

MEMORANDUM

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THROUGH: Lynn Murray
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DATE: October 14, 2014

SUBJECT: BJS request for OMB Clearance to conduct a pilot test with select probation and parole agencies currently participating in the Annual Surveys of Probation and Parole under the generic clearance agreement OMB Number 1121-0339

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is developing a series of supplemental data collections to the Annual Surveys of Probation and Parole (ASPP) in order to address information gaps and emerging issues in the field of community corrections. This is part of ongoing efforts by BJS to expand and enhance its Community Corrections Statistics Program (CCSP) by producing statistics on the operations, policies, and practices of community corrections agencies and by addressing emerging issues or information gaps in order to enhance the understanding of population trends and characteristics as they relate to the changing nature of community supervision (i.e., the policies and practices of agencies). The enhancements to the CCSP are designed to meet BJS's core mandates to collect, analyze, and disseminate information on the operations of the nation's criminal justice system at the federal, state and local levels as specified in its authorizing statute under Title 42, United States Code 3732, Section 302 (see Appendix A – Title 42 BJS Authorizing Legislation). This generic clearance seeks permission to pilot test a Staffing Supplement as part of the ASPP in order to determine the feasibility of national implementation of a survey assessing the types and levels of staffing in probation and parole agencies.

BACKGROUND

Authorized by the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended (42 U.S.C. 3732), BJS has collected annual yearend counts and movements of adult community corrections populations for more than 30 years through its Annual Probation Survey and Annual Parole Survey. Nearly 4.8 million adults in the United States were under community supervision at the end of 2012 (Maruschak and Bonczar, 2013). Because of the size of this population, policymakers and practitioners recognize the importance of having reliable data. The information gained through the ASPP is critical for policy development and criminal justice planning at both the state and national levels. BJS is the only federal government agency that collects national-level data on the probation and parole populations including its stock, movements, outcomes, and characteristics. While the ASPP provide critical data on the national indicators of change in the size and composition of the community corrections population, they do not collect data on the operations and characteristics of the supervising agencies and so BJS's mission in the area of community corrections is not fully achieved. Implementation of supplemental data collections, such as the Staffing Supplement, is envisioned as a means of providing such information to criminal justice stakeholders.

Collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data on the organization of the criminal justice system is part of BJS's authorizing statute. Staffing is a core indicator of agency organization and operations. Currently, no data are available on staffing for community corrections at the national level. Data on staffing, such as the number of probation and parole officers, will allow for the analysis of: 1) caseload sizes and workload issues; 2) the capacities of agencies to manage different population sizes and types of caseloads; 3) the relationship between population outcomes and staffing; and 4) the varying use of supervision methods such as implementation of evidence-based practices in relationship to staffing. These topics represent key issues and information gaps identified by stakeholders from the American Probation and Parole Association and the National Institute of Corrections. Expanding the types of data collected on community supervision agencies in order to address the issues described above will support initiatives sponsored by the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs regarding the implementation and evaluation of offender re-entry programs and use of evidence-based practices in community corrections. This pilot represents foundational work for addressing these issues by assessing the feasibility of the national implementation of a Staffing Supplement and how it relates to other BJS data on community corrections including the ASPP and the Census of Adult Probation Supervising Agencies (CAPSA).

REQUEST FOR DEVELOPMENTAL WORK

This document is a request to OMB for developmental research under BJS's generic clearance and seeks permission to pilot test the Staffing Supplement in order to assess the functionality of the instrument, the capacity of respondents to provide the information, and the level of burden associated with reporting the information prior to implementing it on a national scale. The findings will be used to make the necessary changes to the instrument to enhance its functionality, improve the quality of the data collected, and minimize burden prior to national implementation.

In the development of the pilot test version of the Staffing Supplement, community corrections practitioners contributed ideas about key issues related to staffing through informal and formal

consultation and working group meetings at the American Probation and Parole Association training institutes and through the National Institute of Corrections data providers meeting. In 2013, BJS conducted additional survey development work where nine probation and parole agencies responded to draft questions. Based on feedback from these respondents, the content, definitions, and format of the questionnaire were revised.

The following sections describe the proposed methods to pilot test the Staffing Supplement.

Procedures

This pilot test will be implemented by Westat, a research and statistical survey organization that currently has cooperative agreements with BJS to conduct the ASPP and CAPSA data collections.

