

7535-01-U

NATIONAL CREDIT UNION ADMINISTRATION

GUIDELINES FOR ENSURING THE QUALITY OF DISSEMINATED INFORMATION

AGENCY: National Credit Union Administration (NCUA)

ACTION: Notice and request for comment.

SUMMARY: NCUA is soliciting comments on proposed guidelines for ensuring the quality of disseminated information. The guidelines are being developed in response to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued government-wide guidelines. The notice states some of the basic features of how NCUA will address the OMB guidelines and includes NCUA's draft guidelines.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before June 1, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be directed to Becky Baker, Secretary of the Board. Mail or hand-deliver comments to: National Credit Union Administration, 1775 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3428. Fax comments to (703) 518-6319. E-mail comments to regcomments@ncua.gov. Please send comments by one method only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The proposed draft guidelines are available at www.ncua.gov. For additional information contact Neil McNamara, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer at the above address or telephone number: (703) 518-6440 or Mary F. Rupp, Staff Attorney, Office of General Counsel, at the above address or telephone number: (703) 518-6540.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Section 515 of the Treasury and General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Pub. L. No 106-554, 114 Stat. 2763) directs each agency subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. chapter 35) to issue customized guidelines for ensuring the quality of the information it disseminates. The agencies are to base their guidelines on final guidelines issued by OMB and to post proposed guidelines by May 1, 2002. 67 FR 8452 (February 22, 2002).

The goal of these guidelines is to ensure that information disseminated by the NCUA Board is: useful to the intended users of the information; presented in an accurate, clear, complete and unbiased manner; and protected from unauthorized access or revision. Section 515 also requires the agencies to include in their guidelines "administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information maintained and disseminated by the agency."

Draft Guidelines

Policy

NCUA will undertake to ensure that the information it disseminates to the public is objective (accurate, clear, complete, and unbiased), useful and has integrity. Most information disseminated by NCUA is subject to the basic standard described in these guidelines. Additional levels of quality standards are adopted as appropriate for specific categories of disseminated information. The OMB guidelines require “influential scientific, financial or statistical information” to meet a higher standard of quality. OMB defines “influential” to mean, “the agency can reasonably determine that dissemination of the information will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions.” *Id.* at 8455. Influential information disseminated by NCUA is subject to a level higher than the basic standard. The NCUA’s Chief Information Officer (CIO) serves as the agency official charged with overseeing the agency’s compliance with OMB guidelines for the quality of information disseminated by NCUA.

Scope

NCUA will review all information disseminated for its quality before it is disseminated. The agency’s pre-dissemination review and the guidelines in this document will apply to information that the agency first disseminates on or after October 1, 2002. The agency’s administrative mechanism for correcting information will apply to information that the agency disseminates on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the agency first disseminated the information.

These guidelines apply to NCUA information dissemination in all media and formats, including print, electronic, audio/visual, or some other form. Information includes books, papers, CD-ROMs, electronic documents, or other documentary material disseminated to the public by NCUA. The guidelines apply to information disseminated by NCUA from a web page, but they do not apply to hyperlinks from NCUA’s web site to information that others disseminate. Nor do the guidelines apply to opinions if it is clear that what is being offered is someone’s opinion, rather than fact or the agency’s views. The guidelines do not apply to distribution limited to correspondence with individuals or persons, press releases, archival records, library holdings, public filings, subpoena, or adjudicative processes. Documents and information disseminated but neither authored by NCUA nor adopted as representing NCUA’s views are not covered by these guidelines.

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-agency or inter-agency use or sharing of governmental information; or responses to requests for agency records under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Federal Advisory committee Act or other similar law.

Process for Ensuring Quality of Information at the Basic Standard

The section 515 guidelines issued by OMB focus primarily on the dissemination of

substantive information, for example, reports, studies and summaries, rather than information pertaining to basic agency operations. NCUA reviews all information before dissemination to assure that it meets the basic quality standard. Most information disseminated by NCUA does not require the higher standard of review associated with influential information.

As stated in the Policy section of these guidelines, NCUA's basic quality standard for information involves objectivity, utility, and integrity. Objectivity involves two distinct elements: presentation and substance. Objective presentation means the information is presented within a proper context to ensure an accurate, clear, complete and unbiased presentation. Objective substance means the data, the analytical process, and the resulting reports are accurate, reliable and unbiased. To the extent possible, and consistent with confidentiality protections, NCUA will identify the source of disseminated information so the public can assess whether the information is objective. The utility of information refers to its usefulness to its intended users, including the public. Integrity refers to the security of information, in other words, the protection of information from unauthorized access or revision.

