Customer Satisfaction Survey Results:

The Readers' Voice

September 2004



U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

Office of Policy and Evaluation

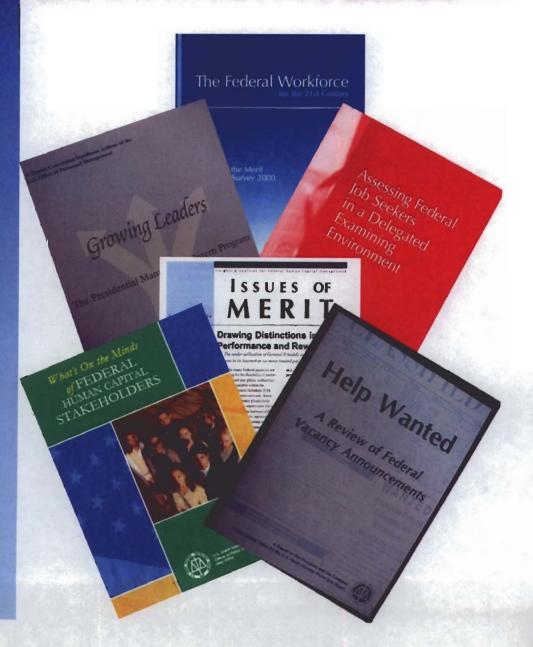


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
About the Board	1
About the Customer Satisfaction Survey	1
Survey Report Summary	2
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results	3
Respondents' Profile	3
Distribution of Publications	3
How Research is Used	4
Satisfaction with Publications	5
Visual Appeal of Reports and Newsletters	8
MSPB's STUDIES Web Page	8
Conclusions and Recommendations	10
Publications	10
Distribution and Formatting	11
Appendix: Customer Satisfaction Survey	Appendix - 1

INTRODUCTION

About the Board

The mission of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB or the Board) is to:

- Protect employees against management abuses;
- Ensure agencies make employment decisions based on merit; and
- Ensure Federal merit systems are free from prohibited personnel practices.

As part of this mission, MSPB's Office of Policy and Evaluation (OPE) conducts independent, objective research that strives to:

- Support Federal merit system values;
- Improve the way human resources are managed in the Federal Government; and
- Ensure that the public interest in a civil service free of prohibited personnel practices is being served through these merit systems.

We issue most research findings and recommendations through reports and a quarterly newsletter. We make the information available in hard copy and on the STUDIES page of the Board's website at www.mspb.gov. While the ultimate audience for these publications, as identified in our statute, is the President and the U.S. Congress, we attempt to reach out to other decision-makers who are also interested in improving the civil service through the protection of merit. These stakeholders include, but are not limited to, agency leaders, managers, human resource (HR) professionals, employees, union officials, and academicians.

About the Customer Satisfaction Survey

MSPB's goal has always been to issue publications that are results-driven and customer-focused – a key initiative under the President's Management Agenda. To ensure that the Board is meeting this goal, we have been conducting periodic customer satisfaction surveys since 1994 to measure readers' satisfaction with OPE publications. The 2004 OPE Customer Satisfaction Survey was administered from July 14 to August 23, 2004. The specific goals of this survey were to:

- Obtain feedback from our readers that will allow us to measure the usefulness of our reports, newsletters, and STUDIES web site;
- Find ways to improve our publications and make them more useful to our stakeholders;
 and
- Measure our agency's performance within the context of the "Customer Satisfaction" balanced scorecard measure.

The survey was posted on our STUDIES web page, and we used two methods to advertise the web-based survey to our readers. A letter was mailed to our readers who receive paper copies of our reports and newsletters, and a broadcast e-mail was sent to those who were subscribed to our listserv. This report summarizes the responses of about 300 individuals who completed the OPE survey. This survey only covered publications released by OPE. We therefore refer to these as OPE publications to avoid confusing them with other Board products.

Survey Report Summary

Based on the results from the survey, our readers continue to hold OPE's publications in high regard. As in previous years, our readers found that the topics of the publications are timely and relevant to the issues they face in their jobs and that they are well written and well analyzed. Many use the information from the reports and newsletters as reference materials, to improve human resources (HR) programs or operations, and as a source for innovative ideas. While in the past our customers indicated that they preferred receiving hard copy publications, this survey has shown an increasing interest in electronic publications. There was also a dramatic increase in the number of respondents who reported visiting our MSPB STUDIES web page.

