



U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board Merit Principles Survey 2016 Data and Methodology

This document describes the data (public use files and supporting documentation) and methodology for MSPB's 2016 Merit Principles Survey (MPS or MPS2016).

Background

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) has the statutory responsibility to assess the health of Federal merit systems and the authority to conduct special studies of the Federal civil service [see 5 U.S.C. 1204(a)(3) and 5 U.S.C. 1204(e)(3)]. MSPB administers a periodic Merit Principles Survey to help carry out those studies. Those studies, including summaries and analyses of data from the MPS, are officially submitted to the President and Congress and shared with Federal policymakers and agencies.

Survey Design and Sampling

Typically, the MPS contains a combination of core items that MSPB tracks over time and special-purpose items developed to support a particular special study. This survey differs from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey administered by OPM in several respects, including: a focus on merit system principles and Governmentwide civil service issues; administration every few years instead of annually; and a smaller sample. Agency participation in the MPS was mandatory, but individual response to the survey was voluntary.

Survey Content

The MPS2016 comprised three distinct surveys ("paths"), denoted Path 1, Path 2, and Path L. Path 1 and Path 2 were directed to both line employees and supervisors; Path L was directed to supervisors only. The major topics in each survey path are listed below. All the topics, with one exception, were selected and developed by MSPB. One topic (ethics, on Path 2) was included in the MPS at the request of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE). Items for that topic were developed by OGE and adapted by MSPB for integration into the MPS.

Path 1

- Employee Engagement
- Work Environment
- Career Entry and Career Interests
- Fair Treatment
- Preventive Measures and Complaint Resolution
- Workplace Violence
- Workplace Aggression/Harassment
- Sexual Harassment
- Respondent Demographics

Path 2

Your Work and Workplace
Your Supervisor
Work Behaviors
Employee Engagement
Employee Performance
Work Tasks
Emotional Labor
Career Interests
Classification and Pay Factors
Prohibited Personnel Practices
Non-Disclosure Agreements and Policies
Workplace Conflict
Respondent Demographics
Ethics

Path L (Leadership)

Respondent Demographics
Being a Supervisor
Managing Performance
Performance Appraisal
Supervisory Tasks and Skills
Managing Poor Performance
Managing Conduct
Managing Supervisors
HR Responsibilities and Services

Survey Sampling

MSPB developed a sampling strategy, using a stratified random sample, to provide a reliable measure of Governmentwide opinion among permanent, full-time civilian Federal employees. The sample was stratified by Federal agency (and agency bureau or component for selected agencies) and supervisory status (nonsupervisor, supervisor, or executive).

MSPB drew the survey samples from the Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), a repository of information on Federal employees developed and maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. The sample was drawn in summer 2015, and included nearly 126,000 employees from 25 Federal agencies, representing all major Departments and independent agencies. However, ultimately the Department of Health and Human Services could not be surveyed, for technical reasons, reducing the sample to 24 agencies.

Survey Administration

MSPB notified participating Federal agencies and selected stakeholders (e.g., major Federal employee unions) of the survey to request their support. The survey was administered electronically (over the Internet) by a support contractor in an environment that complied with Federal Government information security and accessibility standards.

Employees were invited to complete the survey via an email message that contained a link unique to the individual employee. Invitations were sent to nearly 114,000 of the 126,000 employees initially selected (an invitation was not sent if the employee had left the agency, or did not have a valid email address).

Employees were informed, through the invitation and other media, that their participation was voluntary and that their responses were confidential. MSPB also assured participants that it would not disclose data that could be used to identify an individual employee.

The MPS was launched in July 2016, with periodic reminders to complete the survey, and closed in September 2016.

Response Acceptance, Rate, and Weighting

After the survey closed and the support contractor transmitted survey data to MSPB, MSPB reviewed the response records to determine whether they would be accepted. For Path L, the initial criterion was holding a supervisory position, based on a screening item asking the respondent whether he or she supervised civilian Federal employees. For all paths, the final criterion was completing a minimum number (approximately ten percent) of the non-demographic items asked of all respondents in the designated survey path.

MSPB then estimated a response rate, calculated by dividing the number of accepted responses by the estimated number of invited employees who were eligible to complete the survey.

