Request for Approval under the "Generic Clearance for Improving Customer Experience: OMB Circular A-11, Section 280 Implementation"
(OMB Control Number: 2900-0876)

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Public Contact Team Survey

PURPOSE OF COLLECTION:

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is responsible for providing and/or managing a wide array of services to Veterans and their family members. One such responsibility is to ensure Veterans, beneficiaries, spouses, and stakeholders know what benefits and services are available to them.

The Veteran Experience Office (VEO) is in partnership with VBA on many surveys, but this is the first partnership with the VBA Public Contact Team (PCT). The PCT is a specialized department dedicated to answering, aiding, and providing guidance for Veterans, beneficiaries, spouses, and stakeholders about VBA services and benefits. While often located within the VBA Regional Office, the PCT acts as a gateway for Veterans to interact with VBA. The PCT typically consists of various roles, including Intake Specialists, Legal Administrative Specialists (LAS), Congressional Liaisons, Assistant Coaches, Coaches, Assistant Directors, and Directors. These roles vary from Regional Office (RO) to Regional Office (RO), with many individuals being tasked with additional functions like Homelessness Coordinator, Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Coordinator, and Outreach Specialists. Unlike the Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), the PCTs mission is to provide Veterans and their families with guidance and assistance navigating through VBA benefits and services, rather than advocating on behalf of Veterans. It's important to note that although there are some standards that are implemented nationally, every PCT office operates differently to meet the needs of their customers and the needs of the Regional Office. The goal of service level measurements is three-fold:

1) To collect continuous customer experience data from PCT customers
2) To help field staff and the national office identify areas for improvement
3) To better understand the reasons PCT customers provide positive or negative feedback

The survey questionnaire is brief and contains general Likert-scale (a scale of 1-5 from Strongly Disagree to

Strongly Agree) questions to assess customer satisfaction as well as questions assessing the knowledge, speed, and manner of the interaction. These questions have been mapped to the OMB A-11 Customer Experience drivers. After the survey has been distributed, recipients have two weeks to complete the survey. Invitees will receive a reminder email after one week.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY: (Check one)

[ ] Customer Research (Interview, Focus Groups, Surveys)
[X] Customer Feedback Survey
[ ] Usability Testing of Products or Services

ACTIVITY DETAILS

1. If this is a survey, will the results of this survey be reported to Touchpoints as part of quarterly reporting obligations specified in OMB Circular A-11 Section 280?
   [ ] Yes
   [X] No
   [ ] Not a survey

2. How will you collect the information? (Check all that apply)
   [ ] Web-based or other forms of Social Media
   [ ] Telephone
   [ ] In-person
   [ ] Mail
   [X] Other, Email Based survey

3. Who will you collect the information from?
   The target population of the VBA PCT survey is all VBA PCT customers that have interacted with the PCT within an 8-day period.

4. How will you ask a respondent to provide this information?
Randomly sampled customers will be contacted through an invitation email. A link will be enclosed so the survey may be completed using an online interface, with customized customer information. The survey itself will consist of a handful of questions revolving around a human-centered design, focusing on such elements as trust, emotion, effective, and ease of the interaction.

5. What will the activity look like?
The survey will consist of 12 questions. Randomly sampled customers will be contacted through an invitation email. A link will be enclosed so the survey may be completed using an online interface, with customized customer information. The survey itself will consist of a handful of questions revolving around a human-centered design, focusing on such elements as trust, emotion, effective, and ease of the interaction.

6. Please provide your question list.
See attached.

Please make sure that all instruments, instructions, and scripts are submitted with the request.
XXX

7. When will the activity happen?
The survey will take place within 8 days of their interaction with the PCT.

8. Is an incentive (e.g., money or reimbursement of expenses, token of appreciation) provided to participants?
[ ] Yes [X] No
If Yes, describe:

N/A

BURDEN HOURS

Category of Respondent	**No. of Respondents**	**Participation Time**	**Burden Hours**
Public Contact Team Survey	9,842	5 minutes	820
Totals	**9,842**	5 minutes	**820**

CERTIFICATION:

I certify the following to be true:
1. The collections are voluntary;
2. The collections are low-burden for respondents (based on considerations of total burden hours or burden-hours per respondent) and are low-cost for both the respondents and the Federal Government;
3. The collections are non-controversial;

4. Any collection is targeted to the solicitation of opinions from respondents who have experience with the program or may have experience with the program in the near future;
5. Personally identifiable information (PII) is collected only to the extent necessary and is not retained;
6. Information gathered is intended to be used for general service improvement and program management purposes
7. Upon agreement between OMB and the agency aggregated data may be released as part of A-11, Section 280 requirements only on performance.gov. Summaries of customer research and user testing activities may be included in public-facing customer journey maps.
8. Additional release of data will be coordinated with OMB.