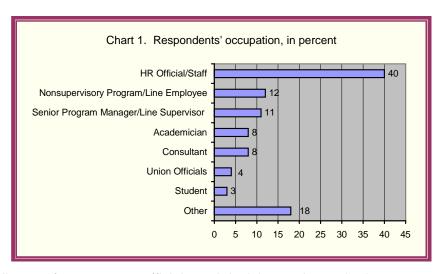
While the overall satisfaction with our publications was positive, our readers suggested a number of areas where we can improve. They would like us to publish more reports on a wider variety of topics. Some would like shorter reports, while others would like more access to the raw data and technical details. They would like us to shorten the time between data collection and the publication of results and would like newsletter articles to provide more detailed information. Finally, they suggested making publications more widely available on-line and improving the layouts, particularly for those posted on-line.

MSPB is dedicated to meeting the needs of our customers, which is why we periodically conduct these surveys and have included the administration of this survey in our 2004 performance goals. In response to customer suggestions, we have identified a number of areas for improvement in the Recommendations section of this report. With each report, newsletter issue, and change to the web site, we will address the concerns identified by our customers.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents' Profile

MSPB is statutorily required to report to the President and the Congress on the state of the civil service. However, we make our reports available to a broader audience, i.e., human resource professionals, program managers and supervisors, Federal employees and their representatives, academicians, and others who are involved in – or are students of – human resources management. Our newsletters

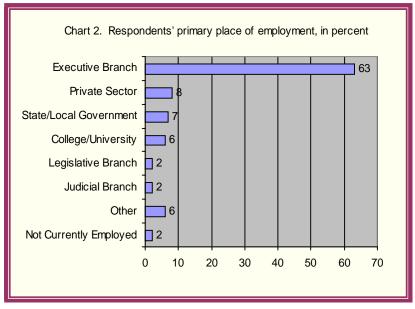


are generally sent to a target audience of government officials and decision-makers who have a great influence in changing Federal human resources management systems.

Understanding the profile of the respondents puts the results of the survey in perspective. As can be seen in Charts 1 and 2, most of our respondents were human resource officials and worked in the Executive branch of the Federal Government.

Distribution of Publications

Our readers may request to receive reports and newsletters in paper copy and/or electronically. They may also visit our web site directly to download our publications or visit the site



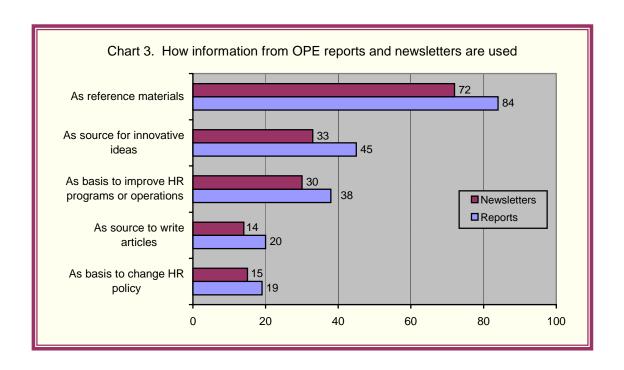
through links from other media sources that have featured OPE reports or newsletter articles.

We asked our customers how they generally receive or get access to OPE reports or issues of the newsletter. Most (68 percent) responded that they receive the reports and *Issues of Merit* electronically through an e-mail notification sent by our listserv. Others receive either paper copies in the mail (32 percent) or visit our web site (37 percent). Not surprising, when asked in what format they prefer to receive our reports or newsletters, 60 percent of those who responded said they prefer to receive our publications electronically.

How Research is Used

Information from OPE reports and newsletters are used for a variety of reasons.

One area that is challenging for OPE to measure is the impact our research has in the long-term. Therefore, we have begun to ask customers how they actually use the information they find in our publications. It is not surprising to see that OPE reports and newsletters are predominantly used as reference materials. In fact, over 60 percent of respondents indicated that they at least occasionally quote or otherwise use the information they find in our publications. In addition, for many of our readers, the research serves as a source for innovative ideas, as a basis to improve human resources programs and operations, and, to a lesser extent, as a basis in which to change human resources policy. While we strive to increase our impact in the latter two categories – changing policy and programs – it does appear that OPE's publications are having a positive impact on the Federal Government's human resources programs and operations.



