

Qualitative Research on Survey Error Resulting in the Undercount of Young Children  
Submitted Under Generic Clearance for Questionnaire Pretesting

**Request:** The Census Bureau plans to conduct research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB #0607-0725). We will be conducting focus groups and cognitive interviews to assess the conditions that result in the omission of children under age 5 from Census household rosters.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to explore reasons for the undercount in households at risk of under-reporting young children using a range of qualitative methods, including focus groups and cognitive interviews. We seek to understand where current rostering questions and procedures are problematic and to test alternatives. We will attempt to interview multiple respondents per household to evaluate the role of the relationship between the household respondent and the individuals who are listed as household members. Probing will explore individuals' interpretation of the current wording of the roster questions, and their rationale for including or excluding certain individuals. Vignettes will be used to examine how respondents would complete the roster questionnaire under various complicated and known-to-be-problematic situations, and follow-up probes will explore why respondents included or excluded particular individuals.

**Population of Interest:** Residents of the United States.

**Timeline:** From June until December 2019 staff from the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) will conduct an iterative series of 12 focus groups and 90 cognitive interviews in four sites: the DC metro area, Rhode Island, the Mississippi delta region, and the southern tip of Texas. In total we expect to hold focus groups with a maximum of 120 participants. As needed throughout the interview period, CBSM staff will update the interview materials to address feedback from respondents.

**Sample:** Cognitive interview respondents (n=90) and focus group participants (n=120) will be selected based on the known characteristics of households that are at risk of omitting young children from household rosters. Characteristics of these households include:

- “Complex households” including multigenerational households, families living with non-relatives, and blended families
- Householders who is someone other than the biological or adoptive parent of the child, such as a grandparent, distant relative or non-relative
- Mothers under age 35

In Rhode Island, participants will be selected based on a sample from the 2018 Census Test in Rhode Island.

**Recruitment:** Respondents will be recruited through community organizations and partners; advertisements on Craigslist.com; existing respondent frames of interested participants

maintained by CBSM; and broadcast messages distributed through the Census Bureau's daily online newsletter. In Rhode Island, households identified as having omitted young children during the 2018 Census Test will be selected for recontact. All recruiting materials are attached (see Attachment I).

**Location of Interviews:** Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in-person in the local DC metropolitan area, the Mississippi delta region, the southern tip of Texas, and Providence, RI. Specific locations will be selected for convenience and public transit accessibility.

**Protocol:** For cognitive interviews, after being informed of their rights as a study participant and providing informed consent, respondents will be asked to complete a copy of the Census questionnaire for their household while using a think-aloud protocol. Once completed, an interviewer will probe on their responses and comments made during the questionnaire exercise. Vignettes and other cognitive interviewing tools may be used to delve further as necessary. With households for which we have 2018 Census Test roster information, additional probing about the completion of that questionnaire will be included. See Attachment II for the full protocol. The focus groups moderator guide will cover a range of topics, including past experience with and perceptions of the decennial census; within-household negotiation over who completes the census on behalf of the household; an exercise in completing the household roster; vignettes to examine how respondents would complete the roster questionnaire under various complicated and known-to-be-problematic situations, and messaging to explore factors that would encourage or discourage participation. See Attachment III for the full protocol.

**Informed 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. Participants who do not consent to be audio-taped will still be allowed to participate. A copy of the consent form is attached (see Attachment IV).

**Incentive:** Cognitive interview participants will receive \$40 for their participation in this research. Focus group participants will receive \$75.

**Length of Interview:** We estimate burden hours for each phase of work:

- Focus groups: the 12 focus groups with a maximum of 10 participants (120 participants total) are expected to last 1.5 hours each, for a total burden of 180 hours.
- Cognitive interviews: each of the 90 interviews will take approximately one hour for a total of 90 hours.
- Screening: we expect to recruit 210 participants in total, and we estimate that we will need to screen five people for each successful recruit. Thus we expect needing to screen 1,050 individuals in total to yield the target 210 participants. The pre-approved generic screening questionnaire will take approximately ten minutes per person, and the pre-approved additional screening questions specific to this research will take two minutes

per person (see Attachment V for both screeners). Thus we estimate needing to screen 1,050 individuals at 12 minutes each, for a total of 210 screening hours.

Thus, **the total estimated burden of this research is 480 hours.**

**Table 1. Total Estimated Burden**

| <b>Category of Respondent</b> | <b>No. of Respondents</b> | <b>Participation Time</b> | <b>Burden</b>    |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Screening                     | 1,050                     | 12 minutes                | 210 hours        |
| Cognitive Interviews          | 90                        | 60 minutes                | 90 hours         |
| Focus Groups                  | 120                       | 90 minutes                | 180 hours        |
| <b>Totals</b>                 |                           |                           | <b>480 hours</b> |

The following documents are included as attachments:

- Attachment I – Recruitment Flyers
- Attachment II - Eligibility Screeners
- Attachment III- Cognitive Interview Protocol
- Attachment IV – Focus Group Moderators Guide
- Attachment V - Consent Form

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

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