National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Social Science Program

Guidelines and Submission Form for Expedited Review of NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys, Focus Groups and Field Experiments

June 2006

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Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) sponsors public surveys to provide park managers with information needed for park planning, management, operations and evaluation of performance related to protecting park resources and meeting the needs of the public. In consultation with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of the Interior (DOI), the NPS has developed an expedited review process for NPS-sponsored public surveys. It streamlines the approval process required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. This booklet provides guidelines as of May 2006 for using the expedited process and a copy of the necessary submission form.

What Kinds of Studies Are Covered?

The program of expedited review applies to NPS-sponsored surveys designed to furnish *useful applied knowledge to NPS managers and planners.* Questions asked under the expedited review must show a clear tie to NPS management and planning needs. The expedited review may only be used for *non-controversial surveys that are unlikely to attract or include topics of significant public interest* in the review process. Investigators who are unsure if a study qualifies under the expedited review are strongly encouraged to contact the Social Science Program for clarification early in the planning process.

Who May Be Surveyed?

The program of expedited review is limited to three specific segments of the public—*park visitors, potential park visitors, and residents of communities near parks.*

Park Visitors: Park visitors include persons visiting any unit of the National Park System for recreational purposes, to participate in educational activities, to use resources legally available in a given unit, and for non-recreational purposes, such as traveling through or making deliveries. "Visitors" include the general public, participants in organized tour groups, teachers and students participating in NPS programs or activities, commuters, concession or partner employees, and subsistence resource users.

Potential Park Visitors: Potential park visitors include those individuals who might visit any unit of the National Park System for recreational purposes,

to participate in educational activities, to use resources legally available in a given unit, and for non-recreational purposes, such as traveling through or making deliveries.

Residents near Parks: Residents near parks include people living in gateway communities near any unit of the National Park System, communities within the boundaries of park units and related areas (e.g., National Heritage Areas, National Scenic Trails), in-holders, concession or partner employees, and subsistence communities within park boundaries or who traditionally use park resources.
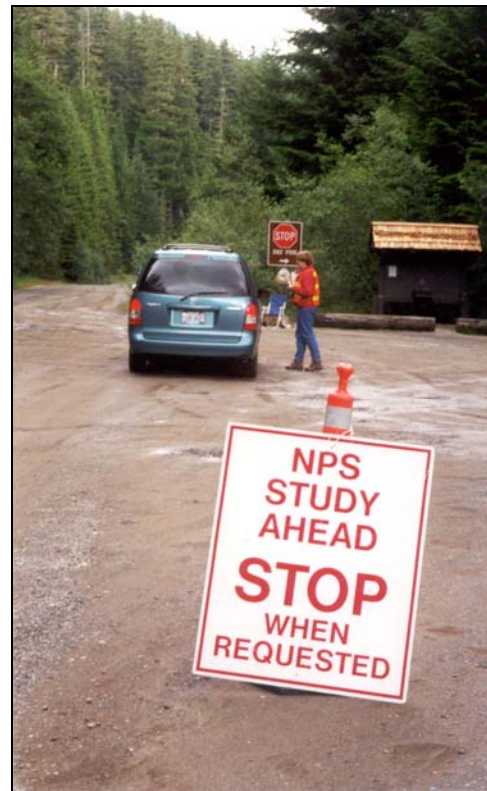
What Kinds of Information Collection Methods Are Covered?

The requirements described in this publication apply to any information collection in which *the same questions are asked of ten or more people.* This includes all forms of surveys (mail, on-site, telephone, Web-based), focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and field experiments. Studies in which information is collected about people solely through observation are exempt from the approval process.

Authorities and Guidance

The authorities and guidance that apply to the expedited approval process are:

- Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-13 May 22, 1995)
- 5 CFR Part 1320: Controlling Paperwork Burdens on the Public; Regulatory Changes Reflecting Recodification of the Paperwork Reduction Act
- United States Code, Title 44, Chapter 25: Coordination of Federal Information Policy
- OMB, The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995: Implementing Guidance (draft, August 16, 1999)
- DOI Collection of Information from the Public: Interim Guidelines (March 20, 1997)
- NPS Director's Order #78, Social Science, Section III (October 7, 2002)
- NPS, Social Science Surveys and Interviews in the National Parks and for the National Park Service: A Guide to NPS and OMB Approvals (July 2002)
- OMB, Guidance on Agency Survey and Statistical Information Collections: Questions and Answers When Designing Surveys for Information Collections (January 2006)

Within the Scope of the Expedited Review - Topic Areas

To qualify for the expedited approval, all questions in a survey must fit within one or more of the approved topic areas and must be approved by the NPS and OMB. Researchers have flexibility, within accepted standards of good survey design and OMB regulations, to develop specific questions within the topic areas. The seven topic areas are identified below. A description of the scope of each topic area follows.

