

Agency: National Institute of Justice (NIJ)
Title: Generic clearance for cognitive, pilot, and field studies for Office Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention data collection activities
OMB No.: 1121-0360
Request: Revision of a currently approved collection

A. Justification

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any 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.

This is a request for a 3-year generic clearance for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), on behalf of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), that will allow it to develop, test, and improve its survey and data collection instruments and methods. The procedures utilized to this effect include, but are not limited to, tests of various types of survey and data collection operations, focus groups, cognitive laboratory activities, pilot testing, exploratory interviews, experiments with questionnaire design, and usability testing of electronic data collection instruments.

NIJ is requesting the generic clearance to test new methods for surveys and data collection activities. In fiscal year 2019, the OJJDP transferred management of its research and statistics function to NIJ, including multiple high-profile, complex national data collections. These efforts provide policymakers, practitioners, and the public with important information, including in the areas of child victimization and youth involvement with the juvenile justice system. NIJ has been coordinating closely with the federal partners to enhance its data collection efforts, both self-report and establishment surveys, to ensure they meet the highest and most efficient standards for design and data collection methodologies. We believe the generic clearance will be a helpful vehicle for evaluating questionnaires and various other data collection procedures related to new or changing data collections.

OJJDP initiated a generic clearance in 2017 to complete developmental activities associated with evaluating and improving its survey design and data collection instruments and methods (OMB Control Number: 1121-0360). Prior to using a generic clearance NIJ and OJJDP largely relied on expert review and/or convenience samples of 9 or fewer persons to provide input and feedback on survey design and data collection methods. This approach does not meet needs to develop and implement more rigorous testing procedures. Relatedly, seeking full OMB clearance prior to testing instruments causes delays to NIJ and OJJDP achieving its timeliness objectives for collections. Reliance on 9 or fewer persons does not provide a basis for conducting any type of test and the data from 9 or fewer have no generalizability. The information collected via these mechanisms, while still helpful, was nonetheless somewhat limited in its ability to detect and diagnose problems with the instruments and the procedures being tested.

The generic testing clearance will allow NIJ and OJJDP to take advantage of a variety of methods that are useful for identifying questionnaire/assessment and procedural problems, suggesting solutions, and measuring the relative effectiveness of alternative solutions. Through the use of these techniques, when employed routinely in the testing phase of data collections, questionnaires and assessments can be simplified for respondents, respondent burden can be reduced, procedures for the collection of administrative data can be streamlined, and the quality of the questionnaires and assessments used in continuing and one-time surveys and assessments can be improved. Thus, an increase in the quality of the data collected can be achieved.

NIJ is requesting a three-year generic clearance for pretesting, during which NIJ will provide periodic reports on pretesting activities. The pretesting activities conducted under this generic clearance will be for development work only. These development activities will include such things as investigating item types, assessing the availability and quality of administrative data from state and local justice agencies, small scale testing of access and retrieval methods for administrative data, evaluating survey administration modes (e.g., telephone, paper and pencil, computer-based, mail-out and mail-in), testing questionnaires and assessments, and appraising items. Activities covered under this generic clearance will not include field testing of a full-scale program implementation protocol.

This clearance package is intended to serve as a request for generic clearance. In this document we have provided a description of the scope of possible activities that might be covered under this clearance. The requested clearance is important to NIJ's use of pretesting activities because of the length of time required to plan the activities. This generic clearance will go through the usual two Federal Register Review periods. Subsequent to these review periods, NIJ requests that OMB review then comment on or clear proposed studies in a two-week period with no 30-day Federal Register Notice period required under the generic clearance. This clearance is similar to the testing clearances held by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics.

The specific methods proposed for coverage by this clearance are described below. Also outlined are the procedures NIJ plans to put in place for keeping OMB informed about the identity of the surveys and the nature of the research activities being conducted.