Name and email address of person who developed this survey/focus group/interview:

Name: Juan Jackson

Email address: juan.jackson@va.gov

All instruments used to collect information must include:
OMB Control No. 2900-0876
Expiration Date: 02/28/2026

HELP SHEET
(OMB Control Number: XXXX-XXXX)

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Provide the name of the collection that is the subject of the request. (e.g. Comment card for soliciting feedback on xxxx)

PURPOSE: Provide a brief description of the purpose of this collection and how it will be used. If this is part of a larger study or effort, please include this in your explanation.

TYPE OF COLLECTION: Check one box. If you are requesting approval of other instruments under the generic, you must complete a form for each instrument.

CERTIFICATION: Please read the certification carefully. If you incorrectly certify, the collection will be returned as improperly submitted or it will be disapproved.

Personally Identifiable Information: Agencies should only collect PII to the extent necessary, and they should only retain PII for the period of time that is necessary to achieve a specific objective.

BURDEN HOURS:
Category of Respondents: Identify who you expect the respondents to be in terms of the following categories: (1) Individuals or Households;(2) Private Sector; (3) State, local, or tribal governments; or (4) Federal Government. Only one type of respondent can be selected per row.
No. of Respondents: Provide an estimate of the Number of respondents.
Participation Time: Provide an estimate of the amount of time required for a respondent to participate (e.g. fill out a survey or participate in a focus group)
Burden: Provide the Annual burden hours: Multiply the Number of responses and the participation time and divide by 60.

VBA Public Contact Team

Sampling Methodology Report

Prepared by

Veteran Experience Office

Version 1 December 2023

VETERANS EXPERIENCE OFFICE

Contents

Executive Summary……8

Part I – Introduction……9

A. Background……9
B. Basic Definitions……10
C. Application to Veterans Affairs……10
Part II – Methodology……10

A. Target Population and Frame……10
B. Sample Size Determination……11
C. Stratification……12
D. Data Collection Methods……12
E. Reporting……12
F. Quality Control……13
G. Sample Weighting, Coverage Bias, and Non-Response Bias……13
H. Quarantine Rules……14
Part III – Assumptions and Limitations……15

A. Coverage Bias……15
References……16

Executive Summary

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is responsible for providing and/or managing a wide array of services to Veterans and their family members. One such responsibility is to ensure Veterans, beneficiaries, spouses, and stakeholders know what benefits and services are available to them.

The Veteran Experience Office (VEO) is in partnership with VBA on many surveys, but this is the first partnership with the VBA Public Contact Team (PCT). The PCT is a specialized department dedicated to answering, aiding, and providing guidance for Veterans, beneficiaries, spouses, and stakeholders about VBA services and benefits. While often located within the VBA Regional Office, the PCT acts as a gateway for Veterans to interact with VBA. The PCT typically consists of various roles, including Intake Specialists, Legal Administrative Specialists (LAS), Congressional Liaisons, Assistant Coaches, Coaches, Assistant Directors, and Directors. These roles vary from Regional Office (RO) to Regional Office (RO), with many individuals being tasked with additional functions like Homelessness Coordinator, Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Coordinator, and Outreach Specialists. Unlike the Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), the PCTs mission is to provide Veterans and their families with guidance and assistance navigating through VBA benefits and services, rather than advocating on behalf of Veterans. It's important to note that although there are some standards that are implemented nationally, every PCT office operates differently to meet the needs of their customers and the needs of the Regional Office. The goal of service level measurements is three-fold:

4) To collect continuous customer experience data from PCT customers
5) To help field staff and the national office identify areas for improvement
6) To better understand the reasons PCT customers provide positive or negative feedback

The survey questionnaire is brief and contains general Likert-scale (a scale of 1-5 from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) questions to assess customer satisfaction as well as questions assessing the knowledge, speed, and manner of the interaction. These questions have been mapped to the OMB A-11 Customer Experience drivers. After the survey has been distributed, recipients have two weeks to complete the survey. Invitees will receive a reminder email after one week.

