



Medicare Health Outcomes Survey (HOS)

2021 Survey Vendor
Minimum Business Requirements and
Rules of Participation

Medicare HOS 2021 Survey Vendor Minimum Business Requirements

A survey vendor must meet all of the Minimum Business Requirements listed below to be considered for approval to administer the Medicare HOS in 2021.

Relevant Survey Experience

Demonstrated recent experience in fielding patient experience surveys.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Number of Years in Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of four years. Subcontractor experience cannot be used to fulfill the Number of Years in Business requirement. |
| Organizational Survey Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of three years of prior experience administering standardized patient experience and/or functional health status and/or self-reported health surveys for Medicare or other vulnerable/elderly populations as an organization within the most recent five-year period. • Minimum of three years of prior experience conducting mixed mode (mail and telephone) survey protocols within the most recent five-year period (i.e., mail survey administration followed by survey administration via computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) follow-up of nonrespondents). • Prior experience submitting survey data electronically to an external third-party organization. • If applicable, poor past performance on Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) beneficiary surveys will be considered as failing to meet Minimum Business Requirements. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to adhere to the timeline and/or procedures for survey administration. ○ Failure to demonstrate the ability to submit accurate and complete survey data on time during interim and/or final data submission periods. ○ Failure to demonstrate the ability to adhere to Discrepancy Report submission timelines and procedures and to appropriately implement and manage required corrective actions. |

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Experience with Multiple Survey Languages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior experience administering mail and telephone surveys in English and Spanish. • Survey vendor will have the option of conducting the 2021 survey in Chinese and Russian. If administering Chinese language surveys, survey vendor should have prior experience administering mail and telephone surveys in Chinese. If administering Russian language surveys, survey vendor should have prior experience administering mail surveys in Russian. |

Organizational Survey Capacity

Capacity to handle a required volume of mail questionnaires and conduct standardized telephone interviewing in a specified time frame.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Capacity to Handle Estimated Workload | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient physical and personnel resources to administer large-scale outgoing and incoming mail surveys and to perform telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All survey-related activities must be conducted within the continental United States, Hawaii, Alaska, and U.S. Territories. ○ Must adhere to requirements specified in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. |
| Personnel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated Project Manager, who is directly employed by the survey vendor (i.e., not a subcontractor), oversees all survey operations, and has at least two years of experience in overseeing all functional aspects of survey operations including mail, telephone, data file preparation, and data security. • Designated Mail Supervisor (i.e., not a subcontractor), who is directly employed by the survey vendor and has at least one year of previous experience managing large-scale mail survey projects. • Designated Telephone Supervisor, who is directly employed by the survey vendor (i.e., not a subcontractor), has at least one year of previous experience managing large-scale telephone interviewing projects, and either provides oversight of internally-conducted interviews or provides oversight of approved telephone interview subcontractor/external partner. • Designated Information System staff responsible for data submission (programmer), who is directly employed by the survey |

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| | <p>vendor (i.e., not a subcontractor), and has previous experience preparing and submitting electronic data files in a specified format to an external third-party organization within the past two years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey vendor has sufficient and experienced organizational back-up staff to manage functions of survey administration in the absence of key staff. |
| System Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial physical plant and system resources meet CMS specifications and accommodate the volume of surveys being administered. All system resources are subject to oversight activities, including remote quality oversight activities and in-person site visits to physical locations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All survey-related work, including mail survey administration activities and telephone interviewing, must be conducted at the survey vendor’s or approved subcontractor/external partner’s official business location. Home-based places of work (e.g., residences) and virtual organizations will not be permitted without CMS approval. <p><i>Note: An “external partner” is defined as an organization utilized by the survey vendor to perform a specific aspect of HOS administration. While it is assumed that a subcontractor will have access to personally identifying information (PII), an external partner may furnish goods or services to support HOS administration without access to PII.</i></p> • Capacity for production and mailing of questionnaires, cover letters, and postcards in-house or in accordance with requirements outlined in “Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incoming paper surveys must be processed (e.g., scanned or key entered) at the survey vendor’s or designated subcontractor/external partner’s official business location. • Capacity for programming electronic telephone interviewing systems in accordance with specifications provided and conducting telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system in-house or in accordance with requirements outlined in “Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners.” • Capacity to record all telephone surveys. • Capacity to handle concurrent survey projects while maintaining high quality survey data and high response rates. • Ability to track fielded surveys using an electronic survey management system through each stage of the protocol via the use |

