Pre-Separation Transition Assistance Program (PSTAP) Assessment

SUPPORTING STATEMENT A

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.

Preparing Transitioning Servicemembers (TSMs) for civilian life is an important goal for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This goal has been highlighted in a 2014 report to Congress by the General Accountability Office (GAO), "Better Understanding Needed to Enhance Services to Veterans Readjusting to Civilian Life" [GAO-14-676). VA's progress toward meeting this imperative for Veterans' readiness for civilian life includes expansions to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to meet long-term outcomes in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Transition Assistance Program for Servicemembers Transition from Active Duty MOU signed 16 Dec 2016). The Interagency group that carries out the performance management activities of this MOU is the Performance Management Workgroup (PMWG) comprised of the following federal partner agencies:

1) U.S. Department of Defense
2) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
3) U.S. Coast Guard (representing Department of Homeland Security)
4) U.S. Department of Labor
5) U.S. Department of Education
6) U.S. Office of Personnel and Management
7) Small Business Administration

Active duty and reserve TSMs being discharged from their respective branches of service are required to take part in either an online or in-person TAP curriculum. After separation, Veterans, their family members, and caregivers remain eligible to take TAP. This training is comprised of a 5-day comprehensive course. Additional separate modules and tracks such as Entrepreneurship, (e.g., "Boots to Business"), can be selected. Contracted Benefit Advisors conduct VA TAP briefings at transition sites located at military installations across the country as well as locations Outside Continental United States (OCONUS). These briefings provide information on the full range of VA's benefits, including but not limited to, VA healthcare, disability compensation, education, home loan program, insurance, vocational rehabilitation, and burial benefits. These benefits are collectively administered and monitored within the VA.

Over 200,000 service or family members participate in this mandatory briefing every year in one of two ways—online or in-person at a military installation. The Contractor will be hosting the online survey instrument through its portal, and print paper versions of the survey instrument for mailed responses.

Currently, assessment of TAP is limited to feedback provided by TAP attendees immediately upon completion of each module. This data is collected and disseminated by the Office of People Analytics (OPA). This course assessment is not designed to assess information retention or track applicability for TSMs over time. The goal of this Post-Separation Transition Assistance Program (PSTAP) Assessment is to conduct a longitudinal study of three cohorts—with a baseline (cross-sectional) study for Veterans at six months, one year, and three years after separation. Future waves of the PSTAP Assessment will be conducted annually for Veterans who opt into the study to help VA learn how to improve the TAP curriculum and best prepare Veterans for civilian life. The purpose of this information collection request fulfills Executive Order 13571—*Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service*. Without collecting satisfaction information, VA would be unable to monitor and improve its TAP delivery and implementation. Additional legislative guidance for this improvement to TAP falls under the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to *Hire Heroes Act* (November 21, 2011, Public Law 112-56, §221-225, 125 Stat. 715-718) and the *National Defense Authorization Act* (Fiscal Year 1991, P.L. 101-510 amended Title 10 of the U.S.C.), specifically Chapter 58, which authorized comprehensive transition assistance benefits and services for Servicemembers transitioning from active duty, as well as their family members and caregivers.

VA will benefit from obtaining direct objective and subjective feedback from Veterans regarding their online or in-person experience with their TAP course and adjustment to civilian life. Specifically, Veterans' feedback will provide VA with three key benefits: 1) identify what is most important to Veterans in determining their satisfaction with TAP; 2) determine what to do to improve the experience; and 3) serve to guide training and/or operational activities aimed at enhancing the quality of service provided to Veterans.

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release April 27, 2011

Executive Order 13571--Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, and in order to improve the quality of service to the public by the Federal Government, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Policy. The public deserves competent, efficient, and responsive service from the Federal Government. Executive departments and agencies (agencies) must continuously evaluate their performance in meeting this standard and work to improve it. To this end, Executive Order 12862 (Setting Customer Service Standards), issued on September 11, 1993, requires agencies that provide significant services directly to the public to identify and survey their customers, establish service standards and track performance against those standards, and benchmark customer service performance against the best in business. This effort to "put people first" was an important step. It was reinforced by a Presidential Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies issued on March 22, 1995 (Improving Customer Service), and a further Presidential Memorandum issued on March 3, 1998 (Conducting "Conversations with America" to Further Improve Customer Service).

