

## **DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GENERIC CLEARANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

---

**TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION:** Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Retirement Applicant Survey

**SSA SUB-NUMBER:** D-03

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has been measuring the satisfaction of applicants for Title II and Title XVI disability benefits at the both the initial and appeal levels since 2008. However, we did not have a comparable ongoing survey of Title II retirement benefit applicants. To fill the gap in our knowledge of customer perceptions of the agency's service during the application process, we began conducting a biennial survey of Title II retirement benefit applicants in FY 2014. We will conduct the Retirement Applicant Survey again in FY 2016.

### **SURVEY**

#### **Description of Survey**

In designing the questionnaire, we drew from our earlier one-time surveys of retirement benefit applicants and our ongoing surveys of disability benefit applicants to identify the key aspects of the application process that influence customer perceptions. We also included questions that capture applicants' expectations and preferences for conducting future business with SSA.

The Retirement Applicant Survey questionnaire includes the following questions:

- Questions 1 – 8 address retirement planning, including where sampled individuals obtained retirement benefit information and what effect the information may have had on their decision to retire. Questions 3 and 4 ask sampled individuals whether they have used the online tools on SSA's website for estimating retirement benefits and to rate their usefulness.
- Questions 9 – 13 ask sampled individuals how they actually completed their application and solicit feedback related to the convenience of a scheduled appointment. We also ask individuals who file in person or on the telephone if they were aware of SSA's online application and to provide the main reason they did not file online.
- Question 14 measures satisfaction with various aspects of the online application process.

Generic Clearance FY 2016 Retirement Applicant Survey

- Questions 15 – 17 address satisfaction with the service SSA provided over the telephone, including ease of getting through to an employee.
- Questions 18 – 19 solicit feedback about the quality of service provided in person, including office location, hours, privacy, comfort, appearance, check-in signs and instructions, and waiting time to be served.
- Question 20 asks sampled individuals to rate the service provided by SSA employees, including their courtesy, helpfulness, job knowledge, and clarity of explanations.
- Question 21 addresses satisfaction with the overall application experience and other issues, such as how quickly SSA issued the decision and the clarity of the notice explaining the decision.
- Questions 22 – 25 explore sampled individuals' preferences for conducting future business with SSA and solicit information about their expectations of timely service for each service delivery mode.
- Question 26 asks sampled individuals how confident they are that SSA keeps their personal information secure regardless of how they choose to do business with us. This feedback will help SSA's efforts to inform the public about our information security strategies.
- Questions 27 – 30 obtain information about sampled individuals' experience with the Internet, which will allow SSA to gauge the overall sophistication of users of their electronic services. This insight will help SSA understand the market for its electronic services.
- Questions 32 - 33 address authentication issues related to conducting business with SSA electronically: how comfortable sampled individuals are with providing various types of personal information and with SSA matching their personal information against other types of records.
- Questions 34 – 36 solicit sampled individuals' attitudes about creating a secure online account for conducting future business with us online. By asking sampled individuals to provide the main reason they might or might not create the online account, SSA will be able to identify their most important concerns, which we could address through service enhancements and targeted marketing.
- Questions 37 - 38 obtain information about what special accommodations sampled individuals need due to a medical condition. This information will help SSA understand the needs of future customers.
- Question 39 asks for sampled individuals' education level as a means of identifying differences in the attitudes and expectations for service among various subgroups. Other

demographic information such as the age and sex of sampled individuals is available from SSA records.

## **Statistical Information**

### ***Sample Selection***

SSA processed over 4 million applications for Title II retirement benefits in FY 2014. Using the agency system that maintains these records, we will select a random sample of 10,000 applicants nationwide who are awarded retirement benefits in October 2015. The sample will include applicants who filed in person, on the telephone, or online.

### ***Methodology***

An SSA-approved contractor will 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.

### ***Response Rate***

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

- We send the initial correspondence as a postcard rather than in an envelope. Using a postcard format allows sampled individuals to see quickly that SSA sanctions the survey. Additionally, the postcard identifies the contractor who is conducting the survey for SSA, which should increase the likelihood that sampled individuals will recognize and open the envelope when they receive the questionnaire.
- One week after we send the initial postcard, we mail all sampled individuals the questionnaire and an accompanying cover letter. We include both the Paperwork Reduction Act and the Privacy Act statements on the questionnaire.
- One week later, we mail a follow-up postcard reminder only to those sampled individuals who have not yet responded.
- Three weeks after the mailing of the initial survey package, we send a follow-up package, consisting of the follow-up cover letter and another copy of the questionnaire, to those sampled individuals who have not responded as of that point.
- Two weeks after the mailing of the follow-up package, we send a fifth and final reminder letter to those sampled individuals who have not responded to previous mailings.
- An experienced contractor converts the questionnaire to a user-friendly scannable format.
- We send Spanish surveys to sampled individuals where SSA records indicate that is their

preferred language; and,

- We provide SSA's toll-free National 800 number so participants can call if they have any questions.

In our FY 2014 Retirement Applicant Survey, we achieved a response rate of 74 percent using the same methodology. We anticipate an equally good response rate in the upcoming survey. Note that SSA routinely conducts a non-responder analysis to identify any significant differences in the responder and non-responder populations and their potential impact on the survey results.

### ***Sampling Variability***

The key variable for this survey is overall satisfaction with SSA's service, i.e., the percent giving a rating of excellent, very good or good (E/VG/G). In the FY 2014 survey, the overall satisfaction rate was 96 percent. Assuming a 74 percent response rate, our proposed sample size is large enough to provide a sampling variability at the 95-percent confidence level of +/- .7.

SSA's Office of Quality Review and Office of Quality Improvement (OQI) are responsible for sampling and data analysis. Dan Zabronsky, Deputy Associate Commissioner, OQI, provides statistical support. OMB can reach Mr. Zabronsky at (410) 965-5953.

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

We will not compensate participants for this survey.

### **USE OF SURVEY RESULTS:**

SSA will use the results of this study to gauge satisfaction with the current initial retirement application process, and to prepare to meet customers' needs and expectations for conducting future business with us.

**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

**NAME OF CONTACT PERSON:** Naomi R. Sipple

**TELEPHONE NUMBER:** 410-965-4145