

Foreigners' Forum

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Organisation: The Mazovian Voivodeship (region) Office

Country: Poland

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: General public services

Type: Communication, Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2008

Overall development time: 3 months

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Foreigners' Forum is a dialogue platform, an opinion exchange and cooperation point between representatives of governmental institutions and the non-governmental sector. It has been created in response to the need of having a dialogue between these two sectors. The Forum ensures the exchange of opinions and cooperation between the Mazovian Voivodeship (region) Office and NGOs.

The number of migrants in the Masovia Region is uniquely high for Poland. The Masovian Voivode (governor of a voivodeship) hence introduced a programme of cooperation with NGOs as the first in the country. Initially, it worked as a "crisis management team." The priority of the Forum was the improvement of customer service in the Department of Foreigners of the Mazovian Voivodeship Office. Subsequently, it became a platform of exchange of opinions and information, partnerships and cooperation in the field of pre-integration and integration activities.

The Foreigners' Forum plays an important role in increasing immigrants' trust in public administration services, and ensures quick problem solving of migrants' issues.

Why the innovation was developed

(1) Very negative opinions of the customers relating to the level of service quality towards foreigners in Mazovia. The lack of cooperation between the Department and non-governmental organisations providing assistance to migrants. The very noticeable (on the part of customers) shortage of information relating to the procedures that are followed in the Department. (2) Determination of the principles of cooperation of the Mazovian Voivode with non-governmental organisations in the form of annual cooperation programmes developed in the process of mutual consultations that are co-ordinated by a representative of the Voivode for cooperation with non-governmental organisations. (3) Process of creation and implementation of the Foreigners' Forum did not require any external changes, including legal changes.

Objectives

Enhance public trust, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- Improve access to services, reducing the time for issuing a decision.
 - Improve user satisfaction.
 - Improve job satisfaction.
 - Meet political goals like transparency and availability of information.
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Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Civil Society, Ethnic or racial minorities, General population, Low-income groups

The implemented solutions are primarily used by foreign nationals legalising their stay and work within the Mazovian Voivodeship. The main countries of origin are first of all Ukraine and Vietnam and then Belarus, Russia, China and India. The services of the Department of Foreigners are used by approximately 8 000 customers per year. This group consists of:

- Foreign nationals from the EU and from over 120 countries outside the EU.
 - Polish employers employing foreign nationals.
 - Polish citizens inviting foreign nationals for a tourist visit to Poland.
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Existing similar practices

Other thematic fora

In my own organisation

The Mazovian Voivodeship (region) Office

Other thematic fora involving the cooperation of representatives of a government institution with non-governmental organisations, e. g.: Security Forum, Education Forum, Social Policy Forum. The formula of cooperation is similar in all fora. They differ in terms of their area of activities. The Foreigners' Forum in comparison with other fora is distinguished by a variety of forms of cooperation and measurable effects, e. g. joint projects and activities having a measurable effect on the quality of customer service in the Department of Foreigners.

<http://www.mazowieckie.pl/pl/dla-klienta/ngo/fora>

Results

Service quality

Accessibility:

- Access to information on pending procedures has considerably increased as a result of the establishment (in a branch of the Department) of a separate position providing legal assistance managed by a non-governmental organisation and also due to the regular publishing of information materials for foreign nationals (leaflets, posters).
- Within the Department a permanent location has been allocated for representing the activities of non-governmental organisations providing assistance and support for foreign nationals free of charge.
- The possibility to have consultations concerning arising problems on an on-going basis has significantly reduced the number of complaints submitted by customers, from the level of approximately 60 in 2008 to the level of approximately 8 in 2011.

Responsiveness:

The service provided to customers is more adapted to their needs and thus more effective.

User satisfaction

In our customer survey, ratings of 'satisfied' users increased from 40% in 2008 to 97% in 2012.

Evaluation

Evaluation is conducted under separate projects, using a variety of research tools. One of the projects in question was: "Friendly office. Evaluation of the Department of Foreigners of the Mazovian Voivodeship Office" of 2009. The report was prepared by a NGO. A questionnaire and focus group interviews were used for the survey.

In 2012 the survey was reconducted using the following techniques: a questionnaire, "mysterious customer", oral interviews. The project is entitled: "More friendly office? Evaluation of the Department of Foreigners of the Mazovian Voivodeship Office of 2012".

<http://www.interwencjaprawna.pl>

Development

Design

In 2008, it was agreed in the Mazovian Voivode that one of the instruments aimed at improving the handling of foreign nationals' cases will involve establishing systematic cooperation with non-governmental organisations and representatives of migrant communities. This was linked to a general policy of Voivode cooperation with NGOs.

