

ConnectHome Use and Barriers Focus Groups

Supporting Statement for Paperwork Reduction Act Submission, Part A

Submitted to:

U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)

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OMB control number 2528-New

Part A: Justification

This supporting statement provides information on the data collection activities associated with the baseline survey for the White House and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's ConnectHome initiative.

A.1 Circumstances that make the collection of information necessary

President Barack Obama and Secretary Julián Castro announced ConnectHome on July 15, 2015 as the next step in the Obama Administration's efforts to increase access to high-speed Internet access for all Americans. The ConnectHome initiative builds on ConnectED, which aims to connect 99 percent of K-12 students to high-speed Internet in schools and libraries by 2018. ConnectHome will bring the opportunity for high-speed home Internet access to low-income families across the nation, including an estimated nearly 200,000 children. Through public-private partnerships, nonprofits, businesses, and Internet service providers (ISPs) ConnectHome will offer high-speed Internet service, devices, technical training, and digital literacy programs to residents of HUD assisted housing in 28 pilot communities, including the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. To date, local government executives have already committed to reallocate local funds, leverage local programming, and use regulatory tools to support this initiative and the expansion of broadband access in low-income communities.

ConnectHome responds to an urgent need in our communities. As a recently released report from the President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) illustrates, some Americans are still unable to benefit from high-speed internet access, especially America's lower-income children.¹ The report highlights that while nearly two-thirds of households in the lowest-income quintile own a computer, less than half have a home internet subscription. While many middle-class U.S. students go home to Internet access, allowing them to do research, write papers, and communicate digitally with their teachers and other students, too many lower-income children go unplugged every afternoon when school ends. This "homework gap" runs the risk of widening the achievement gap, denying hardworking students the benefit of a technology-enriched education.

HUD selected the twenty-seven cities and one tribal nation to participate in ConnectHome. HUD selected these communities through a competitive process that took into account local commitment to expanding broadband opportunities; presence of place-based programs; and other factors to ensure all are well-positioned to deliver on ConnectHome:

Albany, GA; Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Baton Rouge, LA; Boston, MA;
Camden, NJ; Choctaw Nation, OK; Cleveland, OH; Denver, CO; Durham, NC;
Fresno, CA; Kansas City, MO; Little Rock, AR; Los Angeles, CA; Macon, GA;
Memphis, TN; Meriden, CT; Nashville, TN; New Orleans, LA; New York, NY;
Newark, NJ; Philadelphia, PA; Rockford, IL; San Antonio, TX; Seattle, WA;
Springfield, MA; Tampa, FL; and Washington, DC.

¹ White House Council of Economic Advisors. July 2015. *Mapping the Digital Divide*.
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/wh_digital_divide_issue_brief.pdf.

HUD is also taking major steps to provide communities across the nation with tools to improve digital opportunity for its residents:

- Rulemaking that requires HUD-funded new residential construction and substantial rehabilitation projects to support broadband internet connectivity.
- Providing communities with the flexibility to spend portions of their Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grants on local broadband initiatives and associated connectivity enhancements, including approximately \$150 million dedicated to the current competition.
- Rulemaking to include broadband planning as a component of the Consolidated Planning process, which serves as a framework for a community-wide dialogue to identify housing and municipal development priorities.
- Providing guidance and share best practices with HUD-funded grantees on how to more effectively utilize HUD funding to support broadband connectivity.
- Integrating digital literacy programming and access to technology into related initiatives.

HUD is partnering with an external research team (Insight Policy Research) to evaluate the ConnectHome program. The evaluation includes a process study in five sites where the program is implemented to understand how sites approach early implementation of the program, gain insights as to practice challenges and breakthroughs in these settings, and to understand early outcomes. The purpose of this data collection is to conduct focus groups in 5 ConnectHome sites of targeted residents' use of their high-speed, at-home Internet connections and self-reported benefits, including for education and employment.

This research is conducted under the authority of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to undertake programs of research, studies, testing and demonstration related to the mission and programs of HUD (12 USC 1701z-1 et seq.).

A.2 Purpose of the Information Collection

As communities begin to implement ConnectHome in 2016 and connect residents to Internet access within their homes, these focus groups will illuminate how families are taking advantage of ConnectHome as well as barriers they may encounter. The focus groups will explore ConnectHome subscribers' previous broadband access, current and planned patterns of use, and current and anticipated benefits of their at-home high-speed Internet access. Questions will emphasize educational Internet use such as completing homework, connecting parents with educators, and applying to college. In addition, the focus groups will explore barriers to signing up for ConnectHome, securing devices, and using the Internet.

