

**Supporting Statement**  
**OMB Control No. 3095-0042**  
**Military Personnel Records (MPR) Customer Satisfaction Survey**  
**--Renewal FY 2009--**

**A. Justification**

**1. Explanation of circumstances that make collection of data necessary**

The Government Performance and Results Act and subsequent Presidential directives on customer service require that agencies be able to demonstrate that their goals truly reflect what their customers want. In particular, we are required to survey our customers to find out if we are providing the kind and quality of service they want. Each year the Military Personnel Records (MPR) facility of our National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) responds to about 1 million requests from veterans, government agencies, and the public for information from many of the 50 million official military personnel files in its custody. This information is used primarily to obtain veterans' rights and benefits, including health care, home loan guarantees, education, employment, and burial allowances. In the mid-1990's, backlogs of unanswered requests and other concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of the traditional work processes at MPR triggered a multi-year Business Process Reengineering (BPR) project that went into full effect in 2002. The information collection provides the consistent feedback on our customers' satisfaction with our reengineered processes that is needed to ensure we are taking the right steps to improve our effectiveness and efficiency.

Two major innovations occurred in 2002: an extensive Case Management and Reporting System and the availability of an on-line request form that approximately 40 percent of customers now use for many of the most common kinds of requests. Continuation of the survey will enable us to measure customer reaction to these innovations.

**2. Description of how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used.**

This survey, first authorized by OMB in August 2000 and re authorized in 2003, has been collecting information from customers to document how satisfied they are with NPRC services and reengineering initiatives and confirm the validity of the significant efforts that the Center has made to improve both the quality and timeliness of our responses to these requests. NPRC management has been using the information from the current survey to:

- a. Gain a better understanding of who MPR's customers are, the nature of their requests, and their satisfaction with the current reference process;
- b. Measure how factors such as timeliness, quality, and accessibility influence overall customer satisfaction and develop appropriate customer service standards in terms of these factors; and
- c. Identify areas for improvement within the reference service process, develop strategies for improving customer service, and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives

designed to improve customer service as they are implemented. (For example, early analysis showed that by far the greatest opportunities for improving customer satisfaction among those who telephoned the Center were in the areas of reaching the Center at all, and especially getting through to the right person. NPRC consequently increased telephone support.)

The surveys conducted so far provide a history of customer satisfaction. Comparisons now can be made to measure the success of changes implemented since 2000 and to suggest future directions. Surveys in more recent years have shown customers to be concerned especially about the timeliness of our replies and their ability to determine the status of pending requests. We have responded to such concerns by dramatically decreasing the length of our reply times and by substantially strengthening our customer service operations to provide status information both by telephone and e-mail. Response times that used to average several weeks, if not many months, now are ten workdays or fewer for about 90 percent of our most typical and time-sensitive requests. In addition, concerns about timeliness and access were considered when NPRC set up an auto-messaging service that confirms immediately that an e-mail inquiry about the status of a request has been received.

### **3. Use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology to collect information or reduce the burden**

The survey is conducted by mailing paper survey forms to MPR customers. To reduce respondent burden, the survey will continue to use survey forms that are easy to interpret and complete and that focus on issues that have been central to the reengineering effort.

### **4. Efforts to identify duplication**

NARA is not aware of any other survey on satisfaction with our services that is aimed at MPR's hundreds of thousands of public customers.

### **5. Collection of data from small entities and efforts to minimize burden**

Some of the surveys will be sent to small entities because the veteran or his or her authorized representative will have designated them to request and receive information from the veteran's military service file. However, no data will be collected from small entities regarding their operations and, as described in A3 above, the information collection has been constructed to minimize the reporting burden.

### **6. Consequence to the Federal program/policy activity if the collection is not conducted or is less frequent**

Beginning in FY 2001, the Center underwent dramatic transformation of its organizational structure and its case processing methods, as a result of the Business Process Reengineering initiatives. The opinions of customers from that year form a baseline of customer satisfaction before the improvements were fully in place. Knowledge of subsequent customer attitudes is

needed to measure changes in perceptions and thus the success of the initiatives implemented since then.

## **7. Special circumstances**

This information collection is conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines contained in 5 CFR 1320.5.

## **8. Publication of the agency's notice in the Federal Register**

A *Federal Register* Notice was published on March 3, 2009 (74 FR 9307 and 9308). No comments were received.

## **9. Explanation of decision to provide payment or gifts to respondents**

No payment or gifts will be provided to respondents.

## **10. Assurances of confidentiality for respondents**

The survey cover letter and follow-up cover letter both include a specific assurance that the answers will be kept confidential by the following means:

- a. An independent research organization will conduct the survey;
- b. The responses to the survey will be returned directly to that organization only; and
- c. The information will be processed into a database that cannot be disaggregated to individual names, so that none of the reports made available to NPRC management will include any identifying personal information.

