

Alternative Supporting Statement for Information Collections Designed for  
Research, Public Health Surveillance, and Program Evaluation Purposes

# **Communications Focus Groups for Remaking the Safety Net**

**Formative Data Collections for Program Support**

**0970 - 0531**

## **Supporting Statement**

### **Part A**

**August 2020**

Submitted By:  
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## **Part A**

### **Executive Summary**

- **Type of Request:** This Information Collection Request is for a generic information collection under the umbrella generic, Formative Data Collections for Program Support (OMB #0970 – 0531).
- **Description of Request:**  
This information collection request is to conduct focus groups that will inform messaging to program beneficiaries and service providers about a new program initiative called Remaking the Safety Net. The intent of the data collection is to shape communications and messaging about the initiative to the broader program beneficiary and service provider populations, aligning key messages about the initiative with messaging that resonates with those participating in social safety net programming either as recipients or providers of related services. We do not intend for this information to be used as the principal basis for public policy decisions.
- **Time Sensitivity:**  
This project is funded in Federal Fiscal Year 2020, which concludes September 29, 2020.

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### **A1. Necessity for Collection**

The Remaking the Safety Net (RSN) focus groups will assist the program office in (1) gathering feedback on safety net programming, (2) creating resonant communications messages for the Remaking the Safety Net initiative, and (3) identifying trustworthy and relevant channels for communication with program beneficiaries and providers. This information will ensure the program office is able to effectively communicate messages about the initiative, and disseminate the information about the programmatic initiative through accessible and trusted channels of communication with each of the target audiences. There are no legal or administrative requirements that necessitate this collection. ACF is undertaking the collection at the discretion of the agency.

### **A2. Purpose**

#### *Purpose and Use*

The RSN focus groups will provide constituent research designed to understand target audiences with experience with economic and social safety net programming. The focus groups will help identify experiences and perceptions of program beneficiaries and providers, and identify ways for the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) to produce and tailor communications messaging about their RSN initiative in a clear and resonant manner.

The purpose of engaging each group of respondents in the focus groups is to identify audience-specific messaging most appropriate for beneficiaries and providers in faith-based organizations, social enterprise organizations, and public sector agencies. By holding specific focus groups for each audience, OFA intends to identify ways in which messages may be different among the identified groups, and among their trusted and accessible channels of information.

Following the focus groups, a final report will be created by BLH Technologies Inc., and submitted to Office of Family Assistance (OFA) outlining the findings of the discussions as they relate to messaging and trusted sources for information dissemination. The final report will be used by BLH Technologies, Inc. on behalf of OFA to modify or create audience-specific communications that describe the RSN initiative to beneficiaries and providers. It will also be used to identify targeted communication channels that are known to be trusted and accessible to the intended audience types.

This proposed information collection meets the following goals of ACF's generic clearance for formative data collections for program support (0970-0531):

- Delivery of targeted assistance and workflows related to program implementation or the development or refinement of program and grantee processes, and the development and refinement of recordkeeping and communication systems.

The information collected is meant to contribute to the body of knowledge on ACF programs. It is not intended to be used as the principal basis for a decision by a federal decision-maker, and is not expected to meet the threshold of influential or highly influential scientific information.

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### Guiding Questions

- Do the messages created to describe the Remaking the Safety Net initiative resonate with program stakeholders including safety net program beneficiaries and service providers?
- How should the messages be tailored for each specific audience group – social safety net beneficiaries, providers in faith-based organizations, providers in social enterprise organizations, and providers in public social service agencies?
- What channels of communication are most trusted and effective among each of the specific audience groups - social safety net beneficiaries, providers in faith-based organizations, providers in social enterprise organizations, and providers in public social service agencies?

### Study Design

The study includes four individual focus groups with stakeholders of the social safety net – 1) program beneficiaries, 2) service providers in faith-based organizations, 3) service providers in social enterprise organizations, and 4) service providers in public social service agencies. Each respondent group has been chosen in order to tailor communications messaging and information dissemination activities for audience-specific messaging, and to ascertain the specific trusted and most common communications methods and channels for each individual stakeholder audience. Focus groups will consist of 6-8 respondents each and will be facilitated by BLH Technologies, Inc. and their research partner W5. The focus groups will be observed by OFA staff.

