

## **Testing Respondent Knowledge and Perceptions of EIA Efforts to Protect Confidentiality**

### **Proposal to Convene One Focus Group during the 2015 EIA Energy Conference**

**Date:** March 2, 2015

**Project Sponsor:** Jake Bournazian, OES/SDSI/SDT Team Lead

**Project Co- Leads:** Marlana Anderson, Survey Statistician, SDSI/SDT; and Matt McDonough, Contractor, ICF International

**Project Description:** The Energy Information Administration (EIA) protects the information it collects by applying two main legal authorities:

- The data collected on most EIA surveys are protected and not disclosed to the public to the extent that it satisfies the criteria for exemption under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- The data collected on some EIA surveys are protected by the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act, commonly referred to as CIPSEA.

Additionally, for certain surveys EIA pledges to protect the identifiability of the information collected. For certain selected surveys, EIA applies disclosure limitation methodologies to statistical aggregates of the data to ensure that no identifiable information is publicly released.

While there has never been a data breach involving EIA, recent data breach incidents, such as the hacking of Veterans Administrations databases reported in 2013, have given rise to doubt among the general public as to whether or not the Federal Government can protect information intended to be kept confidential.

The Survey Development Team (SDT), in conjunction with the Office of Survey Development and Statistical Integration (SDSI), seeks to: 1) ascertain the current level of knowledge among EIA respondents concerning EIA efforts to protect the confidentiality of respondent information; 2) document respondent perceptions as to the effectiveness of these confidentiality practices; and 3) evaluate respondents' trust in EIA's use of reported information only for statistical purposes.

SDT proposes to convene a focus group on this topic during the 2015 EIA Energy Conference, which will facilitate participation of, potentially, both a large number and wide range of participants at minimal cost. Following promotion of this focus group among the EIA Energy Conference attendees, SDT envisions being able to select participants from various energy industries as well as potentially some members of the media. Results could warrant additional focus groups at future EIA conferences.

SDT staff began with a literature review, the results of which informed an initial set of questions on this topic. From there, SDT staff began working on a protocol to be used for the focus group. SDT staff plan to further test this protocol through a series of meetings with representatives from energy industry trade associations. It is our hope that two trade associations from each of the four fuel groups will be

represented in these meetings. This testing will allow refinement of the protocol prior to the focus group.

**Project Objectives:**

- Conduct a focus group with a variety of industry representatives concerning knowledge and perceptions of EIA efforts to protect confidentiality.
- Use findings to produce a report to assist EIA in evaluating what statistical information it needs to protect and how to protect this information.

**Significant milestones/deliverables:**

1. Schedule and conduct meetings with trade associations to test confidentiality questions.
2. Finalize protocol for the June focus group.
3. Promote the focus group among registered attendees of 2015 EIA Energy Conference.
4. Based on characteristics of those that expressed interest in attending, select participants for the focus group.
5. Conduct the focus group.
6. Deliver report of focus group findings.

**Project Management:** The project will begin in March 2015. The end date is currently scheduled for July 2015. The estimated schedule is dependent on the availability of the project team and is subject to stated constraints. It is also subject to the confirmation of, and agreement to, the scope of the project. Project management standards will be employed in the planning, execution, and closeout of each phase of this project. This includes the following:

- Creation of project folder at: Z:\Survey Development Team\Projects\Confidentiality Study
- Project monitoring and reporting to the SDT Team Lead.
- Project closeout activities that include verifying that project objectives and schedules are met, submission of the final deliverable, and documenting lessons learned for SDSI.

**Assumptions:**

1. Funding exists to conduct the focus group at the 2015 EIA Energy Conference.
2. Adequate space is available to conduct the focus group at the 2015 EIA Energy Conference.

**Constraints:**

1. Funding may not be available to conduct the focus group.
2. Available space may not be adequate.
3. It might be difficult to recruit participants.

**Risks:**

1. Project Co-Leads, Marlana Anderson and Matt McDonough, may be diverted to other SDT projects resulting in delay of project completion.

2. Possible schedule delays due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., delayed approval from OMB to conduct cognitive testing).

**Communication and Reporting:** The Project Co-Leads will report progress to the SDT Team Lead bi-weekly. In addition to the ongoing meetings held with the project group, SDSI Team Leads will receive an updated weekly status report. The project co-leads will provide a findings and recommendations report to the project sponsor following completion of the focus group. The SDT Team Lead and the SDSI Director will discuss project developments on an as needed basis.