

Customer Satisfaction Survey and Focus Groups

OMB Supporting Statement

A. Justification

1. Necessity of Information Collection

On September 11, 1993, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12862, "Setting Customer Service Standards" which clearly defined his vision that the Federal agencies will put the people first. To do that, the President called for a "revolution within the Federal government to change the way it does business." He expected this process to require continual reform of government practices and operations with continual reform of government practices and operations with the result that, when dealing with the Federal agencies, all people would receive services that match or exceed the best service available in the private sector.

Section 1(b) of that Order required agencies to "survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services" and Section 1 (e) requires agencies to "survey front-line employees on barriers to, and ideas for, matching the best in business." These Presidential requirements established an ongoing need for the Department of Education (ED) to be engaged in an interactive process of collecting information and using it to improve program services and processes. Agencies are therefore authorized to measure customer satisfaction and report results. In addition, the March 22, 1995 Presidential Memo "Improving Customer Service," states that customer views should be obtained to determine whether standards have been met on those matters which most concern the customer. This Master Plan represents the Department's continued commitment to improve products and services.

Surveys to be considered under this generic will only include those surveys that improve a customer service or collecting feedback about a service provided. The results of the customer surveys will help ED managers to plan and implement program improvements and other customer satisfaction initiatives. Focus groups that will be considered under the generic clearance will assess customer satisfaction with a direct service, or will be designed to inform a customer satisfaction survey ED was considering. Surveys that have the potential to influence policy will not be considered under this generic clearance.

ED has included appendices A and B. Appendix A contains the listing of surveys from FY2006 - FY2008 (to date) with the overall burden and responses. Appendix B includes survey examples (a few examples that were previously approved by OMB). The main purpose of this submission, however, is to obtain continued OMB approval of the concept of internal ED clearance of 1800-0011 and continue to improve customer service.

2. Needs and Uses

The primary objective in the Executive Order was that all entities and individuals directly served by ED will receive the highest quality of service comparable to that service delivered by private organizations. These individual and entities are defined as our "customers."

In ED, senior management has clearly defined our ultimate customer as the learner of all ages. This ultimate customer might be classified in four primary groups: pre-school children, elementary and secondary students, postsecondary and graduate students, and adult learners. Besides these customers, ED also provides funds and services directly to: parents, teachers, principals, local education agencies, state education agencies, Governors and those committees and agencies which report directly to them, institutions of higher education, accreditation agencies, lenders, guarantee agencies, national special interest groups with an interest in education, contractors, grantees, and individuals seeking employment with ED. Each of these groups, while often also a partner in the education process, is to be considered an ED customer. As such, the expectations and requirements of each of these groups will need to be understood. The array of customer satisfaction surveys to be conducted by ED will assess these needs to help develop proposals to meet the needs at a level that matches or exceeds the best service available in the private sector.

In order to continue to meet the objectives, ED will establish an internal process where customer satisfaction is regularly monitored and measured. The results will be “fed back” into the ED programs’ planning and decision-making processes to improve the quality of ED program’s products and services. To do this, ED program offices will continue to conduct customer service focus groups and surveys.

Results from some surveys and focus groups will be used to establish customer-defined goals and standards for measuring ED progress toward those goals. Other surveys and focus groups will clarify those standards and evaluate ED performance. This will be an ongoing process of measuring customer satisfaction and then using that information to refine or redefine the ED programs and processes. The survey results will be used to fulfill customer satisfaction reporting requirements in Executive Order #12862 and to improve ED’s services and products and their use. Without this institutionalized process, ED managers will have little basis in reality for planning and implementing program improvements and other customer satisfaction initiatives.

Surveys that produce prevalence estimates or official statistics of any kind do not fall within the scope of this generic clearance for customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups.

3. Information Technology

The determination to use technology, and which technology to use, will be based on the type of information collected and the utility and the availability of specific technology to each set of potential respondents in each proposed customer satisfaction survey. Many programs will utilize and have utilized Internet “home pages” to seek public comment and suggestions. Others may propose the submission of comments with electronic submission of application and reports. Many of the approved customer satisfaction surveys have utilized electronic collection and submission technology.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

The information to be supplied on these surveys will not be duplicated on any other information collection. The Regulatory Information Management Service (RIMS) will review the proposed ED surveys to verify that the information sought is not already available and that the survey fits into a coordinated department-wide customer satisfaction program. Since the initial OMB approval of ED’s umbrella clearance for customer satisfaction surveys, ED has been careful to

ensure the streamlining in number of surveys, number of questions, and type of questions proposed for approval. RIMS will continue to review the proposed surveys to verify that the information sought is not already available. In addition to these reviews, RIMS routinely runs reports of ED customer surveys to determine that there is no duplication among surveys.