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| | <p>of a unique de-identified member identification number and interim disposition codes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A secure work environment for receiving, processing, and storing hardcopy and electronic versions of questionnaires, sample files, and supplemental files that protects the confidentiality of survey data and personally identifying information (PII) and protects the integrity of the survey. • Prepare and submit data via secure methods (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA] compliant). |
| <p>Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners (Subject to Approval)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMS must approve subcontractors and other external partners as part of the survey vendor approval process at the time of application. • Subcontractors and other external partners must meet the criteria outlined for the survey administration activities they will perform. • Subcontracting of data file preparation and submission is not permitted. • Subcontractors and other external partners added after the application process are subject to approval by CMS. Survey vendor must inform the HOS Project Team immediately of changes in subcontractor(s) and/or external partner(s). • Survey vendor must update Data Use Agreements (DUA) to include any new subcontractors that are added after the completion of the DUA process. • Survey vendor is responsible for supervising and providing quality oversight of all subcontracted tasks and/or those tasks completed by an organization external to the survey vendor. • All survey functions performed externally (i.e., not using the survey vendor's physical resources and/or in-house staff) must be listed in both the Participation Form and the survey vendor's Quality Assurance Plan. This includes, but is not limited to, organizations with which the survey vendor has subcontractor or purchased service agreements. |

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| <p>Mixed Mode Administration</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for printing, assembling, and mailing survey materials in accordance with the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. • Responsible for programming electronic telephone interviewing systems in accordance with the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. • Demonstrate ability to collect and accurately process and code survey data through all phases of survey administration. • Use commercial software/resources to ensure that addresses and telephone numbers are updated and correct for all sampled beneficiaries. • Conduct accurate monitoring of interviewers in all languages in which the survey vendor is fielding the survey. • Assign appropriate disposition codes to each sampled beneficiary indicating final survey status. • Demonstrate ability to adhere to the survey administration timeline. • Comply with all quality oversight requirements described in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>, including submitting mail materials and telephone interviewing screenshots to the HOS Project Team for review prior to survey administration. This includes all subcontractor and external partner materials. • Attest that the organization meets Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) requirements by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for dialing cell phones. |
| <p>Data Submission</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow all data preparation and submission rules as specified in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. • Submit data electronically in the specified format outlined in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. • Execute business associate agreements with Medicare Advantage (MA) contracts and receive annual authorization from MA contracts to collect data on their behalf and submit to CMS. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Must be authorized by a MA contract prior to submission of data. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the HOS Project Team to resolve data and data file submission problems. • Complete attestation of data quality. • Submit revised data files as requested by the HOS Project Team within the specified timeframe. |
| <p>Data Security and Confidentiality</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain established electronic security procedures related to access levels, passwords, and firewalls as required by HIPAA. • Perform regularly scheduled data back-up at least daily and off-site redundancy procedures that adequately safeguard system data. • Develop a disaster recovery plan to support continued business operations or recovery in the event of a natural or human-related disaster. • Use required encryption protocols, if applicable, for transmitting data files. • Implement established procedures for identifying and reporting breaches of confidential data. Data files (electronic or paper) must be stored securely and confidentially in accordance with the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. • Ensure confidentiality of sampled members' identifying information during each phase of the survey process. Only contract-level data may be shared with MA contracts, as specified in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i> (i.e., no member-level or member identifying information can be shared with MA contracts). • Obtain signed confidentiality agreements from staff and subcontractors (i.e., those individuals and organizations with access to PII). Confidentiality agreements must be reviewed and re-signed periodically, at the discretion of the survey vendor, but not to exceed a three-year period. • Ensure the DUA is kept up to date and that all CMS requirements are followed, including documenting all subcontractors. Survey vendor will update the CMS DUA immediately if any change in subcontractors occurs after the initial DUA submission. • Ensure compliance with all applicable HIPAA Security and Privacy Rules in conducting all survey administration and data collection activities. |

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| <p>Data Retention</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to retain all data files (electronic or paper) for a minimum of three years, or as otherwise specified by the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>, onsite at the survey vendor’s facilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Store returned paper questionnaires in a secure and environmentally safe location until December 31 of the following survey administration year, or as otherwise specified by the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>, onsite at the survey vendor’s facilities. Scanned images must be retained for three years. ○ Record all telephone interviews and retain all telephone survey recordings for three years or as otherwise specified by the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>, onsite at the survey vendor’s facilities. • Establish a process for data destruction after three years and complete an attestation of data destruction. |
| <p>Technical Assistance/ Customer Support</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish toll-free customer support telephone lines with live operators Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (survey vendor local time), either in-house or in accordance with requirements outlined in “Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners.” • Establish a customer support email address for members who have questions about the survey or their eligibility. • All emails received through the customer support email address and survey vendor responses must be forwarded to the HOS Project Team via secure transfer network. • Accommodate telephone and email inquiries in all languages in which the survey vendor is fielding the survey, starting at the beginning of the survey fielding period and continuing through the duration of survey fielding. |