Table: Response Rates for the MPS2016

Version	Eligible	Accepted	Response Rate
Path 1	37,452	14,515	38.8%
Path 2	37,397	14,473	38.7%
Path L	32,654	13,058	40.0%
(TOTAL)	107,053	42,046	39.1%

To provide useful measures across lines of agency and supervisory status, MSPB oversampled (i.e., surveyed a higher proportion of) some groups, including supervisors, executives, and employees in smaller agencies. Accordingly, MSPB calculated response weights to produce results that are representative of Government wide employee opinions. Generally, tabulations and analysis should use the weighting variable (STRAT_WEIGHT) included in the survey datasets. Results presented in official reports are weighted unless stated otherwise.

Survey Representativeness

For selected dimensions, MSPB compared the proportion of respondents from a particular demographic group (based on survey responses) with the estimated proportion of employees in that group in the survey population (based on OPM’s CPDF). MSPB concluded that representation of major demographic groups was acceptable and that the survey results are reasonably representative of the population from which they were drawn.

Margin of Error

MSPB estimated margins of error and the confidence levels for each item on each of the three paths. At a 95 percent confidence level, the margin of error for most items was at or below 1 percentage point. As shown below, the margin of error varies, based on the structure of the survey item and the number of employees responding to the item (some items were asked only of a subset of participants, based on their reported experiences or opinions).

Table: Estimated Margins of Error for the MPS2016

Version	Average	Range
Path 1	1.1%	0.30% – 8.80%
Path 2	1.0%	0.50% – 4.40%
Path L	1.2%	0.30% – 3.10%

Survey Access and Files

Data from merit system study surveys is available to the public through the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). MSPB submitted data files from the 2016 MPS, in a variety of machine-readable formats, to NARA in April 2017. Following acceptance, those files will be accessible online at www.archives.gov, as part of record group 479 (permanent records of MSPB) under the Merit Principles Survey file series. The files submitted to NARA for public use are listed below.

Table: Public Use Files for the 2016 MPS

Name(s)	Description
MSPB_MPS2016_MethodologyMaterials.pdf	Overview of the MPS 2016 methodology and public use data (this document).
MSPB_MPS2016_Path1_Images.pdf MSPB_MPS2016_Path1_Representation.pdf	Screen shots and representation of the Path 1 survey instrument (survey items, response format and options, and response values).
MSPB_MPS2016_Path1_Rel.sav MSPB_MPS2016_Path1_Rel.sas7bdat MSPB_MPS2016_Path1_Rel.csv	Datasets for Path 1, in SPSS, SAS, and comma-delimited formats.
MSPB_MPS2016_Path1_Release_Dictionary.pdf	Data dictionary for Path 1 (response frequencies, values, and codes).
MSPB_MPS2016_Path2_Images.pdf	Representation of the Path 2 survey

MSPB_MPS2016_Path2_Representation.pdf	instrument (survey items, response format and options, and response values).
MSPB_MPS2016_Path2_Rel.sav MSPB_MPS2016_Path2_Rel.sas7bdat MSPB_MPS2016_Path2_Rel.csv	Datasets for Path 2, in SPSS, SAS, and comma-delimited formats.
MSPB_MPS2016_Path2_Release_Dictionary.pdf	Data dictionary for Path 2 (response frequencies, values, and codes).
MSPB_MPS2016_PathL_Images.pdf MSPB_MPS2016_PathL_Representation.pdf	Representation of the Path L survey instrument (survey items, response format and options, and response values).
MSPB_MPS2016_PathL_Rel.sav MSPB_MPS2016_PathL_Rel.sas7bdat MSPB_MPS2016_PathL_Rel.csv	Datasets for Path L, in SPSS, SAS, and comma-delimited formats.
MSPB_MPS2016_PathL_Release_Dictionary.pdf	Data dictionary for Path L (response frequencies, values, and codes).
MPS2016_Formats.sas7bcat	SAS format catalog (usable with all MPS 2016 SAS datasets)

To protect the confidentiality of responses and individual privacy, in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-579), responses to survey items have been eliminated or recoded (combined into larger categories or groups) in the public use dataset. Those items include certain demographic characteristics that are sensitive or, in combination, could be used to identify an individual and open-ended responses that might contain personally identifying or otherwise sensitive information.