The methods proposed for use in questionnaire and assessment development are as follows:

Pilot testing. For the purposes of this clearance, we are defining pilot tests as data collection efforts conducted among either purposive, quota, or probability samples, for which evaluation of the questionnaire and/or procedures is the main objective. NIJ will only publish research and development and methodological reports on the results of these pilot tests, and will not publish statistical reports or data sets based on the findings. Pilot tests are an essential component of this clearance package because they serve as the vehicle for investigating basic item properties for new or redesigned data collection efforts, such as reliability, validity, and difficulty, as well as feasibility of methods for standardized administration of forms. Under this clearance a variety of surveys will be pretested, though the exact nature of the surveys and the samples is undetermined at present. However, due to the smaller nature of the tests, we expect that some will not involve

representative samples. In these cases, samples will basically be convenience or purposive samples, which could be limited to specific geographic locations, may involve expired rotation groups of a current survey, respondents known to have specific aggregate demographic characteristics, etc. The needs of the particular sample will vary based on the content of the survey being tested, but the selection of sample cases will not be completely arbitrary. Where applicable, pilot testing may also include collecting sample administrative data, which will allow NIJ to test procedures regarding data procurement as well as comparability of data across sites.

Behavior coding. This method involves applying a standardized coding scheme to the completion of an interview or questionnaire, either by a coder using a tape- or video-recording of the interview or by an in-person observer at the time of the interview. The coding scheme is designed to identify situations that occur during the interview that reflect problems with the questionnaire. For example, if respondents frequently interrupt the interviewer before the question is completed, the question may be too long. If respondents frequently give inadequate answers, this suggests there are some other problems with the question. Quantitative data derived from this type of standardized coding scheme can provide valuable information to identify problem areas in a questionnaire, and can be used as a substitute for or as a complement to the traditional interviewer debriefing.

Interviewer debriefing. This method employs the knowledge of the employees who have the closest contact with respondents. In conjunction with other methods, we plan to use this method in our field tests to collect information about how interviewers react to the survey instruments, as well as understand problems and pitfalls encountered by interviewers during the interview.

Exploratory interviews. These may be conducted with individuals to understand a topical area and may be used in the very early stages of developing a new survey. It may cover discussions related to administrative records (e.g. what types of records, where, and in what format), subject matter, definitions, etc. Exploratory interviews may also be used to investigate whether sufficient issues with an existing data collection are present to necessitate consideration of a redesign.

Respondent debriefing questionnaire. In this method, standardized debriefing questionnaires are administered to respondents who have participated in a field test. The debriefing form is administered at the end of the questionnaire being tested and contains questions that probe how respondents interpret the questions and whether they have problems in completing the survey/questionnaire. This structured approach to debriefing enables quantitative analysis of data from a representative sample of respondents, to learn whether respondents can answer the questions and whether they interpret them in the manner intended by the questionnaire designers.

Follow-up interviews or re-interviews. This involves re-interviewing or re-assessing a sample of respondents after the completion of a survey or assessment. Responses given in the re-interview are compared with the respondents' initial responses for consistency between responses. In this way, re-interviews provide data for studies of test-re-test reliability and other measures of data quality. In turn, this information aids in the development of more reliable measures.

Cognitive and usability interviews. This method involves intensive, one-on-one interviews in which the respondent is typically asked to "think aloud" as he or she answers survey questions. A

number of different techniques may be involved, including asking respondents to paraphrase questions, probing questions asked to determine how respondents came up with their answers, and so on. The objective is to identify problems of ambiguity, misunderstanding, or other difficulties respondents have answering questions. This is frequently one of the early stages of revising a questionnaire.

Focus groups. This method involves group sessions guided by a moderator, who follows a topical outline containing questions or topics focused on a particular issue, rather than adhering to a standardized questionnaire. Focus groups are useful for surfacing and exploring issues (e.g., confidentiality concerns) that people may feel some hesitation about discussing.

