

Memo: Modification to the September Civic Engagement Supplement. June 21, 2019
Anthony Nerino, Research Analyst/Statistician, Corporation for National and Community Service

The purpose of this memo is to describe modifications to the CPS September Civic Engagement Supplement and to provide justification for these changes.

The 2017 September Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement consists of 16 queries on Civic Behavior, Social Engagement, Political Activity and Volunteering. The first administration of the new instrument was as a supplement to the September 2017 Current Population Survey.

Initial cognitive testing indicated that the item instrument was approximately 10 minutes long however public comments and requests led CNCS to reintroduce two additional volunteering measures that asked about volunteer organizations and activities. The inclusion added substantially to the time burden as these items had eight and fourteen categories respectively, contributing to an unusually high respondent drop off rate.

To address the burden issue and to refine the item list to reflect proposed civic engagement measures, CNCS reviewed each item through a factor analysis to identify those questions that formed coherent scales. The primary consideration for this modification is that retained items are meant to contribute to these civic engagement scales, allowing greater utility and flexibility in reporting these measures across both geography and demographic group.

Consequently, CNCS is proposing the following modifications to the current supplement:

Remove - Item S3 In the past 12 months, how often did you/[NAME] provide food, housing, money or help for friends or extended family? Do not include anything [you do/[NAME] does] for [your/his/her] children, parents, and spouses, partners or significant others even if they do not live with [you/him/her]

Rationale – Although there were high frequencies for this behavior, the item did not load on any factors across all samples. Additionally this item appears to reflect helping behavior more associated with close social ties and poverty and is probably better suited to a different instrument.

Remove - Item S8. In the past 12 months, how often did [you/[NAME]] talk to or spend time with people from a racial, ethnic or cultural background that is different than [yours/his/hers]? This may have been in person, over the phone, or through the internet or social media.

Rational – This Item loaded only occasionally and its value as a civic or social cohesion measure is uncertain. This query also appears more suitable for social cohesion and community engagement instruments that assess smaller geographic areas such as communities.

Remove - Item S15A. Thinking about the group, organization, or association with which [you are/[NAME] is] most active, which best describes the proportion of [your/his/her] in-person activity to online activity?

(1) All activity is in person (2) Activity is more in-person than online (3) Activity is evenly split between in-person and online (4) Activity is more online than in-person (5) All activity is online, or (6) You are a member but not active with any groups, organizations or associations.

Rationale: This item was included to access the proportion of online activity involving group membership. Frequencies for this measure indicated over 70% involvement in-person and an additional 12% both in-person and on-line. Additionally it is not suited for civic engagement scales and is a stand-alone for reporting purposes. CNCS does not report findings on this item and previous iterations on the 2010 – 2011 supplements were dropped for similar reasons.

Remove - Items 16B. For each organization that I mention, please tell me – yes or no – whether (you/he/she) volunteered for this type of organization. In the past 12 months, did (you/he/she) volunteer for a(n): (1) Civic, political, professional or international (2) Educational or youth service (3) Environmental or animal care (4) Hospital or other health (5) Public safety (6) Religious (7) Social or community service (8) Sport, hobby, cultural or arts (9) Other (10) Not determined

Remove - Item 16C. For each activity that I mention, please tell me – yes or no – whether (you/he/she) did that activity for an organization in the last year. In the past 12 months, did (you/he/she): (1) Coach, referee, or supervise sports teams (2) Tutor or teach (3) Mentor youth (4) Be an usher, greeter, or minister (5) Collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food (6) Collect, make or distribute clothing, crafts, or goods other than food (7) Fundraise or sell items to raise money (8) Provide counseling, medical care, fire/EMS, or protective services (9) Provide general office services (10) Provide professional or management assistance including serving on a board or committee (11) Engage in music, performance, or other artistic activities (12) Engage in general labor; supply transportation for people (13) Other

Rationale: These items contribute significantly to the time burden and provide limited information about civic engagement. Lastly, CNCS reported these activities and associations as part of a volunteer report, however reporting organizational involvement and activity for different demographics is not consistent with the proposed reporting plan for civic engagement and volunteering.

Rationale for retained Items: CNCS ran Exploratory Factor Analyses using 8 random samples of between 590 and 3061 cases to verify the following factor structure. The analyses assumed correlation between each factor (Oblique Rotation). The proposed structure was largely replicated across all analyses

The analysis identified 4 factors:

Factor #1 – Civic/Social (Vote – Belong to a Group – Donate Money to a Non-Profit – Volunteer)

Factor #2 – Social/Civic (Have Conversations with Neighbors – Discuss Political, Societal or Local Issues – Do Favors for Each Other – Do Something Positive for the Neighborhood)

Factor #3 – Active Civic/Political - Post Views about Political, Societal and Local Issues on the Internet – Attend a meeting - Visit a Public Official – Buy or Boycott a Product – Donate to a Political Campaign

Factor #4 – Passive Informed Civic - Spend time with Family and Friends – Talk Politics with family or Friends – Read, Watch or Listen to the News about Political, Societal, or Local Issues

As is evident, the retained items load on the four identified factors. The inclusion of additional items is not warranted as the CNCS reporting process primarily reflects civic/social/political engagement of which volunteering is one component of Factor #1.

Detailed description of the analyses and tables available upon request.