However, with advances in technology and service delivery systems in other sectors, the public's expectations of the Government have continued to rise. The Government must keep pace with and even exceed those expectations. Government must also address the need to improve its services, not only to individuals, but also to private and Governmental entities to which the agency directly provides significant services. Government managers must learn from what is working in the private sector and apply these best practices to deliver services better, faster, and at lower cost. Such best practices include increasingly popular lower-cost, self-service options accessed by the Internet or mobile phone and improved processes that deliver services faster and more responsively, reducing the overall need for customer inquiries and complaints. The Federal Government has a responsibility to streamline and make more efficient its service delivery to better serve the public.

Public Law 112–56
112th Congress

An Act

To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to repeal the imposition of 3 percent withholding on certain payments made to vendors by government entities, to modify the calculation of modified adjusted gross income for purposes of determining eligibility for certain healthcare-related programs, and for other purposes.

Nov. 21, 2011
[H.R. 674]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. TABLE OF CONTENTS.

The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

(2) Section 6383(h) of such title is amended by striking out "section 1174(a)" and inserting in lieu thereof "section 1174(a)(1)".

(g) TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.—(1) Subsection (a) of section 1174 of such title (as amended by subsection (a) of this section) is further amended—

(A) by striking out "or release"; and

(B) by striking out ", under section 564" and all that follows through "Management Act" and inserting in lieu thereof "or under section 564 or 6383 of this title".

(2) Subsection (c)(1) of such section is amended by striking out "after September 14, 1981,".

(h) STYLISTIC AMENDMENTS.—Such section is further amended—

(1) by inserting "OTHER MEMBERS.—" in subsection (c) after "(c)";

(2) by inserting "AMOUNT OF SEPARATION PAY.—" in subsection (d) after "(d)";

(3) by inserting "COUNTING FRACTIONAL YEARS OF SERVICE.—" in subsection (f) after "(f)";

(4) by inserting "COORDINATION WITH OTHER SEPARATION OR SEVERANCE PAY BENEFITS.—" in subsection (g) after "(g)";

(5) by inserting "COORDINATION WITH RETIRED OR RETAINER PAY AND DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—" in subsection (h) after "(h)"; and

(6) by inserting "REGULATIONS; CREDITING OF OTHER COMMISSIONED SERVICE.—" in subsection (i) after "(i)".

SEC. 502. OTHER TRANSITION BENEFITS AND SERVICES

(a) BENEFITS AND SERVICES.—(1) Part II of subtitle A of title 10, United States Code, is amended by inserting after chapter 57 the following new chapter:

"CHAPTER 58—BENEFITS AND SERVICES FOR MEMBERS BEING SEPARATED OR RECENTLY SEPARATED

"§ 1141. Involuntary separation defined

"A member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marine Corps shall be considered to be involuntarily separated for purposes of this chapter if the member was on active duty or full-time National Guard duty on September 30, 1990, and—

"(1) in the case of a regular officer (other than a retired officer), the officer is involuntarily discharged under other than adverse conditions, as characterized by the Secretary concerned;

"(2) in the case of a reserve officer who is on the active-duty list or, if not on the active-duty list, is on full-time active duty

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from current collection.

The stakeholders of the PSTAP Assessment are Veterans, the VA, congressional committees with oversight of Veterans' issues, the Office of Management and Budget, the interagency partners that liaise with Congress and GAO regarding military and Veteran concerns, as well as companies and service providers that address Veterans' needs (e.g., housing, healthcare, etc.). The interagency partnership was established to coordinate the federal government's transition programs that support Veterans and the Performance Management Working Group is the primary subgroup that addresses performance management for TAP.

