U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of Policy Analysis

Guidelines for Accessing the Department of the Interior's Generic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys

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Contents

Purpose

These guidelines are intended to help Department of the Interior (DOI) offices and bureaus successfully use the Department's Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys (also known as the Generic Clearance package) to collect customer satisfaction data. It describes the process, its requirements, and contains copies of necessary approval forms as attachments.

Why Do We Need to Collect Customer Data?

Interior offices and bureaus must collect customer satisfaction data to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 (P.L. 103-62) and Executive Order (E.O.) 12862. Additionally, in order to help realize the President's Management Agenda priorities of creating a citizen-centered government, the Department of the Interior must measure customer satisfaction levels associated with its services, products, and information through periodic surveys, face-to-face meetings, and frequent communication with our customers. Data obtained from these customer interactions can be used to identify opportunities for improvement. Comment cards, questionnaires, and other survey methods are viable tools for collecting valuable customer information that can assist DOI's bureaus and offices in complying with the Administration's guidance.

What's Special About the Generic Clearance?

The Generic Clearance enables DOI offices and bureaus to collect customer information using a streamlined process for approving the research instruments used in the data collection. The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995 requires Federal agencies to obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before they can collect information from the general public. The PRA defines "collection of information" quite broadly. It covers any identical questions posed to 10 or more members of the public, whether voluntary or mandatory, written, electronic, or oral. The term "public" does apply to State, local and tribal governments. It does not apply to Federal agencies as long as representatives of Federal agencies are being surveyed as such and not as private citizens.

The standard Paperwork Reduction Act compliance process used by agencies to obtain approval from OMB to collect customer information typically takes more than 120 days. The Generic Clearance, once approved, significantly reduces the time needed to obtain OMB approval for use of instruments covered by the Generic Clearance.   Approvals can be obtained in as few as 45 days.

What is a Generic Clearance?

A generic clearance is a master plan for conducting one or more customer surveys. It is prepared using the standard Paperwork Reduction Act compliance process, which requires at least 120 days from preparation of the initial draft to final approval by the OMB.   Once the generic clearance has been approved, bureaus and offices can request a quick review of actual details of surveys to be conducted within the context of the master plan within a significantly reduced timeframe.

The DOI Generic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys was first approved by OMB in January 2002. Bureaus and offices interested in collecting customer satisfaction data may receive expedited processing of specific survey instruments, as long as the instruments are consistent with the pre-approved "master plan" and provide the required information.

DOI's Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys

The DOI has received approval from OMB to extend its programmatic (or generic) clearance, OMB #1040-0001, so that Interior bureaus and offices can conduct customer research using the following tools:

In-person intercept surveys: In a face-to-face situation, the survey instrument is provided to a respondent who completes it while on site and then returns it. This may include oral administration or the use of electronic technology and kiosks. The survey proctor is prepared to answer any questions the respondent may have about how to fill out the instrument but does not interfere or influence how the respondents answer the questions.

Telephone interviews or questionnaires: Using existing databases, an interviewer will contact customers who have had a specific experience with the agency. The interviewer will dial back until the customer has been reached. Once contacted, the survey respondent is given a brief introduction to the survey, including its importance and use. The interviewer will then expeditiously move through the survey questions.

Mail and e-mail surveys: Using existing lists of customer addresses, a three contact-approach based on Dillman's "Tailored Design Method" will be employed. The first contact is a cover letter explaining that a survey is coming to them and why it is important to the agency. The second contact will be the survey instrument itself along with a postage-paid addressed envelope to return the survey. The third contact will be a reminder postcard sent 10 days after the survey was sent. Finally, the respondents will receive a letter thanking them for the willingness to participate in the survey and reminding them to return it if they have not already done so. At each juncture, the respondents will be given multiple ways to contact someone with questions regarding the survey (including phone, FAX, web, and email). If the survey has been lost, the respondent can request that another be sent to them. Electronic mail is sometimes used instead of postal mail to communicate with customers. Although this is a cost-effective mode to survey a large group of people, it does not usually generate the best response rate. Telephone calls to non-respondents can be used to increase response rates.