The purpose of this document is to define VA's sampling methodology for selecting potential survey respondents for this study. This survey is conducted via random sampling. The sample size for PCT survey was determined so that the reliability of monthly survey estimates is 3.0% margin of error at a 95% confidence level. This report describes the methodology used to conduct the PCT survey. Information about quality assurance protocols, as well as limitations of the survey methodology, is also included in this report.

Part I – Introduction

A. Background

The **Enterprise Measurement and Design** team (EMD) within the **Veterans Experience Office** (VEO) is tasked with conducting transactional surveys of the customer population to measure their satisfaction with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) numerous benefit services. Thus, their mission is to empower Veterans by rapidly and discreetly collecting feedback on their interactions with such VA entities as National Cemetery Administration (NCA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). VEO surveys generally entail *probability* samples which only contact minimal numbers of customers necessary to obtain reliable estimates. This information is subsequently used by internal stakeholders to monitor, evaluate, and improve beneficiary processes. Customers are always able to decline participation and can opt out of future invitations. A *quarantine* protocol is maintained to limit the number of times a customer may be contacted over a period of time across all VEO surveys, in order to prevent survey fatigue.

Surveys issued by EMD are generally brief in nature and present a low amount of burden to customers. A few targeted questions will utilize a human centered design (HCD) methodology, revolving around concepts of Trust, Ease, Effectiveness and Emotion. Questions will focus on a specific aspect of a service process—spanning communication, applying for benefits, deliberation, and/or receipt of benefits. Structured questions directly address the pertinent issues regarding each surveyed line of business. The opportunity to volunteer open-ended text responses is provided within most surveys. This open text has been demonstrated to yield enormous information. Machine learning tools are used for text classification, ranking by sentiment scores, and screening for homelessness, depression, etc. Modern survey theory is used to create sample designs which are representative, statistically sound, and in accordance with OMB guidelines on federal surveys.

VEO has been commissioned by VBA to measure the satisfaction and experience of customers with the VBA Public Contact Teams (PCT). VEO proposes to conduct a **brief survey** on customers who interacted with the PCT. Randomly sampled customers will be contacted through an invitation email. A link will be enclosed so the survey may be completed using an online interface, with customized customer information. The survey itself will consist of a handful of questions revolving around a human-centered design, focusing on such elements as trust, emotion, effective, and ease of the interaction.

B. Basic Definitions

Coverage	The percentage of the population of interest that is included in the sampling frame.
Measurement Error	The difference between the response coded and the true value of the characteristic being studied for a respondent.
Non-Response	Failure of some respondents in the sample to provide responses in the survey.
Transaction	A *transaction* refers to the specific time a customer interacts with the VA that impacts the customer's journey and their perception of VA's effectiveness in servicing customers.
Response Rate	The ratio of participating persons to the number of contacted persons. This is one of the basic indicators of survey quality.
Sample	In statistics, a data sample is a set of data collected and/or selected from a statistical population by a defined procedure.
Sampling Error	Error due to taking a particular sample instead of measuring every unit in the population.
Sampling Frame	A list of units in the population from which a sample may be selected.
Reliability	The consistency or dependability of a measure. Also referred to as *standard error*.

C. Application to Veterans Affairs

This measurement may bring insights and value to all stakeholders at VA. Front-line VA leaders can resolve individual feedback from customers and take steps to improve the customer experience; meanwhile VA executives can receive real-time updates on systematic trends that allow them to make changes.

1) To collect continuous customer experience data to monitor the relative success of programs designed to improve customer experience with VBA PCT.
2) To help field staff and the national office identify need of the specific population they serve.
3) To better understand why VBA PCT customers provide positive or negative feedback

Part II – Methodology

A. Target Population and Frame

The target population of the VBA PCT survey is all VBA PCT customers that have interacted with the PCT within an 8-day period.

Sample Size Determination

For a given margin of error and confidence level, the sample size is calculated as below (Lohr, 1999). For population that is *large*, the equation below is used to yield a representative sample for proportions:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 pq}{e^2}$$

where

- $\boldsymbol{Z_{\alpha/2}}$ = 1.96, which is the critical Z score value under the normal distribution when using a 95% confidence level (α = 0.05).
- **p** = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, with q=1-p.
    - Note that pq attains its maximum when value p=0.5, and this is often used for a conservative sample size (i.e., large enough for any proportion).
- **e** = the desired level of precision; Also referred to as **MOE**.

