



U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board 2021 Merit Principles Survey Fact Sheet for Federal Agencies

What is the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board? The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is an independent, quasi-judicial agency in the Executive branch that serves as the guardian of Federal merit systems. In addition to hearing Federal employee appeals, MSPB reviews significant actions of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and conducts studies of merit systems in the Executive branch.

What is the Merit Principles Survey? The Merit Principles Survey (MPS) is a Government-wide survey of Federal civilian employees that measures the health of Federal merit systems and progress in achieving a workplace free of prohibited personnel practices. MSPB has conducted the survey since 1983 as part of its statutory oversight responsibility under 5 U.S.C. § 1204(a)(3). Survey results are reported to the President and Congress and shared with Federal policy-makers and decision-makers. This survey differs from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey administered by OPM in several respects, such as: a focus on merit system principles and HR policy and practice; administration every few years instead of annually; and a smaller sample. The most recent MPS was conducted in 2016.

Is agency participation in the Merit Principles Survey mandatory? Yes. 5 U.S.C. § 1204(e)(3) states that “In carrying out [special studies relating to the civil service and to other merit systems], the Board shall make such inquiries as may be necessary and, unless otherwise prohibited by law, shall have access to personnel records or information collected by the Office of Personnel Management and may require additional reports from other agencies as needed.”

Who will be asked to complete the survey? Approximately 100,000 full-time permanent employees and managers from across the Federal Government will be invited to complete the survey. Employees are selected randomly, using a sample designed to produce a statistically sound Government-wide measure of employee opinion. MSPB will notify major Federal employee unions of the survey and ask them to support their members’ participation.

What will be asked on the survey? The MPS includes questions concerning the merit system principles, the prohibited personnel practices, and sexual harassment. To support analysis of patterns, trends, and effects, the survey also requests demographic information and includes items related to employee engagement and career plans.

Why is participation important? The survey provides a unique opportunity for Federal employees to voice their opinions and concerns about workforce issues and inform Federal Government human resources policies and practices. Survey results provide the President and Congress with a balanced perspective on the state of the civil service and how well the Federal workforce is being managed.

How will the survey be administered? The survey will be a secure web-based survey. Participating employees will receive an invitation through their work (official) email that includes a link to the survey. In advance of that invitation, agencies should inform employees and employee representatives of the survey and agency leaders should encourage employees to respond.

When will the survey be administered? January–March 2021. The survey will be open for approximately four weeks in each participating agency.

How long will it take to complete the survey? Approximately 30 minutes. Supervisors are asked to allow employees work time to complete the survey.

Who will see the responses? Employee participation is voluntary and responses are confidential. Results will only be reported in summary, by agency or for groups of individuals (e.g., supervisors and non-supervisors). No data will be reported that could be used to identify an individual employee.