



Council of the
INSPECTORS GENERAL
on INTEGRITY and EFFICIENCY

Guide on the Inspector General Empowerment Act's Exemption to the Paperwork Reduction Act

Conducting Surveys as Part of
Audit, Investigation, Inspection,
Evaluation, and Other Review Work



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Developed by CIGIE's Paperwork Reduction Act Working Group

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Introduction

The Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2016 (IGEA) exempts Offices of Inspectors General (OIGs) from the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). OIGs no longer have to seek Office of Management and Budget (OMB) clearance when conducting surveys of the public as a part of their audit, investigation, inspection, evaluation, and other review work.

In an effort to assist OIGs with understanding the exemption and its implications, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) created a PRA Working Group. The Working Group wrote this guidance to assist OIGs with conducting high quality surveys that will yield useable results with minimal participant burden.

CIGIE recommends that OIGs document their survey work as if they still had to comply with the PRA to ensure OIGs maintain transparency, self-governance, and continuity. Documenting survey work will facilitate high-quality survey development. Not every OIG has access to expertise in survey design, so this guidance provides resources to help them get started.

This document is a general guide for OIGs to use when conducting surveys, an OIG activity that was constrained by the PRA. However, the IGEA exemption from the PRA is not limited to surveys. Thus, each OIG should make its own independent assessment of how to apply the IGEA's new exemption. Also, with respect to the provisions of both the IGEA and the IG Act discussed herein, the guide does not represent the official legal interpretation of CIGIE, nor that of any CIGIE members. Because OIGs across the community may be subject to different laws, OIGs are strongly encouraged to consult with their respective office of legal counsel. OIGs may also seek further clarification by engaging in discussions with legislative committees, as appropriate.

What are the Paperwork Reduction Act and OMB Clearance?

Prior to the IG Empowerment Act of 2016, OIGs, like all other Federal agencies, were subject to PRA provisions for collecting data from the public. These provisions required agencies to prepare Federal Register Notices and a Clearance Request for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This process could take a significant amount of time (six months or more) which made it prohibitive for OIGs to carry out surveys in the relatively short timeframes of most audits, reviews, and inspections. The IG Empowerment Act of 2016 has exempted OIGs from the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act when collecting information during the conduct of an audit, investigation, inspection, evaluation, or other review. This frees OIGs from the need to obtain OMB clearance to conduct surveys.

Summary of the applicable section of the Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2016 (from <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/6450>; bold added for emphasis):

*(Sec. 2) This bill amends the Inspector General Act of 1978 to exempt inspectors general (when they are conducting an authorized audit, investigation, inspection, evaluation, or review) from: (1) information privacy protections that require agreements between agencies for computerized comparisons of automated federal records systems under the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act of 1988, and (2) **procedural requirements for information collections under the Paperwork Reduction Act.***

Excerpt from CIGIE Legislative Priorities - B. PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT:

Section 6 of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(h)(1) Chapter 35, Subchapter I of title 44, United States Code, shall not apply to the collection of information during the conduct of an audit, investigation, inspection, evaluation, or any other review conducted by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency or any Office of Inspector General, including any Office of Special Inspector General.”

The PRA requires a lengthy and burdensome approval process for the collection of information by a Federal agency. The CIGIE has recommended that Federal IG offices be exempt from PRA requirements for the purpose of collecting information during any investigation, audit, inspection, evaluation, or other review conducted by a Federal IG.

The IG Community has advocated for over a decade for an exemption from the PRA in order to facilitate the independent reviews of IGs. Specifically, our concern is that the PRA requires that information collections, such as OIG surveys, be subject to approval from a “senior official” of the agency and then from OMB. Subjecting IGs to the review process requirements of the PRA conflicts with their statutory mission to be independent and nonpartisan. Additionally, the protracted approval process affects IG’s ability to carry out audits and evaluations required by members of Congress, through law or by requests, in a timely and effective manner.