Topic Area 1 - Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics are attributes of individual park visitors or visitor groups, potential visitors or groups, and residents of communities near parks. Examples include age, zip code or country of residence, group type and size, ethnicity, race, disabilities and impairments, language abilities, socio-economic status, level of educational attainment, and frequency of visits. Individual characteristics relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area. Demographic questions should be limited to those that are germane to the topic being studied, useful and relevant to the park and its managers and included in the final report. Qualitative studies that do not generalize to a specific population should minimize the number of demographic questions or eliminate them altogether. An exception may be made when a demographic question (e.g., race or ethnicity) is intrinsic to the qualitative research topic (e.g., a focus group on interpretation of slavery at Civil War sites).

Topic Area 2 - Trip/Visit Characteristics

Trip/visit characteristics include aspects of travel which affect a trip or decisions which individuals make prior to, during, or following their trips to parks, related areas, and nearby communities. Also included are aspects of travel influencing potential visitors to units of the National Park System. Examples include use of overnight accommodations, transportation, trip route, trip origin, trip destination(s), payment of entrance/user fees, ability to obtain tickets, and length of trip. Trip characteristics relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 3 - Individual Activities and Uses of Park Resources

Individuals participate in many activities during their visits to parks, related areas and nearby communities. Important examples of these activities include sightseeing, using visitor centers, day hiking, backpacking, picnicking, camping, shopping, observing wildlife, attending ranger-led programs, taking photographs, boating, fishing, and many others. Individuals use a variety of park or related-area resources, including natural and cultural resources, as well as park infrastructure and visitor services when they visit these areas. Examples include roads, trails, restrooms, parking lots, drinking water, viewpoints and overlooks, visitor centers, gift shops, stores, and overnight accommodations. Depending on the site, individuals may harvest berries, fish, game animals, firewood, or sea shells; travel cross-country in road-less parts of the park or related areas; travel through historic structures or landscapes; or handle historic

objects. Individual activities or uses of natural and cultural resources which are relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 4 - Individual Expenditures

Individual expenditures include both time and dollar costs that people incur visiting parks and surrounding areas. Individual expenditure data include information on expenditure patterns in the park or surrounding area (direct expenditures) and expenditures associated with their travel to access the park, nearby communities, or related areas (indirect expenditures). *Contingent valuation questions may be included only if they are limited to goods and services currently or potentially provided by the NPS, cooperating associations, concessioners, and other NPS partners.* Questions about entrance fees should describe what the fees would be used for, so respondents can evaluate whether the fee level is appropriate. Contingent valuation questions regarding non-market goods are not allowed under the expedited review. In general, contingent valuation questions should include enough context, including trade-off information, to allow respondents to make an informed decision. Thus, careful attention should be paid to writing contingent valuation questions to ensure that respondents are aware of the important trade-offs involved in choosing an alternative. Individual expenditures which are relevant to the mission, management, and/or operations of National Park System units are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 5 - Individual Evaluation of Park Services

Individual evaluation data include quality and importance ratings of services which individuals used or could have used during a visit to a park or nearby area. Evaluation of services and facilities provided by NPS, concessioners, or other cooperators in the park or nearby area are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 6 - Individual Perceptions of their Park Experiences

Individual perception data include the public's awareness and observations of the natural and

social environments in the parks and nearby areas they visit. Examples are perceptions of the values and benefits of parks and nearby areas and how public awareness and individual observations influence overall experiences. For purposes of the expedited review, *please limit perception questions to topics the park or the NPS can control and manage.* For example, visitors' satisfaction regarding interactions with members of their party would not be appropriate. Individual experiences regarding natural and cultural resources, other visitors, park and other employees, and infrastructure and services in the parks and nearby areas are included in the scope of this topic area.

Topic Area 7 - Individual Opinions on Park Management

Individual opinions about park management include the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, and values that visitors, potential visitors, and residents of communities near parks express regarding all aspects of NPS park management. Included in the scope of this topic area are individual opinions about how the parks manage natural and cultural resources, maintain physical structures, guide human uses of park resources and facilities, and provide educational and other services to the visitors, potential visitors, and residents of communities near parks.

