The study was conducted by the Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) at Wichita State University (WSU). The PPMC is an independent research body unaffiliated with the Kansas Department of Commerce. This report was prepared by the research team. It represents the findings, views, opinions and conclusions of the research team alone, and the report does not express the official or unofficial policy of WSU.
The PPMC would like to thank the staff of the Kansas Department of Commerce Workforce Services Division for their commitment to advancing excellence in public service and serving the state. This project is only one example of their commitment to improving services and addressing needs of the residents of Kansas. In addition, the PPMC would like to acknowledge and express sincere appreciation to the secret shoppers for their work and dedication to this project. For purposes of protecting their anonymity, names will not be included in this report, but their critical effort still should be acknowledged and recognized.
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1. Background & Protocol

In the summer of 2016, the Kansas Department of Commerce (KDOC) Workforce Services Division requested assistance with evaluation of entry services delivered at workforce centers across Kansas. Located in 22 communities across the state, Kansas Workforce Centers serve more than 176,000 customers a year. These centers experience a constant management challenge to effectively serve this volume of clients and meet the unique employment needs of each individual.

The Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) at the Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs (HWS) at Wichita State University developed a study to design a “secret shoppers” appraisal tool, conduct an assessment in nine workforce centers and write a formal report for the KDOC. While “secret shopper” programs are most often associated with retail stores, the same concept of “undercover shoppers” can effectively evaluate customer experiences with public agencies. All efforts pertaining to the “secret shopper” initiative were completed confidentially without the awareness of those KDOC Workforce Center team members involved in delivery of frontline services.

This assessment included the following specific requests from KDOC:

1) **Develop Evaluation Metrics:** The PPMC worked with representatives from KDOC to identify critical metrics to evaluate effectiveness of initial service delivery at Kansas Workforce Centers. Metrics were identified that could be consistently measured across centers, both “point in time” and historically, to allow for comparative analysis across centers and longitudinal analysis of metrics for each center over time.

2) **Design and Execute “Secret Shopper” Process:** The PPMC worked with KDOC representatives to develop the “secret shopper” appraisal tool. The evaluation tool guided the secret shoppers on the appraisal criteria and included metrics developed by the project team. Design of the secret shopper process included the development of different shopper scenarios, identification of services to be evaluated, and timing of the individual assessment.
3) Implement the Secret Shopper Evaluation: From October through December 2016, the PPMC coordinated 63 secret shopper evaluations with seven different shoppers at nine different workforce centers across the state. Shoppers represented diverse ages, races, job experiences and education levels, and included veterans and persons with disabilities. Each shopper used a unique “script” developed to represent different segments of the population that access services from workforce centers.

On average, the evaluators spent four to five hours participating in project orientation and training. This training included script and scenario development individualized for each shopper, online application training, role-playing rehearsal and overview of the workforce delivery system. Evaluators were also trained on consistent and reliable use of the evaluation tool and participated in pilot evaluation.

PPMC staff worked closely with the KDOC project team to identify customer categories or roles that represent the diverse cross-section of customers that the workforce centers serve. The following scenarios were identified:

- Person with a disability
- Senior worker returning to work
- Underemployed worker looking for trade skills and career change
- Recent high school graduate with limited skills and employment history
- Person of color with new educational achievement looking for a career change
- Person speaking English as a second language
- Veteran seeking employment change

The PPMC identified evaluators to best fit each scenario. Evaluators did not disclose their role or the intent of their involvement to workforce staff. A pilot test evaluation was completed at a workforce site that was not included in the official study, in order to determine if the online evaluation tool was effective and to provide role-playing practice for evaluators. Information revealed during the pilot test was used to refine the evaluation tool and reporting process, as well as to provide additional coaching for the evaluators.

From October through December 2016, the PPMC coordinated 63 secret shopper evaluations, with seven roles played by ten different shoppers (three different veterans participated in the evaluation) at nine different workforce centers across the state: Emporia, Great Bend, Independence, Junction City, Kansas City, Overland Park, Salina, Topeka and Wichita.

