

Household Pulse Survey
During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Request for OMB approval

September 16, 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 initial emergency clearance was approved through July 31, 2020. OMB subsequently approved an extension of the emergency clearance for the balance of the duration authorized under 5 CFR Section 1320, *Paperwork Reduction Act*, specifically 1320.13, *Emergency Processing*. This extension was granted in light of the continuing pandemic and recognition that the Household Pulse Survey data were widely used and valued by government officials and others managing response and recovery efforts.

The emergency clearance for the Household Pulse Survey will expire on October 31, 2020. In anticipation of a continuing need for Household Pulse Survey data, the Census Bureau is putting forward this request through normal (non-emergency) clearance channels for the purposes of continuing the survey beyond the emergency clearance expiration.

For the purposes of referencing prior ICRs, we refer to the initial approval by OMB to conduct the Household Pulse Survey as “Phase 1” (April – July, 2020), and the period approved for the balance of the emergency clearance as “Phase 2” (August – October, 2020). 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 was approached by other Federal agencies with requests to include additional content to the Household Pulse Survey, resulting in a revised questionnaire for Phase 2. Also in Phase 2, the Census Bureau refined its strategies for contacting households in a clear and effective manner.

This ICR requests regular (non-emergency) approval to conduct “Phase 3,” starting November, 2020. Upon approval, the Census would continue to collect the same data collected in Phase 2, through December, 2020. This ICR is designed to provide policymakers with time-sensitive and geographically granular data for informing policy responses to the pandemic, and it is expected that information needs may change over time. Thus during November and December 2020, the Census Bureau will perform an evaluation of the continued need and relevance of the existing content, and weigh its findings with the additional content proposed by other agencies. Because

the Census Bureau goal is to keep the participant burden low to encourage response, the Bureau will give priority to questions that generate data that are most suited to and consistent with the purpose and design of the Household Pulse Survey. The Census Bureau will submit a request to OMB including 30 days of public comment announced in the Federal Register to receive approval to make any substantive revisions to the content or methods of the Household Pulse Survey subsequent to December, 2020.

The launch of new content will be considered a new data collection cycle under Phase 3 as approved by OMB (e.g., Phase 3.1, Phase 3.2, etc.). To facilitate the introduction of new content and a new data collection cycle, the Census Bureau may take a break in data collection. Such breaks will be anticipated and communicated via the Census Bureau's website. In circumstances that meet the requirements for Emergency Clearance under 5 CFR 1320.13, Census may request OMB approval to receive public comment concurrent with the collection of new or revised items or methods.

The Census Bureau commits to continuous evaluation of the need for the continuation of the survey in response to the coronavirus pandemic in consultation with OMB. Depending on the pandemic and the degree to which the Household Pulse Survey data continue to be useful in response and recovery efforts, the Census Bureau may conclude data collection activities prior to the clearance expiration date.

With rare exception (typically to make a clarification or correction), the Census Bureau will not introduce revisions to the questionnaire in the middle of a collection cycle. Rather a revised questionnaire would be deployed as part of a designated new cycle. This ensures that the revised instrument includes question and response items that have been tested, and that collection and processing activities are set up to result in timely and reliable data releases. The Census Bureau will monitor the trajectory of the pandemic and continue its engagement with OMB, other agencies, and stakeholders to determine when additional collection cycles make sense to remain responsive to evolving data needs.

The proposed questionnaire to complete the collection cycle from Phase 2 and start of Phase 3 can be reviewed in Attachment A. The statement to respondents related to the Privacy Act and Paper Reduction Act is included in Attachment B. The language we propose to use to contact respondents, including invitations to participate via email and SMS text, is in Attachment C.

The collection is authorized under Title 13 United States Code, Sections 8(b), 182 and 196.

2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection

Phase 3 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.

