

OMB Information Collection Request
Supporting Statement A
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
Current Population Survey (CPS) 2025 Field Test
OMB Control Number 0607-XXXX

Abstract

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is the primary source of detailed labor force characteristics, including the closely watched U.S. unemployment rate as well as other important population data such as migration and housing statistics. The CPS is a monthly survey of 60,000 eligible households jointly funded by the Census Bureau (Census) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The monthly CPS data are also critical inputs to state and local area labor force statistics. The Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) is a leading survey in collecting data on income, poverty, and health insurance coverage that is administered as a supplement to the CPS.

Data for the CPS are currently collected by Census field interviewers via in-person interviews or by telephone. Modernization efforts underway to introduce an Internet Self-Response (ISR) instrument to enable data collection online are detailed later in this document.

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary

The CPS faces intensifying headwinds as the costs of data collection increase and it becomes more difficult to reach respondents who are reluctant to participate. Over the last several years, BLS and Census have taken numerous measures to ensure the survey stays within budget, but there is serious risk that further cuts to operations will impact the quality of the survey. Because of this, BLS and Census has launched an effort to modernize CPS by adding an Internet Self Response option with the goal of easing response rates declining by providing another method to respond that is more cost efficient. As CPS is an input to a key economic indicator, testing the changes is necessary.

The goal of the 2025 Field Test is to test the use of an internet self-response mode, and to measure its success as a possible method of contact and interviewing with the goal of review accuracy, reporting, and representativeness. In addition, should it prove as a viable response method, the goal is to experiment with timing and contacts in order to refine procedures that best fit the needs of CPS. This is the first of two field tests with the second in 2026 and the goal to phase in changes to the survey in 2027.

Authority for the collection of this information for the Current Population Survey is provided under 13 U.S.C. Sections 8(b), 141, and 182, and 29 U. S. C. Section 2.

2. Purpose and Use of Information Collection

The goal of the 2025 Field Test is to measure the success of the Internet Self Response (ISR) mode as a possible method of contact and interviewing with the goal of review accuracy, reporting, and representativeness. The main goal is to understand how many people will report by internet and what is the type of household that reports by ISR. These people need to report in a timely manner accurately for ISR to be successful for CPS.

In addition, should it prove as a viable response method, the goal is to experiment with timing and contacts in order to refine procedures that best fit the needs of CPS. This is the first of two major field tests with the second in 2026 and the goal to phase in changes to the survey in 2027.

3. Use of Improved Information Technology and Burden Reduction

Since January 1994, we have been collecting both the demographic and the labor force data using computer-assisted interviewing in person and on the phone. We believe adding the use of the Internet as a response mode, to improve both the respondent experience during the survey and the response rate, is the next step in improving the use of available IT systems while reducing response burden.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication and Use of Similar Information

The CPS collects near real time employment information and needs to be collected in a survey format. As part of modernization use of other survey data and administrative records is being reviewed on how it could reduce burden or improve the survey data. This field test will be sampled from extra sample that has not been interviewed as well as expired sample. It cannot be included in the main CPS data collection due to unknown effects on the key economic indicators.

5. Impacts on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities

The collection does not involve small businesses or other small entities.

6. Consequences of Collecting the Information Less Frequently

This data collection is necessary to review the impact of offering data collection by internet self-response. This data collection will allow for measurement of use of the modes, effective

communications, issue respondents may encounter and reviewing possible mode effects. A typical data collection for CPS is over 16 months. The test is being limited to 6 months in order to expedite testing.

7. Special circumstances that would cause the information collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines

This data collection will be consistent with the general information collection guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5. No special circumstances apply.

8. Comments in Response to the Federal Register Notice/Outside Consultation

A team at BLS and Census have been working collaboratively in order to develop the ISR mode. The team is made up of Subject Matter Experts, Methodologists, and Information Technology Staff. The following people have been in continuous consultation concerning the development of the ISR mode:

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In addition to the above, the CPS team has been requested comment and feedback both during a Webinar open to the public as well as on the CPS Census page. We are also visiting various stakeholder meeting and advisory committees for feedback on the plan for modernization and testing.

A notice of intent to ask the CPS Field Test questions was published in the September 30, 2024, edition of the Federal Register (89 FR, p. 79512). This notice invited comments on the necessity and practicality of the data collection and comments on various other aspects of the proposed collection. In response to the notice, we received no comments.

9. Explanation of any Payment or Gift to Respondents

This data collection will be testing use of incentives in the format of digital gift cards. Some respondents will be offered up to \$15 an interview to test the impact of providing a response within in the interview period. To evaluate the impact of offering these incentives on response rates and response timing, not all respondents will be offered an incentive or the same incentive.

10. Assurance of Confidentiality Given to Respondents

The Census Bureau will collect data in compliance with OMB Circular A-130. Each sample household will receive an advance letter approximately a few days before the start of the CPS field test interviewing period (see Attachment C). The letter includes the information required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, explains the voluntary nature of the survey, and states the estimated time required for participating in the survey. Interviewers must ask if the respondent received the letter and, if not, provide a copy and allow the respondent sufficient time to read the contents.

All information given by respondents to Census Bureau employees is held in strict confidence under Title 13, United States Code, Section 9. Disclosure of the information provided to us is permitted under the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a) and may be shared with other Census Bureau staff for work-related purposes identified in the Privacy Act System of Records Notice COMMERCE/Census-COMMERCE/Census-3, Demographic Survey Collection (Census Bureau Sampling Frame).

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

1There are no sensitive questions in CPS.

12. Estimates of Annualized Hour and Cost Burden

We plan to collect information monthly from each newly sampled household for four to six months, so as to replicate the longitudinal design of the current CPS. We also plan to collect information from retired CPS sample for one more month.

Currently the sample size is not known because the final funding has not been confirmed, but once funding is decided, the sample size will be determined. The sample size will vary between 10,000 and 25,000 cases for the entire test. The budget will also dictate how many times we will be able to interview each household. We estimate the possible maximum response burden to be 33,333 hours.

The wage rate is \$31.38 per hour based on hourly earnings for employees as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Therefore, the estimated total annual respondent cost burden based on these hours is \$1,046,000.

13. Estimates of Other Total Annual Cost Burden to Respondents

There are no direct costs to the respondent other than that of their time to respond.

14. Annualized Cost to the Federal Government

The estimated cost to the government is expected to be \$100 million in fiscal year (FY) 2025 for the full CPS data collection program as administered by the Census Bureau. Census is receiving funding of \$4.4 million a year for modernization efforts which includes development and internal testing costs. Additional funding has been requested for FY 25 to cover the needs for the actual field test. The field test is expected to cost approximately \$1.5 to 3 million dollars. The sample size and procedures will be based on the amount of funding received.

15. Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments

N/A

16. Plans for Tabulation, Publication, and Project Time Schedule

The main findings from the test will be shared with the public. The analysis of the data and the experiments implemented will be vetted and shared between BLS and Census and shared in adherence to our disclosure policies.

17. Reason(s) Display of OMB Expiration Date is Inappropriate

OMB number and expiration date will be displayed in the instrument and on advance letters.

18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions

There are no exceptions to the certification.