Web-based: For products or services that are provided through electronic means, whether e-commerce or web-based information, a web or email survey may be most appropriate. During the course of their web interaction, users can volunteer to add their name to a list of future surveys. From this list, a respondent pool will be selected in accordance with the sampling procedures outlined above. An email will be sent to them explaining the need and importance of the survey with a web link to the survey. Within 5 days, a follow-up email will be sent to the respondents reminding them to complete the survey. Finally, the respondents will receive an email thanking them for the willingness to participate in the survey and reminding them to complete it if they have not already. The respondent will always have the option to submit the survey in paper form, should they elect to do so.

Focus groups: Some data and information are best collected through more subjective, conversational means. A focus group is an informal, small-group discussion designed to obtain in-depth qualitative information. Individuals are specifically invited to participate in the discussion, whether in person or through technologically enhanced means (e.g., video conferencing, on-line sessions). Participants are encouraged to talk with each other about their experiences, preferences, needs, observations, or perceptions. A moderator whose role is to foster interaction leads the conversation. The moderator makes sure that all participants are encouraged to contribute and that no individual dominates the conversation. Furthermore, the moderator manages the discussion to make sure it does not stray too far

from the topic of interest. Focus groups are most useful in an exploratory stage or when the bureau/office wants to develop a deeper understanding of a program or service.

Using the best in focus group research practices, groups will be constructed to include a cross-section of a given customer group. The questions and additional probes used during the focus groups will be consistent with the "guideline menu."

Comment Cards: Comment cards, when provided to a customer at the time a product or service is provided, offer an excellent means to give the bureaus and offices feedback. A comment card should have a limited number of questions and an opportunity to comment. These comment cards provide managers and service providers with direct and specific information from their customers that could not be obtained through any other means.

Electronic users may be offered the opportunity to complete a comment card via a "pop-up" window (or other web-enabled means that may be available). The "pop-up" window will not appear for every user; rather, the users will be selected randomly to receive the survey. This practice is widely used in private industry. In other instances, the electronic user may be offered the option to self-select in answering the electronic comment card.

Whether using paper or electronic comment cards, the intent is to provide a feedback mechanism. The data are not intended to be statistically significant. Although questions may include numeric scales, those data should be considered only in an anecdotal fashion and not reported as a significant measure.

OMB Guidance on Survey Design

All surveys must be designed and implemented in accordance with OMB "Guidance on Agency Survey and Statistical Information Collections (January 20, 2006)." The OMB guidance document, entitled "Questions And Answers When Designing Surveys For Information Collections," can be obtained from the OMB web site at the following link:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/statpolicy.html

Types of Questions Covered by the Generic Clearance

The DOI Generic Clearance was approved for customer satisfaction surveys. Therefore, survey instruments that will be approved under the authority of the generic clearance **must focus on customer satisfaction data**. It is important to note that **NO INFORMATION COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS SEEKING TO COLLECT INFORMATION BEYOND THE SCOPE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION DATA WILL BE CONSIDERED UNDER THE SCOPE OF THIS PROGRAMMATIC CLEARANCE. This includes information collections designed to obtain social science or visitor use information.**

To be considered under the scope of this Programmatic Clearance, information collection instruments are restricted to the following topic areas. Although no one survey will cover all the topic areas, these should be viewed as a "guideline menu" from which bureaus and offices will develop their survey questions.

1. **Delivery, quality and value of products, information, and services :**
    The range of questions envisioned for this topic area will focus on customer satisfaction with aspects

of information, products, and related services offered by DOI.   Information, products, and services include written reports, press releases, computer modules, workshops and seminars, or technical assistance. Respondents may be asked for feedback regarding the following attributes of the information, service, and products provided:

Timeliness (Was the information, service, product provided to you in a timely manner?) (Was the information itself timely?)
Consistency (Was the quality of the service consistent with your expectations?)
Accuracy (Were the data provided accurate?)
Ease of Use and Usefulness (Was the product easy to use? Was the information useful to you?)
Ease of Information Access (Were you able to find the information you needed easily?)
Helpfulness (Was the information helpful?)
Quality (Was the information of high quality?)
Value for fee paid for information/product/service (Was the cost of the product, information or service appropriate for the value?)

