



# The Inquiry Process

# Understanding Inquiries

## What is a Constituent Inquiry?:

- Any instance in which a Constituent contacts your organization to request information, file a complaint, or share their experience.

### Who are our Constituents?

- Veterans
- Eligible Dependents
- State & Federal Legislators
- Other state agencies
- Businesses
- Funeral Homes
- ***Anyone that interacts with us in any form.***

### Where do we receive inquiries from?

- Phone calls
- Emails
- Office walk-ins
- Mail
- Web-based forms
- Social Media
- Referrals
- Legislators

### What inquiries do we get?

- Federal Benefits
  - VBA, VHA, NCA
- State Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Employment
- Records Requests
- Legislative Inquiries
- Resources

### Why is the inquiry process important?

- Improves constituents' experience & satisfaction.
- Builds trust and loyalty with constituents.
- Provides insight on constituent needs and preferences.
- Assists with identification of trends, patterns, and areas for process improvement.



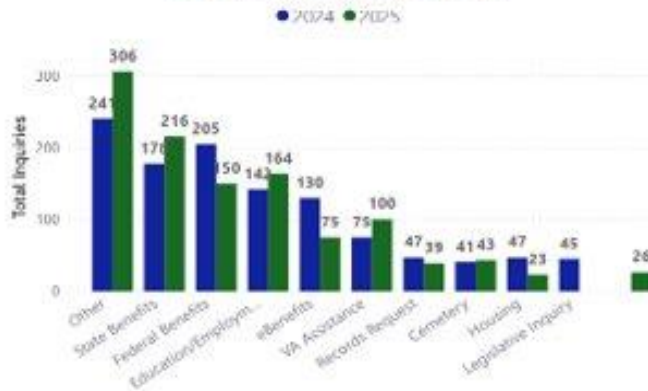
# Customer Service Data

## Customer Service FY 25 Qt. 3

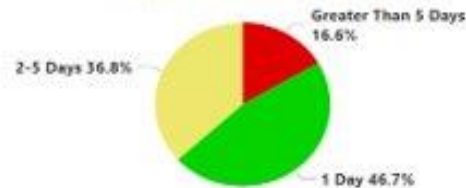
Inquiries FY24 vs. FY25

Fiscal Quarter	2024	2025
1	818	820
2	715	626
3	811	633
Total by FY	2344	2079

FY Inquiries By Topic Totals



Inquiries Resolved %



Inquiries by Assigned

Original Name	Total Inquiries
Ashley Allen-Tizard	700
Amy Knoch	619
Daniel Schuldt	316
Mary Deel	254
Adam Fields	117
Travis Murphy	81
Timothy Forre	71
Michael Rind	66
Stephen Bell	48
Jonathan Soto	36
Devon Leigh	32
Suzanne Ellis	21
Deanna Day	8
Chelsea Anderson	7
Patricia Cook	6
George Davis	2
John Houston	2
Charles Sevier	1
Jason Bruch	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2079</b>

## Customer Service Feedback

Staff Name	Survey Count	NPS
Amy Roach	3	100%
Ashley Allen	21	100%
Chelsea Anderson	1	100%
Dan Moore	1	100%
Mary Deel	10	100%
Sherry Pickering	5	100%
<b>FY25 Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Phone Calls FY24 vs. FY25

Fiscal Quarter	2024	2025
1	3137	3266
2	3189	3003
3	2688	2820
Total by Year	9014	9089

## Duration of Calls FY24 vs. FY25

Fiscal Year	Avg. Duration of Call
2024	0.54
2025	0.55

# Customer Service vs. Customer Experience



## Customer Service

- Reactive Approach
- Involves assisting our constituents before, during, and after their interaction with an organization.
- Customer service addresses specific needs, inquiries, and issues quickly and effectively.
- It includes activities such as answering customer queries, resolving complaints, processing claims, and providing technical support.
- Customer service's main goal is to satisfy and retain customers by exceeding expectations.



## Customer Experience

- Proactive Approach
- Refers to a constituent's overall impression of an organization or brand based on all interactions and touchpoints.
- It includes the entire constituent experience – i.e. marketing, website usability, product/service quality, customer service interactions, and support following their service.
- Customer experience aims to create positive, memorable experiences that build brand loyalty, advocacy, and long-term relationships.

# The Inquiry Process

## Contact

- This is where the constituent will gain their first impression of their interactions with an individual or organization.
- First contact may be through any channel.
- Greet warmly, introduce yourself, and thank the constituent for choosing your organization.
- **First impressions are important – make them positive ones!**

## Information Gathering

- Listen actively and show empathy
- Ask open-ended questions for details.
- Repeat or paraphrase what the constituent shares to confirm understanding.
- Avoid interrupting, making assumptions, or jumping to conclusions.
- Record the information in the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system.

