

Household Pulse Survey
During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Request for OMB approval

Revised July 31, 2020

Supporting Statement Section A

1. Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary

On April 19, 2020, the Office of Management and Budget authorized clearance of an emergency Information Collection Request (ICR) to the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau to conduct the Household Pulse Survey. The emergency clearance enabled the Census Bureau to collect urgently needed data on the experiences of American households as the coronavirus pandemic prompted business and school closures, and widespread stay-at-home orders.

The Household Pulse Survey was approved for data collection through July 31, 2020. As the pandemic continues and the data from this survey continue to be widely used and valued by government officials and others managing response and recovery efforts, the Census Bureau seeks to extend the emergency clearance for the full 180 days permitted under 5 CFR Section 1320, *Paperwork Reduction Act*, specifically 1320.13, *Emergency Processing*. For the purposes of discussion, the Census Bureau refers here to the initial deployment of the Household Pulse Survey through July 31, 2020 as “Phase 1,” and to plans for extending the data collection through the balance of time allowable under the emergency clearance as “Phase 2.”

Phase 1 of the Household Pulse Survey was launched on April 23, 2020 as an experimental effort to produce and disseminate data about the health, social, and economic characteristics of American households as they experience the coronavirus pandemic. It is a rapid response endeavor that leverages the resources of the federal statistical system to address emergent data needs. Given the rapidly changing dynamics of this situation for American households, the Household Pulse Survey has been successful in meeting an acute need for information on changes in employment and income, spending patterns, health and access to care, food and housing security, and educational disruption.

In Phase 1, the Census Bureau worked in collaboration with five other Federal agencies to develop questionnaire content. Subsequently, the Census Bureau has been approached by other Federal agencies with requests to include additional content to the Household Pulse Survey for Phase 2. Understanding that information needs are changing as the pandemic continues, the Census Bureau will propose a revised questionnaire to ensure that the data collected continue to be relevant and broadly useful. The Census Bureau has also refined its strategies for contacting households in a clear and effective manner. The proposed questions to be fielded for Phase 2 will be shared in Attachment A once determined. The statement to respondents related to Privacy Act and Paper Reduction Act is included in Attachment B. Contact language for respondents, which includes invitations to participate via email and SMS text, is in Attachment C.

The initial Information Collection Request (ICR) submitted to OMB, including background materials on the Household Pulse Survey, are available at https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAViewDocument?ref_nbr=202004-0607-005.

2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection

Phase 2 of the Household Pulse Survey will continue as an experimental endeavor in cooperation with other federal agencies to produce near real-time data to understand how individuals are experiencing business curtailment and closures, stay-at-home orders, school closures, access to health care, and other dimensions of daily living that may have been changed by the pandemic.

Phase 1 question domains contributed by the Census Bureau (Census), Economic Research Service (ERS), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and the Department of Housing (HUD) were designed to measure employment status, consumer spending, food security, housing, K-12 education disruptions, and dimensions of physical and mental wellness.

For Phase 2, the survey plans to carry over many of these questions to allow users to understand how these domains are changing as the pandemic continues. The Census Bureau has discussed proposed content with the following agencies: NCES, BLS, the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Phase 2 proposes to include additional questions on different topics that may end up including the application and receipt of benefits, spending patterns, post-secondary education disruptions, tobacco and alcohol use, capacity to telework, travel practices, and behavioral changes in response to the pandemic. Questions from Phase 1 that are no longer relevant will be removed; additionally, results from cognitive testing efforts may inform revisions in the questionnaire to improve comprehension and clarity of questions and response options. Many of the questions on this survey have been fielded on other surveys in the past. Others are new, designed to explore potential impacts associated with the coronavirus pandemic response.

All results will be disseminated from the U.S. Census Bureau's Experimental Data Products Series (<https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html>).

3. Use of Improved Information Technology and Burden Reduction

The Census Bureau will conduct this information collection online using Qualtrics as the data collection platform. Qualtrics is currently used at the Census Bureau for research and development surveys and provides the necessary agility to deploy the Household Pulse Survey quickly and securely. It operates in the Gov Cloud, is FedRAMP authorized at the moderate level, and has an Authority to Operate from the Census Bureau to collect personally identifiable and Title 13-protected data.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication and Use of Similar Information

The Census Bureau and its sponsoring survey partners have initiated efforts to incorporate pandemic response-related questions into the existing benchmark surveys, but those efforts are longer term. Over the course of the pandemic, other polls and surveys have been fielded by the following organizations:

- Kaiser Family Foundation
- CNBC/Change Research
- Huffington Post
- CNN/SRSS
- Morning Consult/Politico
- Harris Poll
- University of Southern California, Understanding America Study
- The Data Foundation and NORC at the University of Chicago

