

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT**  
**U.S. Department of Commerce**  
**U.S. Census Bureau**  
**Current Population Survey (CPS) Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement**

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Necessity of Information Collection

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) requests authorization from the Office of Management and Budget to conduct the Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey (CEV). In partnership with the U.S. Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics the CEV will be a supplement to the September Current Population Survey (CPS).

The proposed CEV supplement is a redesigned instrument will replace the previous September Volunteer and November Civic Engagement supplements. If authorized, the proposed instrument will be administered bi-annually starting in September 2017. CNCS will use the Volunteer and Civic Engagement Survey to collect data for annual reports and research on volunteering and civic health (Attachment A1).

CNCS has partnered with the US Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics to collect data and produced annual volunteering reports since 2002. CNCS is also mandated by the Serve America Act (2009) to produce an annual Civic health assessment in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship. Volunteering and Civic Life reports and tables are made public on the CNCS VCLA Website and specialized tables are made available upon request.

The proposed survey will be the only source of nationally representative data on the number of Americans who are active in their communities, through volunteering, social interactions, political activities and civic behaviors. These measures include a person's interactions with family, friends and neighbors, participation in community events, informal interactions, communication with one another on issues of public concern, interactions with public and private institutions and political participation.

Authorization for the collection of this information is provided in Title 13, United States Code, Sections 8(b) and 182, and Title 29 USC, Section 1, and PL 111-13 (H.R. 1388), 42 USC 12639a

2. Needs and Uses

2.1 Purpose of Project

The purpose of collecting data on civic engagement and volunteering is to provide scholars, government officials and policymakers with official government measurement on the level of civic engagement social capital and social cohesion in the

United States. These indicators can inform policies and practices that promote increased citizen activity in the political, civic, and social spheres, at the national, state, and community levels.

When combined with demographic characteristics (age, sex, race, education, occupation, income), the data can provide information on the relationship between these characteristics and the level of civic engagement in the United States.

Government agency analysts and private, state and local leaders may use these data to compare levels in their area of interest to the national level of civic engagement, and to link these data to other measures of civic health in order to formulate policies that foster healthy communities.

## 2.2 Rational for a Redesigned Supplement

Historically CNCS has fielded two national surveys through CPS supplements. The September Volunteer supplement have been administered yearly since 2002 and the November Civic Life supplement has been administered yearly from 2008 through 2011 and bi-annually since then.

In 2010 CNCS considered redesigning its Civic Life and Volunteer data collection instruments with the goal of achieving greater theoretical coherence, less public burden and reduced cost. CNCS contracted with the National Academy of Sciences to review the supplements and the data collection process and make recommendations to guide the development of a re-designed instrument and data collection process in order to achieve these goals. In 2014 the National Academy released a report summarizing a comprehensive study of measurement on the topics of civic health and volunteering, and made a series of recommendation for how CNCS may proceed<sup>1</sup>. These recommendation strengthened data collection and reporting and also addressed the goals of burden and cost

## 2.3 Proposed Design

The design of current instrument, for which CNCS is seeking authorization was substantially guided by these recommendations and through consultation with a technical working group of stakeholders and civic researchers (Attachment A7.). Additionally, the redesigned supplement was guided by comments and suggestions from public users (Attachment A6.).

The most salient recommendations pertinent to this data collection effort included:

- Combining the Civic Life and Volunteer supplements
- Eliminating redundant items from the prior supplements and to the extent possible, similar items on other federal surveys
- The selected items should be related to conceptual or policy issue of interest
- Survey items should be limited to concepts that can be estimated from a small set of questions
- The survey items should ask about people's behaviors

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/Civic-Engagement-and-Social-Cohesion>

- The measured concepts should be difficult to ascertain through non-survey methods
- The selected items can be correlate with personal attributes captured on the Current Population Survey in order to study how they interrelate for groups
- The selected items should focus primarily on political and civic participation
- CNCS should consider both administrative data and alternative sources of data (social media) to complement its measurement efforts, and should also consider quantitative and qualitative data gathered at the community or neighborhood level.

In deciding which items to include on the re-designed supplement, CNCS referenced four broad domains encompassing civic behavior: Political Engagement, Social Engagement, Moral Engagement and Civil Engagement.

Briefly described, political engagement represents activity intended to affect government action. Social engagement represents associational involvement, including informal socializing and personal friendships that do not have a political objective as their basis. Moral engagement represents activity in support of a particular moral code, moral reasoning, or moral principles. The fourth domain, civil engagement, is the combination of social and moral engagement manifested as public-spirited, cooperative problem-solving.

