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PART B: COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

The Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is requesting Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval to collect data from the public for the Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care study. Senate report language accompanying the 2009 Appropriation for HUD directed the Secretary to “conduct an evaluation of the housing models that are most effective in preventing and ending homelessness for youth aged 16-24.” HUD has decided to focus this specific research effort on the housing needs of the up to 30,000 youth who “age out” of the foster care system each year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2009).

As part of the project, HUD plans to conduct a web-based survey of public housing agencies (PHAs) and their partnering public child welfare agencies (PCWAs) in communities that use Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers to identify which communities allocate vouchers to youth aging out of foster care and obtain information on how FUP vouchers work for this population. Topics covered in the survey include community and agency context, the rationale for choosing to allocate FUP vouchers to eligible youth, the process for helping youth secure housing with the voucher, and progress and challenges providing FUP vouchers to eligible youth.

1. Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods

PHAs with a current allotment of FUP vouchers may allocate them either to FUP-eligible families with children and/or FUP-eligible foster youth aging out of care. Because HUD is uncertain as to which PHAs are allocating FUP vouchers to foster youth, the PHA survey sample will comprise the universe of approximately 300 PHAs that, according to HUD records, currently administer the Family Unification Program. HUD will provide the contractor with contact information for each of the 300 PHAs to be surveyed. We estimate that roughly half of all PHAs administering FUP allocate FUP vouchers to youth aging out of foster care, about 150.

While most PHAs are local-level entities, some are state or regional agencies that contract with one or more local organizations; some local PHAs also may contract out the administration of FUP vouchers to other organizations. The number of PHAs contracting with local agencies or other organizations is expected to total 30 or fewer. The state and regional PHAs that may have partnering agencies will be instructed to enlist the help of their largest partner to complete the survey. Therefore, only one survey is expected to be completed on behalf of each of the 300 PHAs in the sample.

Because contact information for the set of PCWAs that are partnering with the 300 PHAs administering FUP vouchers is not stored in any easily accessible format, the identification of the PCWA partner for each PHA is included as part of the survey instrument that will be administered to the

PHA. In this way, a database of PCWA contacts will be built through the administration of the PHA survey. Only PHA respondents who are currently administering FUP vouchers to youth (estimated to be about 150) will be asked to identify the PCWAs with which they partner, and these PCWAs will also be surveyed. We expect that there will be no more than one PCWA partnering with each such PHA, so we expect the respondent pool of PCWAs to total approximately 150. Thus, the total respondent pool for the survey, including eligible PHAs and PCWAs, is expected to be approximately 450 agencies. The data collected from the survey will provide important information that cannot be obtained through existing HUD documents or other sources. This kind of survey has not been conducted previously.

The estimated response rate is 80 percent for PHAs and 75 percent for PCWAs invited to complete the survey. The subject matter and purpose of the survey are salient to PHAs and PCWAs. For these reasons, a high response rate to this survey is expected among these groups. A single PCWA may be partnered with multiple PHAs. In such cases, the same PCWA would appear more than once in the sampling frame; however, no PCWA will be asked to complete the survey for more than one partnering PHAs (we will ask PCWAs who partner with more than one PHA to answer the survey focusing on the PHA they have referred the most foster youth to in the past 18 months). Additionally, while the survey content will be very relevant to PCWAs, and PHAs and PCWAs are required to collaborate to administer FUP, these partners may not feel as connected to the survey sponsor as do PHAs. This is another reason PCWAs are expected to have a slightly lower response rate than the initial sample of PHAs.

2. Procedures for Collecting the Information

For the survey of PHAs and PCWAs, the mode of data collection is a web-based survey instrument. The contractor will program, test, and implement the web-based survey questionnaire. A web instrument will offer the easiest means of providing data, as it will be programmed to automatically skip questions not relevant to the respondent. The instrument will also allow respondents to complete the survey at a time convenient to them without the risk of their losing a paper survey questionnaire. Since the instruments will automatically skip to the next appropriate question based on a respondent's answers, it will also provide high-quality data. If respondents are unable to complete the survey in one sitting, they may save their place in the survey and return to the questionnaire at another time. To lessen respondent burden, in addition to the web instrument, participants may request a hard copy questionnaire or receive telephone assistance in completing the survey from the contractor's facility liaison.

