

APPENDIX B
PRETEST MEMO

MEMORANDUM**TO:** Stefanie Schmidt**FROM:** Julita Milliner-Waddell**DATE:** 10/1/2013
NLS-UI - 25**SUBJECT:** Pretest Summary—National Longitudinal Study of
Unemployment Insurance Recipients (NLS-UI)

A. Introduction

Mathematica conducted a comprehensive pretest of the first interview questionnaire for the National Longitudinal Study of Unemployment Insurance Recipients (NLS-UI) in preparation for data collection. The goals of the pretest were to confirm respondents' ability to provide the requested information, test question clarity and flow, check entrance conditions and skip instructions for each question, and estimate respondent burden.

To optimize the value of the nine pretests allowed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), we conducted pretest interviews in two rounds. In the first round (August 21 through August 27), four pretest interviews were conducted. All pretests were reviewed for timing, clarity, and accuracy and were recorded to facilitate review and revision. A member of the project team also monitored pretest interviews in real time to assist with administration.

The first four pretest interviews revealed that the questionnaire items are generally clear and would yield valid responses. The general flow and sequencing of questions worked well. However, administration time in the first pretest round was approximately 10 minutes longer than the budgeted length of 25 minutes, requiring cuts to questionnaire items to balance coverage and timing goals. We made questionnaire improvements, including question deletions, before proceeding with additional pretest interviews.

Four additional interviews were conducted in the second round of pretesting (September 16 through September 20) using the revised version of the questionnaire that incorporated changes and lessons learned in the first round. The second round of pretesting confirmed respondents' ability to provide responses and the clarity of items. Administration time for interviews conducted during the second round of pretesting aligned better with our target than first-round administration times. We discuss interview timing in detail next.

B. Pretest Sample

To enhance the utility of the pretest, we sought to test the survey questionnaire with recent UI claimants who would be similar to respondents to the NLS-UI first interview. To identify and contact recent UI claimants without the benefit of OMB clearance, an internal email sent to staff at all Mathematica office locations asked for referrals of friends and associates who recently filed

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for and began receiving UI benefits within the past two months. Trained telephone interviewers recruited 12 pretest candidates. Eight of the 12 candidates completed interviews.

Table 1 provides the UI filing, employment, and household characteristics of the eight pretest respondents. As shown, six of the pretest respondents had filed for UI compensation benefits more than eight weeks before being interviewed—a situation we expect to differ somewhat from the actual survey sample. (We expect to conduct a first interview with sample members two to three months after the initial claim is filed.) Six of the pretest respondents had held one job since filing for UI and were working at the time of pretest. Two respondents were unemployed and had not held any jobs since filing for UI benefits. Seven respondents reported household sizes of two people or more. Pretest respondents were from six states—Maine (1), Maryland (1), Massachusetts (2), Michigan (1) New Jersey (2), and Illinois (1).

Table 1. Characteristics of Pretest Respondents and Survey Length

Pretest #	Filing State	UI Claim Month/Year	Pretest Month/Year	Employment Status	Household Size	Survey Length (minutes)
First Round Pretest Interviews						
1	NJ	July 2013	August 2013	Currently working	1	36
2	MD	July 2013	August 2013	Unemployed	3	26
3	ME	March 2013	August 2013	Currently working	3	37
4	MI	June 2013	August 2013	Currently working	2	42
Average Length of First Round Pretest Interviews						35.25
Second Round Pretest Interviews						
5	MA	April 2013	September 2013	Currently working	3	33
6	IL	June 2013	September 2013	Currently working	2	32
7	MA	July 2013	September 2013	Currently working	2	32
8	NJ	June 2013	September 2013	Unemployed	2	27
Average Length Of Second Round Pretest Interviews						31.00

C. Pretest Administration

Pretests for the NLS-UI were restricted to the first interview questionnaire. (Questionnaires for the second and third rounds of data collection will closely mirror the first interview questionnaire, with many questions skipped because the information has already been gathered

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and a few new questions added.) We trained three interviewers to administer the pretest questionnaire in a two-hour session that included a summary of the project, a detailed review of the questionnaire, and role-play interviews. Role-plays used scenarios that were developed to ensure that different paths through the questionnaire were reviewed.

To use resources most efficiently, we will perform computer programming of the questionnaire for web and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) using the questionnaire version that benefitted from pretesting. Therefore, interviewers used hard-copy versions of the questionnaire to administer the pretest. To facilitate the administration of the survey on hard copy, we developed a cheat sheet on which to record critical and repetitive item fills such as the UI claim date, marital status, job search and current employment status for use at the interviewers' discretion. Nevertheless, navigating skip instructions using paper and pencil requires more time than both the web and CATI versions.