Procedures for Clearance

Before testing activity is undertaken, NIJ will provide OMB with a memo describing the study to be conducted and a copy of instrumentation and debriefing materials that will be used. Depending on the stage of instrumentation development, this may be a printed questionnaire, a set of prototype items showing each item type to be used and the range of topics to be covered by the questionnaire, or an interview script. When split-sample experiments are conducted, either in small group sessions or as part of a field test, the different versions of the questionnaires to be used will be provided. For a test of alternative procedures, the description and rationale for the procedures will be submitted. A brief description of the planned field activity will also be provided. NIJ requests that OMB raise comments on substantive issues within 10 working days of receipt.

Data collections that will be the focus of requested generic clearances will be permitted under authorizing legislation. In most cases, data collection activities conducted by NIJ on behalf of OJJDP will be authorized under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (34 U.S.C. 10121-10122). At this time, it is not known whether other titles will be referenced for specific projects as we do not know the data collections that will be pretested during the course of the clearance. The authorizing statute will be specified in each requested clearance.

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 the current collection.

The information collected under a generic clearance will be used by staff from NIJ, on behalf of OJJDP, to evaluate and improve the quality of the data in the surveys and assessments that are ultimately conducted. None of the data collected under this clearance will be published for its own sake.

Because the data collections being tested under this clearance are still in the process of development, the data that result from these collections are not considered official statistics of NIJ or other Federal agencies. Data will not be made public, except when they are included in research reports prepared for sponsors inside and outside of NIJ. The results may also be prepared for presentations related to data collection methods at professional meetings or publications in professional journals.

NIJ anticipates conducting testing work under this Generic Information Clearance for a number of projects, including but not limited to the following:

- a. Juvenile Facility Census Program (JFCP): The JFCP collects data from all secure and nonsecure residential placement facilities that house persons younger than age 21 who are being held as a result of some contact with the juvenile justice system for a law violation. It collects general information on facility characteristics (e.g., facility ownership and operatorship, capacity and crowding) and the number of youth housed in facilities. The JFCP includes two rotating content modules that are administered separately during a two-year collection cycle: the Youth Population module and the Facility Operations modules. The Youth Population module collects detailed information on individual youth housed in facilities, by collecting individual-level information on youth younger than age 21 assigned a bed in the facility on the census day for an offense and individual-level information on youth younger than age 21 who were released from the facility in a 28-day period. Information collected includes demographic details, placement characteristics, admission date, and release date, when applicable. The Facility Operations module collects information on resident services (e.g., medical, mental health, substance use), facility features, and operations.

NIJ will pursue development work for the JFCP (OMB # 1121-0381) through (1) retrospective cognitive debriefings of data providers in an effort to identify the necessary changes to the survey instrument to enhance data quality, reduce burden, and increase efficiencies for the annual collections, (2) development and cognitive testing of new items and modifications of past items in the core instrument and supplemental modules, and (3) pilot testing of new and modified items to determine respondent capacity to report survey items and estimate the burden associated with responding to the questionnaire. Estimated burden hours needed for cognitive debriefings, facility questionnaire review and testing, and pilot testing are 400 hours.

- b. Census of Juveniles on Probation (CJP): The CJP collected (OMB No. 1121-0291) individual-level data about youth on formal probation, including their age, sex, race, residence, offense type, and offense location. NIJ would like to engage in activities, including cognitive interviews, to determine the feasibility of future administrations and inform the possible redesign of the CJP questionnaire and survey methods to identify a core set of data elements that can be used to produce key statistics to track changes in size and composition of the nation's formal juvenile probation. Estimated burden hours needed for cognitive interviews and pilot testing are 400 hours.
- c. NIJ will work with a grantee to develop and test strategies to collect information from law enforcement agencies, child welfare agencies, and nonprofit organizations on prevalence, incident characteristics, and responses to child maltreatment in youth serving organizations. NIJ would seek clearance for developmental research in support of this effort including pilot testing the collection to assess the functionality of the instrument, the capacity of respondents to provide the information, and level of burden associated with reporting the information prior to implementing it on a national scale. The findings

will be used to inform instrument development and determine the feasibility of a national administration. Estimated burden hours needed for pilot testing protocols and follow-up procedures are 300 hours.

