

Supporting Statement for  
National Cemetery Administration, Customer Satisfaction Survey (Headstone/Marker)  
(2900-0571)

B. Collections of Information Employing Statistical Methods

All surveys will use statistical methods and will follow OMB guidelines. The organization will also follow the guidance in the OMB Manual, "Resource Manual for Customer Surveys." Technical survey expertise and statistical service will be sought from VA statisticians or from other Federal statistical agencies.

To ensure NCA and VA are in compliance with Executive Order No. 12862, NCA conducted the voluntary Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries since 2000. The survey's purpose and design were developed to determine the kind and quality of services customers of NCA wanted and their level of satisfaction with existing services. Since 2000, NCA followed the OMB generic clearance guidance established in the OMB guidance named Resource Manual for Customer Surveys Part 1, dated October 1, 1993. As a result, NCA continually identified its customer's needs, expectations and level of satisfaction of service in an effort to meet or exceed customer expectations, to improve service, and to be in compliance with Executive Order No. 12862. The annual survey is administered to NCA's two major customer groups, next of kin and funeral directors.

To ensure that the questions in the survey were appropriate, addressed the needs of NCA's customers and provided NCA with valuable customer based information to improve customer satisfaction, NCA conducted focus groups to identify salient issues. As a result, a draft survey was developed and cognitive lab sessions were held to identify survey improvements. A national pretest was performed and the survey was revised based on the findings.

The Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries and the Survey of Satisfaction with Memorial Service Products and Services are paper based survey. The focus groups, the cognitive labs and the pretest demonstrated that next of kin respondents, having recently lost a loved one and still in a stage of grieving, found phone surveys intrusive during this sensitive time. As a result, the paper surveys were used out of respect for the mourning process. Additionally, surveys are never sent to a grieving next of kin until a minimum of 90 days pass. Again, this process was implemented to respect the grieving process.

To administer the Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries in the least burdensome manner, a detailed sampling plan was developed that determined the sample size needed for each national cemetery to yield valid data at the 95 percent confidence level, assuming a 60 percent response rate. Two different approaches will be used that are dependent on the number of interments per year at each national cemetery.

For cemeteries with 400 or more interments per year, a representative random sample of next of kin will be drawn based on the required sample size needed to yield a valid respondent sample. The sample will be drawn from next of kin who visited the national cemetery of the 6-month period that fell three to nine months prior to the survey administration. Based on this approach, surveys will be sent to approximately 20,000 next of kin across cemeteries with 400 or more interments.

For cemeteries with fewer than 400 interments, the number of survey returns needed to yield a valid sample at the 95 percent confidence level exceeds the population size, given a 60 percent response rate. Surveys therefore will be sent to the census of next of kin at these cemeteries. Based on this approach, surveys will be sent to approximately 5,200 next of kin across cemeteries with fewer than 400 interments in the year.

Across all cemeteries, surveys will be sent to approximately 7,500 funeral directors. For cemeteries with fewer than 260 unique funeral directors, surveys will be sent to a census of funeral directors. For cemeteries with more than 260 unique funeral directors, a representative random sample will be drawn based on the required sample needed to yield a valid respondent sample. The number of funeral directors needed was much lower than the number of next of kin needed because many funeral directors conducted multiple services at a national cemetery over the survey timeframe.

To maximize the response rate, a five-step mailing protocol will be used. It will consist of a prenotification letter; a copy of the survey with return envelop along with a cover letter; a reminder/thank you postcard; a second questionnaire to those who had not yet responded; then a final reminder/thank you postcard. Last year the five step process generated an overall response rate of 56.4%.

For surveys such the Survey of Satisfaction with Memorial Service Products and Services for customer that are buried in private cemeteries and receive government furnished headstones and markers or Presidential Memorial Certificates, NCA will also administer the survey in the least burdensome manner. NCA developed a detailed random sampling plan to determine the sample size needed to yield valid data at the 95 percent confidence level, assuming a 60 percent response rate. A random representative sample will be drawn from the two population groups – next of kin of deceased veterans that ordered a headstone or marker for installation at a private cemetery and the funeral directors that assisted in the process.

To secure the customer survey data from customers of receiving government headstone and markers and the Presidential Memorial Certificates at private cemeteries, NCA will use a three step mailing protocol. It will consist of a prenotification letter; a copy of the survey with return envelop along with a cover letter; a reminder/thank you postcard. Used in prior surveys, this strategy provided timely accurate customer satisfaction information for NCA and provided the appropriate response rate.