VA is the primary stakeholder of this study and currently has several staff and contracts in place to deliver and determine the effectiveness of TAP training. Findings and recommendations from the PSTAP Assessment will be used to make informed program-related decisions and facilitate Veterans' access to benefits as they transition into civilian life.

This new information collection request (ICR) is scheduled to field no later than December 2018. Once collected and analyzed, these surveys will enable VA to understand and quantify satisfaction levels of Veterans who have undergone TAP training. Results will provide VA critical inputs that can be used to assist decision-makers in formulating operational changes in the VA environment to ensure that Veterans are effectively served.

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

The PSTAP Assessment will be collected using two self-administered modes—an electronic eSurvey hosted on the Contractor's website followed by a paper survey to Veterans who do not respond electronically. The paper instrument will also meet OMB guidelines for increased automation because it will be a scannable instrument to decrease data entry time and errors due to manual keystrokes. The third and final reminder to participate in the PSTAP Assessment will be a postcard inviting Veterans who have not responded to the initial eSurvey or paper survey to complete the survey online. Although Veterans will be given two opportunities to reply electronically, previous VOV surveys of Veterans demonstrated higher response rates for paper surveys. This could be function of age since the overall Veteran population still includes older groups from World War II and may not hold true for the population targeted for this study.

All survey procedures used for data collection are in accordance with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) requiring agencies to comply by October 21, 2003.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.

There is no data currently being collected for use by the federal government to understand the retention of TAP training and readiness for civilian life by TSMs. Although there was a prior study that concluded in 2012, the TAP curriculum has since been redesigned. Presently, OPA conducts a course assessment of TAP participants at the end of their training. While this data is useful for monitoring TAP training quality as well as participation rates, it neither determines which modules TSMs find useful once they have transitioned nor does it measure any domains of their lives related to their readiness to become a civilian.

There is a similar longitudinal survey that was initially designed to study post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This study, the Veterans Metric Initiative (TVMI), led by health researchers and receiving private funding from the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, has an expanded scope including additional domains related to civilian life.

While the TVMI does share some features with the proposed PSTAP Assessment, it does not capture any information pertaining to the TAP curriculum. In addition, it is not a federal study and was established through a public-private partnership. In an effort to make these studies as comparable as possible, during planning for this proposed study permission to use and adapt select batteries where possible for this study was sought and obtained from the TVMI instrument (as well as other validated instruments).

Finally, the PSTAP Assessment planning, pretesting, and questionnaire has been shared with the PMWG and interagency partners (listed in Item B5). This group has provided input as well as pre-test referrals. Given this working group's expansive reach across so many federal agencies, it is highly unlikely that there is another federal study that duplicates the proposed new information collection request (ICR).

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities (Item 5 of OMB Form 83-I), describe any methods used to minimize burden.

Not applicable. All data is collected from individuals, so no small businesses or other small entities are impacted by this information collection. Veteran-owned small businesses are not impacted because Veterans are being surveyed in their capacity as individuals.

6. Describe the consequences to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

If VA is unable to proceed with the collection of the data, VA will not be responsive to the recommendation of GAO to Congress to prepare TSMs for transition to civilian life. VA will not have the benefit of receiving feedback on what is important to Servicemembers during TAP or how best to improve their service and how best to serve the needs of our Veterans as they transition into civilian life. The collection of the data will enable VA to track and document improvements or declines in TAP effectiveness over time. Absent a rigorous and statistically sound survey, VA will only have anecdotal information available to improve its programs.

The design and administration of the PSTAP Assessment incorporates several best practices in survey research to minimize burden on respondents (see Item 3 in Supporting Statement B). There are currently no known technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden using the planned methods.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

- **Requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;**
- **Requiring respondents to prepare written responses to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;**
- **Requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;**
- **Requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;**
- **In connection with a statistical survey, that is designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**
- **Requiring the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**
- **That includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or**
- **Requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secrets, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.**

The PSTAP Assessment is planned to be administered annually. Although the first wave of the survey (baseline) will be cross-sectional, future waves of the survey will be longitudinal since respondents will be asked to opt into future studies that will not exceed being contacted more than once in a 12-month period. There are no special circumstances that would require respondents to prepare or submit the documents outlined above or provide written responses in fewer than 30 days since the survey is voluntary. The surveys will be designed and carried out with appropriate scientific rigor and will produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study.

