

The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). We will conduct cognitive testing of revisions to a pre-notice mailing, two cover letters and two revised envelopes for the American Community Survey (ACS). These mailings are intended to be used in ACS operations during the 2010 Census year. After Census 2000 it was noted that response rates to the ACS fell roughly seven percentage points beginning in April 2000. While response rates did climb later in the year, they consistently remained one percentage point lower than in non-census years. With the decennial census approaching, it is important to try to keep ACS response rates in 2010 from experiencing the same decline seen in 2000.

We plan to conduct cognitive testing of revised versions of two outgoing envelopes, a pre-notice letter, an initial questionnaire cover letter, and a replacement questionnaire cover letter in order to evaluate whether respondents who receive these materials from both the decennial census and ACS in 2010 will understand that the ACS and decennial census are two different operations, and realize that they must complete both the ACS and the decennial census questionnaires. Additionally, we plan to observe respondents' reactions to the mailings in order to assess how likely they would be to complete and return one or both forms, and to identify what factors might influence their decision to complete one, both, or neither.

Though preventing the one percentage point decline in response rates seen throughout June-December of 2000 is important, reducing the seven percentage point decline seen in April and May is a higher priority. Therefore, we plan to cognitively test the pre-notice mailing, cover letters and envelopes in a way designed to simulate the situation an ACS sample respondent will encounter at home during those months in 2010. We will present participants in this study with 8 mailings: the ACS and decennial census pre-notices, initial questionnaire packages, reminder cards, and replacement questionnaire packages. The census and ACS materials will be presented according to the order in which they will be received in households in March and April, 2010. The participants will be asked to complete portions of both the decennial census form and the ACS form in order to simulate respondent burden. We will use this information to decide whether the revised messages are adequate and whether modifications are needed. Unfortunately, there is insufficient time to conduct a split-panel field test to determine if these revised messages improve response rates.

The cognitive interviews will commence in early October and conclude by the beginning of December. Staff from the Center for Survey Methods Research in the Statistical Research Division will conduct 15-20 cognitive interviews in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. We will selectively recruit respondents who would be likely to respond to a mail-back form. According to the 2005 ACS Respondent Characteristics Evaluation, participants who live with a spouse, live in a single unit, or live in a residence that they own are the most likely to respond by mail. We will recruit people with these characteristics in differing age, gender, race and education levels through use of our database, personal connections, and Craig's List. Interviews will be done in our lab or at locations more convenient for respondents.

Prospective respondents will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that information that could identify individuals will be held strictly confidential. The information will be used only for research purposes. Interviews will be audiotaped and videotaped with the permission of the respondents. Respondents will be paid \$40 as an honorarium.

The estimated time for completion of the interview is one hour and thirty minutes. Thus, the maximum estimated burden is 30 hours.

The contact person for questions regarding this data collection is:

Laurie Schwede
Center for Survey Methods Research
Statistical Research Division
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, D.C. 20233
301-763-2611
Laurel.K.Schwede@census.gov