

**U.S. Department of Commerce
International Trade Administration
Office of Travel & Tourism Industries
Survey of International Air Travelers (IFS)**

Request for Information (RFI) Summary

On April 11, 2005, the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) issued a Request for Information (RFI) through the NOAA Procurement Office. (<http://www.tinet.ita.doc.gov/FINAL%20RFI%20Report.htm> . The RFI is a process that invites the industry to provide input to DOC on its Survey of International Air Travelers (or In-Flight Survey Program). The DOC furnished background information on the program with suggestions on ways to improve it. Numerous questions were asked of the industry to assist the Office in developing a new Performance Work Statement (a/k/a RFP) for this Program. The RFI comment period provided the industry with 60 days to respond. Over 35 groups representing several industry sectors responded to the RFI (see the list at the end). The following is a summary of the industry responses.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES:

Respondents overwhelmingly support the continuation of the Survey of International Air Travelers, but expressed several concerns regarding its accuracy and efficiency.

Sample Size

The sample size for the survey needs to be increased to assure credibility. Almost unanimously, responses urged for a goal of surveying at least one percent of the traveling population (484,000), seven times the current 0.2 percent respondent base (or around 70,000).

Suggestions were received by the industry to request that Commerce consider eliminating the use of “weighting” the value of respondents to make up for non-respondents. Some of the respondents felt the weighting process leads to inaccurate results, as the passengers that choose to respond are not necessarily representative of those who do not. Or DOC should look into other complementary data sources, which may enhance the current weighting methodology.

Sample Selection

DOC should consider targeting collections to focus more on top markets with fewer respondents on smaller markets and U.S. residents. However, more comments were concerned about enhanced selection of smaller markets. One recommendation is to use a ‘disaggregate model’ to infer characteristics about smaller markets (O&D)

Methodology

Conduct a thorough statistical review of the current sampling methodology.

Carefully consider any type of statistical bias that may occur with the surveys.

- On in-flight surveys, do the distributors shy away from first-class passengers (despite their directions to distribute evenly through all classes) to avoid upsetting or bothering the high-paying customers?
- For surveys given in the boarding area, could it be possible that certain demographics are not fully represented, as surveys may be given mostly to those who arrive earlier? Businesspersons and frequent travelers may enter the boarding area later than those who do not travel frequently.
- Could the stressful environment of the boarding area or the unexpected events and changes in airport security have an effect on participants?

Consider using another ‘out of the box’ methodology by measuring international travelers in their home country.

Participation

Encourage increased participation from airlines and at more airports. There are countless problems in today’s environment working with airlines.

Consider using incentives—economic or otherwise—to encourage participation in surveys. Although, in the past, airlines were extremely resistant to DOC using incentives as it would affect the airlines own survey collection processes.

Data Collection

Think about more cost-effective ways of collecting data that would allow for a larger sample size at an equal or lower cost (e.g. hand-held electronic devices, pdas).

Consider processing enhancements – OCR (optical character recognition), image scanning.

Consider using Internet/web based survey techniques

Survey content

The survey may be too long and complex. It has not been revised since 1996, and it should be updated as soon as possible. OTTI should review the entire survey and consider omitting the ambiguous and irrelevant questions; they should also make sure questions have been updated to reflect the current time period and changes in technology. (For example, consider altering the question regarding booking/planning trips with the use of “personal computers” with references to, more broadly, the Internet.)

Reconsider the wording of questions that require a single response for an entire family when, in fact, a family may have different responses for different members. Such ambiguity encourages respondents to leave questions blank or even offer inaccurate information.

Consider using the survey to determine *why* leisure travelers chose the U.S., and to include questions regarding the overall satisfaction of travelers’ trips to the U.S. or to a particular tourist attraction/city. Ask what their future travel plans are.

Numerous other specific recommendations were obtained related to specific questions and will be considered when the questionnaire is revised.

Data Uses

Consider further analysis and study of the psychographics of travelers to provide an improved understanding of the ways in which the U.S. can better market the U.S. to compete with other top tourist markets. OTTI could also better demonstrate how survey information can be used for marketing programs.

Improved Access to the data should include:

- Web based data options for users
- Electronic data options (.pdf, .xls, .ppt, etc)
- Flexible formats

Accessibility and timeliness issues were raised and all requested improvements.

Industry input

Users groups needed to include airlines, airports, CVBs, etc. to keep up dialogue, get them invested into the program and use their expertise and contacts to improve the program.

Industry is supportive of OTTI efforts to improve the program

Pricing/Funding

Most think the Survey of International Air Travelers report is being sold at a reasonable price, however, primary funding for the program should come from the federal government.

Recommendation that U.S. DOC look to other federal agencies who may benefit from the data, to enlist their financial support; similar to already obtained from BEA and BLS.

All prices should be reasonable.

Data analysis, for a price, should not be offered by OTTI since there are a number of third party vendors that can do that.

Airports (additional points)

Airport surveys focus on passenger ground transportation issues, i.e. how they travel to/from the airport.

Against the mandatory reporting and use of Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) to finance the Survey.

International airports benefit from subsidies by the Federal government with the placement of customs and inspection facilities (inference that those airports should participate in the Survey).

Q&A report to follow

Specific questions, with OTTI responses, will follow in a separate TiNews prior to the release of the RFP.

Respondents to the RFI:

OTTI is thankful for the responses received from the following organizations-

U.S. Government

U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT)
U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)
U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)
U.S. Dept of Agriculture (DOA)

Trade Associations

Airports Council International (ACI-NA)
Travel Industry Association of America (TIA)
International Air Transport Association (IATA)

Destinations

National Council of State Tourism Directors
Capitol Region USA Inc.
Illinois Bureau of Tourism
Great Lakes Council of NA
Arizona Office of Tourism
Arkansas Tourism
Utah Tourism
Orlando CVB
Las Vegas CVB
Visit Florida (part of OMB response)
California Travel & Tourism Commission
Virginia Tourism Corporation
So. Carolina – PR&T

Airports

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
Port Authority – New York and New Jersey

Educational

National Organizational Research (NORC) – Univ. of Chicago
East Carolina University
University of California at Berkeley

Consulting/Vendors

InterVISTAS-ga2
Aviation Systems Consulting, LLC
Travel Insights
Datalex
D. K. Shifflet & Associates Ltd.

IAG Schonland
Carlson Destination Marketing Services
The Engle Group
Travel Market Insight
Lufthansa Consulting