

**Supporting Statement for
Department of Veterans Affairs
Voluntary Customer Surveys to Implement
Executive Order 12862
(2900-0569)**

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Authority

In response to Executive Order 12862 and P.L. 103-62, the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) with partner organizations within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), will continue to conduct a series of qualitative and quantitative information collections to determine the kind of services our direct and indirect customers want, as well as customer levels of satisfaction with existing services. The surveys will solicit voluntary opinions and are not intended to collect information required to obtain or maintain eligibility for a VA program or benefit. VA requests an extension to its generic approval to continue information collections over the next 3 years, FY 2007 through FY 2009.

2. Purpose

VBA conducts a variety of activities (see attachment) to implement the Executive Order. If these activities were not conducted, VA would be unable to comply with the Executive Order, and would not have the information needed to establish performance standards for the best possible customer-focused service under GPRA. VBA will use the information to determine where and to what extent services are satisfactory, and where and to what extent they may be improved. The information collection may lead to policy changes to enhance or re-engineer VA's overall operations. VBA will submit each information collection to OMB as it is developed.

VBA recognizes the need to continue to identify aspects of the service that are most important to customers. In addition, voluntary customer surveys will not be used as substitutes for traditional program evaluation surveys that measure objectives and outcomes. In order to maximize the voluntary response rates, the information collections will be designed to make participation convenient, simple, and free of unnecessary barriers.

3. Extent Automated

Information technology will be used wherever possible to reduce the information collection burden these activities place on the public. In fact, Education Survey respondents have been given the choice of filling out the questionnaire on the Internet or paper. It is thought that this population of mostly younger individuals who are receiving education benefits under the title 38, U.S.C. programs would be more receptive to an Internet option. We will look for ways to automate the other surveys we oversee.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

VBA will use its internal review process to examine each information collection to prevent duplication of efforts or redundancy in information collected. No other information currently being collected in VBA can be used to meet the requirements of the Executive Order. The information to be gathered from the surveys as a whole is unique and not available from any other sources.

5. Small Businesses

Small and large businesses and other indirect customers may be involved in these efforts. Their participation will be voluntary. Each activity will collect the minimum amount of information necessary to determine customer needs and evaluate VBA's performance.

6. Consequences if Collected Less Frequently

Most customer satisfaction surveys have been recurring on an annual basis so that the VBA can create ongoing measures of performance for the budget process and to determine how well the agency meets existing customer service standards. The burden consists only of that information which is essential to maintain the validity and accomplish the goals of the Executive Order and GPRA. VBA will use a variety of activities including focus groups and surveys to gauge customer perceptions of VBA services as well as customer expectations and desires. The results of these information collections should lead to improvements in the quality of VBA service delivery by helping to shape the direction and focus of specific programs and services.

7. Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances that require the collection of information to be conducted in a manner that is inconsistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6.

8. Federal Register Notices and Consultations

- a. The agency notice was published in the *Federal Register* on November 1, 2006, (Volume 71, Number 211), pages 64225-64338. To date, there have not been any comments or complaints.
- b. Consultations with other Federal agencies that have conducted information collections similar to those proposed by VBA will be made as needed.

9. Provide Payment to Respondents

There are no plans to provide payments or gifts to respondents, except nominal incentives for some focus group efforts.

10. Assurance of Confidentiality

The identities of individuals and organizations contacted will be carefully protected. Names and personal identifiers will be used to locate survey participants and will thereafter be stripped from any files kept for analysis purposes.

11. Sensitive Questions

Sensitive questions will not be asked.

12. Respondent Burden Estimates (See attached Listing of Survey Activities)

Considering past experience, we project a respondent burden of 19,505 hours in the years 2007, 2008, and 2009 for both quantitative and qualitative survey activities.

13. Total Additional Cost Burden to Respondents or Recordkeepers

Public participation is voluntary and no cost is associated with these collections of information.

14. Annualized Cost to Federal Government

VBA cannot, at this time, estimate the cost of this effort to the Federal Government, however, internal administrative costs in developing, printing, and mailing survey instruments, and in data analyses and reporting results will be incurred.

Additionally, the Veterans Benefits Administration expected to expend \$1.1 million for contractor assistance to conduct surveys in 2007, \$1.12 million in 2008, and \$1.14 million in 2009.

15. Burden Changes From Existing Collection

We project a decrease in the number of burden hours in this request for generic approval from that requested in our previous submission in 2003. Three years ago, we projected 22,692 hours in 2004, 23,022 hours in 2005, and 23,022 hours in 2006 or a yearly average of 22,912. As mentioned above, we are now estimating 19,505 hours per year for 2007 through 2009 or an average of 19,505 hours per annum. This represents an annual decrease of 3,407 hours when comparing the two submissions.

16. Publication Plans

The results obtained from these information collections will continue to be disseminated to key policy and management officials, VBA employees, the Congress, and the public. Additionally, survey reports, instruments and mailing materials are posted to a VBA Internet site, <http://www.vba.va.gov/surveys/>, for the general public and especially for survey respondents so that may see the results of the surveys in which they participated.

17. Display Expiration Date

Survey instruments do not display an expiration date because they are frequently changed from year to year. Thus, one year's stock is not used in the next administration. For this reason, VBA continues to seek an exemption that waives the displaying of the expiration date.

18. Exception to the Certification

There are no exceptions to the “Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submission.”

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

All surveys will use statistical methods and will follow OMB guidelines. VBA will also continue to follow the guidance in the OMB Manual “Resource Manual for Customer Surveys.” Technical survey expertise and statistical service will be VBA’s Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity, and as well as contractor statisticians and analysts.

Listing of Survey Activities

The following list of activities is a compendium of VBA's customer satisfaction survey plan. The actual conduct of any particular activity listed could be affected by circumstances. A change in, or refinement of, our focus in a specific area, as well as resource constraints could require deletion or substitution of any listed item. If VBA substitutes or proposes to add a new activity, that falls under the umbrella of this generic approval, including those activities that are currently in a planning stage, OMB will be notified and will be furnished a copy of pertinent materials, a description of the activity, and the number of burden hours involved. VBA will conduct periodic reviews of ongoing survey activities to ensure that they comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

National Survey Activities (Estimated respondents and response time)		FY 2007 Burden	FY 2008 Burden	FY 2009 Burden
Survey of Veterans' Satisfaction with the VA Compensation & Pension (C&P) Claims Process (20 minutes) [24,000 respondents x .33 hour (20 minutes)]	VBA will continue to gauge customer satisfaction levels of those who experience the C&P claims adjudication process	8,000	8,000	8,000
Survey of Veterans'/Dependents' and Servicemembers' Satisfaction with the VA Education Claims Process (20 minutes) 2,968 respondents x .33 hour (20 minutes)]	VBA will conduct surveys to determine the customer satisfaction levels of veterans and their dependents or survivors who are receiving education benefits from VA.	989	989	989
Survey of Educational Institution Certifying Officials (20 minutes) [1,000 respondents x .33 hour (20 minutes)]	VBA is planning to develop a new survey of educational institutions where veterans attend. This survey would gauge the institutions' level of satisfaction with their dealings with VA offices.	333	333	333

National Survey Activities (Estimated respondents and response time)		FY 2007 Burden	FY 2008 Burden	FY 2009 Burden
Survey of Veterans' Satisfaction with the VA Home Loan Guaranty Process (10 minutes)	VBA will continue to conduct customer satisfaction surveys of those who have had their home loans guaranteed by VA.	1,260	1,260	1,260
[7,560 Respondents x .167 hour (10 minutes)]				
VA Loan Guaranty Lender Satisfaction Survey – (20 minutes)	VBA will continue to conduct a customer satisfaction survey of financial institutions that loan veterans money to purchase a home.	498	498	498
[1,992 respondents x .25 hour (15 minutes)]				
VA Survey of Veterans' Satisfaction with the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program	VBA will continue to collect customer satisfaction information of those involved in a program of rehabilitation.	1,100	1,100	1,100
[3,300 respondents x .33 (20 minutes)]				
Insurance Customer Surveys (6 minutes)	VBA will continue to conduct customer satisfaction surveys of veterans who have life insurance policies administered by VA.	280	280	280
[2,800 respondents x .10 hour (6 minutes)]				
Outreach Surveys (15 minutes)	VBA with partner VA organizations are planning surveys of veterans to gauge the satisfaction with and effectiveness of outreach efforts.	1,125	1,125	1,125
[4,500 respondents x .25 hour (15 minutes)]				
Undetermined Focus Groups (Targeted population groups are to be decided) (up to 2 hours)	VBA is planning to conduct focus groups consisting of specific population groups that have yet to be determined. There will be approximately 38 focus groups of 10 participants meeting for up to 2 hours per session.	760	760	760
[10 participants x 2 hours x 38 focus groups (380 respondents)]				

National Survey Activities (Estimated respondents and response time)		FY 2007 Burden	FY 2008 Burden	FY 2009 Burden
Telephone Survey (7 minutes)	VBA is planning telephone surveys of those who call VA offices for information and/or services.	747	747	747
<u>[6,400 respondents x .17 hour (7 minutes)]</u>				
VA Regional Office-Based Survey Activities				
Customer Satisfaction Focus Groups (up to 2 to 3 hours)	Many VA Regional Offices will conduct focus groups comprising veterans who inquire about and/or apply for different VA benefits. The groups will commonly consist of groups of 10 to 12 participants meeting for 2 to 3 hours at a time.	1,080	1,080	1,080
<u>[12 participants x 3 hours x 30 focus groups (360 respondents)]</u>				
VA Regional Office Specific Service Improvement Initiatives (Comment Card (5 minutes)	VBA has developed and is using a variety of comment cards that are given to customers to determine what effect service improvement initiatives are having on customer satisfaction.	3,333	3,333	3,333
<u>[40,000 respondents x .083 hour (5 minutes)]</u>				
Grand Total		19,505	19,505	19,505
Three-Year Total (Respondents)	285,780			
Average Per Year (Respondents)	95,260			
Three-Year Total (Hours)	58,515			
Average Per Year (Hours)	19,505			