At the outset, Phase 3 will carry forward the same questionnaire content as Phase 2. Content has been provided by the Census Bureau (Census); the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (USDA/ERS); the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); the National Center for

Health Statistics (NCHS); the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); the Social Security Administration (SSA); and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). Domains include employment status, capacity to telework, income loss, consumer spending, application and receipt of benefits, food and housing security, education disruptions (K-12 and post-secondary), travel practices, dimensions of physical and mental wellness, and access to care.

Data collected in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Household Pulse Survey have been in high demand and widely praised as a demonstration of the Federal statistical system's ability to respond quickly to collect and disseminate high-frequency data products that inform response and recovery efforts in urgent circumstances like the pandemic. Some of the ways in which the data have been put to use include:

Federal, State and Local Agencies

National Center for Health Statistics

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>

Dept of Housing & Urban Development

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-spotlight-article-092820.html>

National Center for Education Statistics

<https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/new-education-data-from-the-household-pulse-survey>

USDA Economic Research Service

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=98778>

North Carolina Triangle J Council of Governments

<https://www.tjcog.org/data-resources-2020-census/2020-household-pulse-survey>

Academics and NGOs

University of Utah Gardner Policy Institute

<https://gardner.utah.edu/covid-19/household-pulse-data-tool/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl6OD0JwpQw>; data incorporated into AEC's KIDS COUNT Data Center

Brookings Institution

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/22/unequally-disconnected-access-to-online-learning-in-the-us/>

Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies

<https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/using-the-census-bureaus-household-pulse-survey-to-assess-the-economic-impacts-of-covid-19-on-americas-households>

Media

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/census-surveys-pandemic-impact/2020/05/27/b7b55854-a027-11ea-9590-1858a893bd59_story.html

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/yes-unemployment-fell-but-the-recovery-seems-to-be-slowing-down/>

<https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-05-20/one-fifth-of-americans-couldnt-pay-may-rent-or-mortgage-government-survey-finds>

All results from the Household Pulse Survey will continue to be disseminated from the U.S. Census Bureau's Experimental Data Products Series (<https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html>). This and additional information on the Household Pulse Survey available on to the public on census.gov can be found in Attachment D.

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.

Qualtrics is an online data collection platform that allows survey invitations to be distributed electronically via email and/or SMS. All survey initiations for the Household Pulse Survey will be distributed to sampled participants via email and SMS, and data collection will occur entirely on the web. The data collection platform is optimized for use on a mobile device, so may be used via any type of internet access.

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. Other polls and surveys fielded to track the pandemic and its effect have been well-cataloged by the Societal Experts Action Network (SEAN) at <https://covid-19.parc.us.com/client/index.html#/>.

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; NCHS; NCES; SSA; BTS; and the Census Bureau. As such, it is a comprehensive, omnibus instrument that efficiently produces data 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

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic continue, and as such, it would be imprudent to cease administration of the Household Pulse Survey at the end of October, 2020 when the emergency clearance expires. The Census Bureau thus submits this ICR seeking regular (non-emergency) clearance from OMB to continue the survey beginning in November, 2020. This clearance would allow the Census Bureau to complete the collection cycle started in Phase 2, and to consider future collection cycles, as needed. Continuing this collection helps track changes since the early days of the pandemic in the U.S. (April, 2020) and inform recovery from this unprecedented experience for our country.

The Census Bureau proposes a data collection cycle that allows publication of results on a biweekly basis. As discussed above, the frequency and timeliness of the Household Pulse Survey is a key component of its ability to meet the needs of policymakers. The Census Bureau will review all existing and new items to ensure that the burden created by this frequency of collection is justified by the value of producing biweekly estimates.

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. We note two special circumstances related to this collection, specifically:

- 1) Due to the design of the Household Pulse Survey and its purpose in providing data on a near-time basis to inform on response and recovery efforts associated with the pandemic, survey respondents are asked to complete the survey within a period of 13 days from their receipt of communication from the Census Bureau requesting their participation. After 13 days, the data collected in that period is processed and released within two weeks. A new sample of households is released every two weeks.

