

2019 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE ANNUITANT PAY CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services (CGFS) conducted an Annuitant Pay Customer Satisfaction survey, which is used to assess customer satisfaction and to inform decisions to improve performance and satisfaction. This feedback is appreciated and essential as we work to continuously improve our services to our valued annuitant customers.

Out of the 11,000 survey invitations sent to potential respondents, 5,768 responses were received, representing a 52% response rate. Included in the responses, a total of 15,069 comments were submitted, excluding non-informative comments such as “No comment,” “Don’t know,” “N/A,” etc. Respondents were asked to provide comments when they indicated dissatisfaction with any of the services being evaluated; to elaborate if they selected an “Other” response to a closed-ended question; and to respond to more substantive open-ended questions related to their general experiences—both positive and negative—regarding retirement and interactions with the Department.

OVERALL CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY

Key Measures Among All Respondents

CGFS has set its overall performance target for customer satisfaction at 80 out of 100 for all services. Based on external benchmarks from the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), this goal is considerably higher than what many government agencies (68.4, 2018) and private sector financial institutions (77.8, 2019) have achieved recently.

The overall satisfaction rating for the CGFS retirement team’s services was derived from a question that asked respondents to rate their overall level of satisfaction with CGFS retirement services. Overall, satisfaction with CGFS retirement services was positive, both in terms of overall satisfaction (82) and lack of dissatisfaction.

Only 3% of respondents reported dissatisfaction, defined as 0-3 on an 11-point scale. In addition, satisfaction with all aspects related to transition to retirement was relatively high at 78. Survey respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the Payroll Customer Support and Annuity Pay Processing Offices’ telephone and email services, as well as services rendered via other forms of communications. The overall satisfaction with telephone services across both offices was high (Figure 1), with a rating of 82 for the Payroll Customer Support Office and 80 for the Annuity Pay Processing Office. The overall satisfaction with email services for both offices was slightly below target but still high, with a rating of 79 for the Payroll Customer Support Office and 78 for the Annuity Pay Processing Office. Satisfaction with non-phone and non-email services for both offices was lower than for telephone and email services, with ratings of 74 and 76 for the Payroll Customer Support Office and the Annuity Pay Processing Office, respectively.

Overall Satisfaction Rating by Office

Office	2019
Payroll Customer Support - Satisfaction with telephone services	82
Payroll Customer Support - Satisfaction with email services	79
Payroll Customer Support - Satisfaction with non-email and non-phone services	74
Annuity Pay Processing - Satisfaction with telephone services	80
Annuity Pay Processing - Satisfaction with email services	78
Annuity Pay Processing - Satisfaction with non-email and non-phone services	76

Figure 1

Key Measures by Segments

Figure 2 below provides key satisfaction ratings by segment, namely Foreign Service Retirees, Survivors, Former Spouses of Civil or Foreign Service Retirees, and Others, including Civil Service Retirees (to which we will refer to as “Others” or “the Other segment” in the remainder of the report). Average satisfaction with the services provided by the Department’s retirement team was high among all four segments: it was 82 among the largest segment, Foreign Service Retirees, and ranged from 81 among Others to 87 among Survivors. Average satisfaction with all aspects related to transition to retirement fell slightly below the Departments’ goal, with a rating of 78 among Foreign Service Retirees and Civil Service Retirees.

Among Foreign Service Retirees, telephone services were rated highly for both offices that provide retirement related services, with the Payroll Customer Support Office receiving a score of 82 and the Annuity Pay Processing Office receiving a score of 80. The overall satisfaction rating for email services fell slightly below the target goal, with a rating of 79 for Payroll Customer Support and 78 for Annuity Pay Processing. Non-email and non-phone services had the lowest satisfaction ratings among the two offices, at 75 for the Payroll Customer Support Office and 74 for the Annuity Pay Processing Office.

Overall Satisfaction Rating by Service

Office	2019							
	Foreign Service Retiree		Survivor		Former Spouse of Civil or Foreign Service Retiree		Other, including Civil Service Retiree	
	Avg.	N	Avg.	N	Avg.	N	Avg.	N
Satisfaction with all aspects related to transition to retirement	78	4,305	NA	0	NA	0	78	44
Payroll Customer Support - Satisfaction with telephone services	82	299	78	18	71	18	91	12
Payroll Customer Support - Satisfaction with email services	79	390	93	13	79	24	80	10
Payroll Customer Support - Satisfaction with non-email and non-phone services	75	35	83	3	40	3	90	2
Annuity Pay Processing - Satisfaction with telephone services	80	182	79	22	80	10	85	8
Annuity Pay Processing - Satisfaction with email services	78	178	79	8	77	16	78	5
Annuity Pay Processing - Satisfaction with non-email and non-phone services	74	46	79	10	70	3	95	4

Figure 2

Major Findings

Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents reported contacting the Department in the past 12 months, predominantly via email (70%) and telephone (64%). Respondents said they primarily called or emailed Payroll Customer Support in Charleston, SC, with 39% of respondents who called the Department in the past 12 months saying they called or emailed these offices. Approximately a quarter of respondents who reported contacting the Department in the past 12 months said they either called or emailed Annuity Pay Processing in Charleston, SC.