Using smart phones or tablets, evaluators completed a web-based assessment immediately following each site visit. The same assessment was used by every evaluator at every site. Quantitative and qualitative information was collected by each evaluator at each site. Evaluators typically went to each site in teams of two or three to reduce travel expenses, but they would stagger the times of their visits. At the end of the project, a group debriefing session was conducted with all of the evaluators to identify comparative information from their site visits.
2. Overall Findings

The overall results from the evaluation were extremely positive regarding customer service from the workforce centers and the experience of the evaluators. Here are some of the highlights:

- Evaluators waited less than five minutes to receive services on 89% of the visits
- Over 86% of evaluators reported courtesy at the centers as “excellent” or “good”
- Almost 80% of the evaluators rated the workforce center representatives’ overall understanding of their problem or question as “excellent” or “good”
- Nearly three-quarters of the evaluators indicated an “excellent” or “good” rating for services providing a sense of encouragement about finding a job
- Evaluators rated the assistance in creating an online account “excellent” or “good” 77% of the time
- Nearly 75% of the evaluators rated overall atmosphere of the workforce centers as positive
- The evaluators observed the receptionist effectively interacting with other customers 82% of the time

Some areas designated as opportunities for improvement include:

- Evaluators experienced different registration or intake processes; for example, 54% of the time evaluators were asked for their social security numbers, whereas 45% of the times they were not
- Evaluators rated explanation of the process to receive services as “excellent” or “good” about two-thirds of the time, indicating opportunity for improvement
- Only 61% of the evaluators indicated an “excellent” or “good” experience in receiving referrals to other services provided by the center or at a partner agency
As stated previously, the evaluators’ overall experience was positive and each site provided unique experiences, impressions and outcomes. Since the evaluators, with the exception of the veterans, were consistent among all sites, they were easily able to compare and contrast practices among the sites. At the conclusion of the evaluation process, written statements from the surveys, as well as group debriefing sessions, were conducted. This process helped to identify best practices from specific site visits and overall areas for development. Information from the surveys and debriefing sessions led to the following recommendations:

1. **Develop Consistent Intake Process**

   Evaluators indicated, in the assessment tool and in discussion, the significant differences among intake processes at each site. While some differences can be attributed to physical environment or size of the center, most differences were associated with each center’s process and procedures. Examples provided by evaluators included a division on the request for social security numbers. The online workforce application does not require a social security number, but some evaluators were told they could not be served without providing a social security number.

   Other inconsistencies included the KansasWorks website. Some evaluators were sent directly to the website, while others received more personal attention before being directed to create an account. Another variation was the use of a resource list. Some evaluators received a paper copy of resources and contacts immediately, while others did not. Developing a consistent and friendly intake processes at all sites allows for “best practices” to be utilized everywhere. To achieve this, written processes and expectations can be developed and training conducted with all staff on these intake processes.

2. **User-Focused KansasWorks Accounts**

   Evaluators indicated that each site had a different approach to creating a KansasWorks online account. Some sites asked evaluators to create their own accounts, while at other sites, staff created the account for the client. The evaluators reported the best approach was for staff to coach the clients in the process of account creation and encourage clients to become familiar with the tools available. By providing clients with hands-on instruction on how to use KansasWorks, the client will likely be more comfortable and gain confidence to use the system again.
Some of the best experiences the evaluators reported involved workforce center staff providing information and connections to other community resources. Evaluators indicated that some centers provided a resource list of potential partner service providers. Another center provided specific dates and times of available classes. Finally, another center provided names and contact information of people at the community college and offered to make phone calls at that time to help make the connection for the evaluator.

In comparison, at one center, staff told an evaluator that his/her best opportunity was to figure out how to drive 75 miles to take a trade class. Developing enhanced services beyond KansasWorks (i.e. job fairs, community resources, handouts) is important to ensure clients have a comprehensive understanding of community resources. A client should leave a center with more information and support services than they could have obtained from the website alone.

