

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
Deliberative Focus Groups on American Community Survey Messaging
OMB Control No. 0607-0760

This Supporting Statement provides additional information regarding the Census Bureau's request for processing of the proposed information collection, Deliberative Focus Groups on American Community Survey Messaging. The numbered questions correspond to the order shown on the Office of Management and Budget Form 83-I, "Instructions for Completing OMB Form 83-I."

A. Justification

1. Necessity of the Information Collection

The U.S. Census Bureau requests authorization from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to conduct Deliberative Focus Groups on American Community Survey Messaging as part of the CLMSO Generic Clearance for Data User and Customer Evaluation Surveys, OMB No. 0607-0760.

The ACS collects detailed socioeconomic data from about 3.5 million households in the United States and 36,000 in Puerto Rico each year. Resulting tabulations from that data collection are provided on a yearly basis. The ACS allows the Census Bureau to provide timely and relevant housing and socio-economic statistics for even small levels of geography.

ACS data inform and drive decisions about improvements to roads and public transportation systems, ways to support schools and hospitals, economic growth strategies to create jobs in a given city, areas where emergency services are needed, tactics for helping a community recovering from a disaster, and much more.

Despite the many practical uses of data collected through the ACS, many Americans are not aware of the survey or its value, and other Americans are opposed to completing the survey because they find the questions intrusive or burdensome. This lack of awareness of and resistance to the ACS present challenges for conducting and maximizing its use. (Prior to the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau conducted the Census Barriers, Attitudes and Motivators Survey II (CBAMS II). CBAMS II identified a "cynical" mindset, members of which have a low affinity for Census and have a very low level of trust for government and businesses. This population may have a similar hesitance to complete ACS.)

The ACS faces three significant concerns that prompt consideration of a strategic approach to messaging:

1. A general lack of awareness of the survey, its use, and the value it represents leaves few to defend it.

2. Negative perceptions among fringe audiences lead to adverse events, negative publicity, and lower response rates, causing the Census Bureau to incur significant extra expense.
3. Little incentive or motivation for those who have cynical, suspicious, distrustful or ambivalent attitudes toward the U.S. government to respond in a timely fashion, or at all, causes the Census Bureau to incur significant extra expense.

To overcome these challenges, the ACS needs to create appropriate messaging to increase public awareness, support, and use of ACS data; link the value of ACS/census data to key areas of interest for respondents and those in a position to aide in encouraging completion; and increase early response rates for participants.

Increasing early response rates can potentially save millions of taxpayer dollars by cutting down on telephone and in-person follow-ups. These follow-up contacts are not only costly, they are also an additional burden on the respondents who are required by law to complete the survey—whether early and via Internet or mail, or late and over the telephone or in person.

2. Needs and Uses

The ACS must collect data on a continual basis and aggregate one, three, or five years worth of data to release data for all states, Congressional districts, counties, cities, and small towns down to the census tract and block group level. The ACS collects data every day of the year, either by mail, Internet, telephone interviews or personal-visit interviews. There are many federal programs that distribute funds based on population and income data from the Census Bureau, including data from the ACS. Federal agencies use ACS data to determine appropriate funding for state and local governments through block grants. State and local governments use ACS data for program planning, administration and evaluation. Thus, the reliability and the quality of the data must remain high in order for the users to rely on the data for funding decisions.

So that the Census Bureau can provide critical information to governments and the private sector, the ACS collects comprehensive demographic, social, economic, and housing statistics covering every community in the nation. The ACS provides a continuous stream of updated information for states and local areas on an annual basis, and has revolutionized the ways the country uses data to understand communities and plan for the future.

Information collected during these focus groups will be used in the immediate future—along with information collected during quantitative testing (the focus of a separate OMB request) and industry best practices—to develop alternative options for the ACS mail response package. Pending additional research on alternative options, it could be determined that an alternative to the existing package would better catch recipients' attention, address their questions and concerns, and lead to higher response rates.