While agency heads may generally supervise IGs, they are not to “prevent or prohibit the Inspector

General from initiating, carrying out, or completing any audit or investigation.” (Inspector General Act of 1978, 5 U.S.C. app. 3, § 3(a)). We recognize OMB’s wealth of knowledge in the formulation and conduct of surveys. Indeed, our community may wish to informally seek its advice in the areas of survey formats, techniques, and methodologies. However, application of the PRA to IGs has both process and substance implications, and we continue to support an exemption to the PRA for IGs

Usefulness of Surveys in OIG Work

Surveys can be a valuable tool for OIGs to obtain data from populations that are affected by the subjects of audits, reviews, and inspections. Auditors review programs and determine the condition, cause, and effect of problems they find. A survey can be used to more thoroughly evaluate the effect of issues on subject populations. For example, the Veterans Affairs OIG has used a web survey to collect data from VA contracting officers to help evaluate the effects of a new automated contract information system. The VAOIG asked Contracting officers about their experiences required to comply with using the system and their opinions of the usefulness, quality, and accuracy of the new system and the data it contained.

Supporting Statement Questions and Answers: What is Important in Designing Surveys

Much of what OMB required to review requests for information collection is useful for OIGs to consider when designing and implementing a survey. This guidance borrows heavily from the OMB requirements documents. It also refers the reader to the OMB standards and a number of other sources for information about survey design and implementation.

The “Supporting Statement” required by OMB includes narrative information explaining the purpose, scope, and benefit(s) of the collection. Items in the supporting statement that are applicable to OIGs developing their own surveys include:

- Cite the authorizing legislation (public law, executive order, etc.) or the pertinent regulation applicable to the collection being carried out.
- An explicit reference to the operating unit’s information quality guidelines, as required by the Data Quality Act.
- Attachments should include the data collection instrument form, questionnaire, survey, interview guide, telephone interview script or other instruments that will be used for the collection. Any instructions for completing information collection. Introductory and follow-up letters to respondents. If Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is needed, include the IRB letter of approval for research involving human subjects. Include additional backup information necessary to explain the procedures described in Part B of the supporting statement.

The OMB Supporting Statement is divided into two parts; Part A (Justification) and Part B (Statistical Methodology). Part A is mandatory for all supporting statements; Part B is required for all supporting statements that involve statistical methods, such as sampling and estimation. This guidance recommends, in general, that OIGs document much of the information required by OMB as a best practice. OMB requirements follow in italic type; OIG guidance follows in regular type:

A. Justification

Q1. (OMB) Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection.

Q2. (OMB) Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used.

A1/A2. (OIG) OIGs should document the need to collect information to inform the audit, inspection, evaluation, or investigation of which the survey is a part. While unlikely that the information would be required by law, the OIG should explain how the survey results will be used to inform their work product.

Q3. (OMB) 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.

A3. (OIG) OIGs should document the mode of data collection (e.g. web-based, telephone interview, personal interview, printed questionnaire completed by respondent then mailed) and why this was chosen. Often, populations will have limited access to the internet or are otherwise difficult to contact by web alone. This type of population may need to be contacted by telephone or mail in order to ensure a sufficient response rate.

Q4. (OMB) 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 2 above.

A4. (OIG) This item was an attempt by OMB to get agencies to avoid burdening people with a data request that could have been accomplished by obtaining access to computer databases or some other source. OIGs should consider other methods of obtaining the data they need before conducting a survey.

Q5. 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.

A5. (OIG) For an OIG survey, this item may be answered by items 2 and 3 above. OIGs should consider the burden on respondents when determining the need for survey data and whether it can be reduced by shortening the survey or using sampling methodology rather than surveying an entire population.

Q6. (OMB) 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, or prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it, or submit more than an original and two copies of any document, or 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 a 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 secrets, 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.

A6. (OIG) This item focuses attention on the need to keep survey responses confidential. OIGs should carefully consider and design procedures to protect the confidentiality of respondents' reports. In the interests of data security, OIGs should be careful not to use public, web-based survey tools (e.g., Survey Monkey) to collect data without a binding legal agreement to maintain control of the survey data. IT professionals should be consulted on how to best maintain control and security of survey data collected and stored online. In addition, OIGs should consider how the promise of confidentiality of responses can be protected by legal means from disclosure via FOIA or other requests for

information. Respondents should be informed of how their information is protected.

