

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

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**TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION:** Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Prospective Client Survey

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

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) expects the number of applicants for retirement benefits to increase substantially in the next five to ten years. In 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.

SSA conducted the Prospective Client Survey with the same target population in FY 2005, FY 2008, FY 2011, FY 2013, and FY 2015. We are conducting the survey again in FY 2017 to update findings and track trends in service preferences and expectations.

### **SURVEY**

#### **Description of Survey**

As noted above, the FY 2017 Prospective Client Survey is a follow-up to a survey of the same population conducted by SSA five times since FY 2005. To ensure comparability, the FY 2017 questionnaire, wherever possible, uses essentially the same battery of questions from the previous four versions.

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

- Questions 1 – 7 solicit feedback about where sampled individuals have obtained retirement benefit information. Questions 1 – 3 address receipt of the Social Security Statement, including a rating of its usefulness. Question 5 asks sampled individuals who have used the Retirement Estimator on SSA's website to rate its usefulness as well. These opening questions act as an icebreaker to get sampled individuals thinking about their current and future connection with SSA.
- Questions 8 – 10 gather information about how soon sampled individuals plan to retire and at what age they plan to claim Social Security retirement benefits. Knowing sampled individuals' retirement plans will provide additional context for understanding their other survey responses.

- Questions 11 – 14 explore sampled individuals’ preferences for conducting a wide range of business with SSA; from actions they might take in the present to those they might take after they start to receive benefits.
- The next three sections (questions 15 - 27) solicit sampled individuals’ opinions about what aspects of the three main service delivery modes, telephone, in-person, or electronic (Internet or email) are most important to them. They also obtain information about their expectations of timely service for each delivery mode. The rating questions do not address aspects of service that SSA knows are universally considered very important, for example, courteous and knowledgeable employees. Question 24 measures the public’s inclination to conduct business through video service.
- Questions 28 and 29 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.
- Question 30 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 31 – 35 obtain information about sampled individuals’ experience with the Internet, which 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 36 – 40 solicit sampled individuals’ attitudes about two activities on SSA’s website: creating a secure online account and filing for retirement benefits. By asking sampled individuals to provide the main reason they might or might not use the online application, SSA will be able to identify their most important concerns, which we could address through service enhancements and targeted marketing.
- Questions 41 and 42 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 43 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 age, sex, and marital status of sampled individuals 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. The first question on the survey screens out individuals who currently receive benefits of any kind from Social Security, or who applied for benefits in the last five years. (Beneficiaries and applicants for benefits have a chance to give 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 101 million individuals, with about 46 million individuals between the ages of 50 and 64 with valid addresses. Based on U.S. Census figures, there are approximately 62 million individuals in that same age range in the United States; therefore, 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***

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 quickly see 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 designed the scannable version for ease of use, e.g., font sizes are large, difficult fill-in bubbles are not used.

In the five previous Prospective Client Surveys, using the same five-part Dillman method we achieved a response rate of around 45 percent. These are remarkably high figures considering that the vast majority of sampled individuals do not have any current connection with SSA. In view of our past experiences, 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 variables for this survey are the three questions that solicit sampled individuals’ preferences for using one of SSA’s primary service delivery channels, either telephone, in-person or electronic (Internet or email) service. The responses from the FY 2015 survey appear in the table below. Assuming a 50 percent response rate and similar responses, the sampling variability around the results will be acceptable for the intended purpose of the survey.

<b>Service Delivery Channel</b>	<b>“Yes” Responders in FY 2015</b>	<b>Sampling Variability</b>
Internet or e-mail	80%	± 1.8
Telephone	90%	± 1.2
In person	83%	± 1.5

SSA’s Office of Quality Review and Office of Quality Improvement (OQI) are responsible for sampling and data analysis. Douglas Turnbull, Director, Office of Modeling, OQI, SSA, provides statistical support. OMB can reach Mr. Turnbull at (410) 966-2595.

**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:**

The Prospective Client Survey will provide insight about the service delivery expectations and preferences of future clients. SSA will use these insights to plan for the challenges of providing satisfactory customer service for the increasing number 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