

Survey Says: Co-op Members Give

**Soliciting
input from
members
makes
sense and is
invaluable for
cooperatives'
futures.**

by Brenda Kleinjan

CO-OP MEMBERS NATIONWIDE ARE GIVING THE electric cooperatives they own high marks, both national and regional surveys show.

Nationally, co-ops continue to outmatch the rest of the utility industry when it comes to customer satisfaction, confirmed once again by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). Results for the second quarter of 2007 give Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives a score of 81 and the utility industry a score of 72. The nine-point gap between the two scores has been consistent for the past several years, shifting occasionally by only one or two points.

The Touchstone Energy score stands out when compared to other industries, as well.

The airline industry registered a score of 65 for second quarter 2007; wireless telephone service came in at 66; cable and satellite TV scored a 63.

According to the ACSI Web site, ACSI reports scores on a 0-100 scale at the national level and produces indexes for 10 economic sectors, 43 industries (including e-commerce and e-business) and more than 200 companies and federal or local government agencies. In addition to the company-level satisfaction scores, ACSI produces scores for the causes and consequences of customer satisfaction and their relationships. The measured companies, industries and sectors are broadly representative of the U.S. economy serving American households.



High Marks

The Index was developed to provide information on satisfaction with the quality of products and services available to consumers. Prior to the development of ACSI, no national measure of quality from the perspective of the user was available. ACSI was designed to measure the quality of economic output as a complement to traditional measures of the quantity of economic output.

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives have the opportunity to participate in the survey nationally and have their results become part of the overall cooperative satisfaction results. Professional surveyors conduct random, confidential surveys to determine customer satisfaction levels. Using this tool, co-ops are able to compare the satisfaction level of our member-consumers to electric cooperatives nationally and other utilities nationwide.

A recent ACSI survey indicated that electric cooperatives that are members of East River Electric Power Cooperative in Madison, S.D., achieved a composite score of 89. The cooperative members surveyed rated East River member systems (as a group) 2 points higher than in 2006. This score is higher than both the Touchstone Energy national average and higher than the national utility industry average.

Cooperatives also engage in surveys that are designed to determine what the future power needs of cooperative members will be. This information is crucial in determining population and electricity demand trends that will impact where the cooperative's infrastructure needs to be.

Surveys can help cooperatives refine their marketing and communication strategies to better serve their members. They can also identify opportunities to improve cooperative business processes and improve member satisfaction and involvement.

Cooperatives hear from their members periodically on specific issues – thank yous from community groups for sponsorships or from members experiencing

problems or seeking information on services and products offered by the cooperative. Those communications are often very narrowly focused. Conducting surveys allows the cooperative to gain a clearer perspective on overall issues.

Soliciting input from members makes sense and is invaluable for cooperatives' futures.

Another survey tool utilized by cooperatives is a readership survey of this publication. Two surveys have been conducted since 2001. The most recent survey found that 96 percent of cooperative members read all, some or most of their magazine each month.

It also indicated readers are interested in learning more about energy efficiency ideas for their homes. These findings help guide cooperatives in determining stories to include in future issues of their magazines.

The survey also indicated that 91 percent of readers believe their cooperatives give excellent customer service and another 87 percent say that their co-ops take an active role in area communities. Readers also gave co-ops high marks for having a professional business manner, providing reliable electric service, being member-owned and offering a variety of programs and services.

An underlying belief for cooperatives is that the cooperative exists for the members, so it only makes sense to take time to see how we're measuring up.

Surveys allow for feedback from the membership in their own voice on how they evaluate our performance in key elements of our service. This allows your local Touchstone Energy Cooperative to measure how well it is living up to the expectations it has promised: integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community.

The survey allows cooperatives to explore the current attitudes of electric cooperative members, both young and old, from a large sample of members.

So, the next time your cooperative calls seeking your input, please take time to respond. Your opinions and observations matter.