The field period for this survey will be 16 weeks, with the first 8 weeks scheduled for fielding the PHA population, followed by 8 weeks for fielding the PCWAs named by the PHA respondents as partner agencies. At the start of the field period, the contractor will send an advance letter from HUD to

the PHAs alerting them to the survey and describing its purpose. Within one week, the contractor will email an invitation to each PHA that will include a unique URL, username, and password to access the web-based questionnaire. The unique username will allow tracking of who responded and who will require additional follow up. The contractor will send email reminders (up to four) to nonrespondents, beginning in the second week of the field period. Although all agency administrators will have email and Internet access, some may prefer to complete the questionnaire by telephone. During reminder calls (up to two) in weeks 4 and 6, trained interviewers from the contractor's facility will call the nonrespondents to remind them of the survey and offer to complete it by telephone. If needed, one reminder will be sent by mail in the fifth week of the fielding period. After the PHA fielding is complete, the same procedures will be used to field the PCWA sample identified by their PHA partners. Table B.1 describes the fielding schedule for this survey.

Table B.1. Fielding Schedule for the PHA/PCWA Survey

Week	Activity for Web-Based Survey of PHAs and PCWAs
0	Advance letter from HUD
1	Email invitation
2	Email reminder
3	Email reminder
4	Telephone reminder
5	Mail and email reminders
6	Telephone reminder
7	Email reminder from project officer
8	Final email reminder

Data security. The contractor has a secure server for online data collection utilizing its existing and continuously tested web-survey infrastructure. This infrastructure features the use of HTTPS (secure socket, encrypted) data communication; authentication (login and password); firewalls; and multiple layers of servers, all implemented on a mixture of platforms and systems to minimize vulnerability to security breaches.

Hosting on an HTTPS site ensures that data are transmitted using 128-bit encryption so that transmissions intercepted by unauthorized users cannot be read as plain text. This security measure is in addition to standard password authentication that precludes unauthorized users from accessing the web application.

The contractor has established data security plans for handling all data during all phases of survey execution and data processing for the surveys it conducts. Its existing plans meet the requirements of U.S. federal government agencies and are continually reviewed in the light of new government requirements and survey needs. Such security is based on (1) exacting company policy promulgated by the highest corporate officers in consultation with systems staff and outside consultants, (2) a secure systems infrastructure that is continually monitored and evaluated with respect to security risks, and (3) secure work practices of an informed staff that take all necessary precautions when dealing with confidential data.

Confidential data are kept in study-specific folders to which only the minimum number of staff members are allowed access. All survey data, as well as qualitative data that are electronically coded, are backed up continuously and preserved on secure media.

3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse

HUD expects the web-based survey of PHAs to achieve at least an 80 percent response rate and to achieve a response rate of 75 percent among sampled PCWAs. As described above, since the subject matter and purpose of the survey are highly salient to the universe of PHAs, HUD expects a high response rate among this group. In addition, the link between the PCWAs and HUD is not as close as that between HUD and the PHAs; thus, the survey sponsorship (by HUD) may not have as large an impact on the PCWAs as on the PHAs—another reason the response rate might be lower for this group.

In addition to survey topic salience, numerous methods will be used to encourage response. The initial message to PHAs and PCWAs will be produced on HUD letterhead to heighten the salience of the survey request and activate the norm of reciprocity. We will highlight the collaboration between HUD and the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in our materials to PCWAs.

The contractor will also set up a 1-800 toll free helpline and an email address dedicated to survey help. This phone and email contact information will be made available to sample members in the advance letter, in the email invitation, and in email reminders. During telephone reminder calls, this information will also be provided.

The contractor will send email reminders (up to four) to nonrespondents, beginning in the second week of the fielding period. The contractor will also place reminder calls to nonrespondents. Although all sample members will have email and Internet access, some may prefer to complete the questionnaire by telephone. During reminder calls (up to two) in weeks 4 and 6, trained interviewers from the contractor's facility will call investigators to remind them of the survey and offer to complete it by telephone. While the primary purpose of the follow-up calls will be to encourage participation, the callers will also offer to assist sample members over the phone to complete the survey. If needed, a mailed reminder will be sent during the fifth week of the fielding period.

