

ATTACHMENT N

PRETEST RESULTS MEMORANDUM

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Wesley Dean

FROM: Michael Ponza and Betsy Santos

SUBJECT: SNAP E&T 12-Month Follow-Up Survey Pretest Results

DATE: 7/17/15
SNAPET-13

This memo summarizes the results from the pretest of the 12-month Follow-Up CATI instrument conducted by Mathematica and summarizes the proposed instrument changes based on these results.

The purpose of the pretest was to address the following issues:

- Survey length when administered in English
- Survey flow
- Respondents' interpretation of questions
- Respondents' ability to recall required information
- Completeness of response category options

To obtain timing estimates, the pretest interviews were conducted by telephone, mimicking as much as possible actual field conditions. And, to explore respondents' understanding and recall of pertinent data required by the survey questions, we conducted a short debriefing after the interview with respondents to learn whether they interpreted questions as intended, if they found any questions difficult to answer from their perspective, why those questions were difficult to answer, and how easy or difficult it was to recall the information required.

Testing Details and Procedures

There were two rounds of pretest interviews. The first round took place between June 23 and June 25, 2015 and was conducted by Brianna Sullivan, a Survey Associate at Mathematica, with assistance from Betsy Santos. Three interviews were conducted using the telephone questionnaire. Results from the round 1 interviews were reviewed and changes were made to the CATI survey. Ms. Sullivan conducted a second round of five interviews between July 1 and July 16, 2015 to confirm that the changes successfully addressed the issues discovered during the first round of testing.

Mathematica's budget assumed that the follow-up surveys would take 30 minutes to complete on average. To obtain timing estimates, the pretest interviews were conducted without any interruptions during rounds 1 and 2. Once the telephone survey was administered, the interviewer then asked a series of debriefing questions to explore respondents' understanding of the survey items.

Pretest respondents were sent a check for \$40 for participating in the 30-50 minute telephone interview, which included extra time for responding to debriefing questions about their perceptions of the interview during or after the interview.

Recruitment and Respondent Profile

We attempted to recruit pretest respondents from four States – Vermont, Virginia, California, and Wisconsin. Evaluation leads sent an email to these States explaining the purpose of the pretest and requested a list of 30 potential respondents who were currently receiving SNAP E&T services. Two pilot States – Vermont and California – ultimately participated. The other pilot States either did not respond to our request, or the process to receive a list of potential respondents required numerous approvals that were judged to be too lengthy.

Respondents were recruited from the convenience sample files provided by Vermont and California. Ms. Sullivan called potential respondents from the lists provided by the States, explained the purpose of the pretest, and scheduled a convenient time for the interview with those who agreed to participate. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the individuals who ultimately participated in the pretest interviews.

TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF PRETEST RESPONDENTS		Round 1	Round 2	Total
Location	Vermont	3	2	5
	California	-	4	4
Gender	Female	1	4	5
	Male	2	2	4
Age	Under 45	1	5	6
	45 and older	2	1	3
Education level	Less than 8th grade	-	-	-
	8th to 12th, no diploma	-	2	2
	High school diploma or GED	1	-	1
	Adult Basic Education (ABE) Certificate	-	-	-
	Some college but no degree	2	-	2
	Vocational/technical degree or certificate	-	1	1
	Business degree of certificate	-	-	-
	Associate degree (AA)	-	-	-
	Bachelor's degree (BA/BS)	-	3	3
	Master's degree (MA/MS) or higher (MD, Ph.D.)	-	-	-
Number of jobs held in past year	0 jobs	2	2	4
	1 job	-	2	2
	2 jobs	1	2	3
Number of employment and training programs attended during the previous year	0 programs	2	2	4
	1 program	1	3	4
	2 programs	-	1	1

Findings

Survey Timing. During the first round of the pretest, interviews averaged 38 minutes. This was quite long considering that 2 of the 3 participants did not hold any jobs or did not participate in any training or education or training programs within the past year, meaning they skipped two entire sections of questions (see Table 2). As a result we cut questions from the survey that we judged did not contribute to primary or secondary outcomes of interest and tested the revised instrument with the remaining 6 participants during the second round of testing.

The second round of interviews averaged approximately 33 minutes. The most time-consuming sections were the ones which required recall of specific details of any jobs (Section B) or education and/or training programs (Section C). Questions were cut from each of these sections. However, it is important to note that additional cuts were made just before the last interview. Many of the changes to Section B occurred after respondent 8's interview but prior to respondent 9's interview. The time savings gained by removing these questions is demonstrated in the difference between respondent 8 and 9's Section B length (ten versus six minutes). Time savings are also demonstrated in the lower mean interview length for round two when compared to round one, even though participants in round 2 had more jobs and programs to discuss in Sections B and C. A list of the cuts that were made can be found in Table 3.

With the current cuts, we believe the survey will average between 30-35 minutes. Other cuts can be made to ensure the survey stays within the 30 minute budgeted time, but it would require eliminating questions that collect data on secondary outcomes, such as the mental health question. However, if the interviews average more than 30 minutes, there are budget implications. We look to FNS for feedback on whether more proposed cuts are desired.