These domains, derived from research and scholarship on social cohesion, social capital, and civic engagement, represent a broad framework that encompasses civic activity. However, given the NAS recommendations, the constraints of the CPS (limits on the number of questions and survey length) and the broad national scope of the survey, CNCS limiting measurement to social/civic and political engagement items. Queries on moral engagement are less well developed in the research literature and inappropriate for large national survey.

The selected items included on the proposed data collection instrument meet the recommended standards from the NAS report. These items have been used on previous versions of the volunteering and civic health supplements, and also aligned with the domains and items on other currently administered civic health and volunteering instruments, including those used by foreign governments.

Following two rounds of cognitive testing conducted by the US Census, the proposed instrument is comprised of 20 distinct items representing the following domains (Attachment 2A.):

### *Social Engagement*

A substantial body of literature, including research reviewed in the NAS Report suggests that the fostering of trust within and between groups is central to creating

social capital from social and civil engagement<sup>2</sup>. Generally, trust can be defined as the “willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another’s intention or behaviors (Rousseau et al., 1998; McEvily et al., 2003).”

Putnam (1995, 2000) identified two types of social engagement that he saw as essential to creating social capital, what he calls bonding and bridging ties. The former are the relationships, and behaviors that maintain or improve them, the foster trust within an intimate or homogenous group, such as an individual’s family or ethnic group. The latter are those connections that foster trust between diverse groups within a community, such as a city-wide festival or inter-denominational council. The importance of the presence of both ties within a society is supported elsewhere in the literature (Granovetter, 1973; Gans, 1974; Berger, 2009).

Questions in this domain pertain to common forms of social interaction with people in the respondent’s family and community. In addition to building trust, regular social interactions allow individuals to share information about social, political and economic events. Items in the Social Engagement domain include Questions # 1, 2, 4, 6, 8,

### *Political Engagement*

Questions in this domain focus on the respondent’s willingness and capacity to participate in a political activity that is purposefully influential. Political participation, is a primary component of civic engagement. Behaviors in this category include voting in local and national election, participation in electoral processes such as donating money to political campaigns, attending meetings to discuss local problems or issues, active political expression such and contacting public officials or boycotting products and exchanging political views with family and friends. Items in this domain include questions # 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

### *Civil/ Social Engagement*

Questions in this domain focus on group or organizational participation, gathering to do something positive in the community, and donate money to religious or non-profit organizations. Collectively these items encompass behavior that taps into social connectedness beyond immediate relationships and surroundings or what has been previously described in the literature as “bridging ties (Putnam, 1995 2000).” Items in this domain items reflect social behavior that is outward directed and potentially beneficial to a larger group. These include questions #3, 7, 15, 16, and 18.

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<sup>2</sup> The Saguaro Seminar out of Harvard University was instrumental in assembling literature and experts that led to the creation of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (2000) and the Social Capital Community Survey (2006). This work, in particular the “Dimensions of Social Capital” that were identified, ultimately informed the questions found in the existing Volunteering and Civic Engagement supplements. It is still considered a significant informant of the redesigned supplement.

<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/measurement/measurement.htm>

3. Use of Information Technology

The proposed items and have been developed by CNSC in consultation the Census Bureau, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The proposed administration will use a mix of computer-assisted personal and telephone interviewing, a proven and appropriate data collection methodology. Consideration has also been given to the use of social media and administrative data however these methods are not feasible for a complex demographic survey such as the CPS. Given the scope and nature of the information collection the proposed method constitutes the least amount of burden.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

The Volunteering and Civic Engagement supplement's comprehensive set of questions does not duplicate any other single information collection with respect topic and content, scope, population of interest. There are no comparable data that can be replicated, substituted, or modified for use as described in sections A1 and A2 above.

5. Efforts to Minimize Burden on Small Business

The collection of the voting and civic engagement information does not involve small businesses or other small entities.

6. Consequences of Less Frequent Collection

CNCS is planning to administer the Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey bi-annually. Previous data from annual administrations the September Volunteer supplement and November Civic Life supplement did not generate substantial variation over a yearly period.

During intervening years CNCS plans to conduct research in communities across the United States. CNCS plans to collect data that will complement the bi-annual supplement and provide additional information about civic activity that is measured at the local level using methodologies that are appropriate for this scale.

7. Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances.

8. Consultations with Outside the Agencies

CNCS published a notice in the *Federal Register* on February 8, 2017, FR Doc. 2017-02527 - Vol. 82, No. 25, pp. 9726 -9727, inviting public comment on our plans to submit this request. We received six requests for additional information and sixteen comments in response to the notice. All letters and comments are listed in the attached doc. In summary, of the sixteen comments, 14 raised concerns regarding proposed changes to the volunteer questions. Many of the comments were from volunteer commissions and organizations that represent multiple users.

Primarily the respondents objected to a reduction in the number of questions regarding volunteer activity (organization types, activity types). Four respondents commented

on the reduced capacity to track longitudinal rates and possible changes in the volunteer rate over the previous 14 year period. Fifteen respondents indicated that the previous instrument should be re-instated.

In considering these comments CNCS offers the following response. The re-designed supplement is intended to focus on the broader concept of civic engagement, of which volunteerism is one component. The re-designed supplement incorporates many of the recommendations made by the National Academy of Sciences, as well as recommendations made by experts in the field of civic engagement, social capital and volunteering. The Civic Engagement and Volunteering supplement more accurately reflects the mission of the CNCS, building stronger communities and promoting active citizenship through service. The proposed instrument does include some measures that will allow for limited continuity with the previous supplement, however the advantage of a combined supplement is that it will allow the user to assess overall civic activity conditioned by volunteering.

However in response to the comments requesting greater continuity and because the time burden on the new supplement is shorter, CNCS is adding back some original questions regarding volunteer activity and organizations (Attachment 6A).

CNCS was also in frequent consultation with the following people concerning the development of the supplement:

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The result of these consultations and comments is the final set of questions. Furthermore, a statement soliciting comments for improving the CPS data is prominently placed in all the Census Bureau publications that cite the CPS data. We include a similar statement in the technical documentation that accompanies the microdata files. Finally, the CPS advance letter (see Attachment A3.) provides respondents with an address at the Census Bureau and at the OMB to which they can submit general comments on the survey, specifically those regarding respondent burden.

9. Paying Respondents  
CNCS and US Census, do not make any payments or provide any gifts to individuals participating in the CPS or the supplemental questions.
10. Arrangements and Assurances Regarding Confidentiality  
Interviewers provide the pamphlet, "The U.S. Census Bureau Respects Your Privacy and Keeps Your Personal Information Confidential," to households whenever necessary (see Attachment A4.). All information given by respondents to Census Bureau employees is held in the strictest confidence as guaranteed by Title 13, United

States Code, Section 9. Each interviewer has taken an oath to this effect and is subject to a jail penalty and/or a fine if he/she discloses any information. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, all data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit data. The pamphlet on privacy is currently being updated to reflect this new process and will be used upon the approval and depletion of current pamphlets.

CNCS published only public use data that contains no personal information and has been coded to shield potential identification of participants.

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

The September Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey does not include any questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Estimate of Hour Burden

The Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey contains 18 questions and will be administered to approximately 54,000 households with approximately 90,000 respondents. Respondents will be age 16 or older. The hour burden per household will vary by the number of individual respondents in the home.

CNCS estimates for burden are based in on cognitive testing results conducted by the BLS with the Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey. A single interview was timed at 5:26 minutes yielding a burden of 7890 hours.

13. Estimate of Cost Burden

There are no costs to the respondents other than that of their time to respond.

14. Cost to Federal Government

CNCS estimates that the Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey will cost \$800,000.

15. Reason for Change in Burden

Not Applicable

16. Project Schedule

The Census Bureau will conduct the CPS, of which this supplement is a part, during the week of September 16-22, 2017. Processing of this supplement will commence in December 2017. A public use file will be released approximately 3 months later, with Civic Engagement and Volunteer Survey released by the CNCS.

17. Request to Not Display Expiration Date

The Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement is administered as part of the CPS monthly interview each November. However, the supplement (as well as all the CPS supplements) bears the OMB control number and expiration date, which is different from the CPS basic interview. The OMB control number and expiration date for the CPS basic interview is included in the advance letter we give respondents. Because of the difficulties and anticipated respondent confusion involved with expressing a separate control number and expiration date to respondents for the



supplement questions, the Census Bureau does not wish to display the OMB control number and expiration date for the CPS November supplement.

18. Exceptions to the Certification

There are no exceptions to the certification.