

**Memorandum**

**Date:** October 18, 2010

**To:** Julie Wise, OMB Desk Officer, Food and Nutrition Service

**Through:** Rachele Ragland Green, Food and Nutrition Service, Information Clearance Officer; Ruth Brown OCIO Desk Officer

**From:** Judy Wilson, Staff Director, Senior Nutrition Advisor  
USDA – Food and Nutrition Service

**Re:** Under Approved Generic OMB Clearance No. 0584-0524  
Request Approval to Perform Formative Research –  
FNS Core Nutrition Messages Concept Testing

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The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services is requesting approval for formative research under Approved Generic OMB Clearance No. 0584-0524.

We will complete this research in two phases; round one is scheduled for October 2010 (formative round), and round two in February 2011 (evaluative round). This package addresses both rounds of research. As it relates to testing stimuli and associated handouts, this package includes versions for the first round only. In addition, testing stimuli and associated handouts for the second round will be developed following the first round, and submitted prior to the testing scheduled for February 2011.

The following information is provided for your review:

1. **Title of Project:** FNS Core Nutrition Messages and Supporting Content Testing
2. **Control Number:** 0584-0524
3. **Public affected by this Project:** Individuals
  - Mothers with at least one child 2-10 years old who reside in households participating in one or more of the nutrition assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, Free or Reduced-price School Lunch) and/or whose income falls at or below 185% of the Federal poverty line (i.e., are eligible to participate in such programs).
  - Children, 8 to 10 years old, who reside in a household whose income falls at or below 185% of the Federal poverty line.
  - Parents of children 8 to 10 years old will respond to questions on the screener for their kids, and will sign parental consent and confidentiality forms.

See the Methodology/Research Design section for an outline of the number of focus groups for each audience. Research will be conducted only with English-speaking audiences.

4. Number of respondents:

**Screener\***

Target audience	Number of Persons – Formative Round (October 2010)	Number of Persons – Evaluative Round (February 2011)
Low-income mothers	1,080	2,592
Low-income children (8-10 years)	816	720
Parents of low-income children	816	720
Total	2,712	4,032

\*Includes non-responders. Generally, for every 12 respondents, 11 will not complete the entire screener (may terminate after introduction or after one of the other questions).

**Focus Groups\***

Target audience	Number of groups	Desired Number of participants per group	Total number of participants
<i>Low-income mothers</i>			
Formative Round (October 2010)	18	3	54
Evaluative Round (February 2011)	18	8	144
<i>Low-income children (8-10 years)</i>			
Formative Round (October 2010)	6	6	36
Evaluative Round (February 2011)	6	6	36
Total	48	Not Applicable	270

\* Formative round groups with mothers will recruit 5 to seat 3. Evaluative round groups with mothers will recruit 12 to seat 8. Groups with children will recruit 10-12 to seat 6.

5. Time needed per response:

**Time Needed Per Screening Questionnaire\***

Target audience	Time (minutes)	Time (hours)
Low-income mothers	15	0.25
Low-income children (8-10 years)	4.8	0.08
Parents of low-income children	10.2	0.17

\*The time per response is an average of the response per respondent. Respondents may be terminated by FNS due to the response to a question or respondent may choose to terminate at any point during the screening (before the first question, after the introduction or at the end of the screener).

**Time Needed Per Focus Group**

Target audience	Time (minutes)	Time (hours)
Low-income mothers	90	1.5
Low-income children (8-10 years)	60	1

**6. Total Burden Hours on Public:**

(a) Affected Public	Respondent Type	(b) Survey Instruments	(c) No. Respondents	(d) Frequency of Responses	(e) Est. Total Annual Responses per Respondent (d x e)	(f) Hours Per Response	(g) Total Burden (f x g)
<b>Reporting Burden</b>	<b>Formative Round</b>	<b>October 2010</b>					
<b>Individuals &amp; Households</b>	Mothers	* Screeners Questionnaire	1,080.00	1.00	1,080.00	0.25	270.00
	Mothers	Focus Group	54.00**	1.00	54.00	1.50	81.00
	Children (8-10 YRS)	* Screeners Questionnaire	816.00	1.00	816.00	0.08	65.28
	Children (8-10 YRS)	Focus Group	36.00**	1.00	36.00	1.00	36.00
	Parents who sign consent forms	Confidentiality Agreement	816.00	1.00	816.00	0.17	138.72
<b>Total</b>			<b>2,712.00</b>		<b>2,802.00</b>		<b>591.00</b>