Q7. (OMB) 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. Explain any circumstances that preclude consultation every three years with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained.

A7. (OIG) OIGs should conduct careful testing of survey questionnaires, including various forms of pretesting with pilot groups that are members of the population being surveyed to ensure that questions are clear and well understood and that answers can be provided.

Q8. (OMB) Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

A8. (OIG) Paying respondents, aka, providing a “monetary incentive” to participate in surveys is a common practice in the survey profession. It can boost response rates and increase the timeliness of response in some types of surveys and populations. OIGs should use care to implement such design methods to make sure their use is based on sound survey research. It would also be advisable to pretest incentives. There is a large survey methods bibliography on this topic that should be researched to determine if a monetary incentive would be worth using for a particular type of survey and population. For example, research has shown that a small, prepaid incentive improves response for mail surveys. However, surveys of physicians typically do not benefit from incentives unless it is large enough for the respondent to feel like they are being paid for their time. OIGs must consider the population being surveyed and the mode of data collection to determine if an incentive to participate will improve response.

Before providing such an incentive, an analysis should be conducted to determine whether the incentive is a proper use of appropriated funds. The analysis should address whether the incentive for the corresponding information collection is essential to achieve a statutory responsibility. Additionally, Federal employees should not receive the incentive for doing anything they are already required to do pursuant to their Federal employment.

Q9. (OMB) Describe any assurance of privacy, to the extent permitted by law, provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

A9. (OIG) It is important that OIGs which conduct surveys keep respondents' identities and answers confidential, both legally and in practice. The IG Act gives OIGs the authority to maintain confidentiality of those providing information to aid OIGs in the conduct of audits and other work. Other laws may also govern data collection and use.

1. Laws and regulations that may relate to OIGs conducting surveys:
2. 5 U.S.C. § 552a, Privacy Act.
3. 18 U.S.C. § 1905, Trade Secrets Act.
4. IG Act (Title 5 U.S.C., Appendix) § 7, Confidential complaints by employees.
5. 45 C.F.R. Parts 160 and 164, the Privacy Rule of the Health Insurance Portability

and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

There may be other privacy laws that apply to particular agencies. In particular, OIGs should inform respondents of their rights under the Privacy Act and of the IGs right to disclose the information without consent under certain circumstances.

Q10. (OMB) 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.

A10. (OIG) OIGs should be aware that some questions they ask may be sensitive in nature. Depending on the type of question, this may impact respondents' willingness to share information, the quality of responses, and any other unintended consequences of asking such questions. Here is where pretesting survey questions can be very informative. For example, in the course of an audit, employees are often asked questions about being made to feel pressure from supervisors to circumvent program controls. Employees may not feel free to answer such questions for a number of reasons. They may not trust that their answers will not, somehow, get back to their supervisors. They may be asked to answer such questions in a setting that is not secure (supervisors could be looking over their shoulder at the web survey). OIGs must account for such issues if useable data is to be collected on sensitive topics.

Q11. (OMB) Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information.

A11. (OIG) While this is not required by OMB, OIGs should still take survey burden into consideration when designing surveys. For example, OIGs should exhaust all other avenues of obtaining data before resorting to a survey. In designing surveys, OIGs should be careful to consider how answers to each survey question will be used to eliminate questions that are not vital to their work. Also, surveys should be designed to be as easy for respondents to complete as possible.

Q12. (OMB) For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation 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.

A12. (OIG) Although OIGs no longer have to complete this information for OMB, they should have already laid out a plan for analyzing the survey results as a part of the survey design process. In order to determine what information is needed, OIGs should think through what use will be made of the answers to each survey question. This includes questions that may be needed for classification purposes, such as questions about sociodemographic characteristics such as age, sex, income, etc. Once the uses of the survey results are identified, OIGs should review their existing System of Records Notices (SORNs) to ensure the listed routine uses provide public notice for all required disclosures of survey information that may be subject to the Privacy Act.

