	SBA main website: www.sba.gov	72
PBGC	U.S. PBGC main website: www.pbgc.gov	71
ITC	U.S. International Trade Commission main website: www.usitc.gov	70
Treasury	IRS main website: www.irs.gov	70
HHS	SAMHSA website: www.samhsa.gov	70
SSA	Social Security Online (Main Website): www.socialsecurity.gov	69
DHS	Department of Homeland Security main website: www.dhs.gov	69
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:	68

	www.epa.gov	
VA	VA Main website: www.va.gov and www.myhealthva.gov	68
HHS	U.S. Food and Drug Administration main website: www.da.gov	67
DHS	Federal Emergency Management Agency Main Site: www.fema.gov	66
DOL	Disability: www.Disability.gov	66
Treasury	Treasury main website: www.treasury.gov	62

News/Information Sites

This year aggregate citizen satisfaction with the news/information category increased one point to score 75. Of the 51 sites measured in this category, the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Resource Center scores the highest (86) and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service site scores lowest (55).

It is also worth noting that the overall category score for e-government news and information sites (75) beats the category score for private sector news and information sites (73) by two points. This means .gov news sites now soundly outperform the private sector. Eighteen sites in this category scored 80 or above, but only one private sector news/information site holds that distinction (FOXNews.com at 82). Aside from FOXNews.com, no other private sector news and information website scores above 77. This score is a major accomplishment for e-government and shows that the public sector does have the ability to compete with the biggest players in the private sector. It must be noted that some e-gov sites in this category target very specific audiences that may differ from the audiences of major news media, but the relatively high average score for this category shows that many federal informational sites often understand and serve their audiences well enough to deliver a very satisfying experience. If all e-gov sites did the same, the federal government and citizens would benefit.

Dept.	Website	Satisfaction
News/Information Aggregate		75
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Resource Center: www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/citizenship	86
HHS	MedlinePlus: www.medlineplus.gov	86
HHS	MedlinePlus en español: www.medlineplus.gov/esp	85
HHS	National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) main website: www.4woman.gov	84
HHS	HHS Healthy People: www.Healthypeople.gov	83
HHS	National Cancer Institute Site en Español: www.cancer.gov/espanol	83
DOD	DoD Navy: www.navy.mil	83
FTC	FTC OnGuardOnline: www.onguardonline.gov	82
HHS	National Library of Medicine AIDS Information: www.aidsinfo.nih.gov	82
HHS	NIDDK: www2.nidk.nih.gov	81

DOJ	NIJ main website: ojp.gov/nij	81
HHS	AHRQ Effective Health Care Program : effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov	81
DHS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services E-Verify: uscis.gov/e-verify	81
DOC	National Geodetic Society, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website: ngs.noaa.gov	81
HHS	AHRQ Health Care Innovations Exchange: innovations.ahrq.gov	81
DOD	Pentagon Channel: pentagonchannel.mil	80
HHS	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development: www.nichd.nih.gov	80
DOD	DoD Air Force: www.af.mil	80
HHS	Girls Health: www.girlshealth.gov	79
DHS	Federal Emergency Management Agency Ready Campaign: www.ready.gov	79
DOS	Department of State blog website: www.blogs.state.gov	78
HHS	Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality : ahrq.gov	78
DOS	U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs alumni website : https://alumni.state.gov	77
DOS	Bureau of Consular Affairs: www.travel.state.gov	77
HHS	National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases: www.www3.niaid.nih.gov	76
HHS	Health Resources and Services Administration main website: www.hrsa.gov	75
DOS	U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs exchanges website: www.exchanges.state.gov	75
DOL	Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov	75
HHS	HHS National Health Information Center: www.Healthfinder.gov	74
DOT	Federal Aviation Administration: www.faa.gov	74
DOT	U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov	74
NRC	U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission website: www.nrc.gov	74
USDA	ERS main website: www.ers.usda.gov	73
USDA	FAS main website: www.fas.usda.gov	73
HHS	AHRQ CAHPS: www.cahps.ahrq.gov	73
HHS	National Library of Medicine Clinical Trials website: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/clinicaltrials.html	72
USDA	FSIS main website: www.fsis.usda.gov	72
DOI	U.S. Geological Survey: www.usgs.gov	69
DOD	Military Health System main website: www.health.mil	69
DOC	BEA main website: www.bea.gov	69
FDIC	FDIC Applications: www2.fdic.gov	69
Treasury	USTTB website: www.ttb.gov	68