(a) Affected Public	Respondent Type	(b) Survey Instruments	(c) No. Respondents	(d) Frequency of Responses	(e) Est. Total Annual Responses per Respondent (d x e)	(f) Hours Per Response	(g) Total Burden (f x g)
<b>Reporting Burden</b>	<b>Evaluation Round</b>	<b>February 2011</b>					
<b>Individuals &amp; Households</b>	Mothers	Screeners Questionnaire	2,592.00	1.00	2,592.00	0.25	648.00
	Mothers	Focus Group	144.00**	1.00	144.00	1.50	216.00
	Children (8-10 YRS)	Screeners Questionnaire	720.00	1.00	720.00	0.08	57.60
	Children (8-10 YRS)	Focus Group	36.00**	1.00	36.00	1.00	36.00
	Parents who sign consent forms (	Confidentiality Agreement	720.00	1.00	720.00	0.17	122.40
<b>Total</b>			<b>4,032.00</b>		<b>4,212.00</b>		<b>1,080.00</b>

\*Includes burden for those answering none or part of the questions (See notes under 4-5). Includes burden for completing confidentiality agreement and parental consent, as applicable.

\*\* Values are not included in this column total since they are counted under screeners questionnaires.

**7. Project Purpose, Methodology and Design:**

## Background

The mission of FNS is to provide children and needy families better access to food and a more healthful diet through its nutrition assistance programs. FNS works to define and coordinate nutrition education across the nutrition assistance programs and to translate nutrition research into informational materials to further educate program participants and service providers.

As part of the Agency's effort to improve the nutrition of children and low-income families, FNS develops nutrition education messages (written in English) and related materials based upon the most recent edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid*. These nutrition messages are designed for low-income mothers and children 8-10 years old, taking into consideration the literacy skills, lifestyles and food resource limitations of FNS program participants. Although FNS notes that nutrition messages communicated in Spanish would have many applications, currently resources are insufficient to develop and test messages and supporting content in both English and Spanish.

Prior research provided valuable insight that allowed the Agency to formulate an initial series of messages and content that resonated with these target audiences. These messages were provided to nutrition educators nationwide via the guidebook, *Maximizing the Message: Helping Moms and Kids Make Healthier Food Choices* (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/default.htm>).

The core messages that are developed and tested in this research effort will add to the base of existing messages and will be implemented across FNS nutrition assistance programs, strengthening the Agency's ability to communicate nutrition information consistently and with greater intensity to program participants. The messages and supporting content will have applications for use in a variety of formats and settings, including printed materials, public service announcements, social marketing, individual and group sessions and other channels for communicating nutrition education to low-income Americans and children.

## Purpose

The purpose of the proposed research is to obtain feedback from low-income mothers and children 8-10 years old on specific nutrition education messages and supporting content that will be used in FNS' nutrition assistance programs targeted at these audiences. These messages and supporting content will focus on milk and milk products, whole grains, fruits/vegetables and the concept of child feeding practices.

As stated, FNS programs will incorporate these new, core messages into their nutrition education communications (e.g., printed nutrition education materials, public service announcements, electronic media), as appropriate, to help low-income families put the recommendations included in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* into practice. Qualitative research will verify that the developed messages and supporting content are clear, credible, actionable, relevant, useful to the intended audience -- and ultimately, that the messages and supporting content motivate audiences to take action.

Methodology/Research Design

FNS will conduct two rounds of qualitative research. The tables below outline the research design, and the subsequent sections outline the approach in more detail.

Target audience	Research Methodology
<b>Formative Round (October 2010)</b>	
Low-income Moms with Children 2-5 Years Old	12 triads (n=36)
Low-income Moms with Children 6-10 Years Old	6 triads (n=18)
Children 8-10 Years Old	6 mini-groups (n=36)
<b>Evaluative Round (February 2011)</b>	
Low-income Moms with Children 2-5 Years Old	12 focus groups (n=96)
Low-income Moms with Children 6-10 Years Old	6 focus groups (n=48)
Children 8-10 Years Old	6 mini-groups (n=36)

**Formative:** The first round of research will explore opportunities for communicating nutrition guidance and test new messages among low-income mothers related to:

- Providing mothers with the information, skills and motivation to increase consumption of low- and fat-free milk/milk products and to offer these foods as part of family meals and snacks.
- Providing mothers with the information, skills and motivation to increase the number of whole grains they consume and that are offered as part of family meals and snacks.
- Communicating the child feeding concepts, focusing on motivating moms to allow their child to decide whether and how much to eat, and to help moms tune in to child “hunger clues.”

The use of a triad research design (a focus group discussion with 3 respondents) in this formative round allows for more in-depth exploration of key motivations and barriers related to these topics. This approach also allows the Agency to capitalize on the small group dynamics to generate new insights regarding motivators, attitudes and perceptions that influence dietary practices of the target audience.

