



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

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Paperwork Reduction Act Basics

What is the Paperwork Reduction Act?

The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), [44 U.S.C. §§ 3501–3521](#), governs how federal agencies collect information from the public. Its purposes include minimizing public burdens, maximizing the utility of information collected by agencies, and ensuring compliance with information access, privacy, and security laws.

What information collections does the PRA cover?

The PRA's requirements generally apply when agencies ask 10 or more members of the public a standard set of questions within a 12-month period, regardless of whether people are legally required to respond ([5 C.F.R. § 1320.3\(c\)](#)).

The PRA does not cover all collections, however. Its requirements do not usually apply, for example, when agencies ask for or receive information at public meetings or in online forums, help people set up accounts, directly observe users, or seek views in open-ended ways (“tell us what you think”) ([5 C.F.R. § 1320.3\(h\)](#)).

What does the PRA require for covered collections?

Agencies must obtain clearance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before collecting information covered by the PRA. As a default rule, agencies must (1) develop an information collection request (ICR), (2) publish it in the *Federal Register* for comment, (3) consider public comments and revise the ICR as needed, (4) publish the revised ICR in the *Federal Register*, and (5) obtain OMB clearance.

Faster, alternative processes are available when, for example, agencies seek to use an ICR that OMB has already approved for another agency, a series of related ICRs, or a customer satisfaction survey. An expedited process is also available when a collection is needed quickly for a reason outside an agency's control.

The PRA Default Process at a Glance

The default process for OMB clearance of agency information collections is set forth in the PRA, OMB regulations ([5 C.F.R. pt. 1320](#)), and [OMB guidance](#).

Step 1: Develop an ICR

The ICR should describe details such as what information the agency is collecting, why the agency is collecting the information, and how long it takes to comply with the request (the “burden”) ([5 C.F.R. § 1320.8\(a\)](#)). *For ICRs associated with proposed rules, the proposed rule is developed concurrently with the ICR.*

Step 2: Publish notice of the ICR and solicit public comments

The agency must provide 60-day notice of the ICR in the *Federal Register* and solicit public comments. The notice should contain enough detail so people can provide feedback on topics such as the need for the information collection and the accuracy of the estimated burden ([5 C.F.R. § 1320.8\(d\)](#)). *For ICRs associated with proposed rules, the ICR is included with the publication of the proposed rule, and the agency also submits the ICR to OMB for review at this step.*

Agencies should consider ways to improve public engagement in the ICR process, including by providing sufficient detail in ICR notices, using additional means to identify and engage with interested parties, hosting all ICRs on a centralized website, and publishing comments received by the public.

Step 3: Consider public comments and revise the ICR as needed

The agency must consider the comments it receives in response to the *Federal Register* notice and revise the ICR as appropriate. *For ICRs associated with proposed rules, the agency also considers comments to the proposed rule.*

Step 4: Publish notice of the revised ICR and submit materials to OMB

The agency must publish a 30-day notice in the *Federal Register* informing the public that it has submitted the revised ICR to OMB. Simultaneously, the agency should submit the ICR to OMB and include supporting materials including a statement explaining the rationale for the information collection, a summary of any public comments and the agency's response, and statutory and regulatory authorities for the information collection. At this stage, comments are submitted directly to OMB ([5 C.F.R. § 1320.8\(a\)\(1\)\(iv\)](#)). *For ICRs associated with proposed rules, the agency publishes its final rule at this step and submits a second and final ICR to OMB.*

Step 5: OMB review

OMB typically reviews the ICR and supporting materials and makes its decision within 60 days. OMB reviews the materials to ensure the information collection is the least burdensome necessary, is not duplicative, and has practical utility ([5 C.F.R. § 1320.5\(d\)\(1\)](#)).

Additional Resources

[A Guide to the Paperwork Reduction Act](#), GSA and OMB
[Paperwork Reduction Act](#), ACUS Admin. Procedure Sourcebook
ACUS Rec. [2012-4](#), *Paperwork Reduction Act*
ACUS Rec. [2018-1](#), *Paperwork Reduction Act Efficiencies*
Stuart Shapiro, [The Paperwork Reduction Act: Research on Current Practices and Recommendations for Reform](#) (2012)
Stuart Shapiro, [Paperwork Reduction Act Efficiencies](#) (2018)