SSA	Social Security Online: Frequently Asked Questions: www.ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov	67
DOT	DOT Research and Innovative Technology Administration Bureau of Transportation Statistics website: www.rita.dot.gov	65
DOD	TRICARE: www.tricare.mil	65
DOT	Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Main Site: www.fmcsa.dot.gov	65
HHS	HHS: www.grants.gov	61
USDA	Forest Service website: www.fs.usda.gov	61
USDA	NRCS website: www.nrcs.usda.gov	55

Citizen Satisfaction Drives Adoption, Participation, and Trust

Understanding citizen satisfaction is important from a practical standpoint: high citizen satisfaction with e-government affects the bottom line as well as citizen participation in the democratic process. The fact that executive branch leadership implemented a plan in 2011 to improve federal websites shows their recognition of the importance of effective, efficient e-government and high citizen satisfaction.

To illustrate the value of high citizen satisfaction, we've compared two groups of citizens: highly satisfied citizens (satisfaction scores of 80 or higher) and dissatisfied (satisfaction scores below 70) across all of the Index sites. Highly satisfied citizens are:

- 87% more likely to use the website as a primary resource
- 90% more likely to recommend the website
- 53% more likely to return to the site
- 48% more likely to participate with and express their thoughts to the government unit

For government agencies, this means cost savings, improved efficiency, and increased citizen participation. As shown in the table below, there are significant differences in most of the average scores. The greatest differences in averages are for those that would use a website as a primary resource and recommend the site. This means that government agencies will greatly benefit from improving citizen satisfaction and that agencies have a lot to lose when citizens are left unsatisfied by their online experience and turn to costlier channels.

	Highly Satisfied Citizens (80+)	Dissatisfied Citizens (< 70)	Difference in Scores	The Impact of Higher Website Satisfaction
Future Participation	65	44	48%	Citizens are more likely to participate with and express their thoughts to their government, which strengthens the democratic process and may provide useful feedback.

Return to Site	96	63	53%	Government departments and agencies have an ongoing channel to provide information and services to citizens efficiently and relatively inexpensively.
Recommend Site	95	50	90%	Use of government websites will grow as citizens recommend them to their friends, family, and colleagues.
Use Site as Primary Resource	91	49	87%	Cost-savings for departments and agencies can result as citizens are right-channeled to web; citizens get information from a credible government source, rather than another online/offline source (in cases where options exist, e.g., health-related information).
Trust	90	55	64%	Citizens believe the agency is trustworthy and acting in their best interests, which fosters faith in the democratic process.

Top Priorities to Improve E-Gov: Website Search, Functionality, and Transparency

The ACSI methodology identifies which aspects of the site have the most influence on satisfaction, return site visits, recommendations, and use of the site as a primary resource. Because different websites serve different purposes, the element(s) an individual website should prioritize to have the greatest impact on citizen satisfaction vary from site to site. However, we are able to make some generalizations for e-gov as a whole.

When analyzed collectively, Search, Functionality and Transparency are top priority elements for federal websites and are very important in driving satisfaction. The matrix below shows a breakdown of what each element measures, and analysis of its level of priority at the aggregate level. It should be noted that these are generalizations, and priorities are different from category to category and website to website.

Aggregate-Level Priorities

Includes elements measured by most federal websites

Element	What It Measures	Priority for
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		Improvement
Search	The relevance, organization, and quality of search results available on the site. (Although this element is not applicable universally, it is often extremely impactful for sites where it is relevant.)	Priority 1 = Top Priority
Functionality	The usefulness, convenience, and variety of online features and tools available on the website.	Priority 1 = Top Priority
Online Transparency	How thoroughly, quickly, and accessibly the website discloses information about what the agency is doing.	Priority 1 = Top Priority
Navigation	The organization of the site and options for navigation.	Priority 2
Look and Feel	The visual appeal of the site and its consistency throughout the site.	Priority 3
Content	The accuracy, quality, and freshness of news, information, and content on the website.	Priority 3
Site Performance	The speed, consistency, and reliability of loading pages on the website.	Priority 3

Navigation has an important influence on site satisfaction for about half of sites that measure it, while Look and Feel, Content and Site, Performance are not highly impactful for a majority of

federal sites. Improvements in these areas are not likely to have as great an impact on citizen satisfaction as the other priority elements.

It is important to understand that each site measured on this index serves a different purpose for a different audience. To make improvements that will impact satisfaction, each federal agency website needs to understand what drives its audience's satisfaction, and how they can meet or even exceed expectations.