We will also test supporting content for previously-tested messages for mothers and children, as FNS was not able to develop and test supporting content for all of the messages covered in previous research efforts. Supporting content is defined as information that complements the nutrition messages by offering additional tips, advice, strategies, and encouragement to facilitate the intended behavior change. Specifically we will test supporting content developed to complement the following messages:

- Child feeding practices messages (Low-income Moms with Children 2-5 Years Old)
  - Let them learn by serving themselves at dinner. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Tell them they can get more if they’re still hungry.
  - Sometimes, new foods take time. Kids don’t always take to foods right away. Offer new fruits and veggies many times. Give them a taste at first and be patient with them.
  - Patience works better than pressure. Offer your children new foods. Then, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their

own choice. It also helps them learn to be independent.

- Fruit/Veggie and Milk messages (Low-income Moms with Children 6-10 Years Old)
  - Let your kids be “produce pickers.” Help them pick fruits and veggies at the store.
  - They’re still growing. Help your kids grow strong. Serve fat-free or low-fat milk at milks
- Fruit/Veggie, Milk and Yogurt messages (Children 8-10 Years Old)
  - Eat smart to play hard. Eat fruits and veggies at meals and snacks.
  - Fuel up with fruits and veggies at meals. And soar through you day like a rocket ship.
  - Eat smart to play hard. Drink milk at meals.
  - Fuel up with milk at meals. And soar through you day like a rocket ship.
  - Snack like a super hero. Power up with fruit and yogurt.

Finally, discussions will also be designed to gather information from both mothers and children to inform development of communication tools that can convey the key messages and supporting content in an engaging way. Based on this feedback, communication tool concepts will be developed to be tested in the evaluative round described below.

The Triad and Mini-Group Moderator’s Guides (Attachments C-F) will serve as tools to guide the group conversations during the discussion sessions.

**Evaluative:** The second round of research will determine whether the messages and supporting content are clear, relevant, actionable and motivational for the target audience and provide insights that will allow the agency to enhance these resources as needed to meet the goals. Specifically, in this second round of research, we will:

- Test refined versions of the new milk, whole grain and child feeding practices messages tested in the formative round of research. These refined messages will be updated based on input from the first round and tested to ensure they effectively communicate and motivate. We will also test new supporting content that will be developed for the milk, whole grain and child feeding practices messages.
- Test communications tool concepts designed to convey core nutrition messaging to mothers. The tools will be developed based upon input gathered in the initial formative round.
- Test communications tool concepts designed to convey core nutrition messaging to children 8-10 years. The tools will be developed based upon input gathered in the initial formative round.

The Triad and Mini-Group Moderator’s Guides (Attachments I-M) will serve as tools to guide the group conversations during the discussion sessions.

The research will span six cities across the United States in order to maximize the geographic and ethnic diversity of participants. The following table details the specific breakout of the focus groups to be conducted by round:

	Low-income Moms with Children 2-5 Years Old	Low-income Moms with Children 6-10 Years Old	Children 8-10 Years Old
<p><b>Formative Round</b></p> <p><i>Cities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birmingham, AL</li> <li>• Dallas, TX</li> <li>• Chicago, IL</li> </ul> <p>18 triads 6 mini-groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Child Feeding Practices messages and supporting content for existing messages (2 triads per location)</li> <li>• New Milk and Whole Grains messages (2 triads per location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Milk and Whole Grains messages, and supporting content for existing milk and fruit and vegetable messages (2 triads per location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting content for existing messages on fruits and vegetables and milk (2 mini focus groups per location)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Evaluative Round</b></p> <p><i>Cities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baltimore, MD</li> <li>• Raleigh, NC</li> <li>• Phoenix, AZ</li> </ul> <p>18 focus groups 6 mini-groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Feeding Practices messages and supporting content (2 focus groups per location)</li> <li>• Milk and Whole Grains messages and supporting content (1 focus group per location)</li> <li>• Communications tools for conveying all core nutrition messages (1 focus group per location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milk and Whole Grains messages and supporting content (1 focus group per location)</li> <li>• Communications tools for conveying all core nutrition messages (1 focus group per location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications tools for conveying all core nutrition messages (2 mini focus groups per location)</li> </ul>

*Design/Sampling Procedures*

The sample will include low-income mothers (participating or eligible to participate in nutrition programs) as well as women with at least one child 2-10 years old in a household whose income falls within 185% of the poverty line. Only mothers that speak English and feel comfortable reading English will be recruited. Groups of mothers will be segregated by age of child. Mothers with at least one non-school aged child (i.e., 2-5 years of age and not yet in kindergarten) will be in one group, and those with at least one child in elementary school, up to 10 years of age, will be in another. Groups will contain a mix of races/ethnicities to ensure representation that approximates demographics of persons participating in FNS programs.

