

# MSPB Readers Speak Out!



## Results of the December 2001



## Customer Satisfaction Survey



The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board  
Office of Policy and Evaluation

# Customer Satisfaction Survey Results



## Background

The U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) was established by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA), Public Law 95-454, as a successor agency to the Civil Service Commission. It is an independent, quasi-judicial agency in the Executive Branch that serves as the guardian of Federal merit systems.

The Board's mission is to ensure that Federal employees are protected against abuses by agency management, that Executive Branch agencies make employment decisions in accordance with the merit system principles, and that Federal merit systems are kept free of prohibited personnel practices.

One way in which the Board accomplishes its mission is by conducting studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch.

The [Office of Policy and Evaluation](#) (OPE) of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board has the responsibility for conducting such studies and reporting the findings to the President and the Congress. A large secondary audience with an interest in public personnel administration includes Federal agency officials, managers, employees, and public interest groups, labor unions, academicians, and other individuals and organizations.

During FY 2001, the Board issued the report titled "Growing Leaders: The Presidential Management Intern Program" and four editions of the *Issues of Merit* newsletter. Findings from the Merit Principles Survey 2000 (to be issued as a full report in FY 2002) were released through several editions of the *Issues of Merit* newsletter, as were findings from other OPE researched topics. *Issues of Merit* newsletter, can be located on the studies page of our website at [www.mspb.gov](http://www.mspb.gov)

OPE also completed work on three other merit systems studies early this fiscal year. These reports are: (1) *The Office of Personnel Management in Retrospect: Achievements and Challenges After Two Decades*; (2) *The Federal Merit Promotion Program: Process vs. Outcome*; and (3) *Assessing Federal Job-Seekers in a Delegated Examining Environment*.

In line with the Board's goal of evaluating the impact of these studies through feedback from formal customer surveys every 2 to 3 years, this MSPB report summarizes the findings of the OPE Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted in December of 2001<sup>1</sup>. The survey focused specifically on the Board's special studies of the civil service and other merit systems and annual oversight reviews of the significant actions of the Office of Personnel Management as well as the "Issues of Merit" newsletter. A copy of the survey instrument is located at the end of this report.

The data discussed in this report are based on responses received from 318 customers. In some instances, these findings have been contrasted with those from two previous Customer Satisfaction Surveys administered in 1994 and 1998. The comparison of results shows that, customer satisfaction has decreased slightly.

The report concludes with a look at new ways to advertise and market the reporting products of OPE. Avenues such as, 1) more outreach activities such as briefings and seminars that assist others who conduct surveys and use research methodologies; and 2) increased interaction with customers through news groups and forums to exchange information and gather data. The results are outlined in the following pages.

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<sup>1</sup> In December of 2001, we mailed our survey to over 2000 individuals and organizations that regularly receive MSPB reports and newsletters. The survey consisted of 15 questions, which took about 5 minutes to complete. Due to the threat of anthrax contamination, the mail was delayed significantly, contributing to a low response rate.

## Distribution of MSPB publications

Traditionally, MSPB distributes printed copies of each report to an average of 3,000 individuals and organizations in the public and private sectors. While the newsletter is distributed to just over 1,000 readers most, 79 percent, responded that they received their newsletter through the U.S. Postal Service and a mere seven percent said they received their newsletter electronically (e-mail).

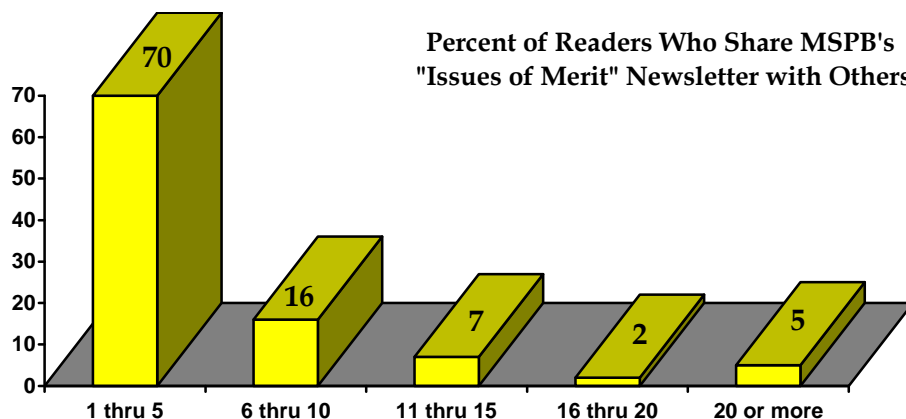
No matter, how they receive them, MSPB readers (60 percent federal employees responded) and are still sharing them with large

numbers of people as the chart below shows. Specifically, concerning the newsletter, almost 70 percent of our readers shared their "Issues of Merit" with between one and five others and 5 percent shared their newsletter with 20 or more people.