Surveys outside the scope of the expedited approval require clearance through the standard information collection approval process outlined by the Paperwork Reduction Act and its implementing regulations.

Submission and Approval Process

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for initiating a request for expedited review and providing a complete and accurate package of review materials. PIs may be park resource management specialists, NPS interpretive designers, agency scientists, researchers from universities, and individuals from organizations cooperating with the NPS, among others. The approval package must include:

- (a) a completed expedited review form,
- (b) a complete copy of the proposed data-collection instrument (e.g., survey or interview guide), and
- (c) other supporting materials (such as cover letters, introductory scripts, follow-up letters, and survey logs).

The expedited review form is available in this booklet and online at the following Web site:

http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/ex_guide.pdf

The request for expedited review and submission of a complete and accurate approval package must be made *at least 60 calendar days* prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey instrument to the public. *Submissions received in the busiest months of May and June will likely experience significant delays in review times.*

The NPS will provide an administrative and technical review of the submitted materials and notify the PI of the results. If revisions are necessary, the PI should complete them as soon as possible so that the NPS can forward materials to OMB in a timely fashion. If no revisions are necessary, the NPS will promptly submit the review package to OMB for review. A description of the steps in the expedited review process follows.

Submissions Received by Social Science Program by Month (Fiscal Year 2005)
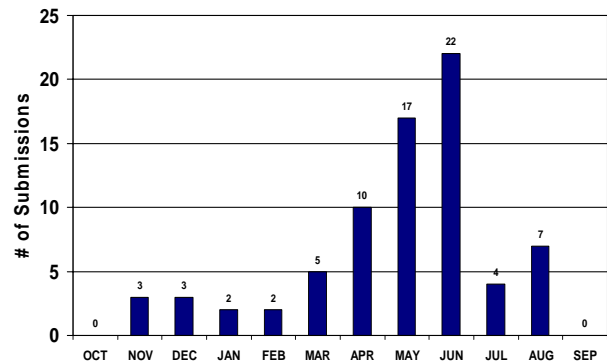
Step 1

The PI completes the Expedited Review Form and prepares the proposed data-collection instrument. Instructions are provided for each item on the form (see page 6). In addition, questions in the proposed data-collection instrument *must have each topic area clearly identified*. Please list topic areas by number and title; for example "Topic Area 4–Individual Expenditures." Topic areas need to be included with all instruments, both quantitative and qualitative (including focus group questions). Submissions lacking this information will be returned to the PI, resulting in delays in the review process.

Step 2

The PI submits the completed form and a copy of the proposed survey instrument to the NPS Social Science Program for review. The submission package must include: a) any introductory script used in contacting the public, b) all cover letters, postcard reminders or follow-up letters to be sent to potential respondents, c) all survey or interview questions, each question being clearly identified as to the topic area under which it is being submitted (topic area number and title), d) necessary Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language inserted into the survey instrument[1], e) if applicable, scripts for non-response bias analysis

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[1] Samples of Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language can be found on the NPS Social Science Web site at http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/survey.htm.

follow-ups, and f) any other supporting materials (such as survey logs). Be sure that for qualitative surveys (including focus groups) there is an introductory script, including the necessary PRA compliance language. For person-to-person information collections, such as on-site interviews, telephone interviews and focus groups, a short statement describing how the PI intends to communicate PRA compliance information to respondents is required in the description of the survey methodology.

All submission packages must be formatted as MS Word documents (any recent version up to and including MS Word XP) and sent via e-mail to the NPS Social Science Program at the following address:

Megan_McBride@contractor.nps.gov

Please do not send materials in PDF format, as these cannot be edited.

Step 3

The NPS Social Science Program staff conducts an administrative and technical review of the submission. The staff recommends either approval, revision, resubmission under the Standard Paperwork Reduction Act approval process, or rejection of the proposed survey. The NPS Visiting Chief Social Scientist makes a decision based on the staff recommendation, and the PI is promptly notified. Should a submission be rejected, the PI may submit an appeal, in writing, to the Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, for a final decision.

Step 4

If approved by the NPS, the NPS Social Science Program staff transmits the submission to OMB for final review.

Step 5

OMB reviews the submission and notifies the NPS of approval or necessary revisions. Should OMB have specific questions about the survey instrument or proposed methodology, the NPS Social Science Program staff will immediately inform the PI and work with the PI to make necessary revisions. The NPS Social Science

Program staff will submit the PI's revisions to OMB and inform the PI of the results.