Recruitment for participants in each of the four focus groups will be completed through online and telephone screening tools for each of the respondent types. The online screener will be the initial screening type for both beneficiaries and providers. Any participant who appears to qualify for the study based on the online screener will receive a follow up telephone screener to confirm responses. The telephone screener will only be implemented with as many respondent of the online screener as necessary to be able to identify 8 qualifying participants for each of the four focus groups. Screening tools are comprised of questions that will ensure respondents meet the qualifications and requirements of the focus group.

<i>Data Collection Activity</i>	<i>Instrument(s)</i>	<i>Respondent, Content, Purpose of Collection</i>	<i>Mode and Duration</i>
Participant Screening	Instrument 1: Beneficiaries Online Screener  Instrument 2: Beneficiaries Telephone Screener  Instrument 3: Providers Online Screener  Instrument 4: Providers Telephone Screener	<b>Respondents:</b> Social safety net beneficiaries and service providers  <b>Content:</b> The content of the screeners are questions related to knowledge of social safety net programming, and experience working in agencies providing services to social safety net beneficiaries.  <b>Purpose:</b> Questions in the online and telephone screening tools assess whether the respondent meets the criteria for participation in their associated focus group and is able to respond to the questions posed in the focus groups.	<b>Mode:</b> Online survey and live telephone screening  <b>Duration:</b> 15 – 25 minutes each
Focus Groups	Instrument 5:	<b>Respondents:</b> Service providers in faith-based	<b>Mode:</b> Online

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	<p>Beneficiaries Discussion Guide</p> <p>Instrument 6: Providers Discussion Guide</p>	<p>organizations, social enterprise organizations, and public social service agencies that work directly with social safety net beneficiaries</p> <p><b>Content:</b> Questions in the discussion guides ask participants to review the current communications messaging about the Remaking the Safety Net Initiative and provide feedback on the messaging, as well as identify trusted and accessible channels for information dissemination for the new Remaking the Safety Net initiative. Additionally, participants are asked to share their own vision for the future of social safety net programming.</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> The purpose of the information collection is to – 1) refine current messaging about the programmatic initiative in a way that resonates with program beneficiaries and service providers and 2) identify trusted and accessible sources of information where the initiative’s information should be shared to reach each individual audience type.</p>	<p>Focus Group</p> <p><b>Duration:</b> 90 minutes with up to 15-30 minutes of login and instruction time for the virtual platform, as needed</p>
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*Other Data Sources and Uses of Information*

There are no other information collection activities that will be used as a data source for this effort.

**A3. Use of Information Technology to Reduce Burden**

Online screening tools will be used to reduce the burden of respondents using Instrument 1 – Beneficiaries Online Screener and Instrument 3 – Providers Online Screener. Online screeners will be sent via email, and will be completed by respondents through an online/web-based screening tool. Additionally the telephone screening tools and the focus groups will be implemented virtually so that respondents will not be required to travel to a screening or focus group central location.

**A4. Use of Existing Data: Efforts to reduce duplication, minimize burden, and increase utility and government efficiency**

Remaking the Safety Net is a new initiative within the Office of Family Assistance. No similar initiatives currently exist in OFA or other Federal agencies, and no existing data on the messages of this or a similar initiatives exists.

**A5. Impact on Small Businesses**

No small businesses will be involved with this information collection.

**A6. Consequences of Less Frequent Collection**

This is a one-time data collection.

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**A7. Now subsumed under 2(b) above and 10 (below)**

**A8. Consultation**

*Federal Register Notice and Comments*

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations at 5 CFR Part 1320 (60 FR 44978, August 29, 1995), ACF published a notice in the Federal Register announcing the agency's intention to request an OMB review of the overarching generic clearance for formative information collection. This notice was published on October 11, 2017, Volume 82, Number 195, page 47212, and provided a sixty-day period for public comment. A subsequent notice, updated with more specific information, was published on June 18, 2019, Volume 84, Number 117, page 28307, and provided a thirty-day period for public comment. During the notice and comment periods, no substantive comments were received.