Satisfaction with Publications

OPE reports and newsletters are timely, relevant, and well-written.

Historically, OPE reports and newsletters have been highly regarded by our readers. In the 2001 satisfaction survey, 96 percent of respondents agreed that topics were relevant to the issues or concerns of interest to them and 90 percent agreed that the topics were timely. Although a direct comparison cannot be made between the 2001 and 2004 results because the questions were worded somewhat differently, Tables 1 and 2 show that customers are still overwhelmingly satisfied with OPE reports and newsletters.

Reports

During the time between the administration of the 2001 and 2004 customer satisfaction surveys, OPE released seven original research reports. They covered topics such as the results of our government-wide Merit Principles Survey and issues surrounding merit promotion, delegated examining, selection interviews, and vacancy announcements. In addition, we worked with our stakeholders to identify issues that are important to them and released a report summarizing what we found.

Table 1. Extent to which respondents agree to the following statements about OPE reports.					
Statement	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Topics are timely	46	43	5	2	<1
Topics are relevant to issues I face in my job	45	44	5	<1	<1
Data are well analyzed	49	37	7	2	<1
I have adopted (whole or in part) OPE recommendations	12	35	23	2	1
Layouts are attractive	36	41	16	3	1
Reports are well written	55	34	6	2	<1
Length is appropriate	43	42	9	2	<1
Reports help improve merit or the civil service	40	30	15	2	2
Reports are free of bias	37	33	19	5	1

Note: Not shown are respondents who marked "Can't judge/Not applicable."

In regard to our reports, almost 9 out of 10 of our respondents agreed that the topics are timely, relevant to the issues they face in their jobs, and that our reports are well written and well analyzed, as shown in Table 1. Additionally, many of the narrative comments were very favorable, such as the following quotations.



"Reports are great; keep them coming!"

"I find the report writing excellent - clear, concise, easy to read style, free of jargon, avoid euphemisms"

"The new colorized format is eye catching and easier to read."

The area on which our reports scored the lowest is whether readers have adopted MSPB recommendations. Only 47 percent of the respondents replied that they have. As indicated earlier, readers generally use our publications as reference materials. While there were some that use them to improve HR programs or operations and to change HR policy, we need to examine how we can better assist our readers to implement recommendations in their organizations.

Some of the narrative comments pointed to additional areas where we might improve. For instance, some readers suggested that we publish more reports, expand the topics we research, and improve the time it takes between data collection and publication, as demonstrated in the following quotations. Again, we will consider these comments as we delve into our fiscal year 2005 research agenda.



"Somewhat shorter reports, perhaps with in-depth background materials available online"

"...sometimes I find myself looking for more technical details on analyses presented"

"I'd like to see more reports, issued more quickly, on a variety of topics."

Issues of Merit Newsletter

During the time between the administration of the 2001 and 2004 customer satisfaction surveys, OPE released newsletters almost quarterly. A total of 8 were released between December 2001 and August 2004. The newsletter articles spanned a wide variety of issues, including preliminary findings from our original research, "Tools of the Trade" articles on how to use some of the HR flexibilities and procedures currently available, and editorial columns from the Director of OPE on issues affecting Federal HR. Table 2 presents the respondents' impressions of the *Issues of Merit* newsletter.

Table 2. Extent to which respondents agree to the following statements about OPE newsletters. Statement Strongly Somewhat Neither Somewhat Strongly agree agree agree nor disagree disagree disagree Articles are timely 41 36 8 <1 <1 Articles are relevant to my 37 39 7 1 <1 37 2 Layouts are attractive 35 13 <1 Information is presented 49 32 6 <1 <1 clearly The newsletter is easy to 49 32 5 <1 <1 32 7 Length is appropriate 43 4 <1

Note: Not shown are respondents who marked "Can't judge/Not applicable."

In general, our respondents think highly of our newsletter. About 8 out of 10 of our respondents agreed that articles in our newsletters are timely, relevant to their jobs, and that information is presented clearly and is easy to read. When asked which parts of the newsletters our readers are interested in the most, they indicated that they are very interested in the feature/front-page articles (50 percent) followed by "Tools of the Trade" (40 percent). "Tools of the Trade" articles are regular and recurring articles that provide human resource practitioners with practical suggestions on how to implement a program or solve a particular problem.