For a population that is relatively *small*, the finite population correction is used to yield a representative sample for proportions:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0}{N}}$$

Where

- $\boldsymbol{n_0}$ = Representative sample for proportions when the population is large.
- **N** = Population size.

The margin of error surrounding the baseline proportion is calculated as:

$$Margin\ of\ error = z_{\alpha/2}\sqrt{\frac{N-n}{N-1}}\sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}}$$

Where

- $\boldsymbol{Z_{\alpha/2}}$ = 1.96, which is the critical Z score value under the normal distribution when using a 95% confidence level (α = 0.05).
- **N** = Population size.
- **n** = Representative sample.
- **p** = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, with q=1-p.

Table 2 depicts the estimated number of unique VBA PCT customers within a month. Preliminary analysis of this population indicates that approximately **55%** of qualifying customers have provided an email address to VBA PCT. VEO proposes to randomly sample VBA PCT customers for this survey. With current estimates, this would result in 9,842 completed surveys from 65,616 invitations per year. To account for potential estimation errors, improvement in email collection, or changes in business volume; we are requesting approval for a maximum of 10,842 completes annually.

Table 2. Monthly Population and Survey Figures

Surveys	Estimated Total Population	Approximate Email Population	Available Population[1]	Target Sample	Actual Sample Needed	Expected Response Rate	Error With 95% Confidence	Ye Ac Sar Nee
Public Contact Team survey	26,201	14,411	10,088	820	5,468	15%	3.0%	65,

[1] Excluding estimated duplicates and quarantined records (30% loss)

B. Stratification

Stratification is used to ensure that the sample matches the population, to the extent possible, across sub-populations. The sample will also use implicit sampling to assure that the sample reflects the demographic breakdown by veteran gender.

C. Data Collection Methods

The population for the survey will be provided to the VEO team from the Office of Field Operations (OFO). OFO will provide the data for those PCT customers that had an interaction with the PCT the previous week. Email invitations are delivered to all randomly selected customers. Selected respondents will be contacted within 8 days of their interaction. They will have 14 days to complete the survey. Estimates will be accessible to data users instantly on the VSignals platform.

Table 3. Survey Mode

Mode of Data Collection	Recruitment Method	Time After Transaction	Recruitment Period	Collection Days
Online Survey	Email Recruitment	Within 8 days of interaction	14 Days (Reminder after 7 Days)	Tuesday

D. Reporting

Researchers will be able to use the VSignals platform for interactive reporting and data visualization. Trust, Ease, Effectiveness, and Emotion scores can be observed for each). The scores may be viewed by various subgroups (e.g. gender) in various charts for different perspective. They are also depicted within time series plots to investigate trends. Finally, filter options are available to assess scores at varying time periods and within the context of other collected variable information.

Recruitment is continuous (weekly) but the results from several weeks may be combined into a *quarterly* estimate for more precise estimates, which is the recommended reporting level.

E. Quality Control

To ensure the prevention of errors and inconsistencies in the data and the analysis, quality control procedures will be instituted in several steps of the survey process. Records will undergo a cleaning during the population file creation. The quality control steps are as follows.

1. Records will be reviewed for missing data. When records with missing data are discovered, they will be either excluded from the population file when required or coded as missing.
2. Any duplicate records will be removed from the population file to both maintain the probabilities of selection and prevent the double sampling of the same customer.
3. Invalid emails will be removed.

The survey sample loading and administration processes will have quality control measures built into them.

1. The extracted sample will be reviewed for representativeness. A secondary review will be applied to the final respondent sample.
2. The survey load process will be rigorously tested prior to the induction of the survey to ensure that sampled customers is not inadvertently dropped or sent multiple emails.
3. The email delivery process is monitored to ensure that bounce-back records will not hold up the email delivery process.

