Appendix G
Linkages to Extant Data Sources

As part of the BPS:04/09 study, data from several extant databases will be collected for inclusion on the final study electronic codebook (ECB), to the extent allowed by the vendor, and as derived variables on the Data Analysis System (DAS). Both direct-pull and derived variables will be documented thoroughly for both the ECB and DAS.

G.1   File Merge with Department of Education Central Processing System

RTI routinely performs file merges with data stored in the Department of Education's (ED's) Central Processing System (CPS) database which contains federal student aid application information. The merge with CPS can occur at any time for any number of cases, provided that the case has an apparently valid Social Security number (SSN) associated with it. RTI sends a file to CPS and receives in return a large data file containing all students who applied for federal aid. There are existing programs and procedures in place to prepare and submit files according to rigorous CPS standards. Similarly, programs and procedures have already been developed to receive and process data obtained from CPS. CPS has recently migrated to an Internet website for file matching, and RTI has been successful sending and receiving files using the new application.

RTI will electronically upload a file on the FAFSA secure website for matching which contains SSN and the first two letters of the sample member's last name (but no other information). Access to the site for the upload is restricted to authorized users who are registered and provide identification/authentication information (SSN, date of birth, and personal identification number) to the FAFSA data site. The file is retrieved by the Central Processing System or CPS (the FAFSA contractor data system) for linkage. The linked file, containing student aid applications for matched records, is then made available to us only through a secure connection (EdConnect) which requires username and password. All CPS files will be processed, edited, and documented for inclusion on the analytic data files.

The CPS data obtained for the BPS:04/09 data collection will cover academic years beginning with 2007–08. All CPS files will be processed, edited, and documented for inclusion in the ECB.

G.2   File Merge with National Student Loan Data System Disbursement

RTI also conducts file merges with the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) to collect federal loan and Pell grant data. The resulting files contain cumulative amounts for each student's entire postsecondary education enrollment. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has set up a secure data transfer system that uses its NCES member site and Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology. The system requires that both parties to the transfer be registered users of the NCES Members Site and that their Members Site privileges be set to allow use of the secure data transfer service. These privileges are set up and carefully controlled by ED's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) NCES Chief Technology Officer (CTO). This service has been designed by ED/NCES specifically for the secure transfer of electronic files containing personally identifying information (i.e., data protected under the Privacy Act or otherwise posing risk of disclosure) and can be used for NCES-to-Contractor; Contractor-to-Subcontractor; Subcontractor-to-Contractor; and Contractor-to-Other-Agency data transfers. The party uploading the information onto the secure server at NCES is responsible for deleting the file(s) after the successful transfer has been confirmed. Data transfers using this system include notification to ED/IES, the NCES CTO, and the NCES Deputy Commissioner as well as the

ED/NCES project officer. The notification includes the names and affiliations of the parties in the data exchange/transfer and the nature and approximate size of the data to be transferred. RTI has programs to create the files for the merge and also programs to read the data received. All matching processes are initiated by RTI staff providing a file with one record per sample member.

G.3   File Merge with the National Student Clearinghouse

RTI plans to use the National Student Clearinghouse to obtain the *Student Tracker* data on institutions attended, enrollment dates, and degree completions for the BPS:04/09 sample. RTI has already set up an account with the Clearinghouse to facilitate the exchange of files securely over encrypted FTPS connections. The file containing sensitive student identifiers (name, date of birth, and SSN) will be encrypted using WinZip 10 then submitted to the Clearinghouse using its secure FTP site. All files received by the Clearinghouse will be securely stored using FIPS 140-2 validated AES encryption, the U.S. federal encryption standard. Matched files, containing data on enrollment dates, institution names, and degrees completed, will be returned to RTI using the same secure FTP site.