U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Policy Analysis

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# GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF A SURVEY UNDER THE DOI PROGRAMMATIC CLEARANCE FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS

## PURPOSE

The Department of the Interior (DOI) guidelines for the DOI Programmatic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys will help offices and bureaus successfully collect customer satisfaction data.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO COLLECT CUSTOMER SATISFACTION DATA?

DOI offices and bureaus must collect customer satisfaction data to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 (P.L. 103-62), Executive Order (E.O.) 12862, and EO 13571. The DOI must measure customer satisfaction levels associated with its services, products, and information through periodic surveys, face-to-face meetings, and frequent communication with our customers. Offices and bureaus may use data obtained from these customer interactions to identify opportunities for improvement. Comment cards, questionnaires, and other survey methods are viable tools for collecting valuable customer information.

## WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THE PROGRAMMATIC CLEARANCE?

The Programmatic Clearance enables DOI offices and bureaus to collect customer information using a streamlined process for approving the research instruments used in the data collection. The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995 requires Federal agencies to obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before they can collect information from the general public.

The PRA defines "collection of information" quite broadly. It covers any identical questions posed to 10 or more members of the public, whether voluntary or mandatory, written, electronic, or oral. The term "public" does apply to State, local, and tribal governments. It does not apply to Federal agencies as long as representatives of Federal agencies are being surveyed as such and not as private citizens. The standard PRA compliance process used by agencies to obtain approval from OMB to collect customer satisfaction information typically takes more than 120 days. The Programmatic Clearance significantly reduces the time needed to obtain OMB approval for use of instruments covered by the Programmatic Clearance. OMB may approve requests in as few as 45 days (from the date of submission to OMB).

## APPROVED CUSTOMER RESEARCH TOOLS

The DOI has received approval from OMB for its Programmatic Clearance under OMB Control No. 1040-0001, so that DOI bureaus and offices can conduct customer research using the following tools:

***In-person intercept surveys*:** In a face-to-face situation, respondents receive the survey instrument, completes it while on site, and then returns it. This may include oral administration or the use of electronic technology and kiosks. The survey proctor is prepared to answer any questions the respondent may have about how to fill out the instrument but does not interfere or influence how the respondents answer the questions.

***Telephone interviews or questionnaires*:** Using existing databases, an interviewer will contact customers who have had a specific experience with the agency. The interviewer will dial back until reaching the customer. Once contacted, the interviewer provides the survey respondent with a brief introduction to the survey, including its importance and use. The interviewer will then expeditiously move through the survey questions.

***Mail and e-mail surveys*:** Using existing lists of customer addresses, bureaus and office may employ a three-contact approach based on Dillman's "Tailored Design Method." The first contact is a cover letter announcing the upcoming survey and its importance to the agency. The second contact forwards the actual survey instrument, along with a postage-paid addressed envelope to return the survey. The third contact will be a reminder postcard sent 10 days after mailing the survey to the respondents. Finally, the respondents will receive a letter thanking them for the willingness to participate in the survey and reminding them to return it if they have not already done so. At each juncture, the bureaus/offices will provide the respondents multiple ways to contact someone with questions regarding the survey (including phone, FAX, web, and email). If the survey has been lost, the respondent can request another copy of the survey. Bureaus/offices may use email to communicate with customers instead of postal mail. Although this is a cost-effective mode to survey a large group of people, it does not usually generate the best response rate. Using telephone calls to non-respondents increases response rates.

***Web-based*:** For products or services provided electronically, whether e-commerce or web-based information, a web or email survey may be most appropriate. During the course of their web interaction, users can volunteer to add their name to a list of future surveys. From this list, select a respondent pool in accordance with the sampling procedures outlined above. Send an email to the respondent explaining the need and importance of the survey with a web link to the survey. Within 5 days, send a follow-up email to the respondents reminding them to complete the survey. Finally, the respondents will receive an email thanking them for the willingness to participate in the survey and reminding them to complete it if they have not already. The respondent will always have the option to submit the survey in paper form, should they elect to do so.

***Focus groups*:** It may be more effective to collect some data and information through more subjective, conversational means. A focus group is an informal, small-group discussion designed to obtain in-depth qualitative information. Individuals are specifically invited to participate in the discussion, whether in person or through technologically enhanced means (e.g., video conferencing, on-line sessions). Participants are encouraged to talk with each other about their experiences, preferences, needs, observations, or perceptions.