No information will be collected in the PSTAP Assessment that will require respondents to keep records or produce written information. All survey questions rely on recall of the respondent about their experiences with TAP or responses to questions about their current life as a civilian.

All data collected in this study shall be kept secure and confidential. As a global survey research firm, data security is paramount to J.D. Power and the company will employ administrative, operational, and technical procedures to protect any data collected under a pledge of confidentiality. Administrative procedures include keeping the data in a secure environment with access limited to approved individuals, including team members who have undergone government background checks but who do not have a need to access the data. Technical procedures are also required to ensure that data or results released do not reveal individually identifiable data.

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the sponsor's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the sponsor in responses to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

The Department notice was published in the Federal Register on February 20, 2018,
Volume 83, No. 34, page 7300. No comments were received in response to this notice.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No payments or gifts shall be provided to respondents. This is a public service and minimal burden; therefore, no special remuneration shall be offered.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statue, regulation, or agency policy.

An assurance of strict confidentiality is provided in the introduction respondents receive with the survey on the top of page 1 (included below). Respondents are assured that answers given will be kept confidential under law and will be for statistical reporting purposes only. Respondents will also be given the opportunity to opt out of completing the voluntary survey during the introduction. The information that respondents supply is protected by law (the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 522a and section 5701 of Title 38 of the United States Code). In addition, three phone numbers are provided to respondents in the event they are in crisis, have questions about the survey, or have questions about their VA benefits.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is interested in learning how Servicemembers transition into civilian life after concluding their time in the military. Your responses will be used to make improvements to help Veterans transition to civilian life after their service. Your responses are voluntary, will be kept confidential (protected by law under the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 522a and section 5701 of Title 38 of the United States Code), and *will only be used for statistical purposes. The estimated time to complete this survey is 15-20 minutes. Please mail your survey in the enclosed business reply envelope by [date] so that your viewpoints can be captured. Thank you for your participation.*

If you are in need of immediate assistance with a crisis, please call the VA Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.

If you need assistance with this questionnaire or have questions about the assessment, please call the Assessment Help Line number: XXX-XXX-XXXX. (Number will be created for execution).

If you need assistance with any VA program or have general VA questions, please call the VA Assistance Line: 1-800-827-1000.

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private; include specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

The PSTAP Assessment contains minimal topics of a sensitive nature. The majority of the questions are attitudinal measures about TAP training and topics such as the Veteran's current financial situation and health status are minimally invasive and discussed more below. The survey instrument does not contain questions that require more careful human subject review such as surveying groups that require special protections.

Mental and physical health are important long-term outcomes to measure for Veterans. While measuring these topics could raise issues related to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other protections for respondents, the questions used do not ask about a specific health condition. This approach was intentional because it is not designed to measure the incidence or prevalence of any given condition but will instead measure if Veterans are experiencing *any* type of health condition.

Two vulnerable subgroups of Veterans that often overlap are those who are suffer from PTSD and/or homelessness. Given that these populations may be hard to survey, it is a given that there will be under-reporting among these groups. All surveys experience this same type of sampling bias and it is why different research techniques need to be employed when such subgroups studied.

In an abundance of caution, this survey does offer a crisis hotline (provided in Item 10) and again at the end of the survey. For respondents who are experiencing a crisis of any kind, this precaution is offered to help Veterans in distress.

12. Estimate of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should:

Estimate of Information Collection Burden:

a. Number of Respondents: Year 1 - 17,469 per year
Year 2 - 12,997
Year 3 – 10,449

b. Frequency of Response: one time per Veteran’s family

c. Annual Burden Hours: 12,630 hours

d. Estimated Completion Time: 18.5 minutes

e. The respondent population is composed of the general population. VBA cannot make further assumptions about the population of respondents because of the variability of factors such as the educational background and wage potential of respondents. Therefore, VBA used general wage data to estimate the respondents’ costs associated with completing the information collection.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) gathers information on full-time wage and salary workers. According to the latest available BLS data, the mean weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers are $973.60. Assuming a forty (40) hour work week, the mean hourly wage is $24.34 based on the BLS wage code – “00-0000 All Occupations.” This information was taken from the following website: (https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm, May 2017).