In addition, the workforce centers should be a link between clients and community resources from colleges, libraries, trade unions and other public and private organizations. Printed handouts should be available at all sites, along with information on services, class schedules, contact information and meeting times for external partners that support or enhance the mission of obtaining or improving employment status. The workforce center should be the central hub to connect clients to all these resources.

### 3. Connect Clients to Other Resources

As mentioned previously, evaluators were very positive overall about the services they received. Customer service, however, should be an area of constant quality improvement in all facets of the work process. First, the Workforce Service Division should consider how a customer service focus is integrated into the screening and hiring process for new staff. Behavior-based interview questions, role-playing exercises and scenario screening questions are important ways to identify that “service” focus in employees.

Second, the Workforce Service Division should implement an enhanced customer service training for staff by utilizing best practices and the talent within the organization through peer coaching. Several excellent customer service providers were identified in the evaluation process. (Site reports in the appendix identify many examples.) A great way to recognize and share this talent is to enlist employees’ assistance in developing and coaching others.

Third, while overall customer service was positive, evaluators identified some areas of needed improvement. Recommended focuses include: customer service empathy, working with people who have physical and learning disabilities, evaluating and delivering on the needs of senior citizens, working with individuals speaking English as a second language and diversity training.

Lastly, customer service is everybody’s job—not just the front line. Developing training for managers on how to observe customer service skills regularly and promote a customerservice focus in all employees is critical. In addition, ensuring managers have the tools to evaluate and reward positive customer service skills is important. In this time of financial austerity, developing reward and recognition efforts beyond financial incentives is critical for keeping quality employees.
5. Implement Wrap-up of Self-Evaluation Process

At Topeka’s workforce center, a closure report process was utilized to ensure a focus on customer needs. At the end of the visit, a written checklist was reviewed with the intent to ensure all concerns were covered. This checklist made certain the client left the center equipped for their job search. In the post-evaluation discussion, all evaluators commented on the checklist as a simple and effective means to enhance the customer service experience.

6. Enhance KansasWorks Website

Evaluators indicated the need to review questions on KansasWorks software to eliminate redundancies (e.g. the number of times the applicant is asked if they are a Veteran or spouse of a Veteran). An overall review and enhancement of the site will continue to encourage clients to see it as resource and not a requirement.

7. Assess Centers’ Physical Environments

Signage, decor and the ambiance of the center are important for creating a “welcoming” customer experience. While concerns about funding are understandable, identifying low-cost improvements such as lighting, paint and other inexpensive enhancements is important for the clients and the employees.
3. Site Summaries

During training, shoppers were not necessarily encouraged to compare among the sites, but to keep the purpose of their visit as the focus. This means asking whether, if the evaluator was truly looking for employment, he or she would feel supported and better equipped to find their desired employment after the visit.
Overview of Site Services

Shoppers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of referral services and information provided at workforce centers. The percent of shoppers rating centers as "excellent" or "good" is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Referral Services and Information Provided

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<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Referral Services</th>
<th>Information Provided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Great Bend</td>
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<td>Topeka</td>
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<td>Wichita</td>
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Shoppers rated the workforce centers’ processes for receiving services and their perceptions of how knowledgeable staff were in responding to their questions. Figure 1.2 shows the percentages of “excellent” and “good” ratings for these categories.

Figure 1.2: Knowledgeable Responses and Processes for Services
**Services**

At the Emporia workforce center, secret shoppers evaluated staff’s overall understanding of their problem or question, with 17% responding “excellent,” 33% responding “good,” 33% responding “fair,” and 17% responding “poor.” Some shoppers commented on the receptionist’s lack of customer service skills. In the words of one shopper, “The receptionist did not seem like she wanted to help much. She advised me that I already had an account and that I could sit at a computer and look for jobs.” Another shopper commented, “They listened to what my situation was and offered help.”

When asked to rate staff’s ability to help with their job search, 16% of shoppers reported that the help was “excellent,” 16% reported “good” and 66% reported “fair.” “The representative seemed knowledgeable about the different services they offered,” noted one shopper. Another commented, “I felt like I was being brushed off and she just directed me to a computer to search for a job. I don’t know if she was on her lunch break or just not supposed to be the receptionist lady, but I just felt unwelcome.”

