

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## *1. What does NPS evaluate during its review of proposed collections?*

A central goal of the review process is to help agencies strike a balance between collecting information necessary to fulfill their statutory missions and guarding against unnecessary or duplicative information that imposes unjustified costs on the American public. In this regard, the NPS Information Collection Review Coordinator evaluates whether the collection of information by the agency:

- is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information has practical utility;
- minimizes the Federal information collection burden, with particular emphasis on those individuals and entities most adversely affected; and
- maximizes the practical utility of and public benefit from information collected by or for the Federal Government.

Collection are also reviewed to the extent that the information collection is consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and policies related to privacy, confidentiality, security, information quality, and statistical standards.

## *2. Is approval required for information collected in focus groups or field experiments?*

Information collected in focus groups or field experiments must be approved if the participation includes ten or more persons and they are asked identical questions. If a series of focus groups is conducted on the same topic using substantially similar questions and the total participants in all groups combined is more than ten, then approval is required.

## *3. I am a student conducting a study of national park visitors. Do I need OMB approval for my study?*

NPS and OMB approval is required if the study is conducted, sponsored, or funded by the NPS. If you are receiving financial or in-kind support from the NPS, approval will be required. The submission should list your major professor or faculty advisor as the PI. Approval by university Institutional Review Boards (Human Subjects Committees) does not substitute for NPS and OMB approval. However, under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) research occurring in national park units that is funded by external sources (e.g., independent grants) and is not assisted or reviewed by the NPS in any way will not require NPS and OMB approval. However, this does not exempt studies from obtaining a special use permit to conduct research within the boundaries of lands managed by the National Park Service.

*4. I intend to study visitor response to interpretive exhibits. I will observe visitors' behavior as they approach, read, and interact with the exhibits under different experimental conditions. Will I need approval?*

Observations are exempt from the review and PRA approval process if no information is solicited from the public. Also exempt are questions asked of the person that are specific to that individual or result from observation. Approval is needed if standardized questions will be asked of ten or more observed people.

*5. How long does the Programmatic review process take?*

The request for Programmatic review, and submission of a complete and accurate review package, must be made at least 60 calendar days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey in the field.

*6. How do I provide Paperwork Reduction Act compliance information to the respondents of my survey?*

Respondents to NPS-sponsored surveys must be informed that the information collection is approved and in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. Depending on the type of survey instrument used, compliance information is passed along to the respondents in different ways. The compliance information can be printed on an on-site or mail-back questionnaire. General compliance information can be presented verbally in face-to-face interviews, focus groups, or telephone surveys. Additional information will need to be made available to respondents upon request. Sample compliance information appropriate to different situations can be found on the NPS Social Science Branch Web site.

*7. I will be surveying small groups of park visitors. Is approval required?*

NPS and OMB approval is required if identical questions are asked of ten or more persons.

*8. Do I need approval if I am pre-testing a survey for later submission?*

Pre-testing of survey instruments and methodology is encouraged. If pre-testing involves collecting the same information from ten or more members of the public, clearance for the pre-test is required. The request for approval of the pre-test can be submitted separately or with the final survey package, whichever is appropriate. However, if done with 9 or less people, pre-testing instruments prior to submission is recommended, especially if you are new to the survey design process and/or the survey includes questions that have not already been well-tested.

*9. I intend to offer respondents to my survey a small token of thanks from the park cooperating association. Is this acceptable?*

Generally, OMB discourages use of incentives in federal surveys because of the possibility of biasing a sample. Under certain circumstances, non-monetary incentives can be used. You should contact the NPS Social Science Branch to discuss your proposed use of an incentive in your survey.

*10. Are there any restrictions on the use of Web surveys?*

Use of Web surveys as an option for respondents is acceptable. The Web should not be the only method of survey administration. There are restrictions on surveys of Web site users. If you intend to do a survey of this population, please contact the NPS Social Science Branch early in your planning process. Further, in terms of sample selection, the Web should not be the means by which a sample population is recruited, since this will bias the sample. An exception occurs when the population being surveyed consists of visitors to a Web site, such as [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov). Contact the Social Science Branch if you are planning such a survey.

*11. How should I anticipate my expected response rate?*

Expected response rates should be based on previous like studies in which the method of data collection and sample population were similar. In reporting your expected response rate, please be sure to justify it with specific reference to these similar studies. If you are having difficulty with this, please contact the Social Science Branch for assistance.

*12. Can I ensure confidentiality?*

Information collections approved under this program are subject to Freedom of Information Act requests. The Department of the Interior has no statutory authority to exempt studies from such requests. Therefore, confidentiality cannot be pledged. However, anonymity is offered and any information on surveys that identifies respondents must be removed and stored separately from survey databases so that the two are not linked. These steps are disclosed to respondents in the Paperwork Reduction Act Statement printed on all information collection instruments.

*13. What is an OMB Control Number?*

An OMB Control Number is a unique number comprised of two four-digit codes separated by a hyphen. The first four digits identify the sponsoring agency and bureau, and the second four digits identify the particular collection. Note that it is possible for multiple information collections submitted under one ICR to have the same OMB Control Number (i.e., NPS Programmatic Process, DOI Generic Customer Satisfaction and the government-wide Customer Feedback Survey).

The responses to the FAQs offer very general guidance. Please contact the NPS ICRC immediately if you have any concerns that are beyond the scope of the topics discussed.