- d. NIJ intends to work with a successful applicant to develop and test strategies to collect data on rare forms of youth victimization such as technology-facilitated victimization, kidnapping, commercial sexual exploitation, etc. NIJ would seek clearance for developmental research in support of this effort to include exploratory interviews to inform frame and survey development and pilot testing the collection to assess the functionality of the instrument, the capacity of respondents to provide the information, and the level of burden associated with reporting the information prior to implementing it on a national scale. The findings will be used to develop the survey frame, make the necessary changes to the instrument to enhance its functionality, improve the quality of the data collected, and minimize burden. Estimated burden hours needed for exploratory interviews, cognitive testing the new instrumentation, and pilot testing the administration protocols and follow-up procedures are 300 hours.

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

When the survey or assessment being pretested employs automated methods for its data collection, the research conducted under this submission will also use automated data collection techniques. This clearance offers NIJ the opportunity to try innovative technologies that can reduce burden, improve data quality and reliability, and increase the use of information technology.

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 A.2 above.

The research to be requested under a generic clearance will not duplicate any other methodological work being done by NIJ or other Federal agencies. The purpose of the clearance will be to stimulate additional research which would not be done under other circumstances. The research will involve collaboration with staff from other agencies that are sponsoring surveys conducted by NIJ, when applicable. The research may also involve joint efforts with staff from other Federal laboratory facilities and statistical agencies. All efforts would be collaborative in nature, and no duplication in this area is anticipated.

To the maximum extent possible, we will make use of previous information, reviewing results of previous evaluations of the data collection instruments and methodologies before we attempt to revise them. However, it is expected that this information will not be sufficient to refine our data collection instruments and methodologies without conducting additional research.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden

The research to be requested under a generic clearance will be designed as relatively small-scale data collection efforts. This will minimize the amount of burden required to improve questionnaires, data collection instruments, and data collection procedures; to test new ideas; and refine or improve upon positive or unclear results from other tests. The results of the research conducted under this clearance are expected to improve the methods and instruments used in full scale studies and thereby improve information quality while minimizing burden to respondents.

6. Describe the consequence 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.

The research to be requested under a generic clearance will involve questionnaire and other data collection research/development activities. If the project were not carried out, the quality of the data collected would suffer. In addition, activities covered under the generic clearance will allow for more specific and precise calculation of burden hours and costs associated with survey and other data collection efforts conducted by NIJ.

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 a written response 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 not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**
- **requiring the use of statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**
- **that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, 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 secret, 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.**

All the guidelines listed in the OMB guidelines are met. There are no special circumstances.

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the agency'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 agency in response to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

Consultation with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained or those who must compile records should occur at least once every 3 years -- even if the collection-of-information activity is the same as in prior periods. There may be circumstances that may preclude consultation in a specific situation. These circumstances should be explained.

The 60-day Federal Register notice was published on March 10, 2026 (91 FR 11563). The 30-day Federal Register notice was published on May 7, 2026 (91 FR 24915). No public comments have been received in response to this notice to date.

Consultation with staff from other Federal agencies that sponsor surveys conducted by NIJ will occur in conjunction with the testing program for the individual survey. Consultation with staff from other Federal laboratory facilities and statistical agencies may also occur as part of joint research efforts. These consultations will include discussions concerning potential response problems, clarity of questions and instructions, and other aspects of respondent burden. Additional efforts to consult with potential respondents to obtain their views on the availability of data, clarity of instructions, etc., may be undertaken as part of the testing that is conducted under this clearance.

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

While no currently proposed projects involve the use of incentives, NIJ may develop other projects where incentives could be used. NIJ may offer up to \$50 for any cognitive labs and up to \$75 for focus group participation. We also may propose incentive experiments in limited cases.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy. If the collection requires a systems of records notice (SORN) or privacy impact assessment (PIA), those should be cited and described here.