Although highly thought of, our respondents regarded our newsletter to a lesser degree than our reports. Based on the written comments, some respondents wanted our newsletter articles to include more detailed discussion of the topics, as indicated by the following quotations.



"Not as useful as reports. Provide references to other sources of information for people who want more detail about a given topic."

"More detail, please! There is frequently excellent information, but the nutshell descriptions are so abbreviated, it can sometimes be difficult to either implement or sell the idea to management."

[&]quot;... the newsletter would be better or more satisfying if it contained more information gained from the Board's original research. What are some of the unique facts and findings gathered by the Board that I cannot find in any number of good HR publications or journals."

Since *Issues of Merit* is specifically written for HR professionals and managers – a target audience currently inundated with information – we specifically intended our newsletters to be brief summaries of some of our findings or literature reviews. Obviously, some of our readers would like articles that contain more detail and original research. We will take this into consideration as we prepare for future issuances.

Visual Appeal of Reports and Newsletters

The layouts of OPE reports and newsletters are attractive.

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 above, a majority of respondents agreed that our reports and newsletters are attractive (77 percent and 72 percent, respectively). Although these results are rather positive, we saw the need to improve the layout of our reports and newsletters and recently implemented some changes. Earlier this year, we researched best practices in newsletter publications and redesigned the look of the newsletter with the use of more color, a different format, and more appealing web-based copies. We have also begun adding additional features, such as agency-specific success stories. For our reports, we have also begun to use more color and are trying to increase the visual appeal with different types of formatting approaches. It appears that we may still have more to do to improve our layout, as these comments suggest.



"The [report's] new colorized format is eye catching and easier to read. Might use some pictures/graphics where appropriate."

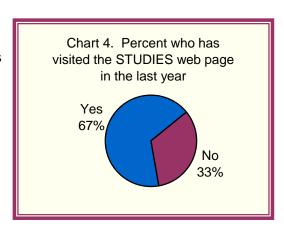
"Use more color [in the newsletter].

MSPB's STUDIES Web Page

• The majority of our respondents have visited the MSPB's STUDIES web page in the last year.

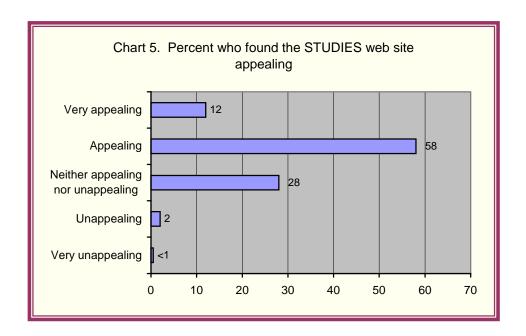
MSPB's STUDIES web page contains electronic copies of all reports published since 1994 and all newsletters released since 1996. All of the postings are accessible to the public and 508 compliant.

A majority of our respondents have visited the STUDIES web page in the last year, as Chart 4 shows. This is a dramatic increase from the 2001 results, when only 28 percent reported visiting the site. Many of the 2004 respondents (39 percent) visited the web page about 3 to 4 times during the one-year period, while 35 percent visited more than



5 times. A quarter of the respondents visited our STUDIES web site only 1 to 2 times.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (92 percent) who visited the site found the reports and/or newsletters they needed. As for the site's visual appeal, a majority found the site appealing (70 percent), as Chart 5 shows.



Although respondents generally find the information they need and consider the STUDIES page straightforward and appealing, many commented that to make it more useful, we should provide links to other useful information that is relevant and related to the topics covered in our reports and newsletters. The following are typical comments.



"More interactive links. Things that will help to identify what's important to...readers."

"Access to background data for further analysis"

"Links to other resources or information or actual downloadable

copies of relevant documents"

"Need better search capabilities."

"This is the first time I have heard of the MSPB's studies web site."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MSPB takes customer satisfaction very seriously and is aware of the importance of providing high quality and timely reports and newsletters to our audience. To ensure that we know what our customers need, we have conducted customer satisfaction surveys on a periodic basis for the past decade and use the results to identify areas for improvement.

After carefully reviewing the 2004 survey results and comparing them to results from previous surveys where possible, we can conclude that our readers continue to consider the quality of our publications to be high. However, there are several areas where we can improve.

Publications

Publish more reports on a variety of topics.

