

Emergency Clearance Request
Temporary Extraordinary Circumstances Exception for
HHS ASPA COVID-19 Public Education Campaign Market Research
(OMB #####-New)

Summary:

In light of the current COVID-19 crisis, there is an immediate need to inform U.S. adults on scientifically proven behaviors to decrease COVID-19 infection rates through a COVID-19 public education communication campaign. These preventative behaviors, to be targeted through the *HHS ASPA COVID-19 Public Education Campaign* (Campaign), include COVID-19 vaccine uptake/confidence, social distancing, wearing a mask, handwashing, as well as COVID-19-related clinical trial participation and flu vaccination uptake. This campaign includes a primary research component that is designed to use scientifically rigorous approaches to assess public attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, and to test draft message materials with the Campaign audience. These research studies include a weekly survey, foundational focus groups, and a copy testing survey. The expedited clearance of our primary research components is critical to evaluating the above targets and informing ongoing communication efforts as soon as possible, therefore, we ask that OMB consider the emergency clearance process to allow for quick implementation.

Current Events Tracker

The primary purpose of the COVID-19 Current Events Tracker (CET) survey is to continuously track key metrics of importance to the Campaign, including vaccine confidence, familiarity with and trust in HHS, and the impact of external events on key attitudes and behaviors. Tracking Americans' attitudes about, perceptions of, and behavior toward the COVID-19 pandemic will inform ASPA and the Campaign of key metrics around vaccine confidence and uptake, as well as towards vaccine messengers such as HHS and key public health officials. It will also inform changes in messaging strategies necessary to effectively reach the entire U.S. population or specific subgroups.

The weekly tracking of this information will be critical for the Campaign's ability to respond to shifting events and attitudes in real-time, helping guide the American public with accurate information about the vaccine rollout as well as on how to take protective actions against COVID-19.

Foundational Focus Groups

Foundational focus groups will be conducted to explore key audiences' perceptions and attitudes toward the COVID-19 pandemic and what preventive measures they take to avoid viral

transmission. They will also identify key communications players that can help deliver messaging to specific targets, including media sources and different channels. This data will help provide the campaign with a more in-depth understanding of the target audiences' behaviors, challenges, and motivations to engage in health-protecting behaviors. The success of the Campaign depends on the ability to uncover and identify the target audiences' understanding of the pandemic and their wants, needs, preferred messaging channels, and source preferences when it comes to being informed about COVID-19. In addition, we want to better understand their adoption of preventive measures (e.g., social distancing, wearing a mask, handwashing) to slow the spread of the virus.

As such, the primary purpose of these focus groups will be to inform Campaign strategy about audience risk knowledge, perceptions, current behaviors, and barriers and motivators to healthy behaviors. Ultimately, these findings will also help inform the development of messages and materials, which, in turn, will be produced and disseminated to the general public.

Copy Testing Survey

It is important that all Campaign messages and materials are thoroughly tested prior to distribution to ensure they resonate with the intended audience and have the desired effect on the Campaign-targeted behavior. If advertisements do not ultimately have an impact on the audience's attitudes and behaviors, then the Campaign will not be successful. Prior to finalizing each wave of Campaign materials, a copy testing survey will be conducted to determine how well draft materials perform with the target audiences. The copy testing survey will be conducted online and will assess participants' reactions to the ads, perceived effectiveness of the ads, and the relationship between exposure to an ad and changes to campaign-targeted attitudes and behavioral intentions. Findings from this survey will be used to inform revisions to Campaign materials and make determinations about what advertisements to air.

Background:

As the lead office providing communication counsel for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA) is responsible for inspiring confidence and persuading Americans to persevere through and recover from one of the worst crises in our history. To address this need, ASPA launched the *HHS ASPA COVID-19 Public Education Campaign*, a campaign to increase vaccine confidence and reinforce basic prevention measures. This campaign includes a primary research component that is designed to use scientifically rigorous approaches to assess public attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, and to test draft message materials with the Campaign audience. These studies will help the campaign better assess the foundation of Americans' beliefs and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide real-time intelligence that will shape Campaign strategy. The primary research component of this campaign is shaped by health behavior theory (e.g., health belief model, theory of planned behavior, transtheoretical/stages of change model, dual-process model, and the social ecological models) and extant research on behavioral factors for COVID-related transmission prevention behaviors.

