

DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GENERIC CLEARANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Prospective Client Survey

SSA SUB-NUMBER: D-03

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

BACKGROUND

The Social Security Administration (SSA) expects the number of retirement applicants to increase greatly in the next 5 to 10 years. The future retirement applicants, who will have adapted to new technologies and experienced multiple methods of customer service, will probably expect similar new kinds of advancements and service from SSA. However, we cannot assume that all future retirees will expect or want advanced technological service provision. In our purposed survey, the Prospective Client Survey, SSA will target people between the ages of 50 to 64 to identify the service expectations and desires of the upcoming wave of retirees. Ultimately, SSA will use data from this survey to plan and prepare for the future.

Please note, SSA conducted the Prospective Client Survey with the same target population in both FY 2005 and FY 2008. Because of the increased Internet use in the general population and the target pre-retirement age group, we are conducting this follow-up survey again to update original findings and track trends in service preferences and expectations.

SURVEY

Description of Survey

As noted above, the FY 2010 Prospective Client Survey is a follow-up to a survey of the same population conducted by SSA in FY 2005 and FY 2008. We developed the original survey based on findings from focus groups we conducted and on our Office of Quality Performance (OQP) staff's experience with question wording and flow in previous mail and phone surveys. In addition, internal SSA components reviewed the survey questions to ensure that we addressed all salient issues. To ensure comparability, wherever possible we used the same battery of questions from the FY 2005 and FY 2008 surveys for the FY 2010 questionnaire. We removed a few questions and added a few new questions, keeping the overall length of the survey essentially the same.

The survey questions cover a variety of topics related to the service expectations and preferences of SSA's future clients, including the following:

- The initial set of questions about the Social Security statement acts as an icebreaker and shows participants how they have a current connection with SSA (questions 1 – 3);
- Questions 4 – 6 give participants the opportunity to rate their satisfaction with any recent service experiences they may have had with SSA. Knowing that participants have had a recent contact provides additional context for understanding their responses to other questions.
- Questions 7 – 10 explore participants' preferences for conducting a wide range of business with SSA, from actions they might have in the present to those they might take after they begin receiving benefits. These core questions will help SSA prepare to meet the needs and expectations of future beneficiaries. Since we used this set of questions in the FY 2005 and FY 2008 surveys, we will be able to track any changes in public preferences over time.
- The next three sections (questions 11 - 18) solicit participants' opinions about what aspects of the three main service delivery modes, electronic (Internet or email), telephone, or in-person, are most important to them. The rating questions do not address aspects of service that SSA knows are universally considered very important, for example, courteous and knowledgeable employees.
- Questions 18 - 20 ask participants to rate their level of comfort with three important authentication issues: 1) convenience of PIN/password and knowledge-based authentication; 2) how comfortable responders are providing personal information; and 3) how comfortable they feel having their personal information matched against other data sources. In question 21, participants provide their opinion on how SSA should balance the security and convenience of its electronic services.
- Question 22 provides participants the opportunity to describe their expectations for timely service, focusing on six specific actions. This information will help SSA measure future beneficiaries' expectations against the level of service it currently provides.
- Questions 23 – 28 solicit information about how soon participants plan to retire and what kind of planning they may have completed so far. SSA can use this information to find the most effective means of providing valuable retirement information to future beneficiaries. In addition, knowing participants' retirement plans will provide additional context for understanding their other survey responses: for example, whether participants closer to retirement age prefer to receive their Social Security statements more frequently than younger responders do.

- Questions 29 – 32 seek information about participants’ experience with the Internet. These questions will allow SSA to gauge the overall sophistication of future users of their electronic services. This insight will help SSA understand the market for its electronic services and plan accordingly.
- Questions 33 – 35 directly address participants’ attitudes toward filing for retirement benefits online. By asking participants to provide the main reason they might or might not use the online application, SSA will be able to identify their most important concerns that we may be able to address through service enhancements and targeted marketing.
- Question 36 asks for education level as a means of identifying differences in the attitudes and expectations for service among various subgroups, for example, whether the inclination to use electronic services varies based on education level. Other demographic information such as age, sex, and marital status of participants is already available in the sample.

Statistical Information

Sample Selection

SSA will procure a random sample of 10,000 men and women, aged 50 to 64, from throughout the United States. We believe this age group represents those who will retire within the next 15 years, and who may have given some thought to the timing of their retirement. We screen out those who currently receive benefits of any kind from Social Security, or who have ever applied for them, by asking them to return the survey virtually blank. (Beneficiaries and applicants for benefits have a chance of our asking for their opinions through our ongoing service satisfaction surveys.)