Conclusion

At the end of 2011, citizen satisfaction with e-government websites remains near the highest level it has ever been. In order to continue at this level or to increase satisfaction and to improve e-government as a whole, federal agencies need to focus on the specific needs of their audiences. Knowing the audience's priorities is the first step toward satisfying them; satisfying them is an important step in moving toward a more efficient and transparent government. The .Gov Reform Task Force recognizes the importance of e-government and continues to take steps to improve federal websites, and so it is possible we will see even greater improvement in the years to come.

About the Author

As President and CEO of ForeSee Larry Freed is an expert on customer satisfaction and authors dozens of research papers and reports on the subject every year as well as the 2011 book, *Managing Forward*. Larry speaks extensively on the topic at private- and public-sector industry events and has been quoted in numerous publications and media, including *CNN*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Internet Retailer*, *Internet Retailing*, *Multichannel Merchant*, *DM News*, *Computerworld*, *Federal Computer Week* and *Government Executive*, among many others.

About the Research Team

Rhonda Berg, Research Manager at ForeSee, leads the research team that produces the quarterly E-Government Satisfaction Indices and the quarterly E-Government Transparency Indices. She also serves as an internal consultant regarding statistics, methodology, and survey design. Rhonda has been a research professional for over 20 years in a number of industries and holds advanced degrees in business and sociology.

ABOUT THE ACSI E-GOVERNMENT INDEX

The ACSI E-Government Satisfaction Index is a special quarterly report of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) in partnership with ForeSee.

The ACSI, created at the University of Michigan, is the only uniform, national, cross-industry measure of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available in the United States, both in the private and public sectors. In 1999, the federal government selected the ACSI to be a standard metric for measuring citizen satisfaction. Over 100 federal government agencies have used the ACSI to measure citizen satisfaction with more than 200 services and programs and more than 100 websites. The report on offline federal government services is released annually in December. The E-Government Index is released quarterly.

ForeSee collects and analyzes the data for the e-government websites included in the report. ACSI e-government scores were calculated based on data gathered from voluntary online surveys of randomly selected site visitors. Each government website was rated by its visitors on

various components of overall satisfaction. The ratings were converted to a score on a 100-point scale using the ACSI methodology.

The ACSI methodology identifies key drivers of online satisfaction (such as navigation, look and feel, search, site functionality, etc.) and quantifies their relationship to overall citizen satisfaction. This cause-and-effect methodology demonstrates the impact of website enhancements in these areas on overall customer satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction, as measured by the ACSI, has been proven to predict how citizens will behave in the future. Improvements to customer satisfaction will make citizens more likely to choose to interact with an agency online (the more cost-effective channel), return to the site, and recommend it to others. Monitoring and improving customer satisfaction has a tangible impact on citizen usage of the web channel and on the bottom line.

So that federal government websites can benchmark against their peers, scores in the ACSI E-Government Index are organized by both functional category and organizational structure. The functional categories include:

- News and information
- Portals and department main sites
- E-commerce and transactional
- Career and recruitment

The ACSI E-Government Index also analyzes scores according to three organizational categories that match the way the federal government is structured:

- Department sites, which includes independent agencies, corporations, administrations, etc.
- Agency sites, which includes all entities that fall directly below a department or equivalent organization
- Program sites, which includes all other sites

The ACSI methodology assesses satisfaction with specific elements of a government website experience, including but not limited to:

- Navigation
- Functionality
- Search
- Look and feel

ABOUT THE ACSI

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is a national economic indicator of customer satisfaction with the quality of products and services available to U.S. consumers. It is updated quarterly with new measures for differing sectors of the economy, building on the previous year's data. The overall ACSI score for a given quarter factors in scores from more than 200 companies in 44 industries, and from government agencies over the previous four quarters. The Index was founded at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business and is produced by ACSI, LLC.

ABOUT FORESEE

As a pioneer in customer experience analytics, ForeSee continuously measures satisfaction across customer touch points and delivers critical insights on where to prioritize improvements for maximum impact. Because ForeSee's superior technology and proven methodology connect the customer experience to the bottom line, executives and managers are able to drive future

success by confidently optimizing the efforts that will achieve business and brand objectives. The result is better business for companies and a better experience for consumers. Visit www.foresee.com for customer experience solutions and original research.

About the Federal Consulting Group

The Federal Consulting Group (FCG) operates as a fee-for-service franchise in the National Business Center (Dept. of the Interior) and serves as the executive agent in the government for the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). The Federal Consulting Group uses a generic clearance from the Office of Management and Budget to obtain expedited approval of ACSI surveys as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act. This enables agencies to conduct ACSI surveys without obtaining a separate clearance. Agencies can assess and improve programs, call centers and websites using the ACSI methodology through an Interagency Agreement with the Federal Consulting Group.