There is no information available from any other source, which will enable ED to evaluate the satisfaction of our customers under the provisions of the Executive Order.

5. Minimizing Burden on Small Businesses

The information collected in these surveys will represent the minimum necessary to evaluate customer satisfaction with ED programs. It is expected that most survey instruments will be designed to take less than thirty minutes of the respondent's time.

The frequency for individual respondents is essentially "once." Without a regular program of customer satisfaction surveys, the Department of Education will not be able to attain the commitment to "best in the business" practices.

6. Consequences if Collection is not Conducted

These customer satisfaction measurement activities will be conducted only when specific information is required. The question of frequency is not an issue. There are no legal or technical obstacles to the use of technology in these information collection activities.

7. Special Circumstances

These surveys will be consistent with all guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5.

8. Consultation Outside the Agency

There were no comments as a result of the 60-day notice.

Program offices continue to be charged with the responsibility to develop their plan to coordinate the reception and use of public suggestions for improvement. FSA developed its own customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups Master Plan (1845-0045), which is separate from this 1800-0011 department-wide plan.

9. Payment or Gift to Respondents

No payment or gift will be provided to respondents in these customer satisfaction or focus group surveys. If any are proposed for use, they will be small and ED will submit specific justification for each proposed use as part of the completed package submitted to OMB.

10. Assurance of Confidentiality

These surveys and focus groups will provide all necessary assurances of confidentiality to the respondents, as applicable when permissible. Although there is no requirement for such assurances in statute, the quality of this type of information requires respondent candor and anonymity. Customer surveys don't request personal identifiable information. If they do,

justification will be provided with the individual customer survey according to the Privacy Act. In addition, NCES may assure confidentiality under The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Part E, Section 183, as necessary.

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

No sensitive questions will be included under this Generic clearance.

12. Estimate of Hour Burden of Collection

The respondent burden averages from 5 to 30 minutes per response for each survey, dependent on the individual survey. This estimation has been based on previous surveys generated by ED in the past years. The respondents are estimated to average 60-90 minutes in each focus group discussion.

Each survey respondent will most likely submit only one response per survey. The Department usually estimates approximately 70,000 responses with a total burden of 24,930 which is ~~more on~~ a high estimate. In the past Fiscal Years, ED has not gone over 53,000 responses or 10,000 hours. With some surveys continuing year to year, the current FY2008 total is 19,735 responses and 4,098 hours. The Department will keep the current hours since we are in the middle of the fiscal year and hours tend to fluctuate year to year.

Each member of a focus group is expected to spend an average of 75 minutes per group. If four focus groups were held over the next year with an average of 10 participants per group, the total burden is estimated to be 50 hours (4 groups x 10 participants x 1.25 hours).

Burden for both activities is estimated at 24,930 hours.

The average hourly cost per respondent is estimated to be \$30.00.

13. Estimate of Cost Burden to Respondents

There should be no costs to respondents except for costs under number 12.

14. Cost to the Federal Government

The cost required to read and evaluate the surveys and focus groups discussions by ED, including the time taken by individuals under contract to ED, is estimated to be 7,000 hours. Given an average hourly rate of \$35 per hour, the total cost to the Department is estimated to be \$245,000.

15. Reason for Program Change

There is a decrease of -70 hours due to reducing the response/time for focus groups. The changed hours reflect a more accurate average for focus groups.

16. Project Schedule

The responsibility to measure customer satisfaction is not a “project” with an assigned completion date. Instead, it is an interactive process, which is becoming incorporated into the fabric and culture of the department. The process will continue with the attached survey proposals for collecting information. There is no projected completion date.

As the information is collected, it will be evaluated by the sponsoring program offices and by the Regulatory Information Management Service and shared with any other program and support service managers and employees to who it is relevant.

Customer satisfaction surveys employ statistical methods according to the OMB guidance. Experienced and trained ED researchers will be sought from the Principal Offices such as NCES in ED to serve as advisors to evaluate the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the proposed survey instruments and plans. These experts will make recommendations, as needed, to improve the research initiative. These recommendations will be implemented in each approved collection activity.

OMB statistical experts, information collection experts, program specialists will be invited to participate with and advise the ED clearance office as their time permits. ED will consult with OMB about the expectations and standards of this important activity and will incorporate the OMB guidance in the ongoing internal clearance process. This feedback will enable ED to continuously improve the usefulness of these collection activities.

17. Expiration Date for OMB Approval

The expiration date will be displayed on all surveys.

18. Certification Statement

There are no exceptions to the certification.

Appendix A includes ED listings of all individual customer surveys and focus groups for FY 2006, 2007, and FY2008. This appendix also includes the “continued” listing of surveys by designating as asterisk at the end of the survey title.

Appendix B includes a few examples of OMB approved customer satisfaction surveys.