Quality Control Procedures

Personnel training and quality control mechanisms employed to collect valid, reliable survey data.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| <p>Demonstrated Quality Control Procedures</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and document quality control procedures for all phases of survey implementation and in all languages in which the survey vendor is fielding the survey, as specified in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internal staff and subcontractor/external partner training. ○ Printing, mailing, and recording receipt of surveys. ○ Telephone administration of surveys (electronic telephone interviewing system). ○ Scanning, coding, and processing of survey data. ○ Preparing interim data files for submission and resolving any identified errors. ○ Preparing final data files for submission and resolving any identified errors. ○ All other functions and processes that affect the administration of the HOS survey. • Physical business premises on which major operations of survey business are conducted are amenable to site visits by CMS and the HOS Project Team, as specified in the <i>2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5</i>. • Subcontractors and other external partners must meet the criteria outlined for the survey administration activities they will perform. • When a discrepancy occurs, submit a Discrepancy Report and corrective action plan to the HOS Project Team within one business day. • Prepare, accommodate, and plan for announced or unannounced site visits and/or remote quality oversight activities from CMS or the HOS Project Team for quality oversight purposes. |
| <p>Training Requirements</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the HOS Survey Vendor Training (via Webinar) after confirmation of conditionally approved status. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participate in all poll questions administered during the training. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete a post-training test. ○ Complete a training evaluation. ● At a minimum, the organization’s Project Director, Project Manager, Mail Supervisor, and Telephone Supervisor must attend the annual training as representatives of the organization. ● Subcontractors and other external partners performing key survey administration responsibilities must attend training. ● All survey vendor staff responsible for data coding and file preparation are strongly recommended to attend training. |

Approval Term

An approved survey vendor may administer the Medicare Health Outcomes Survey for the specified amount of time.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Approval Term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One year subject to annual re-approval based on submission and review of Participation Form. ● Approval as a survey vendor in prior years does not guarantee future re-approval. ● Approval and/or re-approval as a survey vendor is dependent on successful past performance. ● Survey vendor must administer the survey and submit data for a minimum of one MA contract within two years of approval (if applicable) to remain eligible for re-approval. Multiple years as an approved vendor without HOS clients will be negatively weighted as a decision factor when considering re-approval. |

HOS 2021 Rules of Participation

Any organization participating in the 2021 HOS administration must adhere to the following Rules of Participation. To be eligible, the organization must:

1. Meet the HOS Minimum Business Requirements.
2. Participate in teleconference call(s) with the HOS Project Team to discuss relevant survey experience, organizational survey capability and capacity, quality control and assurance procedures, and the role of subcontractors and other external partners, if applicable.
3. Participate in the HOS Survey Vendor Training, participate in polling questions administered during the training, complete the post-training test, and complete the training evaluation. At a minimum, the organization's Project Director, Project Manager, Mail Supervisor, and Telephone Supervisor must attend the annual training as representatives of the organization. Subcontractors and other external partners performing major functions with key survey administration responsibilities must attend training.
4. Complete and maintain a DUA for access to data from CMS for use in collection of additional beneficiary-level information on persons with Medicare. Survey vendors are required to include all subcontractors on the DUA. Survey vendors must update their DUA to include any new subcontractors that are added after the completion of the DUA process.
5. Comply with all rules and regulations pertaining to PII and protected health information (PHI) per HIPAA.
6. Review and follow the *2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5* and all policy updates.
7. Develop and submit an HOS Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) by the specified deadline, including plans to provide quality oversight of subcontractors and external partners. In addition, submit materials relevant to the survey administration (as determined by CMS), including mailing materials (e.g., cover letters and questionnaires) and screenshots of telephone interviewing systems.
8. Store paper HOS surveys onsite until December 31 of the following survey administration year and retain electronic images for three years.
9. Record all telephone interviews and retain all telephone survey recordings for three years.
10. Destroy data after three years and complete an attestation of data destruction.
11. Participate and cooperate (including subcontractors and other external partners) in all oversight activities conducted by the HOS Project Team, including but not limited to,

survey material review, site visits, remote telephone interview monitoring, remote data record review, data audits, and other oversight activities as determined by CMS.

12. Submit interim and final HOS data files on time, as specified by the deadline determined by CMS, via the HOS Data Submission System.
13. Through agreement with these Rules of Participation, attest to the accuracy of the organization's HOS data collection, following the guidelines set forth in the most current version of the *2021 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.5*.
14. Notify the HOS Project Team of any discrepancies or variations from the standard HOS protocol that occur as the discrepancy is identified. Survey vendor must complete and submit a Discrepancy Report Form within one business day of becoming aware of a discrepancy.
15. Acknowledge that the use of virtual telephone interviewers is prohibited unless approved by CMS.
16. Disclose business relationships with sponsors of MA contracts for potential conflicts of interest annually. Survey vendor may not administer the HOS to meet CMS requirements for an MA contract client that controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with the survey vendor.
17. Acknowledge that CMS may, at its sole discretion, terminate, discontinue, or not renew the "approved" status of a survey vendor.
18. Acknowledge that the survey vendor must contract with and administer the HOS on behalf of at least one MA contract within two years of initial approval status to remain eligible for reapproval.
19. Acknowledge that fielding non-CMS surveys using HOS questions to Medicare beneficiaries could have a negative effect on the official HOS survey response rates and measure scores.