

The Census Bureau plans to conduct a series of iterative usability tests on the new American FactFinder (AFF) Web site 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 recently released a new version of the application and it has a number of usability issues that they are committed to address. Over a period of a year (end of 2011 to end of 2012) the AFF development team will be working with the usability team to take the findings of the usability study and implement a better design for their users. This nature of this project is iterative and ongoing, such that each round of testing will build on the prior round and new components of the interface-design will be created and tested.

Between October 2011 and September 2012, we will conduct a number of iterative rounds of usability tests. In each round of testing we plan to recruit 6 to 9 external participants from the Washington DC metropolitan region. This letter is about the first iterative usability test in the series of the study. We plan to recruit 6 participants in November and December 2011 on the html wireframes, and 9 participants in January and February 2012 once the tested wireframe design goes live. The participants we recruit will be a mix of novice and expert users of Census data. All participants will have a minimum of one year 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 also be recruited by word of mouth, and Census Partner organizations. 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 complete an electronic initial questionnaire about their computer use, 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. At the conclusion of the session, participants will be asked to complete a 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. Following the satisfaction questionnaire, the test administrator will ask final debriefing questions about the user interface.

A copy of the print version of the initial questionnaire, the satisfaction questionnaire, participant tasks and debriefing questions are all 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 portion is 15 hours.

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

Erica Olmsted-Hawala
Center for Survey Methods Research
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, D.C. 20233
(301) 763-4893
Erica.L.Olmsted.Hawala@census.gov