

SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR THE MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY

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 80,000 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. All 45 of the questions will be included in the Merit Principles Survey (MPS) for those agencies that are using the MPS as their required annual survey. Nineteen of the 45 questions will be included in the version of the survey that will be administered to employees in agencies who are conducting their own annual survey. These 19 questions will provide data we require for our research purposes. 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.

Copies of the *Federal Register* notices soliciting comments on the proposed survey are attached. The first notice was published on November 27, 2006 in Volume 71, Number 227, pages 68639 - 68640. No comments were received. A second notice in the *Federal Register* soliciting comments was published on March 13, 2007 in Volume 72, Number 48, page 11380. No comments were received.

Twenty-eight Federal agencies are participating in the 2007 Merit Principles Survey; 14 of these are using the MPS as their annual 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.

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

Number of respondents: 40,000

Frequency of response: once

Annual hour burden: Average of 20 minutes for employees, 30 minutes for supervisors

Total reporting burden: 19,000 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.