Shoppers were asked about the help they were provided in creating a KansasWorks account. Thirty-four percent rated the assistance as “excellent,” 33% “good” and 33% “poor.” When asked to evaluate information provided about resources that would help with their job search, 33% responded “good,” 17% responded “fair” and 50% responded “poor.” One shopper noted, “No information about referral services was provided.”

**Atmosphere and Facility**

Shoppers rated their perceptions of the atmosphere at the Center, with 17% responding “excellent,” 33% responding “good,” 16% responding “fair” and 33% responding “poor.” One shopper noted, “Both staff were helpful.” When asked about the facility, a shopper commented, “The office was located in a very strange place, inside an old high school. There was very little signage telling you where to go. You had to wander around until you found it. This isn’t a place I want to return.” Another shopper observed, “The office was small.”

Figure 2.1: Perceptions of Overall Atmosphere

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<thead>
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<th>Overall Atmosphere</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>Good</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>17%</td>
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Great Bend

**Services**

Secret shoppers at the Great Bend Workforce Center rated staff’s overall understanding of their problem or question as “excellent” (57%), “good” (29%) or “poor” (14%). One shopper noted, “The representative was very nice and took me through all the steps on what the Workforce Center does and how to make an account.” Another shopper noted, “I told him I was here to look for opportunities for job training and he said there weren’t any in Great Bend. He also told me that skilled labor jobs don’t pay as much as you might think.”

When asked to rate staff’s ability to help with their job search, 72% of shoppers reported “excellent,” 14% reported “good” and 14% reported “poor.” “The representative was prepared to handle my request,” noted one shopper. Another commented that the help was “customer-centered.” Another shopper noted, “I was given little to no information and was only told to create a KansasWorks account, and they said I could even do it at home.”

Shoppers were asked about the help provided to create a KansasWorks account. Seventy-two percent responded “excellent,” 14% responded “good” and 14% responded “poor.” When asked to evaluate information provided about resources that would help with their job search, 29% responded “excellent,” 43% responded “good,” 14% responded “fair” and 14% responded “poor.” A shopper noted, “I was given information about future workshops and local job fairs.”

**Atmosphere and Facility**

Shoppers rated their perceptions of the positive atmosphere at the Center, with 57% rating it “excellent,” 29% “good” and 14% “poor.” One shopper noted, “They were really helpful and explained that I needed to carry my ID with me. [...] They were not judgmental and really wanted to help me find what I was looking for.” Another shopper commented, “This was a terrible experience. I would have never thought a representative from KansasWorks would discourage me from going down my preferred career path and say it’s really not what you think it is. He was pessimistic, impatient and unpleasant.” When asked about the facility, shoppers commented, “The room was open and comfortable,” and another shopper noted, “The front door sign was small and hard to read.”

Figure 2.2: Perceptions of Overall Atmosphere
Services
Shoppers at the Independence Center rated the staff’s understanding of their problem as “excellent” (29%), “good” (57%) or “fair” (14%). One shopper wrote “[She] knew I was having trouble due to my language barrier and she never judged me because of it. She provided enough information to me to understand that there were services for me.” Another noted, “I was immediately helped by a receptionist who asked about my situation and gave me information.”

Seventy-two percent of shoppers rated staff as “excellent” or “good” in their demonstrated ability to help. Comments included, “She immediately walked up to me once I walked in and helped me on what I was searching for.” Another shopper noted, “I think she could have helped me, but she didn’t do much; just explained how to create an account on Kansasworks.com.” Another commented, “When I walked in […] not one of the four employees acknowledged me or said that someone would be right with me.” (This last comment is from a secret shopper who is African American. See related observation comments later in report.)

Shoppers were asked to evaluate the helpfulness of workforce staff in assisting with the creation of an account in KansasWorks. No “excellent” responses were noted, 43% rated assistance as “good,” 29% “fair” and 28% “poor.” Fifty-eight percent of shoppers gave “excellent” or “good” ratings on how encouraging staff were about their job search.

