

Example of an expert panel

Use of an expert panel and a survey of experts in the field of retirement income

Example

Example taken from "Retirement Income Data", US GAO, March 2003.

Background

With a view to identifying information about retirement income and wealth, the US GAO conducted a Web based survey of experts in the field and convened 11 experts to a panel. The US GAO also used the Web based survey instrument to survey 276 experts.

GAO

Report to the Ranking Minority
Member, Subcommittee on Employer-
Employee Relations, Committee on
Education and the Workforce, House of
Representatives

March 2003

RETIREMENT INCOME DATA

Improvements Could Better Support Analysis of Future Retirees' Prospects



G A O

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To identify information that experts say is a priority for improving data for the study of retirement income and wealth, we conducted a Web based survey of experts in the field and convened an 11 member panel of experts to discuss opportunities for improving these data. We used the Web based survey instrument to survey 276 experts in retirement income data.¹ Before implementing the survey, we contacted respondents via email and asked them to participate. Out of our initial list of 326 experts, 27 declined to participate, with the majority citing busy schedules or lack of sufficient expertise as their reasons. In addition, we concluded that we had inaccurate or out-of-date E-mail addresses for 23 of the experts.

We studied available research and interviewed experts in order to develop a questionnaire of options to improve retirement income. The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the priority (from highest to lowest) they would place on 22 actions to improve retirement income data. Respondents were asked to rate each action independently, without making comparisons between the actions. We pretested the content and format of the questionnaire with 6 experts in the area of retirement income. The questionnaire was then refined and posted on our Web site and an E-mail message informed participants of its availability. This E-mail message also contained a unique user name and password that allowed each respondent to log on and fill out his or her own questionnaire.

As of December 12, 2002, 190 of the experts responded to the survey (a 69% response rate). Eighteen percent of respondents indicated that they were affiliated with federal agencies, about half were affiliated with colleges and universities, 24 percent were affiliated with other nonprofit organizations, and the remaining 9 percent were affiliated with for profit or other organizations.

Our preliminary results of the survey identified two areas for improvement that respondents most often cited as having the highest priority: (1) matching survey and administrative data and (2) employer data. We used these areas to serve as the principal topics at a 1-day expert panel meeting at our headquarters on September 10, 2002. The 11 panelists included 5 federal officials with responsibilities related to retirement income data, 3 university based analysts, and 3 from private not-for-profit agencies.

¹We identified these people through literature searches on topics related to retirement income data and by asking members of our Retirement Advisory Panel for suggested names and in turn asking them for additional names.

Barbara Bovbjerg, Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues, and Robert Parker, Chief Statistician, moderated the discussion. (For a summary of the panel's discussion and a list of panelists, see app. IV.)

To identify factors limiting the availability of information needed for the study of retirement income and wealth, we reviewed documents obtained from and interviewed officials at the Department of Labor's (Labor) Employee Benefit Security Administration (EBSA), and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the Census Bureau, the Treasury Department's Office of Tax Analysis, the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Statistics of Income Division, the National Institute of Health's National Institute on Aging, and the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics. We also attended conferences related to retirement income analysis sponsored by the Retirement Research Consortium and the Society of Actuaries and interviewed analysts at the Urban Institute, The Brookings Institution, the Employee Benefit Research Institute, and the National Research Council.

The scope of our work did not include an evaluation of estimated costs and benefits of specific proposals for improving retirement income data. We did not independently verify the federal funding figures provided to us by longitudinal survey administrators or agencies sponsoring the surveys.