The triads and focus groups designed to discuss the child feeding concepts with mothers of children 2-5 years of age will be segmented based on low-income mothers' agreement with the statement, "It is important for preschool children to eat at every meal, even if they say they are not hungry."

This statement serves as a basis for establishing a respondent's openness and/or resistance to the child feeding concepts; as such, mothers will be divided into amenable (those who indicate agreement to this statement) and less assured groups (those who indicate disagreement). We believe this segmentation will be important since reactions to the messages and supporting content will be heavily influenced by a mother's initial stance on the concept. The information gathered will also provide important insight to guide plans for implementation.

Children 8-10 years of age who live in households within 185% of the poverty line will also be recruited. Participants will include boys and girls of various races/ethnicities consistent with FNS participants (to the extent possible). This age range of children represents a formative time during which children are exercising food choices and influence family food purchases. Previous research has shown that kids within this age range are more likely to respond to similar motivating factors in messages.



### Site Selection

The formative sessions, scheduled for October 2010, will be conducted in three cities—Birmingham, AL, Dallas, TX and Chicago, IL. All respondents will be of different families. The sites for formative research testing were chosen because they represent three geographically different areas of the country (Western, Mid-west and South) and include both urban (Dallas and Chicago) and less urban (Birmingham) locations. These locations were also chosen because market research firms are available in these cities with access to databases from which a diverse sample of respondents can be recruited.

The February 2011 focus groups will be conducted in three cities—Baltimore, MD, Raleigh, NC, and Phoenix, AZ. These sites were chosen because they also represent three geographically different areas of the country, include both urban and less urban locations, and market research firms are available in these cities with access to databases from which a diverse sample of respondents can be recruited.

### Recruitment of Participants

Professional focus group recruitment facilities in each location will identify and screen potential participants for the testing using a random selection technique from their databases of area residents willing to participate in research. These focus group facilities develop their databases by placing ads in local papers and using community events and local resources to recruit respondents. Low-income participants may also be recruited through community outreach programs and soup kitchens. Then, facilities will call individuals from their databases who are most likely to meet the criteria identified for participation for a specific project. Facilities will obtain specific demographic information on the individuals who agree to participate to make the recruiting process for a specific study more efficient. For this effort, we are partnering with facilities who have a long track record of quality recruits (i.e., have quality databases). Moreover, the use of the focus group facilities' databases of people interested in participating in focus groups minimizes the need to "cold-call" individuals for participation thereby reducing recruitment costs.

Screener Guides (Attachments A-B and G) will be used to ascertain that participants are representative of those participating in or eligible for FNS programs and to identify participants. These Screener Guides cover all questions to be used in the selection process. To recruit participants for the focus groups with 8-10 year old children, the interviewer will use the recruitment Screener Guide (Attachment B) with the parent and the child to determine that participants meet the eligibility criteria and to obtain parental and child consent to participate in the focus group. The Screeners were previously approved by OMB under FNS Core Nutrition Messages Concept Testing ICR Reference No: 200709-0584-003 (OMB control number: 0584-0524).

Participants will receive a cash stipend of \$75.00 for adults and \$50.00 for families of child participants, to reimburse for expenses such as transportation and childcare costs (see table on the following page).

Location	Audience	Incentive amount per participant
Birmingham, AL	Mothers*	\$75.00
	Families of Kids ages 8-10	\$50.00
Dallas, TX	Mothers	\$75.00
	Families of Kids ages 8-10	\$50.00
Chicago, IL	Mothers	\$75.00
	Families of Kids ages 8-10	\$50.00
Baltimore, MD	Mothers	\$75.00
	Families of Kids ages 8-10	\$50.00
Raleigh, NC	Mothers	\$75.00
	Families of Kids ages 8-10	\$50.00
Phoenix, AZ	Mothers	\$75.00
	Families of Kids ages 8-10	\$50.00

\*Note: there is no difference in incentive amounts offered by facilities to mothers with children ages 2-5 compared to mothers of children ages 6-10. As such, only one "mothers" audience is included in this table.

Low-income mothers who participate in the sessions will sign an agreement on security of comments (see Attachment N) ensuring that the participants' names will not be divulged in any focus group reports. Parents of 8-10 year old children participating in the focus groups, will sign an agreement on security of comments and a parental consent form (see Attachments O and P). These forms were previously approved by OMB under FNS Core Nutrition Messages Concept Testing ICR Reference No: 200709-0584-003 (OMB control number: 0584-0524).

