DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GENERIC CLEARANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Appointed Representative Suite of Services Customer Profile Development Discussions

SSA SUB-NUMBER: D-03

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

Background:
For many years, SSA used form SSA-1699 (OMB No. 0960-0732, the Request for Appointed Representative's Direct Payment Information) to collect information from representatives of Social Security claimants. We used this information to facilitate direct payment of authorized fees to representatives and meet Internal Revenue Service requirements to issue an IRS Form 1099-MISC to representatives.

In September 2009, SSA obtained OMB approval for a revised form SSA-1699 and accompanying new business process. SSA planned to expand the user population for the new SSA-1699 to include not only representatives, but also individuals who 1) perform advocacy services on behalf of appointed representatives, 2) act on behalf of appointed representatives and want access to SSA's electronic services, and 3) serve as administrators for an entity appointed as a representative.

Additionally, SSA envisioned creating one comprehensive suite of services for these groups, eliminating the need to complete more than one form and allowing respondents to accomplish multiple goals in one setting. Specifically, we planned to use the new SSA-1699 business process to 1) authenticate and authorize respondents to conduct business with us, 2) allow them access to our records for the claimants they represent, 3) facilitate direct payment of authorized fees to appointed representatives, and 4) collect the information we needed to meet Internal Revenue Service requirements to issue specific IRS forms if we paid these representatives in excess of a specific amount ($600).

Before implementing this new business process, SSA consulted two professional organizations comprising many of the representatives who would use the new form and process. Both groups conveyed their members' enthusiasm for the project. Accordingly, we began using the new system in October 2009.

After several weeks, SSA realized the scope of this new project was too ambitious. Multiple appointed representatives called the agency and expressed confusion with the system. They were uncertain which questions to answer, felt some questions were duplicative (they were not, but their unique purposes were unclear), were perplexed by the length of the new form/accompanying Internet system, and were unsure of some questions' intent. As a result, multiple representatives submitted new applications incorrectly or in incomplete form. This required SSA employees to call each representative and complete the application over the phone, imposing extra time burdens on both parties.

SSA realized continued use of this new business process would cause confusion and inconvenience for representatives, would prevent them from transacting business effectively with the agency, and would impose cost and time burdens on SSA. For these reasons, we sought and received clearance for an abbreviated interim version of form SSA-1699 on February 12, 2010. This current interim form is entitled “Registration for Appointed Representative Services and Direct Payment.”

While we continue to use the interim form, SSA will be working toward designing a new user-friendly, representative-centric eService portal. Before re-designing such a system, though, we would like to conduct a series of conversations with the target audience –representatives and end users. We are clearing these conversations in the current generic clearance customer satisfaction survey submission.

Description:
SSA would like to conduct a series of discussions with a group of representatives and other end users to obtain their feedback on our current and proposed representative documentation processes. A description of the proposed discussions follows.

We plan to conduct a series of semi-structured focus groups, more aptly termed “discussions,” with attorney and non-attorney representatives and their affected staff (i.e. other employees who will be using the system). We will recruit participants by asking the national representative and advocacy organizations, with whom we are working closely on this project, to refer their interested members.

We will conduct these discussions in groups of no more than twenty representatives at a time. Most of the discussions will take place via conference call, although we may invite representatives to attend meetings at SSA’s main headquarters building in Woodlawn, MD if both parties deem it necessary.

We anticipate conducting these meetings over a period of six months to one year, beginning as soon as OMB grants clearance. Meetings will progress from a general discussion of the types of information representatives would like a comprehensive application to include, and will hopefully progress to representative analysis of future Appointed Representative Services website design.

The initial meetings will focus on issue such as these:

- What are appointed representatives’ typical tasks?
- What is their organizational behavior and business model(s), and how do these affect the type of application they will prefer?
- What are representatives’ specific constraints and expectations?
- How frequently do the representatives transact business online?
- What are their expectations for electronic collections such as the one SSA would like to create?

- What is important to them and their clients, and how much importance do they place on the integrity and security of the information they provide to us?

Discussions of future proposed web applications will include:
- Website prototype analysis;
- Evaluation of the design;
- Discussion of the clarity, relevance, and ease of completion of information on the website;
- Utility of the proposed website;
- User satisfaction with the site's security/authentication protocols;
- Usability testing of the site.

Attached please find a sample discussion guide for our proposed focus groups.

IF FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE A PAYMENT, INDICATE AMOUNT*:*
We will not compensate respondents.

USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:
SSA will use the information we obtain during these discussions to map out and better understand the appointed representative business process, to determine how satisfied representatives are with what we currently offer, to ascertain what they want to see in a future integrated electronic application, and to assess appointed representative satisfaction with proposed new integrated electronic applications prototypes.

BURDEN HOUR COMPUTATION (*Number of responses (X) estimated response time (/60) = annual burden hours):*

400 representatives total (no more than 20 at a time) x 60 minutes meeting time/60 = **60 hours**

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