

July 22, 2015

NOTE TO THE REVIEWER OF: OMB CLEARANCE #1220-0141
“Cognitive and Psychological Research”

FROM: William Mockovak
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Office of Survey Methods Research

SUBJECT: Submission of materials for focus groups
with users of BLS news releases

Please accept the enclosed materials for approval under the OMB clearance package #1220-0141 “Cognitive and Psychological Research.”

In accordance with our agreement with OMB, I am submitting a brief description of proposed focus groups with users of BLS news releases. We estimate 35 burden hours will be required for this study.

We are attaching the protocol and consent form for this study.

If there are any questions regarding this project, please contact Bill Mockovak at (202) 691-7414 or Mockovak_W@bls.gov.

1. Introduction and Purpose

The Bureau of Labor Statistics is exploring the possibility of revising the format and content of its news releases, which have a standardized appearance for all economic releases (see <http://www.bls.gov/bls/newsrels.htm> for a list of BLS news releases).

Past, small-scale research on news releases revealed that people used a variety of approaches for handling news releases. Some very experienced users often did not read any of the explanatory text at all, and would use automated routines to read table values that could be immediately converted into other methods of communication. Their straightforward message to BLS was “use whatever format you prefer, but if you change any of the tables, please let us know immediately.” On the contrary, other users reported that they ignored the tables and relied primarily on the explanatory text that was provided with news releases, especially the first paragraph that provides a quick summary of the release.

Therefore, before making any changes, BLS first plans to seek feedback from a wide variety of users of the news releases to help guide any possible revisions. Since BLS attempts to meet the needs of all its data users, both experienced and inexperienced, we plan to conduct a customer satisfaction survey on our website that will ask visitors to the website to provide feedback about their current satisfaction with, and use of the news releases. In addition, a direct survey invitation will be sent via email to subscribers to various BLS email notification lists.¹

Because customer satisfaction surveys tend to capture only high level reactions, BLS is also requesting approval through this clearance request to conduct focus groups with known users of news releases so that satisfaction with the news releases can be explored in greater depth. We hope to conduct both in-person and online focus groups so that we can obtain representative opinions from around the country, and not just the DC area.

2. Participants

We will recruit unpaid volunteers among journalists who attend BLS lock-ups, and also work with the information offices in BLS regional offices to recruit journalists for online, remote sessions. We hope to recruit up to 30 participants for five focus groups (average of six participants per group). No structured questions will be used with either recruiting approach. We will mention the purpose of the focus groups and ask if people are interested during lock-up sessions. EA&I staff will approach journalists during their normal interactions with them. Most of the recruiting time will be required for the regional participants. We estimate it will take an average of 5 minutes to recruit each participant.

3. Burden Hours

Since each focus group will last about an hour, plus 5.0 hours for recruiting (assume we’ll need to contact 60 participants at an average of 5 minutes each to get 30), we anticipate using 35 burden hours.

¹ The clearance request for this survey has already been submitted using form “Customer Satisfaction Survey and Conference Evaluation Clearance.”

5. Data Confidentiality

Participants will be informed as to the voluntary nature of the study, and that the feedback obtained will be used to improve BLS news releases. Information related to this study will not be released to the public in any way that would allow identification of individuals except as prescribed under the conditions of the Privacy Act Notice.

6. Attachments

- A. Protocol
- B. Consent form

Appendix A: Protocol for Focus Group

Thank you for joining us today. Before we begin, let me give you some context for our objectives today.

BLS realizes that the basic format of its news releases has not been changed in a long time, so we were wondering if there are changes that could be made to make the releases easier to use, and possibly more useful.

Before we go on, I need to take care of a few housekeeping details, so please bear with me.

- First, I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'll be asking. The whole point of this discussion is to hear your opinions about the news releases. It doesn't matter whether you have a positive or a negative opinion, both are important to hear.
- Next, I want to assure you that everything we discuss today will remain confidential. Whatever information we obtain from you will not be shared with anyone in a way that identifies who you are. For example, we won't use your name or the names of your organization in the report of the findings that we'll be writing. To facilitate this outcome, I'll just be calling you by your first name, and when you talk about your organization, try not to mention it by name.
- We also expect that you'll treat the information we exchange today as confidential. You should not identify anyone who participates in this group after we're finished today.
- With your consent, we'll be audio-taping the discussion today. This helps reduce the burden of note taking, plus others who could not be here today will be able to hear what you have to say. The only people who will listen to the tape will be BLS research staff. Does anyone have any objection to audio-taping?
- Finally, I want everyone to get a chance to speak when they have something to say. So I ask that you try to keep your comments brief and related to the issue at hand. And I'd appreciate it if you wait until another person is finished speaking before speaking up yourself.

How about if we quickly introduce ourselves? Please tell us your first name, your position, how long you have used BLS data, and which news releases you use.

Questions

1. **What is your general opinion of BLS news releases? If you were asked to give them a grade, A, B, C, or D, what grade would you assign, and why?**
2. **How do you use the BLS news releases?**
Probe: How much of the explanatory, descriptive text do you use?

Probe: What level of user, for example, novice, moderately experienced, very experienced, are the news releases designed for? Why do you say that?

3. How do you use the charts and maps that are embedded in the news release?

Probe: How easy or difficult are they to use?

Probe: Are there any improvements that you would like to see made to them?

4. How do you use the tables in the news releases?

Probe: How easy or difficult are they to use?

Probe: Are there any improvements that you would like to see made to them?

5. How do you use the technical notes that accompany each press release?

Probe: Which audience do you think they are written for?

Probe: Are there any improvements we should make?

6. As BLS considers making changes to the news releases, what changes would you suggest, or that you would like us to investigate?

Attachment B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is conducting research to improve the utility of its news releases.

The BLS, its employees, agents, and partner statistical agencies, will use the information you provide for statistical purposes only and will hold the information in confidence to the full extent permitted by law. In accordance with the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (Title 5 of Public Law 107-347) and other applicable Federal laws, your responses will not be disclosed in identifiable form without your informed consent. The Privacy Act notice on the back of this form describes the conditions under which information related to this study will be used by BLS employees and agents.

During this research you may be audio and/or videotaped, or you may be observed. If you do not wish to be taped, you still may participate in this research.

We estimate it will take you an average of 60 minutes to participate in this research.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary, and you have the right to stop at any time. If you agree to participate, please sign below.

Persons are not required to respond to the collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB control number is 1220-0141 and expires April 30, 2018.

I have read and understand the statements above. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant's signature

Date

Participant's printed name

Researcher's signature