In addition, the contractor will restrict access to the response data to only those employees whose specific responsibilities require access, and will dispose of the survey responses in a timeframe and manner consistent with our records disposition schedule and regulations for handling Privacy Act materials.

## **11. Questions of a sensitive nature**

No questions commonly understood to be of a sensitive nature (i.e., pertaining to religious, sexual, or other private attitudes or behavior) are included in the survey.

## **12. Estimate of burden of survey information collection**

It takes less than ten minutes to complete the survey form. (This estimate is based on test completion of the original survey form by several MPR staff members and a handful of public visitors to the MPR Research Room.) Based on previous response rates of 50 percent, we expect about 500 surveys to be returned during each survey period, with two survey periods to be conducted over 12 months. The anticipated 1000 responses from members of the public would require 10,000 minutes or 167 hours annually.

The average cost to respondents for the hour burden associated with the survey would be \$3.39 per individual response. This is based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data used to estimate the burden on the previous survey periods. We used \$19.56 per hour as the nationwide average hourly wage for all private industry and state/local government workers in 2007. Adjusted by the Consumer Price Index, the equivalent amount in 2009 would be \$20.32. Therefore, at 10 minutes per survey, the average overall burden would be \$3.39 per individual response (\$20.32 x 0.167 hours).

### **13. Estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers**

There are no costs to respondents other than their time to complete the survey. Respondents are not required to keep records to support their response.

### **14. Estimate of the annualized cost to the Federal Government**

The contractor's annualized cost of administering the survey for public customers will be approximately \$16,700 for one survey period in FY 2009 and for one survey period in the first half of FY 2010. The contractor's price includes printing all business reply envelopes and paying for their return; printing survey forms and cover letters for each follow-up mailing to non-respondents; postage for these mailings; data entry for completed surveys; preparing an analysis of findings each quarter, and providing a database containing the survey results for further analysis by NPRC.

NPRC costs will include desktop printing of the 2-sided survey form and single-sided cover letter for each completed case selected for the sample. Six thousand images at \$.021 per image would cost about \$125.00. Clerical staff time will be required to enter data about each selected case, print materials, and stuff the survey materials into the pre-addressed outgoing envelopes. Staff time is estimated at 5 minutes per case, or 10,000 minutes (167 hours) to process 2,000 outgoing survey requests during 12 months. At an expected salary of \$36,825 (\$17.64 per hour in FY 2009), approximately \$2,946 of clerical salary will be expended during the first year. Printing and postage should not exceed \$.50 for each of 2,000 mailings per year, or \$1,000.

### **15. Reasons for program changes**

The number of surveys to be sent per quarter will be reduced from 3,000 to 1,000, and two surveys every 12 months are planned, rather than four. This volume will be sufficient to measure customer satisfaction at the agency level. Previous surveys had aimed for achieving a statistically significant quarterly measurement of customer satisfaction with the work of each of the 20 reference teams that were established under the reengineering and reorganization initiative. The intent was to tie satisfaction at the team level with the performance evaluation for each team, but this is no longer considered necessary. Other indicators of team performance, such as timeliness, accuracy, and cost per case, are now available through the sophisticated Case Management and Reporting System.

## **16. Plans for tabulation, statistical analysis, and publication**

The contractor will compile a report following each of the two survey periods each year. Each report will include data and findings from surveys mailed out (including follow-ups) during that survey period. The reports will include descriptive statistics of MPR customers (e.g., type of customer, age of veteran, branch of military service) and statistical estimates of the determinants of customer satisfaction. The data will be analyzed to identify:

- various types of customers' satisfaction with NPRC's overall service;
- customer satisfaction with different methods of contacting NPRC to ask for military service information (e.g., phone call, written letter, Internet); and
- the impact of other BPR initiatives on customer satisfaction.

This analysis will support identification of customer needs over time; specific changes in telephone, written, or Internet communication processes to facilitate timely responses; and ongoing refinement of the current organizational structure to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

The information from the reports will be used to supplement the various performance measures NPRC gathers (in accordance with reporting requirements under the Government Performance and Results Act and the NARA Performance Management and Reporting System) and NARA publishes in its annual performance report.

## **17. Approval to not display expiration date for OMB approval**

The proposed instrument will display the OMB control number and expiration date on the survey form.

## **18. Exception to the certification statement in item 19 of OMB Form 83-I**

The proposed data collection does not require any exceptions to the certification statement in Item 19 of OMB Form 83-I.

