

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

DRAFT

Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality

Summary

These *Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality)* are prepared under the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, Section 515(b), and are designed to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility and integrity of information disseminated by the Commission.

The information that is subject to the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* includes statistical information prepared for public dissemination and reports, studies and summaries prepared to inform the public about the impact of the Commission's programs or to use in formulating broad program policy.

Background

On December 21, 2000, the Congress enacted Public Law 106-554, known as the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Act). Under Section 515(a) of the Act, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) was directed to issue government-wide guidelines that "provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information..." an agency disseminates to the public. OMB issued final guidelines on September 28, 2001, amended them on January 3, 2002, and reprinted a fully corrected version on February 22, 2002 (*OMB's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*).⁽¹⁾ Section 515(b) of the Act required a Federal agency covered by the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. 35) to issue its own guidelines to ensure and maximize the quality of information it disseminates.

The Commission is covered by the Paperwork Reduction Act and is required to issue guidelines under Section 515(b). Section 515(b) of the Act builds on existing agency responsibilities regarding information quality. These guidelines are a continuing effort to provide quality information to the public in an era where information dissemination has grown because of a revolution in the ability to communicate, particularly through the Internet.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (the Commission) was established under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to eradicate unlawful employment practices in the United States. The Commission administers programs that touch the lives of almost every working American.

The Commission collects individual facility workforce information from employers, employment agencies and labor organizations by race, sex, and national origin and publishes on a regular basis aggregate profiles of nationwide employment from this information. It also collects race, sex, national origin and disability data from federal agencies and publishes aggregate information by agency and government-wide. Finally, it collects information from its private sector and federal sector enforcement programs about the processing of cases, the relief obtained from settlements or other resolutions of enforcement actions, and litigation activity. The agency is highly cognizant of the need to protect the confidentiality of individual information it obtains through its policies and practices and only publishes aggregate information of its enforcement program data by key indicators.

These Commission-disseminated information products are used by other government agencies, planners and policymakers, actuaries, economists and other social scientists, the media, and the public to understand and analyze employment discrimination programs and their impact on the nation's workforce.

Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

The *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* describe procedures the Commission will employ in the future to ensure the quality of its information products. "Quality" is a statutory term that collectively comprises the terms of utility, objectivity, and integrity. The *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* are organized by these three key components of quality. A guideline is in bold face type with accompanying text providing information on current procedures or approaches the Commission uses to provide quality information.

Coverage of the Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality

There are several important parameters contained in the Act or *OMB's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* that describe the type of information covered by the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* :

1. "'Information' means any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data... ." (*OMB's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*, Paragraph V.5.)

The definition includes the communication of "information" in any form or media, including the agency's web site. It does not include the use of hyperlinks on the site to other information that the Commission itself does not disseminate. It also does not include opinions by others of the information provided, as long as the Commission makes it clear that the opinion is not the agency's point of view.

2. "'Dissemination' means agency initiated or sponsored distribution of information to the public... . Dissemination does not include distribution limited to government employees or agency contractors or grantees; intra- or inter-agency use or sharing of government information; and responses to requests for agency records under

the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Federal Advisory Committee Act or other similar law. This definition also does not include distribution limited to correspondence with individuals or persons, press releases, archival records, public filings, subpoenas or adjudicative processes." (*OMB's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*, Paragraph V.8.)

The Commission emphasizes the limitation that the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* do not include any individual items of information collected in its administrative and legal processing of charges in the private sector and hearings and appeals in the federal sector. Also, any use or dissemination of Commission information by others is not covered by the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*, unless the Commission specifically uses a third-party to disseminate its own information.

Commission dissemination of aggregated information on administrative and litigation processes are included under the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*.

3. Finally, the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* pertain to information it first disseminates on or after October 1, 2002. The administrative mechanism describing a request for timely correction of information pertains to information disseminated on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the agency first disseminated the information. (*OMB's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*, Paragraph III.4.)

The *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* establish an approach to ensure that quality standards are met for information it disseminates on or after October 1, 2002. Using the procedures in the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*, persons affected by the information can request correction of new information that does not comport with the *OMB's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*. In addition, affected persons can request correction of information that was previously created by the Commission but is newly disseminated on or after October 1, 2002. Commission information only disseminated before October 1, 2002, is not covered by the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality*.

Utility

Utility refers to the usefulness of the information to its intended users, including the public. The Commission needs to consider the use of its information from the public's perspective to produce useful, policy-relevant information.

The Commission will keep informed of information needs through active and ongoing contact with the user community and will provide vehicles for user input into information programs.

The Commission keeps abreast of information needs with respect to the analysis of programs in a variety of ways, including performing internal analyses of information

requirements, convening and attending conferences, working with advisory committees and stakeholder groups, and sponsoring outreach activities. In addition, contact information is now included with some of the Commission's information products, and will be made more available in the future on a variety of information products, where appropriate, to allow for questions, comments, and suggestions from users.

The Commission's analytical and statistical publications and other information products will be reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant and timely and that they address current information needs.