Legally, respondents may not pay a person or business for assistance in completing the information collection. Therefore, there are no expected overhead costs for completing the information collection. (4,210 burden hours x $24.34 per hour).

There is only one instrument being submitted for approval under this clearance and all Veterans meeting the time past separation criteria will receive the same instrument. For example, this clearance will not use a second questionnaire to focus on unemployment for those Veterans since it does not employ a screener instrument.

The total average annual burden is estimated to be 4,210 hours. The full description of this calculation is detailed in Item 1 of Supporting Statement B and summarized in this table below.

Average Annual Hourly Burden Calculation

	Retention Rate*	Number of Responses	Minutes	Hourly Burden
Year 1	n/a	17,469	18.5	5,386

Year 2	74.4%	12,997	18.5	4,007
Year 3	60.1%	10,499	18.5	3,237
			Annual	**4,210**

* Retention rates are derived from the attrition rates reported in the VR&E longitudinal study for follow-up at one and two years. The upper bound of the 95% confidence interval was to estimate the maximum burden to the public for this ICR.

13. Provide an estimate for the total annual cost burden to respondents or recordkeepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).

- The cost estimate should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start-up cost component (annualized over its expected useful life) and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component. The estimates should take into account costs associated with generating, maintaining, and disclosing or providing the information. Include descriptions of methods used to estimate major cost factors including system and technology acquisition, expected useful life of capital equipment, the discount rate(s), and the time period over which costs will be incurred. Capital and start-up costs include, among other items, preparations for collecting information such as purchasing computers and software; monitoring, sampling, drilling and testing equipment, and record storage facilities.
- If cost estimates are expected to vary widely, agencies should present ranges of cost burdens and explain reasons for the variance. The cost of purchasing or contracting out information collection services should be part of this cost burden estimate. In developing cost burden estimates, agencies may consult with a sample of respondents (fewer than 10), utilize the 60-day pre-OMB submission public comment process and use existing economic or regulatory impact analysis associated with rulemaking containing the information collection, as appropriate.
- Generally, estimates should not include purchases of equipment or services, or portions thereof, made: (1) prior to October 1, 1995, (2) to achieve regulatory compliance with requirements not associated with the information collection, (3) for reasons other than to provide information or keep records for the government, or (4) as part of customary and usual business or private practices.

There are no capital, start-up, operation, or maintenance costs to respondents or record keepers because J.D. Power is a survey research company and already is a federal contractor complying with federal requirements such as 508 compliance.

14. Provide estimates of annualized costs to the Federal government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies also may aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 in a single table.

The average annual total cost to the Federal Government is estimated at $319,380.59**.** The table below presents the labor and contracting costs for conducting the surveys. Operational costs will be outsourced to the Contractor and are included in the Contractor's total cost.

Estimated Annual Cost to the Federal Government

Cost Item initial fielding	*Hours*	*Cost*
VA labor	420	$19,509.00
Contractor costs		$299,871.59
TOTAL	**420**	**$319,380.59**

The VA labor cost was estimated using a composite average salary and benefits figure of $46.45 per hour based on 2017 estimates. The amount paid to the Contractor for the survey effort includes as its major components, the survey of Veterans who have attended TAP for total cost of $299,871.59.[1] These costs include development of the instruments, development of the sampling plan, review of the instrument, locating of respondents, programming of the questionnaire for administration, administration of the instrument, validation, data processing, providing a clean data file, project management and analysis, and reporting.

[1] This total is based on a cost estimate for the proposed contracted work.

15. **Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-I.**

There is no change. This is a new collection.

