

American Housing Survey (AHS) Cognitive Interviews

Request: The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). We propose to conduct a cognitive pretesting evaluation of new and revised questions about a variety of topics for the 2025 American Housing Survey (AHS). This evaluation will be conducted by staff in the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM).

Purpose: The purpose of this cognitive research is to test questions added to or revised in the AHS. The question changes were requested by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to improve existing questions, to measure new concepts, and to update rotating modules that were not included in the last survey administration. The following modules of the AHS are being tested:

- *Doubling Up* is a revised topical module that contains questions about special living arrangements in which a household has an additional adult living there.
- *Accessory Dwelling Units* is a new topical module that contains questions about additional living units/areas independent of a primary residence.
- *Climate Risk & Insurance* is a new topical module that contains questions about damages due to natural disasters and supplemental insurance; also contains questions about electric vehicle charging access.
- *Real Estate* is an existing core module that contains questions about ownership/rental of real estate properties, including questions about payments, purchase price, and property acquisition.
- *Taxes and Fees* is an existing core module that asks questions about housing costs, taxes, fees, and insurance.
- *Utilities* is an existing core that asks questions about the type, cost, and frequency of utility bills and includes a new question about the source of electricity in the home.
- *Home Improvement* is an existing core module that focuses on home improvement and remodeling projects by homeowners and includes questions about home improvements done for energy efficiency.
- *Recent Movers* is an existing core module with questions about reasons for moves and home advertisements.

Population of Interest: The AHS samples households from the general U.S. population. For our cognitive pretesting evaluation, the respondents will be 18 years of age or over and will answer questions about the household in which they currently live.

Timeline: Cognitive interviews, will be conducted remotely in two rounds between late June and early August of 2024. Results from testing will be used to inform recommendations for the final wording of the questions.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: Staff from CBSM will conduct 25 cognitive interviews remotely using Microsoft Teams. Sessions will be one-on-one with a participant and an interviewer. The cognitive interviews will include questions from all modules mentioned in the Purpose section and an introductory module collecting the household roster and basic questions about the home. Questions will be asked orally using a think-aloud protocol and concurrent qualitative probing after new questions.

Sample: For cognitive interviews, our recruiting efforts will target the following groups:

- Respondents who live with at least 1 other adult 18 years or older who is not a spouse or partner.
- Respondents who have another residential unit or short-term or long-term rental unit on their property.
- Respondents who live in a home that has experienced damage from a natural disaster in the past year.
- Respondents who moved residences within the past two years.
- Respondents who are knowledgeable about the insurance on the home they live in.
- Respondents who made any energy efficient home improvements.
- Respondents who received government assistance for rent payment.
- Respondents who have a mortgage or home loan.

In addition to these characteristics, we will attempt to recruit respondents from diverse demographic groups including race/ethnicity, age, gender, and household size to the maximum extent possible. Participants can live anywhere in the 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Recruitment: For cognitive interviews, participants will be recruited through CBSM's recruitment database, an internal Census Bureau broadcast email (Enclosure 1), and via personal networks. They will be selected based on the survey-relevant characteristics of interest listed in the preceding section. Participants will be screened with a questionnaire programmed in Qualtrics (Enclosure 2). If they are selected based on the survey-relevant characteristics of interest listed in the preceding section, they will be contacted to schedule a cognitive interview appointment. Participants will receive two emails reminding them about the cognitive interview appointment after they agree to participate.

Protocol: For cognitive interviews, we will use a "think-aloud" approach in which participants are instructed to speak their thoughts aloud as they receive, process, and respond to the survey questions. As the AHS is an interviewer-administered survey, CBSM researchers will administer the survey questions orally with the participant using a protocol (Enclosure 3). After participants have given their response to each survey question in the survey module, they will be asked probes intended to elicit more information about their interpretations of the survey questions and specific terms, and of the circumstances they were thinking about when answering the survey questions.

Consent: For cognitive interviews, we will inform participants that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be accessed only by employees involved in the research project. The consent form will also indicate that the respondent agrees that the session will be recorded to facilitate analysis of the results. Since it will be done remotely, participants will be emailed a secure link to an electronic consent form in Qualtrics that allows for signature (see Enclosure 4). Participants who do not consent to be recorded will still be allowed to participate. The participant will return to this same Qualtrics survey upon completion of the session to sign the voucher for the incentive.

Use of Incentive: For cognitive interviews, each respondent will be offered \$60 for participation in a 90-minute interview. This incentive will be offered to help ensure that we are able to recruit participants from all desired populations and to offset the costs of participation in this research, such as childcare. The incentive will be mailed to the respondent at their preferred address using Priority Mail. Federal employees who participate in this research are not eligible to receive the cash incentive.

The materials to be used in this study are enclosed with this letter and include:

- Enclosure 1 – Recruitment Advertisement Text
- Enclosure 2 – Recruitment Screener
- Enclosure 3 – Cognitive Interview Protocol
- Enclosure 4 – Consent Form and Incentive Voucher

Length of interview: For cognitive interviews, we estimate that each interview will take approximately 90 minutes for each of the 25 participants. The additional screening questions will take approximately 5 minutes per person. We estimate that a little less than half of the people who complete the screener will be eligible for this study.

Thus, the total estimated burden for this research is 42.5 hours.

Table 1. Estimated Burden

Research Activity	No. of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden
Screening	60	5 minutes	5 hours
Cognitive Interviews	25	90 minutes	37.5 hours
Total			42.5 hours

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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