The content of ongoing information products is changed, new products are introduced, and some products are discontinued based on internal product reviews, information from users, and the changing needs and emphasis from proposed changes in the law and related policy debates. The Commission identifies requirements to support the preparation of analytical reports and policy studies and modifies its current information products accordingly.

The Commission's information dissemination process will make information products widely available and broadly accessible.

Most public reports and other data products are available in print, and more are becoming electronically available. All documents posted on our Web site are in compliance with Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, to ensure the accessibility to individuals with disabilities, specifically an audience that includes persons who have a visual impairment and read online using assistive technology. In fact, as a model for the Federal government, the Commission's Web site was accessible before any statutory deadline.

Objectivity

Objectivity involves two specific elements: presentation and substance. Disseminated information should be presented in an accurate, clear, complete and unbiased way. Additional information may have to be provided to present disseminated information in its proper context. In addition to the presentation of information, objectivity ensures the substance of products is accurate, reliable and unbiased. Basically, objectivity is ensured for disseminated information if reliable data sources and sound analytical techniques are used; methods exist to carefully review the contents of all information products; and, information is prepared by qualified people using proven methods.

Information products disseminated by the Commission will be based on reliable, accurate data.

Much of the information disseminated by the Commission is based on its administrative data files. Those files contain information used to manage programs. The Commission conducts ongoing quality assurance reviews of employment discrimination charges and settlement information in its data systems to ensure their accuracy. Computer programs use automated checks to ensure internal consistency of the data and that proper sequencing of charge-processing activities has occurred. In addition, manual edit

checks are conducted to evaluate year-to-year comparison of data fields to detect anomalies or outliers for further verification of accuracy. Finally, reports producing charge statistics are validated quarterly by field office management and quality assurance reports are created on regular intervals (monthly, quarterly, yearly) to identify erroneous or missing data elements and correct them.

The Commission has recently deployed new personnel, payroll, and financial management systems. The new financial system is expected to conform to high standards of financial accountability to provide complete, reliable, consistent, timely, and useful management information to enable the agency to carry out its fiduciary responsibilities. These new systems will additionally enhance the agency's ability to link administrative data with resources to improve information disseminated to the public.

The Commission also uses data from external sources for some of its information products; in particular, administrative Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data from other federal agencies. A new web-based data collection mechanism was implemented in fiscal year 2002, allowing government agencies to electronically transmit their aggregate EEO data to EEOC. This has increased the accuracy of agency data by eliminating errors resulting from manual re-keying.

Surveys that are sponsored by the Commission will be conducted using methodologies that are consistent with generally accepted professional standards for all aspects of survey design and implementation.

The Commission is exploring ways to survey individuals and organizations to collect information about its programs and services. Surveys will employ and document accepted professional standards and practices, including sampling design and implementation, questionnaire design and testing, data collection, analysis, and other appropriate statistical techniques to analyze the information. The Commission's surveys will follow the guidelines and policies of the Paperwork Reduction Act and other regulations related to the conduct of government surveys.

All data employed in the preparation of information products will be compiled using statistically sound procedures implemented by qualified professional staff.

Administrative data files used to prepare disseminated information products are compiled and analyzed by qualified professional staff. System checks are conducted when data are entered into systems and automated checks are conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the information. Professional staff peruse the information manually for anomalies and outlier data and make corrections to further ensure the accuracy of the information.

Analytic reports will be prepared using sound statistical and analytic methods and by staff knowledgeable about the data sources and models used.

Reports are prepared by staff using a variety of analytical techniques ranging from simple tabulations and descriptive summary statistics to other statistical methods and models. Staff preparing analytic reports and policy studies are expert in their use of

relevant administrative data files, external data sources, and the statistical approaches used to provide the data and analysis

Analytical techniques will be reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate for the data and the analysis to which they are applied.

All analytical reports and policy studies are reviewed by qualified staff to ensure that the analysis is valid, complete, unbiased, objective, and relevant. Analytic techniques are clearly described in relevant reports and data sources are identified in publications. When analyses are based on projections, the assumptions used to produce the projections are identified.

Data sources and other relevant disclosure information will be documented in publications, either for the publication as a whole or for individual tables.

Documentation in publications contains information on data sources, including definitions and specifications of variables. Report documentation also includes, where appropriate, information on sampling and any disclosure rules or techniques.

All information products will be edited and proofread before release to ensure clarity and coherence of the final report, or Web Site posting.

Text is edited to ensure that a report is easy to read and grammatically correct; thoughts and arguments flow logically; and, information is worded concisely and lucidly. Tables and charts are edited to ensure that they clearly and accurately illustrate and support points made in the text and include concise and descriptive titles. Tables and charts indicate the unit of measure and the universe being examined, and all internal labels (column headings, row stubs, and panel headings) accurately describe the information they contain.

Integrity

Integrity refers to the security of information-protection of the information from unauthorized access or revision, to ensure that the information is not compromised through corruption or falsification.

To ensure the integrity of its administrative information, the Commission will employ rigorous controls that have been identified as representing sound security practices.

