

DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GENERIC CLEARANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Usability Testing of SSA Electronic Projects

SSA SUB-NUMBER: B-02

BACKGROUND/DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

The mission of the Usability Center is to provide the Social Security Administration (SSA) with well-designed, well-executed usability evaluations for all data collection and information dissemination vehicles SSA uses to interface with the public. Thus, we ensure these vehicles are customer-centered and effective.

Given the approaching retirement wave of both SSA employees and the general public, it is critical that SSA's self-service forms, applications, and other service delivery vehicles provide viable alternatives to SSA's in-office and telephone interview service channels. To this end, User-Centered Design Activities and Evaluations are a critical success factor. In other words, we must design all of SSA's public facing information dissemination and self-service forms and applications to ensure user success and accurate data collection. It is SSA's goal to provide American citizens, businesses, and government with self-service applications that are extremely secure, highly rated, and easy to use.

Currently, we conduct SSA's usability evaluations toward the end of the Planning and Analysis Phase of the Internet Project Lifecycle, which obtains the same type of data sets for each project. Because of our short timeframes and inability to stop and obtain clearance for each Usability session, we limit our usability groups to nine or less participants.

SSA would like to seek clearance for an expanded list of usability activities. Citizen-centered design activities, conducted early and iteratively during the design of a vehicle would allow SSA to design more usable, effective and accepted self-service vehicles. Conducting these citizen-centered design activities with more participants would allow SSA to satisfy the needs of a broader segment of the public. Conducting a series of tests iteratively with design refinements would allow design refinement and confirmation that design changes actually improved participant performance.

Some of the specific types of User-Centered Design Activities and Evaluations that this clearance pertains to are as follows:

- **User Interviews** - Interviewing one or more users is an effective method to gather information about their tasks, issues, goals, and the environment in which they work. Interviewing a small group of users can elicit multiple perspectives about the work. Interviewing can also be done from a distance and may involve traditional or newer technologies ranging from the telephone to internet-based applications such as

NetMeeting. Interviewing users at remote locations can provide access to more users and to users who might not otherwise be able to participate.

- **Contextual Inquiries** - Contextual inquiry combines interviewing with work observation and allows teams to watch users perform tasks. Teams listen to users explain what they are doing as they work, and can interject questions to elicit more about the user, the work, and the environment.
- **Card-sorting** - Card sorting is a simple design technique that can help structure the content of an application. Users are given a pile of cards, with a description of the menu or content item written on each card, and told to sort them into logical groups. Card sorting streamlines the process of structuring content, such as pages on a web site or menus. It also provides an excellent way of finding out what terminology is best for labels and links. We believe card sorting works best when used early in the design phase before making decisions about the structure of the web site or the grouping of menu options. It is an effective tool for capturing feedback from target users before producing a paper mock-up.
- **Usability Testing** - Usability testing is an iterative process that involves testing a design with users and then using the test results to improve the design. Tests can be informal or formal and done in person or at a distance using a combination of telephone and remote technologies such as NetMeeting. The purpose of usability testing is always to see what is working well and what is not working well — with the goal of improving the design based on feedback from users.

Team members of SSA's Usability Center (UC), which consists of SSA personnel and contractor staff, conduct these activities and evaluations. Study participants are members of the general public or members of a group, such as state and local government agencies, employers, advocates, who use the vehicle under evaluation in conducting their business task(s) with SSA. The vehicles may be paper, such as forms and pamphlets; or automated, such as computer systems, the Internet, or voice-response telephone menus.

The Usability Center team records information related to the effectiveness of the vehicle's design in enabling the participants to conduct their tasks accurately, efficiently, and to the participant's satisfaction, such as:

- Task completion percentages and time;
- Task completion accuracy;
- Problems the participants encountered; and,
- Comments the participants make regarding the vehicle's ease-of-use.

The study participants provide feedback consisting of one or more of the following:

- Completion of the System Usability Scale (SUS) questionnaire or other standardized usability rating surveys;
- Specific suggestions for change; and,
- Both their positive and negative reactions to the system including general comments.

We typically select study participants from SSA’s beneficiary rolls or by contacting organizations and businesses that would meet the user requirements for the application or website undergoing testing. For example, if the UC were to test an application designed for disabled people, we may randomly select people from those receiving disability benefits. If the UC were to test a form that attorneys would complete, we would contact law firms for test participants. If the UC were to test an application designed for wage reporting, we would contact employers and payroll service providers.

In this Generic Clearance Request, we are requesting clearance for all usability sessions through the end of fiscal year 2012. Although the subject of the usability sessions may change, the questions and procedures remain constant. Therefore, instead of requesting individual clearance for each usability session, we have attached for your review a list of projected projects for which we will conduct usability testing next year, and the questions/usability guides we will use for each of these projects.

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

If a vendor assists in recruiting and hosting our evaluations, we contract with them to provide the compensation for the participants. For example, recruiting physicians to participate in evaluating a Consultative Examination Scheduling System may require higher incentives. The vendor will provide an average payment of \$75 unless another amount is required. **(Rationale for payment amount:** Our vendors, who are experienced in conducting these types of studies, have informed us that this amount is consistent with compensation for other, similar evaluations conducted in areas that have a higher cost of living.)

USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:

The results of the surveys will remain within SSA; we will not disseminate the results outside the agency. Once aggregated, project teams will use the results to make decisions regarding changes to the vehicle’s design in the form of a written document, or a PowerPoint presentation.

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

Thirty projects per year x 3 rounds of testing x 20 users per round x 120 minutes session/60 = 3,600 hours.

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