

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT A FOR
SOCIAL SECURITY STATEMENT SURVEY**

OMB No. 0960-NEW

A. Justification

1. The Social Security Administration (SSA) is required by *42 U.S.C. 1320b-13* to provide annual benefits and earnings statements to Social Security number-holders age 25 and over who earn wages (either by working for someone else or through self-employment).

In response to a recommendation in the General Accountability Office (GAO)'s report, *SOCIAL SECURITY STATEMENTS: Social Security Administration Should Better Evaluate Whether Workers Understand Their Statements* (GAO-05-192, April 2005), SSA has begun a systematic and regular evaluation of customer satisfaction with the Social Security Statement (called the *Statement* in this documentation).

GAO suggested that SSA should consider customizing messages and periodically gathering feedback on the *Statement*, possibly using surveys sent shortly after *Statement* receipt, to assess customer satisfaction with its usefulness and clarity. GAO also suggested that SSA systematically collect and review data from internal sources, such as customer call-in centers, walk-in traffic, and its website. Finally, GAO recommended an ongoing series of focus groups to evaluate the *Statement*.

To implement the GAO recommendations, SSA has developed a process for evaluating customer satisfaction with the *Social Security Statement* on a systematic and routine basis. As part of this process, SSA conducted focus groups on various prototypes of the *Statement* in 2006 (these were cleared as generic clearance surveys under OMB No. 0960-0526).

Developing the evaluation process even further, we are now planning to conduct a series of comprehensive surveys under the authority of *Section 1110* of the *Social Security Act* to monitor and improve customer satisfaction with the *Statement* messages in the 2007 *Statement*.

2. SSA plans to use the information it collects from this survey to evaluate customer satisfaction with the most recent version of the *Statement*. A description of the survey follows (see Supporting Statement B for methodology details):

The 2007 *Statement* contains new Windfall Elimination Provision/Government Pension Offset (WEP/GPO) language, as is mandated by law. There are two versions of the WEP/GPO language in the *Statement* to accommodate different groups of wage-earners: those who have an earnings history with both covered and non-covered earnings under Social Security, and those who have only earnings covered under Social Security. Each group will receive a *Statement* with WEP/GPO language specific to them and will be surveyed to determine their satisfaction.

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Part A
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Information obtained through this evaluation will help SSA improve the *Statement* as a communications product that meets SSA's goals and assures that the public is aware of, understands, and can act upon the information the *Statement* provides in a timely way.

The surveys will be conducted by telephone in the evenings and on weekends. They are designed to collect information about customer knowledge, awareness, and satisfaction with the various sections and features of the *Statement*. SSA has a blanket purchase agreement (BPA) with Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), a national marketing and research organization, to conduct surveys and other communications research activities. SRBI will obtain a sample from SSA's *Statement* mailing files and will conduct several telephone surveys in 2008 using a sample of *Statement* recipients, including those who have an earnings history with both covered and non-covered earnings under Social Security and those who have only earnings covered under Social Security.

Specific **research issues** explored through the surveys include the following categories:

Customer satisfaction with the *Statement* and various elements and features of the *Statement*:

- *Satisfaction with SSA Communication of benefits (q1)*
- *Satisfaction with their understanding of the Message from Commissioner (q5b)*
- *Satisfaction with their understanding of the information about the amount of their benefits in the *Statement* (q6a)*
- *Satisfaction with their understanding of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)(q8b)*
- *Satisfaction with their understanding of Government Pension Offset (GPO) (q9b, 9e)*
- *Satisfaction with the insert "Thinking about Retirement"*
- *Satisfaction with specific features of the SSA *Statement* (q12a-j)*
- *Overall satisfaction with the *Statement* (q12k)*
- *Satisfaction with the accuracy of the *Statement* (q7a,b,d)*

Reasons for dissatisfaction with the *Statement*, its elements and features:

- *Why they haven't used information to plan retirement (q3)*
- *Why not satisfied with understanding of information (q5c, 6b,8c)*
- *Why not satisfied with the explanation of WEP (q8f)*
- *Why not satisfied with the explanation of Government Pension Offset (q9c,9f)*
- *Why not satisfied with Thinking about Retirement*
- *Additional information that would be useful to include in the *Statement* (q13a/b)*
- *Method of delivery preferred for the *Statement* (q14a)*
- *Frequency preferred for delivery of the *Statement* (q14c)*