Task 1. Survey administration

The Staffing Supplement will be administered to respondents as part of the routine 2014 ASPP data collection process conducted in early 2015. The pilot of the Staffing Supplement will employ the standard web survey application used for the ASPP. Some of the advantages of using a web-based survey include a dynamic survey interface with built-in skip patterns to reduce burden; reduced costs for data entry; dynamic error checking capability; and minimization of missing items, thereby reducing the need for data retrieval. The Staffing Supplement questions will have the look and feel of the current ASPP web survey design (see Appendix B for sample web survey screen shots of ASPP). The goal of embedding the Staffing Supplement questions into the ASPP web survey is to minimize respondent burden and unit nonresponse. Respondents will not have to take any additional action (e.g., log into a separate instrument) to complete the Staffing Supplement; after the last ASPP question is asked, the web survey will provide an introduction to the Staffing Supplement and then transition to the questions. Data providers who are unable to complete the web survey will have access to hardcopies of the survey as a back-up mode to minimize non-response rates.

Four different hardcopy versions of the survey were developed. Each version addresses the same topics; however, skip patterns and item wording were tailored to the different types of the respondents in order to reduce burden and minimize reporting error. The four versions were designed for specific respondent types including: 1) ASPP parole respondents who are dual reporters for both probation and parole (Appendix C1 - Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Dual Reporter, Parole Focus); 2) ASPP probation respondents who are dual reporters for both probation and parole (Appendix C2 - Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Dual Reporter, Probation Focus); 3) ASPP parole-only respondents (Appendix C3 - Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Parole Only); and 4) ASPP probation-only respondents (Appendix C4 - Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Probation Only). Examples of the tailored content and wording include:

- References to agency and population types. Question 1 on the forms shows an instance of this tailoring, where the Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Parole Only asks about staff working in the “parole agency,” whereas the Probation Only version asks about staff working in the “probation agency.”

- Content/Reference sets. Questions 5 and 6 on the forms present either 3 or 4 items depending on the agency type. For example, on the Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Dual Reporter version, these questions ask only about juvenile and “other” population types. Dual reporters will describe their parole and probation populations on the standard CJ7 and CJ8 forms, so there is no need to ask about the parole and probation population types in the Staffing Supplement. However, on the Parole Only and Probation Only versions, these questions also ask about the parole and probation populations not included in the reference set (e.g., the Parole Only form asks about probationers).

Task 2. Sample selection and correspondence

The organizational structure of probation and parole varies markedly by state. As of the end of the 2013 data collection, the ASPP included 464 probation respondents and 53 parole respondents. The pool of probation respondents was composed of 33 central state reporters and 431 separate city, county, or court reporters including the District of Columbia and the federal system. The pool of parole respondents was composed of 53 central state reporters including the District of Columbia and the federal system. In 37 jurisdictions, the same respondent reported for probation and parole (dual reporter) as part of the routine ASPP data collection. In the pilot, respondents who are dual reporters for probation and parole will only receive one Staffing Supplement.

BJS, in coordination with Westat, will develop a list of approximately 80 agencies that will be asked to participate in the pilot test. The sample will include a purposefully selected group of central reporting parole agencies and local reporting probation agencies, and all central reporting probation agencies. Inclusion of all central reporting probation agencies will allow BJS to determine if states with central reporters have the capacity to report staffing data for the entire state or whether it is necessary to go to the localities for the information. In addition, BJS will work with Westat to define other agency characteristics that should be considered when selecting pilot test participants in order to assess the appropriateness of staffing categories and the ability of the respondents to provide the information. Characteristics to be considered include: 1) participation in the earlier pretest of the Staffing Supplement; 2) whether agencies supervise only parolees, only probationers, both parolees and probationers (dual reporters), and other population types such as juveniles; 3) level of government in which the agency operates; 4) population size; and 5) item response and reporting patterns to the main ASPP survey.

Agencies selected for the pilot will each receive a pre-notification letter from BJS addressed to the agency head that includes a one-page insert describing the content addressed in the Staffing Supplement (see Appendix D for the pre-notification letter). In addition, each agency will receive a survey invitation letter from Westat addressed to the designated data provider that also includes the one-page insert (see Appendix E for the survey invitation letter). The data providers' letters will include login information to complete the ASPP and Staffing Supplement online. Each data provider will be assigned a single PIN to access the survey using the standard ASPP procedures. Any data providers who are unable to complete the web survey will be offered alternative methods for completing the questionnaires (phone, fax, mail).

Task 3: Non-response follow-up and debriefing

Agencies that are unable to provide any information on the Staffing Supplement will receive a debriefing call asking why they are not able to report the data and from whom the information could be obtained.

