



Date: March 14, 2011

To: Nathan Dietz  
Corporation for National and Community Service

CC: JoAnn Jastrzab  
Abt Associates

Courtney Kennedy  
Abt Associates

From: Benjamin Phillips  
Abt SRBI

Johnny Blair  
Abt Associates

RE: Results of Respondent Debriefing Items

This memo summarizes answers to the respondent debriefing items for cognitive testing for the November 2011 Civic Engagement Supplement (CES) to the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by Abt Associates on behalf of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNS). The cognitive testing protocol is found in Appendix A.

## Results

Overall, the survey was well received. Respondents felt most questions were easy to answer and generally reported being interested in question topics. There was little consensus on which questions might be sensitive. The item most consistently mentioned as problematic was Q21 (trust in various institutions), with a number of respondents feeling that it was difficult to provide an answer for categories of institutions where they may be confident in some but not all institutions and difficulties with certain categories of institutions asked about.

*Overall, would say the survey questions were easy or difficult to answer?*

Respondents felt that the majority of the questions were generally easy overall ("Majority pretty much easy;" "Did a good job;" "Very easy;" "Good overall;" "Easy and clear;" "Easy, made sense and were clear;" "Mostly easy.") Exceptions that were specifically mentioned were length/comprehensibility (mentioned by two respondents), difficult comparisons, and being overly broad (mentioned by single respondents). One respondent who mentioned length and comprehensibility felt that some questions

“need to break down, get to the point”—what did the questions want to find out, giving as an example Q5, particularly regarding Q5(a) community organizations. The other respondent felt that “some questions were too long,” with the question about “labor organizations” (presumably Q21(d)) as an example. The respondent who raised problems with comparisons felt it was “difficult to compare one thing to another,” giving Q21, confidence in institutions in the country, as an example: it may not “be a true picture with ‘some.’” A similar point was made by another respondent, who felt he had to average his response options. These tie in with feedback about Q18 (trust some neighbors and not others) and Q21 (feel one way about some institutions and not others). The respondent who felt questions were overly broad thought that they could be “more specific.”

*Which questions did you have to think about the most to decide on an answer?*

Respondents gave various answers. The respondents noted above who referred to community organizations (Q5(a)) and labor organizations (Q21(d), “very lengthy”) again referenced these questions. Two respondents mentioned questions on media (presumably Q21(e)-(g)). One respondent felt that “There is so much media to consider. It is hard to break it down.” The other had problems with Q21(g), noting that s/he was “not too fond of blogging. Sometimes amusing, but not information you can use.” In the Q21 series another respondent felt that s/he didn’t know anything about the scientific community (Q21(h)). This respondent also had difficulties answering about her/his neighborhood, having just moved there. Another respondent had questions about the type of contact intended by some questions: In Q5 (participation in various kind of organizations), what did “participation” entail? In Q15, what did “communication” with neighbors entail, a simple nod hello? (The item actually referred to talking with neighbors. The respondent lived in a small neighborhood where there was not a lot of contact.)

*Which questions or topics were [most/least] interesting to you?*

Respondents were very positive about the topics, with most replying that the questions were “most”/“mostly” interesting. The exception was a respondent who felt they were “all interesting.” It should be noted, however, that respondents were recruited from a pool that had expressed interest in participation in surveys. In general, respondents mentioned questions about the social or political topics as being of interest, appreciated the lack of “personal” questions (however, respondents were not asked the core CPS items), and appeared to like the fact that these were different from typical survey questions. Questions singled out as for comment were items about respondents’ neighborhoods (three respondents found them interesting, one felt they were the least interesting of those asked) and visiting neighbors’ homes (Q17; one respondent). Questions about how people obtained news were also of interest to one respondent. Another respondent mentioned being most interested in the confidence questions (Q21).

*Do you think there are there questions people would find difficult?*

There were few consistent themes in answers about which questions people might find it difficult to respond to. One response shared by two respondents was that the survey would only be difficult for non-English speakers/people with English as a second language. Another two mentioned the need to think about responses: “Some people might have to think a minute;” “Depends on how much people think about these things.” A single respondent mentioned religious institutions: “Maybe religions. I go by what I have seen. Another respondent thought questions about neighbors might be difficult “because people have gotten out of the habit of knowing their neighbors.” I can’t speak for anyone else.” Q5(b), participation in civil service organizations like the American Legion and Lions Club, was mentioned by one respondent who was concerned that people would not know the American Legion. This respondent also mentioned Q21(g) regarding “citizen media.” A respondent, apparently in response to Q8 (work on a community project), felt that “the community part” was difficult: “I was thinking as an individual, do I do things for community vs. being part of church when they do things for the community.” Finally, a respondent saw multiple choice questions as a problem, saying that there were “too many” and “it would be hard for people to narrow them down.”