System of Record FNS-8, FNS Studies and Reports, published in the Federal Register on 4/25/1991 at 56 FR 19078, covers personal information collected under this study and identifies safeguards for the information collected.

#### Focus Group Sessions

Each triad and focus group with low-income mothers will last 90 minutes. Focus groups with 8-10 year old children will last 60 minutes. In all sessions, a trained moderator will facilitate discussion as described in the Moderator's Guides (Attachments C- F and I-M).

#### Data Analysis

Focus groups will be audio-recorded using professional equipment and the information collected will be used to inform the final messages and related products. We will summarize the key findings in a report for future reference. Respondents will be informed that the sessions are recorded. Recordings will be transcribed, with no names being associated to individual respondents' comments. Notes taken while watching all focus group sessions and transcripts of audio recordings will serve as the primary methods of data collection. Focus group transcripts will be reviewed for recurring themes stated across multiple focus groups and respondents.

Differences across group location and audience will be noted when appropriate, but given the qualitative nature of this research, findings will be considered descriptive and directional but not definitive. No names will be associated with individual respondents' comments in the final report. No attempt will be made to generalize the findings to be nationally representative or statistically valid.

#### Outcome

Information and formative input gathered from the specific target audiences through both the formative and evaluative rounds of research will help to understand the key themes and messages that are most effective at motivating the target audience to take action. FNS may decide to publish summary findings of the focus group research either electronically or in print, but such documents will not include information that personally identifies focus group participants.

8. **Security of Comments:** Participants will be informed of confidentiality and privacy act provisions before the interview (see Attachments N and O). System of Record FNS-8, FNS Studies and Reports, published in the Federal Register on 4/25/1991 at 56 FR 19078, covers personal information collected under this study and identifies safeguards for the information collected.
9. **Federal Costs:** Contract costs, formative and evaluative research tasks (for low-income mothers and children 8-10 years old): \$883,367.58

#### 10. **Research Tools/Instruments:**

Formative Round:

- Attachment A: Triad Screening Questionnaire for Low-Income Mothers
- Attachment B: Mini Group Screening Questionnaire for Children 8-10 Years (and Parents) from Low-income Households (To be used in Evaluative Round as well)
- Attachment C: Triad Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers of Children ages 2-5 years - Milk and Whole Grain Messages
  - o Attachment C1: Handout A
  - o Attachment C1a: Milk message note cards for moms of kids ages 2-5
  - o Attachment C2: Handout B
  - o Attachment C2a: Whole grain message note cards for moms of kids ages 2-5
  - o Attachment C3: Handout C
- Attachment D: Triad Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers of Children ages 6-10 –

#### Milk and Whole Grain Messages

- o Attachment D1: Handout A
- o Attachment D1a: Milk message note cards for moms of kids ages 6-10
- o Attachment D2: Handout B
- o Attachment D2a: Whole grain message note cards for moms of kids ages 6-10
- o Attachment D3: Handout C, narrative supporting content for existing messages
- o Attachment D3a: Existing produce picker and milk message note cards
- o Attachment D4: Handout D, other supporting content for existing messages
- o Attachment D5: Handout E
- Attachment E: Triad Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers of Children ages 2-5 - Child Feeding Practices
  - o Attachment E1: Handout 1
  - o Attachment E1a: New child feeding practices message note cards
  - o Attachment E2: Handout 2, narrative supporting content for existing messages
  - o Attachment E2a: Existing child feeding practices message note cards
  - o Attachment E3: Handout 3, other supporting content for existing messages
  - o Attachment E4: Handout 4
- Attachment F: Mini Group Moderator's Guide for Children (8-10 years old) from Low-income Households
  - o Attachment F1: Packet of supporting content for kids

Evaluative Round:

- Attachment G: Focus Group Screening Questionnaire for Low-Income Mothers
- Attachment H: Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers of Children ages 2-5 years - Milk and Whole Grain Messages
- Attachment I: Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers of Children ages 6-10 – Milk and Whole Grain Messages
- Attachment J: Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers of Children ages 2-5 - Child Feeding Practices
- Attachment K: Mini Group Moderator's Guide for Children (8-10 years old) from Low-income Households
- Attachment L: Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Low-income Mothers – Communications Tools

Security of Comments and Consent Forms Used in Both Rounds:

- Attachment M: Agreement of Security of Comments for Low-income Mothers
- Attachment N: Agreement on Security of Comments for Parents of Children (8-10 years old)
- Attachment O: Parental Consent Form