2.   Management practices:
This area covers questions relating to how well customers are satisfied with Interior management practices and processes, what improvements they might make to specific processes, and whether or not they feel specific issues were addressed and reconciled in a timely, courteous, responsive manner. Questions within this area may involve feedback regarding how well Interior engaged customers on a specific topic.   They may also seek opinions from customers regarding how well Interior programs are managing and administering specific processes (for example, the Bureau of Land Management may ask customers how well it is administering its permitting processes.)

3. Mission management:
Questions will ask customers and partners to provide satisfaction data related to Interior's ability to protect, conserve, provide access to, provide scientific data about, and preserve natural, cultural, and recreational resources that we manage, and how well we are carrying out our trust responsibilities to American Indians, Native Alaskans, and Insular Areas. Questions will specifically ask customers and partners to provide satisfaction data related to each of its four mission areas as described in its GPRA Strategic Plan: Resource Use, Resource Protection, Serving Communities, and Recreation.

4. Rules, regulations, policies:
This area focuses on obtaining feedback from customers regarding fairness, adequacy, and consistency in enforcing rules, regulations, and policies for which Interior is responsible. It will also help us understand public awareness of rules and regulations and whether or not they are articulated in a clear and understandable manner. It will not seek opinions from customers regarding the appropriateness of regulatory rulings themselves.

5. Interactions with DOI Personnel and Contractors:
Questions developed under this topic area will focus on obtaining customer feedback regarding attributes of interactions with Interior office and bureau employees, as well as Interior contractors. Attribute questions will range from timeliness and quality of interactions to skill level of staff providing the assistance, as well as their courtesy and responsiveness during the interaction.

6. General demographics:

Some general demographics may be gathered to augment satisfaction questions in order to better understand the customer so that we can improve how we serve that customer. Demographics data will range from asking customers how many times they have used an Interior service or visited an Interior facility within a specific timeframe, to their ethnic group and race. Sensitivity and prudence will be used in developing and deploying questions under this topic area so that the customer does not perceive an intrusion upon his/her privacy. Additionally, these questions will only be asked as long as the data are critical to understanding customer satisfaction and the character of the customer base. Demographics may also be used as part of a non-response bias strategy to ensure responses are representative of the contact universe.

How to Use the Clearance

To use the Clearance authority, bureaus and offices must ensure that the survey instrument is consistent with the intent of the generic clearance; i.e., that the instruments focus on obtaining customer satisfaction data. Bureaus and offices must prepare an approval package and submit an electronic copy of that package in Word format to a qualified statistician for preliminary review and approval. Some .pdf files of survey instruments may be accepted. Each package must have the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of the statistician who reviewed and approved the package, along with the dates of his/her review and approval. Next the reviewed package must be approved by the bureau or office Information Collection Clearance Officer. Each package must have the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of the Information Collection Clearance Officer who reviewed and approved the package, along with the dates of his/her review and approval. The reviewed and approved package may then be submitted to the Office of Policy Analysis.

Each package must include the following:

A copy of the entire survey instrument;
A completed Supporting Statement (see attachments 1 and 2);
A Certification Form containing contact information of reviewers and dates of respective reviews and approvals (see attachment 4);
Other supporting materials, including cover letters, introductory scripts (primarily for focus groups) and follow-up letters (aimed at encouraging response).

Important: One electronic copy of the entire package, containing each of the above components, must be provided to the Office of Policy Analysis, along with certification that the required reviews and approvals have been obtained, before we can process the request. Deviation from these guidelines will result in the package being returned to the requesting office/bureau for completion of missing components.

