

OMB Control #0693-0031

Expiration Date: 06/30/2021

NIST Generic Request for Customer Service Related Data Collections

NIST, NIJ, Evidence Management Steering Committee Data Collection

FOUR STANDARD SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Explain who will be surveyed and why the group is appropriate to survey.

The Evidence Management Survey is intended for handlers of forensic evidence across the criminal justice system, including law enforcement, courts, hospitals, forensic laboratories, and medical examiner's offices, to obtain data on the extent of evidence management issues within our criminal justice system. This data collection, sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), is one project among several led by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and NIJ in consultation with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and federal laboratories, to establish best practices for evidence retention as required by the 2016 Justice for All Act. In alignment with these activities, this survey will provide insight on how to best serve our audience of evidence handlers by assessing existing policies and protocols, personnel education and training needs, and knowledge gaps among entities responsible for storing or analyzing physical evidence.

2. Explain how the survey was developed including consultation with interested parties, pre-testing, and responses to suggestions for improvement.

This survey was developed in consultation with the Evidence Management Steering Committee (EMSC), a group of about 20 stakeholders selected by NIST and NIJ, who represent state, local, and federal agencies and private organizations that deal with the management of physical evidence. In March 2018, the EMSC met for the first time and developed a plan to complete its charge to: 1) develop best practices for the retention, preservation, integrity, and disposition of evidence and property and 2) encourage adoption through education and engagement of the broad community of U.S. justice system stakeholders involved in the management of evidence. This plan included a survey of evidence handlers to assess the extent of evidence management policies and protocols, personnel and training needs, and gaps in knowledge about the appropriate handling of physical evidence.

With leadership from NIST, the steering committee developed the questions, respondent email lists, and conducted pre-testing with a small group of respondents (less than 9). Suggestions for improving the survey were discussed with EMSC and integrated into the survey.

3. Explain how the survey will be conducted, how customers will be sampled if fewer than all customers will be surveyed, expected response rate, and actions your agency plans to take to improve the response rate.

The survey will be sent electronically to a list of 445 members of the Evidence Management Community of Practice (CoP) established by EMSC. CoP members opt into a listserv managed

by NIST and are sent monthly newsletters discussing various evidence management related topics.

Additional respondents are obtained via professional associations who are represented on EMSC and have volunteered to forward the survey to their membership. Professional associations include the International Association of Property and Evidence, the International Association of Forensic Nurses, the Association of Crime Laboratory Managers, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the NIST Organization of Forensic Scientific Area Committees. The survey is applicable to many different roles within one agency and some associations have memberships upward of 100 people of which a small portion will answer the survey.

Customers will be sampled via convenience using the methods described above. Due to the nature of the survey, we expect that multiple respondents will receive the survey per email sent. Using chain-referral sampling, approximately 5,000 customers will be contacted in total. The anticipated response rate is about 10% making the total number of respondents estimated at 500.

The precise population of customers being surveyed is uncertain. There are nearly 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Other agencies represented in this survey include courts, hospitals, and medical examiner's offices making our total population of customers likely in the hundreds of thousands.

Our agency plans to improve the response rate through frequent interaction with the assembled Evidence Management CoP. The CoP newsletters are sent monthly and will continue until April of 2021. Once the survey is released, reminders for respondents to participate in the survey will be sent via the CoP newsletter where additional resources including training, best practices and information about the progress of the NIST/NIJ Evidence Management effort are provided on an ongoing basis. In addition, the link to the online survey instrument will be placed on the NIST Evidence Management website.

4. Describe how the results of the survey will be analyzed and used to generalize the results to the entire customer population.

The survey will be conducted via an online tool called SurveyMonkey which allows for rapid analysis of responses. Collected data will be provided to the EMSC for discussion and incorporated into a document discussing best practices for the handling of physical evidence to be published as a NIST Interagency Report. Since the survey is not a randomized sample, inferences cannot be made about the entire customer population based on the results. However, since demographic information is being collected from the respondents, some useful information about evidence management practices in certain states and localities can be gathered and explored. Currently, there are very little sources of information on evidence management practices. This survey will be in good start in gathering useful data to assess the needs of this customer population.