

**2021 MINIMUM  
BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS**

A vendor must fulfill all Minimum Business Requirements (MBR) listed below to apply for consideration to administer the 2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey (QHP Enrollee Survey) on behalf of QHP issuers. These include requirements related to relevant survey experience, organizational survey capacity, quality control procedures, and approval term.

## Relevant Survey Experience

Demonstrated recent experience in fielding patient experience surveys.

Criteria	Vendor Requirements
<b>Number of Years in Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum of four years.</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Survey Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum of three years' prior experience administering standardized patient experience surveys; all experience within the last three years (2017-2020).</li> <li>• Minimum of three years' prior experience conducting large-scale mixed-mode survey protocols (mail/telephone/internet) in all three modes; all experience within the last three years (2017-2020).</li> <li>• Prior experience* administering patient experience surveys for vulnerable populations.</li> <li>• Minimum of two years' prior experience employing a statistical sampling process; all experience within the last three years (2017-2020).</li> <li>• Prior experience* submitting patient experience survey data to an external third-party organization.</li> <li>• Prior experience complying with CMS-sponsored survey project protocols. Poor past performance on CMS-sponsored survey projects (e.g., not adhering to the timeline and/or survey administration procedures, not adhering to required oversight activities, not adhering to Discrepancy Report procedures and/or corrective actions) is considered a failure to meet minimum business requirements.</li> <li>• Approval as a survey vendor in prior years does not guarantee future approval.</li> </ul>
<b>Experience with Multiple Survey Languages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior experience administering mail, telephone, and internet surveys in English and Spanish.</li> <li>• Prior experience with Chinese (Mandarin) language survey administration, if opting to administer the 2021 QHP Enrollee Survey in Chinese.</li> </ul>

\* Experience with polling questions, qualitative data collection, surveys that did not use statistical sampling methods, and Interactive-Voice Response (IVR) surveys are not considered relevant experience for approval.

## Organizational Survey Capacity

Capability and capacity to handle the required volume of mail questionnaires and to conduct standardized telephone interviewing and internet surveys in a specified time frame.

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
<b>Capacity to Handle Estimated Workload</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient physical and personnel resources to administer large-scale outgoing and incoming mail surveys, perform telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system, and administer the internet survey during the survey fielding period (e.g., February through May).</li> <li>• Ability for all staff and subcontractors to conduct all survey-related activities within the Continental United States, Hawaii, Alaska, and U.S. Territories to enable the Project Team to conduct all required oversight activities.</li> <li>• Adherence to requirements specified in the 2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications.</li> </ul>
<b>Personnel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated Project Manager who is directly employed by the vendor (i.e., not a subcontractor) to oversee all survey operations and who has at least three years of experience in overseeing all functional aspects of survey operations including mail, telephone, internet, data file preparation, and data security. This individual must have a strong background in survey research and methodology and previous experience using mixed-mode administration.</li> <li>• Designated Mail Survey Supervisor with a minimum of one year's previous experience managing large-scale mail survey projects.</li> <li>• Designated Telephone Center Survey Supervisor with a minimum of one year's previous experience managing large-scale telephone interviewing projects.</li> <li>• Designated Internet Survey Supervisor with a minimum of one year's previous experience managing large-scale internet survey projects.</li> <li>• Designated Sampling Manager who is directly employed by the vendor (i.e., not a subcontractor) and has a minimum of one year's previous experience with sample frame development and sample selection.</li> <li>• Designated Information System staff responsible for data submission (programmer), who are directly employed by the vendor (i.e., not a subcontractor) and have a minimum of one year's previous experience preparing and submitting data files in a specified format to third-party organization(s).</li> <li>• Sufficient and experienced organizational back-up staff for coverage of key staff.</li> </ul>

