

Procedures for Collecting Information

Recruiting/Training

Prior to the start of interviewing, the Census Headquarters will send the regional offices their workload/case information regarding the location of cases in their regional office (RO). Using this information, the ROs determine if they have current field staff to conduct interviewing in these sample areas. If they determine there are field representatives (FRs) in the area, the ROs send a memorandum to the FR asking if he or she is able to work on the survey. After we determine the availability of existing field staff, the RO determines how many new hires they will need in the workload areas. The RO will then look in their applicant databases to see if they have applicants in the area. They will call applicants if they have some in the area and if they need to get more applicants, they will have a recruiting session. Usually these recruiting sessions are held in venues, which the RO uses free of charge. Applicants take a standardized test to determine if they are qualified, and then the RO interviews the applicants.

After the RO completes recruiting, the RO will send training materials to the applicants selected to work on the survey. These include generic training for all new hires. AHS materials include a home self-study, computer based training, and manuals that cover survey content and interviewing techniques. All new hires go to a designated area for a 2-day classroom training usually given by the RO staff. FRs are trained in such areas as – survey content; efficient planning of time and travel route; importance of making timely calls or visits to the sample unit; how to explain the purpose of the survey and uses of the data; telephone and personal visit interviewing techniques; and how to respond to frequently asked questions, among other things. After classroom training, a supervisor observes the new hire for 2 days during their first interviews. The observations program is an extension of training, and the observer will try to help resolve any problems the new FRs might have and evaluate their understanding of the survey concepts and procedures.

Advance Letters

Prior to contacting the sample unit, the regional office mails an advance letter to the respondent to introduce the AHS to the occupants of the sample unit. The advance letter also encourages the respondent to look up utility bills and real estate records prior to the visit/telephone interview in order to have that information readily available during the interview. The ROs may mail the advanced letter before FRs are given their assignments, or the FRs will mail the letters. In the latter case, FRs will send the letters within a week of the day they plan to telephone or visit that sample unit, if they have a deliverable mailing address available. If not, in a personal interview, an interviewer must give the respondent the letter during his/her introduction. We also give the respondents a Thank You Letter to express our appreciation for their cooperation.

During a personal visit interview, the FR presents an official Census Bureau ID and identifies himself. The FR asks the respondent whether they received the advance letter. If the respondent says that they never received a letter, the FR gives him/her a copy and allows time to read it. The letters are available in English and Spanish.

Interviewing

The FRs will use a computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) instrument to interview sample units during a 4-month interview period. The CAPI instrument will allow FRs to conduct interviews in English and Spanish. The FRs can conduct interviews by either telephone or personal visit to the sample unit. FRs are encouraged to work in an efficient manner and to call or visit their sample unit as soon as possible. FRs use the telephone as much as possible and to call or visit at productive times, and consolidate their work in a given geographic area. In an effort to reduce costs, the FRs attempt a telephone interview for all sample units that are defined as regular occupied housing units or occupied usual residence elsewhere; however, the FR must conduct personal visit interviews for all sample units new to the survey. The FRs conduct the following types of interviews:

- **Regular occupied interview:** The sample unit is a housing unit and it is occupied by one or more persons whose usual place of residence is the sample unit.
- **URE occupied interview:** The sample unit is a housing unit and it is occupied entirely by persons who all have a usual residence elsewhere.
- **Vacant interview:** The sample unit is an unoccupied housing unit that has the interior protected against the elements, does **not** meet the AHS definition of condemned or to be demolished, and is not being used for commercial, farm or other nonresidential purposes
- **Various types of noninterviews:** Refusals, No one home, etc.

For the AHS regular interview, any knowledgeable adult household member 16 years of age or older is technically eligible to act as the respondent. However, FRs are instructed to try to interview the most knowledgeable household member; that is, one who appears to know--or might reasonably be expected to know--the answers to all or the majority of the questions. This will frequently be the reference person or his/her spouse. If no knowledgeable household member 16 years of age or older is available, FRs try to determine from some reliable source when an eligible respondent will be available for interview. We do not allow proxy respondents. If the occupants of the sample unit do not understand or speak English, FRs try to conduct interviews through an interpreter. The interpreter must translate the questions and **not** answer them from personal knowledge or observation. When conducting an interview in which an interpreter is needed because of a language problem, the FR asks the respondent if he/she is willing to have another person act as interpreter. If the respondent objects or an FR cannot locate an interpreter nearby at the time of the interview, the FR calls the office to see if another FR who speaks the respondent's language can conduct the interview later.

We also conduct a reinterview operation for the AHS. Reinterview is a means of independently evaluating the FR's on-the-job performance. A RO supervisor or supervisory FR will reinterview part of the FR's assignment by interviewing some of the

same households that he/she interviewed originally. The re-interviewer compares reinterview answers with the original answers, identifies differences, and tries to determine reasons for the differences. FRs will not know beforehand which sample units will be included in the reinterview and may be contacted following reinterview to review the results. Errors will be discussed and appropriate concepts and procedures reviewed. If the extent and type of errors are severe enough, the RO will schedule an additional observation and/or retraining.

In addition to our reinterview program, we use a web-based tool called Performance AND Data Analysis (PANDA) to track the progress and performance of each FR during the AHS, and to provide an early indication of the quality of specific data items. PANDA provides critical and time sensitive data to Census Headquarters and the RO staff to see if the FRs are having difficulty with concepts or are falsifying data so action can be taken to correct the problem as soon as possible. Analysts can view the data in PANDA at the RO level, the FR level, and at the individual case level. For the AHS metropolitan sample, we can also view the data at the MSA level within the RO.

The FRs transmit data to Census Headquarters on a nightly basis.