*Do you think there are questions that people would find sensitive?*

Several questions were singled out as being sensitive by some respondents. Two respondents mentioned questions about the number of people one could rely on in an emergency (Q19): “You’re asking them to size up, define the relationship. You’re telling on yourself [by saying] who you count on.” Two respondents felt questions about neighbors might be sensitive. One suggested that this might be because people might not know if they’re not involved in the neighborhood. The other suggested reaffirming to respondents that their answers were confidential. Two respondents felt questions on political issues might be sensitive. One simply mentioned “political activities,” while the other mentioned volunteering for a campaign. Single respondents mentioned questions about religious issues, about friends, and about participating in charitable walks. Another respondent articulated concerns about social desirability in general terms, feeling that “people would feel bad saying that they hadn’t done anything.” Four respondents explicitly stated that no items were sensitive.

**Appendix A: Cognitive Testing Protocol****Testing Protocol**

Participant ID #: |\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|

Interview Date: |\_|\_|\_| / |\_|\_|\_| / |2|0|1|1| (mm/dd/yyyy)

Interviewer Initials: |\_|\_|

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ AM / PM

End Time: \_\_\_\_\_ AM / PM

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**Section 1: Interviewer: Read/ Paraphrase the following text:**

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for Abt Associates, a research company that does work under contract mainly for federal agencies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study.

**Human subjects requirement (*prior to starting the recorder*)**

**Confidentiality:** Before we begin, I need to be sure you understand that our session today is completely confidential. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can decline to answer any particular question.

**Incentive:** In appreciation for your participation, you will receive an American Express gift card for \$40.

**Recording:** So I don't have to rely on my memory later on, this session is being video recorded. That way, I can focus today on what you're saying rather than having to concentrate on taking notes.

**Observers:** Some members of our research team may be observing the interview.

**\*\* HAVE PARTICIPANT READ THE CONSENT FORM\*\***

Before you sign this, do you have questions or see anything that is not clear?

**\*\* HAVE PARTICIPANT SIGN THE CONSENT FORM\*\***

***START RECORDING***

**Describe the interview objectives and procedures. (This should begin a conversational interaction with the respondent; it is not necessary to read these descriptions verbatim.):**

Before I go into the details of what we'll be doing, I'd like you to tell me what you were told about why you were asked to come in today.

**(INTERVIEWER: Confirm respondent's understanding if it is correct. If there are misconceptions, let the respondent know that you'll clarify some things as you describe the plan for the interview session.)**

In order to help us improve our surveys, we turn to people like you to find out if our questions make sense and are fairly easy to understand and answer. We have found that the best way to do that is to actually conduct the survey with people and see how it works for them. So you will be helping us test a questionnaire from one of our surveys.

How: I want you to answer the questions exactly the way you would if an interviewer had come to your home for an interview, but with one major difference: I would like you to tell me your thoughts as you decide on your answers.

Think aloud: I would like you to think aloud as you answer the questions. I am interested in your answers, but I am also interested in the thoughts that occur to you as you answer the questions. I would like you to tell me everything that you are thinking and feeling as you go about answering each question.

I don't want you to try to plan what you say. Whatever you're thinking as you decide on your answer is what I'd like to hear.

Usually, it helps to try this out once or twice before we get to the survey questions.

I'd like for you to think aloud as you decide how to answer the question: "How many windows are there in your house or apartment?"

**(INTERVIEWER: Use this second practice question if necessary: "Thinking about yesterday, starting with the time you got up until you went to bed, how many phone calls did you make?")**

Probes: As we go through the survey, from time to time I'll ask you some questions about your answers, or about the questions themselves. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

I really want to hear your opinions and reactions, so don't hesitate to speak up whenever something is unclear, is hard to answer, or doesn't seem to apply to you.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

**(INTERVIEWER: Wait for respondent to complete thinking aloud or commenting before asking the probes.)**

Q1 In any election, some people are not able to vote because they are sick or busy or have some other reason, and others do not want to vote. Thinking about recent local elections, have you voted in all of them, most of them, some of them, or none?