## Problem-solving

- Analyze constituent needs to find the best solution.
- Offer a clear and realistic solution.
- Explain any additional steps to be taken, along with any time frames that may come with it.
- If the solution or action steps are beyond the scope of your role and/or organization, provide alternative resources or escalate to someone else.
- **Never promise anything.**

## Resolution

- Confirm that the constituent understands the information being provided.
- Thank the constituent for their patience and cooperation.
- Ask for feedback or suggestions on how to improve services.
- If using a CRM system, update the inquiry with the resolution.
- Close the inquiry accordingly.



Department of

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# Best Practices for Handling Inquiries

# Active Listening

1. Actively show that you're following along with what the constituent is saying. You can occasionally say "I see," or "I understand," etc. to let them know you are still there.
2. Avoid interruption, unless you're using tracking statements to acknowledge their information.
3. Demonstrate concern. Showing empathy and understanding is something that constituents will look for during their interactions.
4. Avoid distractions. Focus on one constituent at a time.
5. Repeat information back to the constituent – this tells them that you are listening, care, and have good comprehension of the information they are sharing.
6. Ask questions. Try to get as much information about the concern as possible, and about their expectations for resolution.
7. Avoid arguments. There will always be constituents who are upset and may lash out even when it's not our fault. It's important to listen and look for a solution – arguing will only escalate the situation.
8. Build trust. Use a friendly tone, take time to explain function and scope, and remind them that we are here to help as much as possible.
9. Be personable. Try to relate to your constituents during your conversations.
10. Use positive language. Instead of saying, "we can't do that, sorry," try informing the constituent of the best option for the service they are seeking.

# Empathy

Empathy has a direct impact on constituent satisfaction. While we know active listening can help show empathy, using empathetic language can also be helpful:

1. Empathetic Questions – using open-ended questions to gather more information supports active listening and shows interest.
2. Leading Questions – when needing more information, you can ask questions like “what happened then?”
3. Reflective Questions – you can use these to repeat back information you think you’ve heard, and ask for additional information.
4. Words of Urgency – these can help convey that an inquiry or complaint is important.
  1. “Thank you so much for letting us know.”
  2. “What I am doing to help resolve this is...”
  3. “Here’s how I can help.”
5. Committed Closes – making a commitment can assist with showing that you care about their inquiry.
  1. “Please let me know if you need any additional assistance.”
  2. “Someone will be in touch shortly.”
  3. “I will reach out as soon as I have more information.”



# Detailed Communications

## Why are detailed communications important?

- Ensures that customer inquiries are fully understood, leading to accurate and timely responses.
- Helps identify the specific needs and concerns of customers, enabling more personalized and effective solutions.
- Prevents misunderstandings and reduces the need for follow-up inquiries, saving time for both the constituent and the customer service representative.
- Builds trust and confidence by showing the commitment to addressing the concerns and/or needs of the constituent thoroughly.
- Helps document all interactions, which provides a reference for future inquiries.

# What should I include in my communications?

## Information to Include in an Inquiry Communication

- **This is where the most detailed information should be provided. We should document:**
  - Any conditions or concerns wanting to be discussed. This should be as detailed as possible.
  - If they are terminally ill, over 85, or currently homeless.
  - Any important dates mentioned (ITF, deadlines on claims letters, possible date of homelessness).
  - If they have never filed previously.
  - If they are a surviving spouse or eligible dependent.
  - If they have any service records, and if not, if they need assistance with obtaining them.
  - Any actions steps that have been taken to assist with the inquiry or concern.
  - Any details about any communication with the constituent – good or bad.

# Don't Assume!

- Sometimes, we make assumptions based on the notes provided in a profile, or on past experiences with either the same constituent, or someone else.
  - **We should never base the service we provide to a constituent on past experiences or assumptions without understanding the full scope.**
    - A constituent may have a mental health issue, TBI, or other disability/condition, impacting their ability to regulate their emotions or comprehend information being provided.
      - While this does not excuse any disrespectful behavior from our constituents, this is a unique population, and we have an obligation as public servants to provide the best service possible.
    - Sometimes the answer might seem obvious, but sometimes it is not.
      - Every constituent has a unique path – what may have worked for one person may not work for another.
    - The assumption may negatively impact your mentality, which can create barriers to finding effective solutions.
      - Any previous notes or communications should be reviewed and considered as part of a bigger picture but shouldn't be what we base our interactions off of entirely.

# Ask for Help

- Don't be afraid to ask for help! Someone else may have experience with a specific situation and know exactly how to successfully assist the constituent.

## Training Team

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## Customer Service Team

- Customer Service Main Line
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## Additional Resources

- Training tools:
  - <https://www.tn.gov/veteran/about-us/learning---development-division/training-resources1.html>