I. Timelines for Requesting Approvals
The request for approval under the Generic Clearance and submission of a complete and accurate approval package should be made to DOI at least 45 calendar days prior to the first day the bureau/office plans to administer the survey instrument to the public.

The Office of Policy Analysis will provide an administrative and technical review of the submitted materials and notify the requesting bureau/office of the results. The Office of Policy Analysis will work with the bureau/office to make any necessary revisions before submitting the package to OMB for approval. Once OMB approves the instrument, the bureau/office will be notified. No survey

instruments may be administered until OMB approval is received.

II. Request and Approval Process Steps
The steps in the Generic Clearance approval process include the following:

Step 1:
The requesting bureau/office completes the Supporting Statement (attachment 2) and the Certification Form (attachment 4). Instructions are provided for each item on the form (attachment 1).

Step 2
The bureau/office submits a copy of the entire approval package to a qualified statistician for review and approval of the instrument and survey methodology. The package must include:

(a) the completed Supporting Statement (attachment 2);

(b) completed Certification Form (attachment 4);
(c) any introductory script used in contacting the public;
(d) all cover letters, postcard reminders or follow-up letters to be sent to potential respondents;
(e) the entire survey instrument;
(f) necessary Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) compliance language inserted into the survey instrument; and
(g) any other supporting materials.

For face-to-face information collections, such as interviews and focus groups, a short statement describing how the bureau/office intends to communicate PRA compliance information to respondents is required in the description of the survey methodology (required as part of the Supporting Statement).

The statistical review must be performed on the complete package to be acceptable.

Step 3
The bureau/office submits a copy of the entire approval package, including a Certification Form noting the date of the statistical review and approval, to the bureau/office Information Collection Officer. The package must include elements a-g as described in Step 2 above.

Step 4
Once both a qualified statistician and the bureau/office Information Collection Clearance Officer have reviewed and approved the package, it may be submitted to the Office of Policy Analysis (PPA). The entire package should be submitted electronically and be formatted in Word. .pdf files of some information collection instruments may be accepted in lieu of Word.

Step 5
PPA assigns a certification tracking number and confirms receipt of the package with an email to the bureau/office point of contact.

Step 6
PPA staff members conduct an administrative and technical review of the submission. The staff recommends (a) approval, (b) revision, (c) resubmission under the Standard Paperwork Reduction Act approval process, or (d) rejection of the proposed survey. If the package is not approved, PPA will notify the originating office/bureau and coordinate revision and resubmission.

Step 7
Once approved, PPA staff transmits the package to OMB for final approval.

Step 8
OMB reviews the submission and notifies PPA of approval or necessary revisions.

Step 9
Once approved by OMB, PPA notifies the requesting bureau/office and assigns an OMB number, a unique PPA identification number, and an expiration date. If OMB requires any special conditions to the approval, the requesting bureau/office will be informed and the conditions must be met for approval.

Should OMB reject the submission or have specific questions about the survey instrument, PPA will immediately inform the requesting bureau/office. The bureau/office may submit an appeal of the OMB decision to PPA, in writing. PPA will submit the appeal to OMB and inform the bureau/office of the results.

Step 10
The bureau/office prepares a final survey instrument, submitting an archive copy to PPA.

The final survey instrument must include the following: (a) the OMB number, (b) the unique PPA identification number, (c) the expiration date, and (d) the Paperwork Reduction Act compliance statement.

Additions or changes to a survey instrument after it has been approved, even within the specific topic areas, are not allowed by OMB. An exception is that questions may be deleted after approval by OMB, if necessary.

Step 11
The bureau/office submits a copy of the survey report to PPA (see requirements for Reporting Plan at Question #15 on Supporting Statement) for archiving.

ATTACHMENT 1: Instructions for Completing Supporting Statement for DOI Generic Clearance Submission, OMB Approval Number 1040-0001

1. **Survey Title/Date Submitted to the Office of Policy Analysis (PPA)**: Insert title for the proposed survey. Insert date that the expedited approval package will be submitted to PPA. Reminder: Please submit the package through your bureau/office Information Collection Clearance Officer.