After the creation of alternative options for the mail package, the learnings from these focus groups will be incorporated into general messaging surrounding ACS. For instance, the

messages that prove most effective at explaining the purpose of the survey and answering questions about it will be used to draft a brochure that can be made available to the general public.

3. Use of Information Technology

There will be a screening questionnaire survey (see appendix B) administered to potential participants to determine whether they fall into the desired category (those likely to be distrustful of the government). This will be read over the telephone to individuals who have previously expressed an interest in participating in surveys.

Because the focus groups themselves will be conducted in-person, there will be minimal automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques used. There will be an audio/video recording made during each group, for the purpose of accurately documenting conversations and to allow Census staff who cannot travel to observe each group, resulting in production of DVD recordings. Participants will be informed of this recording. In addition, depending on the availability of travel funding for Census staff, it may be necessary for some observers to be remote. In that case, audio and video of the focus groups will either be broadcasted to Census employees at a remote location, or available for viewing for a short time following the focus group.

4. Efforts to identify duplication

No other government agency is currently conducting this research.

5. Minimizing burden

The design of the Deliberative Focus Groups incorporates several features to reduce burden on participants. This collection does not impact small businesses or other small entities. Participants will be individuals who volunteer to travel to a focus group facility in their area and share their thoughts. The full focus group comprises three distinct sessions: two small group sessions (of 6 to 8 participants each), and a subsequent “jury” session. Two (2) individuals from each of the small groups will be selected to participate in the “jury” session. They will be joined by 8 new participants, for a total of 12 participants in the jury session. Those who participate only in a small group session will be compensated \$50 for 30 minutes. Jury session “jurors” will be compensated \$75 for two hours’ time. Advocates and opponents emerging from the small groups into the jury session will be compensated \$90 for from three hours and 15 minutes to four hours’ time, depending on which small group session they participated in. As focus groups will be held in the evening, participants will also receive a meal provided at the facility.

The format of each evening’s focus group will be as follows:

Time	Group	
5:30 - 6:00 PM	Part 1	First group session with 6-8 advocates/opponents
6:15 - 6:45 PM		Second group session with 6-8 advocates/opponents
7:00 - 7:30 PM		Top advocates (2) and opponents (2) from small group sessions develop arguments for jury session
7:30 - 9:30 PM	Part 2	Jury session with 8 jurors, plus 2 advocates and 2 opponents selected from Part 1

We will conduct the first and second SMALL group sessions as follows:

Before the start of each small group session, participants will be briefed on the structure and the objectives of the mini-group about to begin.

Before initiating the session, the moderator will ask participants about their present level of support for/opposition to the ACS.

The moderator will explain that an assortment of materials and messages (including existing ACS materials and editorials/articles for and against the ACS) that discuss the ACS are displayed throughout the room. The moderator will encourage participants to review these materials to help in developing arguments for their side.

The two strongest speakers from each group in the pro- and anti-ACS camps will be selected as advocates and opponents for the next phase.

The selected advocates and opponents will have 30 minutes to formulate arguments for the jury session:

Before the 2-hour jury session begins, the teams arguing for and against the ACS as well as the jury will be briefed on the structure and the objectives of the session.

The advocates and opponents will be given handouts so that they can prepare their arguments. Participants will work with their partners to prepare their arguments.

The jury session will take up to two hours:

The single jury session will consist of two debates. During each debate, the advocates and opponents will present their cases and the jury will vote. After the two debates are over, the jury will decide which side has won overall—which side has made the most persuasive arguments during all debates. After the verdict, there will be a Verdict Debriefing Session involving members of the jury and the debaters together.

6. Consequences of Less Frequent Collection

These deliberative focus groups will be a one-time, special project comprised of seven focus groups in seven cities conducted over two weeks.

7. Special Circumstances

The Census Bureau will collect these data in a manner consistent with the OMB guidelines.