OPE has recently taken steps to identify topics that are important to our stakeholders. We obtained comments from over 800 stakeholders on what they think are the important issues that need to be studied. We published these findings in a May 2004 report, *What's on the Minds of Federal Human Capital Stakeholders*, and considered the suggestions as we developed our fiscal year 2005 research agenda. While we cannot research all of the topics that were suggested due to the high volume of ideas, we believe we were able to identify some key areas of interest and that we have developed an aggressive research agenda to meet the needs of our customers.

Publish shorter reports and/or include technical materials in appendices or on-line.

Many of our customers indicated that they would like to see shorter reports while other respondents would like to see more detailed analysis and data. As we address our research agenda this year, we will try to identify those reports that can be completed in a shorter format. We will also look at how we can provide readers with the additional detail some of them would like, possibly through additional features on our web site or in report appendices.

• Improve time between data gathering and publication of results.

Timeliness is always an issue for complex research projects like those we conduct. While we want to keep the data fresh, we also do not want to short-change the in-depth analysis of the data that goes into the reports. As we prepare for future research studies, we will evaluate how we can balance both of these goals for each project.

Write longer newsletter articles and provide more detailed information.

Many of our readers would like more detailed analysis in our newsletter articles, as they find in our reports. The intent of the newsletter is to give shorter, more summarized findings of information and good HR practices that readers can digest quickly in the short amount of time they have available during their busy work days. However, as we continue to redesign *Issues of Merit*, we will consider readers' comments and try to identify how to meet this

need. This could include more serial features, such as the series we did on job analysis in 2002. Or we may expand space for the feature/front page articles, which are the articles most preferred by our readers according to survey results.

We are constantly looking for new ways to improve the *Issues of Merit* newsletter and encourage readers to e-mail additional suggestions to studies@mspb.gov.

Distribution and Formatting

• Increase distribution of electronic publications.

Survey results indicate that there is a broad interest in receiving OPE publications on-line. Therefore, we will identify ways to increase the marketing of our listserv capability. Individuals who subscribe to the listserv receive downloadable copies of publications as soon as they are published and can easily forward these to others. We also recognize, however, that a number of customers still prefer hard copies of our publications, and we will continue to meet these needs as well.

• Improve the layout of newsletters and reports, particularly those posted on-line.

We have made several attempts to improve the attractiveness of our reports and newsletters by adding more color, graphics, and adopting new formatting techniques, including user-friendly on-line formats. We will continue to identify ways to improve the layouts and to adapt on-line formats that reduce scrolling requirements as we finalize each publication.

MSPB plays a key role in ensuring that Federal human resources systems support merit and that the public's interest is served through these systems. We recognize that customer opinions and the assessment of customer satisfaction are important factors to the Board's overall organizational success. Therefore, with each publication we release, OPE is committed to addressing customer concerns. We will continue to give serious consideration to suggestions offered by our customers and continue to conduct surveys of our customers to see how well their needs and expectations are being met.

APPENDIX

Customer Satisfaction Survey



The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) conducts special studies on the civil service and other merit systems. Results from these studies are reported to the President and the Congress, and shared with Federal policymakers, managers, employees, and others. Our reports covered a variety of topics including staffing (e.g., delegated examining, college recruiting, assessment, and merit promotion), fair and equitable treatment (e.g., glass ceiling and sexual harassment), and whistleblowing. Also, the Office of Policy and Evaluation (OPE) of the MSPB provides expert and timely information regarding Federal human resources management issues through its Issues of Merit newsletter.

We would like to know what you think of our reports, newsletters, and our STUDIES web site. Please read our privacy policy to learn more about the information we will collect from you. The survey is divided into 4 parts: Part I solicits general demographic information, Part II asks your opinion about our reports, Part III refers to the newsletters, and Part IV pertains to our web site. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Part I. General questions

What is your occupation?

