

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR  
GENERIC INFORMATION COLLECTION AND CLEARANCE OF  
“QUALITATIVE STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK ON AGENCY SERVICE DELIVERY”**

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary**

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, oversees roughly \$1.5 billion to fund research, educational, and extension efforts in a wide range of scientific fields related to agricultural and behavioral sciences. NIFA achieves its mission through partnerships with Land-Grant Universities (LGU), non-profit organizations, private sector firms, and other government agencies. These partners, through research, education, and extension activities, help NIFA and USDA address highly complex and multidimensional challenges in food and agriculture. To ensure that our programs address the Nation’s food and agricultural priorities and our processes minimize burden without jeopardizing accountability, NIFA seeks to obtain OMB approval of a generic clearance to collect qualitative feedback on our service delivery. By qualitative feedback, we mean information that provides insights on perceptions and opinions, but are not statistical surveys or quantitative results that can be generalized to the population of study.

This collection of information is necessary to enable NIFA, herein “the Agency,” to garner qualitative feedback from customers, stakeholders, and partners (herein “stakeholders”) in an efficient and timely manner, and in accordance with our commitment to providing the highest quality service delivery. The information collected from our stakeholders will help NIFA identify emerging and significant priorities in food and agriculture; refine NIFA’s business processes; and promote inclusiveness and diversity to ensure that NIFA drives outcomes that meets the needs of all Americans.

**2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection**

Improving agency programs requires ongoing assessment of NIFA’s programs and processes, by which we mean systematic review of the operation of a program compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards. NIFA will collect, analyze, and interpret information gathered through this generic clearance to identify strengths and weaknesses of current services and make improvements based on stakeholder feedback. If this information is not collected, NIFA’s ability to respond to stakeholders’ needs and continuously improve programs and services will be greatly diminished.

The solicitation of feedback will target areas such as: strategic, portfolio, and programmatic planning; the quality and timeliness of competitive and non-competitive awards processes; post-award management; information technology systems and websites; and, grants management training needs. Responses will inform efforts to improve or maintain the quality of service offered to the public.

The Agency will only submit a collection for approval under this generic clearance if it meets the following conditions:

- Information gathered will be used only internally for general service improvement and program management purposes and is not intended for release outside of the agency (if released, procedures outlined in Question 16 will be followed);
- Information gathered will not be used for the purpose of substantially informing influential policy decisions;<sup>1</sup>
- Information gathered will yield qualitative information; the collections will not be designed or expected to yield statistically reliable results or used as though the results are generalizable to the population of study;
- The collections are voluntary;
- The collections are low-burden for respondents (based on considerations of total burden hours, total number of respondents, or burden-hours per respondent) and are low-cost for both the respondents and the Federal Government;
- The collections are non-controversial and do not raise issues of concern to other Federal agencies;
- Any collection is targeted to the solicitation of opinions from respondents who have experience with the program or may have experience with the program in the near future; and
- With the exception of information needed to provide remuneration for participants of focus groups and cognitive laboratory studies, personally identifiable information (PII) is collected only to the extent necessary and is not retained.

If these conditions are not met, the Agency will submit an information collection request to OMB for approval through the normal PRA process.

To obtain approval for a collection that meets the conditions of this generic clearance, a standardized form will be submitted to OMB along with supporting documentation (e.g., a copy of the questionnaire). The submission will have automatic approval, unless OMB identifies issues within 5 business days. The types of collections covered by this generic clearance include, but are not limited to:

- Pre- and post-meeting questionnaires;
- Methodological testing or pre-testing;
- Surveys or focus groups of customers, potential customers, delivery partners, or other stakeholders;
- Qualitative customer satisfaction surveys (e.g., post-transaction surveys; opt-out web surveys);
- Message development and testing; and,
- Website satisfaction surveys.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined in OMB and agency Information Quality Guidelines, “influential” means that “an agency can reasonably determine that dissemination of the information will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions.”

The Agency has established a manager/managing entity to serve for this generic clearance and will conduct an independent review of each information collection to ensure compliance with the terms of this clearance prior to submitting each collection to OMB.

### **3. Consideration Given to Information Technology**

NIFA will collect information electronically and/or use online collaboration tools to the extent possible to reduce burden.

### **4. Duplication of Information**

No similar data are gathered or maintained by the Agency or are available from other sources known to the Agency.

### **5. Reducing the Burden on Small Entities**

Small business or other small entities may be involved in these efforts but the Agency will minimize the burden on them of information collections approved under this clearance by sampling, asking for readily available information, and using short, easy-to-complete information collection instruments.

