

American Housing Survey (AHS) Cognitive Interviews

Request: The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). We propose to conduct a cognitive pretesting evaluation of new and revised questions about a variety of topics in the American Housing Survey (AHS). This evaluation will be conducted by staff in the Center for Survey Measurement (CSM).

Purpose: The purpose of this cognitive research is to test concepts added to or revised in the AHS. The question changes were requested by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to address known problems with the questions, to measure new concepts, and to update rotating modules that were not included in the last survey administration. The following topical modules of the AHS are being tested:

- *Front* is an existing core module that contains new and revised questions about a respondent's contact information.
- *Inventory* is an existing core module that contains three new or revised questions about the number of stories or floors in the respondent's home.
- *Equipment* is an existing core module that contains three revised questions about fuel or power sources in the respondent's home.
- *Breakdown* is an existing core module that contains revised questions about breakdowns in equipment and pest control problems in the respondent's home.
- *Home Improvement* is an existing core module that contains a modified question about whether a respondent made any home improvements to make their home more accessible for people with physical limitations.
- *Demographics Supplement* is an existing core module that contains a new series of questions about post-secondary education for any members of a respondent's home.
- *Home Accessibility* is an existing rotating module that contains questions about difficulty accessing and using rooms for household members with physical limitations, current home accessibility, and future plans to make the home more accessible.

The full text of the questions to be tested can be found in Enclosure 1, which shows the full cognitive interviewing protocol. Some of the questions are included only to provide context for the questions identified for testing.

Population of Interest: The AHS samples households from the general U.S. population. There are two types of respondents to the survey.

1. For Occupied Housing Units – A household respondent, who must be a knowledgeable household member 16 years of age or over, provides information on the unit, the household composition, and income.
2. For Vacant Housing Units – A landlord, owner, real estate agent, or knowledgeable neighbor can provide data on the unit.

For our cognitive pretesting evaluation the respondents will be 18 years of age or over, and answering about the household in which they currently live (i.e. for Occupied Housing Units).

Timeline: Testing will be conducted in two rounds, with the first round being conducted in April 2018 and the second round being conducted between May-June 2018. Iterative changes may be made within or between rounds. The second round of interviews will be used to confirm the effectiveness of changes made to questions in the first round and to inform recommendations for the final wording of the questions.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: Staff from CSM will conduct 35 cognitive interviews (20 in the first round, 15 in the second round). Interviews will be held in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, either at the Census Bureau Headquarters or at another location that is more convenient for a respondent, such as a public library.

Sample: Our recruiting efforts will target the following groups:

- Respondents who live with anyone attending college or other school beyond high school
- Respondents who live with anyone who has physical disabilities or limitations
- Respondents who own their home and made any home improvements in the past two years
- Respondents who live in an apartment or condo.

In addition to these characteristics, we will attempt to recruit respondents from diverse demographic groups including race/ethnicity, age, gender, and household size to the maximum extent possible.

Recruitment: Respondents will be recruited through CSM's recruitment database, an internal Census Bureau broadcast email, advertisements in local libraries, Craigslist.com, and via personal networks. Respondents will be screened and selected based on the survey-relevant characteristics of interest listed in the preceding section. The recruiting screener and ads are attached (see Enclosure 2 and Enclosures 3a-3b). Respondents will be screened by telephone and may receive an email reminder about the cognitive interview appointment after they agree to participate.

Protocol: The cognitive interviews will use a "think-aloud" approach in which respondents are instructed to speak their thoughts aloud as they receive, process, and respond to the survey questions. As the AHS is an interviewer-administered survey, CSM researchers will administer the survey questions orally and face-to-face with a respondent, but using a paper questionnaire rather than a CATI or CAPI instrument. After respondents have given their response to each survey question and finished thinking aloud about it, they will be asked probes intended to elicit more information about their interpretations of the survey questions and of specific

terms, and the circumstances they were thinking about when answering the survey questions. Respondents will also be asked to describe how easy or difficult the questions are to answer. The cognitive interview protocol is included in Enclosure 1, as mentioned earlier.

Consent: We will inform participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be accessed only by employees involved in the research project. The consent form will also indicate that the respondent agrees that the interview can be audio-taped to facilitate analysis of the results (see Enclosure 4). Participants who do not consent to be audio-taped will still be allowed to participate.

Use of Incentive: We plan to offer an incentive of \$40 to offset the costs of participation, such as travel and parking. Federal employees who participate in this research are not eligible to receive the cash incentive.

The materials to be used in this study are enclosed with this letter and include:

- Enclosure 1 – Cognitive Interview Protocol
- Enclosure 2 – Recruitment Screener
- Enclosures 3a-3b – Recruitment Advertisement Text
- Enclosure 4 – Consent Form

Length of interview: We estimate that each interview will take approximately one hour (35 hours total). The screening questionnaire will take approximately ten minutes per person. We estimate that we will screen 3 people for each successful recruit (17.5 hours). **Thus, the total estimated burden for this research is 52.5 hours.**

Table 1. Estimated Burden

Research Activity	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Screening	105	10 minutes	17.5 hours
Cognitive Interviews	35	60 minutes	35 hours
Total			52.5 hours

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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