2. **Bureau/Office:** Insert the name of the bureau/office conducting the survey.

3. **Abstract:** Summarize the proposed study with an abstract not to exceed 150 words.

4. **Bureau/Office Point of Contact Information:** Complete the bureau/office contact information. PPA will communicate with the point of contact listed here throughout the entire approval process.

5. **Principal Investigator (PI) Conducting the Survey:** Complete information about the PI who will be conducting the survey, if different than Point of Contact listed in #4. Otherwise note: Same as #4.

6. **Name of Program Office Conducting Survey:** Provide the name of the bureau program, office, or organizational unit conducting the survey.

7. **Description of Customers/Services Provided:** Provide a brief description of the customers who will be surveyed, the services provided by the program conducting the survey, and how these services are provided to customers.

8. **Survey Dates:** List the time period in which the survey will be conducted, including specific starting and ending dates. The starting date should be at least *45* days after the submission date. The request for expedited approval, and submission of a complete and accurate approval package, must be made at least *45* calendar days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey instrument to the public.

9. **Type of Information Collection Instrument:** Check the type(s) of information collection instrument(s) that will be used. If other, please explain.

10. **Survey Development:** Explain how the survey was developed. With whom did you consult during the development of the survey on content? On statistics? Did you pretest the survey? What actions did you take to improve the survey? What suggestions did you receive for improving the survey? Which of the six topic areas will be addressed? (Note: A description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument is highly recommended.)

11. **Survey Methodology:** Explain how the survey will be conducted. Provide a description of the survey methodology including: (a) How will the customers be sampled? (if fewer than all customers will be surveyed); (b) What percentage of customers asked to take the survey will respond, and (c) What actions are planned to increase the response rate? If statistics are generated, this description must be specific and include each of the following:
    - The respondent universe,
    - The sampling plan and all sampling procedures, including how individual respondents will be selected;
    - How the instrument will be administered;
    - Expected response rate and confidence levels; and
    - Strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias.

    Note: Web-based surveys are not an acceptable method of sampling a broad population. Web-based surveys must be limited to services provided by the web.

12. **Total Number of Initial Contacts/Expected Number of Respondents:** Provide an estimated total

number of initial contacts and the total number of expected respondents.

13. Estimated Time to Complete Initial Contact/Instrument: Estimate the time to complete the initial contact and the survey instrument (in minutes).

14. Total Burden Hours: Provide the total number of burden hours. The total burden hours should account for the amount of time required to instruct the respondents in completing the survey, and the amount of time required for the respondent to complete the survey.

15. Reporting Plan: Provide a brief description of the reporting plan for the data being collected. A copy of all survey reports must be archived with PPA. Please note this in the reporting plan.

16. Justification, Purpose and Use: Provide a brief justification for the survey, its purpose, goals, and utility to managers. Specifically, describe how data will be tabulated and what statistical techniques will be used to generalize the results to the entire customer population. Describe how data from the survey will be used. Describe how you will acknowledge any limitations related to the data, particularly in cases where we obtain a lower than anticipated response rate. Note whether or not the survey is intended to measure a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measure.

10. **ATTACHMENT 2: Approval Form for DOI Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys (OMB Control Number 1040-0001)**

U.S. Department of the Interior **Office of Policy Analysis (PPA)**	PPA Tracking Number: *(for PPA use only)*

1.	**Survey Title:**		**Date Submitted to PPA:**
2.	**Bureau:**		
3.	**Abstract:**		
		(not to exceed 150 words)	

4.	**Bureau/Office Point of Contact Information**		
	First Name:		**Last Name:**
	Title:		
	Bureau/Office:		
	Street Address:		
	City:	**State:**	**Zip code:**
	Phone:	**Fax:**	
	Email:		
5.	**Principal Investigator (PI) Information**		
	First Name:		**Last Name:**
	Title:		
	Bureau/Office:		
	Address:		
	City:	**State:**	**Zip:**
	Phone:	**Fax:**	
	Email:		