Factors that may influence customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the *Statement*:

- How customers get information on their SSA benefits (q2)
- Awareness of the *Statement* (q1a)
- Recall of the recent receipt of the *Statement* (q1a)
- Ability to recall specific information contained in the *Statement* (1c)
- Ability to recall general information contained in the *Statement* (q4)
- How thoroughly the *Statement* is read (q5a)
- Retirement benefit more or less than expected (6c)
- Information was correct in the *Statement* (7a,7b, 7d)
- Recall of the Windfall Elimination Provision (8a)
- Believe that their benefits will be reduced by WEP (8d)
- Recall the Government Pension Offset section (q9a)
- Believe benefits will be reduced by the Pension Offset (q9d)
- Read insert “Thinking about Retiring” (q11b)
- Awareness and use of the Social Security website (q15a)
- Preferred method of receiving information from SSA (q14a)

Outcomes affected by satisfaction/dissatisfaction:

- Whether receipt of the *Statement* prompted other actions related to financial planning (q2a-f)
- Used information to help plan retirement (q2a/b)
- Actions taken to correct inaccurate *Statement* information (7c, 7e)
- Ordered publications from back of *Statement* (q10a/b)
- Visited SSA website as a result of *Statement* (q15a/b)
- Aware could file on line as a result of *Statement* (q15c/d)
- Likelihood of filing on-line for SSA benefits in future (q15d/e)

Customer segments among which satisfaction with the *Statement* may vary:

- Demographics (age, race, gender, annual household income, etc.).
 - As with any survey, demographic information is extremely important for SSA to be able to measure satisfaction levels among population segments. This helps us improve both our marketing of the *Statement* but also addresses whether more customized *Statements* as recommended by GAO and others will be needed.

SSA will share the results of these surveys with GAO, who made the initial recommendation to conduct them. The survey results will not be shared with any other agency or outside party.

3. These surveys will be conducted via telephone, so they cannot be conducted electronically under the aegis of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act. However, Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing software will be used to record responses, which will enable a faster interview for participations.
4. The nature of the information being collected and the manner in which it is collected preclude duplication. There is no other collection instrument used by SSA that collects data similar to that

collected here.

5. This collection does not impact small businesses or other small entities.
6. If these surveys were not conducted, we would have no means of assessing customer satisfaction with the latest version of the *Statement* and collecting related information that will help us assess the *Statement*. This would deprive us of valuable information we can use to improve this widely used document. Since respondents will only be surveyed once, the information cannot be collected less frequently.

There are no technical or legal obstacles that prevent burden reduction.

7. There are no special circumstances that would cause this information collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with 5 CFR 1320.5.
8. The advance 60-day Federal Register Notice published on November 5, 2007 at 72 FR 62510, and no public comments were received. The 30-day Federal Register Notice published on January 17, 2008, at 73 FR 3307. We will forward any public comments we may receive in response to the 30-day Notice to OMB.

Except for the initial recommendation in the GAO report, there have been no outside consultations with members of the public.

9. SSA provides no payment or gifts to the respondents.
10. The information requested is protected and held confidential in accordance with 42 U.S.C. 1306, 20 CFR 401 and 402, 5 U.S.C. 552 (Freedom of Information Act), 5 U.S.C. 552a (Privacy Act of 1974), and OMB Circular No. A-130.
11. The information collection does not contain any questions of a sensitive nature.
12. We estimate that approximately 1,200 respondents in total will take 10 minutes to complete the telephone survey, for a total of 200 hours. The total burden is reflected as burden hours, and no separate cost burden has been calculated.
13. There is no known cost burden to the respondents.
14. The annual cost to the Federal Government for conducting these surveys is approximately \$50,000. This estimate is a projection of the contractor costs for conducting the surveys, and SSA staff costs for analyzing the results.
15. This is a new information collection that will increase the public reporting burden by 200 hours.
16. The results of the information collection will not be published.

17. SSA is not seeking an exemption from providing the OMB expiration date to the respondent as part of the survey.
18. SSA is not requesting an exception to the certification requirements at 5 CFR 1320.9 and related provisions at 5 CFR 1320.8(b)(3).