

Service Delivery Strategies for Multicultural Environments

Identifying Service Delivery Strategies for Ethnically Diverse Users of a Wildland-Urban Recreation Site¹

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Abstract: Service delivery has become an increasingly important part of managing public lands for recreation. The range of preferences held by ethnically diverse users of recreation sites may warrant the development of more than one service delivery strategy. Two questions were examined: (1) Are there differences in site perceptions that can be identified on the basis of ethnicity? and (2) If so, how many service delivery strategies are necessary to meet the needs of the site users? Three ethnic groups were identified, but most differences were found between Anglos and Hispanics. These results indicate the development of two service delivery strategies could meet the needs of most recreationists.

Customer service has become an increasingly important part of managing public lands for recreation. This trend is evident in the National Recreation Strategy sponsored by the USDA Forest Service and Recreation 2000 sponsored by the USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM). These initiatives have a strong emphasis on customer service. To meet recreationists' desires, managers must determine what recreationists want and then provide the desired service. To the extent that this occurs, "quality" in recreation management is achieved.

In southern California, maximizing customer service requires an understanding of the recreation preferences of an ethnically diverse population. As of 1990 California became the first state without a single ethnic group comprising more than 50 percent of the State's population. The diverse ethnicity of users might make it difficult to develop one service delivery strategy that effectively meets the needs of all. Maximizing customer service can probably be best achieved by segmenting or partitioning users into similar groups with respect to some characteristic of interest.

Segmentation is a concise way of examining the diversity of preferences held by recreationists and can be used as a means of allocating resources to the most highly valued recreation opportunities. Segmentation has been used to classify recreationists on the basis of activity participation, recreation experience preferences, and ethnicity. Once distinct groups are identified, it is relatively easy to develop service delivery strategies based on the distinguishing characteristic of each segment.

I investigated recreation use at a site in southern California to answer two questions: (1) Are there differences in site perceptions that can be identified on the basis of ethnicity? and (2) If so, how many service delivery strategies are necessary to meet the needs of the site users?

This paper reports the results of this study.

Methods

Data for this study were collected at a BLM site located near Palm Springs, California. Discussions with BLM recreation staff indicated the increased use of the area by members of the Hispanic population in the last decade. This situation provided an opportunity to test the utility of segmenting recreationist preferences on the basis of ethnicity. Data were collected on two weekends in spring 1991. Respondents were individuals who agreed to complete a questionnaire about their visit to the area. Respondents had the option to complete the survey in English or Spanish. Bilingual field personnel collected 250 questionnaires.

Service delivery needs were identified in two ways. One way involved measuring the differences between the importance of and satisfaction with 17 site and management attributes. Possible responses ranged from 1 to 5 for importance and satisfaction questions, with response categories ranging from not important to very important and from not at all satisfied to very satisfied. The second way involved categorizing responses to an open-ended question that asked respondents what they would do to improve the area. Responses were grouped into six categories: activity related facilities (baseball field, trails), high development features (trees, water, better roads), eating facilities (picnic tables, grills), concessionaire services (rent hiking equipment, snack bar), cleanliness of the area (trash cans), and management regulations (more law enforcement, no target shooting).

Results

Respondents were predominately Hispanic (78.5 percent, n=186), followed by Anglo (16.5 percent, n=39), followed by other ethnic categories. Using respondents' birthplace (country) and their self-identified ethnic group, three primary ethnic groups were identified, totalling 238 respondents. In order of decreasing frequency, ethnic groups were Mexico-born Hispanics (Mexican-Americans), U.S.-born Hispanics (Hispanics), and U.S.-born Anglos (Anglos).

Analysis of variance of mean differences between importance and satisfaction responses revealed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) for 11 of the 17 site and management attributes. For those 11 attributes, differences between Anglos and Hispanics were found, suggesting Hispanic site users have a greater desire for improved service delivery than Anglos. Emphasis on providing additional facilities, such as toilets and picnic tables, would probably meet the needs of most Hispanic users, while maintaining a clean nonlittered area would probably meet the needs of most Anglo visitors. The attributes that differed among all three ethnic groups were "clean area" and "low cost recreation area." Anglos showed a greater desire to have a

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clean area than Hispanics, and Hispanics were more concerned about having a low cost recreation area than Anglos.

Differences also were found by examining the open-ended, aggregated responses by ethnic group. Again, differences seemed evident between Anglo and Hispanic visitors, but not between the Hispanic and Mexican-American subgroups. For example, 47 percent of the comments mentioned by Hispanics and 52 percent of those by Mexican-Americans pertained to high development features (grass, more trees, better access).

Among Anglos, only 27 percent of the comments about improving the area pertained to development. About 34 percent of the comments by Anglos pertained to cleanliness, whereas about 9 percent of the comments by Mexican-Americans and 11 percent by Hispanics were about cleanliness.

Conclusions

Ethnic differences for service delivery needs were found for 11 site and management attributes. Although three ethnic groups were identified, most differences were found between Anglos and Hispanics. Analysis of comments about improvements to the area revealed a similar pattern. These results suggest two management strategies are probably adequate to meet the needs of most recreationists at this site. One service delivery strategy, focused on Hispanic recreationists, might emphasize development of the area (adding picnic tables, grills, and toilet facilities). Another service delivery strategy focused on Anglo users might emphasize removing trash periodically and disseminating information to recreationists about keeping the area clean.