- O Human resources (HR) official/professional/staff
- Senior program manager/line supervisor (not in HR)
- Nonsupervisory program/line employee (not in HR)
- Senate/House member/staff/aide
- Union official
- O Journalist
- Student
- Consultant
- Academician
- Other

Wh	nere are you primarily employed?
0	Executive branch (U.S. Federal Government)
0	Legislative branch (U.S. Federal Government)
0	Judicial branch (U.S. Federal Government)
0	U.S. State/Local Government
0	Foreign Government
0	Union
0	Media
0	College/University
0	Private sector (profit and non-profit)
0	Not currently employed
0	Other
Ho	w do you receive or get access to MSPB reports or newsletters? (Select all that apply.)
	E-mail notification from MSPB
	Paper copy mailed by MSPB
	Visits to MSPB website
	Visits to other websites
	Other
Par	t II. MSPB Reports
In v	what format do you prefer to receive MSPB reports?
0	Electronic
0	Paper
0	Either - no preference
	w frequently do you quote or otherwise use information that you read from MSPB orts?
0	Often
0	Occasionally
0	Never
Ho	w do you use information from MSPB reports?
0	As reference materials
0	As a basis to change HR Policy
0	As a basis to improve HR programs or operations

As a source	ce to write artic	eles				
Other						
To what exter reports?	nt do you agre	e or disagree wi	th the followi	ng statements re	elated to MSP	В
Topics are timely.	C Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Topics are relevant to issues I face in my job.	C Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Data is well analyzed.	C Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
I have adopted (in whole or in part) MSPB recommendations.	O Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	O Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	O Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Layouts are attractive.	Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable

Neither

Neither

Neither

Neither

agree nor

agree nor

agree nor

agree nor

disagree

disagree

disagree

disagree

0

Somewhat

Somewhat

Somewhat

Somewhat

disagree

disagree

disagree

disagree

Strongly

Strongly

Strongly

Strongly

disagree

disagree

disagree

disagree

Not

Applicable

Not

Applicable

Not

Not

Applicable

Applicable

Do you have any recommendations for improving our reports?

Somewhat

Somewhat

Somewhat

Somewhat

agree

agree

agree

agree

As a source for innovative ideas

Strongly

Strongly

Strongly

Strongly

agree

agree

agree

agree

Reports are well

written.

Lengths are

appropriate.

Reports help

Civil Service.

bias.

improve merit or the

Reports are free of

In what format do you prefer to receive OPE newsletters? Electronic Paper Either - no preference Please rank your interest in the following parts of the newsletter. Director's Column O Very Somewhat Neither Somewhat Very interested nor uninterested uninterested interested interested uninterested Featured/Front-Very Somewhat Neither Somewhat Very Page Article uninterested interested interested interested nor uninterested uninterested Tools of the Trade O O Very Verv Somewhat Neither Somewhat uninterested interested interested interested nor uninterested uninterested Focus on the Very Somewhat Neither Somewhat Very Facts/Factoids interested interested interested nor uninterested uninterested uninterested **Other Articles** Somewhat Verv Very Somewhat Neither interested interested interested nor uninterested uninterested uninterested How frequently do you quote or otherwise use information that you read from OPE **Newsletters?** 0 Often Occasionally Never How do you use information from OPE Newsletters? As reference materials

Part III. OPE Newsletter: Issues of Merit

As a basis As a sour	s to change HI s to improve I ce for innovat ce to write art	IR programs or ive ideas	operations			
To what exte Newsletters?	nt do you agı	ree or disagree	with the foll	owing stateme	its related to	OPE
Topics are timely.	O Strongly agree	C Somewhat agree	O Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Topics are relevant to issues I face in my job.	C Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	C Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Layouts are attractive.	C Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	O Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Information is presented clearly.	C Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Newsletter is easy to read	C Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	O Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
Length is appropriate.	C Strongly agree	O Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	C Strongly disagree	O Not Applicable
4		endations for in	×	r newsletters?	al)	
	`	TUDIES web p	•	• 0	 ,	

Ho	w many times have you visited MSPB STUDIES web site in the last year?
0	1-2 times
0	3-4 times
0	5-6 times
0	7 or more times
Did	you find the publications you need on MSPB's STUDIES web site?
0	Yes
0	No
0	Can't judge
Ho	w visually appealing do you find the STUDIES web site?
0	Very appealing
0	Appealing
0	Neither appealing nor unappealing
0	Unappealing
0	Very unappealing
0	Can't judge
Wh	nat kinds of information would you like to find on MSPB's STUDIES webpage?
4	

Please click the submit button below to send your responses to us.

If you, or anyone you know, are not currently receiving notification when we release new publications and would like to, please join our listserv at http://www.mspb.gov/studies/mspbstudiespage.html. To receive paper copy of reports and newsletters, please join our mailing list by calling (202) 653-6772, ext. 1350 (V/TDD 202-653-8896), toll free 1-800-209-8960 (select option 2), or by sending an e-mail to STUDIES@mspb.gov.

Thank you for participating in this survey.