- 2) The Census Bureau randomly selects households in numbers sufficient to produce and disseminate statistics at a state level. Generally speaking, the sample is selected in a manner such that no household would be selected to participate in the Household Pulse Survey more than once; however, it is possible that this may occur in states with very small populations in order to continue producing data for those states. In those limited cases, it is possible that a given household may be asked to respond to the survey more than once in a calendar quarter.

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

Outside the Agency

As a condition of receiving OMB's 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. A second Federal Register Notice was published on June 3, 2020 in recognition of a growing demand for Household Pulse Survey data beyond the initial emergency expiration date of July 31, 2020. In response to these two Notices, the Census Bureau received 29 comments from organizations and private citizens. The comments are available in Attachment E, and summarized as follows:

- Of the 29 comments, 28 comments offered positive feedback conveying the value of the Household Pulse Survey in terms of its timeliness and the breadth of data made available; one comment offered negative feedback, indicating that the government and its data cannot be trusted.
- Twenty-six comments explicitly requested that the Household Pulse Survey be continued; one commenter believed it should not be continued.
- Twelve comments indicated a desire to include additional content on the questionnaire focused on child care; one comment indicated a similar desire for content relating to other dependent care demands (e.g., older parents, family member with disabilities)
- Twelve comments indicated a desire for the survey to collect age ranges for children under 18.
- Three comments indicated an interest in more information on the impacts the pandemic has had on children.
- One comment indicated a desire for additional questions on educational reopenings.
- One comment indicated a desire for the survey to collect information on household relationships.
- One comment recommended improvements to the health insurance questions currently on the survey.
- One comment recommended content on work conditions and employees' sense of feeling safe and protected at the workplace relative to availability of PPE, social distancing and other practices designed to slow contagion.
- One comment expressed interest in the survey including questions on households' access and use of P-EBT benefits.
- One comment expressed concerns that the survey's online data collection mode could present a participation barrier for respondents, particularly those in the Latino

community, given the “digital divide” in the U.S., and encouraged the Census Bureau to consider additional modes of collection.

- One commenter requested additional data tables that crosstab gender and race, gender and households with and without children, and other gender-based data points.
- One commenter requested more guidance on how to use the data and its limitations through the posting of additional documentation.

The Census Bureau appreciates the feedback received and has taken these important comments and recommendations under advisement. As indicated above, Phase 3 will start using the same questionnaire as was used during Phase 2. As additional collection cycles within Phase 3 are considered, we will evaluate the content and propose deletions, additions and revisions to the questionnaire in light of evolving data needs expressed in these comments and from other agencies and stakeholders. It is the goal of the Census Bureau and its Federal agency partners contributing to this effort that the survey continue to meet as broad a range of data needs as possible while managing household burden.

With regard to consult with outside agencies, 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 questions in the Household Pulse Survey include age, Hispanic origin, race, sex, and tenure. Additionally substantive items on program use and mental health are included as critical content. A number of these questions could be considered sensitive by some people.

The Census Bureau collects racial and ethnic data in accordance with the 1997 OMB standards on race and ethnicity. Information on race and Hispanic origin is required for many federal programs and is critical in making policy decisions, particularly for civil rights. States use these data to meet legislative redistricting principles. Racial and ethnic statistics are used in planning and evaluating government programs and policies to ensure they fairly serve the needs of each community and to monitor against discrimination in these programs and in society. Race and Hispanic origin data are also used to promote equal employment opportunities and to assess racial and ethnic disparities in health and environmental risks.

The content included on program use and mental health are central to the survey. This COVID-19 pandemic impacts many parts of household life. The impact and resource use are critical aspects of the data provided for assisting government and the public understand and meet the ongoing material and non-material needs.