NCUA's CIO is charged with primary oversight responsibility for assuring that all disseminated information meets the basic quality standard. The CIO relies on the Office Director with primary responsibility for the disseminated information to ensure that the pre-dissemination review process is performed and documented at a level appropriate for the type of information disseminated. The Office Directors will use internal peer reviews and other review mechanisms to ensure that disseminated information is objective, unbiased, and accurate in both presentation and substance. The approval of information before dissemination will be documented. This documentation may include routing slips, clearance forms, e-mails and other approval mechanisms currently used to assure the quality of disseminated information.

The Office Director with primary responsibility is also responsible for ensuring the utility and integrity of the information disseminated by his or her office. Information is useful only if it can be retrieved. Therefore, the Office Director should ensure that information published on the NCUA's website is retrievable by the public.

The security and integrity of agency information is addressed in NCUA Instruction No. 13500.04, "Agency-Wide Information Security Policy & Procedures" and the NCUA Agency-wide electronic systems records retention schedule. Office Directors are responsible for ensuring that information is protected from unauthorized revision, falsification, corruption, and intentional or inadvertent destruction. In particular, the originating Office Director is responsible for ensuring that the record copy of information products is filed in the appropriate official record keeping system and included in an approved records retention schedule. All NCUA employees are responsible for following security procedures intended to safeguard sensitive information. The originating Office Directors are required to review and update the security plans for their systems each year. The CIO provides an ongoing security-training program for agency staff. NCUA also has a comprehensive internal control program, including management, operational and technical controls, designed to protect the integrity of agency systems and information. The CIO, the Information Security Officer, and the Records Officer of

NCUA advise the Office Directors and other employees, as needed on the implementation of appropriate security and records management procedures.

The originating Office Director is to review disseminated information on a regular basis, including information on the NCUA website, to ensure that information is current, timely, and correct.

Process for Ensuring Quality of Information at a Level Higher than the Basic Standard

Some of the information disseminated by NCUA is influential, meaning that the “information will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions.” *Id.* at 8455.

OMB has instructed the agency’s to take into account their mission in determining whether the information they disseminate is influential. NCUA’s primary mission is to ensure the safety and soundness of federally insured credit unions. NCUA collects financial data from credit unions and produces statistical reports based on that data. This information is potentially influential. Both the individual credit union data and the statistical reports are made available to the public. These reports assist the NCUA in its functions as regulator and insurer, as well as credit unions and the public in their financial decisions. The information is considered influential if important public policies or important private sector decisions are made based on it. To ensure the accuracy of the original data, NCUA staff or the appropriate state regulator reviews it for accuracy. The data is then collected by NCUA’s Office of Examination and Insurance (E&I) and reviewed for discrepancies. E&I then prepares summary statistical and trend reports for distribution to the general public. The original data on which these statistical and trend reports are based is available to the public, making the statistical and trend reports reproducible. Every possible step is taken to ensure the accuracy of the underlying data. The computer program used by credit unions for their initial submission of the call report data is designed to detect errors before submission. Next, the credit union’s examiner or the appropriate state regulator reviews the call report to assure that the information is accurate. Finally, the information is reviewed by E&I to detect any errors. With these steps in place, NCUA is assuring the accuracy and reproducibility of information that is potentially influential.

Administrative Correction Methods

Background

NCUA has developed a procedure to seek correction of information under Section 515. These procedures are designed to be flexible, appropriate to the nature and timeliness of the information disseminated and incorporated into NCUA’s information resources management and administrative practices. An affected person may request correction of information disseminated by NCUA. An affected person means anyone who may benefit or be harmed by the disseminated information. Documents and information disseminated but neither authored by NCUA nor adopted as representing NCUA’s views are not covered by these guidelines.

Procedure

An affected person may submit his or her request to NCUA's CIO and the CIO will forward it to the appropriate NCUA Office Director for a determination. All requests should be addressed to: Chief Information Officer, Office of Chief Information Officer, National Credit Union Administration, 1775 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3428.

The request should state that the correction of information is submitted under section 515 of Public Law 106-554 and include the requester's name and mailing address. The request should describe the information asserted to be incorrect, including 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. The request should also state specifically why the information should be corrected, and if possible, recommend specifically how it should be corrected, and provide any supporting documentary evidence, such as comparable data or research results on the same topic to help in the review of the request.