- (1) All of them
- (2) Most of them
- (3) Some of them
- (4) None

**Probe: What do you think of as being a “local election”?**

**Probe: What did you consider as being “recent” in this question?**

Q2 I am going to read a list of things some people have done to express their views. Please tell me whether or not you have done any of the following in the last 12 months, that is between November 2010 and now:

(a) Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to express your opinion?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

(b) Bought or boycotted a certain product or service because of the social or political values of the company that provides it?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

**No probes. Preexisting questions.**

(c) Gave money to a candidate, party, or political organization?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

**Probe: IF YES: Can you tell me about what gave to?**

**Probe: IF NO: What kinds of things do you think this question is asking about?**

Q3 I'm going to read to you a list of different Internet technologies. Please say whether you have used each of these to express your opinions about political or social or community issues within the last 12 months:

**(INTERVIEWER: Repeat as necessary: *Have you used this within the last 12 months to express your opinions about political or social or community issues?*)**

(a) Email

(1) Yes

(2) No

(b) Text messaging

(1) Yes

(2) No

(c) Chat room

(1) Yes

(2) No

(d) A social networking site like Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter

(1) Yes

(2) No

(e) My own blog

(1) Yes

(2) No

(f) Commenting or writing on someone else's blog

(1) Yes

(2) No

**Probe: For selected items (or a subset): Can you tell me what you used [ ] for?**

**Generic follow-up probe (if necessary): What (other) kinds of [social / community] issues have you expressed opinions about?**

**Probe: For unselected items (or subset): Have you used [ ] for something other than giving your opinions about a political or social issue?**

Q4 Have you watched an online video that supports or opposes a candidate, party, political organization, or public policy campaign in the past 12 months, that is between November 2010 and now?

(1) Yes

(2) No

**Probe: Would you tell me, in your own words, what this question wants to find out?**

**Probe: What do you think an online video means in this question?**

Q5 Next, I will give you a list of types of groups or organizations in which people sometimes participate. Have you participated in any of these groups during the last 12 months, that is between November 2010 and now:

(a) A school group, neighborhood, or community association such as PTA or neighborhood watch groups?

(1) Yes

(2) No

(b) A service or civic organization such as American Legion or Lions Club?

(1) Yes

(2) No

(c) A sports or recreation organization such as a soccer club or tennis club?

(1) Yes

(2) No

(d) A church, synagogue, mosque or other religious institution or organization, NOT COUNTING your attendance at religious services?

(1) Yes

(2) No

(e) Any other type of organization that I have not mentioned?

(1) Yes *Continue*

(2) No *Skip to Q7*

**No probes. Preexisting questions.**



Q6 What type of organization is that?

Record verbatim

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q7 In the last 12 months, between November 2010 and now, have you been an officer or served on a committee of any group or organization?

(1) Yes

(2) No

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q8 Have you worked on a community project in the past 12 months?

(1) Yes

(2) No

**Probe: IF YES: Can you tell me a little about the project(s) you worked on?**

**Probe: IF NO: What sorts of things do you think the question means by “community project”?**

Q9 Within the past twelve months, have you personally walked, ran, or bicycled or done anything else for a charitable cause? This is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event.

(1) Yes

(2) No

**Probe: IF YES: Can you tell me about what you did?**

**Follow-up probe (if not volunteered): What was the charitable cause?**

**Probe: IF NO: What kinds of events do you think this question is asking about?**

Q10 In the last 12 months, have you volunteered for a political organization or candidates running for office?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

**Probe: IF YES: Can you describe what you did as a volunteer?**

**Probe: IF NO: What do you think the question means by “volunteered for a political organization”?**

Q11 These next questions ask how often you did something during a TYPICAL MONTH in the past year. How often were politics discussed when communicating with family and friends, -- basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day *Skip to*
- (2) A few times a week *Q13*
- (3) A few times a month *if one*
- (4) Once a month *person*
- (5) Not at all *household*

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q12 How often did you eat dinner with any of the other members of your household -- basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q13 During a TYPICAL MONTH in the past year, how often, if at all, did you spend time visiting friends—basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

**Probe: Would you tell me, in your own words, what this question wants to find out?**

Q14 During a TYPICAL MONTH in the past year, how often, if at all, did you communicate with friends and family by email or on the internet -- basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q15 How often did you talk with any of your neighbors -- basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q16 How often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other? By favors we mean such things as watching each other's children, helping with shopping, house sitting, lending garden or house tools, and other small acts of kindness -- basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q17 During a TYPICAL MONTH in the past year, how often, if at all, were you in the home of a neighbor--basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

**Probe: How long have you lived at your current address?**

**Follow-up [if less than a year]: Did you think mostly about your current neighborhood, your last neighborhood, or both neighborhoods?**

**Probe: Would you tell me, in your own words, what this question wants to find out?**

Q18 We'd like to know how much you trust people in your neighborhood. Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust them a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?

