

The Census Bureau plans to conduct a usability test of the existing American FactFinder (AFF) Web site under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). The objective of this research is to identify issues that are problematic and frustrating to the user. AFF is a free online tool that allows users to find, customize and download Census information. It is available to the public, and a multitude of diverse users search the site seeking a vast range of information.

The developers of the AFF are currently working on a new release of the site. This study is intended to be a “baseline” on the current version of the site to understand how it performs from the user’s perspective. Once the new site is deployed, sometime in 2011 or 2012, the team intends to run the same usability study and, thus, be able to compare the performance of the new site in respect to the performance of the old site (i.e., the now-current site). We will submit a separate approval request for that testing.

Between November and January 2008, we will interview 20 external participants from the Washington DC metropolitan area. The participants we recruit will be novice users of Census data but must have a minimum of one year of Internet experience and use the Internet at least three times a week to search for information. Participants will be recruited from the Usability Lab database, which is composed of people from the metropolitan DC area who volunteered to participate after responding to a craigslist.com posting or an ad in a local newspaper. Participants will come to the Usability Lab at the Census Bureau for the study and will be compensated \$40.00 for their participation.

Participants will be given an initial questionnaire about their Internet experience and some demographic characteristics. Then each participant will be given a set of tasks for the Web site. Tasks will be randomized such that no participant will receive the tasks in the same order.

Participants will be asked to think-aloud while they are working on the tasks, and they will also provide feedback about the Web site during a debriefing at the conclusion of the session. Participants will be prompted to think-aloud when they fall silent. Finally, participants will be asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire designed to measure their satisfaction with the new version of the AFF site. Subjective satisfaction ratings will be collected for such design elements as the layout of page, ease of finding information, and use of Census jargon. A copy of the initial questionnaire, the satisfaction questionnaire, and the task sets are enclosed.

We estimate that users will spend one hour on average taking the study, including time spent working on the demographic and satisfaction questions, the tasks and the debriefing. Thus, the total estimated respondent burden for this test is 20 hours.

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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