6.	**Name of Program or Office Conducting Survey:**						
7.	**Description of Customers/ Services Provided:**						
8.	**Survey Dates:**		(mm/dd/yyyy)	to		(mm/dd/yyyy)	

9.	**Type of Information Collection Instrument (Check ALL that Apply)**				
	__Intercept	__Telephone	__Mail	__Web-based	__Focus Groups
	__Comment Cards				
	__Other, Explain:				

10.	**Survey Development:** (Who assisted in survey content development Statistics? Was the survey pretested? How were improvements integrated? Which of the six topic areas will be addressed?)	

11. **Survey Methodology:** (Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on separate page.)	(a) Respondent universe:
	(b) Sampling plan/procedures:
	(c) Instrument administration:
	(d) Expected response rate/confidence levels:
	(e) Strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias:
	(f) Description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument (recommended):

12. **Total Number of Initial Contacts/ Expected Number of Respondents:**			13. **Estimated Time to Complete Initial Contact | Instrument (mins.):**			14. **Total Burden Hours:**	

15. **Reporting Plan:**	

16. Justification, Purpose, and Use:

Survey Justification and Purpose:

Survey Goals:

Utility to Managers:

How will the results of the survey be analyzed and used?

How will the data be tabulated? What Statistical Techniques will be used to generalize the results to the entire customer population? How will limitations on use of data be handled? If the survey results in a lower than anticipated response rate, how will you address this when reporting the results?

Is this survey intended to measure a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measure? If so, please include an excerpt from the appropriate document.

ATTACHMENT 3: Checklist for Submitting a Request to Use DOI Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- ☐ *All* questions in the survey instrument are within the scope of one of the DOI Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys topic areas.
- ☐ The approval package is being submitted to the Office of Policy Analysis at least *45* days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey to the public.
- ☐ A qualified statistician has reviewed and approved your request.
- ☐ Your bureau/office Information Collection Clearance Officer has reviewed and approved the approval package.

The approval package includes:
- ☐ a completed Information Form
- ☐ a signed Certification Form
- ☐ a copy of the survey instrument
- ☐ other supporting materials, such as
  - ☐ cover letters to accompany mail-back questionnaires
  - ☐ introductory scripts for initial contact of respondents
  - ☐ necessary Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language
  - ☐ follow-up letters/reminders sent to respondents

The survey methodology presented on the Information Form includes a specific description of:
- ☐ (a) the respondent universe
- ☐ (b) the sampling plan and all sampling procedures, including how respondents will be selected
- ☐ (c) how the instrument will be administered
- ☐ (d) expected response rate and confidence levels
- ☐ (e) strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias
- ☐ (f) a description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or the instrument is highly recommended.

- ☐ The burden hours reported on the Information Form include the number of burden hours associated with the initial contact of all individuals in the sample (i.e., including refusals), if applicable, and the number of burden hours associated with individuals expected to complete the survey instrument.
- ☐ The package is properly formatted (Word) and submitted to the Office of Policy Analysis electronically.

ATTACHMENT 4: CERTIFICATION FORM FOR SUBMISSION UNDER OMB CONTROL NUMBER 1040-0001

This form should only be used if you are submitting a collection of information for approval under the DOI Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys.
If the collection does not satisfy the requirements of the Programmatic Clearance, you should follow the regular PRA clearance procedures described in 5 CFR 1320.
Bureau/Office Subgroup or Program:
Title *(Please be specific)*:
Burden Hour Estimates
No. of Respondents: Hours/Min Per Response: Total Burden Hours:
Bureau/Office Contact (who can best answer questions about content of the submission):
Name:
Phone:
Certification: The collection of information requested by this submission meets the requirements of OMB control number 1040-0001.
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Bureau/Office Qualified Statistician   DATE
Bureau/Office Information Collection Clearance Officer   DATE
Office of Policy Analysis   DATE
OMB, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA)   DATE