Because the expected response rate for the PCWA web survey is less than 80 percent, the contractor will analyze nonresponse patterns using whatever relevant information is known about both respondents and nonrespondents. The contractor will compare the characteristics of respondents, nonrespondents, and the total attempted sample to evaluate the risk for nonresponse bias of estimates, which cannot be measured directly.

The contractor will review frequencies early on to identify any nonresponse patterns. If the data are submitted by mail or fax, they will be

keyed into the web instrument and the frequencies checked in the same way as for web-collected data.

4. Tests of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken

The survey questionnaire for the web-based survey of PHAs and PCWAs will be pretested in March 2012. Results from the pretest will be reported to OMB once they are available.

The survey pretest will be designed to determine whether the information being requested in the web-based survey is reasonable, clearly stated in coherent and unambiguous language, and collected in the least burdensome way possible. Each survey questionnaire will be pretested with fewer than 10 respondents to learn about problems they might experience in providing the requested information and to make appropriate changes to the questionnaire. Pretest responses and comments to the survey questionnaires will be collected by mail to simulate the self-administration mode of the survey. Contractor staff will follow up with pretest respondents by telephone to learn their reactions and determine how to improve survey language. The pretest will also establish the average interview length, currently estimated at 30 minutes per respondent. The results of the pretest will be used to revise the questionnaire.

5. Individuals Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data

No individuals outside of the project were consulted on statistical aspects of the design. HUD has contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct this project. Table B.2 identifies the individuals at this organization who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing the data. Anne Fletcher, the Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) for the contract providing funding for the project, will be responsible for receiving and approving all contract deliverables. Her contact information also is included in Table B.2.

Table B.2. Individuals Responsible for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection and Analysis

Name	Title (Project Role)	Organizational Affiliation and Address	Phone Number
Debra Wright	Associate Director, Survey Research (Data collection design, survey data collection management)	Mathematica Policy Research 1100 1st St, NE, 12th Floor Washington, DC 20002	(202) 554-7576
Mark E. Courtney	Senior Researcher (Data collection design, analysis)	Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago 1313 E 60th Street Chicago, IL 60637	(773) 256-5162
Keri-Nicole Dillman	Researcher (Data collection design,	Mathematica Policy Research 20 Paulina Street, Apt. 1	(646) 265-2623

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Name	Title (Project Role)	Organizational Affiliation and Address	Phone Number
	analysis)	Somerville, MA 02144	
Robin Dion	Senior Researcher (Project director, data collection design, analysis)	Mathematica Policy Research 1100 1st Street, NE, 12th Floor Washington, DC 20002-4221	(202) 484-5262
Amy Dworsky	Senior researcher (Data collection design, analysis)	Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago 1313 E 60th Street Chicago, IL 60637	(773) 256-5164
Shilpa Khambhati	Systems Analyst (IS lead)	Mathematica Policy Research P.O. Box 2393 Princeton, NJ 08543-2393	(609) 936-2770
Rebecca Kleinman	Research Analyst (Site visit data collection, analysis)	Mathematica Policy Research 1100 1st Street, NE, 12th Floor Washington, DC 20002-4221	(202) 250-3583
Sharon M. McGroder	Senior Researcher (Data collection design, analysis)	Mathematica Policy Research 1100 1st Street, NE, 12th Floor Washington, DC 20002-4221	(202) 554-7563
Chrissie Grover-Roybal	Survey Associate (Survey data collection management)	Mathematica Policy Research 505 14th Street, Suite 800 Oakland, CA 94612	(510) 830-3723
Anne Fletcher	Project Officer	U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Office of Policy Development & Research 451 7th Street, SW, Room 8120 Washington, DC 20140	(202) 402-4347

REFERENCES

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. AFCARS report #16: Preliminary estimates for FY 2008 as of October 2009. Washington, DC, 2009.