

Corporation for National and Community Service
Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement
OMB Control Number, 3045-0139
Justification – Part A Supporting Statement

Overview of Information Collection:

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS, operating as AmeriCorps) requests authorization from the Office of Management and Budget for a Revision of an Existing Collection of information via the Civic Engagement and Volunteer (CEV) supplement to the September Current Population Survey (CPS). The CEV was administered in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau in September of 2017, 2019, and 2021. The proposed 2023 CEV questionnaire (see Attachment A1) includes one new sub-item about in-person versus virtual volunteering in response to feedback from data users and agency stakeholders that this construct is significant for their work in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. No other material changes of importance have occurred since the last approval in 2020.

1. Need & Method for the Information Collection.

AmeriCorps has partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics to collect data and produced comprehensive national volunteering reports since 2002. AmeriCorps is also mandated by the Serve America Act (2009) to produce a Civic Health Assessment in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship.

The CEV is the most robust source of nationally representative longitudinal data on the number of Americans who make a difference in their communities through organizations, informal social interaction, political engagement, and other arenas of civic life. Key measures in the survey include formal volunteering, charitable giving, organizational membership, informal helping, spending time and discussing issues with family, friends, and neighbors, attending community meetings, and voting in local elections. Like all CPS supplemental surveys, professional interviewers administer the CEV via computer-assisted personal and telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of households. The U.S. Census Bureau oversees every aspect of the information collection.

The CEV is the only source of official government measurement on the level of civic engagement in the United States over time. Failure to collect this information biennially would inhibit the ability of scholars, government officials, and policymakers to assess the nation's civic health over time and implement programs and policies that promote and sustain it. The CEV adheres to U.S. Census Bureau policies that apply to all CPS supplements in terms of content, length, and other aspects of administration that impact burden.

Authorization for the collection of this information is provided in Title 13, United States Code, Sections 8(b) and 182, and Title 29 USC, Section 1, and 42 USC 12639a.

2. Use of the Information.

The purpose of collecting data on civic engagement and volunteering is to provide scholars, government officials, and policymakers with official government measurement on the level of civic engagement in the United States over time. These indicators can inform policies and practices that promote increased citizen activity in the political, civic, and social spheres at the national, state, and metro area levels. Conducting the CEV as a supplement to the CPS is ideal for these purposes because it leverages the existing infrastructure and research design innovations of one of the largest, longest running, and most reliable federal surveys in the country.

For example, CPS supplements have consistently achieved the response rates and statistical power necessary to generate reliable estimates of civic engagement rates among population subgroups. The continuity and institutional credibility of the CPS also ensures that CEV data addresses the core research question of this study: how does the civic health of America change over time? Acknowledging that federal surveys are not necessarily well suited to capture local-level variation and the social processes that drive national civic engagement trends, the CEV's biennial data collection cadence allows AmeriCorps to also invest in scholarship that takes complementary methodological approaches to gain a fuller picture of civic life in America.

AmeriCorps publishes key findings from the CEV through public agency reports such as *Volunteering and Civic Life in America* and uses the data internally to inform programmatic efforts related to the agency's mission to promote civic engagement in America and assess strategic plan progress. AmeriCorps also makes the de-identified dataset available to other federal agencies, scholars, government officials, policymakers, and the public in accordance with U.S. Census Bureau procedures to mitigate privacy concerns. When combined with demographic characteristics (age, sex, race, education, occupation, income), CEV data can address research questions about the relationship between these characteristics and the level of civic engagement in the United States.

Government agency analysts and private, state, and local leaders may use these data to compare levels of civic engagement in their area of interest with national figures – and to link CEV data to other measures of civic health in order to formulate policies that foster healthy communities. In addition, these data can be administratively linked to other federal survey or administrative data to empirically assess the relationship between civic behaviors and economic, social or health outcomes. For example, data from the CEV have been linked to employment data to assess the relationship between labor force behaviors and volunteering behavior over time. Other federal agencies could use the data to assess the relationship between civic engagement and other outcomes of programmatic interest such as the nation's current loneliness epidemic.

The U.S. Census Bureau conducted two rounds of cognitive testing of the September 2017 CEV questions. The purpose of cognitive testing was to examine new and revised questions included in the combined supplement and assess the feasibility of conducting a survey interview with a single household member who could accurately provide proxy reports for other household members. Overall, the findings from this research indicate the majority of questions tested in the combined CEV were clear and comprehensible to respondents. It also indicated that responding to CEV questions involved negligible psychological costs.

Administering the CEV as a supplement to the CPS also has the advantage of minimizing respondent burden. Since households selected to participate in the CPS experience the same beginning-to-end experience each month they are in the rotating sample, respondents develop familiarity with the interviewing procedures such that any learning costs marginally decrease over time. In response to Census concerns about declining response rates for all CPS supplements, AmeriCorps has also made efforts to further reduce respondent burden by cutting the most time-intensive questions from the 2017 CEV from 2019 on and adding two new items in 2021 to ensure a more logical transition between the employment-focused CPS questions and questions about civic behaviors like volunteering.