A moderator whose role is to foster interaction leads the conversation. The moderator makes sure that all participants are encouraged to contribute and that no individual dominates the conversation. Furthermore, the moderator manages the discussion to make sure it does not stray too far from the topic of interest. It may be more useful to employ focus groups in an exploratory stage or to develop a deeper understanding of a program or service. Using the best in focus group research practices, groups will be constructed to include a cross-section of a given customer group. The questions and additional probes used during the focus groups will be consistent with the “guideline menu.”

***Comment Cards*:** Using customer comment cards when providing the product or service offers an excellent means to give the bureaus and offices feedback. A comment card should have a limited number of questions and an opportunity to comment. These comment cards provide managers and service providers with direct and specific information from their customers unobtainable through any other means.

Bureaus and offices may offer electronic users the opportunity to complete a comment card via a “pop-up” window (or other web-enabled means that may be available). The “pop-up” window will not appear for every user; rather, you should randomly select the users to receive the survey. This practice is widely used in private industry. In other instances, you may offer the electronic user the option to self-select in answering the electronic comment card. Whether using paper or electronic comment cards, the intent is to provide a feedback mechanism. Data collected under this generic clearance should not be statistically significant. Although questions may include numeric scales, consider those data only in an anecdotal fashion and not reported as a significant measure.

## OMB GUIDANCE ON SURVEY DESIGN

All surveys must be designed and implemented in accordance with OMB "Questions and Answers When Designing Surveys for Information Collections (January 20, 2006)."

## TYPES OF QUESTIONS COVERED BY THE PROGRAMMATIC CLEARANCE

OMB approved the DOI Programmatic Clearance for customer satisfaction surveys. Therefore, approval of survey instruments under the authority of the Programmatic Clearance must focus on ***customer satisfaction data***. It is important to note that bureaus and office should not submit ***information collection instruments seeking to collect information beyond the scope of customer satisfaction data under the scope of this Programmatic Clearance. This includes information collections designed to obtain social science or visitor use information.***

Although no one survey will cover all the topic areas, bureaus and offices should view the topic areas listed below as a "guideline menu" from which restrict their survey questions to ensure they are within the scope of this Programmatic Clearance:

**1. Delivery, quality, and value of products, information, and services:** The range of questions envisioned for this topic area will focus on customer satisfaction with aspects of information, products, and related services offered by DOI. Information, products, and services include written reports, press releases, computer modules, workshops and seminars, or technical assistance. Bureaus/offices may ask respondents for feedback regarding the following attributes of the information, service, and products provided:

- ***Timeliness***
  - Was the information, service, product provided to you in a timely manner?
  - Was the information itself timely?
- ***Consistency***
  - Was the quality of the service consistent with your expectations?
- ***Accuracy***
  - Were the data provided accurate?
- ***Ease of Use and Usefulness***
  - Was the product easy to use?
  - Was the information useful to you?
- ***Ease of Information Access***
  - Were you able to find the information you needed easily?
- ***Helpfulness***
  - Was the information helpful?
- ***Quality***
  - Was the information of high quality?
- ***Value for fee paid for information/product/service***
  - Was the cost of the product, information, or service appropriate for the value received?

**2. Management practices:** This area covers questions relating to how well customers are satisfied with DOI management practices and processes; what improvements they might make to specific processes; and, whether or not they feel DOI addressed and reconciled specific issues in a timely, courteous, responsive manner. Questions within this area may involve feedback regarding how well DOI engaged customers on a specific topic. They may also seek opinions from customers regarding how well DOI programs are managing and administering specific processes (for example, the Bureau of Land Management may ask customers how well it is administering its permitting processes.)

**3. Mission management:** Questions will ask customers and partners to provide satisfaction data related to DOI's ability to protect, conserve, provide access to, provide scientific data about, and preserve natural, cultural, and recreational resources that we manage, and how well we are carrying out our trust responsibilities to American Indians, Native Alaskans, and Insular Areas. Questions will specifically ask customers and partners to provide satisfaction data related to each of its four mission areas as described in its GPRA Strategic Plan: Resource Use, Resource Protection, Serving Communities, and Recreation.

**4. Rules, regulations, policies:** This area focuses on obtaining feedback from customers regarding fairness, adequacy, and consistency in enforcing rules, regulations, and policies for which DOI is responsible. It will help us understand public awareness of rules and regulations, and clarify if DOI articulates information in a clear and understandable manner. It will not seek opinions from customers regarding the appropriateness of regulatory rulings themselves.

**5. Interactions with DOI Personnel and Contractors:** Questions developed under this topic area will focus on obtaining customer feedback regarding attributes of interactions with DOI office and bureau employees, as well as DOI contractors. Attribute questions will range from timeliness and quality of interactions to skill level of staff providing the assistance, as well as their courtesy and responsiveness during the interaction.