### **6. Consequences of Not Conducting Collection**

The inability to collect this information will leave the Agency without timely information to adjust its services to meet customer needs. The agency measures its performance around three elements – relevance, quality, and performance. Stakeholder feedback is critical to assessing and sustaining its relevance to addressing domestic and global food and agriculture challenges. Stakeholder feedback will be sought primarily from the Land Grant Universities which help carry out the Agency's mission.

### **7. Special Circumstances**

There are no special circumstances. The information collected will be voluntary and will not be used for statistical purposes.

### **8. Consultations with Persons Outside the Agency**

In accordance with 5 CFR 1320.8(d), on October 4, 2016, a 60-day notice for public comment was published in the *Federal Register* (Vol 81, No 192). No comments were received.

### **9. Payment or Gift**

The Agency will not provide payment or other forms of remuneration to respondents of its various forms of collecting feedback. In many cases, stakeholders who provide feedback will be doing so in the context of having been remunerated for other services, such as serving on panels for reviewing grant applications.

**10. Confidentiality**

If a confidentiality pledge is deemed useful and feasible, the Agency will only include a pledge of confidentiality that is supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, and that does not unnecessarily impede sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use. If the agency includes a pledge of confidentiality, it will include a citation for the statute or regulation supporting the pledge.

**11. Sensitive Nature**

No questions will be asked that are of a personal or sensitive nature.

**12. Burden of Information Collection**

Information will be collected primarily through surveys and focus groups. The annual burden hours requested (10,500) are based on the average number of collections (15 per year) that we expect to conduct annually and the anticipated average number of respondents per activity (750). Below we project average annual estimates.

Type of Collection	Total No. of Respondents	Annual Frequency per Response	Hours per Response	Total Hours
Pre- and post-meeting questionnaires	10,500	1	.5	5,250
Surveys or focus groups of customers, potential customers, delivery partners, or other	8400	1	.5	4,200

stakeholders				
Qualitative customer satisfaction surveys	10,500	1	.5	5,250
Message development and testing	1,650	1	.5	825
Website satisfaction surveys	3,000	1	.5	1,500
<b>Total Burden</b>	<b>10,500</b>		.5	<b>17,505</b>

### 13. Costs to Respondents

The table below shows the estimated cost to respondents. These estimates are based on an assumption that majority of respondents will be university faculty. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the mean annual wage of a professor in agricultural sciences in 2015 was \$95,280.<sup>2</sup> BLS does not provide an hourly wage. To estimate an hourly rate, we assumed a 40-hour work week, multiplied by 52 weeks for a total of 2,080 hours worked annually.

Position	Mean annual wage	Hourly Rate	Hourly Rate incl. benefits (1.5 x hourly pay rate)	Estimated time (hours) per task	Cost Per submission	Annual Cost (x15)
Project Director	95,280	\$45.81	\$68.72	.50	\$34.36	\$515

### 14. Costs to Federal Government

The table below shows the estimated costs to the Federal government. We anticipate that each activity will involve two staff and require 4 hours per activity to design the survey instrument, administer the survey, and provide results to program staff.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2015, 25-1041 (Agricultural Sciences Teachers, Postsecondary) [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes251041.htm#\(4\)](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes251041.htm#(4)).

<b>Position</b>	<b>Grade/ Step</b>	<b>Hourly Rate</b>	<b>Hourly Rate incl. benefits (1.5 x hourly pay rate)</b>	<b>Estimated time (hours) per task</b>	<b>Cost Per submissi on</b>	<b>Annual Cost (x15)</b>
Social Science Analyst	14/7	\$64.62	\$96.93	4	\$387.72	\$5,815
Program Analyst	12/5	\$43.43	\$65.15	4	\$260.58	\$3,908
<b>Total</b>				8	\$648.30	\$9,723

**15. Reason for Change**

Not applicable. This is a new request for a generic ICR.

**16. Tabulation of Results, Schedule, Analysis Plans**

Feedback collected under this generic clearance provides useful information, but it does not yield data that can be generalized to the overall population. Findings will be used for general service improvement, but are not for publication or other public release.

Although the Agency does not intend to publish its findings, the Agency may receive requests to release the information (e.g., congressional inquiry, Freedom of Information Act requests). The Agency will disseminate the findings when appropriate, strictly following the Agency's "Guidelines for Ensuring the Quality of Information Disseminated to the Public" and will include specific discussion of the limitation of the qualitative results discussed above.

**17. Display of OMB Approval Date**

We are requesting no exemption.

**18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions**

These activities comply with the requirements in 5 CFR 1320.9.