As an aside, of those that responded to our survey only 40 percent were federal supervisors or managers out of 60 percent of federal employees. Below is what one reader who receives the newsletter electronically and shares it the same way had to say:



*"We put your newsletter up on our website and notify thousands of readers that the newsletter is available for download. We send out these notices to Fednews on line readers with each issue. Please continue to send us the newsletter via email..."*



## Readers Continue to Find Publications Useful



*"The information you provide and research you undertake is important, timely, and useful."*

A large majority, 93 percent, of the readers who responded find MSPB reports useful. More than half (53 percent) of the respondents said the reports are "very useful" while 38 percent rate our reports as "somewhat useful" compared to a mere 3 percent who find them "not useful" at all.

The chart below compares the percent of readers from the 1994, 1998 and 2001 customer satisfaction surveys that said our reports were useful. These figures clearly show a decrease in readers who view MSPB reports as "useful." Over 90 percent of respondents gave a positive response.

Most of the respondents who didn't find the reports useful said they had retired and commented that because of that their interests had changed, making MSPB publications no longer helpful. However, a few of those who had retired still find the reports useful. Two former Federal employees had this to say:

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*"I retired from the federal government in October 2000. I was a manager. I still find the reports relevant and useful to me in my private sector job. We deal extensively with Federal agencies and employees."*



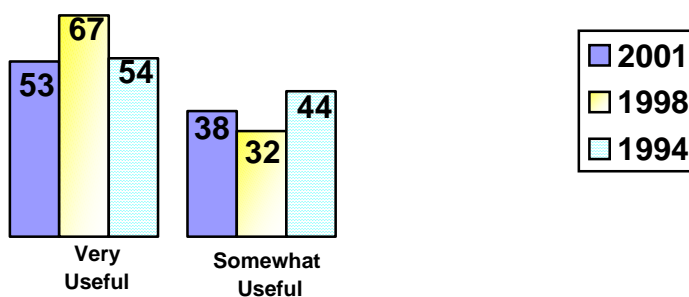
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*"I am a retired SES who teaches public personnel policy and uses your material extensively."*



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### Percent of Readers Who Rated Reports Very Useful or Somewhat Useful



## Topics and Issues Covered in MSPB Publications

When asked "How relevant are the topics/issues covered in the MSPB publications to the issues or concerns of interest to you?" a large majority (96 percent) said that the reports were relevant to the issues or concerns of interest to them.

In the 1998 and 1994 Customer Satisfaction Surveys, 97 percent (1998) and 99 percent (1994) said the issues covered by MSPB publications were relevant to the issues they face in their jobs. Specifically, in the 1994 survey 59 percent said, "very relevant" and 40 percent said "somewhat relevant". Only one per-cent found the issues covered to be "not relevant".

One of the issues addressed by MSPB from 1999 through 2001 concerned the Federal Government's delegated examining units (DEUs) and how they operate. One DEU task is to publicize vacancies. Another is to assess candidates for referral to the selecting Officials for employment consideration. OPE's study of this process revealed a widespread belief that delegated examining has eliminated the major difficulties associated with centralized hiring. However, officials in DEUs with heavy workloads saw some serious problems with the system.

The issues of Merit newsletter released OPE's findings from the Merit Principles Survey 2000. The survey which collected the views of thousands of Federal employees led to many relevant findings in areas such as performance appraisals and feedback, the success of the Government Performance and Results Acts, job satisfaction; and reasons why retirement eligibles leave the Federal Government.

Other survey topics reported on in the newsletter included the hiring of new employees, employees' views on working conditions, job satisfaction, the quality of co-workers and supervisors, Federal supervisors' role in strategic human resources management, and the role that OPM plays in conducting Governmentwide programs to oversee the operations of our merit-based civil service system.

**Issues of Merit**  
A Publication of the Office of Policy and Evaluation, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

February 2001 - Special Issue

**Director's Perspective**  
**Welcome to Our Special Issues of Merit**

The year of a new presidential administration, a new Congress, and, critically, a new merit system, is an auspicious time to reflect on issues that will continue to be important to the federal government. The merit system is a cornerstone of the federal government's human resources management system. It is the foundation upon which the federal government builds its workforce. The merit system is a system of rules and procedures that governs the hiring, promotion, and other personnel actions of federal employees. It is a system that is designed to ensure that the federal government's workforce is the best possible. The merit system is a system that is designed to ensure that the federal government's workforce is the best possible. The merit system is a system that is designed to ensure that the federal government's workforce is the best possible.