*Consultation with Experts Outside of the Study*

There has been no consultation with experts outside of the study.

**A9. Tokens of Appreciation**

All participants who complete both the screening process and the focus group discussion will receive a token of appreciation in the form of a \$75 digital gift card. Studies have indicated a reduction in response rates across Federal surveys. For focus groups with a limited number of participants (in this case 6-8) nonresponse would significantly alter the ability of the researchers to gather the intended data. Research has shown that the use of incentives increases response rate.<sup>1</sup>

**A10. Privacy: Procedures to protect privacy of information, while maximizing data sharing**

*Personally Identifiable Information*

Participants will only be asked for personally identifiable information for the purpose of being able to be contacted regarding the screening responses and participation in the focus group. This personally identifiable information includes the respondent's name, location, email, and phone number.

*Assurances of Privacy*

Information collected will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. Respondents will be informed of all planned uses of data, that their participation is voluntary, and that their information will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. As specified in the contract, the Contractor will comply with all Federal and Departmental regulations for private information.

*Data Security and Monitoring*

Information collected will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. Respondents will be informed of all planned uses of data, that their participation is voluntary, and that their information will be kept

<sup>1</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/255531/Decliningresponserates.pdf>

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private to the extent permitted by law. The data collected in this information collection will be stored in accordance with requirements outlined in the Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS 140-2) including compliant encryption to protect all instances of sensitive information during storage and transmission. Additionally, any data stored electronically will be secured in accordance with the requirements of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and other Federal and Departmental regulations. Sensitive information has been removed from instruments, where possible, to prevent its storage and transmission. Final reports from the focus groups will include no personally identifiable information or sensitive information, and will aggregate responses so that no response can be traced back to an individual respondent.

### **A11. Sensitive Information<sup>2</sup>**

In Instrument 1: Beneficiaries Online Screener and Instrument 2: Beneficiaries Telephone Screener, we ask respondents three questions related to receipt of economic assistance from the government:

- 1) Have you ever been a client of a public assistance or social services program (e.g. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Food Stamps, etc.)?
- 2) Are you currently a client of a public assistance or social services program (e.g. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Food Stamps, etc.)?
- 3) Do you currently receive, or have you previously received benefits or support from any of the following programs? (Response choices include SNAP, TANF, WIC, etc.)

We ask these questions because we are directly seeking the input of individuals who have been beneficiaries of public assistance/social service programs, and ask these questions to qualify participants to participate in the virtual focus group for beneficiaries. Beneficiaries represent a primary audience for communications about RSN. Thus, we are seeking beneficiaries' insights into message testing, message development and sources of information they find credible.

Regarding secondary use of the data collected, Instrument 1: Beneficiaries Online Screener, Instrument 2: Beneficiaries Telephone Screener, and Instrument 5: Beneficiaries Discussion Guide all state that the focus groups are being conducted on behalf of the Federal government and that their participation/responses will in no way impact eligibility for programs and services. Responses to these questions will only be used to qualify them to participate in the focus group whose content is defined in Instrument 5: Beneficiaries Discussion Guide.

Regarding precautions for inadvertent release of identifying information, all identifying information will be stored on secure servers. Our recruiting partner notes, in their privacy policy, that in order to

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of sensitive topics include (but not limited to): social security number; sex behavior and attitudes; illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating and demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close relationships, e.g., family, pupil-teacher, employee-supervisor; mental and psychological problems potentially embarrassing to respondents; religion and indicators of religion; community activities which indicate political affiliation and attitudes; legally recognized privileged and analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians and ministers; records describing how an individual exercises rights guaranteed by the First Amendment; receipt of economic assistance from the government (e.g., unemployment or WIC or SNAP); immigration/citizenship status.

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“prevent unauthorized access, maintain data accuracy, and ensure the correct use of information, we have put in place certain physical, electronic, and managerial procedures to help safeguard the information we collect online. Areas of our websites that collect personal information use industry standard secure socket layer encryption (SSL).” Furthermore, respondents are informed that “we will only share aggregated non-personal information for market research or general marketing purposes with your specific consent.”