Step 6

If approved by OMB, the NPS Social Science Program staff notifies the PI immediately and assigns an OMB number, a unique NPS identification number, and an expiration date not to exceed three years or the expiration date OMB has assigned to the program approval (currently January 31, 2008), whichever comes sooner. The standard expiration date applied to expedited approvals is six months after the survey dates listed on the approval form. If OMB requires any special conditions for the approval (e.g., furnishing actual response rates to surveys), the PI will be informed and the conditions must be met for approval.

Step 7

The PI prepares a final revised survey instrument, submitting both a final electronic copy and hardcopy to the NPS Social Science Program.

The final survey instrument must include the following: a) the OMB number, b) the unique NPS identification number, c) the expiration date, and d) the Paperwork Reduction Act compliance statement.

Additions or changes to a survey instrument after it has been approved, even within the specific topic areas, are not allowed by OMB. An exception is that questions may be deleted after approval by OMB, if necessary.

In addition, the PI must provide the NPS Social Science Program with an archive copy of the final report describing the results of the survey. All archive copies of reports will be catalogued in the Social Science Studies Collection, physically housed in the NPS Washington Office. Reports housed in the Social Science Studies Collection will also be made available electronically to park managers and the public through the NPS Focus Digital Library and Research Station.

Other Approvals

In addition to OMB approval, PIs conducting surveys within units of the National Park System must meet requirements of the National Park Service Research Permit and Reporting System. Research permits under this system are issued by the specific park unit(s) in which the research takes place. Parks may have additional requirements as well. PIs should contact staff members of respective park sites to make this determination. Information on the NPS Research Permit and Reporting System is available online at the following Web site:

http://science.nature.nps.gov/research

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Is approval required for information collected in focus groups or field experiments?*
Information collected in focus groups or field experiments must be approved if the participation includes ten or more persons and they are asked identical questions. If a series of focus groups is conducted on the same topic using substantially similar questions and the total participants in all groups combined is more than ten, then approval is required.

2. *I am a graduate student conducting a study of national park visitors. Do I need approval for my study?*
NPS and OMB approval is required if the study is conducted, sponsored, or funded by the NPS. If you are receiving financial or in-kind support from the NPS, approval will be required. The submission should list your major professor or faculty advisor as the PI. Approval by university Institutional Review Boards (Human Subjects Committees) does *not* substitute for NPS and OMB approval. However, research occurring in national park units that is funded by external sources (e.g., independent grants) and is not assisted or reviewed by the NPS in any way does not require NPS and OMB approval.

3. *I intend to study visitor response to interpretive exhibits. I will observe visitors' behavior as they approach, read, and interact with the exhibits under different experimental conditions. Will I need approval?*
Observations are exempt from the review and approval process if no information is solicited from the public. Also exempt are questions asked of the

person that are specific to that individual or result from observation. Approval is needed if standardized questions will be asked of ten or more observed people.

4. *How long does the expedited review process take?*
The request for expedited review, and submission of a complete and accurate review package, must be made **at least 60 calendar days** prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey in the field.

5. *How do I provide Paperwork Reduction Act compliance information to the respondents of my survey?*
Respondents to NPS-sponsored surveys must be informed that the information collection is approved and in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. Depending on the type of survey instrument used, compliance information is passed along to the respondents in different ways. The compliance information can be printed on an on-site or mail-back questionnaire. General compliance information can be presented verbally in face-to-face interviews, focus groups, or telephone surveys. Additional information will need to be made available to respondents upon request. Sample compliance information appropriate to different situations can be found on the NPS Social Science Program Web site.

6. *I will be surveying small groups of park visitors. Is approval required?*
NPS and OMB approval is required if identical questions are asked of ten or more persons.

7. *Do I need approval if I am pre-testing a survey for later submission?*
Pre-testing of survey instruments and methodology is encouraged. If pre-testing involves collecting the same information from ten or more members of the public, clearance for the pre-test is required. The request for approval of the pre-test can be submitted separately or with the final survey package, whichever is appropriate. However, if done with 9 or less people, pre-testing instruments prior to submission is recommended, especially if you are new to the survey design process and/or the survey includes questions that have not already been well-tested.