Table 2. Survey Length in Minutes by Round

	Round 1			RD 1 Mean	Round 2						RD 2 Mean	Total Mean
	1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8	9		
# Jobs	0	0	2	0.7	0	0	2	2	1	1	1.0	0.9
# Programs	0	0	1	0.3	0	1	2	1	1	0	0.8	0.7
S – Screening	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1.9
A – Household	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0
B – Employment	2	6	13	7	2	2	14	15	10	6	8	7.8
C – E&T	8	13	11	11	4	9	14	12	12	5	9	9.8
D – Assistance	4	4	3	4	3	2	4	3	3	4	3	3.3
E – Food security	2	4	2	3	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2.3
F – Health	5	11	4	7	2	3	2	3	3	4	3	4.1
G – Housing	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0
H – Contact info	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.1
Total time	28	46	40	38	20	24	43	42	38	28	33	34.3

Table 3. Item Deletions Due To Length

Question: S1	Reduced the length of the introduction.
Question: B8	Removed quit/fired follow-up: - B8. IF QUIT OR FIRED: Why did you (quit/get fired) from [FILL COMPANY NAME]?
Question: B16, B16a	Removed important job resource and opportunities for promotion items: - B16. What was the most important resource you used to find this job? - B16a. (Did/Does) your (current/most recent) job have opportunities for promotion?
Question: B19, B19a	Removed questions about earnings from odd jobs, side jobs, and under-the-table jobs: - B19. Since (fill RA MONTH/YEAR), how much did you earn, in total, from odd jobs, side jobs, under-the-table jobs, or any other activities? Do not include income from gifts, child support, lottery winnings, and things like that. Please remember that all of your responses on this survey will be kept private and will not affect any benefits you receive now or in the future. - B19a. Would you say less than \$500, \$500 to less than \$1000, or \$1,000 or more?
Question: B20	Removed job hunting/retention question: - B20. Sometimes people have problems getting or keeping a job. What problems, if any, have you had getting or keeping a job?
Question: C1	Removed the following from the introduction: - "We're interested in individual meetings you may have had in person or over the phone. Please do not include any meeting you may have had as part of an interview or meetings with individuals you may have spoken with at job fairs or hiring events."
Question: C6, C7, C8	Removed additional questions about career assessment testing from the survey. - C6. How many days did it take to do the testing? - C7. On average, about how many hours each day did you take the career assessment testing? - C8. Were the results of the test(s) shared with you?
Question: C33, C34	Removed questions about transportation costs and career goals. - C33. On average, how much, if anything, do you yourself pay for transportation to get to and from work, training or school? - C34. The next few questions are about your career goals. Whether or not you are currently working, please tell me if you strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree with the following statements: a. I have specific goals for my future b. I have a plan for achieving my career goals c. Planning for a career is not worth the effort e. If I have a career, I won't be able to enjoy other things in life
Question: F3, F4	Removed questions regarding general well-being and challenges. - F3. Taken all together, how would you say things are these days? Would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, not too happy, or not happy at all? - F4. The next questions are about how you feel and handle challenges in your life. Please tell me if you strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree with each of the following statements: a. I can do just about anything I set my mind to b. When I really want to do something, I usually find a way to succeed at it c. Whether or not I'm able to get what I want is in my own hands d. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me e. I can do the things I want to do
Question: G1a, G2	Removed more detailed housing questions. - G1a. Do you own the place you live in, rent your own place or contribute to rent at a friend or family's place, or live rent free? - G2. What type of group quarters do you live in?

Survey Content. Overall, respondents seem to understand most questions and did not appear to have much difficulty answering them. There were some questions that did require further clarification. As such, adjustments were made to the question wording, or interviewer probes were added, to address any respondent misunderstandings of question intent. Table 4 provides a list of questions where there was some issue during administration, and the suggested modifications.

Debriefings. Pretest respondents were asked five debriefing questions: (1) Did you find any of the questions difficult to answer? (2) Did I ask you about anything that was confusing or hard to understand? (3) How easy or difficult was it for you to recall or remember the details about some of your jobs/education programs? (4) How confident did you feel about your answers? (5) In general, is there anything you would change to improve the questions?

All respondents said that they didn't find any questions confusing or hard to understand. And they all expressed having a lot of confidence in their responses. Regarding questions that were difficult to answer, one respondent said it was hard to remember how much SNAP benefits she had received each month. Two respondents mentioned that answering the depression scale was difficult for them emotionally. Another mentioned it was difficult figuring out who was paying for the education program in which they were participating. When asked about recall, one respondent said it was hard to recall how many hours they worked during their last week of work. Another said it was difficult to recall how many months they lived in their apartment. The remaining participants said that it was "easy" or not a problem. Finally, when asked about how the survey could be improved, participants felt overall that the questions were good, and "fair". One mentioned that some things seemed repetitive, but understood that they're needed to cover everyone's experience.