F. Sample Weighting, Coverage Bias, and Non-Response Bias

A final respondent sample should closely resemble the true population, in terms of the demographic distributions (e.g. age groups). One problem that arises in the survey collection process is ***nonresponse***, which is defined as failure of selected persons in the sample to provide responses. This occurs in various degrees to *all* surveys, but the resulting estimates can be distorted when some groups are actually more or less prone to complete the survey. In many applications, younger people are less likely to participate than older persons. Another problem is ***under-coverage***, which is the event that certain groups of interest in the population are not even included in the sampling frame. They cannot participate because they cannot be contacted: those without an email address will be excluded from sample frame. These two phenomena may cause some groups to be over- or under-represented. In such cases, when the respondent population does not match the true population, conclusions drawn from the survey data may not be reliable and are said to be **biased**.

While we are not currently planning to weight the data, survey practitioners recommend the use of sampling weighting to improve inference on the population. This will be introduced into the survey process as a tool that helps the respondent sample more closely represent the overall population. Weighting adjustments are commonly applied in surveys to correct for nonresponse bias and coverage bias. As a business rule will be

implemented to require callers to provide email address, the coverage bias for this survey is expected to decrease. In many surveys, however, differential response rates may be observed across age groups. In the event that some age groups are more represented in the final respondent sample, the weighting application will yield somewhat smaller weights for this age group. Conversely, age groups that are underrepresented will receive larger weights. This phenomenon is termed *non-response bias correction* for a single variable. Strictly speaking, we can never know how non-respondents would have really answered the question, but the aforementioned adjustment calibrates the sample to resemble the full population – from the perspective of demographics. This may result in a substantial correction in the resulting weighting survey estimates when compared to direct estimates in the presence of non-negligible sample error (non-response bias).

It was reported earlier that the email population comprises 55% of the full VBA PCT population. This is lower than the reported number of veterans that utilize email (88%) but the PCT population does not consist of only veterans (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2020). It is assumed that the level of customer satisfaction is not directly related to their email status (Missing at Random).

When implemented, weighting will utilize cell weights in real time. With each query on the VSignals platform for each respondent by dividing the target for a cell by the number of respondents in the cell. The weighting scheme will include, where possible all the variables used for explicit stratification, However, cells will be collapsed if the proportion of the population is insufficient to reliably achieve a minimum of 3 completes per month. As a result, weights may be more comprehensive for larger population segments. For instance, in the VA, women are a smaller proportion of the populations. Therefore, woman will have more collapsed cells than men.

As part of the weighting validation process, the weights of persons in age and gender groups are summed and verified that they match the universe estimates (i.e., population totals). Additionally, we calculate the *unequal weighting effect*, or UWE (see Kish, 1992; Liu et al., 2002). This statistic is an indication of the amount of variation that may be expected due to the inclusion of weighting. The unequal weighting effect estimates the percent increase in the variance of the final estimate due to the presence of weights and is calculated as:

$$UWE = 1 + cv^2_{weights} = (\frac{S}{\overline{W}})^2$$

where

- **cv** = coefficient of variation for all weights w_{ij}.
- **s =** sample standard deviation of weights.
- $\overline{\boldsymbol{w}}$ = sample mean of weights, $\overline{w} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{ij} w_{\text{ij}}$.

G. Quarantine Rules

VEO seeks to limit contact with customers as much as possible, and only as needed to achieve measurement goals. These rules are enacted to prevent excessive recruitment attempts upon VA's customers. VEO also monitors participation within other

surveys, to ensure veterans and other customers do not experience survey fatigue. All VEO surveys offer options for respondents to opt out, and ensure they are no longer contacted for a specific survey. VEO also monitors Veteran participation within other surveys, to ensure customers do not experience survey *fatigue.*

Table 4. Quarantine Protocol

Quarantine Rule	Description	Elapsed Time
Repeated Sampling for PCT Surveys	Number of days between receiving/completing online survey, prior to receiving email invitation for VBA PCT experience survey	30 Days
Other VEO Surveys	Number of days between receiving/completing online survey and becoming eligible for another VEO survey	30 Days
Opt Outs	Persons indicating their wish to opt out of either phone or online survey will no longer be contacted.	N/A

Part III – Assumptions and Limitations

A. Coverage Bias

Since the VEO VBA PCT Survey are email only, there is a part of the population that cannot be reached by the survey. Veterans that lack access to the internet or do not use email may have different levels of Trust and satisfaction with their service. As such, it is thought that customers in this latter category do not harbor any tangible differences to other Veterans who do share their information. In order to verify this, VEO plans to execute a coverage bias study to assess the amount of coverage bias due and derive adjustment factors in the presence of non-negligible bias.

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