

2018 American Community Survey Respondent Burden Testing

Cognitive Testing of the “Condominium Fee” and “Place of Work” Questions on the American Community Survey

The U.S. Census Bureau in its continuing effort to reduce respondent burden on the American Community Survey (ACS) plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). Specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau will cognitively test proposed changes to the “Condominium Fee” and “Place of Work” questions on the ACS. The revised questions, developed under the auspices of the OMB Interagency Group on the American Community Survey and related subject-area subcommittees, is designed to facilitate respondent comprehension, reduce respondent burden, and where possible, streamline wording. For the “2019 ACS Respondent Burden Testing,” the U.S. Census Bureau has contracted with Westat, a statistical survey research corporation headquartered in Rockville, Maryland, to perform cognitive testing on the above mentioned topics.

The 2015 American Housing Survey tested the inclusion of a separate homeowner’s association question on their survey. This resulted in a substantial increase in the number of respondents that reported belonging to a condominium, cooperative, or homeowner’s association from 8.7 million in 2013 to 25.5 million in 2015. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has recommended that the Census Bureau incorporate homeowner’s association (HOA) fee wording into the current condominium association fee question in the ACS. Collecting the data improves the monthly owner cost estimate which is an important part of housing costs. The focus of this testing will be on whether or not respondents understand the difference between required and voluntary homeowner’s association fees and if respondents are reporting monthly fees instead of yearly fees. In addition to the version that will appear on the paper questionnaire respondent will complete, a second version will also be shown to respondents and feedback will be obtained.

For the “Place of Work” question, the Census Bureau has found over the years that the order of (and the type of) address components in the workplace address question series may confuse some respondent. The current order of the address components is not in an intuitive or typical order that many respondents are familiar with, such as asking for the county name and if the address is “within town limits” before asking for state and ZIP code. The focus of this cognitive testing is to determine if reordering the address components results in a clearer version of the question. Additionally, it will provide a better understanding of respondents’ knowledge of work locations and addresses for themselves and others in the household.

Cognitive Interviewing Period and Location: Cognitive interviewing will take place between January 21, 2019 and February 1, 2019, with recruiting beginning around January 15, 2019. Westat plans to conduct the interviews at its Rockville, Maryland location. If necessary, Westat

will use additional locations in the Washington, D.C. area to facilitate recruitment and interviews.

Conducting the Cognitive Interviews: Westat will perform 12 English-language cognitive interviews using a paper questionnaire (self-administered). For each interview, a respondent will answer a subset of the ACS questions. As part of the cognitive interview process, Westat interviewers will probe the respondents' understanding and perception of the questions. Each cognitive interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be audiotaped and may be subject to one-way observation from designated sworn employees of Westat and the Census Bureau.

Recruiting Requirements: Recruiting will take place between January 15, 2019 and February 1, 2019. All recruited respondents must be aged 18 and older. In general, respondents are selected who also reflect a mix of age, sex, and level of education. We will also strive for each respondent to meet the requirements for both survey topics (see below).

- **Condominium Fee:**
 - Homeowners who are part of a required homeowner's association.
 - Homeowners who are part of voluntary homeowner's associations (i.e. neighborhood watch, community council, or social clubs)
 - Renters in areas with a homeowner's association or condominium fee.

- **Place of Work:**
 - Employed people who work at home.
 - Employed people with atypical workplace locations (e.g. coworking spaces) or unclear or multiple workplace locations (e.g. Uber/Lyft drivers, truck drivers, operators of public transportation, construction or home repair workers, real estate agents, etc.),
 - Employed people in a standard working situation with fixed location.
 - Employed people who work outside of DC in a location whose "city limits" may be more ambiguous.
 - Households with more than one person who works outside the home are desirable in order to study proxy reporting; however, recruitment minimums below refer only to the primary respondent and not other household members reported by proxy.

See Attachment A for research goals and recruiting targets.

Recruiting Respondents: To recruit 12 respondents who meet the specified characteristics, Westat will use its own participant database as a starting point, and supplement it with recruits obtained through advertising. See the attached OMB-approved flyer template and the Craigslist

ad template (Attachment B). If necessary, Westat will also make use of its personal and business networks, using snowballing techniques where appropriate, and intercept interviewing.

Screening the Respondents: Westat will use a screener (see Attachment B) to screen potential respondents who respond to any of its outreach efforts. Respondents who are selected and complete an interview will receive \$40 to offset the cost of participation (e.g., transportation, childcare costs). Westat will screen approximately 100 people to obtain 12 completed interviews. Screening will take approximately 5 minutes per person. Therefore, the initial screening of 100 people will take approximately 9 hours.

An interview will take approximately 60 minutes per respondent. Therefore, the total number of hours to interview 12 respondents will take 12 hours. The maximum burden is approximately 21 hours. The consent form is found in Attachment C and the testing protocol is found in Attachment D.

Materials to be used for this Project:

Attachment A: 2019 ACS POW-HOA Cognitive Testing to Reduce the Burden and Difficulty of Questions: Research Goals, Recruiting Requirements, and Question Wording

Attachment B: ACS Cognitive Testing Recruitment Plan, Screener, Ad Template

Attachment C: ACS Cognitive Testing Consent Form

Attachment D: ACS Cognitive Testing Protocol

Attachment E: The American Community Survey, paper survey form ACS-1(X)hp

Attachment F: Alternative Version of the Condominium Fee question

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and study design is:

Elizabeth Poehler
Decennial Statistical Studies Division
Room # 4H475
Washington, DC 20233
(301) 763-9305
elizabeth.poehler@census.gov