

Case: Citizen Assistance Service Charters, Brazil

**An interview with Elba C. S. de Andrade
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If bureaucracy impedes service delivery to citizens, it doubly affects citizens in remote areas, who live great distances from administrative centers. In the state of Bahia, Brazil, the government created mobile centers that bring services directly to those citizens. In the process, procedures were simplified and services were coordinated among different agencies.

As in much of the world, public services in the state of Bahia, Brazil, have traditionally been delivered by disparate government agencies at different locations and with very different service standards. In some cases, citizens seeking a single service must nonetheless visit multiple agencies. Often, state residents discover the documentation needed for a given service only after visiting a string of government agencies on multiple occasions. Citizens have regularly encountered poor customer service and lack of professionalism in government offices as opposed to private sector enterprises, compounding the difficulty of access to basic services.

If bureaucracy impedes service delivery to city residents, it doubly affects the services available to citizens living in remote areas. Their physical remove from government offices means that many of the rural residents in the state have no documents at all, making access to services next to impossible.

What was the innovation, and how did it improve access?

To improve access to services and to bypass state bureaucracy, the Bahia State Government has created Citizen Assistance Service (SAC) Centers, a pioneering initiative that has been a true revolution in public service delivery. SAC Centers are veritable “one-stop shops”—full-service, multi-purpose complexes partnered with federal, state, and municipal agencies as well as private companies, offering services most in demand by citizens. These Centers help bring service delivery directly into the community.

The state government has placed SAC Centers in convenient locations for the public, such as shopping malls and major public transportation hubs, as well as crowded low-income neighborhoods. One emphasis of the SAC Centers is professionalism. Applicants for services at these centers can expect the same level of courtesy they might expect from private enterprises. By networking service delivery horizontally, SAC Centers give their users the impression of a single unified system. This streamlining of service delivery has not only improved customer service and citizen access to public resources, but it has also lowered government overhead by simplifying the process of delivering services to citizens.

The SAC Centers have not only improved service delivery in Bahia’s municipalities, but they have also given rural residents access to services that they have never had before. To reach the most remote and deprived communities in the state, the SAC system includes two types of mobile units called, respectively, SAC Documents and SAC Health. Each mobile unit delivers most of the services offered at stationary SAC Centers. SAC mobile units have visited all 417 municipalities of Bahia, as well as the native Indian communities located in the state, where they serve individuals with no other means of accessing state resources.

At this time, the SAC system offers more than 600 separate services from 32 fellow agencies. In its 11 years of activity, the SAC system has conducted over 80 million transactions.

What were the obstacles you encountered?

Some agencies in the Bahia State Government apparatus opposed the project at its inception, arguing that there were not enough human or financial resources to support the SAC Centers. The state government, through the Secretariat of Administration, elected to pay directly for the contributions of state and federal agencies to the SAC Centers, while they outsourced human resources for services like reception and clerical support to the Centers themselves.

What were the results of the innovation?

The SAC Project brought public administration closer to its constituents, improving the relations between state authorities and citizens and establishing a new level of professionalism in public service delivery. The SAC project's superior performance has become a benchmark in terms of public service delivery in Brazil; this has led several agencies in other states to ask for assistance from SAC's innovators in implementing the model in their own offices. Currently, SAC Centers have been established in 22 out of Brazil's 26 states, and internationally in Portugal and Colombia. It is also worth noting that the SAC Centers have inspired some partner agencies to improve public service in their home offices, and to train their civil servants in customer service.

The Innovator



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