**6. General demographics:** Bureaus and officer may gather some general demographics to augment satisfaction questions in order to better understand the customer so that we can improve how we serve that customer.

Demographics data will range from asking customers how many times they have used a DOI service or visited a DOI facility within a specific timeframe, to their ethnic group and race. Use sensitivity and prudence in developing and deploying questions under this topic area so that the customer does not perceive an intrusion upon his/her privacy. Additionally, ask these questions only as long as the data are critical to understanding customer satisfaction and the character of the customer base. Use demographics as part of a non-response bias strategy to ensure responses are representative of the contact universe.

**HOW TO USE THE PROGRAMMATIC CLEARANCE**

To use the Programmatic Clearance, bureaus and offices must ensure that the proposed survey instrument is consistent with the intent of the Programmatic Clearance; i.e., that the instrument focuses on obtaining customer satisfaction data. For each proposed survey, a bureau or office must prepare Form ***DI-4010, "Generic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys"*** and send that Form and the proposed survey instrument to a qualified statistician for review and approval. The statistician who reviewed and approved the package must include his/her name and the date of their approval in the Certification portion of the form DI-4010, "Generic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys."

Next, the bureau/office Information Collection Clearance Officer must review, approve, and certify that survey package complies with the terms of the Programmatic Clearance. They will forward the package to the Departmental Clearance Officer for review. Upon approval, the Departmental Clearance Officer will submit the package to the Office of Policy Analysis.

Each package must include the following:

- A completed Form DI-4010, "Generic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys", including the certifications of the statistician and bureau Information Collection Clearance Officer;
- A copy of the entire survey instrument; and,
- Other supporting materials, including cover letters, introductory scripts (primarily for focus groups), and follow-up letters (aimed at encouraging response).

**TIMELINES FOR REQUESTING APPROVALS**

Submit approval requests under the Programmatic Clearance to your bureau/office Information Collection Clearance Officer at least 75 calendar days prior to the first day the bureau/office plans to administer the survey instrument to the public.

**REQUEST AND APPROVAL PROCESS STEPS**

The steps in the Programmatic Clearance approval process are, as follows:

***Step 1*** - The requesting bureau/office completes the required justification form - ***DI-4010, "Generic Clearance for Customer Satisfaction Surveys."***

***Step 2***- The bureau/office submits a copy of the entire approval package to a qualified statistician for review and approval of the instrument and survey methodology. The package must include:

- the completed form DI-4010;
- any introductory script used in contacting the public;
- all cover letters, postcard reminders or follow-up letters to be sent to potential respondents;
- the entire survey instrument;
- necessary Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) compliance language inserted into the survey instrument; and
- any other supporting materials.

For face-to-face information collections, such as interviews and focus groups, a short statement describing how the bureau/office intends to communicate PRA compliance information to respondents is required in the description of the survey methodology.

***Step 3*** - The bureau/office submits a copy of the entire approval package, including the certification by the statistician, to the bureau/office Information Collection Clearance Officer (ICCO) *at least 75 calendar days prior to the first day the bureau/office plans to administer the survey instrument to the public*.

***Step 4*** - The bureau/office ICCO will review/approve the package before submitting it electronically to the Departmental ICCO (D-ICCO) for review.

***Step 5*** - Upon approval, the D-ICCO will forward the package to the Office of Policy Analysis (OPA).

***Step 6***- OPA staff members conduct an administrative and technical review of the submission. The staff recommends:

(a) Approval,
(b) Revision,
(c) Resubmission under the standard Paperwork Reduction Act approval process, or
(d) Rejection of the proposed survey.

If OPA does not approve the package, they will notify the D-ICCO to coordinate revision and resubmission.

***Step 7***- Once approved, the D-ICCO transmits the package to OMB for final approval.

***Step 8*** - OMB reviews the submission and notifies the D-ICCO of approval or necessary revisions.

***Step 9*** - Upon approval by OMB, the D-ICCO will notify the requesting bureau/office. If OMB attaches any special conditions to the approval, the D-ICCO will inform the requesting bureau/office of the conditions required to conduct of the survey.

Should OMB reject the submission or have specific questions about the survey instrument, the D-ICCO will immediately inform the requesting bureau/office. The bureau/office may submit an appeal of the OMB decision to the D-ICCO, in writing. The D-ICCO will submit the appeal to OMB and inform the bureau/office of the results.

***Step 10*** - The bureau/office conducts the approved survey. Bureaus/offices may not make additions or changes to a survey instrument after OMB approves the request, even within the specific topic areas. However, bureaus/offices may delete questions after approval by OMB, if necessary.