According to Title 34 U.S.C. § 10231, the information gathered under this clearance shall be used only for statistical or research purposes, and shall be gathered in a manner that precludes their use for law enforcement or any purpose relating to a particular individual other than statistical or research purposes. All respondents who participate in research under this clearance will be informed that the information they provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form and that their participation is voluntary. For

personal visit and telephone or video interviews, this information will be conveyed verbally by the interviewer. For personal visit interviews, respondents will also be notified in writing to give them something they can keep and read. For self-administered questionnaires, the information will be included in the mailing package, recruitment communications and materials, either on the questionnaire, or the instructions. For Internet-based data collections, this information will be displayed prominently, and in a format that allows the respondent to print it out. All participants in cognitive research will be required to sign written notification concerning the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation. We will also inform respondents in writing of the need to have an OMB number. No participant direct identifiers will be maintained. The Generic Information Clearance will specify the particular authority for the data collection.

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. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the 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

It is possible that some potentially sensitive questions may be included in questionnaires that are tested under this clearance. One of the purposes of the testing is to identify such questions, determine sources of sensitivity, and address concerns related to those questions, insofar as possible, before the actual survey is administered. Justification for any sensitive questions included in a project covered by this generic information clearance will be included in the individual project submissions.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information.

- **Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. Unless directed to do so, agencies should not conduct special surveys to obtain information on which to base hour burden estimates. Consultation with a sample (fewer than 10) of potential respondents is desirable. If the hour burden on respondents is expected to vary widely because of differences in activity, size, or complexity, show the range of estimated hour burden, and explain the reasons for the variance. General, estimates should not include burden hours for customary and usual business practices.**
- **If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form.**
- **Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories. The cost of contracting out or paying outside parties for information collection activities should not be included here. Instead, this cost should be included in Item 14.**

We estimate that the number of people involved in our exploratory, pilot, cognitive, and focus group work is estimated to cover approximately 2,000 respondents over the three-year period, with a total estimated respondent burden of approximately 4,000 hours for the period from December 2026 through December 2029.

A variety of forms will be used in conducting the research under this clearance, and the exact number of different forms, length of each form, and number of subjects/respondents per form are not thoroughly known at this time. However, we can project that our activities will likely include testing items and data collection modes, cognitive labs or interviews, exploratory interviews, re-interviews, behavior coding and focus groups.

The annualized cost to respondents is not known at this time as the respondent pool is not thoroughly known at this time. We will include information about costs in the individual submissions.

13. Provide an estimate of 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 service 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 the reasons for the variance. The cost of purchasing or contracting out information collection services should be a 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 the 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 is typically no cost to respondents for participating in the research being conducted under this clearance, except for their time to complete the questionnaire or participate in an interview or focus group. However, OJJDP may develop other projects where incentives could be used. OJJDP may offer up to \$50 for any cognitive labs and up to \$75 for focus group participation.

14. Provide estimates of the annualized cost 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), 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 into a single table.

It is very difficult to anticipate the actual number of participants, length of interview, and/or mode of data collection for the work to be conducted under this clearance over the entire three-year clearance period. Without that information, it is not possible to estimate in advance the cost of the work under this Information Clearance to the Federal Government. Costs associated with each individual project will be covered by the statistical unit conducting the research and will come from their data collection budgets. We will include information about costs in the individual submissions.

15. Reason for Change in Burden

There is no change in burden from the previous request for a generic information clearance.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulations, 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.

The research to be requested under a generic clearance is for the testing of various data collection methodologies and survey/questionnaire development. Data tabulations will be used to evaluate the results of the testing. The information collected in these efforts will not be the subject of estimates or other statistics in NIJ and OJJDP reports; however, it may be published in research and development reports or be included as a methodological appendix or footnote in a report containing data from a larger data collection effort. The results of this research may be prepared for presentation at professional meetings or publication in professional journals. Due to the nature of this clearance, there is no definite or tentative time schedule at this point. We expect work to be conducted more or less continuously throughout the duration of the clearance.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

No exemption is requested.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

There are no exceptions to the certification.