Table 1 shows the length of each interview, which is influenced in part by the employment history and household composition of respondents. In the first pretest round, administration time ranged from 26 minutes for a respondent who had not worked since becoming unemployed to 42 minutes for a respondent who had multiple job offers and held one job since becoming unemployed. The average administration time for the first four interviews was 35 minutes. Table 2 lists the topics covered in the first interview, by questionnaire section. As shown, the sections on the pre-UI claim job and financial well-being took the longest to administer.

Table 2. Average Length of Interview, by Questionnaire Section and Pretest Round

Section	Topic	Average Length (minutes)		
		Round 1	Round 2	Average
A	Case Management	1.25	1.50	1.38
B	Demographic and Household Characteristics	1.75	2.00	1.88
C	Pre-UI Employment and Unemployment	6.00	5.00	5.50
D	Job Search and Offers	4.75	3.50	4.13
E	Reemployment Expectations	0.50	0.50	0.50
F	Reemployment	3.75	3.00	3.38
G	Financial Well-Being	9.75	9.25	9.50
H	Customer Satisfaction	2.75	1.75	2.25
I	Closing and Contact Information	4.75	4.50	4.63
Total		35.25	31.00	33.13

As noted earlier, questionnaire items were deleted between the two rounds of pretesting to lessen administration time. The average administration time for the final four pretest interviews after deleting these items was 31 minutes, with a range of 27 minutes for a respondent who was

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unemployed at the time of the interview to 33 minutes for a currently employed respondent with a three-member household. We anticipate that the interview length will decrease by 5 to 8 minutes with the efficiency of web and CATI administration. (For the WIA Gold Standard Evaluation, hard-copy pretesting averaged 40 minutes; actual interviews conducted using CATI average 32 minutes.) This suggests an average administration time of 23 to 26 minutes, achieving our target length of 25 minutes. Table 3 shows questionnaire items deleted between the two rounds of pretesting and the rationale for the deletion.

Table 3. Questionnaire Items Deleted Between Pretest Rounds

Topic	Question	Rationale
Pre-UI Employment and Unemployment	Previous UI experience	This item provided insight on repeat filers who might be more familiar with the UI filing system. We might be able to address this issue by looking at whether the respondent expected to be recalled.
Job Search and Offers	Job offers requiring change in occupation	This item provides insight about occupational mismatches between the skills of unemployed workers and the occupations of job openings; it was deleted due to data quality concerns—an occupational change might be difficult for respondents to identify.
Job Search and Offers	Change in occupation of new jobs held	Occupational coding of other survey items will provide this information.
Reemployment Expectations	Expectations about the need to change occupation	This item was deleted due to data quality concerns—an occupational change might be difficult for respondents to identify.
Reemployment	Characteristics of jobs held between pre-UI and current job	Specific details on type of occupation, industry, and changes in occupation and benefits will be asked only about jobs held at the point of the interview. Start and stop dates, hours worked, and pay rates will still be asked for all jobs.
Financial Well-Being	Specific types of investment accounts at job separation	Separate categories were combined into a single investment account category, using these specific types of accounts as examples.
Financial Well-Being	Amounts received from income support programs	Collecting specific dollar amounts for each type of income support adds a significant amount of time. We retained questions on receipt of each type of income support. Whether income from the various programs increased due to job loss and lower household earnings should be addressed to some degree in the questions about total household income.
Financial Well-Being	Application for income support benefits	The third interview will ask about applications for benefits since job separation if the respondent reported in all prior interviews that he or she had not received a specific benefit type.
Customer Satisfaction	Satisfaction with the promptness with which questions were answered	This question is very similar to another question about the efficiency with which staff members did their jobs.

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D. Summary

The two rounds of pretesting conducted for the NLS-UI were valuable in finalizing our questionnaire development of all three study questionnaires. The pretest helped to identify areas of the questionnaire that had to be shortened, assisted staff in identifying skip errors and clarifying which questions would be asked of specific subgroups, and highlighted topics that might require extra emphasis during interviewer training.

Pretest respondents did not report any major issues comprehending the questions. At the end of each interview, respondents answered a series of questions to gauge their overall reaction to the survey experience and to specific questions. Debriefing questions solicited opinions on survey length and asked about concepts discussed in the survey, such as the definition of household, what they considered when answering the question about employment outlook, the ease or difficulty of answering questions on financial well-being, and the likelihood they would participate in this study if they received a letter from the U.S. Department of Labor. All respondents reported that the survey length was reasonable and noted that they would be very or somewhat likely to participate in a similar study.

cc: Karen Needels, Alicia Leonard, Wendy Costa