SSA will select the sample for the survey from a database maintained by a private company called InfoUSA. The database contains approximately 210 million individuals, with just over 45 million individuals between the ages of 50 and 64 with valid addresses. Based on U.S. Census figures, there are approximately 52 million individuals in that same age range in the United States—so coverage of the InfoUSA database, while incomplete, is still adequate. The data source represents all 50 states and the District of Columbia, so results will be applicable to each region of the United States. The sample size of 10,000 is large enough to permit analysis of variables that apply only to subgroups of respondents, for example, different age ranges in the target population.

Methodology

OQP will have an SSA-approved contractor conduct the survey by mail according to guidelines developed by survey expert Don Dillman, Deputy Director of the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University. These guidelines (the “Dillman method”) call for five distinct contacts (if necessary) with each sampled individual in order to maximize response rates:

1. All individuals will receive a written prenotice advising them they have been selected for the survey and encouraging their participation.
2. One week later, all individuals will receive the survey questionnaire and an accompanying letter. The letter will thank them in advance for participating in the survey; the Paperwork Reduction Act and the Privacy Act statements will be included on the questionnaire.
3. Two weeks later, we will mail a follow-up postcard reminder only to those sampled individuals who have not yet responded.
4. Three weeks after the mailing of the initial survey package, we will send a follow-up package, consisting of the follow-up cover letter and the questionnaire, to those sampled individuals who have not responded as of that point.
5. We will mail the fifth and final reminder 4 weeks after the mailing of the follow-up package only to those sample individuals who have not responded as of that point. This final reminder will use different wording to emphasize the importance of the survey and encourage individuals to participate.

Response Rate

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

- We will send the initial correspondence as a postcard rather than in an envelope. This will allow participants to recognize immediately that the survey is an SSA-sanctioned request and make it more likely that they will recognize and open the survey package that will arrive shortly after the postcard.
- The contractor will convert the questionnaire to a user-friendly, scannable survey format.
- We will follow the five-part Dillman method for mail surveys described above. Each mailing will be slightly different in appearance and tone to increase the chances of sampled individuals noticing and reading them—and thus to increase the response rate. For example, a prenotice postcard will clearly identify from the outset that the survey, although being mailed by a private contract is SSA-sanctioned. The initial cover letter stresses that each person’s participation is important and assures them of the confidentiality of their responses. We will send the postcard reminder shortly after the

first package to keep the survey on participants' minds and thank individuals who have already returned the questionnaire. The second package includes another copy of the questionnaire in case the participant has discarded or misplaced the original. In addition, the final closeout letter lets participants know that we are still interested in receiving their completed questionnaires.

- All letters will include the signature of OQP's Deputy Commissioner.

In the FYs 2005 and 2008 Prospective Client Surveys, using the five-part Dillman method yielded a 50 percent and 49 percent response rate, respectively. These are remarkably high figures considering that the vast majority of sampled individuals do not have any current connection with SSA. Considering our past experience, the refinements made to the survey correspondence for FY 2010, we anticipate an equally good response rate in the upcoming survey.

Sampling Variability

The key variables for this survey are the core questions that solicit participants' first and second choices for doing business with SSA. The question related to filing a retirement application is most significant since handling this burgeoning workload is one of SSA's major challenges. The responses from the FY 2008 survey appear in the table below. Assuming a 50 percent response rate and similar responses in the FY 2010 survey, the sampling variability around the results is acceptable for the intended purpose of the survey.

Preferred Service Delivery Channel	FY 2008 Survey Response	Sampling Variability
Internet or e-mail	69%	± 1.6
Telephone	93	± 1.0
In person	86	± 1.2

OQP will perform all data analysis. Statistical support will be provided by Dan Zabronsky, Director, Division of Modeling, Office of Quality Data Management, OQP. He can be reached at (410) 965-5953.

IF FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE A PAYMENT, INDICATE AMOUNT
(No more than \$25 authorized under OMB rules):

We will not compensate participants for this survey.

USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:

The Prospective Client Survey will provide insight about the service delivery expectations and preferences of future clients. In this way, the survey will help SSA plan for the challenges of providing satisfactory customer service for the upcoming wave of retirees.

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

Number of Responses: 10,000

Estimated Response Time: 20 minutes

Annual Burden Hours: 3,333 hours

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