The Household Pulse Survey does not duplicate these efforts. First, the sample of the Household Pulse Survey is very large relative to these other efforts, sufficient in size to produce estimates at the state level as well as for 15 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Secondly, the sample frame is the Master Address File (MAF), which is the gold standard frame for U.S. statistics and provides sampled respondents all of the strict confidentiality protections afforded them under Title 13 U.S.C. The statistical infrastructure at the Census Bureau, and within the federal statistical system, enables the use of the MAF coupled with auxiliary and administrative data to allow for extensive procedures to ensure the ability to understand and improve the representativeness of the survey results. Thirdly, the questionnaire has been designed with input from multiple federal agencies, including BLS; USDA/ERS; HUD; CDC and NCHS; NCES; SSA; SAMHSA; the BTS; and the Census Bureau. As such, it is a comprehensive, omnibus instrument that produces data that informs on multiple sectors impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and associated response. Lastly, the data will carry the imprimatur of the federal statistical system and its standards for data stewardship, objectivity and transparency.

5. Impact on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities

The collection of this information does not involve small businesses or other small entities.

We designed the survey questions to obtain the required information with minimal respondent burden. Further, there are no legal issues that influence respondent burden.

6. Consequences of Collecting the Information Less Frequently

Given that households will be managing with the pandemic as a backdrop throughout the summer and fall of 2020, it would be imprudent to cease administration of the Household Pulse Survey at the end of July, 2020. With approval to extend the emergency clearance through the allowable 180 days, we will conduct the Household Pulse Survey through mid-October, 2020.

7. Special Circumstances Relating to the Guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5

Collection of these data is conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5.

8. Comments in Response to the Federal Register Notice and Efforts to Consult Outside the Agency

Upon receipt of the 90-day emergency clearance on April 19, 2020, the Census Bureau published a Federal Register Notice informing the public of the Household Pulse Survey on May 19, 2020. In anticipation of submitting this Information Collection Request to continue the Household Pulse Survey beyond the 90 days, the Census Bureau published a second 60-day Federal Register Notice on June 3, 2020.

As of July 30, 2020, seven comments have been received in response to these Notices:

- A comment was received on June 5, 2020 from the Nevada Grant Office expressing support for continuing the Household Pulse Survey, as the state was using the data to guide decision-making on response and recovery for its citizens;
- A comment was received on June 7, 2020 from a private citizen expressing concerns that information coming from the Federal government more broadly was misleading and that the Household Pulse Survey data would be no different.
- A comment was received on July 20, 2020 from the Data Coalition expressing support for the continuance of the Household Pulse Survey and the utility of the data it produces. The Data Coalition also noted the importance of both private and public efforts to provide data useful to understanding the impact the Covid-19 pandemic is having on the nation.
- A comment was received on July 20, 2020 from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund commending the Census Bureau on the deployment of the Household Pulse Survey, but expressing concerns that the survey's online data collection mode presented challenges for the approach – and specifically its contact strategies – presented risk of underrepresentation of the Latino community given the “digital divide” in the U.S. The Census Bureau acknowledges this concern as it continuously strives as an agency to produce data that are fully representative of the U.S. population. In the wake of the pandemic, the agency was limited in the availability of data collection modes, as the Bureau's in-person interviewing and telephone center operations were curtailed, and its printing and mailing facilities were closed. To deploy a survey quickly and capture the immediate experiences of people in this time, the Census Bureau was limited to conducting data collection online. However, as the survey has progressed the Bureau has introduced SMS text messaging to encourage participation and push respondents to the survey via a single link; survey invitations are sent in English and Spanish and respondents have the option to toggle between languages to complete the questionnaire. The survey is optimized to be completed on a mobile phone. The Census Bureau's weighting strategy for the Household Pulse Survey also strives to adjust for non-response bias. The Census Bureau welcomes NALEO's feedback and will continue to find ways to improve response and representation of the Latino population in the survey data.

- A comment was received on July 29, 2020 from a private citizen expressing support for the Household Pulse Survey, pointing to its utility for understanding the need for public services during the pandemic, with a focus on eviction protection services.
- A comment was received on July 29, 2020 from New Mexico Voices for Children, supporting the Household Pulse Survey and requesting that the Census Bureau continue to administer it for at least 14 more weeks, if not longer, to help inform government officials and policymakers on how schools and businesses are operating and where households are needing assistance. The organization also asked for data on child age be collected and released in age ranges that would assist in understanding education experiences at the pre-elementary, elementary and middle/high school levels; additionally, they are interested in questions about how families are addressing child care issues during this period. The Census Bureau agrees that data informing on child care concerns would be valuable. The burden limit on the current instrument does not permit additional questions in Phase 2, but the Census Bureau and its Federal agency partners working on the Household Pulse Survey will explore the inclusion of such questions for future iterations of the survey should it be continued beyond this emergency clearance.
- A comment was received on July 29, 2020 from a private citizen expressing general support for the Household Pulse Survey.