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
<p><b>System Resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Availability of commercial physical plant and system resources that meet CMS specifications and accommodate the volume of surveys being administered. All system resources are subject to oversight activities, including onsite visits to physical locations. CMS specifications for a vendor’s official business location or a subcontractor’s official business location (when applicable), include but are not limited to the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Capacity to conduct all survey-related work, including mail and internet survey administration activities and telephone interviewing at the official business location. Home-based places of work (e.g., residences) and virtual organizations will not be considered for approval.</li> <li><b>Note:</b> Home-based places of work and virtual organizations will not meet the foundational capacity requirements but may be considered in response to public health emergencies.</li> <li>○ Capacity to reproduce and mail questionnaires, cover letters, and reminder letters at the official business location.</li> <li>○ Capacity to process (e.g., scan or key enter) incoming paper surveys at the official business location.</li> <li>○ Capacity to program electronic telephone interview systems in accordance with specifications provided and conduct telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system at the official business location.</li> <li>○ Capacity to produce and program the internet survey instrument and all required emails in-house.</li> <li>○ Capacity to produce a mobile-ready version of the internet survey in-house.</li> <li>○ Capacity to handle concurrent survey projects while maintaining high-quality survey data and response rates.</li> <li>○ Capacity to employ an electronic survey management system to track fielded surveys through each stage of the protocol using a random, unique de-identified enrollee identification number and interim disposition codes. This electronic management system prevents duplicative records.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Capacity to provide regular progress reports to QHP issuers, within guidelines specified by CMS.</li> <li>● Capacity to maintain a secure work environment for receiving, processing, and storing hardcopy and electronic versions of questionnaires and sample files that protects the confidentiality of survey response data and personally identifiable information (PII).</li> </ul>

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to prepare, accommodate, and plan for onsite visits from CMS or the CMS-sponsored Project Team for quality oversight purposes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Use of Subcontractors (Subject to Approval)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive approval from CMS as part of the vendor application process.</li> <li>• Meet the criteria outlined for the survey administration activities that they will conduct. Subcontracting of sample file generation, email or internet survey administration, and/or data file preparation and submission is not allowed.</li> <li>• Use only a reasonable number of subcontractors for printing, outgoing mail processing, data entry/scanning, and telephone interviewing based on the vendor’s estimated number of surveyed enrollees (subject to CMS review).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mode Administration</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for printing, assembling, and mailing survey materials in accordance with the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>.</li> <li>• Responsible for programming electronic telephone interviewing systems in accordance with the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>.</li> <li>• Responsible for producing and programming the internet survey instrument in accordance with the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>.</li> <li>• Comply with all quality oversight requirements described in the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>. This includes the submission of sample mail materials, sample telephone scripts and interviewer screen shots, and an internet survey test link and test emails to the Project Team for review prior to survey administration.</li> <li>• Demonstrate ability to collect and accurately process survey data through all phases of survey administration.</li> <li>• Demonstrate experience identifying nonrespondents for mail and/or telephone follow-up.</li> <li>• Demonstrate ability to follow survey administration timeline.</li> <li>• Use commercial software/resources to ensure that addresses and telephone numbers are updated and correct for all sampled enrollees.</li> <li>• Demonstrate capability to administer the survey in English and Spanish (and Chinese, if applicable).</li> <li>• Assign appropriate disposition codes to each sampled enrollee indicating final survey status.</li> </ul>

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mail and internet survey administration activities and telephone interviews are not to be conducted from any residences (i.e., no remote, home-based or virtual work) under normal business operations; however, under extenuating or unforeseen circumstances, CMS may permit remote, home-based, or virtual mail/internet survey administration and/or telephone interviewing assuming that vendors can demonstrate they satisfy the criteria specified by CMS.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Sampling Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent experience in the last two years (2018–2020) selecting random samples based on specific eligibility criteria.</li> <li>• Adequately document statistical approach to drawing a sample.</li> <li>• Demonstrate ability to work with QHP issuer(s) to electronically obtain sample frame(s) for sampling within a specified time frame.</li> <li>• Adhere to all sampling procedures as specified in the 2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications, including conducting quality checks on sample frame file(s) received from QHP issuer(s) to verify accuracy and completeness of sample frame information.</li> <li>• Conduct the sampling process in-house and must not subcontract this activity.</li> </ul>
<b>Data Submission</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scan or key enter data per standard protocols.</li> <li>• Adhere to all data preparation and submission rules as specified in the 2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications, including verifying data are de-identified and contain no duplicate cases.</li> <li>• Submit data electronically in the specified format.</li> <li>• Execute Business Associate Agreement(s) with QHP issuer(s) and receive annual authorization from QHP issuer(s) to collect and submit data to CMS on their behalf.</li> <li>• Work with the Project Team to resolve data and data file submission problems.</li> </ul>
<b>Data Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain established electronic security procedures related to access levels, passwords, and firewalls as required by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to protect against unauthorized access to electronic files.</li> <li>• Perform daily data back-ups and offsite redundancy procedures that adequately safeguard system data.</li> <li>• Develop a disaster recovery plan for conducting ongoing business operations in the event of a natural or human-related disaster that includes coordination with relevant emergency preparedness systems.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Criteria for virtual operations are under development and will be shared with vendors should an unforeseen circumstance occur.

