

# Attachment A: American Community Survey (ACS) Cognitive Testing of American Community Survey Recipients during a Decennial Year

## Research Goals, Recruiting Requirements, Research Questions and 2020 Modified Materials

November 21, 2019

### I. Introduction

- a) **Research Objective:** This round of cognitive testing will examine the experiences of 48 recipients of the American Community Survey (ACS) during the 2020 Census. This research will assess recipients' (1) reaction to receiving both the ACS and the 2020 Census, and (2) impression of ACS mail materials with added messaging communicating that households need to complete both the ACS and the Decennial Census.
  
- b) **Background:** Households in sample for the ACS in 2020 are legally required to complete both the ACS and the Decennial Census. Receiving two sets of mailings in one calendar year may be confusing to respondents. Also, being asked to complete both the Decennial Census and the ACS may be burdensome and may decrease the rate of self-response.

During the 2010 Decennial Census, ACS response rates were higher than usual in the first few months of the year but were lower than usual in the spring and summer months (see Chesnut and Davis 2011, Baumgardner 2013). The increase early in the year may have occurred because the decennial census communications campaign brought attention to the U.S. Census Bureau. The decrease later in the year may be because recipients thought the ACS was the Decennial Census and disregarded the ACS questionnaire.

To mitigate these issues in 2020, a set of modified mail materials have been developed with language that directly addresses the difference between the ACS and the 2020 Decennial Census. These materials will be used during the main response period for the 2020 Census, March through September. The 2020 ACS language modifications are based on an evaluation conducted by the Census Bureau in 2010 (see Chesnut and Davis 2011). Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that address recipients' questions on the difference between the ACS and the 2020 Census have been added to mail materials as well.

## II. Recruitment and Interviews

### a) Recruitment Requirements:

- Participants have to be in the ACS sample for March, April or May panels.
  - One-third of participants must be in the March Panel.
  - One-third of participants must be in the April Panel.
  - One-third of participants must be in the May Panel.
- Participants must have received the ACS and the 2020 Decennial Census.
- Participant's response to either or both requests are not required.
- At least six participants must live in a rural area.
  - The Census Bureau will define the areas and provide cases to Westat.
- Participants must handle the mail for their household, either alone or in combination with other household members.
  - At least 10 participants should have less than a Bachelor's degree.
  - Participants should be diverse on demographic characteristics such as:
    - Race/ethnicity
    - Age
    - Sex
    - Household size
  - Participants must not have participated in a Westat cognitive testing project in the past six months.

### b) Recruitment Modules:

**Table 1. Recruitment modules per interview and total number of participants**

# of Modules	Interviews per Module	Total # of Participants
4	12	5

### c) Interview Timeline:

**Table 2. Recruitment and interview schedule by panel month and response type**

Panel	Response type	Recruitment begins	Interviewing occurs
March	Self-Response households	April	April - May
	Non-Response households	May	May - June
April	Self-Response households	May	May - June
	Non-Response households	June	June - July
May	Self-Response households	June	June - July
	Non-Response households	July	July- August

- Self-respondents should be interviewed as soon as possible after they respond (Non-respondents prior to CAPI).

- Non-respondents should not be interviewed until they have been exposed to the full ACS and 2020 Census mailing strategies.
- The Census Bureau will provide Westat with a list of respondents and non-respondents.

**d) Research Questions:**

- What are participants' general engagement with civic activities or community involvement (e.g. voting, Parent Teacher Association, Homeowner Association, volunteer work, other political activities)?
- How and how often is mail handled in participants' households?
- What did participants remember about the ACS's and the 2020 Census' mailings and questionnaire?
- Did participants notice that they were asked to complete two different questionnaires?
  - How did participants know that they were being asked to complete two different questionnaires?
  - What did participants think were the differences between the ACS and the 2020 Census?
  - What aspects of the mailings, if any, helped participants understand that the ACS is different from the 2020 Census?
- How did participants decide to answer either or both questionnaires?
  - Were participants aware that their response was mandatory (to either or both)?
  - What aspects of the mailings influenced participants' decision to participate (to either or both)?
- How did participants feel when they received the ACS and the 2020 Census? What thought processes did participants go through when they received the ACS and 2020 Census?
- What were participants' general reaction to the mailings?
- What were participants' perceptions of the usefulness of the 2020 FAQs?
  - Did participants notice the FAQs on the mailings?
  - Did it answer questions that they had?
  - Did it help differentiate the ACS from the 2020 Census?
- What action, if any, did participants take to get additional information about the ACS or 2020 Census?