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 based on average time in the instrument metrics collected during the period from August through October 2020. This includes the time for reviewing the instructions and answers. We plan to field sample in keeping with our approach in Phase 2, i.e., we will release new sample every two weeks and allow households a 13-day window to respond. For each two-week collection period, we anticipate receiving 105,000 responses. In its efforts to ensure questionnaire items are sound and remain relevant, the Census Bureau estimates an additional

400 burden hours for cognitive testing/web probing. The total burden for Phase 3 is estimated to be 1,039,900 hours (105,000 x 30 x 0.33 hours + 400 cognitive testing hours).

We calculate the cost of a respondent’s time to complete this survey to be \$8.49. The estimated total annual respondent cost burden based on these hours is \$8,826,255. For individuals, the wage rate is \$25.72 per hour based on hourly earnings for employees as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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 \$3,000,000, paid from Census Bureau appropriations. This assumes Phase 3 data collection would continue for roughly 30 two-week cycles starting November, 2020. Household Pulse Survey costs associated with Phase 1 and Phase 2, collectively, were \$1.73M, which included an initial acquisition of Qualtrics’ services to enable rapid development and deployment of the survey:

Data Collection Platform (Qualtrics)	\$1.05M
Instrument Design and Development	\$ 87K
Sample Design, Management and Estimation	\$ 104K
Data Processing and Dissemination	\$ 446K
Project Management	\$ 43K

15. Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments

The Census Bureau seeks to continue the Household Pulse Survey beyond its current emergency clearance authorization in recognition of the continued pandemic and the degree to which the data have been used to understand household dynamics in this period. Phase 3 will continue the approach in Phase 2. However, this survey remains experimental and changes to content, collection methods, design, and dissemination can be expected as the Census Bureau continues to learn and refine its methods. Data are expected to be collected for 13 days, and released on a two-week cycle.

The Census Bureau, its partner agencies or data users may determine that changes in content, contact strategies or methodology are warranted – to make the data more useful, or to make the survey more efficient and/or less burdensome. In this case, the Census Bureau will request approval for the change(s) from OMB, and deploy approved changes through the launch of a new cycle within Phase 3. The Census Bureau is committed to continuous improvement through the life of the survey, and ensuring that data remain informative and relevant as communities manage dimensions of life impacted by the pandemic.

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.

Data from this survey will be released as experimental. Experimental data products are innovative statistical products created using new data sources or methodologies that benefit data users. Census Bureau experimental data may not meet all of our quality standards. Because of this, we clearly identify experimental data products and include methodology and supporting research with their release. For further discussion of the Household Pulse Survey experimental data products and how the resulting data and corresponding quality will be messaged to the public, including Census Bureau “Guiding Principles: Experimental Statistical Products,” see Attachment F, “Guiding Principles for Experimental Statistical Products.”

The Household Pulse Survey data have short- and longer-term applications. In the shorter term, data tabulations and visualizations will continue to be disseminated on a bi-weekly basis to provide near-time information on the ways in which American households are experiencing the pandemic from a variety of social and economic dimensions. On a longer term basis, the Census Bureau anticipates these data will support a comprehensive suite of research projects looking at these dimensions as they change over time – tracking the trajectory of the pandemic, its eventual wane and the ensuing national recovery. While they were conceived to address urgent information needs, the Household Pulse data will help researchers seeking to understand the effects of the pandemic in retrospective, and guide federal, state and local officials in developing policy that preserve the well-being of Americans in national crisis. Future research efforts may include evaluating the viability of these data for quality linkage to other data sources, which would further enrich understanding experiences during the pandemic as they relate to topics such as household composition, housing condition, income, race and ethnicity, proximity to health care, access to high quality internet and cellular services, transportation, and other dimensions of geographic, infrastructural and demographic characteristics.

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: Public-Facing Information on the Household Pulse Survey on census.gov

Attachment E: Federal Register Notices – Public Comments

Attachment F: Guiding Principles for Experimental Statistical Products