Referral services were rated as “excellent” by 29%, “good” 14%, “fair” 14% and “poor” 43%. Comments included, “Not much detail or information provided about KansasWorks services or assistance.” Another commenter said, “There were flyers posted in the room. The services looked helpful.” Shoppers rated information provided about tools and resources as “excellent” 14%, “good” 14%, “fair” 57% and “poor” 14%.

Atmosphere and Facility
Shoppers were asked to rate the atmosphere of the workforce center. No “excellent” ratings were given, while 43% rated it “good,” 43% “fair” and 14% “poor.” One shopper noted, “The employees seemed to be friends. […] They didn’t help people while I was there, just kind of whispered among themselves.” Another commenter said, “I did overhear staff complaining that they had to work a full day on the following Friday (there was a local festival going on that weekend) while other Federal employees were able to get off at noon. It’s not a good look for people in the field of helping people find work to complain about their current job.”

One shopper noted that an African-American shopper was treated differently: “The only bad experience I witnessed was how she was treated. I [observed] that it took her a while to receive any assistance, but once she left another group of Caucasian women came in and received assistance right away from another representative in the back.”

Facility environmental factors including seating, cleanliness and computer availability were rated “excellent” or “good” by the majority of shoppers. One shopper noted, “Great location, signage was good.”
**JUNCTION CITY**

**Services**

Shoppers at the Junction City Center rated the staff’s understanding of their problems as “excellent” (14%), “good” (29%), “fair” (29%) or “poor” (28%). One shopper wrote, “The front desk girl was nice but lacked information. She told me to fill out a piece of paper and pointed to a computer. Then she told me (from her desk) to make an account. I asked her where to go and what to click on, and she gave me instructions from her desk.” Another noted, “She took the time to understand my needs and gave me relevant information.”

Thirty-eight percent of shoppers rated staff “excellent” or “good” in their demonstrated ability to help, and 68% marked “fair” or “poor” ratings. One shopper commented, “The front desk receptionist did not explain the process very well and was not attentive to me or other job applicants.” The ESL shopper noted, “There were other representatives there who spoke Spanish on the phone, but they were too busy to help with any other customers.” A shopper observed, “I felt I was actually being helped once I finally got to talk to someone who had information about the process. I felt like up to that point, I was pulling teeth to get some information.”

Shoppers were asked to evaluate how helpful workforce staff was in assisting with the creation of an account in KansasWorks. No “excellent” responses were noted. Forty-three percent of shoppers rated assistance as “good,” 14% rated it “fair” and 57% rated it “poor.” One shopper observed, “There were a lot of people sitting around waiting. I had an individual sitting next to me who just sat with an open browser and spun around in his chair for thirty minutes. Not one staff person walked by and asked if he needed assistance.”

Forty-two percent of shoppers gave “excellent” or “good” ratings for how encouraging staff were about their job search, while 58% rated them “fair” or “poor.” Referral services were rated as “excellent” by 14%, “good” by 29% and “poor” by 57%. Comments included, “I was not offered any referral services other than a calendar showing upcoming trainings.”
Atmosphere and Facility

Shoppers were asked to rate the atmosphere of the workforce center. No “excellent” ratings were reported, while 14% of shoppers responded “good,” 43% responded “fair” and 43% responded “poor.” One shopper noted, “There were some personal conversations between staff members that were distracting, but it was overall pretty quiet in the room.” Another observed, “Once noon struck, half the staff just got up and walked out while people were waiting to be helped.” And another shopper said, “I did not have a great experience at this location. The lack of customer service set this experience up for failure.”

Shoppers were asked about the facility. Most shoppers rated seating, computers, cleanliness and parking as “excellent” or “good.” When asked how easy the office was to locate, 29% of shoppers responded “excellent,” 43% responded “good,” and 29% responded “fair.” A shopper observed, “The location was easy to find, and the building was a bit older but was kept clean and maintained. There were lots of open computers, but the internet was a bit slow.”

