



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:
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SEP 15 2016

Memorandum

To: Regional Concession Chiefs

From: Chief, Commercial Services Program

Subject: Implementation of Updated Service Standards and New Periodic Evaluations

The WASO Commercial Services Program is continuing its launch of updates to the Concession Review Program as part of the Standards, Evaluations, and Rate Administration (SERA) Project. With this memorandum, WASO is issuing revised standards for commercial services and revised forms for periodic evaluations.

Updated standards, service classifications and periodic evaluations forms can be found on the Commercial Services SharePoint site in the Contract Management Toolbox under Concessioner Review Program in Category: 2016 Revised Standards, Evaluations, and Guidance. These can also be found on the NPS Commercial Services website under Concessioner Tools in New (2016) Standards and Evaluations under the topic Service Standards and Periodic Evaluations.

Background

The previous visitor service standards and periodic evaluation forms, which were last revised in the mid-1980s, tended to be general, subjective, missing key components, or have criteria that no longer met current hospitality expectations. The NPS contracted with hospitality consultants, worked with NPS concessioner management field staff, and interacted with concessioners through meetings and field pilots to understand these needs and test improvements.

The standards are being revised to be more current, complete, and objective. Where appropriate, the standards are being defined by service classification levels to enhance applicability. For example, lodging standards are defined for upscale, midscale, basic, and rustic property classifications. Evaluation forms are also being converted to Excel-based workbooks to improve scoring methods and streamline data entry and report generation.

Implementation

The implementation process is dependent upon the age of the concession contract and what information was included in the operating plan.

New Contracts. Going forward, all new contracts will use the new service classifications, standards, and periodic evaluation forms.

Recent Contracts. Contracts issued in the last few years that included the new standards as part of their operating plan, either in their current or earlier version, should implement the new standards and forms. The new service standards and evaluation forms should also be used for recent contracts that did not include the new standards because they were not yet promulgated,

but that included a statement in the operating plan that the new standards would be implemented when they were issued. This should be completed by no later than the 2017 operating season.

Existing Contracts without Reference to the New Standards. The new service standards and periodic evaluation forms may be used for existing contracts where they were not included or referenced in the operating plan only upon mutual agreement of the park and concessioner. If there is not agreement, the existing standards and forms should continue to be used.

Details on how to implement the updates are included in Attachment A.

Supercessions

Concession Review Program changes being implemented through this memorandum consist of updates to visitor service standards and evaluation forms contained in NPS-48 Chapter 20, Concessioner Review Program - Operational Performance, and Chapter 21 - Concessioner Review Program - Operational Performance Standards. The new standards and forms replace those in NPS-48 as described in the Implementation section of this memorandum.

General policies on the Concession Review Program such as authorities, policy, responsibilities, distribution of reports, and appeal processes contained in NPS-48 are not superseded. NPS-48 will be replaced by Reference Manual 48 (RM-48). All Concession Review Program updates will be integrated into RM-48.

Next Steps

As parks implement these SERA Concession Review Program changes, WASO Commercial Services will continue to provide ongoing training and awareness to NPS Commercial Services personnel and concessioners. This will include a number of Commercial Services Chats for NPS personnel and webinars for concessioners in late 2016 and early 2017. Assistance will also be available to parks through the WASO Technical Assistance Program.

It is anticipated that there will be minor adjustments needed as the updated standards and evaluation tools are implemented in the field. Throughout the first several years of implementation, WASO Commercial Services will collect comments from personnel and concessioners and will make adjustments where appropriate to service-specific standards and evaluation tools and processes to ensure the program works as effectively as possible.

Distribution

Please distribute this memorandum to all parks with concession operations. Managers are also encouraged to share the memorandum and updated materials with their concessioners.

For Further Information

For further information on these SERA updates, please contact Kurt Rausch at 202-513-7202, or Kat Berry at 202-513-7153, in the WASO Commercial Services Program.

ATTACHMENT A
IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS
UPDATED SERVICE CLASSIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS AND PERIODIC
EVALUATIONS

There are two key components to implementing the latest SERA effort: 1) implementing updated service classifications and standards; and 2) implementing updated service periodic evaluation forms.

CLASSIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS

New Contracts. The updated service classifications and standards should be used in all new contracts. The classification of services to be offered should be defined through the prospectus planning process and the applicable classifications and updated standards should be referenced in the contract operating plan. The standards themselves need not be included in the operating plan because they are electronically available by providing a link to the standards which are loaded on the Commercial Services external web site.

In some cases, park-specific exceptions to the standards (i.e., additions or exclusions) may exist. For example, televisions are a standard for most lodging classifications, but in some parks they are not allowed. As a second example, for a concessioner with a swimming pool, the pool standards specify the quality and condition of deck furniture if present, but do not define whether deck furniture is required or not. Exceptions to the standards or clarifications on the services and equipment should be documented in the service-specific sections of the operating plan. Parks are advised to be judicious in excluding standard requirements as the standards are designed to help create consistency in offerings across the NPS and with common industry practices.

Recently Awarded Contracts. In many recently issued contracts, services were classified, and earlier versions of the new standards were embedded in the operating plan. In these situations, parks are encouraged to compare the new online standards to those referenced in the operating plan to ensure there are no significant inconsistencies. Then, in communication with the concessioner, the park should update the operating plan to remove the earlier version of embedded standards and refer to the current online standards instead. This action helps to streamline the operating plan and improves continuity in the standards being used across the Service and being revised over time. As noted above, any exceptions to the on-line standards should be documented in the operating plan.

For some contracts awarded in the last few years, the contract did not include the new service standards because they were not yet promulgated but stated the new standards would be adopted when they were available. In this situation, parks should first ensure the classification of services to be provided is defined in the contract. If this is not the case, the classification should be determined based upon applicable classification definitions, and that information shared with the concessioner as well as the associated service standards. The new standards should be incorporated for the 2017 operating season. Although the updated standards are consistent with current industry practices and are already in use by most concessioners, there may be some particular updated criterion that will take time and/or investment for the concessioner to bring on-line. In these circumstances, Parks should work with their concessioner and establish an implementation plan for these standards to allow the concessioner reasonable time to effect any necessary changes. As outlined above, the way to actually implement the standards is to update the operating plan to remove obsolete standards, reference the on-line standards, and document exceptions.

Standards and Evaluations for Existing Contracts. The new service standards are generally consistent with industry practices and many concessioners are already meeting these standards, even if operating under the old standards. As a result, it is anticipated that concessioners should be willing and able to easily transition to the new standards. However, to ensure fairness to concessioners, the NPS has determined that adoption of the new service classifications and standards in existing contracts may only be done voluntarily upon mutual agreement by the concessioner and park. The process for adopting the new classifications and standards is generally as described above: parks should share the updated classifications and standards, mutually agree which will be implemented and when, develop an implementation plan, remove the old standards from the operating plan, document the applicable new service classifications and standards in the operating plan, and then start using them in accordance with the implementation plan. Note that for those services where the new standards are not adopted, the NPS-48 standards will still apply.

UPDATED PERIODIC EVALUATION FORMS AND PROCESS

Updated periodic evaluation forms have been developed that correspond to the updated standards. These forms are Microsoft Excel-based and use an updated scoring methodology that is based on percent of applicable standards that are met. The form generates a 1 to 5 score based upon these results. The updated service periodic evaluation forms must be used whenever the updated standards are adopted. An old form should not be used to evaluate against a new standard.

For those existing contracts where the new standards are not being adopted, the older service-specific periodic evaluation forms must be used. The process does allow for parks and concessioners to adopt the new standards for one visitor service category and not for another. For example, if a concessioner is hesitant to adopt the new pool standards but is willing to adopt lodging, food and beverage and retail standards, this can be done. However, a comprehensive switch-over is encouraged.

The periodic evaluation process has not changed in terms of the service and facility inspection process or frequency. These remain as described in NPS-48 and RM 48 when it is released.

THE ANNUAL OVERALL RATING WORKBOOK AND PROGRAM AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLIANCE STANDARDS AND EVALUATIONS

An updated Annual Overall Rating (AOR) Workbook was released in 2015 and is required for all AORs submitted in 2017 (evaluating the 2016 operating year). The new service standards and associated periodic evaluation forms, as well as the old standards and forms, are designed to integrate into the new AOR.

It should be noted that new standards and forms for programs (Risk, Environmental, Public Health and Asset Management) and administrative compliance were also released in 2015 and are required to be used in 2017 (for evaluating the 2016 operating year).