If the Office Director determines that a request does not reasonably describe the disseminated information the requester asserts to be incorrect, the Office Director will either advise the requester what additional information is needed to identify the particular information or otherwise state why the request is insufficient.

The Office Director will coordinate with the appropriate NCUA officials to determine whether or not to correct information. 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 will determine the level of review and the degree and manner of any corrective action.

The Office Director will respond to a request within 60 business days. The response will explain the findings of the review and the actions NCUA will take. If NCUA denies the request, the response will explain the right to an appeal and how to apply for it. The Office Director may extend the 60 days for up to 30 more business days. If extended, the Office Director will send an interim response that states why more time is needed and when a response may be expected. The 60-day response period begins on the day the request is received by the CIO.

A denial of a request to correct a record may be appealed to the CIO within 30 business days of the date of the denial letter. Appeals must be in writing, state the basis for the appeal, and provide any supporting documentation. Appeals must be addressed to the Chief Information Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer, National Credit Union Administration, 1775 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3428. Appeals must be decided within 60 business days unless the CIO, for good cause, extends the period for an additional 30 business days. The CIO will notify the appellant whether his or her request was granted or denied and what corrective action if any, the NCUA will take.

These procedures for correcting information will apply to information that NCUA disseminates on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the agency first disseminated the information.

Annual Reports to OMB

NCUA will submit an annual fiscal year report to OMB providing information, both quantitative and qualitative, on the number, nature and resolution of complaints received by the agency regarding the accuracy of information it disseminates. The report is to be submitted on an annual fiscal year basis no later than January 1 of the following year. The first report will cover fiscal year 2003 and will be submitted to OMB by January 1, 2004.

Definitions

1. Dissemination means NCUA initiated or sponsored distribution of information to the public. Dissemination does not include distribution limited to government employees or agency contractors or grantees; intra-agency 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.
2. Influential means that NCUA can reasonably determine that dissemination of the information will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions.
3. Information means any communication or representation of knowledge such as fact or data, in any medium or form, including textual, numerical, graphic, cartographic, narrative or audiovisual forms, whether on paper, film or electronic media and whether disseminated via fax, recording, machine readable data or website. This definition includes information from NCUA's web page, but does not include the provision of hyperlinks to information that others disseminate. It also does not include distribution limited to correspondence with individuals or persons, press releases, archival records, public filings, subpoenas, adjudicative processes or opinions, unless that opinion is the NCUA's official point of view.
4. 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.
5. Objectivity involves two distinct elements, presentation and substance.

Objectivity in presentation requires NCUA to present disseminated information in an accurate, clear, complete, and unbiased manner. To accomplish this, NCUA must assure that the information is presented within a proper context. NCUA will identify the sources of the disseminated information (to the extent possible, consistent with confidentiality protections) and, in a financial or statistical context, the supporting data and models, so that the public can assess for itself whether there may be some reason to question the objectivity of the sources. Where appropriate, data will have full, accurate, transparent documentation, and error sources affecting data quality will be identified and disclosed to users.

Objectivity in substance requires NCUA to disseminate accurate, reliable and unbiased information. To accomplish this, in a financial or statistical context, NCUA must assure that sound statistical and research methods are used to generate the original and supporting data and the conclusions that flow from the data. If NCUA disseminates influential information, it must assure that its conclusions are capable of being substantially reproduced.

6. Quality is an encompassing term comprising utility, objectivity, and integrity. Therefore, the guidelines sometimes refer to these four terms collectively, as “quality.”
7. Reproducibility means that information is capable of being substantially reproduced subject to an acceptable degree of imprecision.
8. Utility refers to the usefulness of the information to its intended users, including the public. In assessing the usefulness of information that NCUA disseminates to the public, NCUA will consider the uses of the information not only from the perspective of the agency but also from the perspective of the public. As a result, when transparency of information is relevant for assessing the information’s usefulness from the public’s perspective, NCUA will take care to ensure that transparency has been addressed in its review of the information. Transparency refers to a clear description of the methods, data sources, assumptions, outcomes and related information that will allow a data user to understand how information was produced.

Authorities: Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (P.L. 106-554; H.R. 5658) and the Office of Management and Budget Final Guidelines, 67 FR 369, January 3, 2002.

By the National Credit Union Administration Board on April 29, 2002.

Becky Baker
Secretary of the Board