

**Generic Information Collection Request:
Cognitive testing for the 2021 Rental Housing Finance Survey**

Request: 1The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). The Census Bureau plans to conduct pretesting activities for the 2021 Rental Housing Finance Survey (RHFS).

The RHFS is a survey that is collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and is sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The purpose of this survey is to provide a current and continuous measure of financial, mortgage and property characteristics of rental housing properties in the United States. The RHFS is generally self-administered with Census Bureau field staff following up in select cases. The survey focuses on the financing of rental housing properties, with emphasis on new mortgages, refinanced mortgages, or similar devices such as deeds of trust or land contracts, and the characteristics of debt originations. This survey helps inform the development of rental housing policies, especially those pertaining to financing rental housing for targeted groups such as low-income families and individuals, and the elderly. For more information regarding the RHFS: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/rhfs.html>

Purpose: The RHFS asks questions about a range of questions assessing the financial health of rental properties. The 2021 RHFS cognitive testing will include new potential questions and questions that have been redesigned. These question topics are listed below:

- Do rental units/tenants receive HUD rental subsidies?
- If yes, how many units are inhabited by tenants who receive subsidies?
- What is the estimated capital reserves balance for this rental property?
- Some properties have a policy of not accepting HUD rental vouchers. Does this property accept HUD rental vouchers?

The results from the cognitive testing will be recorded and a report produced that outlines the findings of the pretest and recommendations for improvement to questions. This report will be shared with OMB ahead of the proposed information collection request for the 2021 RHFS. This report will include:

- Identifying respondents' sensitivity in answering the new questions
- Understanding how respondents comprehend specific questions
- Identifying respondents' use of records and/or estimation strategies for answering specific questions
- Assessing the respondent's ability to answer specific questions
- Identifying difficulties in completing the questionnaire
- Recommended changes to questions and response options to be implemented in the 2021 RHFS

Population of Interest: Sample members from the 2018 RHFS. Businesses contacted should be representative of all sized businesses and business types, (namely property management companies and owners) and cover a variety of geographic regions.

Timeline: Testing will be conducted from October through November 2020.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: We will conduct two rounds of cognitive interviews – 12-15 respondents for round 1 and 8-10 respondents round 2 for a total of up to 25 respondents in order to evaluate and refine the new questions. While the RHFS is in CAI, the testing will use a different mode due to time constraints. During the interviews, respondents will answer self-administered paper questionnaires (see Attachments B). We will use concurrent and retrospective probes (see Attachment A) to assess respondents' understanding of the questions and the flow of the questionnaire.

Due to the Federal, state, and local guidance on in-person gatherings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews will be conducted over the telephone. A blank draft of the proposed 2021 RHFS questions will be emailed to scheduled respondents prior to the interviews (see Attachment B). Interviews will be conducted by researchers from the Data Collection Methodology and Research Branch. Staff from the Census Bureau's EID may observe if available. Additionally, specially sworn status members of the HUD will be observing interviews.

Sample: We plan to conduct a maximum of 25 interviews. We plan to conduct interviews with a variety of sizes and types (i.e., industries) of businesses. This number of interviews was selected because it is a manageable number of interviews for the time period allotted, it should adequately cover target companies, and should be large enough to provide reactions to the questions in order to identify meaningful findings.

Recruitment: Participants will be recruited by the DCMRB from a pool of survey respondents to the 2018 RHFS and we will target respondents who reported not receiving any types of HUD subsidies to accurately assess the new subsidy item. Once interviews are scheduled, researchers will send participants a confirmation email. Before beginning the interviews, we will inform participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential under Title 13. Researchers will confirm that the respondents have read, understand, and agree to the contents of the consent form (see Attachment D).

Protocol: A copy of a draft interview protocol and a draft questionnaire for testing purposes are enclosed. Cognitive interviews will be conducted over the phone. Participants will be asked to complete the draft RHFS questions. The new items were provided by the survey sponsor, the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Probes on old and new items will be asked concurrently. We anticipate all sessions will take 60 minutes to complete, and only one participant will be interviewed at a time.

Use of incentive: No monetary incentive for participation will be offered.

Enclosures: Below is a list of materials to be used in the current study:

- Attachment A:** Draft protocol
- Attachment B:** 2021 RHFS Draft Content
- Attachment C:** 2018 RHFS Items Booklet
- Attachment D:** Consent Form
- Attachment E:** Recruiting script

Length of interview: For cognitive interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more than 60 minutes (25 cases x 60 minutes per case = 25 hours). Additionally, to recruit respondents we expect to make up to 5 phone contacts per completed case. The recruiting calls are expected to last on average 3 minutes per call (5 attempts per phone call per completed case x 25 cases x 3 minutes per case = 6.25 hours). Thus, the estimated burden is 31.25 hours (25 hours for interviews + 6.25 hours for recruiting).

Contact: The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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