Table 4. Survey Content – Problems Identified and Recommended Changes

Question: S3	Issue	Reminder that all survey responses would be kept private was repetitive, as this was just mentioned in S1, and most respondents began answering as soon as we asked for the last four digits of their social security number anyways.
	Recommendation	Move the following from the question text itself to an optional interviewer probe instead: "IF NECESSARY: Please remember that all of your responses on this survey will be kept private and will not affect any benefits you receive now or in the future."
Question: B1	Issue	Question asked respondents about being self-employed, then mentioned working at a job for pay. Respondents may concentrate on the self-employed portion of the question and answer no without listening to the second half of the question.
	Recommendation	To help respondents focus on working at a job for pay, switch the order of these two items in the question, "Are you currently working at a job for pay or self-employed?"

Question: B2	Issue	Respondents may give reason for why they lost their last job rather than why they haven't been able to find another job.
	Recommendation	Add interviewer probe to clarify: "IF R MENTIONS HOW LAST JOB ENDED (I.E. FIRED, LAID OFF) PROBE: What is the main reason you have not been able to get a new job? Also, added 'pregnancy' to the family responsibilities response category.
Question: C10	Issue	Respondents sometimes had a hard time realizing they were being asked about a different type of programs in item C10 (e.g. education and training programs) than in the previous questions in section C (e.g. career counseling or one-on-one assistance from an employment professional).
	Recommendation	Add introduction to C10 that begins with, "Now we're going to ask you about..." to help differentiate the different types of programs we are asking about
Question: C12	Issue	One respondent said the main reason she had not participated in any education or training programs was due to her pregnancy and subsequent maternity leave.
	Recommendation	Add 'pregnancy' to the need to care for children or others response category. Pregnancy was also added to a similar response category in question B2.
Question: C18	Issue	Needed clarification
	Recommendation	Add the following interviewer probe to clarify: "General education programs include adult basic education or GED courses, college, and other types of school."
Question: C19	Issue	One respondent was unclear about what was meant by "on-the-job training". This respondent said yes to this question because he worked with actual forklifts during this program, but the program wasn't associated with an actual job site.
	Recommendation	Add this clarifying interviewer probe to question: "On-the-job training, also called "OJT," involves getting on-the-job-experience from a particular employer."
Question: C28, C29, C29a, C30, C31, C32	Issue	This question about support services was lengthy, and at times, confusing for respondents due to a lack of further clarification about what an item was referring to (e.g. one respondent indicated he had received medical assistance because he was enrolled in Medicaid).
	Recommendation	Edit question for length, removing less important items, and removing the sub-question about medical assistance and remove follow-up sub-questions C29, C29a, C30, C31, and C32.
Question: D1d	Issue	Two respondents found the term 'Unemployment Insurance' to confusing and did not recognize that they were being asked about general unemployment benefits.
	Recommendation	Reword item to say, "Unemployment Insurance or Unemployment Benefits."

Question: D1g	Issue	Two respondents were unsure whether they received Medicaid. One wasn't sure if he got Medicaid or Medicare, and another said he had 'Obamacare'.
	Recommendation	Add fill for state-specific Medicaid name to question text, e.g. "Medicaid also known as Medi-Cal."
Question: D1h	Issue	One respondent mentioned WIC when asked if they received any other assistance.
	Recommendation	Add specific response category for WIC assistance.
Question: D2b	Issue	Respondents had difficulty recalling the exact amount of their monthly SNAP/Food Stamp benefits, or would mention that the amount varied.
	Recommendation	Add two interviewer probes – "Your best estimate is fine" and "IF MONTHLY AMOUNT VARIED, PROBE: How much was the most recent amount?" to encourage respondents to provide an answer rather than have incomplete data
Question: G1	Issue	Respondents often thought they were being asked for their address instead of what kind of place they lived in (e.g. house, apartment).
	Recommendation	Add interviewer probe of, "What kind of place do you live in?"
Question: G3, G4	Issue	Respondents often went to a bit of effort to recall exactly how long they had lived in their current place of residence in G3, e.g. "Well my daughter was 3 I think, so I guess that was 2010..." etc.
	Recommendation	Since the data being collected was limited to merely more or less than one year, changed question text to reflect that and ease the recall burden for respondents: "How long have you lived there? Would you say less than one year or one year or longer?" For consistency, the same wording change was made for G4: "How long have you been without a regular place to stay? Would you say less than one year, or one year or longer?"

Next Steps

Implementing the cuts to the questionnaire described earlier, we believe the follow-up survey will average between 30 - 35 minutes. Converting the questionnaire to CATI should streamline the administration. Additional cuts could be made to ensure the survey stays within the 30 minute budgeted time, but it would require eliminating questions that collect data on secondary outcomes, such as the mental health question. However, because our planning and budget assumes interviews should on average take 30 minutes, there could be budget implications if administration of the survey exceeds this threshold. We look to FNS for feedback on whether more proposed cuts are desired, and if so, which questions could be deleted.