

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Volume I
Supporting Statement

NCER- NPSAS Grant Study – Financial Aid Nudges
2017 Focus Groups

OMB# 1850-0803 v.183

December 2016

Attachments:

- Attachment I - Recruitment Procedures
- Attachment II - Consent to Participate in Research
- Attachment III - Focus Group Confirmation Email or Text
- Attachment IV - Pre-Focus Group Review of Text Messages
- Attachment V - Focus Group Protocol
- Attachment VI - Intervention Text Messages

Submittal-Related Information

The following material is being submitted under the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) generic clearance agreement (OMB# 1850-0803), which provides NCES the capability to improve data collection instruments by conducting testing, such as usability tests, focus groups, and cognitive interviews, to improve methodologies, survey questions, and/or delivery methods. This request is to conduct one to four focus groups with postsecondary college students in order to refine the text message language used in the interventions in the Financial Aid Nudges 2017 study. The request to conduct the full scale study is currently in a 60-day public comment period and will be submitted to OMB for review in mid-December 2016 (OMB #1850-new v.1).

Background

In 2010, the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), both within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), began collaborating on an education grant opportunity related to the cross-sectional National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). Under the NCER-NPSAS grant opportunity, researchers could submit applications to the Postsecondary and Adult Education topic within the Education Research Grants program (CFDA 84.305A), under either the Exploration or Efficacy and Replication research goal. Consistent with these two goals, NCER supports research projects using NPSAS to: 1) explore relationships between malleable factors (e.g. information on benefits of financial aid and FAFSA renewal) and postsecondary persistence and completion, as well as the mediators and moderators of those relationships; and 2) evaluate the efficacy of interventions aimed at improving persistence and completion of postsecondary education (e.g., financial aid and FAFSA renewal advice delivered via mail and email). Researchers approved for funding through this program can obtain indirect access to a subsample of the national NPSAS sample (after the study's student interviews are completed) in order to conduct unique research projects that adhere to the guidelines set forth in the Request for Applications for the Education Research Grants Program, as well as guidelines set forth by NCES and the NPSAS program.

On July 1, 2016, two grants were awarded using a subsample of 2015-16 NPSAS sample members:

- *Financial Aid Nudges: A National Experiment to Increase Retention of Financial Aid and College Persistence* (<http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=1848>), and
- *Could Connecting Students with Financial Aid Lead to Better College Outcomes? A Proposal to Test the Effectiveness of FAFSA Interventions Using the NPSAS Sample* (referred to as "Connecting Students with Financial Aid (CSFA) 2017"; <http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=1853>).

The *Financial Aid Nudges 2017* study investigates whether an intervention that provides financial aid information, reminders, and advising to college students via text messages increases completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and compliance with the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) requirements of the Pell grant program. In addition, information will be provided on the availability of additional financial resources and benefits available to students, and the benefit of making use of campus-based support resources. The primary grantee is Sara Goldrick-Rab, Temple University (Grant Award #R305A160400), and the co-principal investigators are: Benjamin Castleman, University of Virginia; Lindsay Page, University of Pittsburgh; and Bruce Sacerdote, Dartmouth College. Data collection will be led by the contractor, RTI International (RTI), with College Possible and Signal Vine subcontracted for this study.

This request is to recruit for and conduct with postsecondary college students one to four focus groups for the *Financial Aid Nudges 2017* study to determine the extent to which terms in the intervention text messages are comprehended and to refine their language accordingly.

Design and Context

Noreen Siddiqui, a doctoral student and Graduate Assistant in Educational Policy and Leadership at Marquette University, will conduct the focus group(s) in December 2016. She is an experienced interviewer and has both practical and academic experience with financial aid, SAP, and food insecurity, the subjects of the text message scripts. Previous to graduate school, Ms. Siddiqui was an academic advisor and student assistance specialist for five years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Oregon State University. In those positions she helped students navigate financial aid and SAP appeals processes. In her doctoral work, she studies food and housing insecurity. The focus group results will guide refinement of text message language to be used for intervention in the Financial Aid Nudges 2017 study. The focus group protocol will contain both open-ended questions and targeted probes to explore participants' opinions, decisions, and understanding of the text messages and terminology.

The focus group(s) will be conducted with low-income and first generation students from a public 2-year institution in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the population of interest in the Financial Aid Nudges 2017 study. An instructor at that institution, who has led multiple initiatives to provide support for low-income and first generation students at the institution, will recruit focus group participants from known to him low-income and first-generation students. The instructor will emphasize the fully voluntary nature of their participation.

Up to 12 students per focus group will be invited to participate. A copy of the text messages will be sent electronically to each participant at least three days prior to their focus group, at which time they will be asked to write down their thoughts about the messages. They will then participate in a focus group to discuss whether and how they understood the information that the text messages are attempting to convey, and to provide input on how the messages may be improved to increase comprehension. The focus group will be held in-person at the institution from which the students will be recruited. Noreen Siddiqui will take notes during the focus group and, immediately following the conclusion of the focus group, will summarize the common themes and insights learned.

Attachment I in this submission presents the materials that will be used for recruitment of participants. Attachment II contains the Assurance of Confidentiality, Attachment III the focus group confirmation email message, Attachment IV information for the pre-focus group review of text messages, Attachment V the focus group protocol, and Attachment VI the intervention text messages to be discussed during the focus group.

Estimated respondent burden

The instructor will ask students from a known population of low-income and first-generation students if they would like to participate in the focus group. The request will emphasize that participation is entirely voluntary. Students who agree to participate will be asked to review the text messages prior to the focus group, which is estimated to take approximately 20 minutes. Each focus group itself will last a maximum of 90 minutes.

Table 1: Estimate of maximum respondent burden (for up to 4 focus groups and up to 12 students per focus group)

Activity	Maximum number of respondents	Maximum number of responses	Minutes per respondent	Maximum total burden hours
Pre-focus group review	48	48	20	16
Focus group	48	48	90	72
Study Total	48	96		88

Estimate of Costs for Recruiting and Paying Respondents

In order to be able to recruit a representative range of respondents, and to thank them for their time and participation, we will offer prospective respondents \$20 for participating in the 90-minute focus group.

Estimate of Cost Burden

There are no direct costs to respondents.

Cost to Federal Government

There will be no cost to the federal government for conducting this/these focus group(s).

Assurance of Confidentiality

Focus group respondents will be informed that:

This study is authorized by law under the Education Sciences Reform Act (20 U.S.C., § 9543). All responses that relate to or describe identifiable characteristics of individuals may be used only for research purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C., § 9573).

No personally identifiable information will be associated with respondents's participation in the focus group discussion. Respondents will be assigned a unique identifier (ID), which will be used solely for summarizing input. The ID will not be linked to the respondent's name in any way. The signed consent forms will be kept separate from the focus group files for the duration of the study and will be destroyed after the focus group results are compiled.

Schedule for OMB requests and related activities

The instructor will begin recruiting for the focus group(s) immediately upon receiving OMB clearance, and the focus group(s) will begin within a few days of OMB clearance. Informed by the focus group(s), a final draft of the text message interventions will be provided in the Financial Aid Nudges 2017 study clearance request (OMB# 1850-new v.1) and will be used with approximately 8,700 sample members. The text message interventions in the full scale study will begin in January 2017. If needed, a change memo will be submitted to reflect the final intervention wording.

Schedule for OMB requests and related activities

Recruit participants	December 2016
Begin focus group(s)	December 2016
Change memo with final text message wording (if needed)	January 2017