

DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GENERIC CLEARANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Hearing Process Report Card (HPRC) Survey

SSA SUB-NUMBER: D-01

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

BACKGROUND

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

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; the second group includes applicants who received an unfavorable decision. 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 2012 is the fifth year in which SSA will undertake the HPRC 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 we tailored to address the different outcomes experienced by these two groups. We have successfully administered all the questions in the survey with these populations.

The survey covers a variety of topics related 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;

- 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.

Statistical Information

Sample Selection

In FY 2012, SSA expects to issue about 741,000 hearing decisions on disability claims, consisting of approximately 75 percent favorable (award) and 25 percent unfavorable (denial) decisions. The following table displays the estimated volume of hearing decisions for each of SSA’s ten regions and the National Hearing Center (NHC) for FY 2012.

Region	Estimated Yearly Hearing Awards	Estimated Yearly Hearing Denials
Boston	22,000	7,000
New York	49,000	16,000
Philadelphia	64,000	21,000
Atlanta	141,000	47,000
Chicago	76,000	25,000
Dallas	72,000	24,000
Kansas City	24,000	8,000
Denver	14,000	5,000
San Francisco	61,000	20,000
Seattle	17,000	5,000
National Hearing Centers	17,000	6,000
Total	557,000	184,000

Because of the relatively small size of these universes, we select decisions at three intervals over the fiscal year (October 2011, January 2012 and April 2012) in order to stratify the sample by outcome (award/denial) and geographic area. At each interval, we select a separate sample of hearing decisions from each of SSA's 10 regions and the NHCs. We select 900 cases from each region and 1,000 cases from the NHCs, with an equal distribution of awards and denials. The total sample sizes for the year equal:

Geographic Area	Awards	Denials
Each Region (x 10)	1,350	1,350
NHCs	1,500	1,500
Total	15,000	15,000

We weight the regional results to arrive at a national overall satisfaction rating that represents the universe of hearings decisions processed by SSA during the fiscal year.

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 large, difficult fill-in bubbles are not used;
- The first survey package includes a cover letter signed by an SSA 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 so participants can call if they have any questions.

Using the same survey methodology for the FY 2010 survey, we achieved a combined response rate of 49 percent at the national level. Among the regions, the combined response rate ranged from 47 percent to 53 percent. Considering our prior experience, we anticipate a response rate of at least 50 percent is also attainable in the FY 2012 survey. (Note we are referencing the FY 2010 survey results because we are still validating the data from the FY 2010 survey. As part of its data validation, SSA conducts a nonresponder analysis to evaluate any potential impact of the response rate on survey findings. We include the results of that analysis when we report the survey data.)

Sampling Variability

The key variable for this survey is overall satisfaction with SSA’s service (percent giving a rating of excellent, very good or good (E/VG/G)). The table below displays the most recent E/VG/G ratings for the nation and regions. Assuming a 50 percent response rate, our proposed sample sizes are large enough to provide a sampling variability at the 95-percent confidence level equal to:

Stratum	National Key Variable (E/VG/G Rating)	Sampling Variability
Awards	76%	+/- 1.7
Denials	37%	+/- 1.9

The table below shows the range of the E/VG/G overall service ratings among the regions in the last published survey. Based on an anticipated response rate of 50 percent from the regional samples of awarded and 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	65% to 82%	+/- 3.5 to +/- 3.0
Denials	32% to 43%	+/- 3.9 to +/- 3.7

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

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

We will not compensate participants for this survey.

USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:

We first conducted the HPRC 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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