HUD shall conduct focus group discussions in 5 ConnectHome sites. These focus group discussions are intended to conduct “deep dives” on themes that emerged from the baseline surveys of internet access and internet subscribers. HUD expects for focus groups to be conducted with public housing residents.

There will be 3 focus groups identified below in each of the 5 ConnectHome sites.

1. Internet subscribers via a ConnectHome offer (9 to 11 residents)
2. Residents without in-home internet connection (to include those with smartphone only access) [9 to 11 residents]
3. Depending on the stage the community is in, the third group will either be with subscribers (1) or residents without in-home internet connections (2)

This Information Collection Request (ICR) includes three data collection instruments:

Public Housing Authority (PHA) Resident Screener Form (Appendix A)

Written Consent Form (Appendix B)

The Focus Group Questionnaire (Appendix C)

The contractor will follow the protocols for both the Non-Subscriber Focus Groups (included as Appendix D) and Subscriber Focus Groups (included as Appendix E). Residents for both the Focus Groups will be identified by PHA staff in the 5 targeted communities using the PHA Resident Screener Form (included as Appendix A). This is estimated to be .083 burden hours (5 minutes) for each PHA resident. The completion of the screener is voluntary. Before beginning the recruitment process, PHA staff will be trained on recruiting procedures by HUD’s research contractor. They will be instructed on following the script in the screener and confidentiality procedures; HUD staff will use their own networks of residents to recruit from. The focus group moderator will also obtain written consent for residents that participate (included in Appendix B). This is estimated to be .083 burden hours (5 minutes) for each PHA resident. The completion of the consent form is voluntary. The Focus Group Questionnaire to be administered by Insight Policy Research (included as Appendix C). This is estimated to be .083 burden hours (5 minutes) for each PHA resident. The completion of the questionnaire is voluntary.

This Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) submission includes the instrumentation required for use under the ConnectHome Evaluation Study.

A.3 Improved technology.

As a process study, the use of automated and electronic data is not appropriate. We will make every effort to reduce the burden on the grantees. The questionnaire will be conducted by an experienced researcher who, whenever possible, will be accompanied by

a junior researcher. The focus groups will be carried out in person and audio recorded, granted prior consent of participants.

All information will be protected and held confidentially.

A.4 Efforts to identify duplication.

There is no existing data source that can readily be analyzed to document early implementation of the ConnectHome Program. Similarly, there is no existing data source that can be analyzed to document residents' views and experiences in the program since the program is being implemented anew in the target developments. HUD's ConnectHome team will be training the PHA staff in the 5 participating communities on recruitment procedures to identify and avoid any duplication of residents in the targeted focus groups.

A.5 Impact on small businesses or other small entities.

Small businesses are not part of this information collection effort and thus we do not anticipate that this study will burden small businesses.

A.6 Consequences if information is collected less frequently.

This is three-year information collection request. The focus groups will explore ConnectHome subscribers' previous broadband access, current and planned patterns of use, and current and anticipated benefits of their at-home high-speed Internet access. Questions will emphasize educational Internet use such as completing homework, connecting parents with educators, and applying to college. In addition, the focus groups will explore barriers to signing up for ConnectHome, securing devices, and using the Internet.

If the focus groups for ConnectHome is not administered and the data not collected, analyzed, reported, and disseminated, Federal program or policy activities will not be informed by high quality evidence on a variety of outcomes of internet connection through ConnectHome. Limiting analysis to only those outcomes available through the baseline survey will complicate critical decisions regarding future investments in internet connection in public housing households.

A.7 Special circumstances.

The proposed data collection activities are consistent with the guidelines set forth in 5 CFR 1320 (Controlling Paperwork Burdens on the Public). There are no special circumstances that require deviation from these guidelines. The following below are **"Not Applicable"** to this collection:

- * requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly; **"Not Applicable"**

- * requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it; **“Not Applicable”**
- * requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document; **“Not Applicable”**
- * requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records, for more than three years; **“Not Applicable”**
- * in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study; **“Not Applicable”**
- * requiring the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB; **“Not Applicable”**
- * that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or **“Not Applicable”**
- * requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secrets, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law. **“Not Applicable”**

A.8 Federal Register Notice/Consultations outside the agency.

The 60-day notice was published in Volume 81, No. 60, Tuesday March 29, 2016. HUD received no public comments on this proposed information collection.

