

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS DIRECTIVE

1060.1

2/15/18

AGENCY SURVEYS

I. PURPOSE

This directive provides the procedures that program areas are to follow when developing or conducting surveys and questionnaires that assist the agency in collecting data on program operations; fulfill specific agency or Department requirements; or gather information on such topics as agency services or employee satisfaction. This directive also provides the processes and standards for the use of survey and questionnaire instruments throughout FSIS. This excludes questionnaires in the Public Health Information System (PHIS) that only collect establishment-specific information, and survey or questionnaire instruments that FSIS uses for which confidentiality is not a necessary component of the data collection or analysis.

II. BACKGROUND

A. A survey is a method used to collect and analyze information from a population, or a sample of a population. FSIS uses surveys to collect data from an audience or audiences of interest on questions related to program operation characteristics, preferences or behavior, experiences related to internal services or partnerships with FSIS, and other topics. The definition of “survey” includes gathering information using questionnaires as well as conducting and recording individual or group interviews, observations, measurement, and analysis of data. Surveys administered to FSIS populations or outside populations nearly always require data/respondent confidentiality.

B. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Performance Evaluation, and Planning staff (OCFO/PEP) is responsible for reviewing and approving all survey instruments, and working with offices to schedule, design, execute, and analyze data collected. OCFO/PEP uses approved survey research and applied statistics approaches in designing and conducting surveys and in analyzing results, and administration techniques to protect confidentiality, such as limiting access to survey data and removing identifying information from survey records. FSIS, through OCFO/PEP, maintains an annual survey agenda and schedule, and conducts follow up to improve response rates, and schedules surveys in a manner that aims to reduce duplicative information queries to respondents throughout each fiscal year (FY). OCFO/PEP generally considers requests at the beginning of each FY to ensure appropriate scheduling and sampling, and throughout the year as new, priority needs arise and as resources permit.

NOTE: For more information on practices OCFO/PEP follows, for example, see the [Reference Manual on Scientific Evidence](#), particularly the chapters on Survey Research and Statistics. For more information on comparable confidentiality practices, see, for example, [U.S. Census Bureau, Data Confidentiality and Privacy, Our Privacy Principles](#).

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Program Areas:

1. The program area's Assistant Administrator (AA) or Deputy AA is to confirm agreement with OCFO/PEP on the use of a survey as the most appropriate data collection instrument and on commencing any survey development and administration.

B. The requesting program area is to contact OCFO/PEP with the initial survey request through an online request form, and include a designated point-of-contact (POC). The form aids in creating a sound survey instrument, analysis approach, and reporting plan, and can be found at <https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/global/forms/formsResults.jsp>

1. Once finalized, this form serves as a working agreement between OCFO/PEP and the requesting program area(s). Information required in the form is as follows:
 - a. The purpose of the survey and related background information;
 - b. The target audience, including whether the survey targets bargaining unit employees;
 - c. The proposed time period for administering the survey;
 - d. The nature of the analysis and reporting that the program area is requesting; and
 - e. The FSIS strategic goal, outcome, or objective that the survey supports.
2. When appropriate, program area staffs with survey expertise can support and/or collaborate with PEP on the design of surveys, associated analysis, or the interpretation of results.

C. OCFO/PEP:

1. Provides guidance to program areas on survey instrument development, sampling frame, overall design, and options for data analysis. This includes question development, answer category development, ordering, timing, coding, administration, and analysis approaches to maximize use of the results.
2. Consults with the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD) to determine if a survey requires Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval.

NOTE: OPPD is the POC for facilitating OMB approval. OCFO/PEP typically completes an OMB Information Collection Request package for OMB approval and coordinates with OPPD on its submission.

3. When appropriate, briefs the Evaluation Work Group or the Enterprise Steering Board to obtain input on survey instruments that are directly related to program area operations, that are multi-program, and that collect information from external populations and require OMB approval.
4. Approves all survey instruments before they are administered.

5. Takes one of two approaches on overall survey administration, as agreed to with the program area's designated POC:
 - a. Tests and administers the survey; conducts data analysis; delivers survey results to the requesting program area(s) in an agreed-upon format; presents the final survey results to the requesting program area(s); or
 - b. Oversees testing and administration of surveys conducted by another program area.
6. Takes one of three approaches specific to survey data analysis, as agreed to with the program area's designated POC:
 - a. Provides raw data to requesting program area(s), and performs peer-review of the program area's analysis;
 - b. Jointly conducts or collaborates on data analysis with the requesting program area (s); or
 - c. Provides internally peer-reviewed summary analysis reports on survey results to the requesting program area(s).
7. Coordinates obtaining approvals from the relevant AA or his or her designee(s) when employees outside of the requesting program area are to be surveyed.
8. Follows up with the POC, as well as the AA or his or her designees, to monitor the use and implementation of survey considerations and recommendations.
9. Coordinates with the Office of the Chief Information Officer to ensure internet-based surveys agree with government information technology standards.
10. Coordinates with the Labor and Employee Relations Division (LERD) for all Agency surveys requiring National Joint Council (NJC) of Food Inspection Locals notification.
11. Re-prioritizes FSIS' survey workload when requests exceed available resources utilizing the enterprise governance process, as appropriate, and criteria that include commitments in strategic and annual planning and Departmental requirements.

IV. APPROVED PLATFORMS

A. FSIS currently retains one authorized and approved survey software package, with licenses hosted through OCFO/PEP. This is the primary approved FSIS platform with internal processes and controls designed to protect respondent confidentiality. In rare circumstances, program areas use other approved survey software or tools through contracts, such as for information technology services or when using contracted external evaluators. However, program areas cannot use any unauthorized or unapproved survey software to administer surveys within or outside FSIS.

B. The PHIS "questionnaire component" is used for surveys or questionnaires that collect establishment-specific data. This tool enables the collection of information beyond the purposes of findings on compliance or non-compliance. This questionnaire component, in certain circumstances, has been appropriate to use for surveys or questionnaires that program areas

have developed with OCFO/PEP. As such, the program area POC, OCFO/PEP, and the Office of Field Operations are to confirm the appropriateness of using this component of PHIS for survey administration.

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

A. If it is determined by OCFO/PEP and LERD that some bargaining unit employees are included in the target audience of the survey, questionnaire, or data collection instrument:

1. LERD provides the NJC with advance notice before the survey start date, and coordinates all communications with the NJC. This includes providing the timeframe for the survey's open period, a copy of the survey instrument, the target audience, the survey administration method, and survey results.
2. Program areas must be aware that conducting interviews and focus groups are included in the survey category for NJC notification.

B. If the requesting program area determines that the survey, questionnaire, or data collection instrument will only be sent to non-bargaining unit employees, notification to the NJC is not required.

VI. QUESTIONS

Refer questions regarding this directive to the OCFO/PEP Director at (202) 708-9515 or sarah.lynch@fsis.usda.gov.



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