

SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR THE MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY 2007

Part A. Justification

1. Circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is requesting approval to conduct employee surveys for a period of three years from the approval date. Title 5, United States Code specifies that a function of the MSPB is to “conduct, from time to time, special studies relating to the civil service and to other merit systems in the executive branch, and report to the President and to the Congress as to whether the public interest in a civil service free of prohibited personnel practices is being adequately protected.” Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations also describes the role of MSPB’s Office of Policy and Evaluation as responsible for carrying out “the Board’s statutory responsibility to conduct special reviews and studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch, as well as oversight reviews of the significant actions of the Office of Personnel Management.”

MSPB is charged with examining the health of the merit system. To fulfill this mandate, we need to collect information from the employees and supervisors who participate in the merit system. In addition, as a service to Federal agencies, we plan to offer the Merit Principles Survey (MPS) to all Federal agencies as a vehicle for fulfilling the annual employee survey requirement in section 1128 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004. The 45 questions required by the Office of Personnel Management, which were previously approved by OMB, will be included in the MPS as well as additional questions about the implementation of the merit system. The survey results for each participating agency will be delivered to them for posting on their web site and submission to OPM as required by regulation.

2. How, by whom, and for what purpose the information will be used.

MSPB will conduct the Merit Principles Survey to assess the soundness of the Federal merit system. The Merit Principles Survey (MPS) will ask employees, supervisors, and higher level leaders to share their perceptions of the implementation of the merit system in the workplace. The topics addressed will include the Merit System Principles, Prohibited Personnel Practices, job satisfaction, performance management, training and development, and leadership. The survey results and recommendations for improvement will be reported to the President, Congress, agency leaders, and the public. The reports will serve as a stimulus for discussion and positive change in the implementation of the merit system.

The survey will be distributed to approximately 100,000 full-time, permanent employees at all levels in September 2007. We expect to publish a formal report of the results in July 2008.

3. Use of information technology

The Merit Principles Survey will be a web-based survey. Participants will receive an e-mail invitation to participate that includes a link to the survey on the web. The survey will be completed and submitted on the web. We will provide paper-based surveys for the small percentage of participants (estimated to be less than 5%) who do not have convenient access to e-mail or the Internet.

4. Efforts to identify duplication

Agencies are required by law to annually ask employees the 45 questions developed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Thus, although these questions were asked of employees last year in the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey conducted by OPM, they must be asked again this year. The additional questions we plan to include in our proposed survey focus on specific Merit Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices or provide in-depth information on supervision and training to support upcoming studies on our research agenda. These additional questions do not duplicate any of the questions that were included in the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey.

We know of no data collection efforts that duplicate the information we seek to obtain through our Merit Principles Survey.

5. Impact on small businesses.

The information we plan to collect does not impact small businesses or other small entities.

6. Consequences of not collecting the information.

If the survey is not conducted, we will not be able to assess the effectiveness of the merit system from the employees' and supervisors' perspectives and report this information to the President, Congress, and the public. Evaluating the soundness of the merit system is a key component of our agency's mission.

7. Explanation of special circumstances.

There are no special circumstances that would cause information to be collected as described in this section.

8. External views of the proposed data collection.

A copy of the *Federal Register* notice soliciting comments on the proposed survey is attached. The notice was published on November 27 in Volume 71, Number 227, pages 68639 - 68640. No comments were received.

Over the past few months, several Federal agencies have expressed interest in participating in the 2007 Merit Principles Survey. Federal agencies are familiar with our mission of conducting studies of the merit system.

9. Remuneration to respondents.

No gifts, payments, or other forms of remuneration will be distributed to respondents.

10. Assurance of confidentiality.

Respondents are advised in the invitations they will receive to participate in the survey that their answers will be kept completely confidential. Information will only be reported in an aggregate form. Any written comments that are published will be edited to ensure anonymity. Responses to the survey are also entirely voluntary.

11. Justification for any questions of a sensitive nature.

Some questions ask respondents about their perceptions of fairness and discrimination in the work environment. Other questions query respondents about the performance of their supervisors. While some respondents may view these to be sensitive topics, to evaluate the soundness of the merit system, it is essential to obtain the perspectives of a diverse population of Federal employees and to be able to report back on their experiences and opinions.

Respondents will be informed before they begin the survey that they have the option to skip any questions that they elect not to answer.

12. Estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information

Number of respondents: 50,000

Frequency of response: once

Annual hour burden: .5 hours

Total reporting burden: 25,000 hours

The reporting burden was estimated based on our staff's past experience in conducting surveys of similar length.

The annualized costs to respondents cannot be calculated since the respondents represent a diverse group whose range of income is not known. We expect most respondents to complete the survey during the work day.

13. Total cost to respondents or record keepers.

There are no additional costs to respondents or record keepers beyond that shown in response to item 12 above.