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use required encryption protocols, if applicable, to transmit data files. CMS-defined PII must be transmitted securely (e.g., encrypted file via email, data portal, or SFTP).</li> <li>• Implement established procedures for identifying and reporting breaches of confidential data.</li> <li>• Prepare and submit data via secure methods (HIPAA compliant).</li> </ul>
<b>Data Retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain all data files for a minimum of three years.</li> <li>• Store returned paper questionnaires in a secure and environmentally safe location, either onsite or using an offsite contractor.</li> <li>• After a minimum of three years, or as otherwise specified by CMS, securely destroy QHP Enrollee Survey-related data files.</li> </ul>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Store data files (paper and/or electronic) securely and confidentially in accordance with specified requirements.</li> <li>• Ensure data confidentiality for sampled enrollee PII during each phase of the survey process.</li> <li>• Obtain signed confidentiality agreements from staff and subcontractors.</li> <li>• Ensure compliance with all applicable HIPAA Security and Privacy Rules, Protected Health Information (PHI), and PII protocols in conducting all survey administration and data collection activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Technical Assistance/ Customer Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish toll-free customer support telephone lines with a live operator during regular vendor business hours and a survey-specific customer support email address to accommodate both English and Spanish inquiries throughout the duration of survey fielding.</li> <li>• Accommodate telephone inquiries from Chinese-speaking survey participants, if administering the survey in Chinese (Mandarin).</li> </ul>

## Quality Control Procedures

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

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
<b>Demonstrated Quality Control Procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and document quality control procedures for all phases of survey implementation, as specified in the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Internal staff training.</li> <li>○ Printing, mailing, and recording receipt of surveys.</li> <li>○ Telephone administration of surveys (electronic telephone interviewing system).</li> <li>○ Internet administration of surveys.</li> <li>○ Adequate monitoring of subcontractor(s), if applicable.</li> <li>○ Scanning and coding of survey data.</li> <li>○ Preparing final data files for submission.</li> <li>○ All other functions and processes that affect the administration of the QHP Enrollee Survey.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop and submit annually a Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) for survey administration in accordance with the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>.</li> <li>• Accommodate onsite and/or remote visits by CMS and the CMS-sponsored Project Team to the physical business premises on which major operations of survey business are conducted, as specified in the <i>2021 Qualified Health Plan Enrollee Experience Survey Technical Specifications</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>Training Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in and successfully complete the required vendor training via Webinar after confirmation of conditional approval status.</li> <li>• Successfully complete an evaluation of QHP Enrollee Survey Vendor Training.</li> <li>• Establish in-house training of staff involved in all aspects of survey administration.</li> </ul>
<b>Training Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Manager, Mail Survey Supervisor, Sampling Manager, Telephone Survey Supervisor, and Internet Survey Supervisor, at a minimum are required to attend.</li> <li>• Attendance by vendor staff responsible for data coding and file preparation is strongly recommended.</li> <li>• Subcontractor attendance is optional.</li> </ul>

## Approval Term

An approved survey vendor may administer the QHP Enrollee Survey for the specified amount of time.

Criteria	Survey Vendor Requirements
<b>Approval Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One year.</li><li>• Maintain a minimum of one active QHP Enrollee Survey client for at least one survey administration period within two years of approval.</li></ul>