The formula for cooperation was developed in the course of a series of working meetings of representatives of the government administration and NGOs. The meetings had the nature of workshops, during which were defined the customer needs, areas particularly sensitive in terms of customer satisfaction as well as organisational, financial and legal restrictions on the part of the government side. The results of the meetings were schedules of activities specifying the responsible persons and task completion deadlines.

Design time: 2 weeks

Testing

The first working meeting at the beginning of 2008 was devoted to diagnose the existing situation and work on finding solutions for identified problems.

The themes of the next meetings depended on current problems with foreigners, especially problems pertinent to public opinion.

From 2008 there were 15 meetings of the Foreigners' Forum.

The first meetings of the Foreigners' Forum had the character of crisis team meetings and sought to develop remedial solutions. At the beginning the group of representatives of non-governmental organisations and migrant communities was limited as well.

Stabilising the formula of cooperation was accompanied by the joint determination to provide the official document "The programme of cooperation of the Mazovian Voivode with non-governmental organisations".

Testing time: 1 week

Implementation

Tools used:

- Department of Foreigners organising periodic meetings with the members of the forum.
- Forum has two equal coordinators, one from the public and one from the NGOs side.
- Numerous (a dozen or so) permanent members participating in the Foreigners' Forum, e. g. NGOs and migration organisations such as the Legal Intervention Association, the Other Space Foundation, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Our Choice Foundation, Free Speech Association and also other governmental and municipal institutions, as well as international organisations like IOM (International Organisation for Migration).
- As a result of regular meetings, less formal ways of cooperation emerge. For instance, officers take part in conferences and seminars as speakers; they also run training and information meetings for foreigners.
- The issues which the Forum deals with vary a lot depending upon the situation but it tries do the most difficult and controversial things first. This rule works well, thanks to both sides having the feeling that they can speak freely, and that the dialogue is constructive.

Resources used:

- The establishment of the Foreigners' Forum costs virtually nothing for the institution; it did not entail any additional (direct) cost.
- The Foreigners' Forum was set up based on existing infrastructure and personnel employed by the institution: 2 members of staff, 2 laptops and conference rooms of the Office.
- Resources from the non-for-profit sector:
 - Several days of running the workshops and consultative meetings.
 - The permanent position of a joint co-ordinator by 1 person for meetings of the Foreigners' Forum.
 - The use of a pool of instructors and lecturers.

Implementation time: 1 month

Diffusion

During its 5 years of functioning, the Foreigners' Forum has been transformed from a crisis management team to a platform for permanent cooperation and exchange of information and experiences. The group of non-governmental organisations and representatives of migrant communities taking part in the meetings, and also participating within the framework of day-to-day cooperation, has also expanded considerably.

Invitations to participate in the Forum are open. The group is not permanent. Access to the Forum is open and free, all you need to participate is to send an e-mail with your name and contact details to forumcudzoziemców@mazowieckie.pl. Then you will receive an invitation for every meeting.

At present, within the framework of cooperation several organisations (at the beginning there were just a few) take part in the Forum.

Diffusion time: 1 month and 1 week

Challenges and solutions

While implementing this solution it is important to determine as quickly as possible the mechanisms of evaluation of its functioning, which we lacked somewhat in the beginning.

Partnerships

Foundations

Civil Society

The Legal Intervention Association, the Other Space Foundation, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights participated at the conceptual stage.

Service users

Other

Foreign nationals submitted their comments and suggestions during the series of meetings.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

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Conditions for success

- Openness for cooperation.
 - Clear definition of a local policy.
 - Support of a local authority.
 - Common goal to achieve.
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Other information

- The activities of the Foreigners' Forum bring measurable effects. As a result of the Foreigners' Forum, the Mazovian Voivodeship Office is more open for other mutual activities to improve migration management. For example, Mazovian Voivodeship Office took part in a 3 years project called "The Information Centre for Foreigners". The overall objective of the project was to improve customer service in the Department of Foreigners. Among the project activities the most important were:
- Organising training for employees of the Department of Foreigners in order to build up staff with intercultural competence.
- Preparing information leaflets for foreigners in Polish, Russian and English.
- Creating an additional information point in the Office.
- Assisting foreigners, third-country nationals, in filling in applications (e. g. to obtain a permit to reside for a definite period of time or to settle oneself or to stay as a long-term resident of EC).
- Providing customers with information about administrative proceedings in Poland e.g. how to prepare an appeal, lodge a complaint.
- Moreover, NGO cooperating with the Mazovian Voivodeship Office prepared a report, containing evaluation of the activities of the Department of Foreigners.