Given the nature of this submission as requesting an extension of emergency clearance, the Census Bureau is seeking OMB approval prior to the comment period for the second 60-day Federal Register Notice expiring on August 3, 2020. The Census Bureau will take any additional comments under advisement and address them in the subsequent 30-day Federal Register Notice required upon OMB approval.

Comments received to date are available in Attachment D.

B. The efforts to consult outside the agency are outlined below:

The content and design of the Household Pulse Survey was developed initially to serve the needs of five agencies and the Census Bureau, as well as to serve as a data resource for the public benefit. Representatives of these agencies have been involved in the development of the content of the survey and in the dissemination of findings. Since its inception, interest in the survey has only grown, with additional agencies requesting content to support their data needs in supporting pandemic response. The following list contains analysts, researchers, economists, and organizational leaders who have collaborated with the Census Bureau and contributed content to the Household Pulse Survey:

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9. Explanation of Any Payment or Gift to Respondents

There are no payments or gifts provided to respondents.

10. Protection of the Privacy and Confidentiality of Information Provided by Respondents

The information to be collected is protected under the confidentiality provisions of Title 13 U.S.C. Respondents are informed of the nature and extent of the confidentiality of the information they report in the emails they receive and in the information collection instruments.

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

The Census Bureau does not deem any content to be of a sensitive nature.

12. Estimates of Annualized Burden Hours and Costs

The Census Bureau estimates that, for the average household, this survey will take about 20 minutes to complete, including the time for reviewing the instructions and answers. In Phase 1, the Census Bureau released new sample on a weekly basis and anticipated that 108,000 households would respond per week over the course of 12 weeks of data collection; the total burden for Phase 1 was thus estimated to be 427,680 hours (108,000 x 12 x 0.33 hours).

Prior to the launch of Phase 2, the Census Bureau will plan a brief, two-week hiatus for the survey. Phase 2 data collection will initiate the first week of August. Building on lessons from Phase 1, we will release new sample every two weeks (instead of every week as was the case in Phase 1) and allow households a 13-day window to respond (instead of 6 days in Phase 1) to maximize participation and reduce overall burden. For each two-week collection period, we anticipate receiving 105,000 responses for each of 5 data collection periods from mid-August through late October, 2020. The total burden for Phase 2 is estimated to be 207,900 hours (105,000 x 6 x 0.33 hours).

In its efforts to ensure questionnaire items are sound, the Census Bureau estimates an additional 400 burden hours for cognitive testing/web probing. The 400 hours include testing prior to Phase 2 deployment as well as ongoing testing to support continuous improvements as needed.

13. Estimate of Other Total Annual Cost Burden to Respondents or Record Keepers

We do not expect respondents to incur any costs other than that of their time to respond.

14. Cost to the Federal Government

The government cost for this continuation of the Household Pulse Survey is approximately \$1,481,337, paid from Census Bureau appropriations.

15. Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments

The Census Bureau seeks to conduct Phase 2 of the Household Pulse Survey in recognition of the continued pandemic and the degree to which the data have been used to understand household dynamics in this period. Phase 2 will differ from Phase 1 in that the Census Bureau will field a smaller sample and provide selected households 13 days (as opposed to 6 days in Phase 1) to respond. Data will be collected for 13 days, and released on a two-week cycle (as opposed to the weekly cycle in Phase 1). The Census Bureau deemed the reduction in burden relative to the value of weekly releases to merit this two-week cycle. This approach will give respondents more time to respond which is expected to increase response and will lower the initial sample size needed. This longer data collection period also provides the Census Bureau more time to process and review data prior to release. The Census Bureau will monitor whether this change to a two-week cycle continues to meet the needs of stakeholders, and how this two-week cycle changes response rates and internal ability to process data. Lastly, the Phase 2 questionnaire will carry over items from Phase 1, but it will also include additional content that reflects evolving needs for data as the pandemic extends into the year. Questions from the Phase 1 questionnaire that are no longer salient will be eliminated.

16. Plans for Tabulation and Publication and Project Time Schedule

The Census Bureau plans to release data on a bi-weekly basis. Data and analysis products will be released in collaboration with the participating agencies. Tabular data and access to disclosure protected microdata through www.census.gov are expected.

17. Reason(s) Not to Display OMB Expiration Date

The OMB expiration date will be displayed within the data collection instrument.

18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions

There are no exceptions to the certification.

Attachment A: Household Pulse Survey Questionnaire

Attachment B: Privacy Act/Paper Reduction Act Statement

Attachment C: Respondent Contact Language

Attachment D: Consolidated Comments to Federal Register Notices Regarding the Household Pulse Survey