16. **For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.**

It is not known whether the results from the PSTAP Assessment will be published and made available to the public in a document or on the VA website. The results will, however, be available internally at VA and within the federal government to facilitate informed programmatic and policy decisions, including those made by Congress. The plans for developing these results are discussed below under two sections of tabulation and publication and a project timeline.

TABULATION AND PUBLICATION

- **Scan Survey and Monitor Response Rates**

During the survey fielding period, the surveys will be scanned as they are received to ensure the accuracy of the data file. During the scanning process, VA's Contractor will inspect and remove duplicates.

The Contractor will host a password-protected website that will provide response rates from the Web-based surveys for the paper and online satisfaction surveys. Throughout the fielding period, data will be updated monthly at minimum. VA's leadership will be provided with passwords to access the site at any time.

- **Clean and Analyze Survey Data**

Each month when the assessments have been completed, a raw data file will be produced, and the process of creating data files for analysis will begin. The Contractor will analyze these data files, including conducting frequencies, cross-tabulations, and other analyses. The analyses will be geared toward providing VA's leadership with user-oriented results.

- **Create Monthly Sample Disposition Reports**

  Monthly disposition reports that include total surveys mailed, number of eSurveys deployed, number of completes, and the number and percent of refusals will be provided by the Contractor on an electronic dashboard.

- **Create Monthly Data Matrix**

  The Contractor shall provide VA with monthly data matrices via a secure FTP site that is accessible to appropriate VA staff and management. Matrices shall provide cumulative summaries of all data month-to-date and year-to-date on a secure FTP site hosted by the Contractor.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The major activities for the PSTAP Assessment project are structured by task and are outlined below.

> **Task 1:** The Contractor shall receive survey sample files and clean those files for survey development and ensure statistically significant results for the TAP Office. Detailed sampling procedures and cleaning rules will be outlined in the Sampling Plan. In creating the sample files for all surveys, the Contractor shall remove any duplicate records. At no time will a respondent be surveyed more than once within a 12-month period.
>
> **Task 2:** Respondents will initially be mailed a postcard inviting them to complete the survey online. This postcard shall be validated by VA Section 508 office and be in conformance with 508 standards. Those respondents who do not complete the survey online may be subsequently mailed a survey packet containing a cover letter, scannable paper survey, and postage-paid return envelope.
>
> Initial postcards shall provide respondents with the Internet address and location of the corresponding online survey (for surveys that include both an online and mail option). Postcards shall also include the survey recipient ID number on the mailing label.
>
> All printing and mailing activities for fielding the surveys shall be conducted by the GPO Print Vendor (costs to be incurred by the government for this service are not available at this time).

Printing costs will be included in the GPO awarded contract to the selected vendor. The Contractor shall work with VA and its approved GPO vendor for printing all materials associated with the surveys.

The Contractor shall receive all completed survey materials and paper-based responses for processing of data results, image/scan all returned survey instruments with quality assurance check (manual) for 10% of instruments returned with a maximum of 100,000 paper survey instruments will be sent out.

Task 3: The Contractor shall provide the live links to VA staff for certification that the questionnaires are live and accessible. The Contractor shall be required to host the website and to ensure it meets the VA data security requirements and is 508 compliant. The term "fieldwork" refers to the time period for which each survey is ‘open for response’. For the duration of the fieldwork portion of the surveys, VA requires 95% up-time for the site. Technical difficulties which could affect the access and use of the questionnaires shall be reported to VA staff on the same business day they are discovered. The Contractor shall be responsible for ensuring that 95% up-time requirements are met and for rectifying any technical or accessibility issues related to this task.

Task 4: For the duration of the fieldwork portion of the surveys, the Contractor shall provide both toll-free phone and Internet-based assistance to survey respondents who require it. The Web helpdesk shall be staffed so that all requests for assistance are addressed within one business day. The toll-free telephone lines shall also have voicemail capabilities so that inquiries can be addressed no more than 24 hours after receipt.

The Contractor shall log all calls and Web-based inquiries received and record the disposition of each. The Contractor shall provide VA with ongoing logs in Excel format of inquiries monthly throughout the duration of fieldwork. After the fieldwork portion of the surveys, the Contractor shall provide final logs to the TAP subject matter expert for review.

The Contractor shall also divide the log into two separate files. The first will be standard calls that do not require any VA follow-up (for example, those who have general questions about the survey or require assistance with the survey), and the second will be calls that require VA to follow-up directly with the respondent (for example, callers who request that VA call regarding their benefits).

Task 5: The Contractor shall provide VA with data matrices via a secure FTP site through EDX that is accessible to appropriate VA staff and management. The Contractor shall send an email to the Contracting Officer's Representative each time data is loaded.

Task 6: After the Contractor creates the data matrices and processes the reports necessary for loading data to the VOV Reporting Site, the Contractor shall load the data collected to VA's Voice of the Veteran (VOV) reporting site for the survey sample quarterly. The Contractor shall send an email to the COR each time data is loaded.

Task 7: The Contractor shall also provide six (6) VOV Reporting Site training sessions for VA personnel. During these sessions, the Contractor will provide an extensive overview of the reporting site, to include all pages available to VA personnel, as well as the various functions and features. Online training materials/resources will be available to users.

Task 8: The Contractor shall prepare presentations and provide briefings on data collected with VA TAP management annually.

This detailed presentation and briefing will be delivered in-person and/or via teleconference and will provide a summary of key findings and recommendations based on the data collected. The Contractor shall follow OMB guidelines for data analysis and reporting. The Contractor shall provide 20 printed versions of the findings and recommendations (overviews) for review during the meetings (40 Total).

Task 9: The Contractor shall prepare annual formal VA Executive Leadership briefings on data collected. These annual formal briefings will be delivered in-person to VA leadership to validate program objectives, data trends and recommendations across surveys based on the data collected. The Contractor shall provide VA with 25 color copies of the presentation as handouts for leadership at the meeting. The Contractor shall provide written summaries with all conclusions derived from the data. The written summaries/reports shall provide a high-level overview with key outcomes, recommendations, and best practices for the reporting period. The Contractor shall work with VA to ensure all edits are incorporated into the final presentations and written summaries.

Task 10: The Contractor shall use data trends and categorize the trends into suggested priority groupings. The Contractor shall review the suggested priority groupings with VA stakeholders to determine up to four relevant topics for participation in two action planning meetings annually. Action planning meetings shall be no longer than a half-day. The Contractor shall coordinate and facilitate an action planning meeting per topic to discuss causes, explore solutions, and determine actions, action owners and desired outcomes. The Contractor shall assist VA by providing senior-level guidance to action owners. Contractor shall then reconvene the stakeholders for each of the topic areas to discuss progress, challenges and future actions. The follow-up meetings shall be continued until action plans are finalized.

Task 11: The Contractor will process the new data collected and add to the data matrices. Further, the Contractor will program any corresponding questionnaire changes to the VOV Reporting Site on all applicable pages as well as update all materials for follow on survey collection.

Task 12: Federal agencies must design the survey to achieve the highest practical rates of response commensurate with the importance of survey uses, respondent burden, and data collection costs to ensure that survey results are representative of the target population so that they can be used with confidence to make informed decisions. Nonresponse bias analyses must be conducted when unit or item response rates or other factors suggest the potential for bias to occur. Per OMB's *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (September 2006), a nonresponse bias evaluation is recommended if any surveys yield a response rate below 80%. The nonresponse bias evaluations will be conducted to ascertain the possible causes of variance in response rates among different respondent demographics and/or to determine the underlying cause of low response rates for the sample as a whole. The Contractor shall conduct such statistical analysis (e.g., weighting and imputation) in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the OMB *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (September 2006). The Contractor shall provide VA with a written report which discusses possibilities for survey sample biases based on the necessary OMB standards and guidelines for statistical surveys.

17. If seeking approval to omit the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

Not applicable. The OMB approval number will be displayed on each paper survey as well as eSurvey.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19, “Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions,” of OMB 83-I.

There are no exceptions requested under this clearance package.