3. Use of Information Technology.

The proposed administration will use a mix of computer-assisted personal and telephone interviewing, a proven and appropriate data collection methodology. Consideration has also been given to the use of social media and administrative data but these methods are not feasible for a complex demographic survey such as the CPS. Given the scope and nature of the information collection the proposed method constitutes the least amount of burden.

4. Non-duplication.

In 2014, the National Academy of Sciences published a report titled “Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion: Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Policy” that included a comprehensive review of the literature about measuring civic engagement, social cohesion, and social capital as well as other information collected about the level of civic engagement in the United States (Attachment A5). The panel of expert authors confirmed that a longitudinal federal survey with a comprehensive set of behavioral civic engagement indicators is the only viable way to obtain the information needed for the purposes outlined in section 2 above.

The CEV does not duplicate any other single information collection with respect to topic and content, scope, or population of interest. There are no comparable data that can be replicated, substituted, or modified for use as described in sections 1 and 2 above.

5. Burden on Small Business.

The collection of the CEV does not involve small businesses or other small entities.

6. Less Frequent Collection.

AmeriCorps administers the CEV biennially. Previous data from annual administrations of the September CPS Volunteer supplement and November Civic Engagement supplement did not generate substantial variation over a yearly period, but CEV estimates of key measures from 2017, 2019, and 2021 are sufficiently varied to warrant continued information collection every other year. For example, during COVID-19, the national rate of talking with neighbors dropped 4.4 percentage points from 2017 to 2019 and the formal volunteering rate dropped 6.8 percentage points from 2019 to 2021.

During intervening years AmeriCorps conducts research in communities across the United States. Findings from these community-based research studies complement the biennial CEV supplement and provide additional information about civic activity that is measured at the local level using methodologies that are appropriate for this scale.

7. Paperwork Reduction Act Guidelines.

There are no special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner contrary to Paperwork Reduction Act Guidelines

8. Consultation and Public Comments.

The 60-day *Notice* soliciting comments was published on Thursday, March 30, 2023 on page 19094. Four comments were received.

All four comments emphasized the utility of the CEV for both research and practice.

Commenters' primary concerns were related to the reduction in the number of questions regarding formal volunteering activity in the CEV relative to the previous Volunteering supplement. For example, all four commenters suggested reinstating questions from the 2017 CEV about types of volunteer organizations (Q16b) and activities (Q16c). The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation agrees that asking these particular questions would generate valuable knowledge. The Census urged us to cut them from the CEV in 2019 due to concerns about response rates and respondent burden – concerns that escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, the Census introduced a new supplement policy requiring that 90% of completed supplement interviews last less than 10 minutes, which means that the supplement must be designed to average no more than 5-7 minutes per household. Since the average CEV administration time is currently 6.67 minutes, we are not able to add questions that would substantially increase the length of the CEV at this time. We have, however, included these questions at the end of the proposed 2023 questionnaire as “Additional questions to be cleared” in the event that Census recommendations change and resources allow them to be reinstated in future rounds of data collection.

Other suggestions related to reinstating various question or design elements from the CPS Volunteering supplement. For example, two commenters suggested reinstating a question about how individuals first began formally volunteering through organizations and one suggested restoring the wording and placement of questions about charitable giving; one commenter further suggested removing or combining existing CEV questions to compensate for the added respondent burden reinstating detailed questions about volunteering would entail. The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation offers the following response: the redesigned CEV supplement incorporates many of the recommendations made by the National Academy of Sciences (see Attachment A5) as well as recommendations made by experts in the field of civic engagement, social capital, and volunteering. While the CEV does include some measures that

allow for limited continuity with the Volunteering supplement, the past three waves of data collection (in 2017, 2019, and 2021) have demonstrated that the CEV has effectively minimized redundancy and captured the broader concept of civic engagement, which includes but is not limited to formal volunteering through organizations. Furthermore, combining existing measures in the CEV would reduce reliability by creating double-barreled questions and inhibit longitudinal analysis of CEV measures that are crucial for other stakeholders

Three commenters suggested adding attitudinal (e.g. barriers to volunteering) or outcome (e.g. personal health) measures to the CEV. AmeriCorps is unable to add these types of questions because they are inconsistent with the 2022 Census supplement policy, which requires CPS supplements to utilize behavioral measures, as well as National Academy of Sciences recommendations that alternative data collections are better suited for attitudinal and outcome measures (see Attachment A5).

The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation also consulted with individuals in institutions both internal and external to the federal government including AmeriCorps CEO-I, AmeriCorps NCCC, CIRCLE, Indiana University, Points of Light, University of Maine, University of Texas at Austin, University of Rochester, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. These stakeholders unanimously endorsed continuing biennial data collection with the questions and instructions in the proposed 2023 questionnaire and affirmed that our estimates of the respondent and cost burden are reasonable. Two individuals pointed out typos or suggested minor changes to the wording of the new proposed virtual volunteering question; their feedback has been incorporated into Attachment A1. Three individuals suggested adding new questions about protest participation and religiosity if Census policy and resources allow.