Services

Secret shoppers at the Kansas City Workforce Center rated staff’s overall understanding of their problem or question as “excellent” (42%), “good” (29%) or “fair” (29%). One shopper noted that a staff person “had quite a few questions off the top of her head and was very enthusiastic about it.” Another shopper commented, “The desk attendant was very nice, but it was clear there was no one available to sit down and talk with. I told her my situation, and she said I should fill out a KansasWorks account and come to the job fair they were having the following day.”

When asked to rate staff’s ability to help with their job search, 29% of shoppers reported “excellent,” 43% reported “good” and 28% reported “fair.” A shopper wrote of one staff member, “She was really busy with the internet being down [...] she seemed calm the whole time and never got frustrated with any of the customers.” Another shopper observed, “It seemed like the only option was to go to a computer, fill out a KansasWorks account and then job search. I didn’t get much information on job training.”
Shoppers were asked about the help provided to create a KansasWorks account. Fifty-seven percent responded “excellent” and 28% responded “good,” with one non-response (15%). When asked to evaluate information provided about resources that would help with their job search, 29% responded “excellent,” 14% responded “good,” 42% responded “fair” and 14% responded “poor.” The veteran shopper noted, “The representative seemed very knowledgeable with veterans’ resources and programs.” Another shopper commented, “The staff was so attentive and willing to go the extra mile.”

**Atmosphere and Facility**

Shoppers rated their perceptions of the atmosphere at the center, with 28% responding “excellent,” 57% responding “good” and 14% responding “fair.” One shopper noted, “Everyone was nice, but towards the end of my visit, I felt like I had to keep asking questions when other [workforce centers] would just tell me about their services.” Another observed, “The receptionist did a good job of getting people in a timely manner. It seemed understaffed.” This was echoed by another shopper who said, “They were very helpful and just busy overall. They never had a bad attitude towards any customer and just did the best they could.”

The facility was evaluated on seating, cleanliness, computers, parking and ease of finding the location. Eight-five percent of shoppers rated seating availability, cleanliness and availability of computers as “excellent” or “good.” Fifty-seven percent of shoppers responded “excellent” or “good” when asked about ease of locating the workforce center. Several shoppers noted the limited availability of parking in close proximity to the center. One shopper concluded, “The receptionist was very helpful, but the environment itself was kind of drab.”

Figure 2.5: Perceptions of Overall Atmosphere
Services
Forty-two percent of shoppers rated the staff’s understanding of their problem as “excellent,” 29% “good” and 20% “fair.” One shopper noted, “She was very helpful and knew exactly how to help me and who to direct me to.” A few shoppers noted there were no questions asked about what they were looking for in employment. In the words of one shopper, “ Didn’t really ask me any questions. Just said I should get registered.”

Staff’s ability to assist in the job search was rated by 57% of shoppers as “excellent,” while 29% responded “good” and 14% “fair.” The veteran shopper noted, “The representative was very helpful. She gave me a card for a person who was a veteran specialist and encouraged me to make an appointment with him.” Another shopper noted, “She gave me a tour of the whole office and showed me what types of supplies and resources they could provide.” The skilled labor shopper noted, “He told me about a weekly meeting they hold in their own offices that deals with skilled labor training. He was happy to sign me up and gave me a flyer with more information.”

Shoppers were asked how helpful staff were in assisting with the creation of an account in KansasWorks. Seventy-one percent responded “excellent,” 14% responded “good” and 14% responded “poor.” When asked about referral services provided, 29% of shoppers rated services “excellent,” 43% responded “good,” and 29% responded “poor.” The veteran shopper noted, “This location compiled a large amount of veteran services including all the job listings from USA jobs and other sources.” Another shopper noted, “She provided me with certain construction companies that were looking for employees and she also advised me about other potential jobs that were not in the construction field.”

Atmosphere and Facility
Seventy-two percent of shoppers rated the Overland Park atmosphere as “excellent,” 14% rated it “good” and 14% rated it “fair.” One shopper said, “Everyone there was super nice and I felt very at ease during my time at the Overland Park Workforce Center.” Another noted, “Helpful people, available resources, pleasant work environment.”

