Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups at NPS

1. Definition of “survey”

Surveys are defined as follows in OPNAVINST 5300.8C:

A "survey" or "personnel survey" is a systematic data collection, using personal or telephonic interviews or self-administered questionnaires, from a group of 10 or more persons as individuals or representatives of organizations. The questionnaires or interview protocols typically contain identical questions which elicit attitudes, opinions, behavior and related demographic, social and economic data to be used for statistical compilations for research and/or policy assessment purposes.

Please note that focus groups are considered to be surveys under the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) interpretation of 5 C.F.R. 1320.3(c).

2. Exemptions from the requirement for survey approval

Certain surveys falling within the above definition may be exempt from the requirement for either NPS IRB approval or DON/DOD survey approval. Generally, surveys related to course evaluations, occupational task surveys, customer satisfaction, or surveys of the personnel of a single command may be exempt from the need for survey approval. As explained in Section 1 above, surveys of nine or fewer individuals are exempt.

With respect to single commands, surveys of personnel of an installation, ship, or other unit require only some form of documentation of approval by that command to be included in the IRB application. The command approving authority should generally be at the O-7/SES level or above, although documentation from a Chief of Staff, Executive Director, or equivalent at the O-6/GS-15 level is acceptable. When the personnel of multiple commands are to be surveyed, it may be more practical to obtain approval from an overarching organization rather than from individual units. Early liaison with IRB staff and command POCs will assist in identifying the appropriate survey approval for the survey population being targeted.

Please note that exempt surveys must still meet certain requirements of OPNAVINST 5300.8C, including IRB approval (see “Exemptions” and “Responsibilities” within that instruction).

3. Approval for surveys of DOD personnel

Surveys of DOD personnel conducted by NPS faculty, staff, and students that are not exempt from approval must obtain a Report Control Symbol in accordance with the DON Survey Policy and the DoD Internal Information Collections approval processes.

The DON Survey Policy applies to all surveys involving U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps military members and their families, as well as Navy civilian personnel. Marine Corps Surveys are administered under the authority of the Commandant, USMC. The DON Survey Policy operates under the direction provided in OPNAVINST 5300.8C. OPNAV N104 serves
as the enforcement mechanism to ensure that all Navy commands, including NPS, comply with the DON Survey Policy. As explained in OPNAVINST 5300.8C:

Navy personnel surveys are a valuable means of collecting information from Navy Sailors and civilian employees about various aspects of naval service and civilian employment. They provide data which enable Navy leaders to make informed decisions, evaluate the impact of existing programs and policies, and pulse opinions in advance of new and proposed interventions. Coordination and control of surveys is required in order to maintain quality control so that Navy surveys are technically sound, avoid duplication of effort, minimize the impact of survey administration on Navy OPTEMPO and provide for the life-cycle management of Navy surveys.

**DOD Internal Information Collections** approval is required for surveys of more than one DOD component, including personnel of more than one military department, defense agency, or other DOD entity. However, surveys of a single component may be carried out with the approval of the leadership of that component. Please check with the appropriate component (Service, Defense Agency or other DOD entity) to determine that organization’s policies on surveys of its employees.

Surveys of Marines by NPS researchers require approval by HQMC or other appropriate USMC authority. NPS researchers may wish to contact HQMC/M&RA/MPP-50 for guidance.

4. **Military family members and retirees**

**OPNAVINST 5300.8C** (paragraph 4) provides an approval mechanism for surveys of retired Sailors, as well as of the family members of currently serving Sailors. The Marine Corps, Army and Air Force have similar policies on surveys of retirees and family members. Please check with authorities of the relevant service for direction.

5. **Employees of other federal agencies**

If you are planning to survey employees of a Federal agency other than DOD, please include documentation of approval from that agency in your IRB application.

6. **Surveys of Individuals who are not Federal employees**

Surveys of other individuals (i.e. the public) who are not U.S. government employees require OMB approval, unless the Federal agency sponsoring the survey (such as DOD or DHS) has OMB or other authority to conduct such surveys. For surveys of the public sponsored by NPS or another DOD organization, please see the guidance on obtaining OSD and OMB approval through the **DOD Public Collection Program**.

7. **State, local, and tribal government personnel**

Under federal law, employees of state, local and tribal governments are considered to be members of the public. Accordingly, surveys of employees of state, local and tribal governments require approval by OMB, unless, as discussed above, specific authority already exists in accordance with **5 C.F.R. 1320.3(b)(3)**:
A collection of information conducted or sponsored by a Federal agency that is also conducted or sponsored by a unit of State, local, or tribal government is presumed to impose a Federal burden except to the extent that the agency shows that such State, local, or tribal requirement would be imposed even in the absence of a Federal requirement.

8. Process for requesting survey approval

Most survey research is also regulated as research involving human subjects, and requires prior approval by the NPS Institutional Review Board (IRB). Where both IRB and Navy Survey or DOD Internal Information Collection approvals are required, IRB approval should be obtained first.

If you are planning to conduct a survey, please submit either an IRB Determination Request Form or an IRB Application. Further guidance is available from the NPS IRB site. Please note that no surveys can be conducted, unless exempt (see Section 2 above), prior to being approved by the appropriate DOD authority, OMB, or other authorized federal agency.