8. Consultations Outside the Agency

Outside of the Federal Government, consultants include:

Jack Benson and Joseph Ney
Reingold, Inc.
202-333-0400
jbenson@reingold.com
[jney@reingold](mailto:jney@reingold.com)
www.reingold.com

9. Paying Respondents

With an ultimate goal to increase the response rates of individuals who are disinclined to complete the ACS given a distrust of government or concerns about privacy, we will offer a cash incentive to focus group participants identified as holding these types of attitudes. Providing incentives to these representative individuals is not cost prohibitive, and is likely essential to drawing together enough participants for each group.

Compensation is important to this study to motivate participants to consider and potentially argue for points of view that may be counter to their incoming inclinations to distrust government entities: we seek to obtain insights on convincing arguments in support of the ACS from individuals who are likely to oppose the ACS. Because participants will have to travel to the focus group facilities, potentially arrange for childcare, etc., it is important that they be offered something for their time.

Eight (8) to 12 small group participants will receive an honorarium of \$50 for 30 minutes' time. Four (4) participants will be selected from the initial small groups to participate in the jury session: they will be compensated \$90 for either three hours and 15 minutes or four hours' time, depending on whether they participated in the first or second small group session. Eight (8) additional jurors in the 2-hour jury session will receive \$75 for their time and effort expended.

Total incentive payments will amount to between \$8,120 and \$8,820. See calculation of burden hours in section 12, below.

Lack of incentive use would severely hinder our ability to successfully accomplish our

purpose.

10. Assurance of Confidentiality

We are conducting this study under Title 13, but the results will not be statutorily confidential. Rather, we will inform respondents that, “We intend to protect your anonymity and will not ask for personal information that could easily identify you.” The Census Bureau will keep all information collected in this test protected, confidential, and in a secure environment. Names, addresses, and contact information will be redacted from all records, reports, and transcripts. Respondents will be assured that their responses will be kept anonymous by the Census Bureau and its contractors. This study also complies with the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act.

Note: The facilities in which the focus groups will be conducted are owned and staffed by people who are not Census Bureau employees or contractors sworn to protect confidentiality of Title 13 data. These employees will not be privy to results gathered during focus groups. However, they will collect names, screening survey results, and contact information during the recruiting stages. Participants will be notified that while focus group facilities will be asked to destroy this information, employees of focus group facilities are not sworn to protect confidentiality of Title 13 data.

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

This survey does not include questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Estimate of Hour Burden

	Total # of Participants	Estimated Response Time	Estimated Burden Hours
Small group participants	28 - 42	30 minutes	14 to 21 hours
Jury group “jurors”	56	120 minutes	112 hours
Advocates/opponents selected from small group 1	14	240 minutes	56 hours
Advocates/opponents selected from small group 2	14	195 minutes	45.5 hours
			TOTAL: 227.5 to 234.5 hours

Participants will provide input at the focus groups for between 30 minutes and 4 hours, depending on the role they play in the proceedings. Screening and registration of each participant will take approximately 15 additional minutes.

13. Estimate of Cost Burden

All respondents will be compensated volunteers. The cost to respondents (focus group

participants) will be negligible, and would only include travel costs to the focus group location, if any, and cell phone (if cell phone is their primary means of communication) minutes during the screening. The payment made to survey participants will exceed any normal costs incurred in participating with this focus group.

14. Cost to Federal Government

The cost of this data collection is estimated at \$145,000.

15. Reason for Change in Burden

Not applicable; this is a new data collection.

16. Project Schedule

The project's timeline is as follows. This timeline assumes approval by OMB by January 10, 2014. Note that we will not be publishing any results from these sessions.

Activity	Begin Date	End Date
OMB Approval	-	1/10/2014
Focus Groups Conducted	1/21/2013	1/30/2013
Conduct Analysis	1/27/2014	2/21/2014
Finalized Findings	2/24/2014	3/7/2014

17. Request to Not Display Expiration Date

The data collection instruments will include the OMB control number and expiration date. This information will be conveyed verbally to the respondents.

18. Exceptions to the Certification

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

19. Appendices

1. Appendix A – Moderator Guide
2. Appendix B – Focus Group Screener
3. Appendix C – Focus Group Locations
4. Appendix D – Handouts
5. Appendix E – Discussion Materials