The facility was rated “excellent” or “good” for seating, cleanliness, computers and ease of finding the location. It was rated 100% “excellent” for adequate parking.
Figure 2.6: Perceptions of Overall Atmosphere

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
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**Salina**

**Services**
Over 85% of shoppers reported that the representative’s overall understanding of their problem was “excellent.” Shoppers commented, “She was very attentive and helpful,” and “She was very friendly and nice!” The ESL shopper noted, “Even though she did not know much Spanish, she slowly tried to explain to me about the other jobs until I understood it.” All shoppers rated the staff’s ability to help with their job search as “excellent.” One shopper noted, “She had an answer to all my questions and was very delightful to work with.” Another shopper said, “She was very informative, and later that afternoon she called and left me a voicemail explaining that she was apologizing for not talking with me about mock interviews after I created my account and left.”

Shoppers were asked to assess staff’s helpfulness with setting up the KansasWorks account. Eighty-six percent of shoppers rated their assistance as “excellent.” All shoppers said the staff was “excellent” or “good” at providing encouragement about their job search. Forty-three percent of shoppers rated referral services as “excellent,” and 57% rated them as “good.” One shopper noted, “She was the first representative, in sites visited, to show me the job search portion of the system.” Another shopper commented, “She did not mention the ‘hot jobs’ list or have a calendar available.” Salina staff were rated as knowledgeable in responses to shopper questions, with 86% responding “excellent” and 14% responding “good.”

**Atmosphere and Environment**
Seventy-one percent of the shoppers rated the Center as having an “excellent” atmosphere and 29% rated it as “good.” One shopper commented, “She was wonderful to work with!” and another said, “The woman I worked with was thorough and professional.” In evaluating the facility, shoppers gave “excellent” or “good” ratings for the seating, cleanliness, computers, ease of access and parking.
Services
Secret shoppers at the Topeka Workforce Center rated staff’s overall understanding of their problem or question as “excellent” 57%, “good” 43%, or “fair” 14%. One shopper noted, “My counselor was very personable and was genuinely interested to assist me with my job search.” The ESL shopper noted, “She understood I struggled with English, and she would repeat herself if she knew I was having a hard time understanding her.”

When asked to rate staff’s ability to help with their job search, 57% of shoppers reported “excellent” and 43% reported “good.” One shopper wrote, “She had an answer to every question and was very informative about what I needed to know, what services were available to me and asked if I had any additional questions. She gave me a calendar and asked if she could highlight specific dates for me.”

Shoppers were asked about the help provided to create a KansasWorks account. Fifty-seven percent responded “excellent” and 43% responded “good.” When asked to evaluate information provided about resources that would help with their job search, 57% responded “excellent,” 28% responded “good” and 14% responded “fair.”

Atmosphere and Facility
Shoppers rated their perceptions of the atmosphere at the center, with 71% reporting “excellent” and 29% reporting “good.” One shopper noted, “I had a good vibe leaving the workforce center in Topeka.” Another shopper observed, “The entry questionnaire that I was given in the beginning was used again towards the end to kind of gauge how well I was serviced. She took the time to ask if I received everything I needed. I was really impressed by how thorough this center was.”

The facility received “excellent” or “good” ratings on seating, cleanliness, computers, parking and ease of finding the location. One shopper commented, “Overall the place was really well maintained and was very easy to find.” Another noted, “Location was great, but it was hard to determine where to enter the building and if it was the right office or not. Signage would help.”
**Wichita**

**Services**
Eighty-six percent of shoppers rated the staff’s overall understanding of their problem as “excellent” and 14% rated it as “good.” One shopper noted, “She was very receptive to my situation and very informative about how to proceed with my job search.” Another shopper commented, “Although there was a long wait time, once I was in front of someone they took the time to fully understand my needs.” The ESL shopper stated, “She understood that my English was not that great and sat down with me and explained what types of services they can provide.”

