

DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GENERIC CLEARANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Hearing Process Report Card Survey

SSA SUB-NUMBER: D-01

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

BACKGROUND

Social Security benefits applicants who do not agree with the Social Security Administration's (SSA) initial decision on their claim are legally entitled to appeal that decision. As part of the appeals process, claimants can file a request for a hearing before an administrative law judge (ALJ), who decides whether or not benefits should be awarded.

In FY 2008, we began conducting a satisfaction survey with two groups of applicants who recently participated in an ALJ hearing. The first group consists of applicants who received a favorable decision from the ALJ, and the second group includes applicants with denied appeals for Social Security benefits. The annual survey assesses overall satisfaction with the hearing and addresses various aspects of service that can have a bearing on satisfaction with the process. FY 2010 is the third year in which SSA will conduct this survey.

SURVEY

Description of Survey

We developed two questionnaires: one for awarded and one for denied hearing applicants. The two surveys are identical with the exception of one question related to notice clarity, which was tailored to address the different outcomes experienced by these two groups.

The survey covers a variety of topics relating to the service SSA provides during the hearing process, including the following:

- The ease of finding information about the hearing request;
- The quality of information explaining the process;
- Ease of contacting SSA and the helpfulness of the information provided about the hearing process;
- Whether the person chose to have a representative handle their hearing;

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- Whether the person had a hearing with a judge face-to-face or by video conference;
- Satisfaction with the location of the office where the hearing was held;
- Satisfaction with the length of the various stages of the hearing process: from date hearing requested to date hearing held, from date hearing held to date decision received, and the overall period from date hearing requested to date decision received;
- Satisfaction with the judge's performance, including clarity of explanations, preparedness to discuss the case, courtesy, and time spent with the claimant;
- Satisfaction with notice clarity, including the explanation of the judge's decision, the explanation of the amount of benefits (for those awarded benefits), and the explanation of how to appeal the judge's decision (for those denied benefits);
- Satisfaction with SSA staff including their helpfulness, courtesy, and job knowledge;
- Overall ratings of the hearing experience and SSA's service.

We have attached a copy of the questionnaire and the survey correspondence to this submission. The majority of the questions remain the same as those used in the prior surveys. Based on our analysis of the survey data, however, we decided to improve the way we ask about the length of the hearing process.

- The prior questionnaire contained two non-sequential questions addressing satisfaction with the length of the hearing process. Question 7 rated the elapsed time from the date the hearing was requested to the date the hearing was held. Question 13 rated the overall time from the date the hearing was requested to the date the decision was received. However, the survey did not ask participants to rate how long it took to receive the decision after the hearing was held.
- To make it easier for responders to consider the waiting time issue, we created a separate section in the FY 2010 survey titled "Waiting for the hearing and decision." The new section includes the original questions 7 and 13 (now numbered as question 12 and 14), as well as a new question rating the time from the date the hearing was held to the date the decision was received.

Statistical Information

Sample Selection

In FY 2010, SSA expects to issue about 608,000 hearing decisions on disability claims, consisting of approximately 72 percent favorable (award) and 28 percent unfavorable (denial) decisions. Because of the relatively small size of these universes, we select decisions at three intervals over the fiscal year (October 2009, January 2010 and April 2010) in order to stratify the sample by outcome (award/denial) and geographic area. We select 500 awarded and 500 denied cases from each of SSA's ten regions in each phase of the survey for an overall regional sample size of 1,500 awards and 1,500 denials. This method yields 5,000 awarded and 5,000 denied applicants at each interval for a combined total of 15,000 awards and 15,000 denials.

Regional results are weighted to arrive at a national overall satisfaction rating that represents the universe of hearings decisions processed by SSA in FY 2010. The following table displays the anticipated volumes of hearing decisions for each of SSA's ten regions.

Region	Estimated Yearly Hearing Awards	Estimated Yearly Hearing Denials
Boston	17,000	6,000
New York	39,000	14,000
Philadelphia	52,000	19,000
Atlanta	121,000	40,000
Chicago	66,000	26,000
Dallas	56,000	27,000
Kansas City	21,000	8,000
Denver	14,000	4,000
San Francisco	41,000	17,000
Seattle	15,000	5,000
Nation	442,000	166,000

Methodology

An SSA-approved contractor conducts the survey by mail. The contractor mails all sampled individuals a brief scannable questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter that explains the purpose of the survey and encourages individuals to participate. We include both the Paperwork Reduction Act and the Privacy Act statements in the initial cover letter. About two weeks later, the contractor sends a follow-up postcard to every sampled individual. Two weeks after the mailing of the follow-up postcard, we send a duplicate survey package (questionnaire and follow-up cover letter) to those sampled individuals who have not responded at that point.

Response Rate

SSA takes the following steps to maximize the response rate for this survey:

- The questionnaire is short and has an eye-catching title. The scannable version is designed for ease of use by a disabled population, e.g., font sizes are larger, difficult fill-in bubbles are not used;
- The first survey package includes a cover letter signed by an Agency official that encourages the individual to respond by emphasizing the importance of the survey;
- We make two follow-up contacts with participants: a follow-up postcard and a follow-up survey package;
- We send a Spanish version of the survey form to those participants identified in the sample selection process as having a preference for doing business in Spanish;
- We provide SSA's toll-free national 800 number on all letters so participants can call if they have any questions.

Using the same methodology in the FY 2008 survey, SSA achieved a combined response rate of 50 percent at the national level. Among the regions the combined response rate ranged from 46 percent to 53 percent. Considering our prior experience, we anticipate that a response rate of at least 50 percent is also attainable in the FY 2010 survey. (Note we are referencing the FY 2008 survey results because data from the FY 2009 survey is still being validated. As part of its data validation, SSA conducts a nonresponder analysis to evaluate any potential impact of the response rate on survey findings.)

Sampling Variability

The key variable for this survey is the percent of hearing applicants who are satisfied with SSA service overall (i.e., those who rate service excellent, very good, or good (E/VG/G)). In FY 2008, the overall rating was 74 percent E/VG/G for awarded applicants and 34 percent E/VG/G for denied applicants. Nationally, our proposed sample size of 10,000 cases in each phase is large enough, assuming a 50 percent response rate, to provide a sampling variability at the 95-percent confidence level equal to:

Stratum	National Key Variable (E/VG/G Rating)	Sampling Variability
Awards	74%	+/- 1.7%
Denials	34%	+/- 1.9%

The table below shows the range of the E/VG/G overall service ratings among the regions in the FY 2008 survey. Based on an anticipated response rate of 50 percent from the regional samples

of 1,500 awarded and 1,500 denied cases, we estimate that the sampling variability will fall in the ranges shown. These ranges are acceptable given the intended purpose of the survey.

Stratum	Regional Key Variable (E/VG/G Rating)	Sampling Variability
Awards	67% to 80%	+/- 3.5% to +/- 3.0%
Denials	27% to 40%	+/- 3.5% to +/- 3.6 %

SSA’s Office of Quality Performance (OQP) will perform all sampling and data analysis. Statistical support will be provided by Daniel Zabronsky, Director of SSA’s Division of Modeling in OQP. He can be reached at (410) 965-5953.

IF FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE A PAYMENT, INDICATE AMOUNT:

N/A

USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:

We first conducted the Hearings Process Report Card Survey in FY 2008 to establish a baseline measure of customer satisfaction with the hearing process. We plan to continue it on an annual basis to track any changes in perceptions that may result from agency initiatives to reduce the hearing backlog and improve efficiency.

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

Number of Responses: 30,000
 Estimated Response Time: 5 minutes
 Annual Burden Hours: 2,500 hours

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