- (1) A lot
- (2) Some
- (3) Only a little
- (4) Not at all

**Probe:** (Unless the respondent answered "Not at all") How did you decide on [choice] rather than [next closest option]?

**Probe:** What sorts of things come to mind when you hear "trust the people in your neighborhood"?

**Probe:** What do you think of as "your neighborhood"?

**Probe:** What comes to mind when you hear "people in your neighborhood"?

Q19 How many friends or family members do you have, if any, whom you could count on in an emergency? Don't worry if your answer is not exact, just give me your best estimate.

Accept integers 0 through 9999

**Probe:** What sorts of things do you think the question means by "emergency"?

**Probe:** What does "count on" mean to you in this question?

**Probe:** How many of the [number >1 mentioned] are [friends/family]?

**Probe:** Do any live outside your neighborhood?

Q20 I am going to read some ways that people get news and information. Please tell me how often you did each of the following during a TYPICAL MONTH in the past year:

(a) Read a newspaper in print or on the Internet - basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?

- (1) Basically every day
- (2) A few times a week
- (3) A few times a month
- (4) Once a month
- (5) Not at all

- (b) Read news magazines such as Newsweek or Time, in print or on the Internet - basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?
- (1) Basically every day
  - (2) A few times a week
  - (3) A few times a month
  - (4) Once a month
  - (5) Not at all
- (c) Watch the news on television or get news from television internet sites - basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?
- (1) Basically every day
  - (2) A few times a week
  - (3) A few times a month
  - (4) Once a month
  - (5) Not at all
- (d) Listen to the news on radio or get news from radio internet sites - basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?
- (1) Basically every day
  - (2) A few times a week
  - (3) A few times a month
  - (4) Once a month
  - (5) Not at all
- (e) Obtain news from any other Internet sources that we have not previously asked about such as blogs, chat rooms, or independent news services - basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?
- (1) Basically every day
  - (2) A few times a week
  - (3) A few times a month
  - (4) Once a month
  - (5) Not at all

**No probes. Preexisting questions.**

Q21 I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?

**[INTERVIEWER: Repeat the response options unless the respondent starts to answer before you read them; or if the respondent appears to forget the options.]**

(a) Banks and financial institutions

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(b) Major companies

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(c) Small and local businesses

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(d) Organized labor

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(e) The print media, such as newspapers and news magazines

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(f) Electronic news media, such as television and cable news

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(g) Independent or citizen media, such as an online blog

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(h) The scientific community

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(i) Public schools

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

(j) Religious institutions

- (1) Great deal of confidence
- (2) Some confidence
- (3) Hardly any confidence

**Probe: Who would you think of as “the people running” the scientific community?**

**Probe: (Use especially if respondent usually chose the middle category) If you really didn’t have an opinion about the people running [insert from list that was answered “some”], how would you have answered?**

**Probe: What were you thinking when you said you had [response choice] in [insert from list]?**

**Probe: What do you think the question means by “citizen media”?**

**Probe: How would you answer about [insert from list] if you had a great deal of confidence in some of the people running [insert from list] but hardly any confidence in others?**



Q22 How would you describe your overall state of health these days: Would you say it is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

- (1) Excellent
- (2) Very good
- (3) Good
- (4) Fair
- (5) Poor

**No probes. Preexisting question.**

Q23 On the following scale, how would you describe the quality of your life overall? Excellent, good, fair, poor, or very poor?

- (1) Excellent
- (2) Good
- (3) Fair
- (4) Poor
- (5) Very poor

**Probe: What did you think the question means by “the quality of your life overall”?**

### ***DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS***

**Overall, would say the survey questions were easy or difficult to answer?**

**Follow-up: Why?**

**Which questions did you have to think about the most to decide on an answer?**

**Follow-up: Why was that?**

**Which questions or topics were [most/least] interesting to you?**

**Do you think there are questions people would find difficult?**

**Follow-up: Which ones?**

**Follow-up: Why?**

**Do you think there are questions that people would find sensitive?**

**Follow-up: Which ones?**

**Follow-up: Why?**