

New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (NYCHVS) 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 questions in the interviewer-administered New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (NYCHVS). The testing will occur for English and Spanish versions of the survey. This evaluation will be conducted by staff in the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM).

Purpose: The purpose of this cognitive research is to evaluate the quality of questions in the NYCHVS in preparation for a redesigned version planned for launch in 2020. Broader goals for the 2020 redesign include adapting the instrument from an interviewer-administered paper survey to the CAPI mode, as well as providing support in additional non-English languages. Some of the questions are new additions to the survey or are revised from the previous version. Others have not been changed, but use terminology considered potentially out-of-date or not reflecting current housing situations. The cognitive testing was requested by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development to look for problems with the questions and propose revisions based on cognitive test findings.

Questions about the following topics would be asked:

- *Household Roster* is a section that identifies the household of people living in the housing unit. The section includes demographic questions including relationship, age, sex, race, ethnicity, education, and sexual orientation/gender identity.
- *Housing Costs Owner* is a section with questions about the costs of home ownership, including for mortgage payments, home utilities, and home maintenance.
- *Housing Costs Renter* is a section with questions about home renting costs, including who in the household pays the rent and the extent to which the rent is paid with public assistance.
- *Housing Quality* is a section with questions about housing amenities, maintenance deficiencies, utility costs, and related unit characteristics.
- *Residential History* is a section with questions about household member mobility, pet ownership, and housing searches.
- *Employment and Income* is a section with questions about employment status, occupation, and the income made from employment and other sources.
- *Public Benefits and Coverage* is a section with questions about who in the household receives public assistance, including the type and amount of assistance.
- *Building and Unit Characteristics* is a section with questions about the characteristics of the building and unit the household lives in, including the number of units, whether the building has a super, and the kinds of rooms in the respondent's unit.
- *Neighborhood* is a section with questions about the respondent's surrounding neighborhood, including amenities, safety, and neighborhood efficacy.

- Financial Well-Being is a section with questions about household debt, assets, and education level, and household expenses like childcare.

The full text of the questions to be tested can be found in Enclosure 1 and Enclosure 2, which shows the full cognitive interviewing protocols for owner-occupied units and renter-occupied units, respectively.

Population of Interest: The NYCHVS samples households from the general New York City area population. For occupied housing units, an eligible respondent must be a knowledgeable household member 15 years of age or over, and can provide information on the unit, the household composition, and income. For our cognitive pretesting evaluation, the respondents will be 18 years of age or over, and answer questions about the household in which they currently live.

Timeline: The cognitive interviews will test the interviewer-administered questionnaire in English or in Spanish, and will be carried out by CBSM staff in two rounds. Round 1 will have 36 total interviews (18 in English and 18 in Spanish) and will take place approximately the week of July 29th, 2019. Round 2 will have 36 total interviews (18 English and 18 in Spanish) and will take place approximately the week of October 14th, 2019. All interviews will occur in New York City. Results from testing will be used to inform recommendations for the final wording of the questions.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English or in Spanish.

Method: Staff from CBSM will conduct 72 cognitive interviews in New York City, either in offices of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, or in locations in the NYC area convenient to the respondent.

Sample: Respondents will be residents of the New York City area. Interviews will occur in New York City because the survey is specifically designed for residents of the New York City area, and thus the cognitive test respondents will be New York City residents.

Recruitment: Respondents will be recruited by the survey sponsor, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Respondents will be screened and selected based on survey-relevant characteristics like:

- Housing tenure (owner or renter)
- Housing type
- Household composition
- Residential history
- Employment status
- Receiving public assistance

The recruiting screener is attached (see Enclosure 3). Respondents will be screened by telephone or in person and may receive a reminder about the cognitive interview appointment after they agree to participate.

In addition to these characteristics, we will attempt to recruit respondents with diverse demographic characteristics like race/ethnicity, age, and gender to the maximum extent possible. Spanish-speaking respondents will also be Spanish-language dominant and will represent a variety of national origins. In order to test some additions to the NYCHVS on the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity, we will make an effort to recruit respondents who self-report different sexual orientations and gender identities.

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 NYCHVS is an interviewer-administered survey, CBSM researchers will administer the survey questions orally and face-to-face with a respondent. The current plan is to use a CAPI version of the instrument, but if the CAPI instrument is not ready in time for cognitive testing, interviewers will use a paper version of the questionnaire. 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 specific survey questions and 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 protocols are attached in Enclosures 1 and 2, as mentioned earlier, along with flash cards to help administer the survey to respondents (Enclosure 4).

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 5). 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 in the 60-minute interview, such as travel, childcare, 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:

Owner-occupied protocol (Enclosure 1)

Renter-occupied protocol (Enclosure 2)

Recruitment screener (Enclosure 3)

Flash cards (Enclosure 4)

Consent form (Enclosure 5)

Payment voucher (Enclosure 6)

Length of interview: We estimate that each interview will take approximately one hour (72 hours total). The screening questionnaire will take approximately six minutes per person. We expect to screen about 360 people to arrive at 72 successful recruits, or 5 people for each successful recruit (36 hours). **Thus, we estimate the burden for this research is 108 hours: 72 hours for interviewing (1.0 hours X 72 interviews) and 36 hours (6 minutes X 360 people) for screening.**

Table 1. Estimated Burden

Research Activity	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Screening	360	6 minutes	36 hours
Cognitive Interviews	72	60 minutes	72 hours
Total			108 hours

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

Mikelyn Meyers

Center for Behavioral Science Methods

U.S. Census Bureau

Washington, D.C. 20233

(301) 763-9008

mikelyn.v.meyers@census.gov