# **B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

## **2. Universe and sampling methods**

The total respondent universe consists of those members of the public to whom MPR will send a prepared reply, usually by copying documents or extracting information from a record. The survey sample will be based on replies already completed in the correspondence cores. It is expected that about 110,000 such replies will be mailed during each quarter in which surveys are mailed. Based on numbers achieved during previous surveys, we estimate a return rate of about 50 percent.

Our objective is to collect responses from the public at the rate of 500 per survey administration.

### **3. Information collection procedures**

Surveys will be mailed to customers enclosed with the Center's completed response. The correspondence cases to be surveyed will be selected as follows:

- a. Nearly all of the Center's completed responses are mailed from the Outgoing Mail Unit, where they are first logged out of the Center via a bar code scanner. The person assigned to send out the surveys (the "survey monitor") will select outgoing envelopes at random throughout each work day as these envelopes are scanned out. The contents of each envelope selected will be reviewed to ensure that the response represents a substantial effort, such as providing the information requested. If the response is not substantial, such as notification that the requested record is not at NPRC, another envelope will be selected instead.
- b. Completed cases will be selected at such a rate as to ensure that 1,000 surveys are mailed during each survey period. This will mean 77 surveys each week, or about 15-16 each day. Daily volume will be adjusted for short weeks
- c. For each substantial response, the survey monitor will enclose a survey form that contains the next unique serial number, along with the standardized cover letter and a business reply envelope addressed to the survey contractor.
- d. As each survey response is selected, the survey monitor will immediately enter data pertaining to that case onto a spreadsheet and will e-mail that spreadsheet to the contractor each week. This weekly spreadsheet will contain only the information about those cases on which surveys were mailed out since the last such e-mail was sent. The spreadsheet will include the following:
  - (1) name (Last, First, MI) of the veteran;
  - (2) unique CMRS number assigned to this case;
  - (3) service number of the veteran;
  - (4) first and last name (and title) of the person and/or organization to whom the survey was mailed, if different from the veteran;
  - (5) street address to which the survey was mailed, including city, state, and ZIP Code;
  - (6) purpose of the inquiry, if indicated by the requester, or else entered by NPRC as "not disclosed";
  - (7) team of caseworker who prepared the reply;
  - (8) date (mm/dd/yyyy) the request was received in the Center;
  - (9) date (mm/dd/yyyy) on which this survey is being mailed;
  - (10) number of days, if any, during which the case was suspended (awaiting additional information from an outside source before NPRC could complete the reply);
  - (11) veteran's branch of military service;

- (12) unique consecutive number assigned to this survey;
- (13) how request was received (mail, fax, Web);
- (14) source of request (an indicator of the priority);
- (15) request type (the kind of assistance needed);
- (16) level of complexity of this case;
- (17) type of response (amount of assistance/information provided); and
- (18) contents of response (the kind of assistance/information provided).

When each completed survey is received, the contractor will key in the responses to the survey questions, on the row in the Excel database that is assigned to that survey case. This merged file will provide the aggregate data that will be used to analyze and prepare a summary report of survey findings that the contractor will issue following each of the two survey periods. Any identifying information that would enable NPRC to associate the customer's response with the specific case on which it is based will be stripped from the raw database that is next used to prepare the quarterly report to NPRC and is subsequently sent to NPRC at the end of the year for further analysis by NPRC.

- e. The contractor's summary reports will also provide the verbatim responses that many of the customers gave to the one open-ended question on the survey. The report will also categorize these verbal responses under various headings, such as how many made generally positive comments, suggested improving the telephone system and/or on-line request form, or wanted a shorter response time.

#### **4. Methods to maximize response rates**

The form has been designed to minimize the time and effort needed to complete it. The cover letter emphasizes how important the responses are to NPRC. The contractor will send a second mailing (cover letter, survey, and business reply envelope) to each survey customer who does not return the survey within 30 days. Historically, that follow-up mailing has been sent to about 70 percent of the original sample. The follow-up cover letter will contain both the name/address of the survey recipient and the name/service number of the veteran to whom the military service record pertains. This will help ensure that the recipient can match the survey with the appropriate veteran if the recipient is an individual or organization other than the veteran.

#### **5. Test of procedures and methods**

This survey form has been used successfully since late 1999, having been modified slightly in 2003. The 50 percent response rate has shown that the form is easy to use and is welcomed by recipients as an opportunity to provide feedback to an agency that provides an important service for military veterans and their families.

## **6. Statistical Consultants and Data Collection and Analysis Personnel**

The survey was developed by Pacific Consulting Group of Palo Alto, CA, but the contract with that organization has expired and a different contractor (Philips & Associates) has been hired to conduct the surveys, as indicated below:

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