### III. Appendix A – Interaction between ACS and 2020 Census

ACS Panel	Census Cohort	Contact 1	Contact 2	Contact 3	Contact 4	Contact 5	Contact 6	Contact 7	Contact 8	Contact 9	Contact 10
March	Internet Push Cohort 1&2	March 2 ACS Initial Mailing	March 9 ACS Pressure Seal	March 12 Decennial letter	March 16 Decennial letter	March 23 ACS Qnaire package	March 26 ACS postcard	March 26 Decennial postcard	April 8 Decennial qnaire	April 17 ACS Final Pressure Seal	April 20 Decennial postcard
March	Internet Push Cohort 3&4	March 2 ACS Initial Mailing	March 9 ACS Pressure Seal	March 19 Decennial letter	March 23 ACS Qnaire package	March 23 Decennial letter	March 26 ACS postcard	April 2 Decennial postcard	April 15 Decennial qnaire	April 17 ACS Final Pressure Seal	April 27 Decennial postcard
March	Internet Choice	March 2 ACS Initial Mailing	March 9 ACS Pressure Seal	March 12 Decennial qnaire	March 16 Decennial letter	March 23 ACS Qnaire package	March 26 ACS postcard	March 26 Decennial postcard	April 8 Decennial qnaire	April 17 ACS Final Pressure Seal	April 20 Decennial postcard
April	Internet Push Cohort 1&2	March 12 Decennial letter	March 16 Decennial letter	March 26 Decennial postcard	March 30 ACS Initial Mailing	April 6 ACS Pressure Seal Reminder	April 8 Decennial qnaire	April 20 ACS Qnaire package	April 20 Decennial postcard	April 23 ACS postcard	May 15 ACS Final Pressure Seal
April	Internet Push Cohort 3&4	March 19 Decennial letter	March 23 Decennial letter	March 30 ACS Initial Mailing	April 2 Decennial postcard	April 6 ACS Pressure Seal Reminder	April 15 Decennial qnaire	April 20 ACS Qnaire package	April 23 ACS postcard	April 27 Decennial postcard	May 15 ACS Final Pressure Seal
April	Internet Choice	March 12 Decennial qnaire	March 16 Decennial letter	March 26 Decennial postcard	March 30 ACS Initial Mailing	April 6 ACS Pressure Seal Reminder	April 8 Decennial qnaire	April 20 ACS Qnaire package	April 20 Decennial postcard	April 23 ACS postcard	May 15 ACS Final Pressure Seal
May	Internet Push Cohort 1&2	March 12 Decennial letter	March 16 Decennial letter	March 26 Decennial postcard	April 8 Decennial qnaire	April 20 Decennial postcard	May 4 ACS Initial Mailing	May 11 ACS Pressure Seal Reminder	May 26 ACS Qnaire package	May 29 ACS postcard	June 19 ACS Final Pressure Seal
May	Internet Push Cohort 3&4	March 19 Decennial letter	March 23 Decennial letter	April 2 Decennial postcard	April 15 Decennial qnaire	April 27 Decennial postcard	May 4 ACS Initial Mailing	May 11 ACS Pressure Seal Reminder	May 26 ACS Qnaire package	May 29 ACS postcard	June 19 ACS Final Pressure Seal
May	Internet Choice	March 12 Decennial qnaire	March 16 Decennial letter	March 26 Decennial postcard	April 8 Decennial qnaire	April 20 Decennial postcard	May 4 ACS Initial Mailing	May 11 ACS Pressure Seal Reminder	May 26 ACS Qnaire package	May 29 ACS postcard	June 19 ACS Final Pressure Seal

## IV. Appendix B – ACS 2020 Mail Materials

ACS 2020 Mail Materials with 2020 Census-specific language include:

### Initial Mailing – Letter (front)

The second paragraph contains two sentences with 2020 Census-specific language.



United States®  
**Census**  
Bureau

#### U.S. Census Bureau

Washington, DC 20233

Office of the Director

A message from the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau:

Your address has been randomly selected by the U.S. Census Bureau to participate in the **American Community Survey**. The Census Bureau conducts this survey each year to give our country an up-to-date picture of how we live – including our education, housing, and jobs.

The American Community Survey is not the 2020 Census. This survey asks questions about topics not on the 2020 Census, such as veteran status, transportation, and internet access. Communities across the country rely on information from this survey to decide where important services are needed, including:

- Improving roads and reducing traffic
- Building schools
- Planning for the health care needs of the elderly

Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/acs>

#### Your response is required by U.S. law.

Because your household has been asked to participate on behalf of your community, it is vital that you complete this survey to help meet critical needs in your area.

**If you are unable to complete the survey online, we will send you a paper questionnaire in a few weeks.** The Census Bureau is using the internet to collect this information to conserve natural resources, save taxpayers' money, and process data more efficiently.

If you need help completing the survey or have questions, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you in advance for your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Dillingham

Enclosures

American Community Survey data help determine the annual distribution of more than **\$675 billion** in federal funds to communities nationwide.