Shoppers were asked about the representative’s ability to help with their search. “Excellent” ratings were reported by 86% of shoppers. One shopper said, “He asked questions about what I was looking for and offered to take me to another representative to look over my resume.” The veteran shopper commented, “Once she knew I was a veteran she was able to answer most questions herself.”

When asked about assistance in setting up an account with KansasWorks, 86% of shoppers reported “excellent” assistance. Eighty-six percent of shoppers also reported that staff were encouraging about the potential to find work. Information about referral services was rated “excellent” by 86% of shoppers. One shopper commented, “I liked the outline for the job search workshop that included classes to help attendees improve their interviewing techniques and format better resumes.”

**Atmosphere and Facility**
All of the shoppers rated the atmosphere at the Wichita Center as “excellent.” One shopper commented, “Very professional and state-of-the-art.” Another shopper observed, “Others appeared to be getting helpful instruction,” while another said, “I felt important there, rather than waiting in line in a drab office setting like many other workforce centers.” One suggestion included, “It was busy while I was there. There could be more efficient ways to conduct introductory interviews.”
When asked about the conditions of the facility, several shoppers noted the “nice lobby” and “nice furnishings.” One shopper said, “The computer took quite a while to boot up and login. Everything else was great. Better than the other locations I visited.”

Figure 2.9: Perceptions of Overall Atmosphere
4. Shopper Comparisons

Secret shoppers assumed roles for the comparison shopping at the nine workforce locations. Shoppers included: (1) a veteran; (2) a woman minority (African-American); (3) a person for whom English is a second language (ESL); (4) an underemployed worker; (5) a person with a disability; (6) a senior citizen; (7) a recent highschool graduate.

Table 1.1: Percentage of “Excellent” Ratings for All Workforce Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ESL</th>
<th>Minority Woman</th>
<th>Veteran</th>
<th>Under-Employed</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Recent Highschool Graduate</th>
<th>Senior Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Help</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey responses marked “excellent” were compared across four variables, including shoppers’ perceptions of workforce staff’s courtesy, attentive listening, ability to help in their job search and encouragement. These ratings represent perceptions of each shopper’s experience at all the workforce centers. It is reasonable to assume that their profile roles may account, in part, for differences in ratings. However, other confounding factors, such as speaking with different workforce employees, may also explain rating differences.
Courtesy was the variable that consistently received the highest ratings from all the shoppers, with “excellent” ratings ranging from 56% to 89%. Interestingly, the ESL shopper rated workforce centers highest on all four of the variables, with “excellent” ratings from 57% to 78%.

The minority woman shopper and senior citizen shopper had consistently lower “excellent” ratings on all variables when compared to other shoppers’ ratings. One “secret shopper” noted that the African-American shopper was treated differently at the Independence center. He said, “The only bad experience I witnessed was how she was treated. I observed that it took her awhile to receive any assistance, but once she left another group of Caucasian women came in and received assistance right away from another representative in the back.”

The minority woman, veteran, person with a disability, recent high school graduate and senior citizen all rated the workforce center representatives’ listening at 50% or lower. The level of encouragement provided by the workforce centers was rated at or below 50% by the minority woman, the underemployed shopper, person with a disability and the senior citizen. Shoppers’ perceptions of the centers’ ability to help was rated at or below 50% by the minority woman, the veteran, the underemployed shopper and the senior citizen.

The data supports the conclusion that there is a strong correlation between shoppers’ perceptions of each site’s listening and encouragement and the site’s ability to “help” the shopper secure employment.
5. Conclusions

The Workforce Services Division should take pride in the numerous positive findings from the “secret shopper” evaluation project. Not only did the study find many sites using “best practices,” several outstanding individuals were also identified that provide excellent customer service in regular basis. That foundation of excellent staff committed to public service is critical for success of any organization. The overall findings and results by site should be used to continue to improve customer service and to support the overall mission of enhancing employment opportunities in our state. The “secret shopper” project is only one part of an evaluation program, and other assessments will be conducted to develop a more complete picture of the activities at the Workforce Centers.