Video recordings of the focus groups will be stored on secure servers, only be available to essential personnel, and will be retained based on Federal requirements for records management.

**A12. Burden**

*Explanation of Burden Estimates*

Estimates of burden hours are made based on the amount of time it is anticipated a respondent will take to complete each instrument, taking into account accessibility, technology, and reading level. Burden hours for discussion guides include both the amount of time to complete participation in the focus groups, and time for login, instructions, and preparation.

*Estimated Annualized Cost to Respondents*

The average hourly rate for beneficiaries was based on 100 percent of the Federal poverty guideline for a family of one, since beneficiaries of social safety net programs typically qualify based on their income as it relates to the Federal poverty guidelines.<sup>3</sup> The average hourly rate for providers was based on the labor category for “21-1021: Child, Family, and School Social Workers” in the National Occupational Profiles published by Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics for May.<sup>4</sup>

Instrument	No. of Respondents (total over request period)	No. of Responses per Respondent (total over request period)	Avg. Burden per Response (in hours)	Total/ Annual Burden (in hours)	Average Hourly Wage Rate	Total Annual Respondent Cost
Instrument 1: Beneficiaries Online Screener	750	1	0.25	187.5	\$6.13	\$1,149
Instrument 2: Beneficiaries Telephone Screener	750	1	0.42	315	\$6.13	\$1,931
Instrument 3: Providers Online Screener	2,250	1	0.25	562.5	\$24.53	\$13,798
Instrument 4: Providers Telephone Screener	2,250	1	0.42	945	\$24.53	\$23,181
Instrument 5: Beneficiaries Discussion Guide	8	1	2	16	\$6.13	\$98

<sup>3</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211021.htm>



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Instrument 6: Providers Discussion Guide	24	1	2	48	\$24.53	\$1,177
<b>Total</b>	6,032			2,074		\$41,334

**A13. Costs**

There are no additional costs to respondents.

**A14. Estimated Annualized Costs to the Federal Government**

This is a one-time information collection, and will be completed in less than one year. There are no ongoing annualized expenses to the Federal government related to this information collection. Costs of this information collection include labor costs for the creation of screening and focus group-discussion guide content, labor costs for completing the information collections, and cost of the use of an online virtual meeting platform that will be used for the focus group. Also included in these costs are 24 – 32 tokens of appreciation paid in an electronic gift card to respondents who participate fully in both screening and focus group-discussion guide information collection.

<b>Cost Category</b>	<b>Estimated Costs</b>
Instrument Development and OMB Clearance	\$ 18,000
Field Work	\$ 12,000
Publications/Dissemination	\$ 4,000
<b>Total/Annual costs over the request period</b>	\$ 34,000

**A15. Reasons for changes in burden**

This is a new generic information collection under the umbrella formative generic clearance for program support (0970-0531).

**A16. Timeline**

Following OMB Clearance, recruitment of focus group participants using the online and telephone screeners for beneficiaries and providers will take two weeks. Focus groups will be conducted in the third week following OMB Clearance, and a full report of findings from the focus groups will be drafted and submitted to the Federal government in the fourth week, following OMB Clearance. In total, the information collection activities and reporting will be completed within one month, following OMB Clearance.

**A17. Exceptions**

No exceptions are necessary for this information collection.

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**Attachments**

Instrument 1: Beneficiaries Online Screener

Instrument 2: Beneficiaries Telephone Screener

Instrument 3: Providers Online Screener

Instrument 4: Providers Telephone Screener

Instrument 5: Beneficiaries Discussion Guide

Instrument 6: Providers Discussion Guide

Appendix A: Beneficiaries Online Screener Instructions

Appendix B: Beneficiaries Telephone Screener Instructions

Appendix C: Providers Online Screener Instructions

Appendix D: Providers Telephone Screener Instructions

Appendix E: Beneficiaries Discussion Guide Instructions

Appendix F: Providers Discussion Guide Instructions