**Using What We've Got**  
(Excerpted from *Issues of Merit*, July 1999)

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**OPE Focus on the Facts**

**Fact:**  
The number of federal employees has decreased as the population has increased. In FY 1979 there were 14.1 federal workers per 1,000 people; in FY 1995 there were 10.5 federal employees per 1,000 people; and in FY 1999 the number of federal workers per 1,000 people had dropped to 9.0.  
Source: Statistics of the United States, 2000

**Belief:**  
"Big government" has gotten bigger over the years. As the U.S. population has grown, the number of federal workers employed to serve the people's needs has grown even more. This is one reason for the current emphasis on downsizing.

**Inside this Issue**  
Continued Attention Needed to Foster Merit Principles, Page 2  
Employee Selection Methods Need to Be Rethought, Page 3  
Handling Poor Performers, Page 5  
Public Service Values, Page 4  
A 19th Century Relic: the Rule of Three, Page 4  
Minority Nominations Perception Gap, Page 5

The Board published four editions of the "Issues of Merit" newsletter in FY 2001. Additional relevant topics addressed in the newsletter were: the Federal hiring process; the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program; the cost of the merit promotion process (estimated about \$238 million per year); and the issue of poor performers which stressed hiring using selection practices that do a better job of matching job requirements qualifications to prevent employees from becoming poor performers.

## How Readers describe MSPB Publications

MSPB publication topics are timely according to 90 percent of respondents. This percentage is somewhat lower than the findings from the 1998 survey where 97 percent agreed that publication topics were timely. In addition, a few (5 percent) of the current survey respondents thought the publication topics were "not timely".



*"As a new EEO Program Manager, the newsletter is very helpful when discussing solutions to complaints with the Director and sharing with the EEO Committee."*



*"Enjoy reading the reports each time. Very informative!"*



*"Information in Issues of Merit is very relevant to my research on federal workforce issues. Keep up the good work."*



*"As a reporter, I find the MSPB newsletter very informative and timely. Keep up the good work. ....GovExec.com"*

Overall, the Office of Policy and Evaluation of the Merit Systems Protection Board continues to provide its customers with timely, informative, and relevant information as the chart below illustrates.

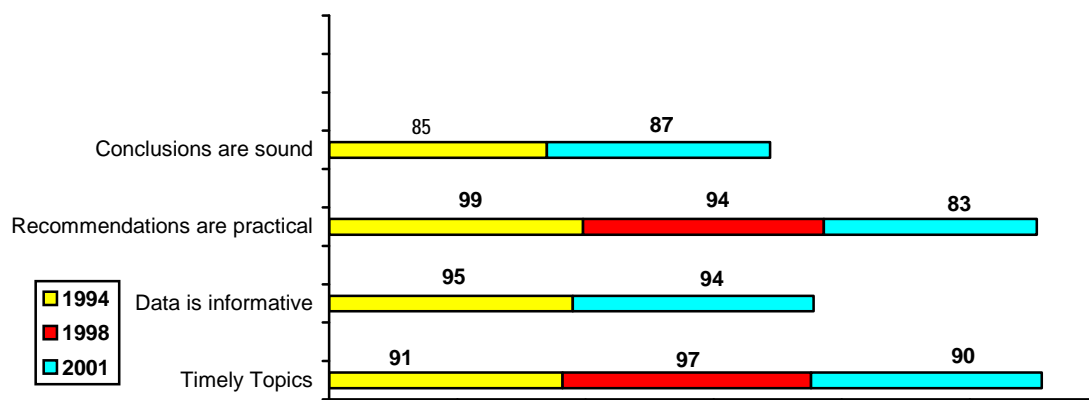
The four categories listed in the chart below indicate areas where customers/readers could have benefited more from MSPB publications. Data show a decline in the percentage of employees who agree with statements describing the publications as presenting "sound conclusions", "practical recommendations", "informative data", and "timely topics". These figures have declined since the 1994 survey when our readers were more positive in their description of our reports particularly in the area of recommendations. Several of our readers commented about the recommendations and conclusions. In fact, one person who did not find our recommendation had this to say:

*"Most articles and particularly recommendations, are 'ivory tower.' I am a HR director in a small agency. The information and recommendations you present is not practical or particularly useful in the real world."*



## How Readers Describe MSPB Publications

(Percentage of Employees who agree with these statements)



## **Web Trends:**

In 2001, we found that only 28 percent of our respondents had visited the MSPB web site, down slightly from our 1998 findings which indicates that 31 percent said they had visited the web site. Of the 28 percent who had seen the web site, almost all (99 percent) found it helpful. Additionally, some 53 percent of them indicated that they had downloaded publications from the site.

