

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
American Community Survey Methods Panel Tests
OMB Control Number 0607-0936

Part B. Collections of Information Employing Statistical Methods

1. Sample Design

2015 ACS Envelope Mandatory Messaging Test

The sample universe for the 2015 ACS Envelope Mandatory Messaging Test consists of all residential addresses in the United States from the Census Bureau's Master Address File sampled for the May 2015 production ACS. No addresses can be in sample (production and methods panel tests) more than once in a 5-year period. This excludes addresses in remote Alaska. Additional information about the production ACS sample can be found under OMB Control Number 0607-0810.

We have divided the monthly production sample of 295,000 addresses in 24 nationally representative groups of approximately 12,000 addresses each. For this test, planned for the May 2015 ACS panel, we will use two randomly assigned groups for the experimental treatment group. The total sample size for the experimental treatment group is approximately 24,000 addresses. The remaining cases in the May 2015 panel will comprise the control.

The sample size provides us with enough statistical power (.80) to detect a statistical difference in the self-response rates of at least 1 percentage point between the control and test group. This assumes a 50 percent self-response rate.

2. Procedures for Collecting Information

The Census Bureau mails ACS survey materials to about 286,000 Housing Unit (HU) addresses each month. The mailing operations are conducted through the U.S. Postal Service and use first-class postage rates for all pieces. Unmailable household addresses are sampled and included in the computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) data collection mode.

All sampled addresses are mailed a pre-notice letter, a request to respond online, and a reminder postcard. Households that do not respond online in a timely manner will also be mailed a paper questionnaire and supplemental postcard urging response.

Each month all sample HUs are matched to commercial phone number lists in an attempt to find phone numbers. For addresses that were mailed survey materials but did not respond by mail, Internet or by calling our telephone questionnaire assistance line, we attempt computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) for all household

addresses for which we obtained phone numbers. After the CATI operation is complete, we select a sub-sample of all households that still have not responded and assign them to the CAPI data collection mode. This sub-sample includes household addresses that are not mailable, that we do not have telephone numbers for, and are CATI non-interviews.

Methods to Maximize Response

The production ACS used a myriad of strategies to maximize response. High levels of data accuracy and response rates through interviewer instruction, training, and close monitoring of the data.

During the development of the household self-administered paper and Internet questionnaire, we have made efforts to clarify item wording and placement, to improve the format of the overall questionnaire, and to be sensitive to questionnaire content effects.

Historically the ACS has employed a tri-modal data collection strategy for households data collection—mail, telephone and personal visit. In 2011 the Census Bureau conducted two tests to assess the feasibility of providing an Internet response option to households that receive survey materials by mail. These tests evaluated various methods for providing an Internet response option. Based on the results of these tests, the ACS added an Internet response option in 2013.

For households eligible to receive survey materials by mail, the first contact will be a pre-notice letter alerting residents that they will receive instructions in the mail in a few days on how to complete the ACS survey, and encouraging them to do so promptly. The letter then explains the purpose of the ACS and how the data are used. Enclosed with the letter, a brochure provides basic information about the survey in English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean, and provides a phone number to call for assistance in each language.

The second mailing includes a letter and instruction card explaining how to complete the survey online, as well as a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) brochure. The instruction card provides the information on how to respond in English and Spanish. The letter explains that if the respondent is unable to complete the survey online, a paper questionnaire will be sent later. The Internet version of the questionnaire is available in English and Spanish and includes questions about the HU and the people living in the HU. The Internet questionnaire has space to collect detailed information for twenty people in the household. The third mailing is a postcard that reminds respondents to complete the survey online, thanks them if they have already done so, and informs them that a paper form will be sent later if we do not receive their response.

A fourth mailing is sent only to those sample addresses that have not completed the online questionnaire within two weeks. The content includes a cover letter, a paper

copy of the questionnaire, an instruction guide for completing the paper form, an instruction card for completing the survey online, an FAQ brochure, and a return envelope. The cover letter with this questionnaire package reminds the household of the importance of the ACS, and asks them to respond soon either by completing the survey online or by returning a completed paper questionnaire.

The fifth mailing is a postcard that reminds respondents that “now is the time to complete the survey,” informs them that an interviewer may contact them if they do not complete the survey, and reminds them of the importance of the ACS.

A sixth mailing is sent to respondents who have not completed the survey within five weeks and are not eligible for telephone follow-up because we do not have a telephone number for the household. This postcard also reminds these respondents to return their questionnaires and thanks them if they have already done so.

The ACS HU non-response follow up consists of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), CATI Failed Edit Follow-up (FEFU) interview, and computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) to ensure a final high weighted response rate.

Non-response follow up operations for household ACS data collection include: CATI to conduct telephone interviews for all households that do not respond by mail and for which we are able to obtain telephone numbers and CAPI to conduct personal interviews for a sample of addresses for which we have not obtained a mail or CATI interview. Both CATI and CAPI instruments are available to interviewers in English and Spanish.

Previously, we have conducted a CATI Failed Edit Follow-up (FEFU) if we have a telephone number and either: 1) respondents omit answering a set of critical questions that are deemed essential for the questionnaire to be considered complete, or 2) the household has more than five people so that we can obtain information for the additional members of the household. Starting in October 2012, we scaled back the FEFU operation to focus on households with coverage problems (such as mail respondents with more than 5 people, mail respondents with more people listed on the cover than in the basic demographic section, or questionnaires returned for vacant units). We will also use the FEFU operation to collect missing data from some survey respondents that did not finish their response to the Internet survey, but rather broke off before completion; to confirm the status of Internet responses classified as businesses or vacant units; and to possibly collect the minimum amount of information needed to further process the questionnaire. If funding can be obtained in the future, we would resume FEFU for mail and Internet returns missing responses to a critical amount of questions. The FEFU instrument is available to interviewers in both English and Spanish.

3. Test Procedures

We have completed extensive testing of the CATI, CAPI, and Internet instruments to ensure that the interviews flow smoothly and the questions are asked appropriately across all modes of survey data collection.

The ACS Methods Panel provides opportunities for annual testing of content and/or survey methods to achieve efficiencies and improve data quality. This test will utilize the ACS Methods Panel to test the impact of removing the phrase, “YOUR RESPONSE IS REQUIRED BY LAW” from the envelopes used to mail the initial mail package as well as the replacement mail package.

4. Contacts for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection

The Census Bureau will collect and process these data as needed for this test. Within the Census Bureau, please consult the following individuals for further information.

Statistical Aspects

Mr. Anthony Tersine	Assistant Division Chief, ACS Methods Decennial Statistical Studies Division Phone: (301) 763-1994
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Overall Data Collection

Mr. James B. Treat	Chief, American Community Survey Office Phone (301) 763-3609
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Attachments

Attachment A: Internet Instrument: screen shots

Attachment B: ACS-1, Questionnaire

Attachment C: Production ACS and Experimental Treatment Envelopes