The time needed to design and conduct a survey may still be difficult for OIGs to fit

within the timeframe of typical audit work even without the OMB clearance process. OIGs should consider the time needed to complete a survey and begin the process early in the audit work. A timeline for a typical web survey is shown in the attachments to aid OIGs with this effort.

B. Collections of Information Employing Statistical Methods

In this section, agencies are to describe the population to be surveyed, sampling methodology (if any), methodology to address non-response bias, and plans for testing the survey questionnaire and procedures. All of these are important parts of the survey process for OIGs to address and document in workpapers.

- Q1.** (OMB) Describe (including a numerical estimate) the potential respondent universe and any sampling or other respondent selection methods to be used. Data on the number of entities (e.g., establishments, State and local government units, households, or persons) in the universe covered by the collection and in the corresponding sample are to be provided in tabular form for the universe as a whole and for each of the strata in the proposed sample. Indicate expected response rates for the collection as a whole. If the collection had been conducted previously, include the actual response rate achieved during the last collection.
- A1.** (OIG) Here, OIGs can create a table to summarize the survey population and sample sizes for each stratum (subgroup) planned for the sample, if sampling is to be used.
- Q2.** (OMB) Describe the procedures for the collection of information including: statistical methodology for stratification and sample selection, estimation procedure, degree of accuracy needed for the purpose described in the justification, unusual problems requiring specialized sampling procedures, and any use of periodic (less frequent than annual) data collection cycles to reduce burden.
- A2.** (OIG) OIGs should describe any sampling methodology they use for the survey in detail. Such details should include the stratification, stages, and other attributes that fully describe the complexity of the sample design. Sample size should be supported by describing what level of precision and confidence level was planned to be achieved, and what was actually achieved, for sample estimates.
- Q3.** (OMB) Describe methods to maximize response rates and to deal with issues of non-response. The accuracy and reliability of information collected must be shown to be adequate for intended uses. For collections based on sampling, a special justification must be provided for any collection that will not yield “reliable” data that can be generalized to the universe studied.
- A3.** (OIG) Surveys must achieve a minimum level of response for responses to be meaningful. If the response rate is too low, the responses may not represent the population from which the survey was taken. OMB has had a minimum response rate of 75%, under which they would not approve a survey to go forward. If this level of response was not expected to be achieved easily, the sponsoring agency would have to outline plans and methodology to follow up with non-respondents and measure any differences between respondents and non-respondents using special non-response bias studies.

OIGs should be aware of the issue of non-response bias and how it can affect the usability

of survey data. They should plan to achieve a high response rate in surveys or have a plan to measure and counteract non-response bias in their survey results.

Q4. (OMB) Describe any tests of procedures or methods to be undertaken. Testing is encouraged as an effective means of refining collections of information to minimize burden and improve utility. Tests must be approved if they call for answers to identical questions from 10 or more respondents.

A4. (OIG) Testing of survey questions is important to determine if questions are understood and can be answered by the respondent population. There are many types of tests that provide useful feedback on survey questions, such as focus group testing, questionnaire pretesting using think-aloud interviews, Interviewer reliability testing to ensure that interviewers read questions and record answers in a consistent way, and a host of other tests.

Before collecting data, OIGs should review survey questions to address content, cognition, and usability. Are the questions relevant to the research topic? Do respondents understand the questions being asked? Can respondents complete the survey easily?

Testing the questions with outside parties is also helpful. Some aids include:

- Expert Reviewers
- Field Tests – presenting the survey to a focus group or trial population will help anticipate common answers and point out the strengths and weaknesses of a survey
- Behavior Coding – Use a third party to monitor the interaction between the interviewer and respondent in a survey field test and look for problems in the questionnaire or its administration.

See the referenced and attached documents for much more on pretesting survey questionnaires.

Q5. (OMB) Provide the name and telephone number of individuals consulted on statistical aspects of the design and the name of the agency unit, contractor(s), grantee(s), or other person(s) who will actually collect and/or analyze the information for the agency.