We are hopeful that more readers will join the many customers who have already been downloading reports directly. According to the Government Printing Office's "Web Trends" report from April 2002, five OPE publications ranked in the top ten of the most downloaded files from MSPB's web-site and three of OPE's studies ranked in the top five of the most downloaded files.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

While survey results reveal a modest decline in the way customers' view OPE publications, MSPB reports continue to be held in high regard by the communities we serve. In order to improve our services to customers and, in turn, their views of OPE, several recommendations should be considered.

### **⇒ Marketing and Dissemination**

Currently OPE mails its publications directly to selected audiences using well-targeted mailing lists and that has been effective.

However, other ways to disseminate information should also be considered. It might be helpful to participate in more outreach activities and have personal interchange with audiences through briefings and seminars. OPE could also do more to consult and assist other interested ones who conduct surveys and are interested in federal human resources issues.

### **⇒ Increase website visibility**

OPE recognizes this as an area with room for improvement. Our last customer satisfaction report recommended several measures to increase web site visibility, most of which were adopted. One measure that should be considered, is the possibility of exploring increased Internet interaction with OPE's customers. This could be done through newsgroups and other forums to exchange information with customers who might also serve as virtual focus groups.

## **Conclusion**

The Office of Policy and Evaluation recognizes customer opinions and assessment of customer satisfaction as important ingredients in MSPB's organizational success. Therefore, with each report, OPE is determined to address issues of concern and problems that may threaten the integrity of the merit systems. OPE will continue to give serious consideration to suggestions offered by Board customers and continue to conduct surveys of its customers to see how well their needs and expectations are being met.





December 12, 2001

## **2001 MSPB Customer Satisfaction Survey**

### **✓ Please tell us how we are doing**

The US Merit Systems Protection Board strives to provide you with high quality, timely information regarding federal human resources management and the merit-based civil service system. We would like to know how we are doing. Please take a few moments to give us your candid opinion. You were selected for this survey because you are currently receiving newsletters and/or other publications from the Office of Policy and Evaluation and your views are very important to us. By way of reminder, within the last 90 days you should have received an "Issues of Merit" newsletter and/or a report on the Presidential Management Intern Program. These publications and other information are also available under the "studies" section of the MSPB website at [www.mspb.gov](http://www.mspb.gov).

### **✓ What the survey asks**

This survey asks your opinions about our publications and the data, analysis, and recommendations they contain. We want to know how relevant and useful you find the information we provide and your overall opinion about our studies and publications.

The survey typically takes less than 5 minutes to complete and any information you provide will remain confidential - you need not put your name anywhere on the survey. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

### **✓ Please return your survey in the enclosed pre-paid envelope by December 28, 2001**

John M. Palguta, Director  
Office of Policy and Evaluation  
US Merit Systems Protection Board  
1615 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20419  
Voice: 202 653-8900, Fax: 202 653-7211  
Email: [studies@mspb.gov](mailto:studies@mspb.gov)

### **✓ Thank you for helping us serve you better.**



## 2001 MSPB Customer Satisfaction Survey

Please answer the following questions. *(Fill in one circle for each question.)*

**1. Currently, how do you receive the Issues of Merit newsletter from MSPB?**

☐ Mail                      ☐ Email                      ☐ Both                      ☐ Other                      ☐ Not applicable

**2. How relevant are the topics/issues covered in the MSPB publications to the issues or concerns of interest to you?**

☐ Very relevant                      ☐ Somewhat relevant                      ☐ Not relevant                      ☐ Not applicable

**3. How useful to you are the topics/issues covered in the reports you receive?**

☐ Very useful                      ☐ Somewhat useful                      ☐ Not useful                      ☐ Not applicable

**4. Do you regularly share the Issues of Merit newsletter with others?**                      ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

**4a. If you answered yes to question number 4, how many would normally read a newsletter sent to you? Enter the number here: {\_\_\_\_}**

**5. Do the following statements generally describe our reports and the Issues of Merit newsletter?**

	Yes	No	N/A
Topics are timely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Data presented is informative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussions of the issues are thought provoking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommendations are practical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conclusions are sound	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**6. Have you visited the studies page of our web site at <http://www.mspb.gov/studies/studies.html>? If not, skip to question No. 7.**                      Yes                      No

☐                      ☐

**6a. How helpful was the information you found?**

☐ Very helpful                      ☐ Somewhat helpful                      ☐ Not helpful

**6b. If you downloaded any material which was it?**                      ☐ Newsletter                      ☐ Report                      ☐ Both

**7. Are you employed in the Federal Government?**                      ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

**8. Are you a Federal supervisor or manager?**                      ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding the data and information provided by MSPB's Office of Policy and Evaluation. *(You may also contact us via e-mail at [studies@mspb.gov](mailto:studies@mspb.gov) or at the address on the reverse).)*

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Public reporting burden for this collection is estimated at 5-10 minutes per respondent, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources for information, and completing and mailing the survey. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (3124-