

SUPPORTING STATEMENT

A. Justification

1. Circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is requesting approval to conduct employee surveys for a period of three years from the approval date. Title 5, United States Code specifies that a function of the MSPB is to “conduct, from time to time, special studies relating to the civil service and to other merit systems in the executive branch, and report to the President and to the Congress as to whether the public interest in a civil service free of prohibited personnel practices is being adequately protected.” (Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations also describes the role of MSPB’s Office of Policy and Evaluation as responsible for carrying out “the Board’s statutory responsibility to conduct special reviews and studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch, as well as oversight reviews of the significant actions of the Office of Personnel Management.”)

Specifically, Section 2302 of Title 5, United States Code, lists “prohibited personnel practices,” which include discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, or political affiliation. In order to evaluate compliance with this regulation, we plan to survey a diverse population of Federal employees regarding their experiences in the workplace. In addition to assessing perceptions held by employees regarding discrimination, we will also examine strategies that employees have successfully used to overcome this potential barrier. We will also seek to learn whether advancement strategies vary between groups of employees and evaluate the outcomes associated with each approach. In addition to the primary survey which is designed to cover all employees, we may also design a limited number of more narrowly focused surveys, which address issues unique to subpopulations of Federal employees (e.g., people with disabilities).

2. How the information will be used.

As mentioned in response to question 1, the results of these surveys will be used to evaluate employees’ perceptions of discrimination in the workforce and to examine career advancement strategies. In the past, MSPB has conducted similar research and produced reports such as “A Question of Equity: Women and the Glass Ceiling” (1992), “Fair & Equitable Treatment: A Progress Report on Minority Employment in the Federal Government” (1996), and “Achieving a Representative Federal Workforce: Addressing the Barriers to Hispanic Representation” (1997), which were delivered to Congress and the President, and distributed to interested parties within and outside of the Federal Government.

3. Use of automated collection procedures.

We make every effort to reach employees via automated collection procedures that will reduce the burden on them and ensure the validity of the information that we are trying to obtain. As a result, approximately 95% of the surveys will be completed online. Paper surveys will be mailed to the remaining employees who do not have email addresses and/or access to the internet.

4. Efforts to identify duplication.

As far as we know, no other surveys have recently explored the issue of discrimination and potential career advancement strategies. MSPB's studies, as noted in response to question 2, most recently examined these issues nearly 10 years ago.

5. Impact on small businesses.

The information we plan to collect does not impact small business or other small entities.

6. Consequences of not collecting the information.

If the survey is not conducted, we will not be able to assess the prevalence of discrimination in the Federal Government and compare these findings to our research conducted during the 1990's to identify trends. This represents an important aspect of our mission to ensure preservation of the merit principles and avoidance of prohibited personnel practices.

7. Explanation of special circumstances.

There are no special circumstances that would cause information to be conducted as described in this section.

8. Federal Register notice.

Copies of the Federal Register notices soliciting comments on this information are attached. The first one was published on September 12 and the second one was published on November 20.

9. Remuneration to respondents.

There will be no remuneration for respondents.

10. Assurance of confidentiality.

Respondents are advised in email messages or cover letters that their answers will be kept completely confidential. Information will only be reported in an aggregate form. Any written comments that are published will be edited to ensure anonymity. Responses to the survey are also entirely voluntary.

11. Justification for any questions of a sensitive nature.

Some questions ask respondents about their perceptions of discrimination in the work environment. While some respondents may view this to be a sensitive topic, it is essential to obtain the perspectives of a diverse population of Federal employees and to be able to report back on their experiences and opinions.

Respondents will be informed up front that they have the option to skip any questions that they elect not to answer.

12. Estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information

Number of respondents: 46,000

Frequency of response: once

Annual hour burden: .5 hours

Total reporting burden: 23,000 hours

Explanation of how burden was estimated: Based on experience with past surveys of similar length and pretesting the survey.

The annualized costs to respondents cannot be calculated since the respondents represent a diverse group whose range of income is not known.

13. Total cost to respondents or record keepers.

There are no additional costs to respondents or record keepers beyond that shown in response to item 12 above.

14. Estimates of annualized costs to the Federal Government.

Professional staff time designing surveys and analyzing survey results. It is estimated that this will required approximately 240 staff hours over the 3 years covered by this request. Assuming an average cost of \$60 per staff hour, this calculation results in a total cost of about \$14,400 over the 3 year period.

Contract support for the online and paper distribution of the survey: \$99,000.

Total: \$113,400.

15. Reasons for program changes.

There were no program changes.

16. Outline of plans for use and publication.

The results of this survey will be published in one or more reports to the President and the Congress and other interested parties.

17. Approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection.

We are not seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection.

18. Exceptions to the certification statement.

There are no exceptions to the certification certificate.

B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

1. Description of the potential respondent universe and any sampling selection methods to be used.

To ensure representation across the diverse population of Federal employees, we will utilize stratified random sampling from the Civilian Personnel Data File (CPDF) to select employees across strata such as race, sex, occupational category, and pay level. To achieve desired cell sizes of about 600 employees per grouping, we will need to select approximately 36,000 employees

Based on prior research, we expect a return rate of approximately 60-70%.

2. Description of procedures for the collection of information.

The sample sizes discussed in the response to question 1 were determined based on our historical response, so that the overall accuracy of our results would be + or – 3 percent (95% confidence interval) for each survey.

3. Description of methods to maximize response rates.

To maximize return rates, we will contact the prospective respondents directly (by name) with an advance email message or cover letter which will be signed by an MSPB official. This message will explain how they were selected and how the confidentiality of their responses will be maintained, while stressing the importance of the research and their participation to ensure representation of all

perspectives. We will also request that the agency leader express support for completing the survey so employees will be assured they can complete the survey on their work time.

We will follow up with weekly email requests as a reminder to non-respondents. These messages will contain everything needed to access the survey (i.e., user ID, password, and hypertext link to the secure survey site). Additionally, we plan to send these emails from an mspb.gov extension to provide additional credibility to our survey and help Federal employees distinguish it from requests (e.g., spam) that they may receive from other sources.

Any respondents who encounter difficulties accessing or completing the survey will be able to contact a “help desk” for assistance. Respondents will also have the option of requesting a paper copy of the survey if they prefer.

We plan to examine the response rate for each of the stratified groups, and when needed, conduct additional follow up efforts to ensure greater participation.

Finally, in the design of the survey instrument, we are pretesting the questions to ensure that the total length is reasonable and that the questions are understandable since extremely lengthy surveys and/or difficult questions may discourage respondents from completing the survey. Similarly, we are working to create a question format that is user-friendly and presents the questions and possible responses in a clear manner.

4. Description of test procedures.

While developing the survey protocol, the MSPB Office of Policy and Evaluation staff will carefully review the item pool to avoid any unnecessary duplication in questions. We will strive to develop concise and understandable instructions and response scales to reduce the time burden on respondents.

We may also conduct a limited number of focus groups to provide feedback on our research questions to further refine our survey instruments. Focus group participants may be recruited either on a volunteer basis or by requesting participation of individuals identified through CPDF as meeting specific criteria.

Once the survey instrument is completed, we will conduct a test of the survey content prior to administration, primarily by having additional staff from the Office of Policy and Evaluation and other offices within MSPB complete the survey online to help ensure a user-friendly navigation through the survey.

5. Name and telephone number of individuals consulted.

Persons consulted on the statistical design:

John Crum (202) 653-6772, ext. 1344

Persons who will collect and/or analyze the information:

Cynthia Ferentinos (202) 653-6772, ext. 1334

James Tsugawa (202) 653-6772, x1338