The 30-day *Notice* soliciting comments was published on July 7, 2023, FR 88: 43323.

9. Gifts or Payment.

There are no payments or gifts to respondents.

10. Privacy & Confidentiality.

Interviewers provide the pamphlet, “The U.S. Census Bureau Respects Your Privacy and Keeps Your Personal Information Confidential,” to households whenever necessary (see Attachment A2). An advance letter is also sent to potential survey respondents (see Attachment A3). All information given by respondents to Census Bureau employees is held in the strictest confidence as guaranteed by Title 13, United States Code, Section 9. Each interviewer has taken an oath to this effect and is subject to a jail penalty and/or a fine if he/she discloses any information. Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, all data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit data.

AmeriCorps publishes only public use data that contains no personal information and has been coded to shield potential identification of participants.

11. Sensitive Questions.

The information collection does not include questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Burden Estimate.

The proposed 2023 CEV contains 22 questions and will be administered to approximately 50,000 households (due to decreasing response rate for the basic CPS) with approximately 60,000 respondents (due to random selection) in each biennial data collection (in 2023, 2025, etc.). Based on analysis of CEV time stamps in trace files for previous data collections, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that each interview will take 6.67 minutes, resulting in total burden of 6,670 hours per data collection and annual burden of $(6,670/2=)$ 3,335 hours.

The estimated annual respondent burdens and labor costs are shown in the following table.

Estimation of Annual Respondent Burden	
Number of respondents	30,000
Responses per respondent	1
Number of responses	30,000
Hours per response	6.67 minutes
Total estimated hours (number of responses multiplied by hours per response)	3,335
Cost per hour (hourly wage)	\$39.95
Annual public burden (estimated hours multiplied by cost per hour)	\$133,233.25

Note: The cost per hour is based on the December 2022 Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics hourly wage rate (see BLS Employer Costs for Employee Compensation – December 2022 (USDLE-23-0488, released 17 March 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ecec.pdf>), plus the 36.25% civilian personnel full fringe benefit rate from OMB memorandum M-08-13. The hourly rate is $\$29.32 + \10.63 ($\$29.32$ hourly rate \times 36.25% fringe) = $\$39.95$ (rounded to the nearest penny).

13. Estimated nonrecurring costs.

AmeriCorps does not estimate any annual cost burden to respondents apart from the hourly burden already reflected in section 12 above.

14. Estimated cost to the Government.

AmeriCorps estimates that the 2023 CEV will cost \$940,000.

15. Reasons for changes.

The CEV was last administered in 2021. The instrument submitted for review (see Attachment

A1) is the same but with the addition of one sub-item about virtual volunteering. The U.S. Census Bureau anticipates the additional sub-item about virtual volunteering will have a negligible impact on burden because it will only be asked of respondents who report they formally volunteer (approximately 25 percent). Although Census supplement policy does not allow AmeriCorps to add questions that would substantially increase the length of the CEV at this time, we request that the eight additional questions listed at the end of Attachment A1 be cleared in the event that Census recommendations change and resources allow questions to be added to the CEV in future rounds of data collection.

16. Publicizing Results.

The U.S. Census Bureau posts public (de-identified) CEV datasets on its website in ASCII and .csv formats along with layout files and replicate weights. To facilitate public use of CEV data, AmeriCorps staff write data definition and read-in files to convert the de-identified datasets into formats that are compatible with commonly used statistical programs such as Stata. AmeriCorps posts these user-friendly, de-identified datasets along with complete documentation on data.americorps.gov. In addition, AmeriCorps publishes topline findings and more in-depth analysis on the Volunteering and Civic Life in America section of its website and in the AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange. AmeriCorps also publishes summary statistics (rates of all CEV measures at the national, state, and top 12 metro area levels) on data.americorps.gov.

For the 2023 CEV, we anticipate data collection will occur in mid-September and that the U.S. Census Bureau will provide the de-identified dataset and documentation to AmeriCorps in May 2024. AmeriCorps anticipates coordinating with the U.S. Census Bureau to release the de-identified dataset and topline findings in the fall of 2024, with additional summary statistics and in-depth analysis to be released throughout 2025.

17. OMB Not to Display Approval.

The Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement is administered as part of the CPS monthly interview each September. However, the supplement (as well as all the CPS supplements) bears the OMB control number and expiration date, which is different from the CPS basic interview. The OMB control number and expiration date for the CPS basic interview is included in the advance letter we give respondents. Because of the difficulties and anticipated respondent confusion involved with expressing a separate control number and expiration date to respondents for the supplement questions, the Census Bureau does not wish to display the OMB control number and expiration date for the CPS September supplement.

18. Exceptions to "Certification for Paperwork Reduction Submissions."

There are no exceptions to the certification statement in the submitted ROCIS form.

19. Surveys, Censuses, and Other Collections that Employ Statistical Methods.

Please see supporting statement Part B.