8. *I intend to offer respondents to my survey a small token of thanks from the park cooperating association. Is this acceptable?*
Generally, OMB discourages use of incentives in federal surveys because of the possibility of biasing a sample. Under certain circumstances, non-monetary incentives can be used. You should contact the NPS Social Science Program staff to discuss your proposed use of an incentive in your survey.

9. *Are there any restrictions on the use of Web surveys?*
Use of Web surveys as an option for respondents is acceptable. The Web should not be the only method of survey administration. There are restrictions on surveys of Web site users. If you intend to do a survey of this population, please contact the NPS Social Science Program early in your planning process. Further, in terms of sample selection, the Web should not be the means by which a sample population is recruited, since this will bias the sample. An exception occurs when the population being surveyed consists of visitors to a Web site, such as www.nps.gov. Contact the Social Science Program if you are planning such a survey.

10. *How should I anticipate my expected response rate?*
Expected response rates should be based on previous like studies in which the method of data collection and sample population were similar. In reporting your expected response rate, please be sure to justify it with specific reference to these similar studies. If you are having difficulty with this, please contact the Social Science Program for assistance.

11. *Can I assure my participants that their identity (if known) will remain confidential?*
Information collections approved under this program are subject to Freedom of Information Act requests. The Department of the Interior has no statutory authority to exempt studies from such requests. Therefore, confidentiality cannot be pledged. However, any information on surveys that identifies respondents can be removed or stored separately from survey databases so that the two are not linked. These steps should be disclosed to respondents.

Expedited Review Form Instructions

1. Insert a title for the proposed study and include park name, if appropriate (e.g., Yosemite National Park Visitor Study). Include the date of submission of the approval request to NPS.

2. Summarize the proposed study with an abstract not to exceed 150 words.

3. Fill in the PI contact information. The NPS Social Science Program will communicate with the PI listed here throughout the entire approval process. For studies in which graduate students are taking an active role, please list the faculty advisor as the PI.

4. Fill in the park or program liaison contact information. List only one park liaison for the purposes of the approval process, even if a PI is conducting a multi-park study.

5. List the park(s) in which the data collection will be conducted or the park(s) for which the data is being collected.

6. List the time period in which the survey will be conducted, including specific starting and ending dates. The starting date should be at least *60* days after the submission date.

7. Check the type(s) of information collection instrument(s) that will be used. If "other," please explain.

8. Provide a brief justification for the study, its purpose, goals, need for specific information, and utility to managers. NPS Social Science Program staff can provide assistance as needed.

9. Provide a description of the survey methodology. This description must be specific and include **each** of the following:

    a) the respondent universe (e.g., all adult visitors over 16 years of age to Yosemite National Park from Memorial Day to Labor Day 2006);
    b) the sampling plan and all sampling procedures, including how individual respondents will be selected and a justification for the planned sample size;
    c) how the instrument will be administered in the field, including follow-up procedures to increase response rates;
    d) expected response rate and confidence levels, ***including a justification of the anticipated response rate*** by citing specific studies similar to the proposed one and their response rates;
    e) a plan for analyzing and reporting the implications of any non-response bias detected (include a copy of your survey log, if applicable);
    f) A description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument.

10. Fill in the total number of initial contacts and the total number of expected respondents.

11. Fill in the estimated time to complete the initial contact and the survey instrument (in minutes).

12. Fill in the total number of burden hours. Burden hours refer specifically to interaction with the sample, including initial contact, reviewing instructions, and filling out a survey. Burden on non-respondents (such as initial contact interviews with individuals declining to participate) should be included in this total.

13. Provide a brief description of the reporting plan for the data being collected. This might include a final technical report to the park, a briefing for park managers, a *Park Science* article, a peer-reviewed journal article, etc. A copy of all survey reports must be archived with the NPS Social Science Program for inclusion in the Social Science Studies Collection. Please note this in the reporting plan.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Social Science Program

Expedited Review for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys

1. **Project Title** |
   Submission Date:

2. **Abstract:**

   (not to exceed 150 words)

3. **Principal Investigator Contact Information**

   First Name: **Last Name:**

   Title:

   Affiliation:

   Street Address:

   City: **State:**   **Zip code:**

   Phone: **Fax:**

   Email:

4. **Park or Program Liaison Contact Information**

   First Name: **Last Name:**

   Title:

   Park:

   Park Office/Division:

   Street Address:

   City: **State:**   **Zip code:**

   Phone: **Fax:**

   Email:

Project Information

5. **Park(s) For Which Research is to be Conducted:**

6. **Survey Dates:** _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)   to   _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)