A.9 Payment or gifts.

As a token of appreciation, residents who participate in focus groups will receive a \$50 gift card. This amount is comparable to compensation provided in OMB-approved studies with similar levels of burden. Three factors helped to determine the incentive amounts for the focus group: 1) participant burden; 2) costs associated with the amount of time that the focus group participant will commit to focus group participation; and 3) other studies of comparable populations and burden. In previous PD&R studies OMB has approved the following: \$25-dollars for Jobs Plus Pilot Program 2528-0310 (60-minute focus group) and \$60-dollars for Pre-Purchase Homeownership Counseling Demonstration 2528-0306 (120-minute focus group). OMB also approved a \$50 incentive for a 90-minute focus group for a recent non-HUD study from USDA/FNS focused on low-income households participating in a Nutrition Assistance Program (OMB Control Number: 0584-0597, Expiration date: 3/31/2015). Given the 90-minute timeframe for the ConnectHome focus group, we believe \$50 is appropriate.

A.10 Assurance of confidentiality.

HUD has entered into a cooperative agreement with an independent research team to conduct this research effort. HUD and the research team does promise confidentiality as stated in the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. 552a), Records Maintained on Individuals. Respondents included in the study will be asked for written consent to participate in

interviews or focus groups (See Appendix B for Written Consent). At the start of each focus group, the moderator will obtain the written consent for residents. All respondents included in the study will be informed that information they provide will be used only for the purpose of this research. Individuals will not be cited as sources of information in prepared reports. Findings will be publicly reported only at the aggregate level in the final report.

A.11 Sensitive questions.

The focus group questionnaire **does not** ask for the study participant’s name, address, telephone number, and email address. The questions in the questionnaire are not considered sensitive. The findings from the study will be publicly reported only at the aggregate level: individual residents will not be identified in any subsequent reports.

A.12 Provide an estimate of the burden, in hours and cost, of the collection of information.

The hour burden estimates for data collection for the process study is outlined in Table 1. We have assumed the maximum possible number of study participants. The estimates included in Table 1 are based on experience with previous implementation studies involving similar populations and data collection instruments.

Table 1: Data Collection Activities and Anticipated Burden

Information Collection (instruments)	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Response	Responses Per Annum	Burden Hour Per Response	Annual Burden Hours	Hourly Cost Per Response	Annual Cost
Screener (Appendix A)	495	1	495	.083 (5 minutes)	41.085	\$30.00	\$1,232.55
Consent Form (Appendix B)	165	1	165	.083 (5 minutes)	13.695	\$30.00	\$410.85
Focus Group Discussion (Appendix D plus Appendix E)	165	1	165	1.5 hours	247.500	\$30.00	\$7,425.00
Total Burden Hours	825				302.280	\$30.00	\$9,068.40

A.13 Estimate of additional total costs to respondents

This data collection effort involves no recordkeeping or reporting costs for respondents other than the time burden to respond to questions on the data collection instruments as described in item 12 above. There is no known cost burden to the respondents. We estimated the \$50.00 gift card as reimbursement for the respondent’s time. PHA staff time was estimated at a yearly gross salary of \$62,400.00. The PHA staff that will be used for the screener form and consent form can be of any position in the PHA so \$62,400 is an average based on a range from highest salary to lowest salary employee. We converted the \$62,400 gross wage to an hourly wage of \$30.00 (.5 minutes = \$2.50) for the screener form and the consent form.

A.14 Provide estimate of annualized cost to Federal Government

This is a fixed price contract. The data collection activities to be supported by the Federal Government total \$220,632 over one year for this research effort, resulting in an annualized cost of \$220,632 to the Federal government. Included are costs associated with the draft focus group protocols (\$55,158), final focus group protocols (\$55,158), final draft focus group summary report (\$55,158) and final focus group summary report (\$55,158).

A.15 Explanation of Program Changes / Adjustments

This is a new collection.

A.16 Publication of Results

HUD will publish results of the focus groups in 5 individual case study reports. There will be no tabulations, and analysis. Insight will conduct the focus groups October 28, 2016 thru December 23, 2016. The publications plan is Insight will submit a draft summary report on February 17, 2017. The final summary report will be submitted on March 17, 2017.

A.17 Display of the Expiration date for OMB Approval of the Information Collection

The expiration date for OMB approval will be displayed on any forms completed as part of the data collection.

A.18 Explanation of Each Exception to the Certification Statement

No exceptions are necessary for this information collection.