



United States
Office of Government Ethics
1201 New York Avenue, NW., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005-3917

Field Office Ethics Program Survey Questionnaire ([PDF](#))
Results of Field Office Ethics Program Survey ([PDF](#))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF FIELD OFFICE ETHICS OFFICIALS

Prepared by:

**PROGRAM REVIEW DIVISION
U.S. OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT ETHICS**

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The Office of Government Ethics (OGE) recently conducted a survey of field office ethics officials to learn more about their experiences, opinions, and needs regarding various facets of their offices' ethics programs. The survey of 523 field office locations of 20 civilian agencies sought to obtain information and opinions on: (1) satisfaction with ethics program organizational location, staffing, and support from field office and agency headquarters management; (2) adequacy of ethics training for ethics officials; (3) satisfaction with ethics materials and information and use of OGE's Web site as a source of information; (4) implementation of the 1997 interim rule training amendments; (5) program successes and problems; and (6) effects of budget reductions. Responses were received from 470 field office ethics officials.

On the basis of the survey, most field office ethics officials are satisfied that they are successfully meeting the many requirements of the ethics program and are receiving adequate program support from their field and headquarters management. Notwithstanding their high level of satisfaction, they identified areas where additional program support and assistance from OGE and their agency management would improve the program.

Specifically, over 90 percent of the field office ethics officials are satisfied with the organizational location (for example, legal office, personnel office, field director's office) and type of staffing (for example, attorney, personnel specialist, other) of their ethics programs and over 80 percent believe that their programs are being supported by their local and agency headquarters management. However, over half of the officials identified areas where additional

support from both levels of management, such as ethics training for ethics officials, dissemination of ethics information and materials, visibility of the ethics program, and human resources, would improve their programs. Those who reported they were less satisfied with location, staffing, and management support were primarily from programs administered by personnel specialists. In addition, over 80 percent of the ethics officials believe ethics training for ethics officials is adequate to effectively administer the program. However, almost all indicated that they would be interested in attending additional training via regional ethics training classes and identified topics on which they believed additional training is needed. These topics included 18 U.S.C. § 208 (conflicting financial interests), outside employment, 18 U.S.C. § 207 (post employment), and employee misuse of his/her official position. These topics were also among those most frequently identified as requiring moderate to extensive research in order to provide ethics advice or make decisions.

The survey also revealed that over 75 percent of the field office officials are generally satisfied with the ethics-related materials and information available to them to support their decision-making and provide ethics advice to field office personnel. However, in some specific areas, such as 18 U.S.C. § 208 (conflicting financial interests) and outside employment they were not satisfied with the sufficiency of available materials and information. Also, almost two-thirds indicated they had never used OGE's Web site as a source of materials and information and many officials reported they were unaware of its existence. Again, those who reported that they were not satisfied with the materials and information on these topics were generally from programs administered by personnel specialists.

Finally, over 80 percent of the ethics officials generally consider their ethics programs successful despite some continuing significant problems and despite the effects of budget reductions at a limited number of agencies. In two training related areas in which significant problems continue--employee attendance at ethics training and materials/methods for conducting training--less than half of the responding officials indicated their agency had implemented OGE's 1997 interim rule training amendments. Those amendments generally provide agencies relief from the annual verbal training requirement. They allow annual ethics training for covered employees, other than public report filers, through the distribution of a written ethics briefing for up to two out of every three calendar years. Moreover, over half of the responding officials indicated that the interim rule change would not be implemented until after 1998, if at all.

Again, programs administered by personnel specialists were more likely to have reported experiencing negative effects of budget reductions and were less likely to have implemented the training changes. In the last few years, many Federal jobs have been targeted as "overhead" jobs for cuts, personnel specialists among them. OGE has found that as part of reorganizations and downsizing, certain agency personnel offices have been consolidated in order to streamline the performance of all personnel-related functions, including ethics. These cutbacks have resulted in ethics programs not being sufficiently staffed to effectively administer the program.

In light of the survey results, OGE should: (1) remind Designated Agency Ethics Officials of their responsibility to disseminate ethics program information to field office ethics officials and to again consider implementing the interim amendments which would allow their field offices to take advantage of the relief offered by the amendments; (2) conduct additional regional training

sessions for ethics officials on a variety of identified topics and ensure that field office officials are informed of the training sessions; (3) develop and distribute additional training materials using videotapes and computer-based modules for use by field offices for conducting employee training; (4) provide feedback directly to the field office officials who participated in this survey--notifying them of the results of this survey and urging them to take advantage of other various mechanisms provided by OGE to help reduce the ethics program work load; and (5) continue to periodically monitor the impact of budget reductions on agency ethics programs, especially those programs administered in personnel offices or by personnel specialists.