7. **Type of Information Collection Instrument (Check ALL that Apply)**

   ❑ **Mail-Back Questionnaire**   ❑ **On-Site Questionnaire**   ❑ **Face-to-Face Interview**   ❑ **Telephone Survey**   ❑ **Focus Groups**

   ❑ **Other (explain)** _____

8. **Survey Justification: (Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on a separate page.)**

9. **Survey Methodology: (Use as much space as needed; if necessary include additional explanation on a separate page.)**

   (a) Respondent universe:

   (b) Sampling plan/procedures (including justification for the planned sample size):

   (c) Instrument administration:

   (d) Expected response rate/confidence levels :

   (e) Plan for analyzing potential non-response bias:

   (f) Description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument (recommended):

10. **Total Number of Initial Contacts | Expected Respondents:**

11. **Estimated Time to Complete Initial Contact | Instrument (mins.):**

12. **Total Burden Hours:**

13. **Reporting Plan:**

Checklist for Submitting a Request for Expedited Review

☐ Survey population includes *only* park visitors, potential park visitors, and/or residents of communities near parks.

☐ *All* questions in the survey instruments are within the scope of the topic areas covered by the expedited review, are non-controversial, and are designed to furnish useful applied knowledge to NPS managers and planners.

☐ The expedited review package is being submitted to the NPS Social Science Program at least *60* days prior to the first day the PI wishes to administer the survey to the public.

The expedited review package includes:
☐ a completed expedited review form
☐ a copy of the survey instrument or telephone interview script (with *each* question clearly identified as to the topic number and area under which it is being submitted)
☐ other supporting materials, such as
  ☐ cover letters to accompany mail-back questionnaires
  ☐ scripts for initial contact of respondents and for any follow-up calls as part of a non-response bias check
  ☐ a survey log recording the disposition of contacts, including refusals
  ☐ necessary Paperwork Reduction Act compliance language
  ☐ follow-up letters/reminders sent to respondents

The survey methodology presented on the expedited review form includes a specific description of:
☐ the respondent universe
☐ the sampling plan and all sampling procedures, including how respondents will be selected and a justification for the planned sample size
☐ how the instrument will be administered, including follow-up procedures
☐ expected response rate (with justification) and confidence levels
☐ plan for non-response bias analysis
☐ a description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or the instrument
☐ The burden hours reported on the expedited review form include the number of burden hours associated with the initial contact of all individuals in the sample (i.e., including refusals), if applicable, and the burden associated with individuals expected to complete the survey instrument.
☐ The package is properly formatted and sent to the NPS Social Science Program.

All submission packages must be formatted as MS Word documents
(any recent version up to and including MS Word XP) and sent via
e-mail to the NPS Social Science Program at the following address:

Megan_McBride@contractor.nps.gov

Mission Statement

The objectives of the NPS Social Science Program are to conduct
and promote state-of-the-art social science related to the mission
of the National Park Service and deliver usable knowledge to
NPS managers and to the public.
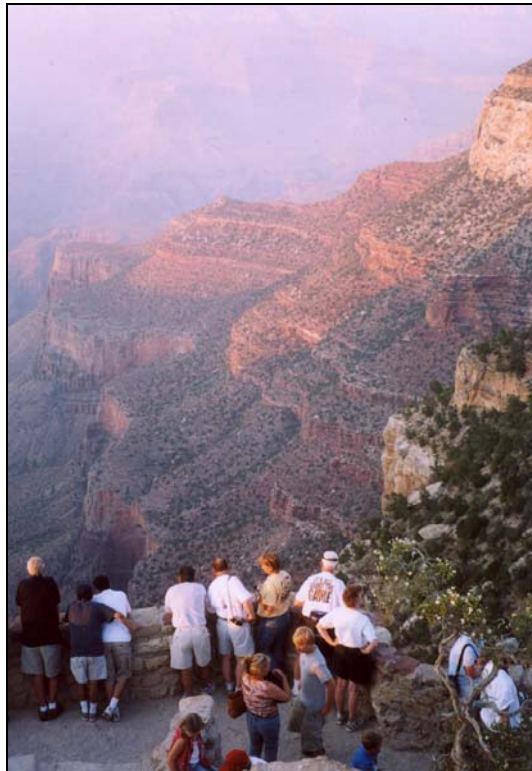
For additional information, contact:

Social Science Program
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW (2300)
Washington, DC 20240
tel: 202.513.7190
fax: 202.371.2131
http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience