

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION  
2020 NEXT OF KIN/FAMILY MEMBER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

**ISSUE:** Due to the covid-19 pandemic, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) implemented changes to their burial practices beginning in March of 2020. The changes have prompted a need for a screening item in NCA' s Next of Kin Customer Satisfaction Surveys for the VA National Cemeteries and State or Tribal Veterans Cemeteries (abbreviated as NC CSS and STVC CSS respectively). The proposed new item introduces a skip pattern based on whether a committal service or memorial service was conducted for the respondent's deceased loved one thus, allowing the respondent to answer only applicable items. Minimal non-substantive changes were made to a subset of questions to align the wording across similar items. Further, the pre-existing gender question was modified to align with current OMB guidance. This change request is non-substantive and has no impact on the burden.

**BACKGROUND:** In March 2020 NCA suspended the bestowing of honors at Veteran's committal services due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to assure the safety of Veterans, their families, and NCA staff. Later in March, committal services were suspended. Families impacted due to the suspensions, are being offered memorial services for their loved ones beginning in July and will continue as conditions permit. The conditions and restrictions at national and local cemeteries can and will change in response to state, local and federal guidelines and orders so the impact of the pandemic may continue to exist intermittently throughout 2020.

**DISCUSSION:** As stated in the OMB renewal application 2900-0571 for NCA Generic Surveys, NCA is not making any significant change to the surveys for the 2020 interment-related surveys. The addition of the screener question is prompted by the covid-19 pandemic and not as an enhancement that was discussed in the OMB renewal application. To be able to add the screener without causing an associated cognitive burden on the respondent, the questions on the surveys were re-ordered to allow a

single block of items for the skip pattern if the respondent did not have a committal or memorial service. This reordering of items eliminated the need for a respondent to skip questions throughout the survey. Further, items were eliminated from the surveys to preserve the original burden estimate. Minimal, non-substantive revisions were made to pre-existing items to allow consistency in references within the surveys.

The proposed 2020 NC CSS and STVC CSS can be found in Appendix A and B.

The 2019 NC CSS and STVS CSS crosswalk can be found in Appendix C and D.

The non-substantive change due to the novel coronavirus pandemic is the inclusion of the following item for the NC CSS and STVC respectively:

#### **NC CSS**

##### **Q9. Did your loved one have a committal service?**

- Yes, at the time of interment.
- No, there was not a committal service at time of interment due to the coronavirus pandemic, but a follow-up memorial service was conducted at a later date.
- No, there was not a committal service at time of interment due to the coronavirus pandemic and there was not a follow-up memorial service at a later time. Go to A1.
- No, there was not a committal service for a reason other than the coronavirus pandemic. Go to Q19.

#### **STVC CSS**

##### **Q4. Did your loved one have a committal service?**

- Yes, at the time of interment.
- No, there was not a committal service at time of interment due to the coronavirus pandemic, but a follow-up memorial service was conducted at a later date.
- No, there was not a committal service at time of interment due to the coronavirus pandemic and there was not a follow-up memorial service at a later time. Go to Q14.
- No, there was not a committal service for a reason other than the coronavirus pandemic. Go to Q14.

The questions that follow the new screener item on the NC and STVC CSSs, were modified to refer to a committal or memorial service.

#### **NC CSS**

**Q10. Prior to attending the service, to what extent were you informed of the details (e.g., length of service, use of committal shelters) related to the committal or memorial service?**

- Very informed
- Somewhat informed
- Neither informed nor uninformed
- Somewhat uninformed
- Very uninformed

**Q13. The committal shelter used for the committal or memorial service was private, clean, and free of safety hazards.**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/Not applicable

**Q14. Overall, how satisfied were you with the committal or memorial service at the VA national cemetery?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**Q16. Prior to the committal or memorial service for your loved one, did you view the NCA videos illustrating different service options at VA national cemeteries?**

- Yes, I viewed it online.
- Yes, the funeral director provided it.
- No. Go to Q19.

**Q21. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: Receiving the PMC at the committal or memorial service rather than receiving it in the mail enhances the meaning of the recognition.**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/Not applicable

## STVC CSS

**Q5. Prior to attending the service, to what extent were you informed of the details (e.g., length of service, use of committal shelters) related to the committal or memorial service?**

- Very informed
- Somewhat informed
- Neither informed nor uninformed
- Somewhat uninformed
- Very uninformed

**Q8. The committal shelter used for the committal or memorial service was private, clean, and free of safety hazards.**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/Not applicable

**Q9. Overall, how satisfied were you with the committal or memorial service at the VA State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**Q11. Prior to the committal or memorial service for your loved one, did you view the NCA videos illustrating different service options at State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/Not applicable

**Q16. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:  
Receiving the PMC **at the committal or memorial service** rather than receiving it  
in the mail enhances the meaning of the recognition.**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/Not applicable

To maintain the burden estimates due to the addition of the screener three questions were eliminated on the NC CSS. The questions and the justification for its removal are presented below.

#### **NC CSS**

- **The national cemetery staff was professional in terms of being knowledgeable, helpful, and responsive.**

*Justification: Item deleted because it references multiple attributes which causes a burden to respondent and an implied weighting of attribute for respondent.*

- **Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, either in the regular military or a National Guard or Reserve Unit?**

*Justification: This information is not used for an analysis and therefore deleted in the 2020 proposed survey.*

- **How far do you reside from the national cemetery?**

*Justification: This information is available using the NOK address and does not need to be collected from NOK.*

#### **STVC**

- **The State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery staff is professional in terms of**

**being knowledgeable, helpful, and responsive.**

*Justification: Item deleted because it references multiple attributes which causes a burden to respondent and an implied weighting of attribute for respondent.*

- **Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, either in the regular military or a National Guard or Reserve Unit?**

*Justification: This information is not used for an analysis and therefore deleted in the 2020 proposed survey.*

In the process of reordering the questions, minimal non-substantive revisions were made to the items such that there was consistency in the items. One such example is the following set of questions (Set A) were revised such that the reference to staff remained consistent (Set B).

#### **Set A**

- The national cemetery staff was courteous.
- The quality of service received from cemetery staff is excellent.
  
- The State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery staff is courteous.
- The quality of service received from cemetery staff is excellent.

#### **Set B**

- The national cemetery staff was courteous.
- The quality of service received from national cemetery staff is excellent.
  
- The State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery staff is courteous.
- The quality of service received from the State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery staff is excellent.

#### **Gender Items**

As provided in OMB guidance<sup>1</sup>, the gender question was changed to ask sex. The original and revised question are as follows:

**Original Question on both NC AND STVC CSS**

**What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**Revised Questions on NC CSS**

**Q49. What is your sex?**

- Male
- Female

**Revised Question on STVC CSS**

**Q47. What is your sex?**

- Male
- Female

**ACTIONS:** Add the screener item and associated reordering of items and minor substantive changes to allow respondents to skip the block of questions that were impacted by the covid-19 pandemic on NCA burial practices, align the wording across items on the surveys, and change the gender question to a sex question.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/hhs-implementation-guidance-data-collection-standards-race-ethnicity-sex-primary-language-and-disability-status>