## **Initial Mailing – Letter (back)**

The first two FAQs discuss the 2020 Census.

### **Is the American Community Survey the same as the 2020 Census?**

No, the American Community Survey (ACS) is different from the 2020 Census.

The ACS shows how we live—our education, housing, jobs, and more. The ACS provides information about the social and economic needs of your community every year.

The census is conducted once every 10 years to provide an official count of the entire U.S. population to Congress.

### **Can you use my 2020 Census answers for the American Community Survey?**

Your answers to the 2020 Census cannot be used for the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS includes questions about topics not on the 2020 Census, such as education, employment, internet access, and transportation.

### **Will my response be confidential?**

Yes. The U.S. Census Bureau is required by law to protect this information. The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in a way that could identify you. We are conducting this survey under the authority of Title 13, United States Code, Sections 141 and 193. Federal law protects your privacy and keeps your answers confidential (Title 13, United States Code, Section 9). Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, your data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit your data.

### **Am I required to fill out the survey?**

Yes. Your response to this survey is required by law (Title 13, U.S. Code, Sections 141, 193, and 221). Title 13, as changed by Title 18, imposes a penalty for not responding. As a randomly selected representative of your community, you are the voice of your neighbors and peers. To create an accurate picture of your community, it is critical that you respond.

### **How will the Census Bureau use the information I provide?**

By law, the Census Bureau can only use your responses to produce statistics. Your information will be used in combination with information from other households to produce data for your community. Similar data will be produced for communities across Puerto Rico and the United States.

We may combine your answers with information that you gave to other agencies to enhance the statistical uses of these data. This information will be given the same protections as your survey information. Based on the information that you provide, you may be asked to participate in other Census Bureau surveys that are voluntary.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Mailing – Pressure Seal Mailer (address side)**

The address side of the pressure seal mailer mentions the American Community Survey.



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**Census**  
Bureau

PRESORTED  
FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Permit No. G-58

**U.S. Census Bureau**  
National Processing Center  
1201 E 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Jeffersonville IN 47132

OFFICIAL BUSINESS  
Penalty for Private Use \$300

**U.S. Census Bureau**  
**American Community Survey**

ACS-20(LZ)(2020) (08-23-2019)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Mailing – Pressure Seal Mailer (letter side)**  
2020 Census-specific language is in the second paragraph.



United States®  
**Census**  
Bureau

**U.S. Census Bureau**  
Washington, DC 20233  
Office of the Director

A message from the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau:

A few days ago, you should have received instructions for completing the **American Community Survey** online. Local communities depend on information from this survey to decide where schools, highways, hospitals, and other important services are needed.

Some households, including yours, will receive both the American Community Survey and the 2020 Census this year. If you have not already responded, please do so now.

Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/acs>  
Log in using this user ID:

If we do not receive your response online, we will mail a paper questionnaire to your address.

**Your response to the American Community Survey is required by law.**

Your response is critically important to your local community and your country. Responding promptly will prevent you from receiving additional reminder mailings, phone calls, or personal visits from Census Bureau interviewers.

If you need help completing the survey or have questions, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you in advance for your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Dillingham

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Mailing – Letter (front)

The paragraph below the response options contains 2020 Census-specific language.



United States<sup>®</sup>  
**Census**  
Bureau

**U.S. Census Bureau**  
Washington, DC 20233  
Office of the Director

A message from the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau:

The U.S. Census Bureau recently sent you a request to complete the **American Community Survey** online. If you have not already responded to this important survey, please do so now.

**Complete the survey using ONLY ONE of the following options:**

- Respond online at **<https://respond.census.gov/acs>**
- If you are unable to respond online, please fill out and mail back the enclosed questionnaire.

This year, the Census Bureau is also conducting the 2020 Census. The American Community Survey is different from the 2020 Census.

**You are required by U.S. law to respond to the American Community Survey.**

The Census Bureau has randomly selected your address to receive this survey as part of a nationally representative sample. Because you will be providing important information on behalf of your community, it is vital that you complete this survey to help meet critical needs in your area – including determining where to locate new schools, hospitals, and fire stations.

If you do not respond promptly, a Census Bureau interviewer may contact you to complete the survey.

**The Census Bureau is required by law to keep your information confidential.**

The Census Bureau is not permitted to publicly release your responses in a way that could identify you or your household.

If you need help completing the survey or have questions, please call our toll-free number (1-800-354-7271).

Thank you for your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Dillingham

Enclosures

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Mailing - Letter (back)**

The first two FAQs contain 2020 Census-specific language.

#### **Is the American Community Survey the same as the 2020 Census?**

No, the American Community Survey (ACS) is different from the 2020 Census.

The ACS shows how we live—our education, housing, jobs, and more. The ACS provides information about the social and economic needs of your community every year.

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