The most important reasons given for contacting the Department over the past 12 months regarded health benefits or life insurance (34% for those calling and 28% for those emailing), tax-related matters (19% for those calling and 20% for those emailing), and adjustment to benefits (16% for those calling and 15% for those emailing). The overall satisfaction rating for Payroll Customer Support telephone services was high, at 82, while that for the office's email services fell slightly below target, at 79. The majority of respondents were satisfied with how courteous the office's employees were during their calls (88) and in their emails (88). Respondents were also satisfied with the clarity of employees' answers to questions via telephone (83) and over email (84). A satisfactory rating of 80 was given regarding the amount of time it took to resolve the issues they called about. Overall satisfaction for non-phone and non-email communications was 74, below the Department's target rating of 80. It should be noted that the base size for the latter is low (N=43), so this number should only be considered as directional and not representative of respondents' thoughts as a whole.

The overall satisfaction ratings for Annuity Pay Processing telephone and email services were 80 and 78, respectively. Those who contacted the office indicated they were satisfied with how courteous employees were during calls (86) and via email (87). Similarly, respondents were satisfied with the clarity of answers provided by the employees over the telephone (82) and over email (83). The ratings related to the amount of time it took to resolve the issues they called or emailed about was 76, lower than the target of 80. Overall satisfaction for non-phone and non-email services was lower than for telephone and email communications, with a rating of 76. It should be noted that the base size for the latter is low (N=63), so this number should only be considered as directional and not representative of respondents' thoughts as a whole.

Regarding Materials and Notices, the majority of respondents (89%) reported receiving their 2018 1099-R tax forms; almost all of these found it to be correct (99%). Just over half of respondents (51%) said they received an annuity adjustment notice; 81% reported that it was easy to understand. Eight percent (8%) received a reemployed annuitant adjustment notice; 69% reported that it was easy to understand.

More than half of the respondents (55%) said they received their first payment of annuity benefits within 60 days of their retirement, with 22% reporting that they received their first payment within 30 days. The most common actions that respondents reported on their annuity accounts in the past 12 months were adjustments to annuity benefits (18%) and changes in Federal tax withholdings (16%). The majority of those who reported an action on their annuity account received some form of communication about this action from the Department (83%), and most of these respondents (86%) considered the communication to be clear.

Three major themes were contained in the comments provided in response to open-ended questions: helpfulness of customer service staff in direct interactions, nature of communications – including response time via any method of communication, and clarity and accuracy of information. Respondents commented on the nature of customer service, including the helpfulness of customer service staff while interacting with them directly. Other comments were related to the nature of communications, including the degree to

which the Department was helpful while communicating with respondents and the response time encountered when dealing with the Department via any method of communication. Respondents provided both positive and negative feedback in response to overall experience with phone, email, and other forms of interaction with the Department. In regard to phone interactions, positive feedback was greater than negative feedback; comments regarding email and other forms of communications had approximately the same amount of positive and negative feedback. Respondents also wrote comments related to the degree to which they received information, as well as the degree to which information was clear and accurate. There were more negative than positive comments regarding materials and notices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey results suggest that respondents were satisfied with the Department's retirement services, including services provided in preparation for retirement as well as those provided after retirement. However, the survey also highlighted areas where improvements can be made, and we are committed to making to addressing this feedback.

Respondents were generally satisfied with the phone and email services provided by both the Payroll Customer Support and Annuity Pay Processing Offices, though the former received slightly higher ratings than the latter. There appears to be an opportunity, however, to better address expectations related to the amount of time it takes to resolve issues that annuitants call or email about. It is recommended that the Department explore ways to improve the helpfulness of the customer service staff as they interact with annuitants via phone and email.

The survey results suggest an opportunity to ensure that annuitants are aware of and/or receive their Annuitant Express login information, since just over half reported receiving it. Of those who did receive login information, a large percentage reported accessing the website. Additionally, it is recommended that the Department consider exploring how to improve annuitants' perceptions related to the clarity and accuracy of key materials and notices received, particularly the re-employed annuitant notice.