Responses to survey items that are inconsistent, incomplete, out of range, and/or estimated values will be identified and debriefing provided as follows:

- If the total number of staff reported is greater than the total number of staff by category, respondents will be asked why and prompted to see if they omitted and/or had difficulty classifying staff who are included in the total number of staff reported.
- If the total number of staff reported is less than the total number of staff by category, respondents will be asked why and prompted to see if staff were reported in more than one category.
- Respondents reporting large proportions of staff in the “other” category who do not list the types of staff will be prompted for a description of the staff included.
- If more than 100 offenders per probation/parole officer are reported, respondents will be asked for an explanation in terms of a description of the nature of the supervision and types of offenders/caseloads.
- For items marked as estimates, respondents will be asked why they cannot provide actual data and queried about their level of confidence in the estimates.
- Agencies that supervise multiple population types (probation/parole, adult/juvenile) will receive debriefing calls reviewing their ability to provide counts for the different categories of staff separately for the populations included in their yearend counts on the ASPP.

All comments and issues will be tracked during the non-response follow-up and debriefing process.

Task 4. Analyze responses and prepare report

Westat will work with the BJS Project Manager to develop an analysis plan for the pilot test. Research questions will be developed to guide the analysis, as follows:

- Are central reporters able to provide answers to the supplement questions that accurately reflect the staffing configuration of all agencies under their purview?
- Are the staffing categories provided in the questions appropriate for different types of agencies (e.g., offender population/staff counts of different sizes, agencies at different levels of government, parole versus probation populations)?
- To what extent do data providers rely on estimates when initially submitting data and when providing responses as a result of follow-up? What is their level of confidence in the estimates?
- Did the inclusion of the staffing questions affect the number of days between invitation and survey submission and the need for nonresponse follow-up relative to the days and follow-up in previous years? Did inclusion of the staffing question increase the need for data retrieval?

The BJS Project Manager and Westat will collaborate to prepare a pilot test report summarizing the methodology used and the findings related to the research questions. The report will include recommendations regarding the feasibility of implementing the Staffing Supplement nationwide and document any changes that should be made to the survey questions prior to future implementation.

EXPECTED BURDEN TO COMPLETE

The Staffing Supplement is designed to be completed online and it is anticipated that the majority of respondents will make use of the online survey application¹ that allows for multi-session, non-sequential completion of the survey instrument. This flexibility in completing the online survey will allow survey respondents to collect and provide information at their convenience and will facilitate completion of the Staffing Supplement and reduce the burden. Westat will provide a toll-free telephone number and email address so that respondents may contact them with questions or for technical assistance in order to facilitate survey completion.

Survey development work on the Staffing Supplement was completed with agencies that ranged in size and organizational structure. Respondents were asked to complete the supplement, provide additional comments or suggestions regarding the clarity of survey questions, and estimate the time needed to complete the questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone and all respondents reported that responding to the survey was straightforward.

The estimated total time to complete the Staffing Supplement pilot test for all participating jurisdictions is 60 hours. The burden hour estimates are divided across the following two tasks: 1) Staffing Supplement data collection; and 2) non-response follow-up and debriefing. The burden hour estimates are based on the survey development work and prior experience collecting similar nationwide data. Table 1 summarizes the burden estimates.

Table 1. Estimated Burden to Complete the Staffing Supplement

<i>Task</i>	Maximum burden on average per jurisdiction	Total respondents	Total estimated burden
<i>Staffing Supplement data collection</i>	30 minutes	80	40 hours
<i>Non-response follow-up and debriefing</i>	15 minutes	80	20 hours
Total			60 hours

¹ In the 2013 ASPP, 95% of responding data providers reported via the online survey.

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH APPLICABILITY

§45 CFR 46.102 defines a human subject as a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with an individual or with his/her identifiable private information. Since the Staffing Supplement collects information about the operational characteristics of probation and parole agencies, the Westat Institutional Review Board has determined that the activities associated with data collection for this project are not considered human subjects research and obtaining informed consent is not required. The information gathered will be used only for statistical or research purposes, as per Title 42 U.S.C. 3735.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For information regarding data collection and aspects of the design of this research, contact:

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Appendices

Appendix A – Title 42 BJS Authorizing Legislation

Appendix B – Sample Screen Shots of ASPP

Appendix C1 – Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Dual Reporter, Parole Focus

Appendix C2 – Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Dual Reporter, Probation Focus

Appendix C3 – Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Parole Only

Appendix C4 – Staffing Supplement Pilot Questionnaire – Probation Only

Appendix D – Pre-Notification Letter

Appendix E – Survey Invitation Letter