A5. (OIG) This item serves to remind OIGs that they can consult with subject matter experts on survey methodology if they do not have such expertise in-house. CIGIE may provide contacts among the IG community or OIGs can contract for this expertise.

GAO Resources for Survey Design, Testing, and Implementation (Links to Online GAO Resource Documents)

1. [Choosing a Survey Administration Method](#)
2. [Content Analysis: Principles and Practices](#)
3. [Developing and Writing Structured Survey Questions](#)
4. [Non-Generalizable Sampling](#)
5. [Pretesting Surveys](#)
6. [Probability Sampling](#)
7. [Structured Interviews: Basic Principles](#)
8. [Addressing Nonresponse and Nonresponse Bias Issues in Surveys](#)
9. [Calculating and Reporting Survey Response Rates](#)
10. [Conducting Questionnaire Surveys](#)
11. [Content Analysis: A Methodology for Structuring and Analyzing Written Material](#)
12. [Developing and Using Questionnaires](#)
13. [Update Notes to: Developing and Using Questionnaires](#)
14. [Questionnaire Pretest Procedures](#)
15. [Reporting on Questionnaire Surveys in GAO Reports, OSM Sections, and E-Supplements](#)
16. [Selecting a Sample of Nongeneralizable Cases for Review in GAO Engagements](#)
17. [Structured Interviewing Guidance for Interviewers](#)
18. [Survey Guidance: Letters, E-Mail Messages, and Introductions for Mail and Electronic Questionnaires](#)
19. [Using Probability, Nonprobability, and Certainty Samples](#)
20. [Using Structured Interviewing Techniques](#)
21. [Update Notes to: Using Structured Interviewing Techniques](#)
22. [A Guide to Using the Right Staff at the Right Time for GAO Surveys](#)
23. [Checklists for Questionnaire Designers and Reviewers](#)
24. [Developing and Using Word Electronic Questionnaires at GAO](#)
25. [Good Practices Guide for Web Questionnaires](#)
26. [Computer Assisted Personal Interview \(CAPI\) Surveys: Guide to Estimating Duration and Personnel Needs by Task](#)
27. [Mail Surveys: Guide to Estimating Duration and Personnel Needs by Task](#)
28. [Survey Nonresponse Planning and Bias Assessment](#)
29. [Using Fillable PDF Forms as a Data Collection Method](#)

Additional Resources for Survey Design, Testing, and Implementation

Office of Management and Budget – Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys – September 2006
http://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/statpolicy/standards_stat_surveys.pdf

This document, dated 2006, is the latest version at this writing. OMB produced this document to help agencies complete the supporting statement for requests for clearance under the PRA. It is a very useful guide for conducting surveys in general but also includes guidance specific to completing the supporting statement for OMB clearance, which no longer applicable for OIGs.

Duke University, Social Science Research Institute, TipSheet
<https://dism.ssri.duke.edu/survey-help/tipsheets>

The Duke University Initiative on Survey Methodology at the Social Science Research Institute produced this section of their website to help students and faculty with surveys. The “tipsheet” format is easy to follow and contains helpful general guidance on survey design as well as a special section on cross-cultural surveys.

PEW Research Center Survey Methodology
<http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The PEW Research Center website contains specific documentation about methodology used in their surveys along with general guidance on survey methodology. They also have specific guidance on methodology for political polls.

American Association for Public Opinion Research
<http://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/Best-Practices.aspx>

The American Association for Public Opinion Research is a highly-respected organization among survey researchers. It sponsors survey methods research and publishes “Public Opinion Quarterly”, one of the best-known periodicals that focuses specifically on survey research methods.

University of Maryland, Laboratory for Automation Psychology and Decision Processing
http://lap.umd.edu/survey_design/index.html

This online survey design guide focuses on web-based surveys and uses a body of literature on human-computer interactions to guide web survey designs to improve data quality and reduce respondent burden.

University of Wisconsin-Madison – Office of Quality Improvement
https://oqi.wisc.edu/resource/library/uploads/resources/Survey_Guide.pdf

Another useful guide from a highly respected university survey research center. This guide walks readers through the survey process in an easy to follow format.