The Commission has in place programs and policies for securing its resources as required by the Computer Security Act of 1987 (P.L. 100-235), Office of Management and Budget Circular A-130, and the Government Information Security Reform Act (P.L. 106-398, title X, subtitle G). Those security procedures address all major components of information security and apply to all operating components. In addition, the Commission is subject to statutory requirements to protect the sensitive information it gathers and maintains on individuals. Requirements regarding that information are contained in the following statutes or guidance documents:

Privacy Act of 1974
Computer Security Act of 1987
Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars A-123, A-127, and A-130
Government Information Security Reform Act
Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA) of 1982
Sections 706(b) and 709(e) of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C.
§§2000e-5(b) and 8(e).

In addition to adhering to these requirements, access to information and the underlying data bases are restricted in the system to ensure the integrity of the information and its appropriate utilization.

Coverage of the Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality

What is NOT covered

Information that is NOT subject to the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* includes:

Personal information received as a result of agency adjudicative decisions, such as notices, claim disputes, settlement amounts, etc.

Program publications that explain how to file an EEO complaint, such as that contained in pamphlets.

Procedural and policy manuals, and other information pertaining to basic agency operations.

Management information that is produced primarily for internal use.

Research reports clearly identified as not representing the Commission's positions prepared by other individuals, groups or organizations.

What IS covered

Information that is subject to the *Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality* includes:

Statistical information prepared for public dissemination.

Reports, studies and summaries prepared to inform the public about the impact of the Commission's programs or, to use in formulating broad program policy.

Procedure to Seek Correction of Information Covered Under the Commission's Guidelines Ensuring Information Quality

If you want to seek correction of Commission information covered by these guidelines, please follow the following procedures.

Important Note:

Do not submit any information, comments or data relating to a charge of discrimination that may have been filed with the agency. This is not a procedure for processing any charge-specific information in the private sector or hearings or appeals in the federal sector. Anything submitted for that purpose will not be considered for the purposes of these guidelines. If you want to discuss charge, hearings or appeals information, please contact the appropriate field office nearest you. Our offices are listed on the agency's web site (www.eeoc.gov). You can also call 1-800-669-4000 (TTY: 1-800-669-6820) to be automatically connected to the closest Commission office.

What you must do

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has developed a procedure to allow you to seek correction of information disseminated by the Commission.

Submit your request in any of the following ways:

U.S. Postal Service or Other Delivery Service

Send your request to:

Request to Change Commission Published Information
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Office of Research, Information and Planning
Room 8219
1801 L Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20507

Facsimile

Use a cover sheet on top of your request, and indicate the fax is for:

Request to Change Commission Published Information
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Office of Research, Information and Planning
Room 8219

Fax to: (202)663-4093

E-Mail

Send requests by e-mail to:

requestchangeinformation@eeoc.gov

If you have any questions, please fax or e-mail your name, telephone number, and hours you can be reached (include the time zone) and a Commission representative will contact you.

What information to include in your request for a change in Commission information

1. Provide your name, mailing address, fax number, email address, telephone number and organizational affiliation, if appropriate. We need this information to respond to your request and contact you, if necessary.
2. Indicate that your request for correction of Commission disseminated information is submitted under the procedures of the *Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*.
3. Clearly describe the information you believe needs to be corrected. Include the name of the report or data product where the information is located, the date of issuance, and a detailed description of the information to be corrected. State specifically why the information should be corrected and, if possible, recommend specifically how it should be corrected. Provide supporting documentary evidence, such as comparable data or research results on the same topic, to help in the Commission's review of your request.

What we will do

1. We will review your request and determine whether a correction is warranted, and, if so, what action to take. Some of the factors in that determination are the nature, influence, and timeliness of the information involved; the significance of the correction on the use of the information; and, the magnitude of the correction needed.
2. Respond to you by letter, e-mail, or fax in a timely manner to update you on the status of your request or provide our response to your request. Our response will explain the findings of the review and the actions the Commission will take.

Your right to appeal our decision

If we deny your request for a correction of the information, you can administratively appeal our decision. You will be told at the time of a denial how to appeal.

Privacy Act Statement

We are authorized to collect the information you provide under section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law No. 106-554, codified at 44 U.S.C. § 3516, note). It is needed to process your request and allow us to reply accordingly. You do not have to furnish the information requested, but, if you do not, it may prevent us from processing your request. The information you furnish is almost never used for any purpose other than to process and respond to your request. However, we may disclose information you give us (e.g., to Congressional office, or Department of Justice) if authorized or required by Federal law.

1. OMB issued its final guidelines on September 28, 2001 (66 FR 49718), however, it requested additional comments on two specific concepts used in the final guidelines. OMB subsequently amended its final guidelines on January 3, 2002 (67 FR 369) with additional corrections on February 5, 2002 (67 FR 5365). Because of numerous errors in the publication of the final guidelines, OMB decided to reprint the guidelines on February 22, 2002, to avoid any confusion (67 FR 8452).

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