14. Estimates of annualized costs to the Federal Government.

- a. Professional staff time for designing the Merit Principles Survey, overseeing administration, analyzing the survey results, and writing the report is estimated to require approximately 2500 hours. This estimate is based on our prior experience in conducting large scale surveys. Assuming an average cost of \$60 per staff hour, the estimated cost for staff time is \$150,000.
- b. Contract support for the online and paper distribution of the survey is estimated to cost \$125,000 based on bids previously received for this work.
- c. The cost for printing the report is estimated at \$7,000 based on the costs for printing previous similar reports.

Total estimated costs: \$282,000

15. Reasons for program changes.

There were no program changes.

16. Outline of plans for tabulation and publication.

The schedule for key milestones in this project is as follows:

- November 2006 – Submit 60-day Federal Register Notice soliciting public comments
- February 2007 – Plan survey content
- March 2007 – Submit request for OMB approval and 30-day Federal Register Notice
- September 2007 – Launch survey
- December 2007 – Deliver data to participating agencies
- July 2008 – Publish formal survey report

Data analysis will consist primarily of determining the percentages of employees who provided specific responses to each question and cross-tabulations so that the responses are viewed by sub-groups demarcated by such characteristics as years of experience, supervisory status, sex, age, race, etc.

The survey results will be published in a written report, distributed both in printed form and through the MSPB web site.

17. Approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection.

We are not seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection.

18. Exceptions to the certification statement.

There are no exceptions to the certification certificate.

Part B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

1. Description of the potential respondent universe and any sampling selection methods to be used.

The population to be studied in the Merit Principles Survey is comprised of the full-time, permanent, non-seasonal civilian workforce of 1.9 million employees in the executive branch agencies, excluding the Postal Service. To ensure representation across the diverse population of Federal employees, we will utilize random sampling from the Civilian Personnel Data File (CPDF) to select employees in each participating Federal agency (or agency component for large agencies) stratified by supervisory status. Our goal is to obtain in each agency or component at least 400 responses from supervisors and managers and 400 responses from employees. In small agencies with fewer than 400 employees and supervisors, we plan to include all employees and supervisors in our sample.

We expect a return rate of 50% to 60% and therefore we will draw a sample of approximately twice the number of returns expected for each strata (700-800 employees and 700-800 supervisors/managers) for each agency or component. We expect that about 65 agencies will participate in the survey. Therefore, the total number of persons included in the sample will be about 100,000 with an estimated 50,000 respondents.

2. Description of procedures for the collection of information.

A probability sample will be drawn in which each employee in the target population has a known, non-zero probability of selection so that results can be generalized from the survey respondents to the survey population. The sampling frame will be the lists of employees from each participating agency grouped into employees and supervisors. From each of these lists, 700 - 800 employees and 700 – 800 supervisors will be randomly selected.

3. Description of methods to maximize response rates.

To maximize return rates, we will provide participating agencies with posters, flyers, the content for e-mail messages, and other communication materials to distribute to their employees before the survey is distributed. These materials are intended to build the interest and enthusiasm among employees required for a high response rate. We will be working with a contact person in each agency whom we will coach to answer employees' preliminary questions.

We will individually invite the prospective respondents to participate in the survey with an email message or cover letter which will be signed by an MSPB official. This message will explain how the employees were selected and how the confidentiality of their responses will be maintained, while stressing the importance of the research and their participation to ensure representation of all perspectives. We will also request that the agency leader express support for completing the survey so employees will be assured they can complete the survey during work time.

We will follow up with weekly email messages as a reminder to non-respondents. These messages will contain everything needed to access the survey (i.e., user ID, password, and hypertext link to the secure survey site).

We plan to send both the initial invitation emails and reminders from an mspb.gov address to provide additional credibility to our survey and help Federal employees distinguish it from requests that they may receive from other sources or spam.

Respondents who encounter difficulties accessing or completing the survey will be able to contact a "help desk" for assistance. Respondents will also have the option of requesting a paper copy of the survey if they prefer.

We plan to examine the response rate for each of the stratified groups each week, and when needed, conduct additional follow up efforts to ensure greater participation.

Finally, in the design of the survey instrument, we are pretesting the questions to ensure that the total length is reasonable and that the questions are clear since extremely lengthy surveys and/or difficult questions may discourage respondents from completing the survey. We are also working to create a question format that is user-friendly and efficient.

4. Description of test procedures.

We will conduct a preliminary test of the survey content prior to administration by having a few members of our own staff complete the survey. After revising the survey as needed and placing it online, we will ask additional staff from the Office of Policy and Evaluation and other offices within MSPB to complete the survey online to help ensure a user-friendly navigation through the survey. We also plan to ask field testers in each agency to try out the survey link to test its functionality before we send e-mail invitations to our sample of participants.

5. Name and telephone number of individuals consulted.

Persons consulted on the statistical design:

John Crum, MSPB, (202) 653-6772, ext. 1344

Persons who will collect and/or analyze the information:

Anne Marrelli, MSPB, (202) 653-6772, ext. 1341

Cynthia Ferentinos, MSPB, (202) 653-6772, ext. 1334

John Ford, MSPB, (202) 653-6772, ext. 13